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**Directives in the Japanese Workplace: Examining Gender
Stereotypes and the Perception of Impoliteness Through
the Bare Imperative**

A Quantitative Study

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Bachelor's Thesis
Japanese
Spring Term 2024

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Abstract

This thesis examines the interplay between gender and the perception of impoliteness in the Japanese workplace. Firstly, impoliteness is an area in sociolinguistics that discusses face-threatening acts, perceived in situations modified by different aspects, e.g. context and the gender of the interlocutors. Secondly, gendered language is another area within sociolinguistics which gained popularity during the 70s. Women's speech is described as polite, non-assertive and powerless. Whereas men's speech is known to be the complete opposite: vulgar, assertive and powerful. Previous studies about directives used in the Japanese workplace suggest that there are differences in how men and women in charge use linguistic practices. Their findings align with the previous gender stereotypes, suggesting that women in charge are politer than men. Due to this, a hypothesis was made: If a woman were to be equally as impolite as a man, would she be perceived as more polite? Inspired by this hypothesis, two main research questions were raised: "How impolite can a supervisor be to a subordinate?" and "Does the respective gender of the supervisor and the subordinate affect the degree of perceived impoliteness?" To investigate this, a questionnaire was sent out to native speakers of Japanese, which was answered by 32 respondents. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. Each part had 6 dialogues with 5 repetitive questions per dialogue (four Likert scale and one open question). Every dialogue had a supervisor commanding a subordinate using the bare imperative. Their genders kept changing. The results suggest that the gender of the supervisor did not affect the perception of impoliteness, but rather the expectations of how they would act, i.e. female supervisors were less expectant to use the bare imperative than their male counterpart.

Keywords: impoliteness, gender, gender stereotypes, directives, bare imperative

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor, Ben Macaulay, for being very patient with me and for giving me very helpful advice and feedback while I was working with this thesis. When I was stuck during the *chūkanhappyō*, I received help from Ishihara-*sensē*, for whom I am very grateful. I would also like to thank Hayashi-*sensē* for helping me construct my questionnaire as well as translating it into Japanese. Additionally, I want to thank my best friend and her mother for supporting me and for helping me create authentic dialogues from a Japanese perspective which were used in the questionnaire. Lastly, I am extremely thankful to all the respondents who participated in my study.

Conventions

In this thesis, the modified Hepburn system is used for transcription. Macrons will be used to mark long vowels (i.e. *ā*, *ī*, *ū*, *ē*, *ō*). Japanese words are shown in italics. English translations are provided in parenthesis. However, if the English translation appears within a parenthesis, brackets will be used instead.

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1. Introduction

Impoliteness in Japanese sociolinguistics is a topic that lacks exploration, especially in comparison to its said counterpart politeness. Nishimura (2019) states that Japanese language experts were more oriented toward teaching “good” Japanese in their second role as language teachers, deeming impoliteness an unworthy topic to study (pp.264-265). On the other hand, gendered speech in Japanese, mainly the ideal of women’s speech, is a topic that in recent years have been researched a lot, e.g. by Ide (1991), StrutzStreetharan (2004, 2006, 2009), Hasegawa (2015), and Ohara (2019). It is especially common within studies about the Japanese workplace, with women in charge due to their sociolinguistic stereotype of being polite and ‘powerless’, which contrasts against their position of power. On the contrary, how men speak and give directives at work are two very understudied subjects. Usually, stereotypes describe them as being the opposite of women; vulgar, aggressive, powerful, and in some cases ‘less polite’. But if a woman in charge were to act more like a man, how would she be perceived according to these stereotypes?

This thesis will examine how gender and the perception of impoliteness interplay in the Japanese workplace. The purpose is to see if the respective gender of a supervisor and a subordinate will affect the degree of perceived impoliteness in a situation where the supervisor is using a very strong command. This paper will also examine whether gender affects the expectations of the supervisor’s behavior, and if the expectations are based on gender stereotypes.

In chapter 2, previous research on impoliteness strategies, gendered speech and social gender stereotypes (general and in the workplace), as well as directives and the bare imperative in Japanese, will be provided. In chapter 3, the research questions, as well as the present study’s methodology, stimuli and respondents will be explained. Thereafter, the analyzed results of the study will be presented, compiled and later discussed. Finally, in chapter 4, a few conclusions will be drawn.

2. Previous Research

In this chapter, previous research about impoliteness strategies, gendered speech, as well as directives in Japanese will be provided. Notions about men's and women's stereotypes, both in general and in the workplace, will be included together with the interplay of impoliteness.

2.1 Impoliteness

As stated by Culpeper (2011), impoliteness is in the eye of the beholder, dependent by how one perceives a certain utterance or action in relation to a situation. Thus, when discussing impoliteness in a cross-cultural scene, it is safe to say that a universally accepted definition does not exist. However, Culpeper has defined impoliteness as:

“[...] a negative attitude towards specific behaviours occurring in specific contexts. It is sustained by expectations, desires and/or beliefs about social organisation, including, in particular, how one person's or a group's identities are mediated by others in interaction. Situated behaviours are viewed negatively – considered ‘impolite’ – when they conflict with how one expects them to be, how one wants them to be and/or how one thinks they ought to be. Such behaviours always have or are presumed to have emotional consequences for at least one participant, that is, they cause or are presumed to cause offence. Various factors can exacerbate how offensive an impolite behaviour is taken to be, including for example whether one understands a behaviour to be strongly intentional or not.”

(Culpeper, 2011, p. 23)

He further explains through his work how face (i.e. one's public image) and social norms relate to impoliteness. He also states that intentionality and the degree of offence taken has generally no strong connection between them (e.g. one could easily get offended despite there being low intentionality of doing so by an utterance or an action). Additionally, he believes that impoliteness is neither determined by the linguistic expression nor by the contextualized situation if they were to be taken into isolation. Rather, it is determined by the interaction of the two together (Culpeper, 2011). In other words, impoliteness is determined by the linguistic expression together with the context it is uttered within.

Leaving Culpeper, Nishimura (2019) mentions the work of psychologist Hoshino (1971) who first challenged the topic of impoliteness in Japanese linguistics. Hoshino points to Tsutsui's (1967) previous research on dividing impoliteness vocabulary into 16 categories (e.g. imaginary being [*akuma*, devil], animal [*yajū*, beast], person [*furyō*, delinquent] etc.) and observes that in contrast to English, which includes profanities originating from Christianity, Japanese lacks such vocabulary related to the emperor or Shintoism, let alone Christianity. Hoshino states, however, that profanities originated from Buddhism, such as *chikushō* (used as "damn it") can be found. Besides impoliteness vocabulary, Hoshino further categorizes impoliteness into target (i.e. oneself, addressee or absent referent) and situation (i.e. privately or publicly around others), listing motives for impolite acts such as: a) attacking others with anger and hatred, b) attacking without any hostility, and c) using impolite expression as banter without any hostility nor anger (cited by Nishimura, 2019, pp. 264-266).

Nishio (2015), also inspired by Hoshino (1971), works on impoliteness through the approach of *taigū hyōgen* (treatment expressions) as he believes they can be both polite and impolite. Nishimura (2019) explains that *taigū hyōgen* refer to "[...] expressions that are used when interacting with others and describing situations" (p. 267), e.g. acknowledging someone in a higher social position using *kēgo*. She states that Nishio characterizes impoliteness as "minus" treatment expressions, further dividing them into two types; one that affects interpersonal relationships and one that does not. The latter has criticized earlier research for only focusing on the abusive expressions and not considering the social and psychological aspects of impoliteness. Nishio emphasizes the speaker's risk of aggravating social relations if expressing negative utterances, which may lead the speaker to withhold such utterances to remain harmonious. This caused him to come up with the three stages of the speaker's mental process before using a "minus" treatment expression:

"(1) the speakers evaluate the situation negatively; (2) they choose to express a negative evaluation; and (3) they use specific linguistic expression to this end."

(cited by Nishimura, 2019, p. 267)

2.2 Gendered Language

In the Japanese language, first-person pronouns, sentence-final particles and a certain set of vocabulary have been discussed as linguistic differences between men and women. Hasegawa (2015) states that the cause of this gender coded speech roots itself in the characteristics of language ideology (p. 355).

2.2.1 Women's speech

By the late 1970s, women's speech had become particularly popular among researchers according to both Hasegawa (2015) and Ohara (2019). In a paper by Ide (1991), both quantitative and qualitative evidence of women's overall politer speech are observed and analyzed with the purpose of explaining how and why women speak differently from men in Japan. The quantitative evidence consists of three surveys, asking both men and women about their use of polite linguistic forms. The participants represent the middle-class, middle-aged population of at that time Japan with most men being businessmen and most women being housemakers, which Ide states is a situation where sex differences are markedly observed.

The results of all three surveys suggest that women do tend to speak more politely than their male counterpart due to multiple reasons: 1) the belief of different norms regarding level of politeness in speech between men and women, 2) that women have a lower assessment of politeness level, thus needing to use even politer linguistic forms than men to sound sufficiently as polite, and 3) women engage more frequently with interactions that call for linguistic forms higher than politeness level toward interactants than men, which again prompts them to use politer linguistic forms (Ide, 1991, pp. 67-71).

Ide (1991) then moves on to study the qualitative evidence of women's politer speech, beginning by comparing men's and women's personal pronouns. There she noticed two kinds of differences; while the formality level of *watashi* (I) is plain for women, it is formal for men, and while *anata* (you) is formal for men, it can be both plain and formal for women, thus proving that women are required to use more formal forms. Additionally, women's speech lacks any derogatory or impolite words such as *ore*, *omae* and *kisama*. Women's speech is also known for its avoidance, or lack of, vulgar and profane expressions. The sentence final particles *-ze* and *-zo*, phonological reduction forms, e.g. *dekē* (alt. *dekai* 'big'), as well as derogatory connotation, are all men's vocabulary that is displayed as masculine and is typically not allowed in women's repertoire. According to Ide, this fact, together with women's use of the

beautification prefix *o-* (e.g. *o-hana*) and hypercorrected honorifics (i.e. overusing honorifics despite it being incorrect, e.g. using honorifics when speaking of one's own mother), are all evidence that display a good demeanor which make women's speech sound more polite. She then tries to explain this phenomenon by saying that women, especially housewives, who lack a label to mark their social status, tend to use high and prestigious linguistic forms as they are associated with higher social class (Ide, 1991, pp. 73-75).

Lastly, Ide (1991) mentions evidence of female sentence final particles such as *wa* and *no*, which functions to "soften" the tone, resulting in it sounding uncertain (less assertive) which in turn makes women's speech sound politer. She then cites McGloin (1986) who argues that *wa* and *no* are instead used by women to create a sense of sharedness and create an emphatic atmosphere in a conversation; an important aspect of women's language in Japanese (cited by Ide, 1991, p.75).

In recent years, Hasegawa (2015) states, that women's speech has undergone considerable change, now being portrayed in public by using what once was only considered male speech. If the expression is considered moderately masculine and used by a woman, such utterance wouldn't draw much attention, and vice versa if it were a man using a moderately feminine expression.

Hasegawa (2015) writes however:

"[...] when strongly masculine or strongly feminine forms are used by members of the opposite sex, they will necessarily be considered marked language uses, and the hearers are likely to make inferences regarding the potential motivations of such marked selections, e.g. attempts at feminizing, joking, mimicking, ridiculing."

(Hasegawa, 2015, p. 360)

A conclusion that can be drawn from this is that despite the changes in women's speech, Japanese is still restrictive about what is socially accepted due to their language ideology and norms regarding gendered speech.

2.2.2 Men's speech

Since most gendered speech studies in Japanese have focused on women, there isn't much about men's speech and it is assumed that men's speech is what women's speech is not: less polite and more vulgar. Ohara (2019) writes about SturtzStreetharan's (2002, 2004, 2006, 2009)

pioneering studies on Japanese men's language behaviors in casual conversations. StrutzStreetharan (2002), uses data collected from a study in 1979 in the Kanto area with middle-class, middle-aged men, and observes that men do engage in talk about different topics, including personal and emotional topics such as children, care for aging parents, their relationships with their wives, etc. Her study (2002) displays that these men used various supportive and collaborative conversational strategies (e.g. latching, overlapping, etc.) despite the claims that they are mostly used by women (cited by Ohara, 2019, p. 289).

Additionally, StrutzStreetharan (2004) has data from her other study about sentence final particles in the Kansai dialect, conducted on men from ages 19 to 68, proving that only the youngest group (university students) were the ones to use masculine forms the most (e.g. *-zo* and *-ze*), while the other men frequently used gender-neutral forms (cited by Ohara, 2019, p.289).

Other similar studies by StrutzStreetharan (2006, 2009) that investigate: 1a) the use of *-masu* verb ending, and 2a) first and second person pronouns used in casual conversations between men show: 1b) that the youngest speakers are the ones to use the least amount of polite forms, followed by the oldest men, while middle-aged men are the ones to use the polite forms the most, and 2b) that the youngest speakers use the strongest form *ore* as first person pronouns while the older males use *boku*, the less-masculine pronoun (cited by Ohara, 2019, pp. 289-290).

Ohara (2019) then concludes that these results are in line with the youngest group using more masculine syntactic forms and sentence final particles (p. 290).

2.3 Interplay Between Gendered Language and Impoliteness

In this section, three different studies regarding gendered speech interplaying with impoliteness will be analyzed. Two studies have been conducted from a Japanese perspective while the third was done from a Jordanian perspective.

Firstly, a survey done by Asada (1979) asked Japanese boys and girls, ranging from elementary to high school, to list abusive expressions. They were also asked to whom they would use the expressions and what emotions they would experience when doing so. The study showcased that the results differed depending on age and gender, both in the content of abusive expressions and in regard to the respondent's emotions (cited by Nishimura, 2019, p.266).

The results were the following:

“Boys tended to use abusive expressions more light-heartedly as an indication of solidarity and were not bothered too much when abuse was thrown at them, while girls uttered abusive expressions when attacking others and suffered psychologically when they were targeted.”

(Asada, 1979, cited by Nishimura, 2019, pp. 266-267)

Secondly, a bachelor thesis by Braun (2021) investigates whether there is a difference in how Japanese native speakers use derogatory language against men and women, and if the gender and relationship between the interlocutors may impact the offensiveness of insults. In preparation, Braun collected a list of derogatory words and sorted them into different categories based on their inherent offensiveness (e.g. intelligence, sexuality, promiscuity, personality etc.). This study was conducted using an online survey in two parts, asking 12 respondents (ten women, one man, and one non-disclosed gender) to rate derogatory words used in and out of contextualized situations from a scale 1-5 on how humiliating they are perceived. The first part of the survey asked the respondents to rate a derogatory word per sentence when in use, based on the gender and relationship between the example sentences' speaker and addressee. The second part gave the respondents two identical lists of derogatory words where they had to choose to whom they associated these words with (i.e. male, female, neither, both, or never heard of the word). Later they had to answer if they would ever use the words from the list in jest (Braun, 2021).

After summarizing the survey's result, Braun (2021) later writes in his conclusion that “[...] this thesis suggest that women's use of impolite language is often seen as more offensive than its use by men” (p. 38). Additionally, the level of perceived impoliteness seems heavily dependent on the relationship between the speaker and addressee. Insulting a stranger or an acquaintance is more impolite than when insulting a friend or a lover. Moreover, female-associated words used towards women were seen as more impolite in comparison to male-associated words being used towards men, which Braun concludes that insulting a woman can be seen as more offensive. Finally, the study revealed that the gender of the addressee had little impact on the perceived impoliteness value of a word. Instead, the choice of word determined the degree of offensiveness (Braun, 2021).

Braun (2021) finishes his thesis by mentioning that due to the small number of respondents, as well as the overrepresentation of women in his conducted study, the results can only determine a pattern showing that women's use of impolite language is perceived as more offensive compared to the use of men, and that female-associated words are seen as more severe when used towards women than male-associated words being used towards men.

Lastly, a study by Bataineh et al. (2023) examines what behaviors are perceived as impolite by Jordanian female and male adults, as well as looking into the differences and similarities in the perception of impoliteness between the two groups. Although gendered speech is not discussed in this specific study, the results regarding the differences in perception of impoliteness between genders are still somewhat relevant.

This study consisted of a random, equally divided group of 100 male and female speakers of Arabic from different regions of Jordan with ages ranging from 20 to 79 years. Each respondent was given a 31-item checklist of impolite behaviors, based on the work of Culpeper (2011) and Brown and Levinson (1987), where they were asked to answer whether each item was polite or impolite. The answers were later analyzed and calculated into percentages to easily make a comparison in the conclusion (Bataineh et al., 2023, p. 19).

Examining the results, gender was found to have a significant role in the perception of impoliteness that favored female respondents. Bataineh et al (2023) comments in their conclusion that it might be attributed due women's natural shyness, social norms and expectations, etc. Previously, they cited Holmes' (1995) work who posits that women are more polite than men, due to linguistic differences reflecting social differences and status (Holmes cited by Bataineh et al., p. 22). Although both men and women were aware of what constitutes impolite behavior, women did so more than their male counterpart. Women perceived situations related to e.g. 'lack of sympathy' and 'boasting about one's own accomplishments, etc.' as more impolite while men were more sensitive to impolite situations related to e.g. 'dissing people's opinions' and 'ordering people around'. Bataineh et al. (2023) writes that because of socialization, where boys and girls are treated and raised differently by parents, the difference in perception of what is impolite by the respective gender is justified (p. 23).

2.4 Directives and Imperatives in Japanese

In linguistics, directives are a speech act category where the speaker attempts to get the listener to do something through an utterance. Both "Open the window!" and "Could you please open

the window?” are examples of directive utterances, the former being a directive use of the imperative. Directive utterances can further be divided into three directive illocutionary categories; ‘request’, ‘order’ (alt. command) and ‘advice’ (Svahn, 2016, p. 17).

When discussing the definition of the imperative, Svahn (2016) states that while it references the function of a directive speech, i.e. to get someone to do something, the term ‘imperative’ itself refers to a linguistic form. He further highlights the difference by giving an example sentence; “Go to Lund and you’ll see bicycles everywhere” which contains an imperative clause (i.e. ‘go to Lund’) but would not function as a directive speech act. Instead, its function would be conditional. Nevertheless, imperatives can still be seen as a type of directive.

The Japanese language possesses many ways to perform directives and it is commonly mentioned that the imperative, especially its bare form, has a very strong illocutionary force. It is therefore rarely used. If used, it is in a situation where the speaker is in a higher position than the addressee and commands the addressee to do something that is, most likely, against their own will (Hasegawa, 2015, p. 247). Due to this illocutionary force where the possibility of refusal is low to the addressee, it is associated with *mērē* (command). The imperative has acquired a sociolinguistic characteristic of bluntness or rudeness and can be inappropriate if used outside of its acceptable circumstances (e.g. if spoken to someone in a higher position than oneself) (Svahn, 2016). Examples of imperatives are as shown:

- 1) a. *-ro*
(e.g. *miro* ‘look’)
- b. *-e*
(e.g. *ike* ‘go’)
- c. *-nasai*
(e.g. *tabenasai* ‘eat’)
- d. *-te*
(e.g. *matte* ‘wait’)
- e. *-te ne/yo*
(e.g. *hayaku itte ne* ‘come here quickly (right away), okay?’ / *hayaku itte yo* ‘come here immediately’)

(Smith, 1992, pp. 64-65)

Both 1a and 1b are verbal suffixes attached to the verb stem, creating what Svahn (2016) refers to as basic imperative verb forms of the bare imperative. When mentioning imperatives in Japanese, this specific verb form is probably what first comes to mind. But as the example suggests, there are other types of imperatives, such as 1c and 1d. *-Nasai* (1c) is the irregular imperative form of the referent honorific verb *nasaru*. While it has a softer tone than the bare imperative, which in turn earns it its nickname of the ‘polite imperative’, it can only be used if the addressee has a lower status than the speaker, e.g. a mother to her child (Hasegawa, 2015; Svahn, 2016).

As for the directive *-te* (1b), it is less face-threatening than the aforementioned imperatives and is often used as an informal request. 1e has the same function as 1d, except that the sentence final particles (SFP) *ne* and *yo* are used to manage the illocutionary force (refer to the example sentence to see the nuance differences). This type of imperative is mostly used in casual conversations between family and friends (Geyer, 2018; Svahn, 2016).

Besides the imperatives, directives such as (2) and (3) are commonly used to issue orders in Japanese:

2) Requests, e.g.:

a. *-te kudasai*

b. *-te kureru*

c. *-te moraeru*

(Smith, 1992; Geyer, 2018)

3) Desideratives, e.g.:

a. *-te hoshī*

b. *-te (verb stem)-tai*

(Smith, 1992)

In general, both requests and desideratives are more polite than imperatives (Smith, 1992). In 2a, *kudasai* in *-te kudasai* is the imperative form of the verb *kudasaru*, which in turn is the other-elevating honorific version of *kureru* (give [towards] me), a benefactive verb. Furthermore, *-te kure* is the imperative form of *kureru* and is traditionally associated with ‘impolite male speech’. 2c showcases another benefactive verb, although in its potential form *moraeru* (to be able to receive), whose honorific counterpart is the self-lowering verb *itadaku* (or *itadakeru* [to be able to receive], the intransitive counterpart). Although not mentioned in

the above examples, advice expressions like *-tara dō* ('why don't you...?') and *-ta hōga ī* ('you'd better...') are also commonly used as directives (Geyer, 2018).

Both 3a and 3b can be examples of what Svahn (2016) calls "desiderative-based strategies that incorporates benefactives". He then provides two example sentences:

"Mado-o ake-te mora-i-tai.

[...] (lit) 'I want to receive [the favor of your] opening the window'

[...] Mado-o ake-te hoshi-i.

[...] (lit.) '[Your] opening the window is desirable [to me]'"

(Svahn, 2016, p.105)

The desideratives are considered indirect expressions as part of the Japanese request repertoire (Geyer, 2018).

2.5 Directives and Gender Stereotypes in the Workplace

Before continuing with this section, it is important to note that similarly to gendered language studies having been more centered around women's speech, studies about directives and gender tend to focus more on women. In other words, how men use directives in the workplace, like men's speech in general, is an understudied subject.

As suggested by the previous section (2.2) on gendered language, women's speech is often described as soft, polite, timid, indirect, etc. Smith (1992) states that these adjectives, in relation to authority, can be summarized as powerless. She hypothesized that due to women's speech having this stereotype, female leaders may face difficulties when trying to convey authority, as their 'powerless' speech will be less effective than men's. Contrary, a study made by Lebra (1984) suggest that women have no such struggles. Instead, they use their politeness and solidarity to counter authority. Lebra further explains that due to Japanese having titles like *buchō* (department chief) and *kachō* (section manager) the gender is separated from the position of authority. She continues by comparing Japan's hierarchal orientation, which insulates men and women from their gender identity, to USA's equalitarianism and individualism and argues that those qualities make gender inseparable from each individual (Lebra, 1984).

Smith (1992) who cited Lebra's (1984) work, made a study to see how Japanese women incorporated politeness with authority, to which some claimed to be the female leadership style. Smith found that women in general are more polite than men and that they used politer speech in both traditionally feminine roles as well as in nontraditional roles. Her study also suggested that women, rather than defeminizing their speech, embraced it and created new strategies, e.g. using passive power to solve conflicts (Smith, 1992). This adds onto what Lebra (1984) previously stated about women choosing politeness and solidarity above authority.

With a desire to investigate Lebra's (1984) claims about the USA, a study by Wiley and Eskilson (1985) which discussed speech style stereotypes for women in the 80s in the USA, will be summarized. The purpose of their study was to see if the success rate for women getting a job was higher if they were to speak more like men. They asked male and female college students to look at two different job interviews, one with a 'powerless' speech style and one with a 'powerful' speech style. Each interview had a picture of a man and a woman attached to them. Both applicants had the same amount of prior managerial experience for each job interview. After reading both interviews, the college students were asked to answer a questionnaire, evaluating what their perception of each applicant was as well as their estimation of each applicants' success rate.

The results showed that only the applicants with a powerful speech style had a higher success rate, suggesting that gender did not matter in this specific case. But in their discussion, Wiley and Eskilson wrote that:

“[...] speech style does not override stereotypical characteristics which are not central to the setting. Thus, a man and a woman may be seen as equally competent for the managerial role, but differentiated on warmth despite identical behavioral input (i.e., speech style).”

(Wiley & Eskilson, 1985, p. 1004)

In other words, while gender was irrelevant in determining the estimated success rate, it did affect the expectations of personality traits belonging to the applicants.

Other interesting findings by Wiley and Eskilson (1985) were: 1) despite having the same prior experiences, the female applicants were believed to have a higher cooperative success, 2) the female applicant with a powerful speech style was less liked by the male college students, and 3) while the male college students found every applicant to be a bit aggressive in their job

interviews, the female college students found the female applicants to be less aggressive than their male counterpart. They conclude their study by saying “Acting as men act (or talking as men do), while it may lead to imputations of success and power, will apparently result in negative evaluations [of women], even among college-aged men” (Wiley & Eskilson, 1985).

While this does not disprove Lebra’s (1984) claims, some of the findings in Wiley and Eskilson’s (1985) study can be compared to the trends found in Braun’s (2021) paper, such as the suggestion that men dislike when women act similar to them (e.g. use more profane language, talk with more power, etc.). This conclusion is drawn from the heavy generalizations and stereotypes suggested by the studies. Other stereotypes that the aforementioned studies (Lebra, 1984; Wiley & Eskilson, 1985; Smith, 1992) suggest are: 1) women are less direct when taking a leading role, and 2) they are perceived as more cooperative and solidary because of this type of approach. Another natural conclusion that these stereotypes seem to propose is that male leaders’ linguistic practices are the opposite.

Saito (2011), who made a study about male superiors’ interactional styles, criticizes previous studies on directives for “[...]emphasiz[ing] prescribed assumptions about gendered speech styles[...] suggest[ing] that there are distinct gender differences in male and female superiors’ linguistic practices” (p. 1689). Before discussing his own study, Saito first mentions previous research that once again suggests that female superiors act more polite and indirect by e.g. using positive and negative politeness strategies, the SFP *ne*, etc. Additionally, Takano’s (2005) qualitative study which analyzed female professionals’ linguistic practices in workplace settings, observes that when managing conflicts, they frequently switch their speech style from distal (i.e. *masu*) to direct (i.e. the dictionary form). Takano writes that by shifting speech styles, it allows female professionals to affect the power dynamics of the workplace, letting them have full control over power distributions among participants (Takano, 2005, p. 656).

Referring once more to Saito’s (2011) light criticism, he gives examples of gender stereotypes describing women’s language as being indirect, empathic, cooperative, nonassertive, etc., and men’s language as being competitive, direct, assertive, and authoritative. In other words, women’s language is associated with a polite speech style while men’s language is associated with a rougher, more aggressive speech style. He states that the descriptions correlate to how Japanese leaders’ directive discourse have been described as.

Finally, the study by Saito (2011) showcased how male superiors strategically switched between interactional styles depending on the context and purpose of the confrontational situation. They would use more aggressive interactional styles in explicit conflicts but would

switch to a more mitigated style after the confrontational negotiation. Saito concludes that male superiors are suggested to possess both masculine and feminine linguistic practices. He finishes by saying:

“This study hence suggests that (1) gender is not the only constituent that determines linguistic practices; rather, myriad contextual factors in addition to the speaker’s gender play a role in determining the patterns of language use in a given context, and therefore, (2) actual practices do not necessarily or exclusively conform to gender stereotypes.”

(Saito, 2011, p.1703)

3. The Present Study

This chapter is an overview of the present study. Firstly, the research questions and a general presentation of the methodology will be provided, together with an explanation of the stimuli and the respondents from the questionnaire. Secondly, the results from the respondents will be presented. Lastly, the summarized results will be discussed.

3.1 Methodology

After reading through the previous studies regarding impoliteness, gendered language, and directives at the Japanese workplace, four research questions were raised:

- How impolite can a supervisor be to a subordinate?
- Does the respective gender of the supervisor and the subordinate affect the degree of perceived impoliteness?
- Do men and women have the same expectations of how a supervisor should act towards a subordinate?
- If they do, are these expectations based on gender stereotypes?

To answer these questions, a quantitative approach was needed. Thus, an online questionnaire was created (see appendix). The outline of the questionnaire was inspired by a previous student's study, Rif (2018). The present study's questionnaire was sent out through social media, as well as through contacts, to native speakers of Japanese using Google Forms. 32 answers were collected in total between the 12th to 21st of April 2024.

The content of the questionnaire was divided into two parts, each containing 6 short dialogues with five questions each: four Likert scale questions (with 5 degrees) and one open question. In total, the questionnaire consisted of 12 dialogues with 60 questions. The approximate completion time was around 10 minutes. Before the questionnaire was sent out to the respondents, it was proofread and tested by one or more native speakers of Japanese. The dialogues were created by me with the help of my supervisors as well as my Japanese friend.

In the next section, the questionnaire will be discussed in more detail.

3.1.1 Stimuli

For the online questionnaire, 12 dialogues were created in total. Each dialogue contained a supervisor (S) and a subordinate (s) with the gender combinations being female to male (FM), female to female (FF), male to male (MM), and male to female (MF). For each condition, three short dialogues were made, using the bare imperative of the selected verbs: *mate* (wait), *henkōshiro* (change it), and *sumasero* (get it done). The reasoning for using the bare imperative in this study was the result of a hypothesis created during the preparatory work for this thesis:

In view of the stereotypes suggesting how women in charge are politer, less assertive and indirect (than men), hypothetically, a female supervisor who is equally as rude as a male supervisor can therefore be perceived as more aggressive than their male counterpart. If this hypothesis is shown to be true even at the use of the rudest form of command (the bare imperative), the difference in degree of perceived impoliteness due to gender can be suggested.

The questionnaire was then divided into two parts with 6 dialogues each, having the subordinate always being female for the first part, and always being male for the second part.

Survey part 1: subordinate is always female

Dialogue	Supervisor's gender	Subordinate's gender	Bare imperative
1	F	F	<i>mate</i> (wait)
2	M	F	<i>mate</i> (wait)
3	F	F	<i>henkōshiro</i> (change it)
4	M	F	<i>henkōshiro</i> (change it)
5	M	F	<i>sumasero</i> (get it done)
6	F	F	<i>sumasero</i> (get it done)

Table 1: Stimuli Survey Part 1

Survey part 2: subordinate is always male

Dialogue	Supervisor's gender	Subordinate's gender	Bare imperative
1	F	M	<i>mate</i> (wait)
2	M	M	<i>mate</i> (wait)
3	F	M	<i>sumasero</i> (get it done)
4	M	M	<i>sumasero</i> (get it done)
5	F	M	<i>henkōshiro</i> (change it)
6	M	M	<i>henkōshiro</i> (change it)

Table 2: Stimuli Survey Part 2

Every dialogue had the same construction: the subordinate asked a question or made a statement to which the supervisor answered with a command (the bare imperative). All dialogues took place in a company, which the respondents were informed of in the beginning of each part of the questionnaire. To minimize the risk of the respondents confusing the gender of the interlocutors, the female gender was color coded in red and the male gender in blue. An example of a dialogue from the survey is shown in 4a.

- 4) a. *Josēbuka*: *Kono shorui-ni me-o tōshiteitadakemasen-ka?*
Dansējōshi: *Iya, mate. Ima-wa muri.*
 (Female subordinate: Could you please look over this document?
 Male supervisor: No, wait. Not now.)

For every scenario, five repetitive questions were asked. The first four used a Likert scale, ranging from *totemo* (very) to *zenzen* (not at all), an exception was made for the third question due to a different phrasing (i.e. ranging from *hai* [yes] to *mattaku, -nai* [not at all]), while the fifth were left open for the respondents to answer freely. The questions were the following:

1. How polite do you think the supervisor is?
2. To what extent do you think what the supervisor said was expected?
3. Do you think the subordinate will follow the supervisor's response obediently after this?
4. How appropriate do you think the supervisor's utterance is in this situation?
5. If you were the supervisor in this situation, what would you have said?

An example of the Likert scale taken from the questionnaire would be as shown in 5a.

- 5) a. *Kono jōshi -wa donokurai rēgi tadashī-to omoimasuka?*
- Totemo rēgi tadashī*
 - Māmā rēgi tadashī*
 - Nyūtoraru*
 - Amari rēgi tadashiku nai*

- Zenzen rēgi tadashiku nai*

(How polite do you think the supervisor is?)

- Very polite
- Reasonably polite
- Neutral
- Not very polite
- Not polite at all)

The reason for the first four questions being a Likert scale was to ease the data analysis process when comparing answers between respondents. Asking about the supervisor's politeness and appropriateness, opens a discussion for whether there is a difference between female and male respondents in their perception of what is impolite or appropriate in the workplace. The third question, which asked for the subordinate's estimated will to be obedient or not, was asked with the purpose to see if the supervisor's command could be perceived as so impolite, it would permeate the hierarchical relationship between him/her and the subordinate. In other words, question three examines whether the degree of impoliteness would interfere with the supervisor's authority. Due to the interlocutors' superficial character traits (work position and gender), it was necessary to ask for the respondents' expectations of the supervisor's command to see if they had based any assumptions on existing gender stereotypes. The fifth and final question served almost the same purpose. It was left as an open question for two reasons; 1) to add some nuance to the study, and 2) to see if any trends between the male and female respondents' answers could be discovered. These trends would, hypothetically, reveal the gendered language between the genders, but also suggest if their replies match any gender stereotypes.

3.1.2 Respondents

As previously mentioned, this questionnaire was sent out to native speakers of Japanese through social media, and some personal contacts, using Google Forms. Between the 12th and 21st of April, 32 respondents answered. The personal data obtained from these respondents were: gender, age, hometown, occupation, and whether they have had any previous work experience (if yes, what kind of work). The purpose of asking for their work experience was to see whether

it influenced their answers when taking the questionnaire, as personal experience could affect one's prior expectations of a situation.

Out of the 32 respondents, 14 were men and 18 were women. The ages ranged from 18-50 years with 11 being 20 or younger, 19 were between 21-29 years old and the remaining two were 30 or above. The respondents originated around the entirety of Japan, from Hokkaido to Kyushu. However, the majority were from Honshu with 16 respondents, specifically Tokyo (7 respondents). The second largest number of respondents originated from Shikoku (14 respondents), with 5 respondents being from Osaka. Around two thirds of the respondents were university students, and the others' occupation were dispersed. As for work experience, only four respondents answered that they did not have any. When compiling the answers of those who were experienced, the 'restaurant and café' compilation were the largest with 10 respondents. The second largest compilation was 'office and administration' with 7 respondents. The other compilations of work experience were: 'custom service', 'school, tutoring', 'internship', and 'industrial work'.

For the questionnaire, please see the appendix.

3.2 Results

The data from the questionnaire was analyzed in two parts, the first one being the results from the Likert scale questions and the second one being a compilation of the fifth question's answers. For the Likert scale questions, their scales were translated into so-called 'data degrees' from a created 'Data scale'. The data degrees ranged from 1 to 5, with 5 being the most agreeable on the Likert scale and 1 being the least agreeable. The survey results were then compiled using the data degrees and recalculated to obtain the 'average degree' (avg. degree) which will be presented going forth.

Likert scale translated to data degrees

Q1, Q2 & Q4	Q3	Degree
Likert scale	Likert scale	Data scale
<i>totemo</i> (very)	<i>hai</i> (yes)	5
<i>māmā</i> (reasonably)	<i>tabun</i> (probably)	4
<i>nūtoraru</i> (neutral)	<i>dochiratomo</i> (either way)	3
<i>amari</i> (not very)	<i>tabun, -nai</i> (probably not)	2
<i>zenzen</i> (not at all)	<i>mattaku, -nai</i> (not at all)	1

Table 3 Likert Scale Translated to Data Degrees

Categories of Identified Directives and Expressions for Q5

Sorted after Smith (1992)

<i>Desu/masu</i> (polite)
<i>Itadaku</i>
<i>Kudasaru</i>
<i>-te moraeru</i>
<i>-te kureru</i>
<i>-tai /</i> <i>-te hoshī</i>
SFP (<i>ne, yo</i>)
<i>Te-form</i>
Dictionary form

Additional expressions from respondents

<i>Onegai</i>
<i>-te mo ī</i>
<i>Shimashō/</i> <i>shiyō</i>
<i>Dekiru</i>
<i>-ta hō ga ī</i>
Other

Table 4 Categories of Directives and Expressions

As for the fifth question, all answers were examined and distributed into categories based on the directives that could be identified in the respondents' sentences. 15 categories were made in total, with 10 identified directives matching the ones being mentioned in the previous background of this paper (see section 2.4. and Table 4). These 10 directives were later sorted from the highest politeness level to the lowest, based off on Smith's (1992) politeness scale of the directives (requests, desideratives and imperatives). Please note that 'Dictionary form' (i.e., e.g. *da*) may not always be perceived as impolite (it depends on context), however, since it is the counterpart for '*Desu/masu*' (polite form), it is placed in the bottom. The remaining 5 categories consisted of '*-te mo ī*', '*Shimashō/shiyō*', '*Dekiru*', '*-ta hō ga ī*' (expressions that were frequently used by the respondents) as well as 'Other' (a category of dispersed expressions). Due to these 5 categories being additional directives or expressions not mentioned by Smith, they are excluded from the politeness scale. Ideally, this paper would benefit by not including these at all. However, since the number of respondents who used these expressions was high, they are still included.

Additionally, as previously mentioned in section 3.1.1, the purpose of the fifth question was simply to see if any concrete patterns or trends could be discovered among the respondents, e.g. varying in their politeness level depending on the situation or the gender of the interlocutors.

3.2.1 Part One of the Questionnaire

For an easier presentation, the analyzed data will be shown in the same format as the questionnaire, i.e. in two parts, followed by a separate section which will summarize and compare all results. An important notice, however, is the difference in number of respondents per question due to there being a few unanswered questions as well as having had some respondents submitting their answers half-way through the questionnaire. In those cases, an asterisk ‘*’ will be used to mark the data where the total of respondents (ToR) differs from the original number.

During the first part of the questionnaire, the total number of respondents were 32. Please note that the subordinate is always female (Fs).

Question 1: How polite do you think the supervisor is?

Bare Imperative	Fs_FS avg. degree	Fs_MS avg. degree
<i>mate</i> (wait)	1.7	1.7*
<i>henkōshiro</i> (change it)	1.5*	1.4**
<i>sumasero</i> (get it done)	1.8**	1.9*

*ToR: 31

**ToR: 30

Table 5 Survey Part 1: Question 1

Table 5 shows that most of the respondents perceived the supervisor, regardless of their gender, to be very impolite. In almost all cases, the average score falls above 1.5 which rounds off to the data degree 2 in the data scale (the second least agreeable answer). Only in condition Fs_MS, *henkōshiro*, can the number round off to a 1 in the data scale (1.4). Additionally, it seems that the respondents found *henkōshiro* to be slightly ruder than the other bare imperatives. However, these small findings do not affect the overall opinion of the respondents.

Question 2: To what extent do you think what the supervisor said was expected?

Bare Imperative	Fs_FS avg. degree	Fs_MS avg. degree
<i>mate</i> (wait)	2.5	3.2**
<i>henkōshiro</i> (change it)	2.1	2.9**
<i>sumasero</i> (get it done)	2.4*	3.1**

*ToR: 31

**ToR: 30

Table 6 Survey Part 1: Question 2

In Table 6, the results suggest that the female supervisor’s utterance was less expected among the respondents in comparison to the male supervisor’s utterance. In all cases, the average degree between the two conditions Fs_FS and Fs_MS differed with more than 0.5 degrees.

Question 3: Do you think the subordinate will follow the supervisor’s response obediently after this?

Bare Imperative	Fs_FS avg. degree	Fs_MS avg. degree
<i>mate</i> (wait)	4.1	4.1*
<i>henkōshiro</i> (change it)	3.9	3.9*
<i>sumasero</i> (get it done)	4.0*	4.1

*ToR: 31

Table 7 Survey Part 1: Question 3

Like in Table 5, the respondents showcased to be in a strong agreement in table 7. The average degree in all cases rounds off to a 4 in the data scale, the second most agreeable value, suggesting that most of the respondents estimated the subordinate to act obediently. As for Table 8, the results suggest that in all cases, respondents found the supervisors’ utterances, regardless of their gender, to be inappropriate. Only a small gap of 0.2 degrees between the conditions Fs_FS and Fs_MS suggests that the appropriateness level for a male supervisor is slightly lower than their female counterpart. However, the nuance difference is so small, it does not affect the overall opinions of the respondents.

When analyzing the female and male respondents' answers respectively, they were in an agreement most of the time. However, for condition Fs_FS, *sumasero* (table 8), the average degree for female respondents was 1.6, whereas the male respondents' average degree was 2.6. Nevertheless, this difference is not visible in the average degree for all respondents.

Question 4: How appropriate do you think the supervisor's utterance is in this situation?

Bare Imperative	Fs_FS avg. degree	Fs_MS avg. degree
<i>mate</i> (wait)	2.1	1.9*
<i>henkōshiro</i> (change it)	1.8	1.6***
<i>sumasero</i> (get it done)	2.1*	2.3

*ToR: 31

***ToR: 29

Table 8 Survey Part 1: Question 4

Question 5: If you were the supervisor in this situation, what would you have said?

Directives and Expressions		Fs_FS			Fs_MS		
		<i>mate</i> (wait)	<i>henkōshiro</i> (change it)	<i>sumasero</i> * (get it done)	<i>mate</i> * (wait)	<i>henkōshiro</i> * (change it)	<i>sumasero</i> (get it done)
Smith (1992)	<i>Desu/masu</i> (polite)	22%	22%	30%	17%	20%	28%
	<i>Itadaki</i>	3%	-	-	3%	-	-
	<i>Kudasaru</i>	3%	-	10%	3%	-	9%
	<i>-te moraeru</i>	-	19%	-	3%	10%	3%
	<i>-te kureru</i>	3%	6%	-	7%	7%	6%
	<i>-tai / -te hoshī</i>	6%	6%	13%	3%	10%	13%
	SFP (<i>ne, yo</i>)	38%	6%	20%	30%	-	3%
	Te-form	31%	6%	10%	30%	3%	3%
	Dictionary form	22%	3%	10%	17%	3%	6%
Additional	Onegai	3%	16%	40%	-	13%	34%
	<i>-te mo ī</i>	19%	-	3%	13%	10%	6%
	<i>Shimashō/ shiyō</i>	-	38%	-	-	37%	-
	Dekiru	3%	6%	20%	3%	7%	9%
	<i>-ta hō ga ī</i>	-	6%	-	-	3%	3%
	Other	13%	19%	10%	20%	20%	3%

*ToR: 30

Table 9 Survey Part 1: Question 5

Table 9 shows the compiled answers from the fifth and final question of the first half of the questionnaire, which was left open for the respondents to answer freely. All sentences were divided into the categories mentioned in Table 4. The percentages represent the number of sentences that included the respective directive or expression out of the total number of the respondents' answers. Do note that a sentence written by a respondent could contain more than one of these directives or expressions (e.g. *-te form* with an SFP).

Unfortunately, when compiling the analyzed data, a fault in how the fifth question was being presented was instantly discovered. "If you were the supervisor in this situation, what would you have said?" never specified whether the respondent should imagine themselves as the supervisor in their own gender or to pretend to be the gender of the made-up supervisor. Thus, the respondents interpreted the question differently. Some respondents changed their language (e.g. switching from using polite to casual form) depending on the gender of the supervisor whereas other respondents gave the same answer regardless of the supervisors' gender. Due to this, it became difficult to summarize the results and identify certain trends or patterns in regards to the research question.

However, generally for table 9, the use of *-te form*, *desu/masu*, SFP (especially *ne* which unfortunately isn't visible in the table), and *onegai* have a higher percentage for the female supervisor than their male counterpart. Additionally, both conditions have expressions that are placed both high and low on the politeness scale (e.g. *desu/masu* and dictionary form).

As for the imperatives, most respondents answered with 1) *-te form*, SFP, dictionary form, and *-te mo ī* for *mate*, 2) *desu/masu*, *-te moraeru*, *shimashō/shiyō*, and 'other' for *henkōshiro*, and 3) *desu/masu*, *onegai*, and *dekiru* (mainly FS) for *sumasero*. Additionally, though not presented in the table, some male respondents and a very few female respondents were shown to use the SFP *ne* and the politer version *shimashō* for the Fs_FS condition. Contrary, they would use the dictionary form more often or the casual version *shiyō* for the Fs_MS condition. In most cases, respondents would use *desu/masu* (i.e. the long version) to sound more polite (e.g. *-dekimasuka*).

3.2.2 Part Two of the Questionnaire

The second part of the questionnaire’s results will now be provided. Due to four respondents submitting their answers half-way through the questionnaire, the total number of respondents for part two is 28. Please note that the subordinate is always male (Ms).

Question 1: How polite do you think the supervisor is?

Bare Imperative	Ms_FS avg. degree	Ms_Ms avg. degree
<i>mate</i> (wait)*	1.8	2.0
<i>henkōshiro</i> (change it)	1.6	1.7
<i>sumasero</i> (get it done)	1.8	2.0

*ToR: 27

Table 10 Survey Part 2: Question 1

Table 10 showcases that the degree of perceived impoliteness is the same for most of the respondents, regardless of the supervisor’s gender, with an average degree rounding off to a 2 in the data scale.

Question 2: To what extent do you think what the supervisor said was expected?

Bare Imperative	Ms_FS avg. degree	Ms_MS avg. degree
<i>mate</i> (wait)*	2.6	3.5
<i>henkōshiro</i> (change it)	2.0	3.5
<i>sumasero</i> (get it done)	2.3	3.6

*ToR: 27

Table 11 Survey Part 2: Question 2

Table 11 suggests, similarly to Table 6, that the respondents were less expectant of the female supervisor’s utterance in comparison to their male counterpart. For the bare imperative *mate*, the average degree differs with 0.9 degrees between the two supervisors. Additionally, the difference is 1.5 degrees for *henkōshiro*, and 1.3 degrees for *sumaserso*. It is also worth mentioning that the usage of *henkōshiro* seems to have been less expectant of the female supervisor compared to the use of *mate*, according to the results.

Table 12's results are consistent with Table 7, having most respondents agreeing that the subordinate would still be reasonably willing to obey the supervisor despite the rude utterance.

Question 3: Do you think the subordinate will follow the supervisor's response obediently after this?

Bare Imperative	Ms_FS avg. degree	Ms_MS avg. degree
<i>mate</i> (wait)*	4.0	4.2
<i>henkōshiro</i> (change it)	3.9	4.1*
<i>sumasero</i> (get it done)	4.1	4.1

*ToR: 27

Table 12 Survey Part 2: Question 3

As for Table 13, its results suggest that the appropriateness level for both supervisors, regardless of their gender, were low. In all cases the average degree rounds off to a 2 in the data scale. Only a small gap between 0.2-0.4 degrees between the conditions Ms_FS and Ms_MS suggests that the appropriateness level for a female supervisor is slightly lower than their male counterpart. However, the nuance difference is so small, it does not affect the overall opinions of the respondents.

Question 4: How appropriate do you think the supervisor's utterance is in this situation?

Bare Imperative	Ms_FS avg. degree	Ms_MS avg. degree
<i>mate</i> (wait)*	2.2	2.4
<i>henkōshiro</i> (change it)	1.7*	1.9
<i>sumasero</i> (get it done)	2.0	2.4

*ToR: 27

Table 13 Survey Part 2: Question 4

Compared to Table 9, Table 14 has a few new interesting findings. While the pattern of what directives the respondents chose to use for *mate*, *henkōshiro*, and *sumasero* are generally the same as previously discussed (see p. 21) the percentage differences are more visible in this table. For example, the percentages for SFP are much lower in the Ms_MS condition than the Ms_FS condition. On the other hand, the percentages for 'dictionary form' and *-te kureru* is slightly higher in the Ms_MS condition compared to the Ms_FS condition.

In terms of where the expressions fall on the politeness scale, it is generally even between the two conditions with both conditions having expressions that is both high and low (e.g. *desu/masu* and *te*-form).

Question 5: If you were the supervisor in this situation, what would you have said?

Directives and Expressions		Ms_FS			Ms_MS		
		<i>mate*</i> (wait)	<i>henkōshiro</i> (change it)	<i>sumasero</i> (get it done)	<i>mate**</i> (wait)	<i>henkōshiro*</i> (change it)	<i>sumasero*</i> (get it done)
Smith (1992)	<i>Desu/masu</i> (polite)	22%	25%	19%	15%	30%	19%
	<i>Itadaki</i>	-	-	-	-	-	-
	<i>Kudasaru</i>	4%	-	7%	4%	-	7%
	<i>-te moraeru</i>	-	21%	-	-	19%	-
	<i>-te kureru</i>	4%	7%	-	8%	11%	4%
	<i>-tai / -te hoshī</i>	4%	7%	11%	-	7%	15%
	SFP (<i>ne, yo</i>)	26%	-	30%	12%	7%	4%
	<i>Te-form</i>	22%	4%	19%	23%	-	7%
	Dictionary form	15%	-	4%	23%	-	11%
Additional	<i>Onegai</i>	7%	11%	44%	4%	11%	37%
	<i>-te mo ī</i>	15%	14%	7%	15%	7%	7%
	<i>Shimashō/ shiyō</i>	-	36%	-	-	37%	-
	<i>Dekiru</i>	7%	4%	19%	4%	7%	11%
	<i>-ta hō ga ī</i>	-	4%	7%	-	4%	-
	Other	15%	14%	15%	31%	22%	22%

*ToR: 27

**ToR: 26

Table 14 Survey Part 2: Question 5

In the next section, all the questionnaire answers will be summarized for an easier comparison.

3.2.3 Comparison

In this section, all the answers from the questionnaire were compiled and arranged to easier compare the results for each supervisor with the gender of the subordinate being different. Please note that the ToR is not marked in neither table due to it being too complicated. Refer to the previously mentioned tables for the precise ToR.

Question 1: How polite do you think the supervisor is?

Bare Imperative	Fs_FS	Ms_FS	Fs_MS	Ms_MS
<i>mate</i> (wait)	1.7	1.8	1.7	2.0
<i>henkōshiro</i> (change it)	1.5	1.6	1.4	1.7
<i>sumasero</i> (get it done)	1.8	1.8	1.9	2.0

Question 2: To what extent do you think what the supervisor said was expected?

Bare Imperative	Fs_FS	Ms_FS	Fs_MS	Ms_MS
<i>mate</i> (wait)	2.5	2.6	3.2	3.5
<i>henkōshiro</i> (change it)	2.1	2.0	2.9	3.5
<i>sumasero</i> (get it done)	2.4	2.3	3.1	3.6

Question 3: Do you think the subordinate will follow the supervisor's response obediently after this?

Bare Imperative	Fs_FS	Ms_FS	Fs_MS	Ms_MS
<i>mate</i> (wait)	4.1	4.0	4.1	4.2
<i>henkōshiro</i> (change it)	3.9	3.9	3.9	4.1
<i>sumasero</i> (get it done)	4.0	4.1	4.1	4.1

Question 4: How appropriate do you think the supervisor's utterance is in this situation?

Bare Imperative	Fs_FS	Ms_FS	Fs_MS	Ms_MS
<i>mate</i> (wait)	2.1	2.2	1.9	2.4
<i>henkōshiro</i> (change it)	1.8	1.7	1.6	1.9
<i>sumasero</i> (get it done)	2.1	2.0	2.3	2.4

Table 15 Comparison Survey Result

Table 15 shows the general trend for each question. In question one, there is a slight pattern among the respondents, suggesting that the perceived degree of impoliteness is the same regardless of the respective gender of the interlocutors. Additionally, the results suggest that the respondents found the bare imperative used against a female subordinate to be ruder. However, this nuance difference is very minor.

In question two, a visible trend can be seen. In every case, the expectation degree for the female supervisor's utterance have been lower than their male counterpart.

For question three, most of the respondents were in an agreement. The average degrees round off to a 4 in the data scale, suggesting that even though the utterance is impolite the subordinate would reasonably not let it affect their willingness to obey whatever they are being told to do.

In the fourth question, the answers were slightly more dispersed compared to the previous questions. However, when looking at the average degrees for each bare imperative, a slight trend can be seen. In almost every case, the average degree is leaning more towards 1 than 2 for *henkōshiro* in the data scale. This suggests that the respondents may have found *henkōshiro* to be slightly less appropriate than the other two imperatives. Nevertheless, all the values round off to a 2 in the data scale, suggesting that the appropriateness level was low in all three cases, regardless of the respective gender of the interlocutors.

Question 5: If you were the supervisor in this situation, what would you have said?

Directives and Expressions		Fs_FS			Ms_FS			Fs_MS			Ms_MS		
		<i>mate</i> (wait)	<i>henkōshiro</i> (change it)	<i>sumasero*</i> (get it done)	<i>mate*</i> (wait)	<i>henkōshiro</i> (change it)	<i>sumasero</i> (get it done)	<i>mate*</i> (wait)	<i>henkōshiro*</i> (change it)	<i>sumasero</i> (get it done)	<i>mate**</i> (wait)	<i>henkōshiro*</i> (change it)	<i>sumasero*</i> (get it done)
Smith (1992)	<i>Desu /masu</i> (polite)	22%	22%	30%	22%	25%	19%	17%	20%	28%	15%	30%	19%
	<i>Itadaku</i>	3%	-	-	-	-	-	3%	-	-	-	-	-
	<i>Kudasaru</i>	3%	-	10%	4%	-	7%	3%	-	9%	4%	-	7%
	<i>-te moraeru</i>	-	19%	-	-	21%	-	3%	10%	3%	-	19%	-
	<i>-te kureru</i>	3%	6%	-	4%	7%	-	7%	7%	6%	8%	11%	4%
	<i>-tai / -te hoshī</i>	6%	6%	13%	4%	7%	11%	3%	10%	13%	-	7%	15%
	<i>SFP</i> (<i>ne, yo</i>)	38%	6%	20%	26%	-	30%	30%	-	3%	12%	7%	4%
	<i>Te- form</i>	31%	6%	10%	22%	4%	19%	30%	3%	3%	23%	-	7%
<i>Dictionary form</i>	22%	3%	10%	15%	-	4%	17%	3%	6%	23%	-	11%	
Additional	<i>Onegai</i>	3%	16%	40%	7%	11%	44%	-	13%	34%	4%	11%	37%
	<i>-te mo ī</i>	19%	-	3%	15%	14%	7%	13%	10%	6%	15%	7%	7%
	<i>Shimashō/ shiyō</i>	-	38%	-	-	36%	-	-	37%	-	-	37%	-
	<i>Dekiru</i>	3%	6%	20%	7%	4%	19%	3%	7%	9%	4%	7%	11%
	<i>-ta hō ga ī</i>	-	6%	-	-	4%	7%	-	3%	3%	-	4%	-
	<i>Other</i>	13%	19%	10%	15%	14%	15%	20%	20%	3%	31%	22%	22%

Table 16 Comparison Question 5

Table 16's results remained slightly inconsistent, due to a fault in how the fifth question was presented, which made it difficult to find any detailed or concrete trends. Rather than discovering notable differences between the genders of the interlocutors, the respondents had a tendency of using a certain set of directives or expressions depending on the context of the situation (refer to section 3.2.1 Table 9 and section 3.2.2 Table 14). The used directives varied from high to low in the politeness scale, which made it hard to identify some sort of pattern.

Before closing this section, the four respondents who had answered that they lacked any working experience will be briefly discussed. In almost all cases, their answers were consistent with the rest of the respondents. There were only a few dispersed moments where one or two out of these four respondents would deviate from what the majority agreed upon (e.g. having a

higher expectation for a female supervisor to use the bare imperative than the rest). But due to the underrepresentation of respondents who lacked work experience, together with the low dispersal of deviating answers, a certain trend or pattern could not be identified. Thus, this study was not able to identify if lack of work experience affected the way respondents would judge the different scenarios in comparison to those respondents who did have prior work experience.

3.3 Discussion

In this section, the results will be discussed in relation to the research question stated previously.

3.3.1 Supervisor's Impoliteness Degree

Firstly, in Table 15, question one shows that the respondents perceived both supervisors to be impolite in all cases. Contrary, question three showcases that most respondents believed that despite the rudeness of the supervisor, the subordinates would still be willing to obey them. These results suggest that a supervisor can be very impolite towards a subordinate and still get them to do what they asked for, which in turn answers my first research question "How impolite can a supervisor be to a subordinate?".

Besides answering the research question, this also suggests how strong the hierarchical relationship between the supervisor and the subordinate is in the Japanese workplace. The reason for including question three in the questionnaire was to see if the degree of impoliteness would be able to permeate the hierarchical relationship, an idea which the results seem to contradict.

However, it is important to note that these results do not cover how the actions of the supervisor may affect the general harmony at a workplace, nor do they suggest how a supervisor should act. While the hierarchical relationship prevents a subordinate from disobeying his or her duty to fulfill their requested work — to be unfairly treated by a supervisor could, hypothetically, result in other consequences, such as the subordinate losing trust and personal respect for the supervisor, which may affect the solidarity of the workplace.

3.3.2 Gender and Degree of Perceived Impoliteness

It has already been established that the degree of perceived impoliteness of the supervisors were low. Table 15, question one and four, showcase what the respondents thought of the politeness and appropriateness level of the supervisor's utterances towards the subordinate.

A hypothesis that was made in preparation of this study proposed that the gender of the supervisor would affect the degree of perceived impoliteness, favoring the male supervisor (refer to section 3.1.1). However, the results of the respondents contradict this hypothesis by suggesting that: 1) the gender of the supervisor did not matter regarding the degree of perceived impoliteness, and 2) the appropriateness degree for using the bare imperative was viewed as equally inappropriate by both supervisors.

Table 15, question one, show that both supervisors were perceived as slightly more impolite when using the bare imperative towards a female subordinate than their male counterpart. Though this nuance is too small to be considered a pattern. If the difference would have been bigger, there would have been a slight possibility that this nuance difference was due to the gender language stereotypes suggesting that men are more exposed to vulgar and direct language than women — which in turn would explain why using the bare imperative to a women might be seen as more impolite. However, this cannot be said to be true for this study.

To answer this study's second research question: "Does the respective gender of the supervisor and the subordinate affect the degree of perceived impoliteness?", the results suggest that gender did not affect the degree of perceived impoliteness after all. In a way, this discovery would support Lebra's (1984) earlier claims — suggesting that due to the hierarchical relationship between the supervisor and the subordinate, their gender can be separated from their positions. This would also support what Saito (2011) mentioned in his own conclusion about gender not being the only factor in determining what language practices should be used, which in turn will affect how it is perceived by others.

Like the previous studies about impoliteness (Asada, 1979; Culpeper, 2011; Nishimura, 2019; Braun, 2021; Bataineh et al., 2023) have suggested, rather than just looking at external factors such as gender, more complex factors, e.g. the context of the situation and the relationship between interlocutors, affect the perception of what is impolite and to what degree.

3.3.3 Expectations and Gender Stereotypes

The last research questions: “Do men and women have the same expectations of how a supervisor should act towards a subordinate?” and “If they do, are these expectations based on gender stereotypes?” were suggested to be true, as showcased in Table 15, question two and in some instances in Table 16.

Both male and female respondents were in an agreement and shared the same expectations for the male and female supervisor respectively. Most respondents were not very surprised by the male supervisor using the bare imperative. Contrary, they were less expectant of the female supervisor to use the same expressions. This suggests that both male and female respondents share the same expectations due to gender stereotypes. Previous studies about gendered language (Ide, 1991; StrutzStreetharan, 2004, 2006, 2009; Hasegawa, 2015; Ohara, 2019) and directives in the workplace (Lebra, 1984; Wiley & Eskilson, 1985; Smith, 1992; Takano, 2005; Saito, 2011; Geyer, 2018) have either contributed to or are based on gender stereotypes derived from gender ideology. What they have had in common is the stereotypical description of how a man and a women talk.

The respondents may have been surprised with the female supervisor using the bare imperative due to women being expected to speak more politely, and softer than men. Contrary, they may have been more expectant of the male supervisor’s use of the bare imperative due to the stereotype describing men as being more vulgar, aggressive, and direct.

Furthermore, in Table 16, and as previously discussed for Table 9 and 14, there were some cases where the respondents would use different directives or expressions depending on the gender of the supervisor. For example, the percentages for the SFP *ne*, which is mostly associated with women’s language, were higher when the gender of the supervisor was female or when the supervisor, regardless of their gender, was talking to a female subordinate. Although not showcased in any of the tables, but rather discussed, the male respondents and a few female respondents showed tendencies of changing their way of speaking depending on the gender when imaging themselves as the supervisor. They would use the SFP *ne* and the politer versions of expressions if they imagined themselves as a female supervisor, or when talking to a female subordinate. On the other hand, they would use the dictionary form more often if they imagined themselves as a male supervisor. All of this suggests that the gender of a supervisor will affect what expectations are brought upon them, and that they are most likely based on preexisting gender stereotypes.

However, due to a fault in how the fifth question was being presented, which led to a disperse in how the question was interpreted, this trend does not represent all the respondents who participated in the study. Therefore, the trend is only a slight suggestion but lacks validity.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study's results suggests that due to the hierarchical relationship in the workplace, the boundaries for how impolite a supervisor can be towards a subordinate stretch further than what might be expected. Even though the supervisor was perceived as very impolite, the results suggest that the subordinate would still be reasonably willing to do what he or she was being told. However, please be mindful that the results should never be taken as any form of evidence for how a supervisor treat their subordinate.

Regarding gender and its effect on the degree of perceived impoliteness, the study suggests that gender does not really matter. Both the female and male supervisor were perceived as equally as impolite by the respondents. Additionally, the appropriateness degree was low for both supervisors, regardless of their gender.

Lastly, this study's results suggest that while gender did not play a big part in the degree of perceived impoliteness between the supervisor and the subordinate, it did affect what was expected of them. The respondents' similar expectations for the two supervisors showed that the female supervisor was less expected to use strong language, such as the bare imperative, in comparison their male counterpart. The expectations were consistent with the gender stereotypes describing how men and women talk, which in turn suggests that the expectations of how a supervisor is going to act are based on said stereotypes.

Based on these findings, a general and final conclusion can be made: In the Japanese workplace, due to the hierarchical relationships, gender can be separated from the work positions. Thus, gender won't affect how a supervisor's degree of impoliteness is perceived. However, because of their gender, subordinates might have different expectations of how they are going to act which are based on gender stereotypes and gender norms existing in the Japanese society.

For future research, it might be interesting to do a similar study that includes more directives than the bare imperative, while at the same time includes more variations of politeness degrees, to see how different language practices may affect the perception of the supervisor. It would also be interesting to test the perception of impoliteness between other types of relationships than the supervisor to subordinate combination. Because context is an important component, it would also be worth trying to test the perception of impoliteness in different, more detailed situations. Additionally, conducting a similar study on a bigger number of respondents would test the validity of the suggested trends discovered in this study.

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Appendix

Below is my transcribed message for the survey I sent out to my respondents using Google Forms. Additionally, to avoid excessive repetition and to save space, I decided to only put the follow up questions once (as they are repeatedly asked under every new dialogue), and instead kept all the dialogue changes as well as the instructions of the survey.

こんにちは。私はルンド大学で日本語学を専攻しているネリーです。現在、私は日本語の語用論が職場でどのように使われているかを調べています。礼儀正しさについていくつかの質問があるアンケートを作りました。所要時間は約 10 分ぐらいです。よろしくお願いします！

4 月 21 日までに回答をお願いします。

ここで得たデータは論文以外には使いません。

Konnichiwa. Watashi-wa rundo daigaku-de nihongogaku-o senkōshiteiru nerī desu. Genzai, watashi-wa nihongo-no goyōron-ga shokuba-de dono yō-ni tsukawareteiru-ka-o shirabeteimasu. Rēgitadashisa-ni tsuite ikutsuka-no shitsumon-ga aru ankēto-o tsukurimashita. Shoyō jikan-wa yaki 10-bun gurai desu. Yoroshiku onegaishimasu!

Shigatsu nijūichinichi made-ni kaitō-o onegaishimasu.

Koko-de eta dēta-wa ronbun igai-ni-wa tsukaimasen.

Hello. My name is Nelly, and I am majoring in Japanese Linguistics at Lund University. I am currently researching how Japanese pragmatics are used in the workplace. I have created a questionnaire with several questions about politeness. It takes about 10 minutes to complete. Thank you in advance!

Please answer before April 21st.

I will not use the data I obtain here except for my thesis.

性別：

- 男性
- 女性

年齢： _____

職業

- 専門学校生
- 大学生
- 大学院生
- 社会人
- 主婦
- その他

「その他」と答えた場合、その職業での職歴は何年ですか

あなたは仕事／アルバイトをしたことがありますか？

- はい
- いいえ

「はい」と答えた場合、どのような仕事／アルバイトをされていますか？

アンケート：パート1

下の会話を読んで、会社の上司と部下を想像してみてください。
部下は常に女性です。上司の性別が変わります。

質問に出来るだけ詳しく答えて下さい。

会話 1/6

女性部下： 「この書類に目を通していただけますか？」

女性上司： 「いや、待て。今は無理。」

1. この上司はどのくらい礼儀正しいと思いますか

- とても礼儀正しい
- まあまあ礼儀正しい
- ニュートラル
- あまり礼儀正しくない
- 全然礼儀正しくない

2. 上司の言ったことはどの程度予想されていると思いますか

- とても予想される
- まあまあ予想される

- ニュートラル
- あまり予想されない
- 全然予想されない

3. この後、上司の対応に部下は従順に従うと思いますか

- はい、従うと思う
- たぶん、従うと思う
- どちらとも言えると思う
- たぶん、従わないと思う
- まったく従わないと思う

4. このような状況で、上司の発言はどの程度適切だと思いますか

- とても適切だ
- まあまあ適切だ
- ニュートラル
- あまり適切じゃない
- 全然適切じゃない

5. もしあなたがこの状況で上司の立場だったら、何と言いましたか

会話 2/6

女性部下： 「この書類に目を通していただけませんか？」

男性上司： 「いや、待て。今は無理。」

[follow up questions]

会話 3/6

女性部下： 「課長が病気で今日は休みです。」

女性上司： 「だったら会議の時間を変更しろ。」

[follow up questions]

会話 4/6

女性部下： 「課長が病気で今日は休みです。」

男性上司： 「だったら会議の時間を変更しろ。」

[follow up questions]

会話 5/6

女性部下： 「この書類は何時までに提出したら良いのでしょうか？」

男性上司： 「急ぎだ。明日の3時までにすませろ。」

[follow up questions]

会話 6/6

女性部下： 「この書類は何時までに提出したら良いでしょうか？」

女性上司： 「急ぎだ。明日の3時までにすませろ。」

[follow up questions]

アンケート：パート2

下の会話を読んで、会社の上司と部下を想像してみてください。

部下は常に男性です。上司の性別が変わります。

質問に出来るだけ詳しく答えて下さい。

会話 1/6

男性部下： 「この書類に目を通していただけますか？」

女性上司： 「いや、待て。今は無理。」

[follow up questions]

会話 2/6

男性部下： 「この書類に目を通していただけますか？」

男性上司： 「いや、待て。今は無理。」

[follow up questions]

会話 3/6

男性部下： 「この書類は何時までに提出したら良いでしょうか？」

女性上司： 「急ぎだ。明日の3時までにすませろ。」

[follow up questions]

会話 4/6

男性部下： 「この書類は何時までに提出したら良いでしょうか？」

男性上司： 「急ぎだ。明日の3時までにすませろ。」

[follow up questions]

会話 5/6

男性部下： 「課長が病気で今日は休みです。」

女性上司： 「だったら会議の時間を変更しろ。」

[follow up questions]

会話 6/6

男性部下： 「課長が病気で今日は休みです。」

男性上司： 「だったら会議の時間を変更しろ。」

[follow up questions]

アンケートが終了しました！

下のボタンをクリックして、回答を送信してください。ご参加ありがとうございました。