Gender, politeness, and discourse management in same-sex and cross-sex opinion-poll interviews

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This paper looks at 48 telephone public-opinion survey interviews conducted by female interviewers. In 23 interviews respondents are women, while in 25 interviews respondents are men. We ask whether the interviewers, who work from a script and deviate from it only for pressing reasons, use language differently with women than with men. Specifically, we look at politeness strategies, by which the interviewer keeps the respondent involved and willing to continue, and discourse management techniques, by which the interviewer handles the flow of topics and turns and ensures that she gets the sorts of answers she needs. We find small but interesting differences in politeness: female respondents elicit more sympathy and understanding, while male respondents elicit more attention to their wants and needs and more joking. For discourse management we find more substantial differences: male respondents are managed more in almost every way. This may be because men are less comfortable with this discourse type, in which interviewers control topic and turn-allocation, than are women, and hence less compliant and more eager to subvert the interview by turning it into teasing or banter. Our findings suggest that even anonymous, information-oriented discourse is crucially interactional and point to the importance of discourse management in non-conversational genres.

1. Introduction

Do women talk differently to women than to men? Anecdotal evidence – our own experience as women and reports from many other men and women – suggests that they do. Few formal studies focus explicitly on sociolinguistic

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effects of addressees’ gender, but those that do, or that touch on the subject
tangentially, suggest that there are such effects. Shopen (ms., discussed in
Trudgill 1986: 8) found that Australian men and women used more higher-
status pronunciations when their addressees were women than when they were
men. Following up on research by Brouwer et al. (1979) about interactions at
Dutch train ticket windows, Brouwer (1982) showed that male and female
clients were more polite to male ticket-sellers than to female ones; Brouwer
defines more polite speech as speech including more salutations, more modal
constructions (may I; could you), and more frequent occurrences of please and
thank you. In New Zealand studies, Holmes (1988, 1989) found that women
complimented and apologized to other women more often than they compli-
mented or apologized to men.

In this paper we report on a study designed to provide another piece of the
answer to the question of whether women talk differently to women than they
do to men, and if so, why. Our data consists of 48 telephone public-opinion
interviews, audiotaped and transcribed, between 15 and 45 minutes long. The
interviews were administered by 18 interviewers, all middle-class American
women in their twenties. We analyze these interviewers’ strategies for
managing the flow of discourse and for displaying the politeness required to
keep the interaction going. The interviewers were employed by the Texas Poll,
a non-partisan polling service that conducts quarterly public-opinion surveys
on behalf of government agencies, non-profit organizations, and academic
researchers. We focus on female interviewers not only because we are
interested in questions of audience design as they relate to women, but also
because most of the interviewers for the particular polling service we are
studying, like most opinion-poll interviewers, are women. We are thus focus-
ing on how women talk in performing a predominantly female job.

Respondents to the poll are residents of Texas selected by means of
random-digit telephone dialing. In the set of interviews we examine, all the
respondents were Anglo-American; approximately half were men (25) and
half women (23). (So as to avoid unduly complicating the set of variables we
are working with, we chose not to look in this paper at interviews with
African-American or Hispanic respondents.) The distribution of ages, income
levels, and education levels was the same for the male and female respondents.
The youngest respondents were 18, the oldest in their sixties. The survey,
conducted in January, 1989, included questions about the performance of
various public officials, questions about issues such as gun control, health
care, abortion, and nuclear energy, and a set of fill-in-the-blank sentences
designed to elicit phonological variation. At the end of the interview,
respondents were asked about their age, education, occupation, income, and
religious and political affiliation. The interviewers conducted the interviews
from a script.

Because they are scripted, interviews like these are in many ways ideal data
for a controlled study of variation in natural speech, more so than most genres. The overall structure of the conversation and the sequence of topics are identical from interview to interview: the interviewer reads mainly multiple-choice questions from the script, the respondent answers them, and the interviewer records the answers. Since interviewers are trained to stray as little as possible from the script, and paid for collecting information rather than for having pleasant conversations, it can be assumed that deviations from the script occur only for pressing reasons. Analysis of the forms and functions of these deviations can thus shed light on the most basic exigencies of communication, same-sex or cross-sex.

In particular, the interviews provide abundant evidence about linguistic politeness (Brown and Levinson 1987) and about the negotiation of power and control in an important genre of professional talk. The ‘cold call’ is among the most egregious of offenses to people’s right to decide whom they wish to interact with, and this infraction must repeatedly be remedied by the interviewer so that the respondent will remain willing to cooperate. At the same time, the interviewer must control the flow of talk, in order to get the information she needs for the questionnaire she must fill out. Interviewers are thus in the position of having to take charge of an interaction with sometimes unwilling interlocutors who are doing them a favor by participating. It will not be surprising to find that they manage this task by subtle trade-offs of apparent power and control.

The results of this study should be interesting for several reasons. As Eckert (1989), among many others, points out, the relationship between gender and sociolinguistic variation is more complex than we once thought. Women may talk differently than men, as considerable research has shown (see Coates 1986, Tannen 1990 for overviews), but the reasons for this keep becoming less clear rather than more clear. As interactional patterns emerge in discourse, gender may be but one of an array of linguistic, psychological, sociological, and rhetorical variables that make the patterns take the shapes they do. And as Eliasoph (1986) suggests, different speech situations may not accommodate male and female ways of talking equally well. Our question is one of many that needs to be asked in the effort to find out exactly what the mechanisms of what we blithely used to call ‘women’s language’ really are. Our results are also a contribution to the analysis of rhetorical ‘audience design’ in discourse (Bell 1984), and to current scrutiny of the nature of linguistic politeness (Brown and Levinson 1987, Kasper 1990, Fraser 1990). The public-opinion survey is a speech event that is both very familiar to Americans (most people know how an interview is supposed to proceed, and they read and hear the results of public-opinion surveys regularly) and quite unfamiliar (relatively few people have actually been called for a survey). Our study thus also contributes to the growing research literature about what goes on when new genres and registers emerge in discourse (e.g. Ferrara et al. 1991), and in particular to the study of language in work settings.
2. Politeness and discourse management in the Texas Poll interviews

Texas Poll interviewers are trained to depart from their written script only when absolutely necessary. As do the British journalists studied by Greatbatch (1988), interviewers for the most part behave in ways that suggest they believe that they should “properly avoid producing talk which is not implicated in the work of questioning” (p. 413). Thus any deviations from the script by the interviewer can be assumed to serve the interactional functions that are most vital (from the interviewer’s perspective) in this speech event: to keep the respondent from hanging up the phone, and to ensure that the respondent hears and understands all the questions and answers them in appropriate ways (that is, ways which are codable on the interviewer’s questionnaire sheet) and that the interview is completed. By examining the types and frequency of interviewers’ deviations from the script when the respondents are women and when the respondents are men, we should be able to see whether systematic differences are correlated with the gender of the addressees.

The Texas Poll interviewers must perform a number of speech tasks. They start the interviews, introducing the Texas Poll and asking for cooperation. They ask questions, reading them from the script and clarifying them when necessary (though preferably, and usually, without interpreting them). Interviewers make sure the questions are answered and encode or copy down the answers, probe for more complete or clearly codable versions, and acknowledge them. All these tasks have to do with managing the interview, with orchestrating the question-and-answer turn-taking sequence. As they do this, interviewers also have the overarching responsibility of keeping the talk going. They have to make sure the respondent continues to want to cooperate. This involves being polite in general, and in particular managing potential threats to the respondents’ dignity such as questions respondents cannot answer or requests to divulge personal information.

We have accordingly subdivided departures from the script into two general categories: (1) discourse-management techniques and (2) politeness strategies. By discourse-management techniques, we mean unscripted vocalizations interviewers use to manage the flow of talk in the interview. These include, for

\[\begin{array}{|c|c|}
\hline
\text{Excellent} & 1 \\
\text{Good} & 2 \\
\text{Only Fair} & 3 \\
\text{Poor} & 4 \\
\text{Don’t know} & 8 \\
\text{Refused/NA} & 9 \\
\hline
\end{array}\]

For example, a typical question, as it appears on the questionnaire, is this: TQ1. Overall, how would you rate Texas as a place to live ... [READ LIST]

The interviewer had to get one of these answers; if the respondent said “Great”, or “I like it just fine”, the interviewer had to do what was necessary to find out what that corresponded to on her list.
example, indicating to the respondent what the appropriate format for an
answer is, making sure the respondent knows when open-ended answers are
being copied verbatim, keeping the floor during the pause necessary to copy
the answers, reclaiming the floor after interruptions, and probing or rephrasing
answers to elicit appropriately formatted ones.

While discourse-management techniques are used to manage the interview,
politeness strategies are used to manage the respondent, to make sure that he
or she begins cooperating at the outset of the interview and continues to
cooperate during it. Our analysis of politeness strategies is based on that of
Brown and Levinson (1987): ‘positive politeness’ is realized in linguistic
strategies that promote closeness and solidarity, ‘negative politeness’ in strate-
gies that convey deference and respect. While Brown and Levinson’s analysis
has been criticized (Kasper 1990, Fraser 1990), it has been extremely influen-
tial in the study of linguistic politeness, and using it makes our study more
easily comparable to other work than it would be if we defined politeness in
an idiosyncratic way.

On the basis of preliminary scrutiny, we identified seven positive politeness
strategies and four negative politeness strategies realized in deviations from
the script in the interviews. These are listed in figure 1, numbered as they are

Positive politeness strategies

P1: Notice, attend to interests, wants, needs of respondent
P5: Seek agreement
P6: Avoid disagreement
P7: Claim common ground
P8: Joke
P10: Make offers, promises
P15: Give sympathy, understanding, cooperation

Negative politeness strategies

N2: Hedge
N4: Minimize the imposition
N5: Give deference
N6: Apologize

Fig. 1. Politeness strategies.

We also identified 15 discourse management techniques, each having to do
with a task or subtask required to manage the interview. These are listed in
figure 2.
M1: Explain the interview or guide respondent through it (what the interview is for, how many questions there are, how long it will take, how many more sections remain, etc.)
M2: Ask respondent for cooperation during the interview (after the initial, scripted, request for cooperation)
M3: Repeat a question when requested to by respondent
M4: Explain or indicate what the appropriate answer format is
M5: Probe for an answer that fits the appropriate format
M6: Rephrase an answer so that it fits the appropriate format
M7: Request respondent to repeat an answer
M8: Repeat an answer to insure interviewer has heard it correctly
M9: Clarify a question when requested to by respondent
M10: Clarify a question when the answer does not fit the required format (i.e. when interviewer infers that respondent has misinterpreted the question)
M11: Request time to copy a response down
M12: Repeat an answer while copying it down
M13: Talk to keep floor while finding place on the script (Some sets of questions are rotated to minimize the effect of question order, so interviewers have to skip around on the script, and they occasionally lose their places.)
M14: Respond to interruptions; regain the floor
M15: Thank respondent during interview (before the final, scripted expression of thanks)

Fig. 2. Discourse management techniques.

Our procedure was to locate each deviation from the script and code it with a number identifying it with one or another of these politeness strategies or discourse management techniques. Our specific research questions are these: (1) Do the female interviewers use different politeness strategies with the male respondents than with the female respondents? (2) Do the female interviewers use different discourse management techniques with the female respondents than with the male respondents? (3) If there are differences, what appears to account for them?

3. Findings

On the whole, politeness strategies occurred slightly more frequently per interview when interviewees were men than when they were women; the differences are not statistically significant, however. This is true for positive as well as negative politeness, as shown in table 1.

2 The interviews vary widely in length, but the variables we are examining – instances of politeness and discourse management – are precisely what account for the variance. (In other words, if there were none of the unscripted expressions of politeness or techniques for discourse management we are examining, then all interviews would consist of the same number of
Table 1
Mean number of tokens of politeness per interview.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>With male respondents</th>
<th>With female respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>($N = 25$)</td>
<td>($N = 23$)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive politeness tokens</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative politeness tokens</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total politeness tokens</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>16.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Far more interesting than these overall totals, however, are the differences correlated with gender in interviewers’ use of particular strategies and techniques. First we discuss differences in positive politeness, then we turn to differences in negative politeness, and finally, we deal with differences in discourse management.

3.1. Positive politeness

The two types of positive politeness used most often with both men and women are P1 (notice, attend to interests, wants, needs) and P5 (give sympathy, understanding, cooperation). Table 2 presents these figures and others relevant to positive politeness. The strategies indicated by arrows – P1, P7, P8, and P15 – merit discussion; others are used about equally often with men and with women. The table is organized as follows: the first two columns identify strategies and give total numbers of occurrences. The third column shows how many interviews in each set involved the interviewer’s using the strategy at least once, and the fourth column states this figure as a percentage. The fifth and sixth columns indicate how often, when the strategy occurred at all, it did occur, the fifth column giving the range of occurrences and the sixth expressing this as a mean. The final column gives the mean number of occurrences of the strategy over all the interviews.
Table 2
Positive politeness strategies with men and with women.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th># of tokens</th>
<th># ints. with strat.</th>
<th>% ints. with strat.</th>
<th>Range, least to most</th>
<th>Mean, ints. used</th>
<th>Mean, all ints.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>182/123</td>
<td>22/21</td>
<td>88%/91%</td>
<td>1-30/1-18</td>
<td>8.3/5.8</td>
<td>7.3/5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>5/6</td>
<td>4/6</td>
<td>16%/26%</td>
<td>1-2/1-1</td>
<td>1.2/1.0</td>
<td>0.2/0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>9/5</td>
<td>3/3</td>
<td>12%/13%</td>
<td>1-6/1-2</td>
<td>3.0/1.7</td>
<td>0.4/0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7</td>
<td>11/10</td>
<td>7/4</td>
<td>28%/17%</td>
<td>1-4/1-6</td>
<td>1.4/2.5</td>
<td>0.4/0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8</td>
<td>19/14</td>
<td>9/4</td>
<td>36%/17%</td>
<td>1-5/1-6</td>
<td>2.1/3.5</td>
<td>0.8/0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P10</td>
<td>3/6</td>
<td>3/4</td>
<td>12%/17%</td>
<td>1-1/1-2</td>
<td>1.0/1.5</td>
<td>0.1/0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P15</td>
<td>56/82</td>
<td>15/17</td>
<td>60%/74%</td>
<td>1-8/1-13</td>
<td>3.7/4.8</td>
<td>2.2/3.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Totals 11.4/10.7

Key
P1: Notice, attend to interests, wants, needs of respondent
P5: Seek agreement
P6: Avoid disagreement
P7: Claim common ground
P8: Joke
P10: Make offers, promises
P15: Give sympathy, understanding, cooperation

We performed chi-square tests on all the male addressee–female addressee differences in politeness and discourse management. Because of the relatively small number of tokens of positive politeness in the interviews, none of the differences could be shown to be statistically significant. Though P1 (noticing, attending to the respondent's wants and needs) was used in a slightly higher percentage of interviews with women (91%) than interviews with men (88%), when interviews with men included this type of politeness, they included more tokens, on average 8.3 instances per interview, as opposed to 5.8 per female respondent. Up to 30 tokens per interview were used with men, whereas the highest number of tokens in an interview with a woman was 18. This category encompassed a wide range of tactics, including laughter, which may account for its frequency.\(^3\) P1 tokens in table 2 could be further broken down: in interviews with men, 81% of the P1 tokens represent laughter or talk

\(^3\) Brown and Levinson’s taxonomies of positive and negative politeness strategies yield categories which, for the interlocutors studied here and for this speech event, are not all equally large. There are many more ways to notice and attend to a respondent’s wants and needs, and many more ways to give sympathy, understanding, and cooperation than there are ways to seek agreement or claim common ground, for example. This is not a defect in Brown and Levinson’s taxonomies, of course, but it does mean that the taxonomies are a less elegant research tool than we originally anticipated.
accompanied by laughter. With women 71% of the P1 tokens represent laughter. Examples of P1 are these (with the relevant portions in italics): 4

(1) Attend to wants, needs
TRA T456 S191 male 37
Int.: Okay. Do you have any adult children living away from home? Young children at home? Or no children?
Resp.: Just one on the way.
Int.: Excuse me?
Resp.: Just one on the way.
Int.: You have one on the way? Really? Ohh!

(2) Attend to wants, needs
JAC T494 S941 female 18–29
Int.: All right. You have anything else you want to say about problems in the state?
Resp.: Oh goodness. I don’t know enough about the problems.
Int.: ((laugh)) Okay.
Resp.: I just listen to what my husband says.
Int.: Okay. (2) This is YOUR chance.
Resp.: ((laugh))

P15 (giving sympathy, understanding, cooperation) was used more often with women (in 74% of the interviews) than with men (in 60% of the interviews). The average for all female respondents was 3.6 occurrences, compared to 2.2 for all male respondents. Examples of this strategy are these:

4 Transcription conventions:
Unfilled parentheses designate unintelligible talk, filled parentheses guesses about less-than-clear segments of tape.
Equal signs on consecutive lines indicate ‘latched’ talk following immediately on the preceding turn.
Int.: I’m sorry, go ahead=
Resp.: = That’s kind of a ...
Square brackets on consecutive lines indicate overlapping talk, beginning at left bracket and continuing to right bracket.
Int.: I’m sorry that we missed the callback [again, I really am.]
Resp.: [Oh okay.] that’s all right.
Double parentheses enclose descriptions of paralinguistic behavior or pause. ((laughs))
Especially loud, stressed talk is in caps.
Pauses of less than 0.5 second are indicated with ellipses, the number of dots corresponding roughly to the length of the pause. Pauses longer than 0.5 second are represented by a number indicating the length of the pause in seconds, in single parentheses.
(3) Give sympathy, understanding, cooperation
REB T266 S723 male 29
[question: How knowledgeable are you about nuclear power plants?]
Resp.: My cousin got killed in one.
Int.: *Oh wow. hmm. ((laughs))* Okay. uh. What do you think the most important issues are with respect to nuclear power?

(4) Give sympathy, understanding, cooperation
LIS T262 S388 female 27
Int.: Do you think people look more healthy when they have a suntan?
Resp.: Yes. ((laugh))
Int.: ((laugh)) Nkay. Do you ever intentionally work on getting a tan?
Resp.: Noo, I've just got the fairest skin in the world.
Int.: *Oh, I know how that is.* Okay. Now we have some questions about families.

We want also to call attention to small but possibly important differences in two other positive politeness strategies, P7, claiming common ground and P8, joking. Examples are (5) and (6):

(5) Claim common ground
BET T409 S258 male 30–44
Int.: What do you think is the most serious problem facing the state of Texas?
Resp.: Uh let's see. Well I guess financially it would be the oil – the oil prices that nobody can get most of the revenues from that ... There could be a lot said about that.
Int.: *Oh yeah. We could write a book.*

(6) Joke
JAN T63 S239 male 18–29
Int.: Okay. Okay. Would you agree or disagree with passing a law in Texas requiring a person under eighteen to have parental consent or a court order for an abortion?
Resp.: Unh. Yeah. I would agree with that.
Int.: Okay. On another subject. do you think =
Resp.: Is it a novel?
Int.: *Uhh, maybe a miniseries or something.* ((laugh)) Okay. Okay. Do you think people look more healthy when they have a suntan?

Interviewers claimed common ground with 28% of the men and only 17% of the women, and they joked with 36% of the men and only 17% of the
women. In fact, nine of the interviews included joking with men, while only four interviews included joking with women. As is the case in example (6), most instances of joking were initiated by respondents; interviewers then followed up on or added to them. Interviewers joked more with men because men joked more with them. We will want to comment further on the possible reasons for this.

3.2. Negative politeness

Three of the four negative politeness strategies were used about equally often with men and with women. Table 3 illustrates our findings.

Table 3
Negative politeness strategies with men and with women.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th># of tokens (M/F)</th>
<th># ints. with strat. (M/F)</th>
<th>% ints. with strat. (M/F)</th>
<th>Range, least to most (M/F)</th>
<th>Mean, ints. where used (M/F)</th>
<th>Mean, all ints. (M/F)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N2</td>
<td>9/8</td>
<td>7/6</td>
<td>28%/26%</td>
<td>1/3/1-2</td>
<td>1.3/1.3</td>
<td>0.4/0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N4</td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>2/2</td>
<td>8%/9%</td>
<td>1/1</td>
<td>1.0/1.0</td>
<td>0.1/0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N5</td>
<td>129/110</td>
<td>20/20</td>
<td>80%/87%</td>
<td>1/35/1-28</td>
<td>6.4/5.5</td>
<td>5.2/4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N6</td>
<td>47/46</td>
<td>16/19</td>
<td>64%/83%</td>
<td>1/13/1-8</td>
<td>2.9/2.4</td>
<td>1.9/2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>7.7/6.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key
N2: Hedge
N4: Minimize the imposition
N5: Give deference
N6: Apologize

The two types of negative politeness used most often with both men and women are N5 (give deference) and N6 (apologize). N5 (give deference) was sometimes realized when interviewers deferred to respondents who took the floor for digressive talk, as in (7), where the interviewer’s back-channeled *uh-huh* encourages the respondent to continue. (Digressions by respondents were by no means always encouraged in this way; many were met with responses that quickly cut them off, such as “Okay, ma’am, I understand.”)
(7) Give deference
FIO T465 S241 female 45–61
Resp.: Strongly [disagree.]
Int.: [Okay.] um, on a different [topic]
Resp.: [( )] I, I, I tell you what, they wouldn’t need as many prisons if they had better education, and if they =
Int.: = Um-huh
Resp.: W- well, I can’t say you can enforce it but it seems like to me right now the kids are dropping out of uh in this particular area of East Texas =
Int.: = Um-huh
Resp.: Kids are dropping out pretty quick.
Int.: Um-huh.

Deference was also realized when interviewers allowed respondents to fail to answer, as in (8).

(8) Give deference
IRE T274 S730 female 42
[Question asks resp. to list charitable organizations that raise money for medical research.]
Resp.: And then there’s also the one that, uh ... uh ... ( ) the transplants.
U. (5) My mind is not working on these.
Int.: Okay. ((laugh))

Deference is also often expressed by the use of *sir* or *ma’am*, as in (9):

(9) Give deference
BET T464 S247 male 70
Int.: Kay. Including yourself, how many people over the age of eighteen live in your household?
Resp.: Including myself?
Int.: Yes, sir.

Deferential negative politeness (N5) was expressed about equally with both sexes – 5.2 times per interview with male respondents and 4.8 times per interview with female respondents. Whether we conservatively exclude the southern American *sir* or *ma’am*, which some of the interviewers used apparently automatically in nearly every speaking turn, or include them as real markers of deference, the results are approximately the same. There were also only very small female addressee–male addressee differences in two other
negative-politeness strategies we found in the interviews, N2 (hedge), and N4 (minimize the imposition).

Apologies (N6) were used in more of the interviews with women than with men. Interviewers used apologies in 83% of the interviews with women but in only 64% of the interviews with men. This difference is significant at the 0.05 level. Overall there were slightly more apologies per interview with women than with men, 1.9 apologies per interview with men versus 2.0 per interview with women. Excerpt (10) shows an apology to a woman, (11) an apology to a man:5

(10) Apologize
LIS T494 S901 female 35
Int.: We're asking the following questions of all students . at at all grade levels and would like- excuse me. Let me start over. ((laugh))

(11) Apologize
ELA T420 S035 male 30–44
[Resp. asks what a question means.]
Int.: I'm sorry, I didn't write the question and I just . I can only ask it as it's written.

When an interview with a man did include apologies, it tended to include more of them. The maximum number in an interview with a woman was 8, but the maximum number in an interview with a man was 13. The average for all interviews containing apologies was 2.9 for male respondents but only 2.4 for female respondents. Holmes (1989) found that women apologize more to women. Our results are more complicated: interviewers do on the whole apologize more to women, but when an interviewer apologizes to a man at all in a given interview, she does so more times. We comment below on possible reasons for this.

3.3. Discourse management techniques

Overall, the Texas Poll interviewers deviate from their script for the purpose of managing the flow of discourse more often with men than with women. On average, 25.1 deviations per interview for the purpose of discourse management occurred with men, but only 18.1 per interview with women. (See

5 The I'm sorry in (11) expresses a more sincere apology than does the excuse me in (10), which really functions principally to signal that the interviewer is starting again. Since these two kinds of apologies, sometimes referred to as 'substantive' and 'ritual' respectively, are not distinguished in Brown and Levinson's master list of strategies, we do not distinguish them here. See Bean and Johnstone (1991) for a detailed analysis of the functions of I'm sorry, excuse me, and beg pardon in survey interviews.
Several male addressee–female addressee differences in discourse management are statistically significant. Our results suggest that, overall, men require more managing in the opinion poll interaction than do women.

Table 4  
Discourse management strategies with men and with women.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th># of tokens</th>
<th># ints. with strat.</th>
<th>% ints. with strat.</th>
<th>Range, least to most</th>
<th>Mean, ints. used</th>
<th>Mean, all ints.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(M/F)</td>
<td>(M/F)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(M/F)</td>
<td>(M/F)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-&gt; M1</td>
<td>59/31</td>
<td>20/14</td>
<td>80%/61%</td>
<td>1-8/2-6</td>
<td>2.9/2.2</td>
<td>2.4/1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M2</td>
<td>5/4</td>
<td>1/3</td>
<td>4%/13%</td>
<td>5-5/1-3</td>
<td>0.5/1.3</td>
<td>0.2/0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M3</td>
<td>83/54</td>
<td>21/18</td>
<td>84%/78%</td>
<td>1-14/1-8</td>
<td>3.9/3.0</td>
<td>3.3/2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-&gt; M4</td>
<td>56/13</td>
<td>22/9</td>
<td>88%/39%</td>
<td>1-6/1-4</td>
<td>2.5/1.4</td>
<td>2.2/0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M5</td>
<td>180/140</td>
<td>24/22</td>
<td>96%/96%</td>
<td>1-24/1-23</td>
<td>7.5/6.4</td>
<td>7.2/6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-&gt; M6</td>
<td>19/2</td>
<td>11/1</td>
<td>44%/4%</td>
<td>1-4/2-2</td>
<td>1.7/2.0</td>
<td>0.8/0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-&gt; M7</td>
<td>13/7</td>
<td>11/5</td>
<td>44%/22%</td>
<td>1-2/1-3</td>
<td>1.2/1.4</td>
<td>0.5/0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-&gt; M8</td>
<td>78/66</td>
<td>22/16</td>
<td>88%/70%</td>
<td>1-8/1-13</td>
<td>3.5/4.3</td>
<td>3.1/2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M9</td>
<td>82/56</td>
<td>21/17</td>
<td>84%/74%</td>
<td>1-14/1-8</td>
<td>3.9/3.3</td>
<td>3.3/2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M10</td>
<td>8/4</td>
<td>8/3</td>
<td>32%/13%</td>
<td>1-1/1-2</td>
<td>1.0/1.3</td>
<td>0.3/0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M11</td>
<td>16/12</td>
<td>10/10</td>
<td>40%/43%</td>
<td>1-4/1-2</td>
<td>1.6/1.2</td>
<td>0.6/0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-&gt; M12</td>
<td>15/7</td>
<td>8/5</td>
<td>32%/22%</td>
<td>1-3/1-3</td>
<td>1.8/1.4</td>
<td>0.6/0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M13</td>
<td>12/5</td>
<td>5/2</td>
<td>20%/9%</td>
<td>1-4/2-3</td>
<td>2.4/2.5</td>
<td>0.5/0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M14</td>
<td>2/5</td>
<td>1/5</td>
<td>4%/22%</td>
<td>2-2/1-1</td>
<td>2.0/1.0</td>
<td>0.1/0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-&gt; M15</td>
<td>0/11</td>
<td>0/9</td>
<td>0%/39%</td>
<td>0/1-3</td>
<td>0/1.2</td>
<td>0.0/0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Totals 25.1/18.1

Key
M1: Explain structure of questionnaire, guide through it
M2: Ask for cooperation
M3: Repeat question on request
M4: Explain or demonstrate answer format
M5: Probe for answer to match format
M6: Rephrase answer to match format
M7: Request respondent to repeat answer
M8: Repeat answer to check
M9: Clarify question on request
M10: Clarify question when answer doesn’t fit format
M11: Request time to copy response down
M12: Repeat answers while copying down
M13: Talk to keep floor when finding place
M14: Manage interruption
M15: Thank respondent

While we identified 15 different management techniques, we discuss only seven of these, since the others occurred in fewer than half of the interviews or equally often with women as with men. For six of these seven techniques,
male respondents elicited more management deviations than did female respondents. The seventh case was exceptional in that women received more than did men. Table 4 summarizes the results. As indicated by arrows, the six discourse management reasons for which interviewers deviated from their scripts more with men than with women were to explain the structure of the questionnaire and guide respondents from section to section of it, to explain or demonstrate appropriate answer formats, to rephrase answers to make them fit the required formats, to request repetitions of answers, and to repeat answers to check them or to hold the floor while copying them down. The first type of discourse management on our list, M1, is explain or guide through the interview. In 80% of the interviews with men, the interviewer had to explain the poll further, beyond the scripted introduction, or to guide respondents through it, indicating segments completed, shifts in topic, and so on. In only 61% of the interviews with women was this necessary. This difference is significant at the 0.05 level. Excerpt (12) exemplifies this type of discourse management.

(12) Guide through the questionnaire
REB T266 S723 male 29
Int.: Okay. All right, that's the end of the cancer questions.

The management of male respondents required M4, explain or demonstrate answer formats, more than twice as often as did the management of female respondents (in 88% of the interviews versus 39%). This technique occurred almost four times as often per interview with men as with women (0.6 tokens per interview with women versus 2.2 with men), and this difference is also significant at the 0.05 level. Here is an example of an interviewer explaining an answer format:

(13) Explain answer format
BET T464 S247 male 62–95
Int.: Uhm, overall how would you rate Te- Texas as a place to live?
Resp.: Great.
Int.: Okay my- I've got four choices down here, excellent, good=
Resp.: =Excellent.

Similarly, it was necessary to rephrase answers to fit the required answer format (M6) in 11 interviews with men (44%), but in only one interview with a woman.
(14) Rephrase answer to fit format
BET T464 S247 male 62–95
Int.: Would you agree or disagree with a law that would allow individuals in addition to police and security personnel to obtain a license to carry a concealed gun?
Resp.: Say that- oh that’s in addition to police.
Int.: In addition to police and security personnel.
Resp.: Uh, with some reservations, certain type people I think it would be all right but just as a general law for anybody to be able to carry one I don’t think it’s a good idea.
Int.: Okay. So you would disagree with a law that would allow individuals =
Resp.: Yeah, if there wasn’t any restrictions as to type of individuals.
Int.: Okay.

The results for M7 show that interviewers requested men to repeat in twice as many interviews (11 versus 5) as they did women.

(15) Request respondent to repeat
CAR T441a S093 male 62–95
[Question is about how much respondent has heard about various forms of cancer.]
Int.: Uh, a lot about lung cancer, a little or nothing at all?
Resp.: Oh, I’ve heard, uh, uh, I would say a lot. ((indistinct))
Int.: A little? ((laugh))
Resp.: No, a lot.
Int.: Okay, I’m sorry. ((laugh))

A similar pattern appears with M8: 88% of the male respondents required repeating the answer to check versus 70% of the female respondents.

(16) Repeat answer to check
REB T410 S40 male 30–44
Int.: Okay. (2) Um, on another subject. How important is the abortion issue to you? Would you say it is one of the most important, important, not very important, or not important at all?
Resp.: Uh, actually it’s only important to the women.
Int.: Okay. Uh, so it’s not important to you. (2) All right.

With M12 (repeating the respondent’s answer while writing), there is a small difference but one perhaps worth noting. This technique was used with 32% of the men but only 22% of the women. It has been suggested (Zimmerman
and West 1975) that men interrupt more, and this floor holding technique by the female interviewers may be a forestalling of male interruption of the question–answer format.

(17) Repeat answer while writing  
DIA T452a S577 female 45–61  
Int.: What do you think the most important issues are with respect to nuclear power?  
Resp.: I think it's about uh the uh contamination of the nuclear waste.  
Int.: Okay, let me write this down, the contamination (.5) of nuclear waste. Okay.

The fact that interviewers did more managing – more guiding, rephrasing, repeating, and explaining – with men does not necessarily mean that the men were less intelligent than the women polled, or paying less attention. Sometimes men would apparently deliberately give answers they knew to be uncodable and the result would be unscripted interchange between interviewer and respondent. Men's banter often seemed to be an attempt to get a rise out of the female interviewer, to trip her up playfully or force her to depart from the script.

The last technique we will examine is M15, thanking the respondent. Men received no unscripted thanks, but 39% of the women were thanked for answers and cooperation elsewhere than at the end of the interview where a 'thank you' was scripted. This difference is significant at the 0.05 level. Excerpt (18) is an example.

(18) Unscripted thanks  
LIS T494 S901 female 35  
Int.: Thanks for um letting me interrupt your time again. ((laugh))

4. Discussion

Overall, the results show that the male respondents in the Texas Poll interviews had their wants and needs attended to more. When they were apologized to, they were apologized to more often. They had the poll explained, answer formats explained, and answers rephrased to fit the format. In general they were managed more, and interviewers did not give them extra thanks. On the other hand, women received more sympathy and expressions of cooperation. They were apologized to in more interviews. They were managed less and thanked more.

One of the questions raised by our findings on politeness is why it is that when men were apologized to, as were 64% in the corpus, they received
slightly more apologies per interaction than did women, even though women were apologized to in more interactions. Holmes (1989) found that men receive more apologies for infractions of time, women for infractions of space. The polling of strangers is an imposition on their time, and interviewers sometimes acknowledge this, as in this example (which includes the scripted ‘thank you’ at the end of the interview):

(19) Acknowledging value of respondent’s time
BEC T480 S620 male 30–44
Int.: I thank you for your time. *I know how valuable it is.*

Apologies to men sometimes occurred as a direct result of the man’s reminder that his time was being imposed on, as in (20):

(20) Apologize
ERI T33 S538 male 62–95
Resp.: I need to hurry. I’ve got a client on the phone.
Int.: Okay, *I’m sorry,* okay …

Compare this with the following excerpt, in which a female respondent’s time and attention were required elsewhere:

(21) Respondent apologizes
DIA T440 S059 female 27
Resp.: What? *I’m sorry,* hold on just a minute.
Int.: Sure, uh-huh.
Resp.: *I’m sorry,* my little girl went out in the street. ((laugh))
Int.: Oh, God! No, no, no!
Resp.: Th- the oldest child came to tell me the youngest was walking out in the street.
Int.: So go grab her, go get her in from the street. ((laugh))

The respondent’s clear reminder that her time was needed elsewhere did not elicit an apology from the interviewer, even though the need was considerably more urgent than the ‘client on the phone’ in excerpt (20). In fact, it was the respondent who apologized.

Another possible reason for the finding that men who were apologized to were apologized to more often may be that it is harder for women to apologize successfully to men than to women. Perhaps this female-preferred strategy falls on deaf ears, is not readily appreciated by men, so that women tend to repeat the strategy to attempt to get the kind of accepting uptake (“Oh, that’s okay”) that they have come to expect in apologetic interactions with women. In the interview excerpted in (22) a male interviewer not only failed to acknowledge an apology, but actually rejected it:
A second question is why do women appear to joke more with men? We found that over a third of the female interviewers engaged in outright joking with men, and many more liberally sprinkled their interviewing with laughter at some clever or unusual comment initiated by men. The answer appears to be tied to discourse management. In the subtle trade-off of power and control of an opinion-poll interview, men appear to be less comfortable than women. Even though they are more powerful than the interviewers in terms of knowledge (they provide the answers), they are interactionally less powerful (they don't control the sequence of turns or topics). While the respondent has the expertise in the situation – he or she has the sole access to his or her own opinions – the interviewer must regulate the flow of questions, initiate new topics, and start and stop the poll itself. Women evidence a high degree of cooperation in this endeavor, and at times willingly employ the metaphor of a test for the interaction, asking “Did I get the right answer?” (Interviewers occasionally play into this, with responses like “You got a hundred!”) Women are more willing to follow the rules and in so doing to be interactionally powerless for the duration of the speech event. Men, on the other hand, are often uncomfortable enough in a speech event in which they are relatively powerless that they try to redefine the situation as a game, a contest among equals. This is illustrated in examples (23) and (24). In both cases, the male respondent attempted, in a playful way, to force the interviewer to answer the question for him, making the questioning and answering into a competitive game.

(23) Making interview into a game
MAR T420 S131 male 61
Int.: Children must learn to do what before they learn to run?
Resp.: Walk, crawl.
Int.: Okay.
Resp.: Pick one.
(24) Making interview into a game
MAR T420 S131 male 61
Int.: The capital of the United States?
Resp.: Got to be where Bush is.
Int.: ((laugh)) Okay, what is that?
Resp.: ((laugh)) Washington.

Since the signals of play and intimacy overlap with the things people have to do in poll interviews, such as divulge personal information about themselves and their opinions, it is possible to interpret one speech event in terms of the other. (See Hopper et al. 1984, Alberts 1986, Glenn and Knapp 1987 on the language of intimacy and play.) Male respondents often deliberately said something false or inappropriate as a teasing gesture, possibly trying to get the interviewer to break out of the interview frame. Extract (25) exemplifies this:

(25) Deliberately inappropriate answer
MAR T420 S131 male 45–61
Int.: What do you think the most ... serious problem facing the state of Texas?
Resp.: Most of the people that's in it.
Int.: ((laugh)) Most of the people in it?
Resp.: What's wrong with Texas is the damn people that's in it.

The interviewer was unable to elicit a more serious or more explicit answer, and proceeded to the next question. Another male respondent told the interviewer that he had completed "senior year of law school", and then announced "I'm a doctor". Later on, in answer to the question "What is your job called?" he said "I'm an attorney". Another, when asked to pronounce the number after thirty-nine, said "fifty-nine"; another answered a question about his marital status with "I've been widowed. No, I, I'm single never been married".

Although the interviewers were instructed to maintain a neutral stance and to adhere to the question-answer format, interactionally they had to find a way to respond to their interlocutors, keeping in mind that their primary goal was to complete the interview. Accordingly, they often played along with men's joking tactics by laughing or engaging in mutual joking or self-disclosure, as in (26):

(26) ER
[Int. Res] Int.: One to another game men. no reason were quest their opinion answer resp perfo ending.

Resp.:
(26) **Mutual self-disclosure**  
ERI T033 S538 male 65  
[Int. asks multiple-choice question about how state judges should be selected.]  
Resp.: I’m a lawyer.  
Int.: (.5) Where did you go to law school?  
Resp.: University of Texas.  
Int.: There? I’m trying to get into that school.  
Resp.: You are?  
Int.: Yeah. ((laughing))

In connection with the findings for discourse management, we need to ask why female respondents were routinely thanked more and managed less than male respondents. The answer appears to be that men subverted the question-answer format of the interview far more frequently than did women. Men deliberately attempted to undermine the status of the female interviewer as the dominant person in the interchange. To do this, they resorted to banter, teasing, playfully wrong or hard-to-code answers in an attempt to alter the balance of power in the interchange. Some interviews were outright flirtatious. One young man, for example, found a way at the beginning of the interview to announce repeatedly that he was unmarried, and eventually managed to engage the interviewer in an extended exchange of personal information. The game or playful goading metaphor permeates many of the interviews with men. Many male respondents said “true” or “false” when asked to give yes/no responses. Others expressed dissatisfaction with the answer options they were given, often elaborating an answer to demonstrate the inadequacy of questions or answer choices. In short, men tried to loosen the constraints on their turns at talk in a number of ways, including expounding on their opinions even though they had been told that codable multiple choice or short answers were desired. Extract (27) shows how this could work, as a male respondent answered a multiple-choice question about Ronald Reagan’s performance as president with an explanation of his opinion of George Bush, ending with a comment about himself:

(27) **Taking over the talk**  
REB T410 S40 male 35  
Int.: How would you rate the job that Ronald Reagan did as president. Excellent, good, only fair, or poor.  
Resp.: It’s hard to say. I can’t really judge George Bush’s performance (even though he has) been vice-president for eight years.  
Int.: Okay. ( )
Resp.: And before him, I wasn't really involved in the in the political view screen of it all just see what Bush George Bush was doing besides being involved in FBI. =

Int.: [Uh-huh]

Resp.: (Only the) future is going to tell.

Int.: Okay. (inhalers to speak) =

Resp.: But the only dissental thing I have against Bush is that he claims to be a Texan even though he holds residence. he's really not a Texan he's just a transplanted Texan.

Int.: (laugh) [Okay.]

Resp.: [Me, I'm] a true Texan and I'm damn proud of it.

On the other hand, the women by and large adhered to the constraints of the format, and displayed cooperation and willingness to operate in the task-oriented framework of question and answer. They occasionally checked to ensure that their answers were in the right format, as in (28):

(28) Checking on appropriateness of answer
LIS T521 S945 female 34

Int.: [Nuclear power plants] do not produce air pollution the way coal does.

Resp.: Don't know.

Int.: Okay, and they =

Resp.: =Is that an answer?

Int.: Yeah, that is. That's fine.

In (29), a female respondent displayed awareness of what the interviewer's questionnaire looked like, and in (30) a woman demonstrated that she understood polling procedures.

(29) Anticipating interviewer's coding task
REB T428 S124 female 54

Int.: Okay. Do you have adult children living away from home, young children at home, or no children.

Resp.: Number one.

(30) Demonstrating understanding of polling
LIS T494 S901 female 32

Int.: Finally, I'd just like to ask you a few questions about yourself so that we can see how the different groups of people feel about these things.

Resp.: Demographics? Huh?

Int.: Excuse- yeah, demographics. (laugh)
Because they were typically willing to cooperate and often eager to make overt displays like these of cooperativeness, women were managed less and thanked for their compliance.

To summarize, there appear to be subtle but interesting differences between talk to men and talk to women by female interviewers in this highly task-oriented type of discourse. We think that the differences have to do not primarily with relatively invariant register differences, but rather with the specific, rhetorically situated demands and expectations of interlocutors. We maintain that female interviewers tailor their discourse to fit the occasion and the gender of their respondents. While many of the differences are small, together they suggest that gender differences in tolerance for temporary powerlessness require differential uses of politeness strategies and discourse management techniques according to the sex of the addressee. Future research might investigate the length of turns by male and female respondents to establish whether constraints on respondent turns are looser for men than for women, as men make a bid to redress the imbalance of power in their favor by expounding on their opinions. We have concentrated on female interviewers, but future studies could examine language use by male interviewers.

Our results blur the global distinction between discourse types as either transactional (focusing on transmission of information) or interactional (having as the primary goal the establishment and maintenance of social relationships), to which Kasper (1990) points. Aston (1988: 319–321) suggests that since identifying shared attitudes in order to build intimacy is not the function of service-encounter talk, one should expect to find little interactional speech in such contexts. This, he claims, is "perhaps why interactional speech often seems a veneer in transactional contexts, a gratuitous addition which is inconsequential, given the transitory nature of the relationship" (1988: 320). Rapport-building discourse moves may indeed seem gratuitous, even grating, in some task-oriented encounters, as when restaurant servers tell customers their names or bank tellers make exaggerated productions of wishing one a nice day. But in the opinion-poll interviews, the basically transactional exchange of information will not work unless the interaction is couched also as an interaction and involves all the kinds of rapport-building moves that have been described by conversation analysts such as Pomerantz (1984) and Aston (1988: 249–323), discourse analysts such as Tannen (1984), and others as characteristic of more explicitly interactional talk. Evidence for this is the many departures from the scripted questionnaire, as the interviewer endeavors to keep the respondent from hanging up the phone. Our results are similar to findings for other discourse types involving strangers, such as Brouwer's (1982) study in an Amsterdam train station. In both cases, either formulaic or scripted discourse is supplemented according to the exigencies of the real-life social interchange. People need to express themselves as individuals interacting with other individuals even when they might accomplish the task at hand more efficiently by acting more like machines (Johnstone 1991).
Our results underscore the importance of attention to the influence of sex of addressee on discourse. The findings we have presented are significant as a contribution to the general area of research on audience design (Bell 1984), an important field where rhetoric, social psychology, and linguistics intersect. Our research focuses on the influence of gender because we consider this a fundamental variable. For this reason we have kept ethnicity constant and have dealt with matched levels of age, education, and income for female and male respondents. But other characteristics of an audience are also important, of course. Future examinations of Texas Poll interviews, which include responses from three ethnic groups and various ages and income levels, may answer other interesting questions about audience design, such as: Do interviewers speak differently to the elderly? (Coupland et al. 1988); Do interviewers use different or more frequent tokens of politeness with Anglos than with African-Americans or Mexican-Americans?; Is perceived social class of respondent a factor in an interviewer's use of politeness strategies or management techniques?

The findings reported here point the way to a new avenue of research for discourse analysts: the study of discourse management techniques. Discourse analysts increasingly see discourse as interactively achieved, that is, not the product of a single speaker, but emergent and jointly constructed by speaker and hearer alike. This emphasis opens the way for investigation of discourse management, the techniques employed by interlocutors with regulatory responsibility to confront and respond to the exigencies of the moment as they use language in real time. Research on discourse management is particularly important in light of the fact that the majority of interactions in which human beings engage do not involve the relative equality of turn-taking or topic-introduction rights typical of ordinary conversation. Most institutionalized forms of discourse involve interlocutors of unequal status, and this is reflected in how and by whom the talk is managed. The subjects of turn taking and topic introduction and acceptance have to date dominated research into discourse management. Work by O'Barr (1982) has elucidated some of the principles of courtroom discourse management, and Merritt (1980) demonstrates the management of service encounters. But the surface has barely been scratched. Our discussion of discourse management techniques used by opinion-poll interviewers suggests the kind of work that can be done for the many other task-oriented speech events involving members of unequal status, such as loan applications with bank officers, questioning by police, or consulting with a physician or psychotherapist. Much more basic research needs to be done in the area of discourse management.

As Holmes points out (1989: 95), the study of gender differences in the performance of specific speech acts is in its infancy. We suggest that if researchers seek to investigate gender differences in discourse, relevant speech events to look at are ones in which men and women play different roles.
Studies of a wide range of naturally occurring speech events (e.g., opinion-poll interviews) will give us contextualized instances of varying speech acts and bring us closer to understanding not only how but, more importantly, when and why women and men use language in different ways.

This research is a contribution to the growing body of research on language in the workplace. The public-opinion poll plays a dominant role in contemporary political and economic life. Most opinion-poll interviewers are female, and analysts of survey research find that women generally make better interviewers, as measured by the rate of responses they obtain (Groves and Fultz 1985, Dijkstra 1987). Perhaps this has something to do with their facility at varying their speech appropriately to elicit cooperation and information from men as well as from women. But discourse is a powerful reflection of people's concepts of social relationships as well as a potent force in constructing social relationships, and the implications of the fact that poll interviewers have to vary their supposedly invariant delivery are great. Because of more general social imbalances in men's and women's expectations for power and control in discourse, these women have to speak differently to men than to women simply to do their job, a job into which gender is not supposed to enter.

References