



Audience participation in politics: Communicative competence for political communication in contemporary Japan



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ABSTRACT

This paper closely examines the political communication by the members of Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly. The particular settings analyzed are (1) 'monological' street speeches; and (2) Assembly (parliamentary) sessions. Each occasion has a distinctive kind of audience, and each audience has a distinctive effect on the emerging discourse. This study examines these two settings with a common concern for addressivity (Bakhtin, 1986) across speech contexts.

Given the observations made in this study, the paper points out that the traditional understanding of communicative competence cannot explain the depth of integrative relationship among the participants present in a setting. CC must be re-considered as shared, publically own interactional vitality which is engendered "on live" by those present.

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1. Introduction

Any speaker, not just politicians, expects a response from his or her audience, or "an active responsive understanding" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 94). But what is unique about politicians is purpose to which their speech is intended, which has specific effects on the form and content of speech. What is unique about *Japanese* politicians' speech is how this purpose interacts with cultural norms and practices on the one hand, and with the specific linguistic resources of the Japanese language on the other, to generate a specific kind of addressivity. While other scholars have studied the addressivity of various types of discourse, varying from the mundane to the institutional, the addressivity of Japanese political discourse until now has remained unexplored.

In addition to filling a gap in research on political discourse, this paper also seeks to draw on addressivity to emphasize a new conceptualization of communicative competence (CC). A political figure, knowing the social dynamics of his or her audience, organizes talk to capture their heart; he or she may monitor emergent audience responses and adjust speech tempo (Atkinson, 1984) or formulation (Duranti, 2001), so that the talk draws the audience's attention towards him- or herself. In other words, one's CC is shaped (or designed, drawing on the conversation analytic notion of 'recipient design') by one's audience. Audience participation in shaping one's CC is certainly beyond the speaker's sole control; in order to understand it, we have to reconsider where competence resides. This paper will illustrate this aspect of CC through a close examination of the political communication by members of the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly.

The main focus? [of what?] was a candidate running for municipal reelection in Tokyo. Before, during, and shortly after the election, he had many different opportunities to participate in something, at times becoming the primary speaker, and at other times acting as a member of the audience in an assembly. Two of the political scenes this paper will analyze may be considered "typical" speech occasions for politicians in Japan: (1) 'monological' street speeches; and (2) Assembly sessions.

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Each occasion has a distinctive kind of audience, and each audience has a distinctive effect on the emerging discourse. This study examines these two settings with a common concern for addressivity across speech contexts.

The audiences of the discourse I examine in this paper are very often silent, i.e., they at times say nothing while interacting with the speaker. Yet they are nonetheless important to the interaction. One of the points I make in this paper is that even silent participants, and even *invisible* silent participants, exert power over speech. The audience's silent "power" of participation is important to a full understanding of the discourse. The audiences in the speech events I examine contribute to the "recipient design" (Sacks et al., 1974; Heritage, 1985) of the politicians' talk; they are better identified as "co-authors"¹ of the speech (Duranti and Brenneis, 1986) rather than mere passive participants.

1.1. Communicative competence for political communication

An examination of political communication, particularly when we highlight the role of the audience, would lead us to understand communicative competence in a particular way. It sheds light on a stream of understanding of communicative competence that cannot be located within a single agent; rather, it is best understood as the way in which people behave when they are engaged in communication with others. A pre-theoretical definition of the notion of "competence" refers to a cluster of related abilities, commitments, knowledge, and/or skills that enable an individual person to act effectively or successfully in a particular situation. The details of this definition varies amongst different sources, but there is one particular commonality that different definitions share, namely the fact that competence belongs to an individual or singular person (as part of his or her cognition).

This kind of research on political communication that I propose cannot be accomplished without close observation and detailed contextual knowledge. Both data collection and data analysis require that the researcher be "embedded", in a sense, in the speech context. Identifying and analyzing the effects of addressivity on speech requires approaching the study from two different but complementary perspectives: the macroscopic and the microscopic. This study seeks to exploit and demonstrate the benefit of the interaction between ethnography and microanalysis. A secondary but no less important purpose of this research is to demonstrate the methodological value of such an approach.

When we turn to *communicative* competence, particularly competence required for oral interaction, the location of competence becomes rather opaque and different works vary on the question. In his ethnography of classroom events, Mehan (1982) suggests that, while the interactional structure of a classroom activity is ritualized (e.g., an Initiation-Response-Follow-up pattern), communicative competence for classroom interaction is only made available in the actual act of interacting. He and Young (1998) suggests that competence for interaction is co-constructed by all participants via discursive practices that are specific to each occasion. By participating with more experienced others in specific interactive practices, the participants, particularly those who are novice to the specific social context, acquire practice-specific interactional competence (see Okada, this volume; Kataoka, this volume). In this paper, through an analysis of how audience participation is engendered in various settings of political communication, I argue that competence in these discursive practices is located in the ecology of particular interactional environments, rather than simply in individuals' cognition.

1.2. Previous works on political communication

The social world under investigation in this paper is politics. In this particular world, negotiations are held, speeches are made, debates take place, bargains are struck, and these activities are all done through words. Language is clearly the engine, fuel, and wheels of political action. This has motivated a great deal of interest across different fields in political language and public communication. The importance of appealing to an audience is recognized by candidates, spin doctors, political consultants and the like. Scholars have variously looked into political oratory (e.g. Atkinson, 1984; Clayman, 1992), debate (e.g., Bilmes, 1999, 2001; Antaki & Leudar, 2001; Carbó, 1992), and political interviews (e.g., Heritage & Greatbatch, 1991; Clayman & Heritage, 2002).

Political oratory has been the target of rhetorical studies for many years. However, it was not until the 1980s that researchers began paying attention to the fact that oratory cannot be produced without audience participation. Studies of speaker–audience interactions began by examining how audience interacts with speaker by producing collective responses, such as applause. Atkinson (1984) examined well-known political speakers in Britain, the United States, and elsewhere, and showed that they monitor emergent audience responses and adjust their speech by slowing down their speech tempo and revising phrasing so as to facilitate, invite, or sometimes inhibit responses. Skillful speakers can orchestrate audience responses through the ongoing delivery of their own talk. Atkinson further suggested that mastery of the relevant devices is among the skills that make a speaker "charismatic".

Applying Atkinson's hypotheses to another body of data, Heritage and Greatbatch (1986) examined 476 speeches delivered to British Conservative, Labour, and Liberal party conferences in 1981. In addition to a descriptive quantitative analysis of the occurrence of audience applause, they detected some basic rhetorical formats, such as *contrasting*, *listing*, *puzzle-solution* (e.g., "Why do they do without?" (1.0) "Because the minimum wage laid down by wages councils and joint

¹ Authorship is understood as a collective responsibility for the shape and content of messages that shifts from individual speakers to particular types of participants' frameworks (Duranti 1997, p. 297).

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