LETTERS TO *LANGUAGE*

Language accepts letters from readers that briefly and succinctly respond to or comment upon either material published previously in the journal or issues deemed of importance to the field. The editor reserves the right to edit letters as needed. Brief replies from relevant parties are included as warranted.

Response to a review

March 9, 2007

To the Editor:

I write to offer a response to Rob Albon's book notice on my book, *Gender, language and culture: A study of Japanese television interview discourse* (John Benjamins, 2004), published in 2006 in this journal (*Lg*. 82.3. 696–97).

It is most unfortunate that Albon provides a rather unbalanced view of my book by omitting the most important findings. He seems to arbitrarily select sections of the book to criticize and misses fundamental information. For example, he selects one statement about the gender-specific use of sentence-final particles and labels it as generalization, and does not even notice the more refined picture given by my book when looking at the differences in the speech of older males (p. 130), or the shift of formal and informal speech styles (pp. 116–33), or the relationship between the host and the guest (p. 134). In fact, a whole section was written on this phenomenon in reference not only to age and gender but also to speech style shift, use of pronouns, lexicon, and the concepts of *uchi* and *soto*.

Albon also completely ignores the section on *aizuchi*, two whole chapters out of the five main ones in the book, although Yumiko Ohara referred to them as 'the most detailed and informative discussion of these short response items that [I] have read to date' in her review of my book in the *Journal of Pragmatics* (38.301–4, 2006, p. 303).

Albon should have referred to works in conversational analysis (CA) in commenting on the analysis (e.g. 'A simplest systematics for the organization of turn-taking for conversation', by Harvey Sacks, Emanuel Schegloff, and Gail Jefferson (*Lg*. 50.4.696–735, 1974); *Joint utterance construction in Japanese conversation*, by Makoto Hayashi (John Benjamins, 2003); *Turn-taking in Japanese conversation*, by Hiroko Tanaka (John Benjamins, 1999); and 'Intrusive or co-operative? A cross-cultural study of interruption', by K. Murata (*J. of Pragmatics* 21.385–400, 1994)). Albon refers to a particular example (p. 113) as an interruption, but interruptions are classified in CA as instances when the listener ignores turn-taking rules (*Conversational dominance and gender*, by Hiroko Itakura, John Benjamins, 2001; Murata 1994), and the example I provide is definitely not one such instance. On the contrary, it is an example of turn projectability that enables Japanese speakers to predict turn-completion (Hayashi 2003, H. Tanaka 1999).

His comment about my conclusion completely misses my main argument. I argue that other aspects such as the formality of the interview, the roles, and the interpersonal relationships between the host and interviewees all contribute to shape the speech of each participant so that gender is only one aspect of the interaction. It needs to be noted that my book and other publications are arguing for a model more refined than a simple dichotomous one (see Janet Bing and Victoria Bergvall's 'The question of questions: Beyond binary thinking', in *Rethinking language and gender research: Theory and practice*, ed. by V. Bergvall, J. Bing, and A. Freed, 1–29, Longman, 1996; Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet's *Language and gender*, Cambridge, 2003; and Sarah Mills's *Gender and politeness*, Cambridge, 2003).

Albon's personal preference appears to be different from the accepted terminology used in the research of language and gender. I have followed the established practice for terms such as 'female' and 'male' language when referring to the language used by women and men (Deborah Cameron, *Feminism and linguistic theory*, Macmillan, 1992; Jennifer Coates, *Women talk*, Blackwell, 1996; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2003; Janet Holmes, *Women, men and politeness*, Longman, 1995). Similarly, the terms 'older' and 'younger' are basic concepts in Japanese communication (Jane Bachnik & Charles J. Quinn, *Situated meaning: Inside and outside in Japanese self, society, and language*, Princeton, 1994; Haruhiko Kindaichi, *Nihongo*, Iwanami Shinsho, 1990), and their use in reference to guests older/younger than 50 is clearly stated in Appendix 1.

If the 'term' *Osorubeshi Tetsuko* is from an academic work, citation conventions should be used. If it is hearsay, then this should be clearly indicated and should not be used with the pretense of academic rigor.

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While the translations of transcriptions may not be to Albon's taste, my book is more than a collection of translations and the readers would have benefited had he written about major issues in the research on language and gender and institutional talk.

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Author's reply: I stand by the book notice that I wrote on Dr. Tanaka's book. I found her data interesting but the interpretations were not compelling. I encourage her and other readers who are interested in the subject to look at Dr. Patrick Heinrich's review of the same book on LinguistList (http://linguistlist.org/issues/15/15-2431.html). He was not bound by *Language*'s 500-word limit for book notices, so his review is more detailed than my book notice was. Incidentally, while *Language* does not require book notice writers to contact authors, I did send Dr. Tanaka an email message on November 7, 2004, to ask if she wanted to see my book notice. She did not respond to that message, so I did not pursue things further.

ROB ALBON
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Editor's reply: I am always happy to give authors a chance to respond when they feel that reviews of their works are in need of comment, though the review author is asked for comment as well (as in this case).

A plea to presenters

April 27, 2007

To the Editor:

Of all the destructive current trends in linguistics, I want to comment on one particularly pernicious one, regrettably quite common and increasing in frequency at conferences these days. I refer, of course, to the practice of blindly printing handouts of one's PowerPoint presentation, six micro-boxes jostling each other uncomfortably on a single side of a page.

The most obvious irritation of these, of course, comes from the extreme miniaturization of text that, even when projected on a screen, is rather too small. Even 20 point font only comes out about 5.5 point size when printed 6 slides to a page. Even in my younger nonbifocal days, I would have appreciated a magnifying glass for such an ordeal. Perhaps those who provide such papers should be required to also provide accompanying convex lenses. Or be required to use only 32 or larger font size on PowerPoints.

White space is supposed to make a document more friendly and easy to read, but when 59% of the total area of the paper is white, I must rebel. Is there no way to decrease the space between boxes and thus increase the box size?

The problem is exacerbated with maps. These generally have variable and fuzzy lettering and borders, which show up not at all on the printout.

And photos? A lovely sunset or distinguished local building in glowing color in a projection comes out as an uninteresting monochromatic blurry whatsit when printed. People lose their distinctive features, as does the whole presentation.

I make an appeal to all those who care about clarity in presentations (and who would like their handouts to be actually looked at after the conference is over) to print only two slides per sheet of paper, unless ALL the text (yes, even references and such) is a minimum of 8 point on the sheet (this translates to at least 36 point font size on the slide). Or even better, as a Florida student recently did, would be to have a handout that has the same information as the PowerPoint slides, but in nice text form, unboxed and liberated. Then perhaps at the next LSA meeting we'll be much more contented, going home happy with our collected handouts.

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Editor's reply: This seems a reasonable plea, though I wonder what the reaction of the environmentalists among us would be to some of these suggestions.

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