Involvement Vs Detachment: Gender Differences in the Use of Personal Pronouns in Televised Sports in Taiwan
Sai-Hua Kuo
Discourse Studies 2003; 5; 479
DOI: 10.1177/14614456030054002

The online version of this article can be found at:
http://dis.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/5/4/479

Published by:
SAGE
http://www.sagepublications.com

Additional services and information for Discourse Studies can be found at:

Email Alerts: http://dis.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts
Subscriptions: http://dis.sagepub.com/subscriptions
Reprints: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav
Permissions: http://www.sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav
Citations http://dis.sagepub.com/cgi/content/refs/5/4/479
ABSTRACT Based on 24 hours of videotaped data, this study investigates, both qualitatively and quantitatively, gender differences in the use of person pronouns in televised sports in Taiwan. This analysis has found that, regardless of their speaker role, male sports reporters use the second-person singular pronoun ni much more frequently than their female counterparts. In addition, there is a significant difference in the distribution of pragmatic functions of ni between men’s and women’s reporting. While male sports reporters use ni in a more varied way, i.e. to refer to the TV audience, a specific athlete or team, an indefinite or non-specific athlete, or to include this pronoun in direct speech to dramatize their reporting, female reporters use this pronoun predominately to refer to a non-specific athlete. In other words, male sports reporters tend to employ impersonal ni and dramatic ni to signal their strong self-involvement, their interpersonal involvement with the athlete and the TV audience, and their involvement with the reported sports event. Finally, male sports reporters’ more frequent use of the second-person pronoun ni in the data also marks their informal and conversational speech style. This result contradicts those previous studies which claim that formality and detachment characterize men’s information-oriented public discourse.

KEY WORDS: gender and discourse, involvement, person pronoun, pragmatic function, speech style, sports announcer talk

1. Introduction

Recent studies in language and gender have not presented a unified result about women’s talk in the public domain. In some cases, women are found to adopt the more adversarial, information-focused style characteristic of all-male talk. For instance, McElhinny’s (1998) analysis of two specific incidents of domestic violence in the Pittsburgh police shows how women police officers have learned to use the strategies typically employed by male police officers, which have attenuated the personal and the emotional. However, in some workplaces women are resisting the androcentric discourse norms of the public sphere and
are employing their own more cooperative speech style in the working environment. West’s (1998) analysis of doctor–patient talk is an example. Her study of directive-response speech sequences between doctor and patient has discovered that, compared with male doctors, female doctors tend to use more mitigated directive forms to minimize status differences between themselves and their patients. These studies all point out that whichever linguistic strategies women adopt, they are constantly facing a ‘double-bind’ situation: they will be perceived as either aggressive and unfeminine or unassertive and feminine.

More than politics, business, law, and medicine, sport has been traditionally considered a male-dominated domain. In the USA, with the emergence of women’s tennis and the WNBA, the concept that sport is and should be a male world has been seriously challenged since the 1970s (Messner et al., 1992). However, sports reporting has still been ‘monopolized’ by male reporters. Most female sports announcers or commentators are limited to those who used to be athletes themselves, and they tend to play a supporting role, rather than taking the center stage, during sports reporting. Furthermore, many feminist scholars have viewed sport as an inherently inappropriate site for their energy because of its institutional sexism (Messner and Sabo, 1990). As a result, although gender differences in speech behavior has been a much-explored scholarship since Robin Lakoff’s (1975) pioneering work *Language and Women’s Place*, there have been very few studies comparing the ways men and women talk about sports from linguistic perspectives.

Utilizing feminist insights on gendered language, Messner et al. (1992) compare and examine the ways that television commentators talk about women’s and men’s basketball and tennis televised coverage. Their analysis reveals that while there is very little of the overtly sexist commentary that has been observed in previous research, the language used by commentators tends to mark women’s sports as ‘other’, derivative or inferior to men’s. There are also stark contrasts between how male athletes and female athletes are referred to by commentators: women athletes tend to be ‘linguistically infantilized’ in that they are far more likely to be referred to as ‘girls’ or by their first name only. In addition, the quality of commentators’ verbal attributions of strength and weakness, success and failure, for women’s and men’s events also tends to differ, and women athletes’ accomplishments are framed negatively or ambivalently. It is concluded that the language of sports commentary tends to reconstruct gender hierarchies.

Johnson and Finlay (1997) examine a 45-minute episode of the popular British football program *Saint and Greavsie* and propose that gossip, a discourse genre which has often been associated with women (Jones, 1980; Coates, 1989), is also used by men to create solidarity within their own gender group. Adopting Jones’s (1980) framework for the analysis of women’s gossip, Johnson and Finlay show that the formal and functional elements of women’s gossip can equally be applied to the way in which some men talk about football. They argue that in the football talk they analyzed, the private and personal concerns that typify women’s gossip are being transferred to a reified world located firmly within the
public sphere – that of competitive sport. They also claim that whereas women’s gossip, as Jones (1980) has contested, is a result of their exclusion by men from other forms of expression, men’s football talk on TV can be interpreted as ‘an active manifestation of that exclusion process’ (Johnson and Finlay, 1997: 137).

Based on videotaped data of 24 hours of televised sports programs in Taiwan, this study aims to investigate, both qualitatively and quantitatively, gender differences in the use of person pronouns from sociolinguistic/discourse perspectives. My analysis will focus on the distribution and communicative function of the first and the second person pronouns in sports casting. In addition, how gender affects the sports reporters’ uses of these pronouns will also be explored. In the following, Section 2 describes the data used in the study, including a brief discussion of sports casting as a discourse genre. Section 3 presents a qualitative analysis of the pragmatic roles and rhetorical functions of personal pronouns in the data. The quantitative analysis in Section 4 examines differences in the use of these pronouns between male and female sports reporters and then discusses the implications and significance of these differences. Section 5 concludes the study.

2. The data

The data for this study consist of 15 televised sports programs in Taiwan recorded during the period between April 2000 and April 2001, totaling 24 hours of sportscasting. Before describing the data further, I will first give a brief discussion of the nature of sportscasting.

Although sports announcer talk (SAT) is a highly structured and well recognized genre of contemporary mass media discourse, there have been very few discussions on this discourse genre. Sportscasting, according to Crystal and Davy (1969: 125), is a type of ‘unscripted commentary’. Like most commentaries, sportscasting consists of three parts: description, explanation, and opinion. In sportscasting on television, since both the reporter and listeners are looking at the same event, the background information and interpretation, rather than the description of the ongoing activity, is the centrally important part of a reporter’s function. Using a commentary of a cricket match as an example, Crystal and Davy (1969) investigate English sports language with respect to phonology, syntax, and lexicon. In general, successful commentary is marked by fluency, spontaneity, and variety. There are varied patterns of pitch movement, tone-unit length, loudness, and speed to avoid monotony and introduce an impression of conversational casualness. To sound spontaneous, commentators frequently make use of the loose grammatical linkage of sentences – especially with *and* – which is commonly found in conversation. In addition, occasional grammatical discontinuities and a high incidence of simple and minor sentences are also salient syntactical features of sports talk. Except for a few technical terms, the vocabulary used by sports reporters is also marked by informality.

Ferguson (1983) examines the linguistic features characterizing the language of SAT as a type of specialized register, with a particular focus on the
syntactic differences between SAT and ordinary adult conversation. According to Ferguson, SAT, like other forms of broadcasting talk, is a monologue or dialog-on-stage directed at an unknown, unseen, heterogeneous mass media audience who provide no feedback to the speaker. Ferguson further points out that the shared knowledge (of technical jargons) and values (about what constitutes good playing) determine the level of arousal or excitement during the discourse.

As Ferguson has observed, SAT generally consists of two phases: the announcing and the commentary. While the former focuses on a description of the action, the latter refers to the more discursive and leisurely speech with which reporters fill in the often quite long spaces between spurts of action. The two phases are also characterized by somewhat different linguistic features. For instance, syntactic reduction (e.g. omission of the subject noun or pronoun) and inversion (e.g. reversal of the order of the subject and the predicate), which aid the announcer in communicating the drama of the moment, tend to occur in announcing. In commentary, by contrast, where there is more time, heavily modified nouns are more likely to be found (Ferguson, 1983; Holmes, 1992).

There are four TV sports channels in Taiwan, and sports reporting is still very much monopolized by male reporters. Among the 12 Taiwanese female sports reporters, seven are commentators who only appear when the televised sports are those in which they have particular expertise. As for the other five female announcers, unlike their more versatile male counterparts, the sports programs they cover are limited to those which put less emphasis on power, strength, aggressiveness and speed. Generally speaking, they tend to de-feminize their appearance by having short hair and wearing suits (Cheng, 2001).

All 15 sportscasting episodes in the data have two reporters, who have a clear division of labor and assume two different kinds of task: announcing and commentary. In order to find out whether there are differences between male and female sports reporters’ use of personal pronouns in terms of frequency and communicative function and whether the differences are related to the task the speaker engages in when reporting (i.e. announcing or commentary), I managed to record equal hours of speech by men and women who also play distinct roles in the analyzed televised sports programs: that is, four hours of recording with male announcer and female commentator; four hours of recording with female announcer and male commentator; four hours of recording with both male announcer and male commentator; and four hours of recording with both female announcer and female commentator.

3. Analysis

In this section, I will investigate the pragmatic roles and rhetorical functions of the first and second person pronouns in the 24 hours of videotaped data of televised sports programs in Taiwan. In the following, first, we review relevant studies of the use of these pronouns.
The person pronouns are typically deictic and referential, especially in the first and second person. According to Huddleston (1984), while the first person pronouns refer to the speaker/writer, the second person refers to the addressee or a group including at least one addressee but not speaker/writer. First and second references are more frequently found in spoken than written discourse and are considered symptoms of involvement (Chafe, 1982; Tannen, 1983).

However, the use of person pronouns in spontaneous speech is not necessarily interpreted as personal; that is, the referent of you need not refer to the addressee exclusively, or I to the speaker exclusively. Kitagawa and Lehrer (1990) distinguish among ‘referential’, ‘impersonal’, and ‘vague’ uses of personal pronouns. Referential uses identify specific individuals. While the referent of the impersonal use of a pronoun can be anyone and/or everyone, a vague use refers to a specific but not identified individual. They further point out that although impersonal you, I, and we are often interchangeable in discourse, impersonal I is more limited in its distribution than you and we and seems to occur mainly in hypothetical contexts.

Biq (1991) focuses on the non-deictic function of the second person singular pronoun ni in conversational Mandarin. She makes the distinction among four types of ni used in conversation: the propositional ni (which is used to refer to the intended recipient of the utterance), impersonal ni (see Kitagawa and Lehrer, 1990), the dramatic ni (which occurs in direct quotations to dramatize the described situation), and the metalinguistic ni (which functions as an address to elicit the attention of the intended recipients of the speech). Biq argues that while both the impersonal use and the dramatic use are non-deictic, illustrating ‘the pragmatically motivated blurring of the demarcation between the described situation and the discourse situation’ (1991: 319), the metalinguistic use is deictic, pointing to the role of the intended recipient instead of referring to the individuals in that role. All these three non-canonical uses of ni, Biq concludes, reinforce the addressee’s involvement in what s/he is being told and mark the spontaneity and interactionality of spoken discourse.

The present study aims to examine the discourse functions of the first and second person pronouns in the SAT of Taiwan’s televised sports programs. Analysis will focus on how the uses of these pronouns are variable in terms of the speaker’s gender and role in the analyzed speech activity.

There are altogether 23 occurrences of the first person singular pronoun wo and 186 occurrences of the second person singular pronoun ni in the data. Considering the much lower frequency of wo, in the following I will concentrate analysis on the second person singular pronoun ni, although sometimes examples with wo will be included to illustrate a point under discussion.

These 186 occurrences of ni can be further categorized into three groups based on their pragmatic roles and rhetorical functions: referential ni, impersonal ni, and dramatic ni. Each use will be discussed separately.
3.1 REFERENTIAL Nǐ

When doing the commentary, the sports reporters sometimes are found speaking directly to a specific player or team of the ongoing sports activity as if they were listening. Unlike the television audience, these athletes and teams are non-participating parties of the speech activity of sportscasting, although they are present where the activity takes place. This type of talk generally intends to evaluate and make comments on the ongoing activity or give advice to a player or a team, and its intended referent can be identified from the clues provided by the context. Examples (1), (2), (3), and (4) are illustrative. In (1), nǐ in lines 1 and 5 refers to the NBA team Lakers, while in (2), nǐ in lines 5 and 9 refers to the Japanese baseball team Yakult:

(1) (NBA Lakers vs Pacers, M. M/M)

1 → suōqǐshuō nǐ bù jīn qiū,
2 bu nénggōu dājīn fēnshū,
3 you bei daifăng lāi le yījié sānfèn
4 yìxiǎi fēnshū yǒu lǎduo sīfèn,
5 → nǐ bǐxù yàoyòng liǎngcì de jīngōng,
6 cāi nēng bā zēgē fēnshū huílái,
7 suōqí yǒushí ne, māshāng nǐ zài Liǔmàdùi zhēbiān.

1 → So if you didn’t make the shot,
2 and you didn’t get any points,
3 and the other team made a three point shot,
4 that’s a four point swing.
5 → In this case you need to have two possessions
6 to get the points back.
7 So now the Pacers have the advantage.

(2) (Baseball, M. M/F)

1 wo xiāng zēgē shì nǎi mǎn yǎnzhòngde wèntí o.
2 jiāoshì dàozé wéishénme yǒuxiē qiúduì yòngyǒu xiǎnggǎi bācūwū gānzhòng dàjié huònián, kěshì wéishénme zài zhēngtāi dājié fāngmiàn dāng cǎi dǎzhǎo yīdiǎn fēnshū shìzhòng méiyǒu bānjiǎ nàdào,
3 zuīzhuyào de jiǔshì chuǎnán zài zēgē dājié duāncéng o,
4 → yǐnwèi nǐ guāng kǎo /? / hàn Gūtiānándūn, tāmén liǎngcì quánle dà shì hǎo zào'
5 → ni zhōngyānghēng jiān wāng zhe liǎngcì yìng yào yì dài chūlái
6 dōuyǒu quānle dǎhuà de diǎnshù de biaoxiàn.

1 I think this is a very serious problem,
2 It is why some teams have very good power hitters,
3 but the team as a whole doesn’t score many runs.
4 The main reason is that there are weaknesses in their line-up..
5 → Because if you count only on XXX and Tanada,
6 even if the two of them are good homerun hitters,
7 but I think the point is,
8 homeruns sometimes depend on luck.
You shouldn’t expect whenever these two players come up to the plate, they will hit a homerun or an extra-base hit.

Compared with examples (1) and (2), the referents of examples (3) and (4) are much easier to identify, for the antecedent in these two examples is close to the pronoun it refers to in the utterance. What makes the two examples interesting is the change of interactive frame (Goffman, 1974; Tannen and Wallat, 1987). The reporters are talking about two specific athletes (i.e. NBA basketball player Kobe Bryant in example (3) and Chinese badminton player Ji Xinpeng in example (4)) in the beginning of these two examples. However, their subsequent use of ni (in line 2 and line 3, respectively), instead of the third person singular pronoun ta, reveals that the announcer now is talking to, rather than talking about, these athletes. Therefore, this pronominal choice signals the shift of interactive frame; that is, a change from the reporting frame to the commenting frame:

(3) (NBA Lakers vs Pacers, M, M/M)
1 xianzai kaoyan Kobe de shihou daole.
2 daodi ni shihushi neng zai qiudui zui xuyao ni de shihou zhanchulai,
3 jiu kan zaihou yijenduzhong Kobe Bryant de biaoxian.

Now it’s the time to test Kobe. Whether you can come through when your team needs you most, it all depends on Kobe Bryant’s performance in the last few minutes.

(4) (Badminton, M, F/M)
1 Qishi jiushi Ji Xinpeng zai faqiu shi yinggai yao you yixie bianhua,
2 yinwei women kandao zhege Taufik de zhege zhanwei bijiao qian,
3 suoyi ni yiding yao zhuyi faqiu de zhiliang.

Actually when Ji Xinpeng serves, he should make some changes. Since we see that Taufik’s position is closer to the net, So you have got to pay attention to the quality of your serve.

Note that in this referential use, ni tends to be followed by modals such as bixu ‘must’ (in example (1)), zhongbuneng ‘shouldn’t’ (in example (2)), and yao ‘need to’ (in example (4)). In English, must, have to, should, and need to are root modals carrying meanings of obligation, necessity, and requirement imposed by a source of authority (Lyons, 1977; Palmer, 1986). It is not surprising that these root modals are found in the speech of commentators, who have authority in the speech activity because of their professional sports knowledge.

On the whole, the most interesting example of ni in the data is when this pronoun is used by the commentator to address a ball in a billiard game. When explaining to the audience why a player shot a certain ball, the commentator said to the ball, Ni gancui sandao yibian jiu dui le ‘You just go to the other side, then it will be right’, in which the inanimate ball was treated as if it were a living person.
3.2 IMPERSONAL NI

Like personal pronouns, impersonal pronouns refer to one or more persons, but ‘no specific person is picked out in contrast to the personal pronouns’ (Kitagawa and Lehrer, 1990: 740). In English, the impersonal you can replace a stylistically more formal non-deictic one to refer to an indefinite person, and only the context can provide clues to the domain of identity of its intended referent. The use of impersonal ni is found in the following examples. The two reporters in examples (5) and (6) are addressing the television audience and giving them advice in terms of watching the baseball game and playing billiards. Note that the singular ni, rather than the plural nimen, is used despite the fact that the audience is composed of more than one person:

(5) (Baseball, M)
1  →  kan bisai ni buzhi shi kan shengfu,
2  →  ni yao kankan zhexie qiuyuan,
3  huo zhe shi caipan han qu yuan de hudong,
4  shi feichang guanxi weixiao erqie you qude.

1  To watch a game you not only watch the outcome,
2  you need to watch these players,
3  or the interaction between the referee and the players,
4  the relationship is very subtle and interesting.

(6) (Billiard, M, M/M)
1  wo shi xiwang dui zhege zhuangqiu aihao de,
2  →  ni xiang yao jinbu,
3  →  ni zuihao bu ta jixediai.

1  I hope those who love billiards,
2  →  if you want to make progress,
3  →  you had better write it down.

In addition to referring to audience in general, ni is used in reference to indefinite and non-specific athletes, as examples (7) and (8) illustrate. In example (8), which is taken from a men’s tennis match, the referent of ni in line 1 is not Agassi’s rival in the match, i.e. Kuerten, but whoever plays against Agassi in a tennis match. This generic use of ni, according to Kitagawa and Lehrer (1990: 742), expresses a sense of universality and ‘the theme of generality’ in the utterance; that is, the speaker intends to convey a generally admitted truth or a personal opinion that he or she hopes is shared:

(7) (Bowling, M, F/M)
1  henduozhong bisai dangzhong.
2  →  tade...ruguo ni zhege xinfu cao de hua.
3  hen keneng fenshu juhuai feichang de di.

1  In many contests,
2  →  it’s...if you, become flighty and impatient.
3  then it’s quite possible (your) score will be very low.
In the above four examples, the impersonal *ni* not only makes the utterances more like a generally admitted truth, but more importantly, it conveys a sense of vividness, immediacy, and camaraderie because the addressee is no longer a passive recipient of information but is assigned an active role by the speaker to share his/her world-view (Kitagawa and Lehrer, 1990; Biq, 1991).

3.3 DRAMATIC NI/WO

Sports reporters are constantly coerced by situational pressures that demand vivid and interesting descriptive language (Crystal and Davy, 1969). One obvious way of meeting the demand is by using reported speech, especially direct speech, and dramatic *ni/wo* are used in direct speech. Many previous studies (e.g. Labov, 1972; Tannen, 1989; Mayes, 1990; Holt, 1996) have observed that direct speech or constructed dialogue not only creates the rhetorical effect of vividness and immediacy but also establishes interpersonal involvement. When *wo* or *ni* is used in direct quotes by the speaker, it creates a story impersonation by assuming the voice of one of the characters in the described situation. The reported speech in example (9) is a self-quotation, in which the commentator of a men’s billiard game quoted his previous utterance addressing one of the players in the game. All the six *ni’s* in the quotation refer to the player. Examples (10) and (11) are more dramatic in that the two commentators not only take the role of the two players being reported upon but also imagine what they would say or do in the described situation. The first person *wo* in these two examples does not refer to the commentators themselves, but rather to the two players (i.e. Kobe Bryant in example (10) and Wei Yunjie in example (11)). These two examples are instances of ‘hypothetical direct speech’ (Haberland, 1986: 225), for the direct quotations are invented or constructed rather than being an authentic rendition of previous utterances. Similar to impersonal pronouns, the dramatic use of personal pronouns is a rhetorical device for more vividly presenting the described situation:

(9) (Billiard, M/M/M)

1  
2  →  *wo jiu gen ta jiang,*
3  →  *ni kankan, ni xianzai mingqi da le,*
4  →  *ni yijian shude jiu shude,*
5  →  *baozhang ye bu hui deng ni,*
6  →  *xianzai jiushi ni xiangshou yale de shihou*

1  I then told him,
2  →  *‘(You) Look, now you’re famous,*
3  →  *if you lose, the newspaper will report it.*
in the past, if (you) lost, (you) lost, the newspaper didn’t report on you.
Now it’s time for you to enjoy the pressure’

We see Kobe Bryant is really something, The more critical the time, the more daring he is, It’s almost like that he’s telling Lakers’ players, ‘It doesn’t matter that O’Neal is out, I can still lead you to victory’

I admire Wei Yunjie very much, she thinks ‘Playing golf is very important for me, how my body looks doesn’t matter much, it’s OK as long as I am very strong’ I feel this concept of theirs is very healthy.

To summarize, in this section, we have discussed how the second person singular pronoun ni is used by sports reporters in the 15 sportscasting episodes that make up the data. I have distinguished three types of ni based on their pragmatic functions. While the sports reporters use referential ni to refer to a specific athlete, team, or even a billiard ball, the impersonal ni generally refers to non-specific audience or athletes. Finally, the dramatic use of ni, found in direct speech, is a rhetorical device to more vividly present the described situation.

4. Quantitative analysis: results and discussion

There are altogether 186 occurrences of the second person singular pronoun ni in the data. Preliminary observation has found that the use of ni is pervasive in men’s reporting: All 13 but 2 (84.6 percent) of the male reporters use this pronoun to refer to the TV audience, a specific athlete or team, an indefinite or non-specific athlete, or to include this pronoun in direct speech to dramatize the reporting. In contrast, ni is not so commonly found in female reporters’ reporting: Only half of the 12 female reporters use this pronoun. In addition to gender, speaker role also emerges as an important variable affecting the occurrences of
ni, i.e., between the two reporters, the one who does the commentary is more likely to include ni in their speech. Table 1 summarizes the results obtained for the use of ni and its rhetorical functions with respect to a speaker's gender and the task they engage in during the 15 sportscasting episodes analyzed.

As Table 1 shows, of the 186 occurrences of ni in the data, non-deictic use (i.e. impersonal ni and dramatic ni) accounts for more than 60 percent (122 out of 186, 65.6 percent). Furthermore, the highest frequency of ni is found in male commentators’ speech (127 out of 186, 68.3 percent), while female announcers seldom use ni in their speech (8 out of 186, 4.3 percent). More importantly, regardless of their speaker role, female reporters never use ni for dramatic purposes, although the first person singular pronoun wo was found in their reported speech. In fact, only male commentators use dramatic ni in their commentary between the play-by-play description of actions.

An analysis of variance was carried out to ascertain whether the above differences are the result of interactions between gender and speaker role. Since the interaction effect is not significant ($p = 0.5740$), the main effects caused by each variable can be tested and discussed separately. As Table 2 shows, male sports reporters, in general, use ni much more frequently than their female counterparts. The total occurrences of ni in their 12 hours of reporting is more than three times as many as those found in females’ reporting (141 vs. 45). However, intra-group differences do exist in both groups. Among the 13 male reporters, the commentator for the men’s billiard game used ni 61 times in the two-hour game. On the other hand, the highest frequency in women’s reporting is found in Kuo’s reporting (61 vs. 45). However, intra-group differences do exist in both groups. Among the 13 male reporters, the commentator for the men’s billiard game used ni 61 times in the two-hour game. On the other hand, the highest frequency in women’s reporting is found in Kuo’s reporting (61 vs. 45).

### Table 1. Occurrences and functions of ni by gender and speaker role

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender/Role</th>
<th>M/A</th>
<th>M/C</th>
<th>F/A</th>
<th>F/C</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Function</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>(%)</td>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referential</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impersonal</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>85.7</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>44.1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dramatic</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: M = male, F = female, A = announcer, C = commentator.
the speech of the female commentator in a men’s baseball game: she used 29 nis in the one-hour game.

The sports reporter’s role, that is, the task he or she engages in when reporting (i.e., announcing or commentary), is also a very strong variable affecting the use of nis. Table 3 reveals the differences between the announcers and commentators with respect to the occurrences as well as the distribution of the pragmatic functions of nis when reporting sports events. Of the 186 nis, 164 (88.2 percent) are found in the reporting of the 15 commentators. As for the announcers, while no single ni is used for dramatic purposes, the overwhelmingly highest frequency (20 out of 22, 90.9 percent) is found in the use of impersonal nis: that is, the sports announcers in the data tend to use nis to refer to non-specific athletes. In general, a similar pattern is found between Tables 2 and 3; namely, while female reporters’ speech style is similar to that of announcers, male reporters’ reporting is not much different from that of commentators in their use of the second-person singular pronoun ni.

As previously mentioned, many studies (e.g., Chafe, 1982; Tannen, 1983) have pointed out that both the first and second person pronouns are more frequently found in spoken than in written discourse and are considered symptoms of involvement which help to create ‘an emotional experience of insight (understanding of the text) and connectedness (to other participants, to the language, to the world)’ (Tannen, 1989: 13). In the present study, these pronouns signal the sports reporters’ strong self-involvement, their interpersonal involvement with the athlete and the audience, and their involvement with the reported sports event. Thus, the substantial higher frequency of nis found in the speech of male sports reporters (regardless of their speaker role) implies that compared with female sports reporters, their speech style is characterized by a higher degree of interpersonal involvement. In addition, the non-deictic uses of person pronouns in their speech, in particular, not only enhance the solidarity and rapport between them and their audience but also make the reporting more dramatic and vivid.

On the other hand, the referential use of nis, which tends to be followed by modal verbs of obligation and necessity in the data, may signal the power and authority of the sports reporters. With their superior professional knowledge of sports, it is not surprising that from time to time the sports commentators tend to

---

**Table 3. Occurrences and functions of nis by speaker role**

| Role     | Announcer |  | Commentator |  | Totals |  |
|----------|-----------|  |            |  |        |  |
| Function | No.       | (%) | No.         | (%) | No.   | (%) |
| Referential | 2        | 9.1 | 62         | 37.8 | 64    | 34.4 |
| Impersonal  | 20       | 90.9 | 84        | 51.2 | 104   | 55.9 |
| Dramatic   | 0       | 0    | 18        | 11.0 | 18    | 9.7  |
| Totals     | 22      | 100.0 | 164      | 100.0 | 186   | 100.0 |

Downloaded from http://dis.sagepub.com at Stanford University on March 17, 2009
tell the TV audience how to watch the sports game and instruct a specific athlete or team how to play the game to beat their rivals. The fact that in the data, men are more likely to use referential *ni* than women supports the previous findings that men prefer to employ those linguistic strategies which both reflect and construct their power and status (Thorne et al., 1983). Therefore, in the SAT we have analyzed, male sports reporters’ frequent use of personal pronouns not only marks their informal and involving speech style but also functions to display their power and status in a field traditionally associated with men.

Previous studies (e.g. Crystal and Davy, 1969) have observed that successful sports reporting conveys an impression of conversational casualness and spontaneity. Since male sports has been perceived as the norm, it is not surprising that male sports reporters’ speech style is more likely to conform to the norm of SAT.

Apart from the use of pronouns, SAT shares with male speech the character of conflict and competition. For instance, the SAT under investigation includes a plethora of verbs emphasizing aggression and power (e.g. ‘push’, ‘press’, ‘struggle’). Animal metaphors – fierce animals such as tigers and dragons and verbal expressions associated with these animals (e.g. ‘swallow’, ‘roar’, ‘snatch’, ‘bite’) – are also frequently used to highlight the violent aspects of sports. More importantly, since sports, like wars, is a matter of winning and losing, it is no coincidence that war metaphors (e.g. ‘attack’, ‘kill’, ‘ambush’, ‘occupy’) are pervasive in SAT.

Finally, I suggest that the identity of the interlocutor and types of speech activity also contribute to the gender differences in the use of personal pronouns in the data. Previous studies in sociolinguistics (e.g. Holmes, 1992) have observed that women’s greater use of standard speech forms may be a reflection of their sensitivity to contextual factors in social dialect interviews. The interview context is different for women and men. Experiencing the interview as a relatively formal interaction with a male stranger, women tend to alter their speech to accommodate their highly educated interviewers. On the other hand, men feel considerably more comfortable when being interviewed by a member of their own sex, and male solidarity would reduce the formality of the context and result in their greater use of casual or vernacular speech. Similarly, men and women respond to the sports reporting context and their interlocutor (i.e. the TV audience) in different ways. Males tend to be formal with mixed gender audiences as well as in formal situations with other men (e.g. business meetings). However, sports is a male province, and male sports reporters imagine an all-male audience where they can use their casual, spontaneous, or sometimes non-standard ‘macho’ language. Female sports reporters, on the other hand, know they have a mostly male audience and so are more formal and detached in their speech. In short, sports reporting serves as a form of male bonding. In this speech activity, male speakers attempt to imitate, in the public arena, their talk in the private sphere.
5. Conclusion

In this study, we have investigated, both qualitatively and quantitatively, gender differences in the use of personal pronouns in televised sports in Taiwan. We found that, regardless of their speaker role, male sports reporters use the second person pronoun *ni* much more frequently than their female counterparts (141 vs. 45). In addition, there is a significant difference in the distribution of pragmatic functions of *ni* between men’s and women’s reporting. While male sports reporters use *ni* in a more varied way, i.e. to refer to the TV audience, a specific athlete or team, an indefinite or non-specific athlete, or to include this pronoun in direct speech to dramatize their reporting, female reporters use this pronoun predominately to refer to a non-specific athlete.

I would claim that male sports reporters, on the one hand, use referential *ni*, which tends to be followed by modal verbs of necessity or obligation as a linguistic device of power and knowledge authority. On the other hand, they employ impersonal *ni* and dramatic *ni* to signal their strong self-involvement, their interpersonal involvement with the athlete and the TV audience, and their involvement with the reported sports event.

Male sports reporters’ more frequent use of the second person pronoun *ni* in the data also marks their informal and conversational speech style. This result contradicts those previous studies which claim that formality and detachment characterize men’s information-oriented public discourse. I would argue that talking about a less personal topic (i.e. sports) with the audience that shares such personal attributes as gender, male sports reporters attempt to imitate, in the public arena, their talk in the private sphere. Female sports reporters, in contrast, perceiving sports reporting as a public and formal interaction with a mostly male audience, tend to adopt a more formal and detached speech style. To sum up, contextual factors, including the identity of the interlocutor and type of speech activity, should be taken into account when studying gender differences in language use.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

An earlier version of this article was presented at RC25 Sociolinguistics, XV World Congress of Sociology, Brisbane, Australia, 7–13 July 2002. I am grateful to Johanna Katchen, Teun A. van Dijk, and an anonymous reviewer for their valuable comments. Special thanks to Hsin-I Cheng for allowing me to use her videotaped data. I also thank John Truscott for spending time discussing with me the English translation of the data. I alone am responsible for any errors and inadequacies in the present version.

NOTES

1. This includes 6 hours of basketball tournaments (male 3 hours, female 3 hours), 5 hours of golf (male 2.5 hours, female 2.5 hours), 2 hours of male billiards, 2 hours of male tennis, 2 hours of male badminton, 1.5 hours of female gymnastics, 1.5 hours of figure skating, 1 hour of male bowling, 1 hour of male baseball, 1 hour of female table tennis, and 1 hour of female volleyball.
This number does not include the 218 occurrences of *wo* which are followed by epistemic verbs such as *xiang* 'think', *juede* 'feel', and *xiangxin* 'believe'.

**REFERENCES**


**SAI-HUA KUO** is Professor in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature, National Tsing Hua University, Taiwan. Her major research interests are in discourse analysis, pragmatics, and sociolinguistics. She has published papers in *Text, Discourse Studies*, and *Research on Language and Social Interaction*. ADDRESS: Department of Foreign Languages and Literature, National Tsing Hua University, 101 Kuang Fu Road, Section 2, Hsinchu, Taiwan. [email: shkuo@mx.nthu.edu.tw]