

Sex Differences in Parental Directives to Young Children¹

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This study investigated how children learn sex-associated strategies for requesting action. We compared the directives which mothers and fathers address to their 2 1/2- to 5-year-old children. Ten children, 5 boys and 5 girls, engaged separately with each parent in a construction task. Fathers produced more directives than mothers and tended to phrase them as imperatives (e.g., Put the screw in) or as highly indirect "hints" (e.g., The wheel's going to fall off) more often than mothers, who relied more on relatively transparent indirect forms (e.g., Can you put the screw in?). There were no differences in the form of the directives addressed to girls and boys, nor were there any cross-sex effects. Parental modeling, rather than differential socialization of girls and boys, appears to be the mechanism by which children learn to request action in sex-associated ways.

A competent speaker can express the same information in several ways depending on the interests and abilities of the addressee and a variety of situational factors such as time and channel constraints. Alternation rules govern the selection of the appropriate form in which to phrase a message under different circumstances (Ervin-Tripp, 1968). Although the possible forms may be equivalent referentially, they often differ substantially in the social meaning they convey. Hence, a speaker's choice may reveal the way he feels about himself, his addressee, their relationship, and the task at hand. The study of alternation rules thus provides a window on the intersection of linguistic and social structure.

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The speech act most studied in terms of its social components is the directive. Ervin-Tripp (1976, 1977) has shown that the surface form which a speaker chooses varies systematically with social features of the situation. For instance, she has found that, in English, the imperative form (e.g., *Shut the window*) is generally addressed to those lower in rank than the speaker or to one of equal rank with whom the speaker is very familiar. The indirect forms (e.g., *Can you shut the window? Would you be willing to shut the window?*), on the other hand, tend to be addressed to those of higher rank than the speaker, to those of equal rank with whom the speaker is unfamiliar, or to addressees whose compliance with the request would entail some sacrifice. Usually, the social features that characterize an interaction specify a range of forms appropriate for requesting action. Not surprisingly, the details of these form-context relationships are somewhat culture specific (e.g., see Hollos & Beeman, 1978, for a comparison of Norwegian and Hungarian). Various studies have shown that by age 3 or 4, children are aware of at least some aspects of these relationships (e.g., James, 1978; Shatz & Gelman, 1973; Hollos & Beeman, 1978; Gleason, 1973; Andersen & Johnson, 1973; Sachs & Devin, 1976).

Gleason (1975), Lakoff (1973), Key (1975) and others have proposed that men and women may differ in the way they request other people to do things. Specifically, these authors suggest that primarily men use the imperative, while women tend to opt for forms which are indirect (i.e., nonimperative). Although it has only anecdotal support, this hypothesis is consistent with the growing evidence that women's speech is less assertive and more polite than men's (e.g., Crosby & Nyquist, 1977; Haas, 1979; Thorne & Henley, 1975). Nevertheless, sex of speaker is a social variable whose role in the alternation rules that govern choice of directive form has not been well studied except insofar as it is often confounded with rank.

Whether these differences between men and women actually exist, they are part of the stereotypic view about the characteristics of "male" and "female" speech. Kramer (1977) presents strong evidence that high school and college students of both sexes tend to perceive male speech as "blunt," "forceful," and "straight to the point," and women's speech as "polite," "gentle," and "friendly." The evidence available suggests that children share these perceptions. In a study of the development of these stereotypes, Edelsky (1977) found that sixth-grade children showed high consensus in judging the indirect directive frame *Won't you please . . .* to be a female form and, furthermore, considered the imperative to be a male form, though with low consensus among judges. Andersen (Note 1) found that, when playing the role of "father," 4-year-old children phrased directives in imperative form; but when playing "mother," they tended to choose indirect forms. Thus, from a rather early age, children associate the more direct way of requesting action with males and the more indirect ways with females.

How children might acquire these stereotypes is an important developmental question. We examined parent-child interaction for clues. In the most general terms, there are two basic theoretical views about the role that parents play in their children's acquisition of the stereotypes described above: One emphasizes differences in the speech of mothers and fathers as parents' primary input to this process (see Hypothesis 1 below), and one emphasizes differences in the speech that parents address to boys and girls (see Hypotheses 2 and 3 below). It should be emphasized that the outcome of the socialization process is not at question, rather the mechanism by which parents socialize their children with regard to this aspect of linguistic behavior. The hypotheses about how this socialization takes place are as follows:

Hypothesis 1. Parental modeling is the important process involved in children's acquisition of sex-associated ways to request action. This hypothesis leads us to predict that fathers use the imperative form more frequently than mothers, who, in turn, make relatively more frequent use of indirect forms. Previous studies have generally shown that imperatives account for a greater percentage of males' than females' utterances to young children across a variety of settings (Gleason, 1975; Kriedberg, Note 2; Weintraub, Note 3; Rondal, Note 4). However, all of these studies examined only directives that were imperative in syntactic form. None examined the full range of forms which can be used directly. To date, there has been no comparison of the relative frequencies with which fathers and mothers use the alternative forms. Golinkoff and Ames (1979) compared fathers' and mothers' use of explicit (i.e., imperative) versus implicit directives, but considered only a narrow range of forms to be "implicit" directives, (viz., those phrased interrogatively). Therefore, it is unclear how to interpret their finding that the mothers and fathers of 19-month-old girls and boys did not differ in the frequencies with which they used explicit and implicit directives.

Hypothesis 2. Parents use different forms to boys and girls, who, in turn, learn to speak as they have been spoken to. This phenomenon has been noted in the use of kinship terms in some Arabic-speaking cultures, where, for instance, a grandfather might address his grandson as *Grandfather* (Ferguson, personal communication). If this process is at work in the present case, we should find that boys are exposed to more directives in the form of imperatives than girls, and girls exposed to more indirect forms than boys. Gleason (1975) noted in a pilot study that fathers tended to use more imperatives when speaking to sons than daughters and suggested that, early in life, boys, unlike girls, become used to giving and receiving orders. Similarly, Cherry and Lewis (1976) reported that mothers addressed a greater number of directives (regardless of their surface form) to 2-year-old boys than girls, although the difference fell just short of significance.

Hypothesis 3. The directive forms that parents address to young girls and boys reflect the ultimate status that males and females have in our society. If this is correct, we should, as above, expect the sex of a child to be an important influence on the parent's choice of directive form. However, in this case, boys, who are the future favored citizens, should receive more indirect (i.e., deferential) forms than girls, who, in turn, should receive more imperatives than boys. Greif (Note 5) found that parents interrupt preschool girls more frequently than they interrupt preschool boys, giving support to this nonintuitive idea that young boys might be treated with greater deference than young girls. Blount (1972), in a study of Luo and Samoan, observed that adult speech to a girl contained a higher percentage of imperatives than the speech to two boys of a similar age. However, this sample was very small and, as in the studies cited under Hypothesis 1, the relative frequencies of the various alternative directive forms in parents' speech to boys and girls were not compared.

In Summary, the predictions which derive from the three hypotheses are as follows:

Hypothesis 1. Parental modeling of the various directive forms is the critical process, so that fathers should use relatively more imperative directives than mothers, who should use relatively more indirect forms.

Hypothesis 2. Children learn to speak as they are spoken to. Therefore, boys should be the recipients of relatively more imperative directives and girls the recipients of relatively more indirect forms.

Hypothesis 3. The way a child is addressed reflects the child's future status. Therefore, parents should request action from boys via the more polite indirect forms, and from girls via the imperative directive.

Note that only Hypotheses 2 and 3 are incompatible. It would be quite possible for the data to support Hypotheses 1 and 2 or Hypotheses 1 and 3.

METHODS

Sample

We obtained the samples of parental speech during two visits by each family to a laboratory playroom. On each visit, the child was recorded and videotaped for 30 minutes with one parent. The parent was asked to divide the time equally among three activities: reading a book which had no words, playing with a Playskool "take apart" car, and playing store using a toy cash register and a variety of food items. A previous study (Weintraub, Note 3) had shown that the car situation tended to elicit the most controlling speech from

the parents, as the frequency of imperatives in their speech in this situation was about twice as high as in either of the other two. Therefore, in our analyses, we focused on the utterances that the parents produced during the car episode. (One might expect that since this task is more a "masculine" task than a "feminine" activity, its use as a data base might introduce bias. While we cannot rule out this possibility, there did not appear to be any difference in the enthusiasm with which mothers, as opposed to fathers, and daughters, as opposed to sons, tackled the problem.)

Because we were interested in parental differences in the use of different types of directives, it was important that the parents produce enough directives to permit a distributional analysis. Therefore, as a criterion for inclusion in the study, both parents in a family had to produce at least 15 directives during the period in which they and their child played with the car. We had access to a sample of 23 middle- to upper-middle-class families participating in a study of children's acquisition of communicative competence. Of these 23 sets of parents, 10 satisfied the criterion. In 5 of these families, the child was a male; in the remaining 5 a female. All children were first-born. The mean ages of the girls and boys were not significantly different (girls: 3; 11, range 3; 0-4; 11, boys: 3; 7, range 2; 6-4; 4, $t(8) = .71$).

These 10 families were select in terms of educational background. Eight of the fathers and 5 of the mothers had earned graduate degrees. However, they were fairly traditional in terms of the way child-care responsibilities were divided in that only 1 mother worked full-time. Another 5 worked part-time for periods ranging from 6 to 27 hours per week. In all 10 families, the mother's estimate of average daily contact with the child was greater than the father's.

Each family was also given the Parent Awareness Measure, an instrument designed to assess both a child's language development and his or her parents' knowledge of the child's status. In essence, this is done by determining how accurately each parent can predict their child's response to a variety of test items. A detailed description of this instrument is given in Gleason, Greif, Weintraub, and Fardella (Note 6).

All play sessions were videotaped using a camera operated from a camouflaged booth in the playroom. Audiotapes were also made to facilitate the preparation and verification of the transcripts. On both the videotapes and the transcripts, utterances which seemed to function as requests for action were identified and assigned to one of the three form classes discussed below. The directives produced by the children during this same period were also classified in order to compare parents' and children's relative use of the alternative directive forms.

Because of this use of videotapes, the coder was not blind to the sex of either the child or parent. The alternative of coding parents' intent solely from transcripts from which all references to parent and child sex had been eliminated was deemed even less satisfactory, since transcripts do not contain much of the information that is critical to the judgment of speaker intent.

Directives

A directive was defined as any request for action, regardless of the syntactic form in which the request was phrased. Directives were coded into the three following categories: conventional imperatives, conventionalized indirect directives, and implied direct directives.

Conventional Imperatives. These include directives of the following forms: (a) *Do X* (e.g., *Pick that up*). (b) *You do X* (e.g., *You pick that up*). (c) *Let's do X* (if it was clear from the context of delivery that the child was to be the sole actor; e.g., *Let's go to the bathroom*). (d) Sentence fragments (usually manner adverbials) which follow conventional imperatives and/or are spoken with imperative intonation; for example, (2) and (3) in the following sequence: (1) *Turn the screw to the right.* (2) *To the right.* (3) *More.*

Conventionalized Indirect Directives. Here, the act being requested and the child as proposed agent of that act are identified explicitly in the utterance, by nonverbal cues provided by the speaker, or by the recent history of the interaction. The directives considered to be conventionalized indirect took a variety of interrogative and declarative forms such as the following: (a) *Can you . . . ?* (b) *You can . . .* (c) *Do you want to . . . ?* (d) *Are you going to . . . ?* (e) *Do you know how to . . . ?* (f) *This one goes here.* (g) *Would you . . . ?* (h) *You need to . . .* (i) *You have to . . .* (j) *Why don't you . . . ?* (k) *How about . . . ?*

Most directives of this sort are generally considered ritualized, almost idiomatic. Unlike true indirect speech acts, they do not require the addressee to compute the speaker's intention on the basis of complex conversational principles or postulates (e.g., Bates, 1976; Ervin-Tripp, 1977). Rather, such a form appears to function more as a routine (i.e., an unanalyzed unit) and is consistently used to communicate a certain intention (e.g., directive) despite the apparent discrepancy between the speaker's intention and the mood of the form.

Implied Indirect Directives. Unlike imperative and conventionalized indirect directives, these fail to make explicit the act that the child is being directed to perform or even the fact that he or she is being asked to do anything. Instead, implied indirect directives correspond to arguments, phrased either interrogatively or declaratively, for why an act should or should not be performed. Only by engaging in a process of logical inference is it possible to interpret these directives properly (see Bellinger, 1979, for a discussion of the logical status of these directives). For example, to a boy who was trying to place one of the wheels on the "take apart" car, a father said *It's going to fall off* in an attempt to get the boy to tighten the wheel a bit more, yet the father chose to do so by referring only to the consequence of failing to tighten the wheel. This forced the child to recognize that to allow the wheel to fall off would be counterproductive and, furthermore, to deduce from his own knowledge of cause-effect relationships the action that would prevent this.

Reliability. Reliability in identifying directives and classifying them by form was checked by having two individuals code the interaction between a

father and his son. The rate at which this father produced directives was typical of that the other fathers, but the car episode lasted a particularly long time for this pair. The father produced 318 utterances, of which 75 were directives. This represents 11% of the total number of directives on which the following analyses are based.

Coders reached 92.8% agreement in indentifying utterances intended as directives. Agreement in classifying the directives on which there was consensus into form classes was 96.9%.

RESULTS

Unless otherwise noted, the data were analyzed by two-way analyses of variance with one between-subjects factor (Sex of Child) and one within-subjects factor (Sex of Parent).

Parents' Directives

Number of Utterances and Frequency of Directives. There were no significant differences in the total number of utterances produced by the fathers and mothers during the "take apart" car segment of the interaction (overall $\bar{X} = 187$ utterances), suggesting equal engagement in the task. There was, however, a significant effect for Sex of Parent (at least in this sample of parents who met the criterion of producing at least 15 directives) in terms of the percentage of utterances which were judged to be directive in intent (regardless of the form in which this intent was realized). The frequency of directives in fathers' speech was higher than the frequency in mothers' speech (28.1% vs. 19.0%), $F(1, 8) = 8.08$, $p < .025$. Directives were addressed to girls and boys with very nearly the same frequency (22.8% vs. 24.3% of all utterances, respectively).

Form Class Frequencies. The percentage of fathers' and mothers' directives which fell into the three form classes (i.e., imperative, conventionalized indirect, and implied indirect) in speech to boys and girls are presented in Tables I-III.³ The rank ordering of the three types of directives in terms of frequency of use

³ An ANOVA was performed on the group percentages of each form class. Two problems are associated with this strategy. First, since the three percentages for any parent must sum to 100, the three ANOVAs are not independent of one another and are subject to the problems of interpretation which arise when one performs multiple tests of significance on a single set of data. While interpreting the meaning of a group difference which reaches significance under these circumstances would be problematic, the failure of a group difference to reach significance may be taken as strong evidence that a true difference between the group means is unlikely. Second, the test of Hypothesis 1 involves the comparison of the speech of 10 fathers and 10 mothers. The tests of Hypotheses 2 and 3 involve the comparison of parents' speech to 5 girls and 5 boys. Hence, the power of the significance test for hypothesis 1 is greater than for Hypotheses 2 and 3.

Table I. Percentage of Parents' Directives in Imperative Form^a

	Sex of parent		
	Father	Mother	Combined
Sex of child			
Boy	62.3 (22.3)	54.1 (14.5)	58.3
Girl	70.9 (12.1)	58.4 (12.1)	64.6
Combined	66.6	56.3	

^aThe numbers in parentheses are standard deviations.

Table II. Percentage of Parents' Directives in Conventionalized Indirect Form^a

	Sex of parent		
	Father	Mother	Combined
Sex of child			
Boy	30.1 (18.0)	43.1 (14.4)	36.6
Girl	22.3 (10.5)	37.0 (9.4)	29.6
Combined	26.2	40.1	

^aThe numbers in parentheses are standard deviations.

was the same for fathers and mothers: imperative, conventionalized indirect, and implied indirect. However, the relative frequencies with which fathers and mothers used these different forms were not the same. A greater percentage of fathers' directives were implied indirect, $F(1, 8) = 6.10, p < .025$, while a greater percentage of mothers' directives were phrased in one of the conventionalized indirect frames, $F(1, 8) = 7.70, p < .025$. Furthermore, fathers showed

Table III. Percentage of Parents' Directives in Implied Indirect Form^a

	Sex of parent		
	Father	Mother	Combined
Sex of child			
Boy	7.7 (6.2)	2.8 (2.8)	5.2
Girl	6.8 (5.9)	4.5 (3.2)	5.6
Combined	7.2	3.7	

^aThe numbers in parentheses are standard deviations.

a nonsignificant tendency to phrase a greater percentage of their directives in imperative form, $F(1, 8) = 3.66, p < .10$.

Neither Sex of Child nor the interaction effect even approached significance for any of the three types of directive, indicating that the directives which parents addressed to boys were not phrased differently from the directives addressed to girls.

To sharpen our view of parental differences in use of the various directive forms (and to avoid the problem of intertest dependence associated with the ANOVAs), we tested the hypothesis that the father and mother in a particular family show the following pattern in the frequencies with which their directives fall into the three form classes: Imperative and implied indirect forms account for a greater percentage of the father's directives than the mother's, and conventionalized indirect forms account for a greater percentage of the mother's than the father's. Five of the 10 couples displayed this pattern. Since there are 6 possible patterns that a couple could show, the probability that 5 or more couples out of 10 would show this pattern by chance alone is .015.⁴ Therefore, within couples, fathers appear to produce more imperative and implied indirect directives than mothers. Mothers, in turn, tend to employ conventionalized indirect forms more often than fathers.

Children's Directives

Since the children tended to produce relatively few directives in the car episode (only 3 of the 10 children produced 15 or more, the criterion for including parents in the sample), we pooled the data within child sex (thus precluding the possibility of testing the significance of group differences). Table IV indicates the relative frequencies with which boys' and girls' directives to fathers and mothers were assigned to the various form classes. The

⁴ Actually, there are 8 theoretically possible patterns:

	Imperative	Indirect	Implied
(1)	F > M	F > M	F > M
(2)	F > M	F > M	M > F
(3)	F > M	M > F	F > M
(4)	F > M	M > F	M > F
(5)	M > F	M > F	M > F
(6)	M > F	M > F	F > M
(7)	M > F	F > M	M > F
(8)	M > F	F > M	F > M

However, because the data are percentages, which must sum to 100 for each member of a couple, it is impossible for the percentages of one parent to exceed the percentages of the other for all three form classes. Therefore, no couple could follow pattern (1) or (5).

Table IV. Percentage of Children's Directives in the Three Form Classes

	Father			Mother		
	Imperative	Conventionalized indirect	Implied indirect	Imperative	Conventionalized indirect	Implied indirect
Boys	72.7	13.6	13.6	73.1	26.9	0
Girls	61.4	38.6	0	58.8	35.3	5.9

Table V. Percentage of Directives in the Three Form Classes: Children Versus Parents

	Imperative	Conventionalized indirect	Implied indirect
Children			
Boys	72.9	20.8	6.3
Girls	60.2	37.2	2.6
Parents			
Fathers	66.6	26.2	7.2
Mothers	56.3	40.1	3.7

differences between girls and boys are in the same direction and of approximately the same magnitude as those between mothers and fathers (see Table V). That is, the boys produced more imperative and implied indirect directives, while the girls produced more of the conventionalized indirect forms. Furthermore, just as the sex of a child did not influence the frequency with which the parents used the alternative forms, the sex of the parent did not appear to influence the children's choice of form. These data must be interpreted with caution because of the small numbers of directives which the children produced.

Parents' Perceptions of Their Children's Linguistic Abilities

Mothers and fathers did not differ significantly in the accuracy with which they were able to predict their children's responses to the items comprising the "linguistic comprehension" and "linguistic production" scales of the Parent Awareness Measure (fathers: $\bar{X} = 51.8$; mothers: $\bar{X} = 54.7$, $t = 1.03$, $df = 9$, $p > .20$). Moreover, the scores for spouses were significantly correlated ($r = .81$, $df = 8$, $p < .01$), indicating that the mothers and fathers tended to have highly similar perceptions of their children's language skills. Together, these findings suggest that the differences noted in mothers' and fathers' use of the various directive forms are probably not due to differences in their perceptions of the children's linguistic abilities.

DISCUSSION

We know from previous studies that more of fathers' than mothers' utterances are imperatives (Gleason, 1975; Kriedberg, Note 2; Weintraub, Note 3; Rondal, Note 4). The present study demonstrates that this is part of a broader phenomenon in that fathers not only produce more imperatives than mothers but more directive speech acts in general. However, we found that mothers

and fathers select differently from among the forms which can be used to express directive intent. Fathers relied on imperatives and implied indirect forms more often than mothers, who tended to employ conventionalized indirect forms more often than fathers. No other group differences reached significance. Hence, only Hypothesis 1 was confirmed: Parental modeling is the strongest candidate for the mechanism by which children learn to use the sex-associated strategies for requesting action. Parents' use of politeness routines follows the same pattern (Gleason & Greif, Note 7). Fathers and mothers prompt girls and boys to produce the routines *Thank you* and *Goodbye* with equal frequency, but mothers themselves use more of these politeness formulas than do fathers in their own speech.

There was little evidence that parents request action differently when speaking to boys and girls and thus little support for the notion that differential treatment of girls and boys is important in this aspect of social development. One cannot prove the null hypothesis, and this conclusion is based on a relatively small number of children. However, these data indicate that there was no striking difference in the types of directives addressed to girls and boys. Furthermore, this is consistent with the findings of Maccoby and Jacklin (1974), who, after an exhaustive review of the literature, concluded that little consistent evidence indicates that parents directly "shape" sex-appropriate behaviors in their children apart from supplying them with sex-typed clothing and toys and, perhaps, putting greater "socialization pressure" on boys than girls.

We should note a few characteristics of the families studied and the setting employed which bear on the generalizability of these findings. First, to obtain a reliable estimate of directive form preferences, it was necessary to select only parents who were relatively "directive" in this situation. Parents who issue fewer directives may exhibit different form preferences. (There was a significant positive correlation between the percentage of a parent's utterances that were directive and the percentage of directives that were conventional imperatives; $r = .53, df = 18, p < .02$). However, parents who met our criterion of 15 directives did not differ from those who did not in terms of level of education, the partitioning of child care responsibilities, the frequency of maternal employment outside the home, the MLU of speech to the child in the car episode, or the age of the child. There was a nonsignificant tendency for the parents included in the sample to be more talkative in the car episode. (The excluded mothers produced 27% fewer utterances than the included mothers; the excluded fathers 16% fewer utterances than the included fathers). Thus, differences in loquacity, rather than in some personality variable relating to "authoritarianism," may have been partly responsible for the fact that one parent satisfied the criterion and another did not. Second, sex of parent and role in the family were confounded in this study. In every family, the mother was the child's primary caretaker. Therefore, the differences noted could equally well be considered differences between primary and secondary caretakers, or between the individuals playing the nur-

turant/expressive versus authoritarian/instrumental roles in the family. However, while the nature of a speaker's role may influence his choice of directive form, the effect of sex of speaker apparently persists even over changes in role. Gleason (1975) studied a natural experiment in which the separate effects of sex and role could be observed, viz., a day-care center which employed male as well as female caregivers. Despite their sex, the male caregivers were in a primarily nurturant role, similar to that played by mothers in families with the traditional division of labors. Caregivers of both sexes produced many fewer imperative directives than either mothers or fathers in the home; but the male caregivers produced many more than the female caregivers, just as fathers tend to produce more than mothers. There appears to be a tendency for males to produce more imperatives than females, even when role is held as constant as this type of natural experiment permits. However, role does exert a tremendous influence on the absolute frequency with which speakers of either sex produce this type of directive.

The unavoidably artificial setting of the laboratory "playroom" in which the families were observed may have led the parents to suppress any inclination to take different tacks in requesting action from girls and boys. This seems unlikely, however, since several studies of the same sample of families in the same setting have found marked effects for Sex of Child on many aspects of parental behavior (and also many cross-sex effects) (e.g., Masur, Note 8; Masur & Gleason, Note 9; Weintraub, Note 3; Greif, Note 5). We are currently analyzing parent-child interaction in the home (for the same sample) to see whether the father-mother differences noted in the laboratory are accentuated in this more natural setting, where parental roles are more clearly defined. We may also see effects for the sex of the child on parental directives, since children may be treated differently in the home and laboratory (Gleason, 1975). In all likelihood, we studied a rather select group of directives (i.e., those issued under relatively congenial, cooperative circumstances). The directives that parents issue when disciplining or prohibiting their children's behavior may take quite different forms. For instance, there are undoubtedly situations in which urgency overrides politeness as a determinant of directive form and the imperative is the form most likely to be used. On these occasions, the differences between fathers and mothers in choice of form may disappear. On the other hand, there may be circumstances in which the sex of child is a more potent influence on parents' choice of form than it was in the setting we used. Only by examining the directives which parents use under widely differing circumstances can we establish the generality of the findings reported here.

Lakoff (1973) has speculated that since little boys generally spend most of their early years with their mothers, they probably use "female" speech until about age 10, when the extensive same-sex peer group interaction characteristic of middle and late childhood finally leads them to begin using the "masculine" tongue. Similarly, Edelsky (1976) comments that while acquisition of phonology,

syntax, and other strictly grammatical aspects of language occurs during the early childhood years, only much later do children acquire stereotypes about "male" and "female" speech. The limited evidence gathered in this study regarding children's strategies for requesting action from their parents suggests that the situation may be quite otherwise. By the age of 4 or so, the children were already using the alternative directive forms with frequencies very similar to those of their same-sex parent. Thus, learning about the linguistic habits that go along with being "male" or "female" may begin earlier than late childhood. This possibility would be consistent with the evidence that, by age 4, children's speech reveals considerable knowledge of form-context relationships (see introduction).

It is curious that fathers tended to phrase their directives in both the most and least explicit forms more often than the mothers. Since the imperative form is usually directed downward in rank, this pattern may simply be a linguistic reflection of fathers' usual position as family authoritarian or at least highest-status member. But why did the fathers phrase their directives in implied indirect form more often than mothers? Ervin-Tripp (1977) argues that this form is used when speaker and addressee share a rich network of knowledge and assumptions, so that only a few well-chosen words are sufficient to communicate a complex message. It follows that implied indirect directives are likely to be more difficult to understand than either imperative or conventionalized indirect forms. An easy explanation for fathers' more frequent use of such forms would be that since they spend much less time than mothers with their children, fathers are less sensitive to their children's comprehension skills and are more likely to produce messages that are beyond their children's understanding.

Two pieces of information suggest that this is not the case. First, the fathers were as accurate as the mothers in predicting their children's answers on the Parent Awareness Measure, suggesting that fathers do not have a less detailed knowledge of their children's communication skills. Second, there is evidence that children who are 4 years old are fairly capable of both interpreting and producing speech acts of the type we considered implied indirect directives (e.g., Leonard, Wilcox, Fulmer, & Davis, 1978; Garvey, 1975; Hollos & Beeman, 1978). Indeed, our impression was that the children did not have more trouble responding to the implied indirect directives than either of the other types. The interpretation we favor rests on the observation that an implied indirect directive not only can serve as an oblique way to establish a request between two individuals who share a rich network of knowledge but also can serve the didactic function of fostering the development of this network in the less experienced person. Teachers often use indirect speech acts of this sort to stimulate logical reasoning by their students (e.g., see Mishler, 1972). When a parent answers a child's question *Where does this piece go?* with the information *It has straight edges*, the child is forced to bring to bear a general principle of problem solving (e.g., "Pieces with straight edges go around the outside of a puzzle"). The parent

hopes that this principle, in conjunction with the information offered by the parent, will lead the child to answer his own question (i.e., "Therefore, this piece goes around the outside of the puzzle") Fathers' more frequent use of implied indirect directives may reflect a greater tendency for them to pose logical challenges of this sort for children (c.f. Gleason's 1975 discussion of fathers as "bridges" between children and the outside world). This may, in turn, be the result of greater expectations regarding children's ability to reason logically or a greater desire that they learn to do so. This is all consistent with the findings of Masur and Gleason (Note 9), who noted that fathers generally are avid testers and consolidators of children's knowledge. They also found that fathers take more opportunities to deepen children's knowledge by providing relevant new and often more complex information on the same topic.

These data suggest that not all indirect directives are equivalent pragmatically. The contrast highlighted in this study was "conventionalized" (e.g., *Could you remove your hat please?*) versus implied indirect forms (e.g., *Your hat is blocking my view*). The principal difference between these forms, the requirement for logical inference, may be meaningful, since the forms were distributed in a consistently different manner in the speech of mothers and fathers. If this distinction had been ignored and both types of indirect directives lumped together, there would not have been a significant difference between fathers and mothers in the frequencies with which their directives were "indirect" as opposed to "imperative" in form. (This finding is reported by Golinkoff & Ames, 1979, who did not make this distinction). Hence, the categorization "direct" versus "indirect" may be too gross to capture certain subtle aspects of registral variation.

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