

Different Realizations of Suggestions in TV Commercials from Japan and the USA

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Abstract

This study examined the differences in the ways of realizing the speech act of suggestion found in TV commercials from Japan and the USA. The focus of research was placed on the characteristic differences in terms of linguistic (syntactic) forms and general strategies employed to realize the speech act of suggestion. A full day-time broadcast of TV commercials from both countries formed the research sample for this study, and the resulting data reaffirmed the assumption that suggestions in TV commercials are made in a socially desirable and appropriate manner, and also that the realization patterns of the speech act vary from one culture to another, depending on the different social/cultural norms and values manifested in the use of respective languages. Based on such findings, some of the interpretations were drawn from social and cultural point of view.

Introduction

The basic assumption that speech acts are realized in different ways from culture to culture has been shared among many researchers, and the details of differences have also been investigated as important sociolinguistic topics of research (Gass & Neu, 1995; Blum-Kulka, House & Kasper, 1989; Olshtain & Cohen, 1989). Recognizing cultural differences in speech acts signifies the fact that realization patterns of the same speech act can be different from one culture to another not only in its linguistic forms or strategies, but also in the force of its speech act itself (Gumperz, 1982). In this paper, thus, I would like to compare TV commercials from Japan and the USA as a way of looking at cultural variations in realizations of speech acts. Although the focus of this study is placed on the speech act of suggestions only found in TV commercials, not in ordinary face-to-face conversations, the fundamental notion of speech act, which is "the performance of a certain act through words" (Gass, 1995, p. 1), can also be applied to the examination of utterances found in TV commercials.

The objectives of this study are three fold; 1) to find out whether there are any differences in the ways of realizing the speech act of suggestions found in TV commercials from Japan and the USA, 2) and to identify and describe the characteristics of these differences in terms of

linguistic forms (syntactic) and strategies employed to realize the speech act, 3) and to consider possible explanations for those differences from social and cultural point of view.

The rationale behind the use of TV commercials as language data for sociolinguistic inquiry are not just that they are relatively easily obtainable, but rather that they are considered to reflect the essence of social and cultural values in a particular society (Mueller, 1987). In other words, TV commercials seem to be quite socially bound in nature, as the messages in any advertisement are often expressed in a socially appropriate or desirable manner so as to accomplish the goal of getting consumers (the viewers) to buy a specific product (Schmidt, Shimura, Wang, and Jeong, 1995).

Therefore, comparing TV commercials from Japan and USA can reveal not only how the speech act of suggestion is being realized differently but also how those differences are related to social and cultural behaviors that are interpreted as appropriate and desirable in each country.

Theoretical Considerations

Before the phase of data analysis, theoretical foundations of speech act should be taken into consideration for determining what specific speech act or acts can typically correspond to the nature or intent of TV commercials.

According to Austin (1962), there are three different types of act identified in the theory of speech acts; 1) A *locutionary* act, or an utterance of a sentence with a particular meaning that can be understood, 2) an *illocutionary* act, or uttering that sentence that reflects the intent of the speaker, and 3) a *perlocutionary* act, which refers to the results or effects produced by uttering that sentence. According to Searle (1969, 1976), such three-part differentiation of an utterance can be reanalyzed, as it corresponds to a two-way distinction in meaning that any utterance is supposed to entail in itself, that is, 1) *propositional* meaning and 2) *Illocutionary* meaning. Propositional meaning, which is also known as locutionary meaning, refers to a propositional content of a sentence or the basic literal meaning of the utterance, whereas illocutionary meaning involves the consequential effect of the utterance on the hearer as a result of its entailed illocutionary force.

In light of these theories on speech act proposed by Austin and Searle, utterances found in TV commercials can be interpreted as having the distinctive illocutionary force of getting the viewers to buy a specific product or do some action with the product (Schmidt et al., 1995). Based on the assumption that the illocutionary force or the intent of TV commercials is viewed as such, the speech act of TV commercials might generally be categorized as a kind of *directive*, either direct or indirect in its representation (Banerjee & Carrell, 1988; Searle, 1976). The speech act of directive has the function of getting the hearer to do something, and its function is realized in such different ways as in making an order, a suggestion (advice), or a request.

Each subcategory of the directive has its own felicity conditions, which must be satisfied if that speech act is to be performed properly (Searle, 1969). In other words, these felicity conditions might serve as a test to see if there are any discrepancies or mismatches between the felicity conditions stipulated for each speech act and the nature of TV commercials, especially in order to specify what kind(s) of speech acts are commonly operative in TV commercials.

As far as the speech acts of requests and advice (suggestion and recommend) are concerned (Searle, 1969), the felicity conditions specified for each act seem to correspond to the essential nature of a TV commercial, in the sense that it can be generally regarded as 1) an attempt to get the viewers to do some future action, namely to buy a product (i.e., request) or 2) an undertaking to the effect that such action is in the viewers' or consumers' best interest (i.e., advice or suggestion). However, TV commercials cannot be claimed "orders", because they are not necessarily meant to expect the viewers to buy a product as a consequence of the advertiser's (the speaker's) or manufacturer's authority (Geis, 1982). In addition, it should also be noted that TV commercials consist not entirely of "requests", in the sense that they do not always attempt to seek the viewer's compliance with the speaker's needs for the act to be done (Schmidt et al., 1995).

In this line of analysis, thus, it is quite appropriate to say that TV commercials are viewed typically as suggestion or recommend, even though the forms or linguistic strategies seem more like requests or orders. Furthermore, Fraser (1983) supports this analysis by arguing that the function of a commercial is only to suggest or recommend with the intention of

persuading the viewer "to consider the merits of taking the action in virtue of the speaker's belief that there is sufficient reason to act" (p. 40).

Although it might be possible to analyze TV commercials as a hybrid containing elements of both requests and suggestion in reference to the viewer's different interpretations of each commercial, the essentially suggestive intent and function of TV commercials is rather obvious, that is; to get the viewers to feel like buying a specific product or get the viewers to do some action with it.

A similar view on TV commercials is offered by Schmidt et al. (1995), and they propose that TV commercials are best viewed as "suggestion to buy" rather than some other types of directive such as requests or orders, on the ground that the essential nature of TV commercials is an attempt to get the viewer or audience to perform some future action, namely to buy a product.

This proposal is certainly tempting in the sense that it corresponds to the very nature of TV commercials, especially as to its illocutionary force (i.e., conveying the advertiser's intent of getting the viewers to buy a product), but as Schmidt et al. (1995) also note, the speech act of TV commercials cannot be limited only to "suggestion to buy", because it might exclude other suggestive functions found in TV commercials, such as suggestions to use the advertised product or enjoy the benefits of owning it, etc..

In an attempt to conceive TV commercials in a comprehensive manner, the notion of "speech event" introduced by Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper (1989) seems quite useful, for the term speech event does not exclude other suggestive functions than "suggestions to buy", but rather it regards TV commercials as a whole discursal situation, in which different functions such as suggesting, informing, or entertaining can be realized in an inclusive manner (Schmidt et al., 1995). Furthermore, a speech event is said to consist of head acts and supporting moves. Head act refers to a central utterance or utterances that directly realize a specific speech act, and supporting moves, on the other hands, refer to a sequence of utterances that provide grounds or reasons for the claim of head acts (Blum-Kulka et al, 1989).

According to this analysis, TV commercials as a speech event can be treated more comprehensively as consisting of head acts of suggestion, that is, any utterance or utterances

that would directly realize the act of suggesting, (e.g., suggestions to buy a specific product, suggestions to use it, or suggestions to enjoy benefits of owning it), and various supporting moves which provide grounds or reasons for the suggestive remarks made in the head acts. In other words, the head acts of suggestions in TV commercials can be defined as any utterance or part of an utterance which corresponds to the illocutionary intent of getting the viewers to buy or use an advertised product, or enjoy the benefits of owning it, along with some justifications for the viewers to act in response to the suggestive remarks. As Schmidt et al. (1995, p. 288) illustrates, the underlying discourse of TV commercials can be like this:

<u>Head Acts</u>		<u>Supporting Moves</u>
Consumer should buy, use, or enjoy (etc.) the product	+ because	Product is effective, stylish, etc. Product will make consumer happy, healthy, young....

It should be noted, however, that there can arise a difficulty to distinguish or draw a line between head acts and supporting moves, as it depends largely upon the viewers' subjective interpretations of each commercial (Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1984; Edmondson & House, 1981). In other words, it is quite feasible for different viewers to interpret each TV commercial differently, creating a situation that a certain commercial might be viewed as containing more than one utterance that can be classified as a head act, but at the same time the same commercial might be interpreted as having no explicit head act except some supporting moves (Schmidt et al., 1995). Such situations can certainly arise in making a clear-cut differentiation between the two, but in light of the fact that the illocutionary force of TV commercials is already quite obvious to the viewers, it might not be necessary for the intent of TV commercials to be stated or notified in an explicit manner, or rather in some cases the supporting statements or moves might play more important roles in conveying the intent of TV commercials to the viewers than explicit head acts.

To sum up, even though some utterances might appear to be other types of speech acts such as requests or orders on the surface level, it is quite reasonable to say that many of the utterances found in TV commercials can contribute mostly to the realization of the speech act of suggestion, which resides under the broad category of directive, whether they might be categorized as either head acts or supporting moves, because the illocutionary point inherent to the nature or intent of TV commercials is strong and consistent enough not to be interpreted otherwise.

Method and Focus

Description of Collected Data

The data collected for this study consists of 8 hours of TV broadcasting from 11:00am to 7:00pm in Pennsylvania CBS (USA) and Tokyo Fuji TV (Japan), of which first 15 commercials per hour were selected for actual data sample. In line with the purpose of study, analysis of collected data was focused on consumer product advertisements only, and repeats of the same commercials and public announcements were eliminated from the data.

These video tape recordings yielded slightly more than one hour of commercials in each language for drawing a sample of 50 commercials from the entire data collected. Although the advertised products were all different in each country, I did not try to balance the samples from both countries according to their product types. In addition, the samples collected for this study also varied in their length of time being advertised on TV, but I did not balance the difference either. A total of 100 samples from both Japanese and American TV commercials were transcribed, including spoken, printed, and sung messages, and all the 50 samples from Japanese commercials were then given a literal translation. Although I tried to make that translation as literal as possible, it cannot be denied that my interpretations might have influenced the wording of the translation.

Focus of Analysis

Characteristic linguistic forms (syntactic) used to realize the speech act of suggestion in TV commercials from Japan and the USA

Characteristic strategies utilized for effective presentation of suggestive messages found in both Japanese and American TV commercials.

Results / Discussion

Results obtained through the two focal steps of data analysis were closely examined, and possible explanations or interpretations for the results were given from the social and cultural

perspective. Although many of the phrases or expressions found in TV commercials are announced ostensibly for the benefit of the viewer (the hearer), the nature or intent of them is obviously rather strong and could possibly be viewed as a kind of face-threatening act without the context of TV commercials (Brown & Levinson, 1987). However, given the specific discursal context of TV advertisement, directive forms of utterances seem to be interpreted as suggestive messages, reflecting the ways of realizing the speech act of suggestion in socially desirable and appropriate manners without sounding offensive to the viewers. With this regard, describing different strategies used for realizing the speech act of suggestion in TV commercials from Japan and the USA can also help illustrate different social and cultural values for each country.

Characteristic Linguistic Forms (Syntactic)

As shown in Table 1, there were several characteristic differences found in the ways of realizing the speech act of suggestion between TV commercials from Japan and the USA. One of the most noticeable differences was that American TV commercials contained a significantly higher number of imperative forms than Japanese TV commercials.

Table 1: Linguistic (Syntactic) Forms of Suggestion

	Japan	USA
Bare Imperative	0	57
Imperative + <i>Please</i> or Tag	11	0
Imperative + If-Clause	5	5
Elliptical Imperative (No Verb)	16	3
Negative Imperative	0	3
Propositives (e.g., Let's see)	4	0
Comperative/Superlative	4	18
Total	40	86

While there were a few indirect imperatives such as those with "please" or those preceded by "if-clause", identified in Japanese commercials, dominant use of bare imperatives in

American TV commercials seems to be in stark contrast with Japanese TV commercials in terms of "directness" and "persuasiveness". For example,

- #A7 Enjoy your sample for only \$3.99.
- #A11 Discover new Eclipse gum!!
- #A18 See the difference!!
- #A27 Try my new tender roasted sandwiches!!
- #A35 So before you think about something more serious and expensive like
Pepcid AC for your heartburn, think about---TUMS.
- #A45 Feel better fast.
- #J33 *Mazu ha 1200 yen no ni-shuukan toraiaru de otameshi kudasai.*
Please try our 2-weeks trial kit first for only ¥1200.
- #J47 *"Xylident" wo tsuzukete kudasai.*
Please keep using "Xylident".
- #J48 *Kurabete mite yo. Zenzen chigau kara.*

Please compare ("Systema" with other toothbrushes), and you'll know the difference.

It should be noted, however, that although the bare imperative seems to be the most direct way of making suggestions in both languages, it cannot necessarily be assumed that the function of imperatives in English is equivalent to that of Japanese imperatives (Leech, 1983). In fact, we hear a lot of imperative suggestions in daily-life situations in the USA without feeling offended to hear those imperatives, while in Japan the imperative suggestions are rarely heard in public and viewed as almost taboo forms or an extremely imposing way of suggestions (Ide, 1982; Matsumoto, 1988).

Thus, it can be inferred that the use of imperative forms in suggestion might not always sound offensive to Americans but rather may sound persuasive in the sense of showing direct intent of the speaker. If this inference is correct, the preferred use of imperative forms in suggestion found in American TV commercials can be interpreted as not a direct way of suggestion but rather as one of the persuasive strategies in realizing the act of suggestion, especially in light of social appropriateness or norms of the USA (Althen, 1988). In the same manner, the strategy of not using bare imperatives and relying more on indirect imperative forms in making a suggestion in Japanese TV commercials are also considered to be quite appropriate in the sense that they are neatly corresponding to the Japanese social norms or values such as "indirectness" or "politeness" (Ide, 1982).

Indeed, it is difficult, if not impossible, to create a universally valid ranking of forms by level of politeness, because the different social/cultural assumptions are involved in the ranking decisions. But at least in comparison between Japanese and English, it might be quite reasonable to say that 1) bare imperatives are less polite than all the other forms and 2) imperatives with overt politeness markers such "please" or those imperatives preceded by a conditional clause such as "if-clause" are more polite than bare imperatives.

Another significant difference of interest in syntactic forms between Japanese and American TV commercials was that Japanese commercials utilized the so-called elliptical imperatives or non-verb sentence structures more often than American TV commercials. Such elliptical examples are:

- #J1 *Konya ha "House" no Guratan de.*
House's Gratin, for a dinner tonight.
- #J7 *San to kin kara ha wo mamoru, "Protect".*
"Protect", because it protects your teeth from germs and acid.
- #J29 *Iyaa na mushi niha Kincho-ru.*
"Kincho-ru" for annoying bugs.
- #J42 *Kondo no donichi ha Nissan no omise dene.*
Next Saturday and Sunday, to Nissan stores near you.
- #J49 *Osentaku no mae ni "Precare".*

"Precare" before washing clothes.

Although elliptical imperatives in English are usually used to make a direct and explicit request (e.g., "salt!", meaning "pass me the salt" when said at a dinner table), those examples in Japanese commercials above do not seem direct, but rather ambiguous. The utterance, "'Precare' before washing clothes" can be paraphrased either as "(Buy and) Use "Precare" before washing clothes" or "'Precare" is helpful when used before washing clothes". Such use of elliptical imperatives by Japanese TV commercials, however, seems to clearly reflect the characteristic nature of Japanese language. Because Japanese is a so-called discourse sensitive language which permits the deletion of any grammatical constituent if it is recoverable from context, it is not surprising that in TV commercials, which are often highly contextualized by visual aids or sound effects, no-verb sentences are more commonly found in Japanese commercials than in English commercials (Takahashi, 1987).

Furthermore, ambiguous and context-bound nature of elliptical imperatives is also considered to be a clear reflection of the indirect or fuzzy nature of Japanese mentality, for the lack of verb in elliptical construction allows the speaker to avoid explicitly referring to the action to be taken by making the hearer guess what is expected or implied (Lebra, 1976; Reischauer & Jansen, 1995). With respect to linguistic forms only, the typical suggestion forms such as "you should/ought to/must---", "why not---?", "maybe we could---", "I suggest that you---", which are often found in dairy face-to-face conversations, were quite uncommon in both Japanese and American TV commercials, although several similar forms were found in American commercials and a few in Japanese commercials, as in the samples A37, A40, and J23.

- #A37 You nourish the inside of your body, why not outside?
- #A40 It's PRILOSEC time.....
- #J23 *Umm, kimari deshou.*
Umm, it's got to be it.

As I mentioned earlier, in the section of theoretical considerations, one of the reasons behind the lack of imperative forms in Japanese TV commercials might be caused by the heavy reliance on the supporting moves such as reasons or grounds for the proposed action to be done rather than by explicitly announcing head acts which directly contribute to the realization of suggesting act. Because the supporting moves themselves can function indirectly as suggestions in a broad sense, it is quite conceivable that Japanese TV commercials are using the strategy of avoiding the use of the explicit head acts intentionally so that the explicit suggestive intent of the commercials would not come out on the surface. This implicit strategy often found in Japanese TV commercials is again considered to be the advertiser's effort to meet the social expectations or norms of Japanese society.

Characteristic Strategies Used to Present Suggestions

Besides differences in the use of linguistic forms, there were some strategic differences found in TV commercials from Japan and the USA. Although TV commercials from both countries shared the same underlying intent of getting the viewer to buy a product or do some action with it by the suggestive commercial effects, they exhibited several characteristic differences in the way of accomplishing such goals (See Table 2).

Table 2: Strategies for Presenting Suggestive Messages

	Japan	USA
Addressed directly to the viewers	10 (20%)	34 (68%)
Addressed indirectly to the viewers	36 (72%)	16 (32%)
Explicit explanatory messages about the product	22 (44%)	39 (78%)
Implicit explanatory messages about the product	22 (44%)	9 (18%)
Product name only	5(10%)	0 (0%)

One of the interesting differences between the two was that suggestions found in American TV commercials were mostly addressed to the viewer directly as a potential consumer with the frequent use of pronoun "you" in suggestive utterances, while many suggestions in Japanese TV commercials, though there were little overt suggestions found, were directed at some other addressees on the screen or simply reporting that other consumers have done something with the advertised product, in a quite indirect manner.

- #A9 You can't control allergy season, but with Clariton you can control what allergy seasons do to you.
- #A16 We don't have what you don't want.
- #A22 When you get it all, all you take is Flonase.
- #J10 *Douri de kimochi ii wake dawa.*
That's why I feel better. (to herself, looking at the mirror)
- #J26 *Hayame ni Pavron nomu ne.*
I'll take "Pavron" sooner. (a mother to her daughter)
- #J33 *Konseputo ga iito omou.*
I think the concept of the product is nice. (to the interviewer)
- #J50 *Chigau desho?*
You can feel the difference, can't you? (a mother to her baby)

These examples above clearly illustrate not only the different ways of presenting suggestions between Japanese and American TV commercials, but also reveal the cultural and social differences between the two countries. What is appropriate or desirable in the way of making a suggestion should be constrained by the social values or assumptions that a society imposes on people living in that society (Mueller, 1987). Thus, it can be inferred that the strategy of addressing suggestions directly to the viewers in American TV commercials can be regarded as showing "sincerity" to the viewers and, in the same vein, that Japanese TV commercials emphasize the "indirect" or "polite" strategy of suggestions, trying not to address directly to

the viewers so that the viewers would not feel confronted or threatened when they are told what to do (Fukushima, 2000; Althen, 1988).

In addition, the fact that Japanese is a language that permits the deletion of an overt subject pronoun when it is apparent from context also explains the Japanese tendency to avoid direct reference to who is addressing to whom (Takahashi, 1987). Furthermore, in light of the assumption that the strong intent of directives can inherently constitute a threat to the addressee's face (Brown & Levinson, 1987), it is quite natural that various strategies would be employed to present suggestive messages that emphasize the benefits to the viewers and minimize the possibility that the viewers would feel any obligation to buy a product.

With regard to the specific strategies, however, there were some apparent differences found between Japanese and American TV commercials, especially as to the ways of making the advertising messages non-threatening to the viewers. In presenting suggestive messages, Japanese TV commercials relied heavily on the contextual clues such as visual effects or printed narrations, and it was not uncommon that even suggestive messages were totally missing except these contextual clues or that only the names of the products are mentioned at the end of commercials. In addition, explanatory statements about the product, which usually play an important role as supporting moves in providing detailed information about a particular product and the reasons for why that product is worth buying, were often missing in Japanese TV commercials, or even if they were provided, they were not directly referring to the benefits to the viewers but rather only presenting some implicit short messages that would expect the viewers to guess (infer) what benefits they were going to get if they would buy the product.

- #J6 *Yume, tsukamou. Pocky and Men's Pocky.*
Let's get (your/our) dream. Pocky and Men's Pocky.
- #J8 *Hodokete, koi shite Lotte no Sasha.*
Unfold, fall in love, Sasha from Lotte.
- #J10
Nanka kouiu no ii ne.
I feel comfortable with something like this.
- #J32
Tsubutsubu pawaa de sukkiri.
Better feeling (Refreshed), with "tsubutsubu" power.
- #J36
Mou kawaii wa sotsugyou shimasu.
I'll graduate from being only a cute girl to be a beautiful woman.
(cosmetic product commercial)

In American TV commercials, on the other hand, the most common way of presenting suggestive messages was through rather explicit and detailed explanations of the products in terms of their quality, price, and most importantly the benefits the viewers would get if they buy them.

#A27 Folks, are you still buying chicken sandwiches from the burger boys? WHY? Some of them boys grill their chicken dry as an old shoe. My new tender roasted chicken sandwich is deep marinated so it's full of flavor, slow roasted so it's tender and juicy. Try my new tender roasted sandwich. Right now, it's just \$1.99....

#A40 It's PRILOSEC time. Time to see your doctor about prescription of PRILOSEC. Your results may vary, but for many people, PRILOSEC provides 24 hours of complete heartburn relief with one daily dose....

These differences found in the way of presenting suggestive messages in Japanese and American TV commercials clearly illustrate the different expectations that viewers of each country may have to the public advertisement in general, and if we assume that such expectations are culturally and socially ingrained products, different use of strategies in Japanese and American TV commercials can be regarded as a reflection of the socio-cultural norms or values that people living in each society subscribe to, whether consciously or unconsciously.

If "explicitness" and "candidness" are social values in the USA, the explicit way of presenting suggestions through detailed explanations of the products and candid statements of the viewer's benefits might prove to be a realization of the American social values accordingly (Althen, 1988; Stewart & Bennett, 1991). By the same token, the use of implicit way of presenting suggestive moves or messages by Japanese TV commercials clearly follows the social values of "implicitness" and "tacitness" prescribed by Japanese society (Lebra, 1976; Fukushima, 2000).

Conclusion

This study, in general, has uncovered several intriguing differences in the ways in which suggestions are made in TV commercials from Japan and the USA. Indeed, the results obtained through comparison between American and Japanese TV commercials turned out to support the claim that American advertising is relatively persuasive in nature, while Asian

advertising emphasizes other functions such as informativeness, entertainment value and the establishment of positive feelings (Schmidt et al., 1995; Miracle, 1987).

Certainly, the frequent use of direct imperatives in American TV commercials was found to be in stark contrast to the indirect and sometimes ambiguous ways of suggestions in Japanese TV commercials, but it should be noted that these findings alone do not necessarily equate with or constitute the contention that Japanese TV advertising is less persuasive than American counterpart (Leech, 1983), especially when we take into consideration the different social and cultural norms or values that underlie the way TV commercials should be like in each country. In other words, what counts as being persuasive can be very different from culture to culture and society to society, and if we want to claim that advertising in a certain society or culture is more persuasive than that in another, we need to establish the universal pragmatic criteria or principles through careful examination of all the different pragmalinguistic strategies used in different societies and cultures, along with their social/cultural norms and values.

With regard to only the linguistic forms utilized in Japanese and American TV commercials, it might be quite reasonable to say that American TV commercials are more direct than Japanese counterparts, because the former samples were characterized by the dominant use of bare imperative forms in making a suggestion, while the latter samples were characterized by the use of elliptical imperatives (no-verb). Again, this claim can only make sense if we assume that there exists a functional equivalence between Japanese and English syntactic imperatives (Leech, 1983).

Looking at the results from the theoretical viewpoint, TV commercials are generally understood as a speech act of suggestion, in the sense that the essential illocutionary intent of TV commercials is quite clear and apparent, that is, to get the viewers to buy a product or do some action with it, assuming that future action would benefit the viewers as well as the advertisers. However, if we regard the linguistic forms as a clue to identify the speech acts used in TV commercials, they might also be re-analyzed as a hybrid that contains elements of both suggestion and request (Schmidt et al., 1995), because there were frequent occurrences of request-like forms, especially in the samples of Japanese TV commercials. Thus, one possible explanation for such data evidence would be that the categories of speech act between request and suggestion might be shady in Japanese, reflecting the Japanese

preference for the linguistic forms typical of requests as a sort of politeness strategy to minimize the face-threatening possibilities produced by the use of linguistic forms of direct suggestions.

About the Author

Kota Ohata earned a B.A. degree from Kyoto University of Foreign Studies in 1994 and an M.A. in TESOL from West Virginia University in 1996. After a few years of EFL teaching back in Japan, he returned to the USA to study for a doctoral degree in the area of applied linguistics. Currently he is a graduate student at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, completing his dissertation.

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