

Power Adjustment in Professional Women's Language

— **An investigation into the use of directives
in the TV-series *Cashmere Mafia***

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1 Introduction

From a traditional point of view, men and women have belonged to two different spheres in terms of the public domain. Men have been believed to be more associated with public life with their occupation as a center, while women have been connected to private life with the family as the core. Hall points this out that when saying that “men were firmly placed in the newly defined public world of business, commerce and politics; women were placed in the private world of home and family” (Coates, *Women Man and Language*, 2004: 197). However, things have changed significantly since the Women’s Movements in 1960s. A great number of women have by now entered workplaces of various kinds, which has brought a great influence to the traditionally andocentric professional world in addition to other aspects in society, including the rising proportion of women in various occupations and the general image of women in society.

Language, as a sensitive indicator of social ideology, will inevitably be influenced by, and at the same time, reflect changes in society. Along with the visibility of women in traditionally male-dominated public domains and the continuously rising status of women in social constructions, the language used by women in contemporary society has brought in some linguistic features that in some way go against the conventionally prescribed feminine way of communication. Linguistic power is one of them. Some linguistic forms are considered powerful, such as interruptions, commands, and some times silences. When these linguistic forms are used in certain context to express speaker’s un-cooperation or even to impose the speaker’s intention to the listener, they express power.

When a quarter of century ago, Lakoff termed such linguistic and paralinguistic features as hedges, tag questions and polite forms women’s language in her *Language and Woman’s Place* (1975), and argued that women’s language expresses powerlessness. Nowadays, more powerful linguistic usages have been adopted by

women in communicating. Professional women, especially those who rank high levels in organizations, use relatively powerful language in their workplaces in order to keep in consistency with their social positions. For instance, directives often appear in their utterances. The following three are directives, a kind of speech act that “speakers use to get someone else to do something (Yule, 1996:54)” given by Yule in *Pragmatics*:

(1) *Gimme a cup of coffee. Make it black.*

(2) *Could you lend me a pen, please?*

(3) *Don't touch that.*

As far as linguistic power is concerned, professional women in contemporary society are put in a so called Catch-22 situation in language usage in the workplace. They often hesitate between language variants in expressing themselves appropriately. Coates describes this Catch-22 situation in professional women's language use in her *Women, Men and Language* and says :

They (women in workplace) are expected to adopt the more adversarial, information-focused style characteristic of all-male talk, and typical of talk in the public domain, but if they do (like Army), they run the risk of being perceived as aggressive and confrontational, as un-feminine. In other words, there is a clash between what is expected of a woman and what is expected of a person with high status in the public sphere. (Coates, 2004: 201)

Thus, it is important for the professional women, especially for those in high ranks in workplaces, to find out solutions to solve the problem of doing power properly in terms of language use. They may choose to use or not to use some linguistic forms; they may use some linguistic forms more or some others less; that is, they may use some linguistic forms in a tactical way in order to keep the balance between the gender role as women and social role as persons with high status.

1.1 Aim and Scope

The aim of the present investigation is to study the use of directives by professional women both in work-place contexts and in private contexts in conversations as found in the TV series *Cashmere Mafia*. A contrast is made in terms of describing the quantity and quality of directives used in different contexts. The numbers and the forms of the directives are analyzed to illustrate how the professional women try to adjust the power in different contexts and keep a balance between their gender roles and their social roles in modern society.

1.2 Material

Cashmere Mafia, a TV-series launched in 2008 in America, makes up the primary material of this study. The TV-series is about four female executives in New York City, who rank in high positions in their respective workplaces and often get together to share happiness and sorrows in their lives and careers.

The reason for choosing *Cashmere Mafia* as the primary material is that it is a lately-launched and therefore contemporary TV-series about professional women and mainly focuses on both the female characters' careers and their personal lives. Besides, all of the four women rank high in their professional organizations. They are more likely to use powerful linguistic forms in workplaces. It provides a lot of authentic linguistic materials for the present study of language use, especially language use concerning power and powerlessness by the professional women in their workplaces and their private talking in modern society.

Cashmere Mafia exists in one season, comprising totally 7 episodes. Each episode lasts for about 40 minutes. Because of the limited number of episodes, the investigator has included all the 7, and then randomly intercepted the first half of each episode as samples, from the very beginning to the middle point of total playing time of each

episode. Thus, there are 7 separate samples taken from the primary material. If the middle point of playing time lies during a scene, the finishing point will be put off a little until the particular scene is completed. That is the reason why the 7 samples are not exactly in the same length in playing time; rather, the shortest one lasts 20'04 while the longest lasts 20'58 and the total playing time of the 7 episodes are 144 minutes and 53 seconds (see Table 1).

In each of the 7 samples shown in Table 1, all the discourses taking place in workplaces of the four female characters have been picked out respectively. The length has been carefully calculated. The length may vary according to different scenes. If there is no such discourse for a certain character in a certain interception, zero will be marked. If a discourse is in the workplace but on a totally private topic with a private mate (boyfriend, husband or parent), which has nothing to do with their work, the discourse has been cut off. Besides, three discourses talking into cell-phone with colleagues have been included. On the other hand, a sample or samples of private discourse context, that is, the get-together of the four females has also been picked out from each of the first half as well. The details of each sample are listed in Table 1.

In Table 1, length of each sample has been listed, and the total playing time of all the 7 samples lasts 144'53. Besides, when the number of scenes for each character in each sample is counted, the playing time of each scene is also calculated and then added up. Therefore, in all the 7 samples, the length of playing time on all the scenes focusing on Mia's workplace is 11'14, 8'17 on Zoe's workplace scenes, 5'17 on Caitlin's workplace scenes and 4'58 on Juliet's workplace scenes. The same has been done on the playing time of the scenes for private context. The length of playing time on all the scenes about private talking among the four characters is 18'08.

Table 1. Details of the samples taken from *Cashmere Mafia*

	time span (min)	number of scenes for each character in workplace				number of scenes for four characters in private contexts
		Mia	Zoe	Caitlin	Juliet	
episode 1	20'55	2	2	1	1	1
episode 2	20'58	3	0	2	0	2
episode 3	20'52	3	2	1	1	2
episode 4	20'25	1	3	0	1	2
episode 5	20'49	3	2	1	0	1
episode 6	20'50	1	2	0	1	1
episode 7	20'04	1	0	2	1	1
Playing time 144'53		11'14	8'17	5'17	4'58	18'08

1.3 Method

From all the chosen samples, the linguistic form – that is, the directives – have firstly been identified, collected and counted both in the females' workplace contexts and in their private contexts. As a second step, the data so collected have been put into tables in order to compare the quantity as well as the quality of the directives used in the two different contexts. Therefore, the different forms of directives were categorized and analyzed according to how they were used by the female characters in relation to different listeners. Based on these analyses, the researcher arrived at the power adjusting strategies that the professional women in this TV-series use to keep the balance between their gender roles and their social roles in modern society.

2. Theoretical Background

Language and language use are dynamic systems in which people deliberately choose and adopt certain variant to express proper selves in different contexts. When choosing and adopting the variant, many factors should be taken into consideration, such as ethnic, culture, gender, age, status and interpersonal relationship. After women enter the traditionally andocentric professional world, they also have to consider the problem of presenting proper image in this public domain. What language is proper for the professional women and how to use the language properly are the things they have to think over. In this part, three aspects of knowledge are put forward: first, the traditional view of regarding women's language as powerless language; second, the language used in workplaces by those in high ranks as powerful language; and third, information on directives.

2.1 Women's language as powerless language

Difference in language used by men and women has long been existed. Both men and women have choices of language using to communicate their role in a certain community. Since Lakoff labeled women's language with powerlessness, many researchers have claimed the similar suggestions on the point, although different terminologies are used.

Based on the study of courtroom language, O'Barr and Atkins (1980) did not accept Lakoff's description of some features as Women's Language; they rename the linguistic features normally associated with women's speech Powerless Language. While acknowledging that powerless language has been confused with women's language, they re-labeled women's language as powerless by suggesting:

that the tendency for more women to speak powerless language and for men to speak less of it is due, at least in part, to the great tendency of women to occupy relatively

powerless social positions. What we have observed is a reflection in their speech behavior of their social status. Similarly, for men, a greater tendency to use the more powerful variant (which we will term powerful language) may be linked to the fact that men much more often tend to occupy relatively powerful positions in society (O’Barr and Atkins, 1980: 104).

Coates explicitly points out in her *Women, Men and Language* that “their re-labeling of Lakoff’s ‘Women Language’ features as ‘Powerless Language’ perpetuates the myth of the intrinsic *weakness* of women’s language” (Coates, 2004: 110).

In the study of conversational dominance in mixed talks, taking such linguistic strategies as overlaps, interruptions, minimal responses, delayed minimal responses, and silences into consideration, the researchers, who hold different methodologies and perspectives, all point to the similar direction that, as Coates suggests, “Research focusing on mixed talk in a variety of social contexts has revealed asymmetrical patterns, with men’s greater usage of certain strategies being associated with male dominance in conversation” (Coates, 2004: 111). As a contrast, women, West and Zimmerman (1998) claim, “like children, have restricted rights to speak, and that interruptions are used both to exhibit and to accomplish socially sanctioned relations of dominance and submission” (Coates, 2004: 111). Women’s discourse interactions in mixed talk are categorized into female powerlessness—the opposition to the above mentioned male dominance.

In the study of same-sex talk, where women’s talk can be assumed to be examined “outside a framework of oppression or powerlessness” (Coates, 2004: 125), power still plays its role. Cheshire and Trudgill summarize their research on the links between gender and conversational discourse as follows:

It seems clear that, other things being equal, women and men do have a preference for different conversational style. Women—in most western societies at least—prefer a

collaborative speech style, supporting other speakers and using language in a way that emphasizes their solidarity with the other person. Men, on the other hand, use a number of conversational strategies that can be described as a competitive style, stressing their own individuality and emphasizing the hierarchical relationships that they enter into with other people. (Cheshire and Trudgill, 1998:3)

Coates consolidates such a dichotomy in relation to same-sex talk. After analyzing the five linguistic categories, namely topic and topic development, minimal responses, hedges, questions and turn-taking patterns, Coates (Coates 1989, 1991, 1994, 1996, 1997) labels women's linguistic characteristics as cooperative style and men's as competitive style after looking at topic choice, monologue and playing the experts, questions, verbal sparring and turn-taking patterns. By comparing the two styles, Coates concludes that "It seems that while men pursue a style of interaction based on power, women pursue a style based on solidarity and support" (Coates, 2004: 126). Women's cooperative style in their conversational discourse is once again put into the category of powerlessness as a contrast of men's competitive style based on power, as Martin Montgomery concludes that "Women are maintained in a subordinate position, it has been argued, because they are socialized to adopt powerless patterns of speech; and conversely men maintain their dominance by the use of verbal strategies associated with power" (Martin, 1995:167).

2.2 Powerful language in workplace

When we mark powerlessness as one of the characteristics of feminine language, we must be cautious that, as Graddol and Swann has pointed in *Gender Voices*, "Power itself is a complex concept which revolves into a variety of components, such as 'expertise', 'status', or 'dominance'." (Graddol and Swann, 1989: 94), especially when the context is concerned.

Workplace is such a context where power is a salient factor. Lenelis Kruse and Caja

Thimm, in their article *Communication at the Work Place*, state that “Asymmetrical interactions are part of everyday work situations... Communication at the workplace is also largely determined by the specific status hierarchy and the sex of interacting partners”(Lenelis and Caja, 1992: 219). Those who are in the senior position in the hierarchy are supposed to use powerful language to indicate their social status or dominance over their subordinate colleagues.

Janet Holmes also asserts in her article *Power and Discourse at Work: Is Gender Relevant?* that “The great majority of workplaces are intrinsically hierarchical in structure; power relationships are constantly constructed and reconstructed in the everyday interactions which constitute the ‘business’ of organization”(Janet Holmes, 2004: 31). By analyzing her excerpts, Holmes, in one aspect, illustrates how those in high positions use overt and covert powerful interactional strategies to do their power to their subordinates.

Again, a series of studies carried out to look into the different interactive practices between males and females in workplace (Susan Schick Case 1988, Nicola Wood 1989, Holmes 1995, Jane Pilkington 1998) suggest that “there is some truth in the idea of the workplace as a competitive arena where the prevailing norms are those typically associated with male speakers” (Coates, 2004: 198).

The above mentioned dimensions of women’s language as powerless language and powerful language in workplaces create a clash. The clash is not a problem for men, for their competitive or assertive style of language use fits well for the hierarchical workplace situation. They can achieve either superior status or masculinity, or both, by using powerful language. But for women, especially those senior in position, it is a problem. Whether to choose powerless style to perform their gender role or the powerful style to perform their social role really puts the career women in contemporary society into a linguistic dilemma. They really have to consider the questions like: whether they should use powerful language or how to use the powerful

language properly.

2.3 Directives

One of the strategies to connote power is to adopt the speech act of directives. Directive has been defined differently by different linguists. Sinclair and Coulthard (1975), in an examination of language use between teachers and pupils, defined directives as involving the teacher asking the pupil to do without saying something, like an imperative “Sit down”. Directives are acts requiring physical response, while those requiring verbal responses are called elicitation (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975: 28, 40-41, 50-51).

Another widely acknowledged definition is from Searle, who defined the directives as “attempts...by the speaker to get the hearer to do something” (Searle, 1976:11). He includes questions requiring a verbal response into directives because “since they are attempts by S (speaker) to get H (hearer) to answer, – i.e. to perform a speech act ” (Searle, 1976:11).

Some other linguists also give definition to directives, but briefly. For example, Goodwin (1980:157) defines the directive as a speech act that tries “to get another to do something”, and Gleason and Greif (1983:141) defines the directive as “any utterance whose intent is to cause the hearer to do something” (Vine, 2004: 24). Goodwin gives two forms of utterances that function as directives. One has explicit directive content like Example (4) given below:

(4) *Open that window.*

The other is a statement that lacks the explicit imperative structure like Example (5)

(5) *It's hot in here.* (Goodwin, 1990:65)

In addition to giving definition to directives, many further studies have been carried out on ranking different syntactic shapes of the directives concerning to the power between the speaker and the listener. Goodwin in her works *He-Said-She-Said* cites Ervin-Tripp's typology for directives according to relative power of speaker and addressee in conversational usage and obviousness of the directives as follows:

Need statements, such as "I need a match."

Imperatives, such as "Gimme a match" and elliptical forms like "a match."

Imbedded imperatives, such as "Could you gimme a match?" In these cases, agent, action, object, and often beneficiary are as explicit as in direct imperatives, though they are imbedded in a frame with other syntactic and semantic properties.

Permission directives, such as "May I have a match?" Bringing about the condition stated requires an action by the hearer other than merely granting permission.

Question directives, like "Gotta match?" which do not specify the desired act.

Hints, such as "The matches are all gone." (Goodwin, 1990:68)

No matter what the definition is, directives, with the purpose of driving the hearer to commit a certain action physically or verbally, present a power of controlling. Therefore, when Ervin-Tripp simplifies different terminologies with the similar function, he adopts the term control acts and Goodwin again cites what Ervin-Tripp says in her works *He-Said-She-Said*:

While languages in complex societies typically have a large vocabulary for speech acts, we can simplify by conceptually distinguishing a family of control acts, of which the directive is just one type. (Goodwin, 1990:69)

When the context of workplace is concerned, it is generally believed that the person with a higher status in a hierarchal organization is more likely to use the directives and the workplace situation is the contexts where there are distinguished status differences and corresponding obligations. Therefore, using directives in their

workplaces is one of the ways that people, including those professional women, adopt to perform their power.

The following study focuses on directives used by the four female executives in *Cashmere Mafia*, and the strategy they use to adjust the power is also under inspection.

3. Analysis and discussion

Based on the background knowledge presented in section 2 Theoretical Background (see especially sub-section 2.3), the definition of directives in the present study is given as an utterance made by the speaker with the intent to cause the listener(s) to do or not to do something physically or verbally. This definition focuses on the function of the directives. Bearing the function in mind, the investigator has borrowed Ervin-Tripp's typology and included the following six structures while looking for directives. One or two examples from the primary material are attached to each structure to give a clear illustration.

I Need statements. This kind of directives takes the form of statement but with an implication for the listener to commit some action.

(6) *I want the latest circulation figures for all magazines.*

II Imperatives. They are the most direct way the speaker use to make the listener to commit certain action. Sometimes, they take the form as elliptical structures.

(7) *Please sit.*

(8) *Last name?*

III Imbedded imperatives. They are in fact imperatives but are imbedded in other

structures, say, questions. Sometimes they are in even more covert form like object clauses.

(9) *Will you roll me to Juliet?*

(10) *And I would really appreciate it if you just wouldn't mention his name again.*

Okay?

IV Permission directives. They are in fact the requires for a certain action instead of asking for permitting, such as

(11) *Katherine, could I see you for a sec?*

V Question directives. There are two kinds of questions while looking for directives:

(12) *Why there is a man about to be eaten by a woman on the cover of my magazine?*

The case of question (12) needs a little explanation. If the speaker utters the question with a mood of anger and pushes the listener to make an explanation, then, the question is regarded as a directive since the question requires a sequence speech act – explanation from the listener. On the other hand, if the question is purely an information-seeking question, that is, the speaker does not know the reason and hope to find one, and the listener is not obliged to answer it, the question is not regarded as a directive. In the present study, information-seeking questions are excluded from the directives as data.

VI Hints. Any syntactic structure with the intention from the speaker to make the listener to commit action is included. When identifying this kind of directives, the function rather than the form is inspected. For example:

(13) *That is what I'm talking about, everyone, OK?*

The structure seems to have nothing to do with directives itself. It is more like a statement. But when the sentence is put at the end of a meeting, it indicates the ending of the meeting and asks the listener(s) to leave. In this case, Example (13) is a hint, which also belongs to one kind of directives.

3.1 Quantity of directives in workplace contexts and in private contexts

Considering both the function of directives, that is, making the listener(s) to do or not to do something physically or verbally, and the six structures as are mentioned above, namely, need statements, imperatives, embedded imperatives, permission directives, question directives, and hints, the investigator has listed, counted and added up all the directives by the four female characters respectively in workplaces as well as in private talking among the four. Table 2 is the result:

Table 2 Total number of directives used by four female characters in 7 samples

Characters \ Contexts	Number of directives in workplace contexts	Number of directives in private contexts
Mia	18	6
Zoe	11	7
Caitlin	15	4
Juliet	5	5
Total	49	22

According to the data in the above table, totally 71 directives have been found. Among all the 71 directives collected in the samples, 49 take place in workplace contexts, which occupy 69% of the total; 22 in private contexts, which is less than one third from the total 71. The general result of this investigation is that the female characters use more (more than twice) directives in workplace contexts compared with in private conversations.

When each character is concerned, the result is still generally the same. Mia uses totally 18 directives in her workplace while in her private talking she uses only 6. Caitlin uses 15 directives in her workplace and 4 in her private talking. The number of directives used by Zoe in her workplace is 11, and 7 in her private talking. Only one character shows a little exception—Juliet. The numbers of directives used by Juliet in her workplace contexts and that in private contexts are the same: both are 5.

The tendency of the female characters' using more directives in workplaces than in private talking may result from the power negotiation relating to the statuses they are in. They have to consider the interpersonal relationship, and then to choose and adopt proper linguistic strategies to reach the balance between their social roles and their gender roles in a given surroundings. The following analysis focuses on workplace contexts and private contexts separately and explains the reason for the difference of directives use in terms of quantity.

3.1.1 Workplace contexts

Workplaces are typical hierarchically-constructed places where power is a salient factor and is often communicated by using some linguistic form from the superior to the inferior in status. The directives, containing the intention of making the listener to do something, are often used by those superiors to perform the “legitimate power” (Spencer-Oatey 1993:12), – power due to the employed people’s different levels within an organization. In her works *Power and Discourse at Work: Is Gender Relevant*, Janet asserts that “in unequal relationships, explicit directives addressed downwards are undoubtedly the most overt means by which power and authority are manifested”(Janet, 2005:33-34).All of the four female characters in *Cashmere Mafia* rank high positions in their separate workplace. The status of being professional women in high levels requires them to perform a proper social role. They have to show authority or power over their subordinate staff, asking them to do or not to do something. The female characters' relative positions in their organizations as well as

the requirement, and sometimes desire, to perform power in the workplace result in the using of many directives.

Mia is a newly-promoted publisher of *Barnstead Magazine Group*. In her workplace context, there is only one male supervisor who often gives Mia directives. Most of the others are in lower levels than Mia. Such a vertically-arranged workplace context has well explained the high frequency of directives in use. She has the power to assign tasks to her assistant. Giving a series of directives at a time is also common in her workplace context. The followings are two examples taken from episode 1 and episode 2 separately.

(14) *Tracy, will you call Peter Johnson's office and find out what he likes to do other than eat?*

We need to show him a rock star nigh on the town.

And will you roll me to Juliet?

(15) *I want the latest circulation figures for all the magazines, a budge breakdown of what we are paying who, a rundown of stories for the next three issues. And all of that for our major competition.*

And I have, like, two pens on my desk. I never want to have to look for a pen.

Two directives are given at a time to her assistant in both of the above examples. Not only to her assistant, Mia also has the power to tell her designers to change or explain their works. The following example is taken from the meeting and Mia chairs it. Like example (15) and example (16), she gives a series of instructions to show her capability.

(16) Mia: *Re-launch equal change, people.*

When we say "modern man", we mean tomorrow's man. We don't want to reflect where men are, we want to tell them where they are going. Okay?

If there's an article, a photo spread anything that could have appeared in last month's issue, we may as well call it "caveman" and pulp the whole.

Employees: *Understood.*

Mia: *Okay, Todd, so tell me who shot the cover, and when am I gonna see it?*

Todd: *Today. Jeremy falcon.*

Mia: *Never heard of him.*

Todd: *You will.*

Mia: *That is what I'm talking about, everyone, okay?*

In such a short meeting lasting 1'04, Mia gives 4 directives. It is natural and necessary that she gives instructions to her subordinate staff, telling them what to do. She declares her relative position in her workplace by means of giving directives. It is her high status in the magazine group that requires her to use these powerful speeches. Such a high density of directive usage will surely bring about the large quantity of directives collected in the dataset.

Caitlin is a market executive at Lily Parrish, a cosmetic firm. In her workplace, there is one lady who is obviously higher in rank than Caitlin. The other characters she connects are her client, an assistant, and low rank employees. Since most of her conversations take place between Caitlin and those in lower levels, Like Mia, she is likely to give many instructions in her work and always several directives at a time as in the following example picked from episode 7 where Caitlin is talking to a young student designer.

(17) Caitlin: *These are beautiful, sophisticated, mature. **And doable?***

Denis: *Absolutely.*

Caitlin: ***At the speed of light?** Because my job is on the line here.*

...

Denis: *I can do this.*

Caitlin: ***Under pressure. Can you pull enough of these pieces together by Friday so we can have some semblance of a show?***

Denis: *Semblance? Was Tom Ford's first for Gucci a semblance of a show?*

Caitlin: *Oh, aim high. I like that. Go. Start. Sew!*

These series of directives well connote her power of control over the young designer and illustrate the position she falls in the hierarchical scale of workplace context.

Zoe's relation-net in her workplace is a little bit different from Mia's and Caitlin's in the TV series. She is a capable managing director in an investment firm and has mainly two characters to face to in her daily working environment. One is Clayton, a male managing director who is in the same rank as Zoe, who is always competing with Zoe, wanting to get raised in position. The other is a young research analyst. She has graduated from college not long before and works for both Zoe and Clayton. When talking to Clayton, Zoe obviously reduces the chance of using directives because they are in the same level of the hierarchical working structure. That may result in the fewer directives in Zoe's data compared with Caitlin though she appears more times in workplace contexts according to Table 1 (see page 3). But compared with her private talking, she still uses more directives in her workplace, sometimes very direct ones like Example (18).

(18) *Ok, just give it to me.* (in episode 5)

Her relatively high rank in her firm gives Zoe the contexts to perform her power by using directives over other subordinate staff and her clients.

The data collected on Juliet seem to present a counter-proof to the result that professional women tend to use more directives in their workplace than in private talking. However, when considering the fact that directives are often used by high-ranking figures to subordinate ones to show their power, Juliet in fact provides another proof. Juliet is a chief operating officer in a chain hotel. She ranks high in her workplace. But in the samples that has been inspected, the persons Juliet talks to are

her clients, an architecture who has his expert power over Juliet in his business. The subordinate staff appears only in two short scenes. Taking this factor into consideration, Juliet's lack of directives in her workplace is understandable, or at least the data can not be regarded as counter-proof to the previous result. (see 1.2 Material, Table 1)

From the above analysis, it is clear that professional women tend to use directives to transmit their power in accordance with their relative social status in their workplace. The quantity of directives varies with their interpersonal relationship. They tend to use more directives to the subordinate staffs while fewer to those in higher level than they are. The higher they rank in the workplace organization, the more directives they tend to use.

3.1.2 Private contexts

Compared with the directives taking place in workplace contexts, directives used in the four female characters' private talking contexts are less in quantity. In all the seven samples, 22 directives are found, and that is less half in quantity compared with the directives used in workplaces. These findings come from the data that have been already presented in Table 2 in Subsection 3.1.

Workplaces are such hierarchical contexts where ranks are strictly clarified and power is a salient factor in routine work, as has been discussed in 2.2. Private contexts are quite different, where hierarchy and power fade to the background and other factors, such as gender, age, individual personality, emerge and affect the speaker's language use. The four female characters in the TV-series are highly-ranked executives in their workplace, but they are, first of all, women in their private lives. They are in close relation with each other and in relatively equal status. Their language use in their private talking fits the description of same-sex talk that Coates gives in her *Women Man and Language*, which says that "it seems that men pursue a style of interaction

based on power, while women pursue a style based on solidarity and support.” (Coates, 2004: 126) Directives still can be used, though, but since they are not used to assign tasks so frequently and to indicate the power over subordinate ones as in workplace contexts, they appear less in quantity.

3.1.3 Politeness

When studying the different quantities of directives used in workplace contexts and in private contexts, one factor should also be mentioned, that is, politeness. Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) define politeness in terms of the concept of face. Coates, again, defines politeness “as satisfying the face wants of others (while protecting our own) (Coates, 1990:105)”. She supports Brown’s claim that “the level of politeness appropriate to a given interaction will depend on the social relationship of the participants. This means that linguistic markers of politeness are a good indication of social relationships (Coates, 1990:105)”. In workplace contexts, those who are superior are less likely to consider politeness and thus use more direct linguistic forms such as directives; on the contrary, those in inferior positions pay more attention to politeness, especially when they are talking to the superiors. They have to avoid face-threatening utterances. Otherwise they are challenging the authority of the superior and may bring bad result to their career in return. This may, from another aspect, well explain a large number of directives in the women executives’ workplaces. In private contexts between friends, politeness still exists, but it is not as salient as in workplace contexts, for politeness sometimes implies distance between the interlocutors, and friends’ talking has to consider the appropriateness of politeness to keep a proper closeness. Therefore, use of some directives is quite common in talking between friends, while too many or too few directives may seem awkward.

By comparing the quantity of directives used in workplace contexts and in private contexts, we find a deliberate shift by the four female characters in language use. They use fewer directives in private talking to avoid showing too much power to each

other and keep the women's collaborative and supportive conversational style to do femininity. In their workplace contexts, on the contrary, they use more directives to show power to their subordinate staffs and consolidate their authority in the hierarchical structures. The shift of the use of directives in quantity can be regarded as one of the strategies that professional women adopted to adjust power and keep the balance between the gender role as women and the social role as persons in high status.

3.2 Quality of directives in workplace contexts and in private contexts

Not only the quantity of directives used by the professional women illustrates the strategy they use to adjust the relative power in different contexts, the different types of directives also say something. In her works *He-Said-She-Said*, Goodwin (1990) says that "one reason directives have proven to be such an attractive and fruitful topic for research is precisely that they provide a rich set of alternative linguistic forms tied to important social phenomena." (Goodwin, 1990:67-68) In the following part, we change the angle of the study a little bit, that is, from the quantity of directives by professional women to the quality of directives they use; we try to study the different forms of directives and go a little further by means of discourse analysis.

3.2.1 Forms of directives

When recognizing and collecting directives from the samples, the investigator has borrowed Ervin-Tripp's typology and six forms are included into the dataset. They are need statements, imperatives, embedded imperatives, permission directives, question directives and hints. They are ranked "approximately according to the relative power of speaker and addressee in conventional usage and the obviousness of the directive" (Goodwin, 1990:68). Table 3 is the list of six forms of directives used by the four female characters in their workplaces in the samples and Table 4 is the list of directives collected in their private talking.

Table 3 Different forms of directives used by four characters in workplace

	Need statements	Imperatives	Embedded imperatives	Permission directives	Question directives	hints
Mia	4	6	5	0	1	2
Zoe	1	5	2	1	1	1
Caitlin	1	12	2	0	0	0
Juliet	1	2	2	0	0	0
Total	7	25	11	1	2	3

In workplace contexts, the female characters tend to use more imperative forms: 25 out of the total 49 directives. That is 51% in percentage. Embedded imperatives rank the second frequent usage: 11 are collected and that is 22%. The next form is need statements: 7 in number, which is 14%. The other three forms do not so frequently appear compared with the previous three forms. Hints appear 3 times, question directives twice and permission directive only once.

When each character is concerned, the result is almost the same. Imperative forms appear most, and the number of embedded imperatives follows as second. The need statements rank the third. In Mia's data, there are 6 imperatives and 5 embedded imperatives, and then 4 need statements; Zoe uses 5 imperatives, 2 embedded imperatives and 1 need statement; Caitlin's choice of the forms is extremely preferential. She uses 12 imperatives, 2 embedded imperatives and 1 need statement. But the data still follow the imperative-first pattern. Juliet's data are a little out of the pattern: 2 imperatives, 2 embedded imperatives and 1 need statement.

The data in Table 3 reflect an imperative-first pattern of directives in workplace contexts, while the data in Table 4 show a little shift. Embedded-imperatives take the first place in quantity by the female characters in their private talking. In total 22

Table 4 Different forms of directives used by four characters in private talking

	Need statements	Imperatives	Embedded imperatives	Permission directives	Question directives	hints
Mia	0	0	6	0	0	0
Zoe	1	4	2	0	0	0
Caitlin	0	1	3	0	0	0
Juliet	0	3	2	0	0	0
Total	1	8	13	0	0	0

directives collected in 7 samples, there are 13 embedded imperatives, which occupy 59% in percentage. Imperatives rank the second. There are 8 in number, occupying 36% in percentage. There is 1 need statement, and no permission directives, question directives and hints in the dataset of private talking.

When looking at the data on each character, there is no consistency in using certain form. Mia uses exclusively 6 embedded imperatives and no other form appears. Zoe prefers to use imperatives. Caitlin uses more embedded imperatives instead of imperatives, although she uses extremely out-numbered imperatives in her workplace. Juliet uses one more imperative than embedded imperatives in her total 5 directives.

Before exploring the reason for the shift from the imperative-first pattern in workplace contexts shown in Table 3 to the embedded-imperative-first pattern in private contexts shown in Table 4, one factor must be taken into consideration. That is the relative power conveyed by different forms of directives.

Goodwin points out in her observation of boys' and girl's adoption of different directive expressions (Goodwin, 1990) that "Directives are designed to get someone

else to do something. There are many different ways that an action of this type can be performed, however.”(Goodwin, 1990:67) When one choose a certain form of directive to realize the function of getting the listener to do something, he has to consider the appropriateness of the form in a particular context. Some forms of the directives contain overt power over the listener while others do not. For example, when Mia wants her assistant to do something, she says

(19) *Please get him up here.* (episode 3)

The imperative used here shows the overt power from Mia over her assistant when she has the authority to make the assistant to do the thing she command. Goodwin (1990) continues discussing the ties between the form of directive and power it contains by saying “some directive formats suggest that addressee has complete control over whether the requested action will in fact be performed (e.g. ‘Would it be possible to give me a match?’), while others propose that speaker is leaving addressee no choice but to perform the action being demanded (e.g. ‘Give me a match, punk, or I’ll break your arm’)” (Goodwin, 1990:67). She terms the former as mitigation the latter as aggravation.

Imperatives rank the second in Ervin-Tripp’s directive scale of aggravation. The power contained in this form is rather strong. The speaker of imperatives leaves the listener little freedom to choose between following the directives or not. When the speaker chooses this form of directives, he/she chooses to perform power over the listener. This may well explain the out-numbered imperatives used by the four female executives in their workplaces. It is more likely for them to give others direct requirements or even commands rather than asking for permissions. For example, where Mia utters the imperative (19), she leaves little freedom for her assistant to refuse doing so. And it appears prolix for Mia to use permission form like: May I ask you to get him up here. If there are some, there must be other factors that override power. The highly-ranked status in their hierarchical working structures warrants

them the power over lower status staffs. At the same time, they are deliberately performing the power to keep their authority in front of others to consolidate their present positions. It is, therefore, natural and understandable to see so many imperatives collected in the four female characters' workplace contexts.

According to the data in Table 4, embedded imperatives are more frequently used in private talking. In Ervin-Tripp's directive scale, this form ranks below to imperatives, which means it contains less power, or be less aggravated. In private talking, using directives is rather a subtle affair. Although all the four female characters rank high in their workplaces, they are good friends in private life and relatively equal in interpersonal relation. Doing power is not considered proper in their private talking. But on the other hand, mitigated directives are not proper, either. Mitigated directives are often used to save the listener's face, indicating the distance between the speaker and the listener. The four characters are intimate friends, and direct expressions are expected in their private talking. That is the reason they choose the embedded imperatives most of the time, and that also explains the zeroes of permission directives, question directives and hints.

Just like the different directives use in quantity in workplace contexts and in private contexts, the shift from more imperatives in workplaces to more embedded imperatives, that is, the shift in directive forms is also the result of power negotiation according to different contexts. When in the workplace, the female executives use strong and direct imperatives to connote power warranted by their social status, they choose direct but intimate embedded imperatives to show their collaboration or powerlessness as women.

3.2.2 Discourse analysis on the directives

While acknowledging that directive forms are related to some power expression, it is over-simplified to equate one form to one power rank. It is too rash to say that need

statements are strong in power than imperatives, or permission questions are less in power than the embedded imperatives. In Vine's *Getting Things Done at Work* (1990), she cites Kimberly Jones' conclusion on directive study by saying "directive usage cannot be adequately understood without considering the specific contexts in which directives occur." (Vine, 2004:18) That means directives and the power they contain have to be interpreted in relation to the contexts in which they are used. Discourse analysis provides researchers with tools to probe the underlying information below certain linguistic forms. In her *Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis* (2005), Lazar explicitly points out that "CDA offers a sophisticated theorization of the relationship between social practices and discourse structures, and a wide range of tools and strategies for close analysis of actual, contextualized uses of language"(Lazar, 2005:4). In the following examples, one may discover that directive forms do not correspond with certain power rank by means of discourse analysis. In other words, the power in a particular directive form can be adjusted by adding some factors. The power should be interpreted in the specific context.

(20) Context: Caitlin is asking her assistant (a black boy) to trying opening the container of some cosmetic in her office.

1 Caitlin: (looking at a stopwatch) *25, 26, 27. 27 seconds, and still you can't open it? Damn it. Who do they think is buying so firming cream? Ninjas?*

2 *Could you schedule a packaging meeting for me tomorrow at 11:00?*

3 assistant: *You're with international at 11.*

4 Caitlin: *10 then.*

5 assistant: *Photo show-and-tell.*

6 Caitlin: (a little impatient) *Just pick a time that works.*

7 *I need five Matte samples. [pause] Please. [pause and smile] Thank you.*

The above excerpt is taken from Caitlin's workplace context in episode 3. The playing time is from 8:03 to 8:26. The conversation is between Caitlin and her assistant. Caitlin's status superiority over her assistant can be obviously seen. She is performing her power throughout the whole conversation by giving a series of directives marked 2, 4, 6, and 7 in the 23-second scene. 2 is an embedded imperative. By using *Could you do something* form, Caitlin indicates both politeness and power to her assistant. But after the denying of two arrangements, she gets a little impatient and uses a bold on imperative 6, and continues by another strong form, that is, a need statement marked 7. At the very moment she finishes her 4 directives, which are rather aggravated, Caitlin realizes her indicates too much power to her assistant and immediately adjusts her power by adding two mitigations—*please* and *thank you*. This example illustrates that even an extremely strong power accumulated by a series of powerful directives, namely, need statement, imperative and embedded imperative, can be mitigated by adding some linguistic (*please* and *thank you*) or non-linguistic (*smile*) strategies. In the above case, directive forms still play an important role in expression power, but can be adjusted. In fact, using other strategies to adjust power and to avoiding being too powerful is a common way exercised by people in workplaces, including professional women.

Another way of mitigating the power of strong directive form is from other way round, that is, to do some foreshadowing before a directive, which can make the directive not too abrupt and aggravated. Excerpt 2 is an example.

(21) Context: Mia has just got promoted as publisher of a fashion magazine is told to fire her previous superior Grant. She is trying to lead the topic to Grant's working performance.

1 Mia: *Well, I don't think it's wrong to expect people to work hard. I mean—I do.*

2 Grant: *Yes, but we all don't have Espresso Machines where our heart should be. That's probably why I don't have your job, which is fine. I'm happy to be*

the parrot to your [pause] pirate.

3 Mia: [a two-second pause] *You know what? I feel like all we've been doing lately is talking about me, which I love. **But still, let's talk about you.***

4 Mia: ***Tell me what you've been working on.***

This excerpt is taken from Mia's office in episode 2. The playing time is from 13'56 to 15'00. The relationship between Mia and Grant is subtle. Grant is Mia's previous superior and takes good care of Mia; now Mia is in higher position than Grant. She has to show respect to Grant on the one hand and perform her authority over Grant on the other. Mia holds the conversation with the purpose of reminding Grant of his bad working performance and giving a warning to him. Therefore, the key sentence of this conversation is the last imperative 4, which shows great power in itself and is rather aggravated. Considering the interpersonal relation between Mia and Grant, Mia has to mitigate the power contained in the imperative. For this purpose, she has made much foreshadowing by talking about her attitude to work in sentence 1, and then about her own personal feelings by 3, and next come a lead-in imperative begin with *Let's...* in 3, and at last the direct imperative in 4. The step-by-step advancing abates the aggravation contained in the last bold on imperative and such a strategy has the same function of lessening power in some strong directive forms, and at the same time, still transmit the authority to the listener.

(22) Context: Juliet is in a negotiation meeting. The opponents have mis-regarded Juliet as a low status assistant and ignored her existence. Even worse, they push their cups toward Juliet, indicating her to fetch them some coffee.

1 Opponent: *Gentlemen, thank you so much for this opportunity, and we hope that a visit to our site might be the next logical step.* [pushing his cup toward Juliet without looking at her]

2 [another opponent pushes his cup toward Juliet, too]

3 Juliet: [smile] *Gentlemen, I would like to remind you that I am the C.E.O. of*

this company and the ranking executive in this meeting.

4 ***If there's a next step, I would appreciate it if you would address your proposals to me as well as to my colleagues.***

5 [hold the cups, smile] *Cream or sugar?*

The above excerpt is taken from a meeting-room in Juliet's firm in episode 1. The playing time is from 2'38 to 3'08. Her opponents' action is rather arrogant and offensive. But in such a business negotiating meeting context, it is not proper to show one's temper; but at the same time, it is not proper to show weak to her opponents, either. Juliet thus adopts a strategy of using a rather indirect and polite form of directive to connote relative strong power. She uses 4, a mitigated form of embedded imperative in the form of *If..., I would appreciate it if you do something*. The form itself show great politeness and mitigation, but she fights back at the very beginning of her utterance 3 by using *gentlemen* again to indicate that they have ignored a high position lady at present and continues by reminding them of her status, the CEO of this company and the ranking executive in this meeting. Based on showing her relatively high status in the meeting, which in fact shows great power to her opponents as well as to her colleagues, she mildly uses the directive in an embedded form, which is very polite on the surface by adding a condition if-clause, a negative polite form *I would appreciate it if....* It is really sarcasm and the sarcasm is even strengthened by Juliet's asking cream or sugar. It puts her arrogant opponents in a dilemma: it is obviously not proper for them to answer cream or sugar, for using directives here means that they are making a high status figure do service for them. One the other hand, such a high status figure does seem ready to make coffee for them and it is also too late to draw back their offence. The strategy of using mitigated directives to connote strong power by Juliet in the negotiation meeting is another example of mis-matching the directive forms and their functions, and it is a tactic strategy in workplace contexts.

(23) Context: Four female characters are talking together in a Café. Caitlin is in

trouble in her work, and is looking for a solution. Zoe has quit her job and stays idle at home. Juliet get divorced and Len Dinerstein, a billionaire, has invited her out for a dinner.

Caitlin: *I am trying to pull off a fashion week miracle in 48 hours. Every cosmetics company in the country is gonna have a week's worth of free publicity except Lily Parrish, which is, of course, somehow my fault.*

Juliet: *So what are you gonna do?*

Caitlin: *I don't know. I've tried every major designer...*

Mia: *You know what? I know the dean of the fashion institute. You could probably find one of their star students and take advantage of that.*

1 Caitlin: *Really? That would be perfect. **Can you call now?***

Mia: *Sure.*

Juliet: *So Gerard Dumais just fired our very talented and very, very expensive architect. So now I have to find some one [pause] younger, hungry, irrencieux.*

Zoe: *What about Eric?*

Juliet: *Eric does commercial project? [feeling hard to answer]*

2 Zoe: *He wants to expand. Restoration's his specialty. **Well, at least give him a chance to pitch.** He is perfect to this.*

...

Juliet: *If I bring Eric into pitch and Gerard doesn't buy it, then...*

3 Zoe: *He's a professional. He gets it. **Just give him a shot.***

Juliet: *All right. I might as well do it now while I still run the company.*

Zoe: *[change the topic and talking to Mia and Caitlin] Len Dinerstein is circling Juliet's company And he's asked her out to dinner.*

Mia and Caitlin: *Mm.*

...

Caitlin: *The fourth Mrs. Len Dinerstein.*

4 Juliet: ***Oh, shut up.***

This conversation is taken from a private talking in episode 7. The playing time is from 11'54 to 14'27. In the private context, where there is no status power working in the conversation, other factors such as individual personality, topic, the mood of the speakers affect the use of directives. Caitlin is the youngest among the four, and she is straightforward in personality. When Mia tells her that someone may help her out of the trouble, she directly and immediately raises the explicit request by asking *Can you call now?* Since they are friends, this embedded imperative used here is not an offensive one but fits Caitlin's personality and mood well. In Zoe's case, she is eager to find a project for her husband since she has quit her job for some time. Besides, she is strong and outward in personality, which leads to the two aggressive directives on Juliet, both are bold on imperatives. This in fact makes Juliet hard to answer, for she is worrying about mixing business and friends together. However, considering that the bold on imperatives take place in the private context, the power in the imperatives are not so strong as they are in workplace contexts. The last imperative comes from Juliet. When Caitlin is making a joke on Juliet about a billionaire's invitation, Juliet interrupts her using an imperative—shut up. This imperative seems rude in form, but it is used to interrupt a joke with no anger in the utterance, and is not powerful in its function. It also can be regarded partly as a joking usage. What is more, Juliet is senior in age than Caitlin, and therefore it is not so abrupt for her to use such a bold on form on Caitlin's joke.

From the above cases, we can say that the discourse analysis helps us have a close look at the directives both at the forms as well as at the functions. The power-negotiation process is clearly presented when the female characters use a certain form to communicate a corresponding function. Directives, or to be more exact, the power transmitted by the directives, are better to be understood in a specific context, as Goodwin has concluded that "whether a specific strip of talk is to be heard as aggravated or mitigated is something that must be demonstrated within the data being investigated, and cannot be claimed simply on the basis of the syntactic shape of the utterance"(Goodwin, 1990: 70).

4. Conclusion

As is stated at the very beginning of this essay, a large number of women have entered the professional world. Change of their social status undoubtedly brings changes in their language use. More and more sociolinguists have noticed the phenomenon and a lot of studies on professional women's language have been carried out from different aspects. The conflict between the traditional view regarding women's language use as powerless and the requirement of powerful language use in workplaces has drawn much attention.

This study has compared quantity and quality of directives in workplace contexts and private contexts used by four professional women in a TV-series *Cashmere Mafia*. It can be concluded that the professional women are aware of the dilemma of being women as their gender role and being professional women as their social role in terms of linguistic power. From this study, one can find that the professional women flexibly exercise linguistic strategies to adjust the power in accordance with the contexts. In workplaces, they tend to use more directives to transmit power to mark their relatively high social status, while in private contexts, they use less directives to indicate the collaborative style in women's talk. When the directive forms are concerned, the professional women use more imperatives in workplaces, which are strong in power; while in their private talking, a neutrally-powered form--imbedded imperatives--appear frequently, which shows both less power and intimacy at the same time. The shifts between the quantity and quality in directives usage are the tactic strategies that professional women use to adjust the power in different contexts, which solve the dilemma and keep the balance well between their gender role and their social role.

In conclusion, language used by women has reflected social ideology to some extent. With the change of women's social status and women's general image in modern society, the language used by women will continuously keep changing, and women's language will be an attractive and fruitful field to research.

List of References

Primary Material

Cashmere Mafia, an American television series run on ABC from January 6, 2008 to February 20, 2008, which is about four female executives in New York City, who rank in high positions in their respective workplaces and often get together to share happiness and sorrows in their life and career. The TV-series consist of one season, 7 episodes, and each episode last about 40 minutes.

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