

On the recognizability of a self-deprecation: A conversation-analytic approach

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1. Introduction

Conversation analysis (CA) emerged in the late 1960s as the product of an investigative exploration by Harvey Sacks, who was soon joined by his principal collaborators Emanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson. The result is a strictly empirical, data-driven framework that allows analysts to reveal the orders and norms that are constitutive of mundane conversation. Its method, in which turns of talk are regarded as basic units for accomplishing social actions by reference to their sequential positioning, proved innovative and robust not only for sociological investigations but also for linguistic and pragmatic explorations of how language (as well as nonlinguistic resources) is used to produce mutually accountable actions in spontaneous interaction (Sacks 1992; Schegloff 2007; Stivers and Sidnell 2012; Levinson 1983).

Among the normative orders that have been documented by conversation analytic studies is the preference for agreement over disagreement (Pomeranz 1984; Schegloff 2007). When one of the parties in a conversation makes an assessment of a referent (a first assessment), the recipient is expected to reciprocate their own assessment of the same referent (a second assessment). The second assessment is inevitably produced and understood by reference to the first assessment, obtaining the status of either an agreement or disagreement with the first. Agreements and disagreements are produced with distinct features such that they reveal the participants' orientations to the "preference" for agreement over disagreement: agreements are predominantly produced immediately after the first assessments and do not accompany mitigations or hesitations, while disagreements are predominantly delayed and accompany mitigations or hesitations. These differences between agreements and disagreements are so systematic that they provide a ground for the interactants to

maximize the chance of achieving agreement and minimize the chance of disagreements fully surfacing (Heritage 1984; Pomerantz 1984; Pomerantz and Heritage 2012; Sacks 1987).

While the preference for agreements is prevalent across languages (Stivers et al. 2009), the matter may be complicated by interactional contingencies. One such contingency arises when a first assessment amounts to a self-deprecation. Upon the production of a first assessment that is hearable as self-deprecating, the preference for agreement is overridden by the principle of avoiding criticism of the interlocutor (Pomerantz 1978), and it is disagreement, not agreement, that is preferred (Pomerantz 1984). Excerpt 1 is an example discussed by Pomerantz. L in line 1 offers an assessment that she is “so dumb” — a belittling assessment of herself.

(1) [Pomerantz 1984, 87]

01 L: I'm so dumb I don't even know it. hhh! -heh!

02 W: y-no, y-you're not du:mb,

Note that W's disagreement exhibits features of a preferred response: it is produced without delay, hesitation, or mitigation. As exemplified here, when a speaker makes a critical or deprecatory comment about themselves, the general principle of avoiding criticism of an interlocutor comes into play to yield an environment where a disagreement is treated as socially preferred over agreement.

Pomerantz (1984) illustrated various ways in which people reject or undermine others' self-deprecations. For instance, they undermine a self-deprecation by calling its producer a “perfectionist” (Pomerantz 1984, 88–89) or by recategorizing the criteria to be used for assessment (e.g., from letter-based grading to pass/non-pass grading in response to a self-deprecating comment about a C) (Pomerantz 1984, 87). On the other hand, there is much less documentation on self-deprecations per se. As is the case with many other types of sequences of actions in interactions, where response actions are more vigorously investigated than the initiating, first actions (Curl and Drew 2008, 134), there has been no systematic investigation of how an utterance comes to be recognized as a self-deprecation. One may consider the matter to be obvi-

ous, given that self-deprecations are evaluative comments about ‘self’ that are ‘deprecating.’ However, an examination of self-deprecation in spontaneous conversational data reveals that neither of these features of self-deprecation is unequivocal: the referent of an utterance that is treated as self-deprecating is not always the speakers themselves; nor is it always clear how a comment comes to be understood as deprecating. The aim of this paper is to explore how an utterance comes to be recognizable as a self-deprecation. It does so by adopting the methodology of CA in the examination of utterances that are responded to with a disagreement produced as a preferred response. In so doing, I explore the extent of the scope of referents that are treated as belonging to the speaker’s territory and demonstrate how an utterance comes to be understandable as self-deprecating by reference to the interactional contingencies surrounding its occurrence.

2. Background

2.1. *Management of Speakers’ Territories through Language and Language Use*

It has long been established that people orient to ‘belongingness’ or ‘territories’ of themselves and others and that their orientations to them are manifested in both language and language use. From the sociological point of view, Goffman (1971) argued that an individual is entitled to their territories, or ‘preserves’ in his terminology, which demarcate the self and others. Goffman considered these territories to be multifaceted, naming eight aspects: 1) personal space, 2) the stall, 3) use space, 4) the turn, 5) the body’s sheath, 6) possessional territory, 7) informational preserve, and 8) conversational preserve. He suggested that these territories are not definite or protected against intrusion: individuals constantly “patrol and defend” their territories in face-to-face interactions with others (Goffman 1971, 29). While some of the territories that Goffman considered may be handled mostly via nonverbal conduct, others may be handled via verbal conduct. More recent studies on epistemics in conversation (i.e., aspects of knowledge and experience to which interactants orient) have addressed ‘informational preserves,’ in Goffman’s terminology, and have indeed demonstrated that languages are equipped with

resources to claim, defend, or respect informational territories of the self and others (Heritage 2002; Heritage and Raymond 2005; Stivers, Mondada and Steensig 2011; Hayano 2011, among many others).

Meanwhile, linguists have been productive in documenting grammatical resources for indexing and handling the ‘territories’ of the speakers and hearers. For instance, the Japanese honorific prefix *o* is an indicator of what is considered to belong to an individual’s ‘possessive territory.’ This prefix is attached to a noun when the item is considered to belong to a respected person. On the basis of a survey on what objects are judged by native speakers of Japanese to be able to be marked with the honorific prefix, Tsunoda (1995) proposed what he called ‘possessive cline,’ the hierarchy of the degree of (in) alienability of an object from its possessor. The hierarchy is summarized as follows: body part > attribute > clothing > kins > pets > product > other belongings. It is appropriate to use *o* (e.g., *o-te*, “*o*-hand”) in referring to items that rank high in this hierarchy (e.g., *o-te*, “*o*-hand”; *o-yasashii*, “*o*-kind”; *o-yoofuku*, “*o*-clothing”; *o-kosan*, “*o*-child”), while it is unnatural to say, for example, *o-inu*, “*o*-dog,” in referring to someone’s dog.

While Tsunoda focused on linguistic markers in researching the relationship between a possessor and a possession, Kamio (1990, 1994) proposed a comprehensive theory of how the notion of ownership is handled in language use in his theory of “territories of information.” Territories of information are managed through a variety of linguistic resources, including a set of Japanese final particles, evidential markers, and deictic expressions. On the basis of his observations regarding the use of these grammatical resources, Kamio argued that a piece of information falls into a speaker’s territory of information if any of the following conditions are met (Kamio 1990, 33):

- a) information that is obtained through the speaker’s direct experience;
- b) information about personal facts regarding the speaker’s life history or possessions;
- c) information about the speaker’s set schedules or plans;
- d) information about important personal facts about the speaker’s family members or close ones;
- e) information about set schedules and plans of the speaker’s family mem-

- bers or close ones;
- f) basic information about the speaker's occupational or professional areas;
 - g) information about places to which the speaker has geographical relation;
 - h) other kinds of information that deeply concerns the speaker

Studies by Tsunoda (1995) and Kamio (1990), as well as many others in this line, appear to yield a reasonable basis for making predictions about what may be considered a possible object of 'self'-deprecation. Indeed, Suzuki (2009) reported that critical comments about a speaker's family member are recurrently treated as self-deprecations (i.e., they are responded to with disagreements produced with features of a preferred response). As we will see, however, the scope of referents that are treated as subject to 'self'-deprecation in actual interaction is more far-reaching. Furthermore, whether a negative evaluative comment about a referent is recognizable as a self-deprecation may not always be determined by the attribute of the referent alone but is dependent, at least to some degree, on the specific interactional dynamics within which the negative evaluative comment is produced. By examining a range of cases in which an utterance solicits a disagreement produced with features of a preferred response, I attempt to document how a referent comes to be treated in a particular interactional context as subject to self-deprecation.

2.2. The 'Deprecating' Qualities of a Referent

The other constitutive feature of a self-deprecation is, evidently, a negative evaluation attributed to its object. What counts as a negative evaluation can be apparent and straightforwardly shared among members of a community. Some descriptive words are unequivocally understood as referring to undesirable attributes, and their use in describing the speaker explicitly formulates the utterance as a self-deprecation. The adjective 'dumb' in the utterance "I'm so dumb" (line 1, Excerpt 1), for instance, is a clear specimen. However, an utterance that is produced and treated as a self-deprecation does not always contain an unequivocally negative word. Furthermore, there are cases in which interlocutors do not immediately agree on whether an attribute is desirable, which poses the question for us of how an attribute comes to be understood as undesirable.

2.3. *Self-Deprecations in Social Interactions*

Before we begin the analysis, a note regarding the sequential environment which a self-deprecation is found in and creates is appropriate. The study by Pomerantz (1984) mentioned earlier shed light on self-deprecations in the context of preference organization: while agreement is the generally preferred response, a self-deprecation creates a sequential environment in which disagreement is preferred. On the other hand, Pomerantz's earlier study (1978) considered self-deprecation in the responsive position. Presenting cases in which a compliment is responded to with a self-deprecatory comment, Pomerantz argued that compliment recipients are oriented to the principle of self-praise avoidance and that self-deprecation is one means of responding to a compliment while observing the principle (see also Golato 2002). A later study by Whitehead (2013) on discourse that includes complaints drawing on racial categories showed that self-deprecatory comments are often produced in the preface to a complaint based on a racial category to preempt the recipient's possible sanction against the complainant.

One obvious conclusion we can draw from these studies may be that the production of a self-deprecation is always embedded within a sequence of turns-at-talk in interaction. It creates an environment for a particular response, responds to a certain type of preceding action by an interlocutor, or is preliminary to an incipient next action. It follows that, in the case in which it is produced as a response or in the preface of a complaint, the recognizability of a self-deprecation may be at least partially provided by the sequential environment in which it occurs, or, in the case in which it is produced in the initiating position, then the ways the recipient responds provide analysts with a resource for identifying the utterances as recognizable as a self-deprecation.

3. **Data and Methodology**

The database used for the study consists of ten hours of face-to-face spontaneous interaction and two hours of telephone conversation in Japanese. The telephone conversations are drawn from the public corpus *TalkBank* available online at <http://talkbank.org> (see MacWhinney 2007). The data were transcribed following the conventions developed by Gail Jefferson (Atkinson and

Heritage 1984, ix–xvi; Jefferson 2004). Symbols and abbreviations used in the interlinear gloss are listed in the appendices. The analyses presented in this paper are based on the examination of twenty-nine cases of self-deprecation sequences extracted and analyzed. It should be noted that the cases are not distributed evenly across datasets; some conversations present many examples of self-deprecations, while others do not present any. This bias suggests the possibility that self-deprecation may be an action found only on specific types of occasions or in specific types of relationships among participants.

The extracts are analyzed using the methodology of conversation analysis (Schegloff 2007; Stivers and Sidnell 2012): using the displayed orientations of the participants as the bedrock of analysis, each relevant utterance is analyzed by reference to the position it occupies within the sequence organization and to the social actions it accomplishes within it.

4. Analysis

In this section, I consider the range of referents of utterances that are produced and treated as self-deprecations and discuss how these utterances come to be understood as self-deprecations. Starting with the most obvious and straightforward of the cases, in which the speaker themselves is the referent of a self-deprecation, I proceed to examine less straightforward cases in which the referent's status as belonging to the speaker would not necessarily be transparent if it were not for interactional contingencies.

4.1. *A Self-Deprecation about Oneself*

The most obvious referents of self-deprecations are, of course, the speakers. We saw earlier that the referent of the self-deprecation in Excerpt 1 was the speaker, as referred to with the first-person pronoun 'I.' Below is an example excerpted from a Japanese conversation that followed a lesson on the tea ceremony. One of the students, Masa, has confessed to the teacher and the other two students that her knee pain makes it hard for her to sit on the floor throughout a ceremony. The teacher then suggests that Masa do whatever she can do to make it easier, such as using a cushion or leaning her hand against the wall when standing up. Masa then describes how this would make her look *migurushii*, "unsightly" (line 1).

(2) [TC: unsightly]

01 Masa: ano mooshiwa- migurushii to omoi masu kedo.
 FL FML unsightly QT think PL but
Well, ((I)) apologi- ((I)) think ((I)) will be] unsightly but

02 TCHR: so[:nna koto [nai.
 such thing NEG
That's not true.

03 Masa: [yo(h)roshiku [onegai itasimasu.
 FML
Your guidance will be appreciated.

Although the referent is not articulated, the preceding exchange makes it clear that Masa is referring to herself (or, to be more specific, how she would perform), and the adjective used (*migurushii*, “unsightly”) is unmistakably deprecatory. The utterance is thus straightforwardly recognizable as self-deprecating. The disagreement the teacher produces immediately after it attests to such an analysis.

4.2. *A Self-Deprecation about a Body Part*

Extract 3 is a case in which a speaker's body part — the item that occupies the top of Tsunoda's ‘possessive cline’ — is the referent of a self-deprecation. This exchange transpires shortly after Extract 2. After discussing Masa's knee problem, the interlocutors, by interactional accident, start discussing the possible relationship between body weight and knee pain, letting the implication emerge that Masa's knee pain has to do with her weight. Most likely as an attempt to manage this awkward moment, Yuki, in line 4 (continued onto line 6), proffers an assessment of her thighs: patting her thighs with her hands, she says that she thinks her thighs are *futoi*, “big.”

(3) [TC: knee]

01 Masa: demo ho:nto [honto.
 but true true
 But (it's) true ((that my knees hurt because of weight)).

02 Kazu: [HAhhah

03 Kazu: =ha[hhahha

04 Yuki: → [atashi ne:, [hon jibun no koko ga fu ↑ toi n ↓ ja nai=
 I IP rea self L this SP wide P TP not
 I think these ((my thighs)) may be big,=

05 Masa: [nn,
 Mm-hm,

06 Yuki: → =ka to omou ne, [↑ ko:re ga itai n da ne kitto,=
 Q QT think P this SP hurt P CP FP probably
 =these hurt (me) I suppose,=

07 TCHR: → [so:nna koto-
 such.a thing
 That's (not)-

08 Yuki: → =o:moi n da ne,
 heavy P CP P
 =(they) are heavy,

09 TCHR: → >iya-< [demo:: [hora hiza no itai hito wa=
 ITJ but see knee L hurt person TP
 No but see, there are many people=

- 10 Yuki: → [gu tto [h h
MIM QT
Pressing down
- 11 TCHR: =ippai [iru kara:, [ano: hoso karoo to[: .hh n-=
many be so well thin or CNJ
=whose knees hurt, uhm whether thin or .hh n-
- 12 Masa: [↑ n ↓ n:, nn [nn nn nn [nn,
- 13 Kazu: [nn [nn,
- 14 TCHR: =doo [daroo to
how AUX CNJ
=whatever

Although the sentence the teacher starts in line 7 does not come to completion, the beginning of her turn, *son'na koto*, “that is,” is unequivocally hearable as the beginning of the sentence *son'na koto nai*, “that’s not true,” a form commonly used to disagree with the preceding utterance. The fact that the teacher produces this disagreement without hesitation as soon as Yuki’s first sentential unit of talk comes to an end, and thus as a preferred response, suggests that she understands Yuki’s utterance as a self-deprecation. The referent of the utterance treated as self-deprecatory in this case is not the speaker herself but her body part—her thighs.

While such attributive adjectives as ‘dumb’ (Excerpt 1) or *migurushii*, “unsightly” (Excerpt 2), are almost unequivocally pejorative, there is nothing inherently undesirable in thighs being *futoi*, “big”—we can easily conceive of a context in which having big thighs is desirable. Yet, Yuki’s comment is treated as self-deprecatory at this particular interactional moment, and the exchange can thus be analyzable as an occasion in which interactants jointly orient to and thereby reproduce the socially shared attitude.

4.3. A Self-Deprecation of One's Possession

One's possession is another common object of self-deprecation. Excerpt 4 is again drawn from the interaction between the tea ceremony teacher and the students. The lesson is held in a tatami room at the teacher's home, a room furnished specifically for the tea ceremony with minimal carefully selected pieces of furniture and items. While observing the teacher make tea from behind, Kazu comments on how nice the six-mat room is (lines 1–2). In response, another student, Yuki, points out that Kazu's apartment also has a six-mat tatami room, implying that Kazu could make her tatami room as nice a room as the teacher's. Kazu admits that she does have a tatami room, and then, in line 9, she says that she cannot believe they both are six-mat tatami room, suggesting that her tatami room is not nearly as nice as the teacher's.

(4) [TC: tatami room]

01 Kazu: hmm ↑ m demo sa rokujoo no tatami no heya ga
ITJ but P 6-mat L *tatami* L room S
Hmm, but a room of 6 mats of tatami can...

02 konnani sutekini naru n da.
such nice become N CP
...be so nice.

03 (.)

04 Yuki: °(anta n) toko ni mo aru kara ne.°=
your place at also be so P
Your place also has one, so=

05 Kazu: =aru mon ne.:=
be P P
=((It) does,=

06 Masa: =n::
ITJ
=Yeah,

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07 (0.2)

08 Masa: hon ↑ to
really
((That's)) true.

09 Kazu: → onaji- .hh rokujoo no- .h heya to omoe nai.
same six-mat L room QT think.can not
((I)) can't believe ((they)) both are six-mat tatami room.

10 (0.2)

11 Kazu: → kon:na=
such
Such=

12 TCHR: → =de mono ga nai to ne, hhe sorry[a:(h) ()
and thing S not then P then
=And if ((it)) doesn't have much ((in it)), then of course(h)

13 Kazu: → [iya: (gete)mono ga
ITJ odd.thing S
No, odd things are...

14 → nakute so- [sono aru beki mono ga ne, yappari hon-
not.and well be should thing S P as.expected
...not ((here)) and well what should be here is, really...

15 TCHR: [,hhh de:: kore ↑ de () okashi o...
and this with sweets O
.hhh and, with this, () sweets...

Kazu's comment about the teacher's tatami room amounts to a compliment, while that about her own room amounts to a self-deprecation. This creates an

environment in which the teacher's next utterance is susceptible to being heard as self-deprecating. The teacher displays her orientation to Kazu's comments as such: she defuses the compliment by saying that her room simply does not have much in it (line 12). This remark by the teacher can then be heard as self-deprecatory, since it suggests that her room simply does not have much in it, and it is otherwise nothing special. As expected, this is followed by Kazu's disagreement, which was designed and produced as a preferred response. She forthrightly rejects the teacher's comment with *iyā*, a negation interjection, and reformulates what the teacher has said in an approbatory way: the teacher's room does not have odd things (which Kazu seems to suggest her room has), and it only has what should be there (lines 13-14). The ways the teacher and Kazu respond to each other's utterances about their respective rooms make it manifest that they understand them as self-deprecatory.

4.4. Self-Deprecation of One's Family Member

Whether a family member can appropriately be the object of self-deprecation may vary across cultures and generations. In some cultures, it may be considered appropriate to stay humble enough to make deprecatory comments about a family member, while in others, such comments may be treated as disrespectful to the family member or upsetting for the interlocutor. However, it is hard to imagine a culture in which it is generally considered socially appropriate to agree with an interlocutor's deprecatory comment about their family member.¹

Suzuki's (2009) study on Japanese conversation attests to the common occurrence of self-deprecations of a family member. The current database also yields some cases of negative comments about the speaker's family member that are treated as self-deprecations. Excerpt 5 is an exchange between an elderly couple, Saki and Ken, and their visitor, Tomo, their old friend. The topic here is Tomo's husband, who is not present but is also close to Saki and Ken. Tomo has been telling Saki and Ken that her husband is good at having conversations with anyone, but he only enjoys having conversations with certain people, one of whom is Ken. In line 1, she goes on to say that when her husband has a conversation with a person whose company he does not completely enjoy, he resorts to topicalizing anything.

(5)

01 Tomo: da ↑ so ga areba ↓ sore-
so that SP be.if that
If ((be)) has that ((company he simply enjoys)),

02 Saki: **.nhh**

03 Tomo: n-ga [ichi]ban ii n da kedo_ [↑ na]kya sa:,
SP most good N CP but not.if P
that would be the best, but if (be) doesn't,=

04 Saki: [nn] [n]

05 Tomo: [.hh] ↓ ↓ nan ↑ ↑ demo ↓ shaberu n yo ano=
anything talk N FP that
=.hb ((be)) talks about anything, that=

06 Saki: [nn,]

07 Tomo: =oshabe[ri (wa).
bigmouth TP
=bigmouth

08 Saki: [uwahha [hehhe .nhh hhe

09 Ken: [hahha <na-

10 ↓ na:n ↑ demo shaberu tte no wa hidoi yo sora.
anything talk QT N TP terrible FP that.TP
That ((be)) talks about anything, that's terrible.

- 11 Tomo: hidoi ↑ ne ↓ ::,=
 terrible P
((It's)) terrible, right?=-
- 12 Ken: =nda: ja-< .hh Tomo chan no ii kata ga=
 no Tomo END L say how SP
=No, .hh the way you say it is=-
- 13 Ken: hido[i,
 terrible
=terrible,
- 14 Tomo: [iya chigau, ↑ hon::toni nandemo shaberu mon.=
 ITJ untrue really anything talk FP
No, ((he)) really talks about anything.
- 15 [.hh mo]:: sa, ie n naka no koto- =
 EMP P house L inside L thing
.hh Really, what happens in our family,...
- 16 Ken: [n n :]

Let us first note that Tomo describes how her husband acts in conversations with some people as complainable. The use of what Pomerantz (1986) called “extreme case formulation” — *nandemo*, “anything” (line 13) in this case — is a practice commonly used to justify a complaint. In addition, the form used for the right-dislocated subject *ano oshaberi*, “big mouth,” is plainly antagonistic.

Presented in a somewhat playful tone, Tomo’s description of her husband is first met with the recipients’ laughter (lines 8, 9). This is followed by Ken’s response in line 10, in which he diverts the criticism away from Tomo’s husband to Tomo herself for being *hidoi*, “terrible.” Now, to reiterate, when an interlocutor makes a complaint about a non-present third party, the normatively preferred response is agreement. In this exchange, however, Ken opts to

disagree with Tomo to defend her husband. His disagreement here is produced without a hearable delay and is formulated as a countercriticism against Tomo.

What is witnessed here is the manifestation of the preference for disagreeing with self-deprecation. Although agreement with a complaint is generally preferred over disagreement, it is Tomo's husband, who belongs to Tomo's territory, who is the target of the complaint. After all, Ken's response in line 10 appears to be nothing but prosocial: by disagreeing with Tomo and playfully blaming her for being terrible, he may be displaying his trust in his relationship and closeness with Tomo while at the same time showing respect to a person with whom Tomo belongs together.

4.5. *Referents Falling under the Speaker's Responsibility*

The self-deprecating utterances examined so far concern the speakers themselves (their competence, performance, taste, personality, etc.) or referents who belong to the speaker in some way (their body parts, their belongings, their family members, etc.).

Another class of referents of self-deprecation is those that may not inherently belong to the speaker but are treatable as falling within the speaker's responsibility. For instance, a negative comment about food a speaker has cooked and served is subject to self-deprecation. Likewise, if a hotel that one has reserved for the trip of a group of friends has turned out to be inferior, the person's negative comment about the hotel may not elicit agreement from the friends. A case I present below revolves around a product that someone has selected and offered to the recipients, which is treated as falling within her responsibility and orients the participants to talk about it as such.

Excerpt 6 is another exchange from the conversation between Saki, Ken, and Tomo. Tomo has brought a bottle of sparkling wine to contribute to the dinner so they can have it together. Tomo and Ken have tasted it while Kazu is still busy in the kitchen. After taking a sip, Tomo says that the gas in the sparkling wine is *kitsui*, making a slight grimace (lines 1–2). The adjective *kitsui* can be roughly translated as “strong,” though with a negative connotation, as in “excessively strong.” Subsequently, Ken minimally disagrees (line 5) while Saki takes her first sip (starting after line 3) of the wine based on which

to respond to Tomo.

(6) [DWT: sparkling wine]

01 Tomo: kore (kake)ta:nsan mitai na no ga ki ↑ tsui wa kono ↓ :
 this gas like CP N SP strong FP this
This, gas is strong, this

02 [supaakuringu.
 sparkling
sparkling wine.

03 Saki: [dore.
 ITJ
Let's see.

04 **(0.2)**

05 Ken: nn.
Yeah.

06 **(1.2)**

07 Tomo: monosugo'u kitsui.
 very strong
Very strong.

08 **(1.5)**

09 Tomo: ne.,
 P
Isn't it,

10 **(0.2)**

11 Saki: so:o ↑ o?,
Is it?

12 Tomo: nn.=
Yeah.

13 Saki: =aa demo;,
ITJ but
=oh bu:t,

14 Tomo: juusu mitai na mon yo. da: war- [a- a- atode=
juice like CP N FP so later
((It's)) like juice (soft drink), so: later=

15 Saki: [hn

16 Tomo: =yopparau [yo.()=
get.drunk FP
=((you/we)) will get drunk.

17 Ken: [wain no biiru da na. korya.
wine L beer CP FP this
**((It's)) wine beer, this
((=it tastes more like beer)).**

18 (0.3)

19 Tomo: **hmmm.**

20 Ken: ne;
Isn't it?

21 Tomo: °un.
°Yeah.

- 22 Saki: a ↓ a[:
ITJ
Oh:
- 23 Ken: [tansan ga ki[ki (sugi)
gas SP work too
Too much gas
- 24 Saki: [wa[tashi wa tansan kitsui no=
I TP gas strong N
I don't mind gas being=
- 25 Tomo: [kooyuu keetoo dame ya mon.
this type unable CP FP
((He) can't take this kind.
- 26 Saki: =kirai janai.
hate not
=strong.
- 27 Tomo: un un,
Yeah yeah,
- 28 Saki: [**hn** ((clearing throat))
- 29 Ken: [watasha kirai da.
I.TP hate CP
I mind.
- 30 Tomo: u:n. dame da to omoo wa.
ITJ unable CP QT think FP
Yea:h. ((I)) think ((he)) can't take ((it)).
- 31 (0.2)

- 32 Tomo: ↑ biiru noma nai yoona hito ya kara.
 beer drink not like person FP so
 Because (he) is a person who wouldn't drink beer.

- 33 Saki: **hn hn**

Ken and Saki, the two hosts of the dinner, orient to Tomo's critical assessment of the sparkling wine quite differently. Whereas Ken immediately agrees with Tomo that the gas of the sparkling wine is strong, Saki, although she implicitly agrees with Tomo that it is strong (lines 24, 26), diverges from Tomo in terms of her attitude toward this quality of the wine: while Tomo has adopted a negative stance toward it for being too sparkling, Saki adopts a positive one, claiming that she does not mind a wine being strongly sparkling (lines 24, 26). The minimization of agreement and maximization of disagreement in Saki's utterances can thus be analyzed as manifestations of her orientation to the preference of disagreement with self-deprecation.

It is worth inspecting in more detail how Saki sidesteps to avoid articulating an agreement. First, she delays her response with a confirmation request (*so:o?*, "Is it?"), thereby projecting a disagreement (line 11) (Pomerantz 1984). She then continues to project a disagreement when she says, *aa demo*, "Oh but" (line 13) before she finally states that she does not mind gas being strong (lines 24, 26). Unlike the cases examined earlier, here, Saki appears to be faced with the difficult job of disagreeing with the guest's comment about the wine she brought when the wine indeed has the quality mentioned (i.e., very sparkling). If the negative comment about a referent consists of a 'subjective' evaluative term (e.g., 'dumb,' 'unsightly,' 'bigmouth'), then the recipient can freely use another, positive evaluative comment to express their evaluative attitudes toward it. In contrast, when the initial comment proffers a term to refer to its 'objective' attribute, such as *kitsui* ("strong"), it may take more elaborate interactional work to reject it or to resist the negative evaluation that is embedded in it. Again, through Saki's carefully constructed response, her orientation to Tomo's negative comment as self-deprecating is displayed.

In a later exchange (shown below as Excerpt 7), Tomo explicitly attends to the wine as falling under her responsibility: she apologizes for having brought

this wine and asks Saki to “bear with” it.

(7) [DWT: sparkling2]

01 Tomo: ↓ kore a:nmari oishiku nakatta ne gomen ne?, (.)
 this much good not.PST P sorry P
***This (the sparkling wine) was not very good ne, ((I’m))
 sorry. (.)***

02 [Saki gamanshite non doite?,
 Saki tolerate drink AUX
Please bear with (it) and drink ((it))?

03 Saki: [↑ Ya ↓ a:
 ITJ
 No

04 (0.2)

05 Saki: #n:#

This exchange reveals Tomo’s and Saki’s orientations to the wine as Tomo’s responsibility, something that can be the object of Tomo’s self-deprecation and of an apology if it does not taste good. In other words, what underlies the formulations of the participants’ utterances is their orientations to their contrastive identities as gift-giver and gift-recipient.

By contrast, Ken simply agrees with Tomo’s negative assessment (Excerpt 6, line 5) and describes it as *wain no biiru*, “wine beer” (Excerpt 6, line 17). He even goes as far as to say that he minds it when wine is strongly sparkling (Excerpt 6, line 29) after Saki says that she does not. These responses by Ken may be seen as his public display of an ungrateful attitude toward Tomo’s wine. Alternatively, however, they can also be seen as a public indication of his obliviousness to the wine’s status as Tomo’s gift. That is, Ken may be assessing the wine not as the host or the receiver of the wine brought by the guest but simply as a participant in the dinner, putting himself in the same position as

Tomo.

This ambiguity—or negotiability—of an object’s status emerges because the referent does not always unequivocally fall under one’s responsibility or territory. The ambiguity may, in turn, be exploited by a participant as an interactional strategy.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

In this paper, I have examined self-deprecation sequences in Japanese interaction and showed that they can be a site for witnessing the participants’ orientations to and negotiation of their relationships to and responsibility for referents. Speakers, by producing a self-deprecation about objects or a person, make social claims about their ownership of, relationship with, or responsibility for them. Thus, self-deprecation sequences can be considered an occasion for observing the interactants’ orientation to what Pomerantz and Mandelbaum (2005) referred to as ‘social knowledge’:

Participants use their knowledge of the activities, motives, competencies, rights and responsibilities that are appropriate for incumbents of particular relationship categories both when they explicitly reference a relationship category and when they engage in certain conversational actions. (Pomerantz and Mandelbaum 2005,152)

I hope to have shown that a conversation analytic examination of self-deprecations and responses to them yields useful insight into how relationship categories and the ownership or responsibility that come with them are constructed and reconstructed in everyday interactions.

Notes

1 When a negative comment about a family member is produced as a serious complaint, then that yields an utterly different interactional environment from the one yielded by a casual negative remark about one. In the former case, the preferred response would be a sympathetic agreement.

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Appendix A: Transcription conventions (after Jefferson 2004)

- . a falling or final intonation contour
- ? a rising intonation contour
- , a slight rise-fall intonation contour
- ?, a slight rise intonation contour

↑ / ↓	marked pitch rise or fall
[]	overlap
=	a single, continuous utterance by the same speaker with no break or pause/ the production of the subsequent talk “latched” to the preceding
(0.5)	pause (length in tenths of a second)
(.)	micropause
wo::rd	the prolongation or stretching of the preceding sound
hh	audible out-breath
.hh	audible in-breath
(h)	within-speech aspiration
#	creaky voice quality
°word°	markedly quiet/soft voice
>word<	fast speech rate

Appendix B: Abbreviations used in the interlinear glosses in transcripts

AUX	auxiliary verb	N	nominalizer particle
END	endearment suffix	O	object particle
CNJ	conjunctive particle	P	particle
CP	copula ('be')	PST	past tense marker
EMP	emphasis marker	Q	question particle
FP	final particle	QT	quotative particle
ITJ	interjection	SP	subject particle
L	nominal linking particle	TP	topic particle
MIM	mimetics		

