GENRE CONVENTIONS, SPEAKER IDENTITIES, AND CREATIVITY: AN ANALYSIS OF JAPANESE WEDDING SPEECHES

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Abstract

Recent approaches to genre as discourse practice have examined how genres as “orienting frameworks” allow speakers to creatively adapt conventional forms to specific situational contexts. This article analyzes congratulatory speeches at Japanese wedding receptions to show how the interaction of conventionalization and creative contextualization varies across both different parts of the wedding speech and different categories of wedding speakers. The analysis demonstrates how the wedding speech genre provides speakers with a spectrum of performance possibilities which are systematically linked to different speaking roles and social identities.

Keywords: Genre, Conventionalization, Social roles, Genre colonization, Japanese discourse.

1. Introduction

At an international conference on intercultural communication, a professor began his paper by explaining that Americans often begin a public talk or lecture with a joke to break the ice, whereas Japanese are more likely to begin by apologizing for their inadequacies as a speaker. “Since my audience includes people from both countries,” he said, “I should perhaps begin by apologizing for not telling a joke.”

This hybrid joke-apology neatly exemplifies some of the main themes of recent work on genre, namely the function of conventionalization as a resource for creating socially appropriate speech and the ability of speakers to utilize these conventions while also varying and adapting them in ways that are appropriate for specific discourse situations. In the case of this particular example, the speaker drew on two distinct sets of discourse conventions to create a new form in response to a relatively unusual situation. But the same interaction among discourse conventions, contextual specificity, and

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2 One possible written source for this opening is Condon 1974, but I have also heard it used by other speakers at other international conferences and have, on occasion, used it myself.
speaker creativity is apparent even in situations where speakers perform conventionalized genres in conventionalized ways. This paper explores several types of interaction between conventionalization and creativity through an analysis of one particular speech genre, namely the congratulatory speeches given at Japanese wedding receptions.

Contemporary Japanese wedding receptions include a series of a half dozen or more speeches by various guests ranging from workplace superiors and former teachers to same-age friends of the groom and bride. These speeches are a culturally recognized genre often referred to as *aisatsu* ‘greetings’ or *spiichi* ‘speeches,’ and are highly conventionalized in both form and content. Commercial etiquette manuals with titles like *One hundred easy wedding speeches* (Teeburu Spiichi Jissen Kenkyuuukai n.d.) or *Collected example speeches and addresses* (Fujino 1977) provide consumers with advice on giving speeches as well as sample speeches for different types of weddings and categories of wedding guests. The speeches are conventionalized to the extent that one of my consultants wondered why I was interested in researching them. “They’re boring,” she said. “Everyone says the same thing.”

Yet although wedding speeches are conventionalized in both form and content, they are not identical. Every couple is different, and there is variation across both individual speakers and the different categories of wedding guests. Thus, the conventionalized pattern of the speeches must itself allow for variations based on the circumstances of individual weddings, the characteristics of individual grooms and brides, and the speaker’s socially defined relationship with the couple. Not only are wedding speeches simultaneously both conventional and creative, but the degree and type of conventionality vary across both different parts of the wedding speech and different categories of speakers. The analysis of this particular genre thus allows me to delineate several different types of interactions that can occur between genre conventions, social identities, and speaker creativity.

2. Theories of genre as discourse practice

In traditional literary studies, genre was a concept used to classify or categorize texts according to their content and formal properties. More recently, however, researchers in rhetoric and linguistic anthropology have shifted attention to the discourse practices through which people produce and understand texts. In this view, the formal conventions of genre are less an inherent property of texts than something that arise in and through discourse practice. Building on the work of Bahktin (1986), researchers in folklore and linguistic anthropology have reconceptualized genres as conventionalized frameworks to which people orient in producing and interpreting discourse (Bauman 1999; Briggs and Bauman 1992; Hanks 1987). Scholars in the field of rhetoric have articulated a view of genres as conventionalized discourse practices which arise in response to the exigencies of recurrent social situations (Berkenkotter and Huckin 1995; Kamberelis 1995; Miller 1984; Yates and Orlikowski 1992). While theories of genre as discourse practice still pay attention to the formal features of discourse, they situate those features in relationship to the functional purposes of the discourse, the situational context in which it is produced, and the wider socio-cultural milieu (Günthner and Knoblauch 1995).
Whereas traditional approaches treated genres as classifying devices for the analyst, theories of genre as discourse practice shift the viewpoint to that of the social actors who produce and interpret discourse within communities of practice. In an interesting twist on the traditional concept of genre as a classifying device, Kamberelis (1995) suggests that genre involves the act of defining a text. Generic conventions thus become a starting point for the speaker/writer seeking to produce a text or the reader/hearer seeking to understand one. Similarly, Briggs and Bauman build on the work of Hanks (1987) to define genre as “an orienting framework for the production and reception of discourse” (Briggs and Bauman 1992: 142-3). Rather than determining textual form, genre conventions are seen as resources that speakers/writers use to accomplish social and rhetorical purposes within particular situational contexts (Kamberelis 1995; Miller 1984). This approach to genre has permitted new insights into how generic structures emerge and change in response to situational exigencies (Berkenkotter and Huckin 1995; Dunmire 2000; Yates and Orlikowski 1992). It also allows us to explore how writers appropriate generic conventions to create emergent genres in situations of cultural contact and change (Blommaert 2004; Hanks 1987) and how social actors may “bend” socially recognized genres to accomplish “private intentions” (Bhatia 2004).

Most centrally to my purposes here, approaching genres as orienting frameworks for discourse practice draws our attention to how convention intersects with contextualization and creativity in any given genre performance. Even highly traditional genres are contextually varied in their performance, and such variation may even be required for a successful performance (e.g., Bauman 1996; Hanks 1984). Drawing on Rosmarin 1985, Kamberelis (1995) argues that genres are “metaphorical” in the sense that they focus our attention on similarity in the midst of difference. Genre conventions do not completely specify all aspects of text or performance, and no text is ever the perfect exemplar of the genre. Similarly, Briggs and Bauman (1992) point to an “intertextual gap” that always exists between the idealized generic form and any actual text or performance. They further note that genres and speech communities may vary in the extent to which they minimize such gaps (e.g., through fixed wording and strict canons for performance) or maximize them by allowing or valuing variation. Although genres give speakers tools for creating texts, they never totally specify them, such that textual production is always to some degree creative.

While previous studies of genre have recognized the possibility of speaker creativity in using genre conventions, less attention has been paid to how the interaction between convention and creativity may systematically vary across different categories of speakers. Certainly it has been recognized that the performance of certain genres is often restricted to certain categories of social actors, and some attention has been paid to how socialization into new genres may involve a restructuring of self and identity (e.g., Minnis 1994). In the case of Japanese wedding speeches, however, the interactions between conventionalization and creative contextualization vary, not only across different parts of the wedding speech, but also across different categories of wedding guests. Speeches of the higher status and more experienced wedding speakers are expected to be more conventionalized in both form and content, while those of younger friends of the couple are expected to be more informal, personalized, and entertaining. Thus, the genre conventions of Japanese wedding speeches offer speakers a spectrum of performance possibilities that are systematically linked to their situationally-defined speaking roles which are, in turn, linked to wider social identities.
3. Ethnographic context and data: Japanese wedding receptions and categories of speakers

Since the middle of the twentieth century, Japanese wedding receptions have generally taken place in commercial wedding halls and have come to follow a standardized format (Edwards 1989; Goldstein-Gidoni 1997; Shida 1991, 1999). The wedding itself is generally private and attended only by family members with the reception serving as the public announcement and celebration of the marriage. The following description is based on discussions with consultants and video tapes of middle class weddings in the Tokyo area as well as the published sources cited above.

The standard Japanese wedding reception takes the form of a banquet with assigned seating, multiple speeches, and a Master of Ceremonies (usually a friend of the groom) who directs the events and introduces the speakers. The reception begins with several speeches followed by a toast which also signals the beginning of the meal. The eating and drinking are punctuated by additional speeches as well as breaks for the groom and bride to change into different costumes (the bride in particular usually appears in several different outfits) and for photo opportunities such as cutting a (plastic) cake and lighting a unity candle. After workplace superiors and former teachers or professors have spoken, there are speeches by high school and college friends of the couple. The reception closes with speeches by the groom’s father and the groom thanking the assembled guests and asking for their further support for the couple.

Commercial wedding manuals typically provide sample speeches divided into different categories of speakers such as baishakunin ‘go-betweens,’ shuhin ‘honored guests,’ ippan raihin ‘ordinary guests’ and yuujin ‘friends’ (Fujino 1977; Teeburu Spiichi Jissen Kenkyuukai n.d.). Each of the speakers is asked in advance to give a speech, and the order alternates between speakers for the groom’s side and speakers for the bride’s side. In general, speakers are selected, not only because of their personal connection to the groom or bride, but also because of their social position. With the exception of the friends, the speakers are usually high status people in positions of authority to whom the couple (or their parents) are obliged for past or future benevolence. Thus, the most common speakers are current or former professors and workplace superiors. Inviting such people to speak is a way of acknowledging the relationship and obligation, and it also raises the status of the family to have high status people speak at their wedding. Thus, people are asked to speak not only as individuals, but as representatives of certain social categories. Even the speakers in the ‘friends’ category, although chosen based on more personal relationships, are sometimes introduced as yuujin daihyoo ‘a representative of the friends’ and speak less as an individual than as a representative of that category.

The first person who speaks at the reception is the baishakunin or ‘go-between.’ In contrast to the other speakers, the go-between is not a guest, but someone who speaks as a representative of the couple and their families. Traditionally this would have been the person who introduced the couple and arranged the marriage. He would thus have been familiar with both members of the couple and their families. Currently only about

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3 Some people may also ask former high school teachers to speak, and this may well be something that varies with social class. In the weddings examined here, all of the grooms and brides were college educated, and the only teachers who spoke were university professors.
10% of marriages are arranged in this manner (Murray and Kimura 2003), and the majority of married couples meet independently through school, workplace, or social activities. In such cases, the bridal couple often asks a workplace superior of the groom, or sometimes a former teacher or older male relative of the groom to take the role of go-between for the wedding ceremony and reception. Consultants told me that the go-between should be part of a married couple of an older generation who can serve as a role model for the younger couple. Both the husband and wife of the go-between couple enter the room together with the groom and bride and sit with them at a head table facing the assembled guests. However, only the husband of the couple gives a speech, and I will hereafter use the term go-between to refer only to the husband of the couple.

The speech by the go-between is followed by speeches by the honored guests, ordinary guests, and friends of the couple. The two shuhin or ‘honored guests’ speak before the toast which signals the beginning of the meal and there is one for the groom and one for the bride. The honored guests are usually workplace superiors or current or former professors; in some cases they may also be colleagues or other connections of the couple’s parents. They tend to be a generation or so older than the couple and are usually people in positions of authority who are likely to have considerable experience with this type of public speaking. Speaking in the position of honored guest is an indication of high status, and the speakers often ritually apologize for claiming this position and speaking ahead of other people even though they have been asked to do so by the groom and bride.

Following the toast and during the banquet itself there continue to be speeches which alternate between the groom’s side and the bride’s side. The order of speeches moves from more senior and socially prestigious guests to lesser ones, so that the earlier speakers are professors and workplace supervisors who rank just below the honored guests, while later speeches are given by colleagues lower down in the workplace hierarchy. Because Japanese men still tend to predominate in managerial roles in the workplace, most wedding speakers are men, but my data also contain several speeches by female professors of the bride. The final guests to speak are the friends of the groom or bride from high school or college, usually of the same gender.

The data to be analyzed in the following sections come from video tapes of five wedding receptions held in the Tokyo area between 1990 and 1994. The video tapes were collected from recently married friends and acquaintances as a part of a larger project on Japanese speech styles and honorific use. Thus, my initial interest in the speeches was primarily as an example of a formal speech genre of Japanese. Video taping has become a standard part of most Japanese wedding receptions, and many wedding halls include a professional video tape as part of the wedding package. In other cases, the couple asks a friend or relative to tape the reception for them. My data include examples of both types. Although I did not personally attend any of the wedding receptions, I talked with recently married couples and some of the wedding speakers about the video tapes and the social norms and expectations for wedding receptions and speeches.

Of the five weddings examined here, one wedding was a Christian wedding, one secular, and three Shinto. Two of the marriages were miai marriages, meaning that the

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4 The Japanese language does not distinguish singular and plural. Consultants sometimes used the term baishakunin to refer to the couple and sometimes to refer to just the husband.
couple were initially introduced to each other as prospective marriage partners through a third party. In the other three cases, the couple met independently through school or workplace activities. The grooms and brides were all college educated and the speakers generally held white-collar occupations. These weddings are typical of middle to upper middle class weddings in the Tokyo area, but the patterns described here may not be generalizable to other demographic segments within Japan.

The video tapes were transcribed and translated with the help of two native speaker Japanese research assistants. After omitting a few speeches that contained large inaudible sections, there were a total of twenty-five speeches including speeches by four go-betweens (two college professors and two workplace superiors of the groom), eleven workplace superiors or colleagues (employers included a bank, insurance company, private high school, electronics company and the Ministry of International Trade and Industry), four professors, one colleague of the bride’s father, and five high school or college friends of the groom and bride. Exact ages were not always available, but friends of the couple were generally in their early twenties to early thirties, while workplace colleagues and superiors ranged from late-twenties to sixties. Six of the speakers were female (three professors of the bride and three friends of the bride), and the rest were male. This corpus of twenty-five speeches together with discussions with my consultants are the main sources of data for the analysis and generalizations in the remainder of the article.

4. The enactment of situational roles through spatio-temporal organization and shifts in key

Günthner and Knoblauch (1995) have argued that genres are constituted through the interaction of communicative patterns at three different analytical levels: The internal structure (formal organization of the spoken or written text), situative structure (temporal, spatio-social, and interactional organization of the speech event), and external structure (cultural milieu in which the speech event takes place). The previous section described how the external structure of Japanese society is linked to the situative level in terms of how people with certain types of social identity are recruited by the couple to serve situationally specific speaking roles as go-between, honored guest, and so forth. In this section of the article, I will describe how these speaking roles are instantiated both through the spatio-temporal organization of the reception (the situative level) and through variation in the linguistic and paralinguistic features of the speeches (the internal level).

Wedding receptions are a formal speech event characterized by a central focus of attention, predetermined speaking order with strict constraints on turn-taking, and an emphasis on public, positional social identities (Atkinson 1982; Irvine 1979). The spatial layout of the room and the positions from which people speak signal the social status and relationships of the participants. The room is arranged with a head table where the newlyweds and go-between couple are seated facing the rest of the room. The guests have assigned seating, with the most high ranking guests seated at tables closest to the head table. On either side of the head table there are fixed microphones for the

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5 Although there were five total weddings, one of the go-between’s speeches had too many inaudible sections to be included in the analysis.
speakers. Speakers alternate between guests of the groom and guests of the bride, with
guests of the groom speaking from the microphone closest to the groom, and the same
for the bride. The go-between, who acts as the connection between the two families,
speaks from the head table where he is seated next to the groom. The go-between’s wife
is seated at the other end of the table, next to the bride. The parents of the couple, as
hosts of the occasion, sit at the lowest ranking seats at the opposite end of the room
from the head table. At the end of the reception, there are thank you speeches by the
groom’s father and the groom. Those speeches are spoken from a microphone at the
back of the room, opposite the head table, and the bride and groom join their parents in
standing against the back wall. The seating arrangement of the room as a physical
manifestation of social hierarchies is found in many social occasions in Japan (see

Both the reception and the individual speeches have a parallel temporal structure
which moves from a highly formalized and conventional opening, through a less tightly
structured middle, to a more formal closing. After the guests are seated, the reception
begins with the entry of the bridal couple accompanied by the go-between couple.
During the initial speeches by the go-between and two honored guests, the audience sits
quietly, looking ahead or downward with little change of expression. People who are
seated with their back to the speaker generally do not turn their chairs or bodies in order
to see them. These initial speeches, especially that of the go-between, are the most
tightly structured and conventionalized in both form and content. The speeches by the
go-between and honored guests are followed by a toast. After the toast, people begin
eating and drinking, and the speeches alternate with conversation, costume changes by
the couple, and sometimes entertainment by guests who chose to sing a song or
otherwise perform in lieu of giving a speech. As the reception moves through speeches
from the honored guests to the ordinary guests to the friends, the speeches become
increasingly more personalized and humorous. Finally, the closing speeches by the
groom’s father and the groom are again extremely conventionalized in both form and
content and the attention of the guests is once again centered exclusively on the
speakers.

Particularly during the speeches by the go-between and two honored guests, the
first part of the reception is characterized by a serious, formal tone and a restraint of
emotional expression. Speakers bow at the beginning of the speech while congratulating
the couple and again at the end of their speech. Throughout the rest of the speech, they
stand with their hands at their side or clasped in front of them and there is little use of
gesture. In contrast to more interactive public speaking genres such as Georgian toasts
(Kotthoff 1995) or African-American performed sermons (Davis 1985), Japanese
wedding speeches are a relatively monologic genre and there are no interjections or
verbal responses from the audience. The guests applaud after each speech, and later in
the reception the audience also responds with laughter to humorous remarks by the
lower ranking speakers.

The atmosphere or key gradually shifts across the course of the reception from
an opening that is very formal and serious to a relatively more relaxed and lighthearted
key in the later parts of the reception. This shift is accomplished in part through subtle

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6 The one exception to this is the toast that signals the start of the meal. At the start of the toast,
all of the guests rise, holding their glasses. The person giving the toast says a few words of
congratulations, ending with “Kanpai” (literally, ‘dry cup’). The guests all echo, “Kanpai,” and raise
their glasses to drink. They then set down the glasses and applaud before sitting down again.
shifts in the linguistic style of the speeches from the speech of the go-between through the honored guests, other guests, and finally close friends of the couple. The stylistic variation in the speeches involves a variety of linguistic and paralinguistic features:

(a) **Pacing and pausing:** The go-between and honored guests speak in a slow, measured tone with pauses after most grammatical constituents. Later speakers speak more quickly, with fewer and shorter pauses.

(b) **Syntactic structure:** Speeches by the go-betweens and honored guests have a relatively high frequency of clauses which end in a sentence-final verb form and a falling intonation. By contrast, speeches by later guests are characterized by multiple clauses strung together with conjunctions. In some cases as many as seven to nine clauses may be loosely connected with conjunctions like *ga* ‘and,but’ or *keredomo* ‘but’.

(c) **Humor and laughter:** Earlier speeches contain few humorous remarks, and even when the speaker does say something that could be construed as humorous, it is often said with a serious face and tone of voice and does not receive laughter from the audience. By contrast, younger guests are expected to gently poke fun at the couple as well as praising them, and there is frequent laughter during the later speeches. Speakers during this part of the reception sometimes “invite laughter” from the audience by laughing themselves during or after the utterance (Jefferson 1979).

(d) **Honorific use:** Wedding speeches are characterized by a ceremonial speech style involving frequent use of honorific verb forms which index deference to the addressee or referent of an utterance. This includes the use of addressee honorifics which communicate social distance and a public presentation of self, the use of subject honorifics to show deference to the couple, the use of humble forms to describe the speaker’s own actions, and very formal forms of the copula (Dunn in press). While most of the go-betweens and honored guests maintained a fairly high frequency of honorific use throughout their speeches, some of the younger friends of the couple used subject honorifics and humble forms primarily in the opening and closing formulae, and shifted to a somewhat less formal style during the main body of their speeches.

(e) **Hesitation and fillers:** Younger speakers are particularly likely to begin clauses with hesitation markers such as *ee, de,* or *ano.* They are also more likely to use clause-internal fillers such as *ano* ‘um’ or *desu ne* ‘you know’, although these are also found in the speeches of some of the senior guests. Taken together, the variation in these features gives the earlier speeches a feeling of seriousness and gravitas that is not as evident in the speeches by the later and lower ranking guests.

This brief analysis has demonstrated how wedding speeches link together the three analytical levels identified by Günthner and Knoblauch (1995). People with certain types of identities in the wider society are asked by the bride and groom to play situationally specific roles as various categories of wedding guest speaker (go-between, honored guest, other guests, friends of the couple). Those situational speaking roles are in turn enacted at the situational level through the spatio-temporal organization of the event and at the discourse level through systematic variations in linguistic and paralinguistic features. As will be seen in the following sections, the different categories of speeches are also marked by differences in the elaboration of the opening and closing segments as well as in variation in the content of the main body of the speech.
5. Organizational structure of the speeches

The structure of each individual speech follows a pattern iconic to that of the reception, with a relatively less structured body bracketed by a formulaic opening and closing. Speakers open their speeches with a series of formulaic phrases in which they congratulate the couple, introduce themselves or their relationship to the couple, and announce or ask permission to say a few words. In the main body of the speech, the speakers talk about their relationship with the groom or bride and describe the person’s character and personality. Some of the older speakers may also share their reflections and advice about marriage. Finally, the speeches close with wishes or requests for the couple’s future and end with a statement of either thanks or congratulations. The overall structure of the speeches is outlined in Figure 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opening Formulae</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Description of the groom or bride’s personality and activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflections and advice on marriage (optional)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Closing Formulae</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Figure 1: Generic Structure of Japanese Wedding Speeches

It can be seen even from this brief description that the degree of conventionalization varies both across different parts of the wedding speech and across different categories of speakers. The different parts of the wedding speech are not only conventionalized to differing degrees, but they are also conventionalized in different ways, exhibiting several different types of relationships among convention, contextual specificity, and speaker creativity. In what follows, I will first begin with the most formulaic parts of the speeches, namely the openings and closings, and then explore the different types of relationship between conventionalization and creativity that can occur in the body of the speeches.

5.1. Openings

Japanese wedding speeches begin with a series of formulaic phrases in which speakers congratulate the couple, introduce themselves and their relationship to the couple, and announce what they plan to talk about or request permission to say a few words. Although no single element is obligatory in the sense of being found in every single speech, the opening segments consist of selections among a relatively small number of elements which can be combined in various orders and permutations. Figure 2 provides a list of the different elements that were found in the openings and closings of the twenty-five speeches together with their frequency of occurrence.
Self-introduction (12 speeches)
Congratulations to the couple and their families with bows (21 speeches)
Apology for speaking ahead of other guests (9 speeches)
Expression of gratitude or happiness for being invited (4 speeches)
Explanation of relationship to the couple (16 speeches)
Metalinguistic announcement of what the speaker will talk about (15 speeches)
Thanking/welcoming guests (2 go-between speeches)
Announcement of wedding (4 go-between speeches)

Figure 2: Formulaic Structure of the Opening Sections of Japanese Wedding Speeches  (The total number of speeches analyzed was twenty-five.)

All but one of the speeches began with at least two of these elements, and some speeches included as many as six. The length and elaboration of the openings vary according to the different categories of speakers, generally diminishing as one moves from more senior to more junior guests. Although the friends of the couple drew on the same repertoire of formulaic elements as the more senior guests, they used fewer of them. All four go-betweens and all but one of the honored guests used a minimum of four elements in their openings. By contrast, three of the five friends had openings that consisted solely of congratulations followed by one additional element (either a metalinguistic announcement or the speaker’s relationship to the couple), and one friend started his speech by explaining his relationship to the groom with no congratulations or other introduction. The following is an example of a fairly typical opening by a male guest who spoke about halfway through the reception. The speech acts are identified on the right in curly brackets.

(1) Opening of a speech by the groom’s workplace superior
((stands at microphone with hands clasped in front of him, looking towards seated guests))

1 M ginkoo no K de gozai-masu./
    m bank NOM K COP HPOLITE-DIST

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7 Glossing: ADJ adjective marker; COP copula; DIST distal form (addressee honorific); DO direct object; GEN genitive; H- humble form; H+ subject honorific; HP honorific prefix; HPOLITE hyperpolite; IP interactional particle; NOM nominalizer; PASS passive; PAST past; PL plural; QM question marker; QT quotative; SU subject marker; TI title; TOP topic marker. Initials are used in place of proper names. Transcription conventions: Following Maynard 1989, / marks a pause-bound phrasal unit. Punctuation is used to show intonation. : indicates lengthening. Unclear segments are enclosed in single parentheses while double parentheses are for non-verbal behavior. [ indicates simultaneous speech or action. Items understood from context are included in square brackets in the translation. Because the structure of Japanese and English are so different, it is impossible to place pauses and other non-verbal signals accurately in the translation. In order to give a feel for the pacing, I have inserted an equivalent number of pauses and hesitation markers after equivalent grammatical constituents in the English translation.
Genre conventions, speaker identities, and creativity

‘I am K of M bank./’ {Self-introduction}

2  Honjitsu wa, ee [Y-kun M-san,] taihen [omedetoo gozai-mashi-ta./
today TOP Y TI M TI very congratulations HPOLITE-DIST-PAST

[(looks towards couple)]  [((slight bow of head))
‘Today,/ congratulations,/ to Y and M.’ {Congratulates couple}

((looks back towards other guests))

3  Mata, aa go-kazoku, go-shinzoku no kata,/ also HP-family HP-relatives GEN people(H+)
makoto ni, [omedetoo gozai-masu./ sincerly as congratulations HPOLITE-DIST

[(slight bow of head)]  {Congratulates families}
‘Also,/ uh my sincere,/ congratulations,/ to the families and relatives./’

4  Ee senetsu nagara,
 presumptuous while
‘Ah although it feels presumptuous./’ {Apology}

5  hito koto go-aisatsu sase-te itadaki-masu./
one word HP-greetings permit-and receive(H-)-DIST

‘permit me to say a few words./’ {Metalinguistic announcement}

Not only are there a limited number of elements that are used to begin and end the speeches, but many of these elements themselves consist of formulaic phrases. For example, all but one of the self-introductions followed the following format:8

((Tadaima goshookai {o itadakimashita}) (Institution no) Name degozaimasu.
{ni azukarimashita}

((Just-now) introduction received)  (Institution of) Name copula

‘(As (just) introduced) I am Name (of Institution).’

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8 Parentheses indicate optional elements. Curley brackets indicate elements that are interchangeable with each other. Underlining indicates places where the relevant information would be inserted.
Similarly, out of a total of fifty instances of congratulations found in these speeches, forty-three fit the following basic pattern:

\{
\text{Groom's name, bride's name}\} \{honjitsu wa\} \{makoto ni\} omedetoo gozaimasu. \\
\{Goshinzoku no minasama\} \{kyoo wa\} \{hontoo ni\} \\
\{Goryooshin\} \{doomo\} \\
\{Gokazoku no minasama\} \{taihen\}

(People being congratulated) (today) (intensifier) congratulations

‘(Today) I (\{sincerely\}) congratulate \{groom's name, bride's name\}.

\{truly\} \{the members of both families\}

\{very\} \{both parents\}

As shown with the slash marks in example 1, the grammatical constituents of the phrase are generally separated by pauses. After congratulating the couple or their families, the speaker bows towards the people being congratulated. In example 1, this was abbreviated to a nod of the head; speakers earlier in the reception often bow more deeply.

There was only one element of the openings which was not characterized by formulaic phrases, namely the speaker’s characterization of his or her relationship with the groom or bride. Here speakers often gave considerable, specific detail about exactly where and how long they had known the groom or bride. Although most of the speakers’ relationships with the couple could be characterized within a limited set of role relationships (e.g., workplace superior, professor, friend), in practice each relationship was described in idiosyncratic language. There were also a few cases where speakers shifted away from formulaic language in response to the circumstances of particular weddings. For example, one go-between said that he especially thanked everyone for attending since it was a national holiday (Constitution Day) and commented that all of Japan was celebrating the couple’s happiness. In another case, a professor of the bride apologized for speaking instead of the professor who had actually supervised the bride’s senior thesis but who was too ill to attend the wedding. In general, however, the speakers relied on the standard elements outlined in Figure 2 and expressed them using very formulaic language.

5.2. Closings

In terms of their basic elements, the closing sections of the speeches were even more tightly structured and less variable than the openings. The standard format was a statement of wishes or requests for the couple’s future, followed by an optional announcement of the ending of the speech, followed by either thanks or congratulations, and ending with a bow (Figure 3).
Wishes/requests for the couple’s future (21 speeches)
Asks guests for continued support and guidance for couple (4 go-between speeches)
Expression of happiness on this occasion (4 speeches)
Announcement of ending of speech (10 speeches)
Congratulations or thanks with bow (20 speeches)

Figure 3:  Formulaic Structure of the Closing Sections of Japanese Wedding Speeches  (The total number of speeches analyzed was twenty-five.)

As in the opening sections, the speakers used a relatively limited number of formulaic phrases to accomplish these speech acts. For example, of the twenty-one closing requests found in these speeches, nineteen fit one of the following three basic structures:

... **Verb-te itadaki-tai to omoimasu/zonjimasu/omo-tte orimasu.**
Verb-and receive-want QT think/ think(H-)/ think-and be(H-)

'I think I would like [the couple] to…'

... **Verb koto o oinori itashimasu/mooshiagemasu.**
Verb NOM DO pray do(H-)/ say(H-)

'I pray that [they] will…'

... **Verb-te kudasai.**
Verb-and please(H+).

'Please…'

There were also certain commonalities in terms of the content of the wishes and requests. Speakers tended to emphasize certain themes such as cooperation and harmony and also utilized conventional metaphors for describing married life, including marriage as building a new home together, marriage as an object jointly created by the couple, marriage as a journey, and marriage as a union (Dunn 2004).

Despite the conventionality of these metaphors, however, many of the speakers also drew on personal details about the couple to individualize traditional metaphors or create new ones. For example, in a case where the couple had met playing tennis, one speaker asked them to make use of their tennis partnership to build a new home:

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9 Slashes indicate elements that can be substituted for each other.
(2) Speech by the bride’s workplace superior

Maa soo iu koto de,/ tenisu no paatonaashippu o ikashi-te./

well that say thing by tennis GEN partnership DO make-good-use-and

rippa na katei o,/ o kizushi-te i-tte—, kizui-te itadaki-tai to./ ee omoi-masu./

fine ADJ home DO build-and be-and build-and receive(H-)-want QT think-DIST

‘Well in this way./ I uh hope that,/ using their experience as tennis partners,/ they will be—

will build,/ a wonderful home together./’

Another speaker noted that the groom and bride come from different parts of the country, each with its own regional cooking style, and asked them to blend the two styles to create their own style of home cooking. In another case, the bride had recently bought a piano. Her friend used this information to add an individualizing detail to the conventional metaphor of building a home:

(3) Speech by the bride’s high school and college friend

kore kara,/ T san to futari de,/ haamonii yutaka na,/ this from T TI with two-people as harmony rich ADJ

atatakai go-katei o,/ kizui-te ika-reru koto to omoi-masu./

warm HP-home DO build-and go-(H+) NOM QT think-DIST

‘I think that from now on,/ together with T,/ she will build,/ a warm home,/ filled with rich harmonies./’

In one case, even the bride’s name was used as the basis for a novel metaphor. The bride’s name included a character meaning ‘cocoon,’ and her former professor said that the name always made her think of a silkworm cocoon and that she imagined the bride spinning out beautiful silk that could be woven into a wonderful cloth for the couple to wrap up their love. She finished by combining this image with the more traditional metaphor of building a home together:

(4) Speech by bride’s former professor

subarashii iroiro na iro o kome-ta,/ nuno ga,/ o-reru yoo na/, splendid various ADJ color DO include-PAST cloth SU weave-can type ADJ

soo iu katei o,/ tsuku-tte itadaki-tai to omoi-masu./

that say home DO make-and receive(H-)-want QT think-DIST

‘I hope that they will make,/ a home in which,/ they can weave,/ a splendid cloth,/ of many colors./’

Thus, many of the speakers at these weddings combined formulaic phrases such as ‘building a new home together’ with personal details that contextualized the metaphor as appropriate to the specific couple, sometimes even creating novel metaphors of marriage as a style of cooking, musical harmony, or woven cloth. Even
though the surface form of these metaphors was novel, they are still based on the same underlying master metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson 1980) of marriage as something jointly created by the spouses. Thus, speakers at these weddings creatively adapted conventional phrases and metaphors in ways that made them appropriate to the context of specific weddings and specific couples. Although the closing wishes clearly fit a formulaic pattern, this pattern allows a creative space for speakers to adapt traditional metaphors and make them personally meaningful.

The formulaic qualities of the opening and closing sections of the wedding speeches serve a number of important functions. In a review of research on formulaic utterances, Wray (2002) demonstrates that formulaic sequences are ubiquitous in everyday speech and serve a number of different functions including reducing cognitive processing to increase fluency and comprehension, social interactional functions such as persuasion and the presentation of speaker identity, and marking discourse genre and structure. Wray notes that by using formulaic phrases, speakers frame their speech acts in ways that are likely to be both recognizable to and socially appropriate for their hearers, thus making them more likely to be successful. By selecting from a limited number of formulaic elements to open and close their speeches, speakers at Japanese weddings frame their discourse as an instantiation of the wedding speech genre. Using these formulaic elements to open and close their speeches allows wedding speakers to be sure of “saying the right thing” in terms of both form and content.

At the same time, however, the formulaic structure of the openings and closings creates spaces for speakers to insert contextual details that make their speech appropriate to the specific context of each individual wedding. Speakers often gave detailed accounts of their specific relationship with the groom or bride rather than classifying themselves in terms of generic role relationships. Similarly, the closing “wishes and requests” were very formulaic yet also allowed speakers to create novel metaphors or to rework conventional metaphors such as ‘building a new home together’ in ways that made them uniquely appropriate to that specific couple. Formulaic structures do not preclude individual creativity or the ability to insert context-specific details.

6. The body of the speeches: Individual biographies and cultural conventions

In the main body of the speeches, speakers describe their relationship with the groom or bride and his or her character and personality. In contrast to the formulaic openings and closings, the main body of the speech is considerably less structured in both form and content. In this part of the speeches, the discourse is contextualized in the sense of being appropriate not just to a wedding ceremony, but to this particular wedding ceremony, with biographical information that is referentially tied to specific individuals. In contrast to the formulaic openings and closings, this section of the speech varies considerably across different weddings and speakers because each couple is different and each speaker draws on a different history of personal contact with the couple. At the same time, however, this personalized description is clearly shaped by cultural

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10 Some of the older speakers may also offer their advice and reflections on marriage in this section. Wedding manuals provide numerous examples of such “reflections on marriage” which can be used in a wide variety of weddings, and speakers often quoted famous sayings or proverbs relating to marriage. Due to space limitations, this aspect of the speeches will not be further discussed here.
understandings of marriage, gender and personhood. The content of the speeches also varies systematically across the different categories of wedding guests.

The speech of the go-between is the most tightly structured because part of his function is to introduce each principal to the guests from the other side. In contrast to the speeches by the other categories of guests, the four go-betweens’ speeches exhibited a clear semantic structure for presenting information about the couple. The go-betweens first presented the biography of the groom, and then that of the bride. For each individual, the go-betweens provided the person’s name, names of parents, date and place of birth as well as birth order (first son, second son etc.), their educational and workplace history, hobbies, and sometimes further information about parents and siblings. This section of the go-betweens’ speeches did not include the type of formulaic phrases found in the opening and closing, but did exhibit a clear semantic structure in terms of predictable information content. The speeches were generally limited to what might be considered as the couple’s public biography including information available in official records. Only occasionally did the go-betweens know the couple well enough to include more personal details, and even information about such topics as hobbies was often based only on what the groom or bride had told them.

In contrast to the conventionalized semantic structure of the go-betweens’ speeches, the speeches of other wedding guests do not have a set structure or format for describing the couple. Rather, speakers draw on their personal experiences of the couple and the conventions of personal narratives. Yet even as speakers tailor their speeches to the specific biographies of individual grooms and brides, cultural conventions come into play in defining what information is considered relevant and what qualities are considered praiseworthy. Different speakers describing different grooms and brides at different weddings characterized them in remarkably similar ways: All of the brides were beautiful and all of the grooms were hard-working young men with promising futures. Both grooms and brides were frequently described as talented people with many hobbies, energetic and enthusiastic, and as serious and careful workers. Consider, for example, the following excerpt in which the honored guest, a high ranking official in the national civil service, characterized the groom:

(5) Speech by honored guest of the groom (workplace superior)

23 Taihen, majime de, e ichizu na, a seikaku de, very serious and eager ADJ personality and

  shigoto ni ii botoo o suru uu to i-ta taipu de, work at devote DO do QT say-PAST type and

  ‘He's the uh type who/ with a very uh eager,/ and serious,/ uh personality,/ devotes himself to uh his work and,’

24 ee:, gotoonin no, o sono jinsei no yorokobi HP-said-person GEN that life GEN pleasure

  wa nani ka, to iu shitsumon o, jitsu wa, ((clears throat))
  TOP what QM QT say question DO actually TOP

  senpai ga shi-ta yoo na koto o i-tte-ru-n desu (kedomo)/ seniors SU do-PAST type ADJ thing DO say-and-be-NOM COP but
‘uh/ in fact ((clears throat)) his co-workers,/ actually,/ did something like ask him,/ what’s your greatest pleasure in life (but).’

25 Sono toki no o kotae ga,/ a hito ni
that time GEN answer SU people to
kansha sa-reru koto to iu fuu (/)./
appreciate do-PASS thing QT say manner
‘his answer to that,/ uh (was) something like to be appreciated by people./’

26 Sakihodo,/ honemi o oshima-zu to iu
recently flesh&bone DO spare-not QT say
hanashi ga,/ aa gozai-mashi-ta ga,/ speech SU HPOLITE-DIST-PAST but
‘Just now,/ there was uh,/ talk about,/ working without sparing himself but,’

27 masa ni,/ ee,/ ji-- jibun ni totte no son-toku nado, nado,/ kangaeru koto naku,/ exactly oneself to for GEN loss-gain etc. etc. think NOM not
‘absolutely,/ uh,/ without any thought,/ of hi-- his own interests,/’

28 isshookenmei,/ jibun de,/ kaburu beki koto o kaburi,/
extreme-effort oneself by take-on should thing DO take-on
‘he would put every effort,/ all by himself,/ into taking responsibility for the things that needed responsibility and,’

29 arui wa,/ hito-sama no yaku ni tatsu koto nara,/
or TOP people-TI GEN help to stand NOM if
‘or,/ if there was some way he could help someone,/’

30 yorokonde,/ to iu koto de,/ kitanai shigoto mo fukumete,/ happily QT say thing as dirty work also including
yaru,/ taihen rippa na a seinen de (/).
do very fine ADJ young-person COP
‘he (is) a uh very fine young man,/ who would happily,/ do so,/ even including the dirty work./’

Descriptions of the bride also often included gender-specific qualities and ideals. In addition to being beautiful, brides were described as kind, charming, or having empathy. Even when the guests were workplace superiors of the bride, they tended to describe her as cheerful and pleasant to be around rather than in terms of her workplace accomplishments. Brides were also particularly likely to be described in terms of their family backgrounds and the characteristics that would make them a good wife.
Speeches by close friends and workplace colleagues of the couple reiterated many of the same conventional praises as the older guests. Friends of the brides described them as beautiful, cheerful, kind, and overflowing with charm, while friends of the grooms described them as energetic and enthusiastic, and workplace colleagues of the grooms reminisced about the long hours they put in together at the office. In contrast to the descriptive adjectives used by the senior guests, however, friends and immediate workplace superiors were more likely to illustrate the groom or bride’s character with amusing anecdotes. For example, one friend told how the bride had spent months knitting a sweater for her fiancé, only to discover that it was too large. She then cheerfully unraveled and re-knit the entire sweater, thus revealing her “kind and devoted personality.” Younger guests frequently poked fun at both themselves and the couple as they told stories about embarrassing experiences. A friend of another bride talked about how they had gone skiing together and took the ski lift to the top of the hardest run. When they looked down at the run, their knees shook so hard with fear that they finally gave up and rode the ski lift right back down to the bottom.

These and other anecdotes told by the friends and immediate superiors of the couple sometimes revealed character traits that were both less flattering and more idiosyncratic than the conventionalized praises of the senior guests. In contrast to example 5, the following excerpt comes from a later speaker at the same wedding who was the groom’s immediate workplace supervisor. This speaker also talked about how dedicated and hard working the groom was and described how he often spent all night at the office:

(6) Speech by groom’s immediate workplace supervisor (same wedding as example 5)

43 Ano: yakusho ni yoku/netomari shi-te-mashita./
   um office at often sleep-over do -(be)-and-DIST-PAST
   ‘U:m [he] often, spent the night at the office.’

44 Ano: watakushi mo,/ wakai koro wa yakusho ni netomari
   um I also young time TOP office at sleep-over
   suru hoo de wa yuumei da-tta-n desu kedomo./
   do direction by TOP famous COP-PAST-NOM COP(DIST) but
   ‘U:m when I was younger,/ I was also known for spending nights at the office but.’

45 Ano iyaa,/ tsui ni kooininha ga de-ta ka to./ iu: gurai desu ne./
   um oh-my at-last successor SU appear-PAST QM QT say about COP(DIST) IP
   ‘Um it was like,/ wow./ finally I might have a successor you know./’

46 Ano yoku:../ ne-te-mashi-te,/ um often sleep-and-DIST-and
   ‘Um he often:/ slept [there] and,’

47 Ano: asa--/ ano: kuru to,/ um morning um come when
‘um: when morning--/ um: came,’

48  *T kun ga./ sofaa no ue de desu ne./ ee: hara o dashi-te./

    T TI SU sofa GEN top at COP(DIST) IP stomach DO put-out-and

    ‘T would be on top of the sofa you know,/ with his u:h stomach sticking out and,’

49  *maa ne-te-ru to./ ((audience laughter))

    well sleep-and-be QT

    ‘well sleeping./’

50  *Sore de ikura okoshi-te mo desu ne./

    that and how-much awaken-and even COP(DIST) IP

    ‘And then no matter how much [we] try to wake him up you know,/’

51  *senaka o boribori kai-te desu ne./

    back DO scritch-scritch scratch-and COP(DIST) IP

    ‘he scritch-scratches his back you know and,/’

52  *[nakanaka oki-nai./

    not-easily wake-up-not

    ‘just won’t wake up./’

In contrast to the stereotypical praises of the higher ranking manager, the groom’s immediate superior drew a more vivid, and considerably less flattering picture of him which provoked considerable laughter from the other guests (lines 49 and 52). The vividness of the anecdote is enhanced by the “reported speech” dramatizing the speaker’s inner reaction in line 45, the use of the sound symbolism *boribori* (which I have translated as ‘scritch-scratch’) in line 51, and the present tense and very informal verb ending in line 52. The excerpt also illustrates a number of features typical of speeches by lower ranking guests including the use of hesitation markers at the beginning of lines 43-47 and the frequent use of the filler *desu ne ‘you know’*. These and other anecdotes told by the friends and immediate superiors of the couple revealed character traits that were not only less flattering, but also more idiosyncratic and unpredictable than the conventionalized praises of the senior guests.

In contrast to the serious tone of the earlier speeches, speeches presented later in the reception by the younger guests are light-hearted and amusing. The use of humorous anecdotes by more junior guests is an expected part of their role that was mentioned by all of my consultants.
7. Bending the conventions: Genre colonization and slippage of social roles

The conventional and stereotypical nature of the praises by the senior guests is due in part to genre expectations that their speeches will be more serious and weighty than those of the later speakers. Yet it is also due to the fact that some of the more senior guests may have a relatively limited history of personal contact with the person they are meant to be praising. In general, couples invite the most prestigious and high-ranking people with whom they have a connection to speak as honored guests at their wedding. What this means in practice is that the first few guests who speak after the go-between are often managers in positions several levels above the groom or bride or professors who may have been an undergraduate advisor several years before. This limited social contact presents something of a challenge when they are expected to share their personal experiences of the groom or bride.

One common response to this dilemma is for the more senior speakers to spend large portions of their speeches giving a detailed description of the institutional activities or contexts through which they knew the couple. For example, one honored guest described the activities at the electronics company where the groom worked, including a detailed description of the production process for color filters for liquid crystal television screens. In another case, the groom’s supervisor at a bank described the application of fuzzy logic to predicting mergers and acquisitions of large companies. In both cases, the grooms were praised for their work on these research projects, but the speakers gave more details about the technical aspects of the project than about the groom or his specific contribution. In another case, a bride had written her required senior graduation thesis on the novels of Willa Cather. After giving a lengthy description of the plot of *My Antonia*, her supervising professor stated that the bride had written an excellent graduation thesis about the novel.

This type of description of institutional activities with little direct reference to the groom or bride is a common occurrence in these speeches, but I would argue that it should not be understood as being a constitutive feature of the wedding genre itself. Rather, I would argue that this particular recurring pattern arises out of a predictable conflict between genre conventions and the contingencies of personal experience and knowledge. Confronted with the need to say something personal about someone whom they do not in fact know very well, the senior guests frequently respond by discussing workplace or educational activities in which the groom or bride was involved.

In places this pattern also shows evidence of a contemporary global trend for the “promotional function” of discourse increasingly to take over and “colonize” other discourse genres (Bhatia 2004; Fairclough 1993). At times the expected praise of the bride or groom slides into promotion of the speaker’s own business or institution. In the case of the company that made liquid crystal television displays, the go-between (who was also the owner of the company), shifted partway through his standard description of the groom’s biography to language that sounded more like that of an annual report. After giving the groom’s employment history in the company’s micro-products development lab, he described the “strong effort” that the company was putting into “developing this process” that “is currently drawing great attention in the electronics industry.” Apologizing for sounding “a bit like an advertisement,” he went on to announce that the company would be featured in an upcoming television news program on “this two billion yen liquid crystal display industry” and invited everyone in the audience to watch.
In other cases as well, there is evidence of speakers using the wedding speeches to express “private intentions” which do not match the “socially recognized purposes” of the genre (Bhatia 2004). For example, one workplace superior of the groom warned the bride that married life might not always match her expectations. He said that the groom would often be expected to work late, and that she should not be upset or nag him if he wasn’t home in time for dinner. It is typical for older speakers to offer the younger couple advice for married life, but in this case the advice was clearly to the advantage of the groom’s employer and the speaker himself as the groom’s supervisor. In another case, one of the bride’s professors spent much of her speech praising her university’s feminist history and philosophy of providing a sex-neutral education. Like the company president described above, she apologized for sounding as if she was “spreading propaganda” for her university. The fact that some speakers made these disclaimers shows their awareness that they were bending or even violating the social norms for this speech genre.

These tendencies towards genre bending are not idiosyncratic events, but rather demonstrate connections between the the speaker’s roles inside and outside of the wedding speech context. Younger speakers are chosen to speak as “friends of the couple” based on certain types of long-term, intimate association in private as well as institutional contexts. This allows them to draw on that personal association to create entertaining anecdotes which reveal personal idiosyncrasies of the bride or groom. By contrast, the more senior wedding guests are frequently selected on the basis of their institutional relationship with the couple as professor, employer, or workplace supervisor. This not only leads their speeches to focus more on the couple’s behavior in the workplace or educational environment, but also results in a certain degree of slippage between the speaker’s role as “wedding guest” and his or her role as an institutional representative, thus resulting in the prevalence of institutional promotion in the speeches of many of the senior guests.  

8. Conclusions

The analysis of Japanese wedding speeches has demonstrated that there are multiple different types of interplay between conventions, contextual specificity, and speaker creativity even within a single genre. Wedding speeches begin and end with formulaic speech acts that frame the speech as an instance of the wedding speech genre. Yet even these strongly conventionalized sections of the speech allow some latitude for speakers to creatively contextualize the discourse to specific weddings, as when speakers adapt traditional metaphors of marriage to reflect the interests of a particular newlywed couple. By contrast, the body of the speeches is much less tightly structured, yet even the personalized descriptions of the groom and bride are clearly shaped by cultural ideals of gender and personhood. This section of the speeches is also vulnerable to genre colonization by promotional discourses, particularly by the more senior guests speaking in institutional roles.

11 Wedding receptions may also be increasingly oriented towards workplace concerns in other ways as well. One bride told me that she and her husband would really have preferred an informal party at a restaurant with their friends. Instead, they felt constrained to host a formal reception and invite the groom’s coworkers and superiors to speak as guests in order in insure his future career success in banking.
The interaction of convention and creativity varies, not only across different parts of the speeches, but also across different categories of wedding guests. The analysis has demonstrated how individuals with certain types of social identities are recruited to fill situation-specific speaking roles and how those speaking roles are enacted through the socio-temporal organization of the reception and through variation in the form and content of the speeches. It is well known that the performance of certain genres may be restricted to certain categories of speakers and that the enactment of certain social roles may be done in large part through the performance of professional or specialized genres. But what may be less recognized is that genre conventions themselves may involve systematic variation across different socially-recognized categories of speakers, even when performing what is recognizably "the same" genre. Thus genre conventions may vary, not only across disciplinary boundaries (Bhatia 2004), but across different socially-defined categories of social actors, all of whom may be recognized as legitimate performers, but who are expected to perform in subtly different ways.

In part this variation may be accounted for through a process of genre acquisition, in the sense that the speeches by the younger guests were recognizable as less elaborated or expert versions of the speeches by more senior guests. For example, speeches by the younger guests had shorter and less elaborate openings and closings, a quicker pace with fewer pauses after grammatical constituents, somewhat greater use of hesitation markers, and an overall lower level of honorific use. But it is also the case that the speeches by the younger speakers are expected to be less serious and more entertaining than those of the more senior guests. This shift in both form and content of the speeches across the course of the wedding reception is an expected and predictable part of the structure of the speech event. It is in part through these differential performances that speakers enact their longer-term social identities as certain kinds of people as well as changes in those identities over the course of the lifespan.

Researchers are just beginning to investigate the processes through which speakers acquire competence in new genres and how that acquisition can involve transformations of self and identity. Yet the present analysis also suggests that different categories of actors may be expected to perform “the same” genre in different ways. The conventions of genre not only specify certain types of performers, but may specify a spectrum of performance possibilities that are conventionally linked to certain types of social roles and identities. Approaching genres as discourse practices through the analysis of actual instances of performance allows us to see the kinds of flexibility that different genres offer speakers and how speakers use or violation of genre conventions is connected to their enactment of various types of social identity.

References


