

Robin T. Lakoff: What's up with upspeak?

Here's an experiment. Tell someone the day of the week, e.g. "It's Monday." As you speak, take note of how your voice rises and falls. If your pitch bends down as you approach the end of the sentence, then you are using "downspeak," or what linguists refer to as "falling intonation." If your pitch increases steadily as you approach the end of the sentence, rising up toward the end of the word "Monday," then you used "high rising terminal," or "upspeak."

Recently, a debate has emerged about the meaning attached to these two types of speech patterns, and upspeak in particular. Some argue that ending a declarative statement—"Today is Monday," for example—on a high note typically reserved for questions—"Is it Monday?"—betrays a speaker's lack of confidence and willingness to submit to their interlocutor.

On the other side of the debate are those who view upspeak as more innocuous, and even as a sign of an individual's superior and innovative communication skills. A study based on business and academic meetings conducted in English in Hong Kong, found that meeting chairs—in other words, the most powerful people in the room—used rising intonation three to seven times more often than did their subordinates. These findings suggest that rising tones, far from a show of inferiority, can be used to assert dominance by exerting pressure on listening participants to respond and establish common ground.

削除すべき語句

Robin T. Lakoff was the first linguist to incorporate gender into the study of language. Lakoff began to think about the relationship between identity and public discourse, and about gender in particular. How did being a woman or man affect one's use of language, both in form and content? To answer these questions, Lakoff had to listen, and listen closely. speech act, but, she added, "it'll make you incredibly unpopular."

The research Lakoff conducted served as the foundation for her article "Language and Woman's Place" (1973). In the article, Lakoff argued that gender stereotypes conditioned how women spoke—and were spoken of—in American society. She showed how uncertainty, triviality, and lack of clarity and force distinguished "women's language" from that of men, a distinction that reflected prevailing "rules of