



Survival or success? A critical exploration of the use of 'double-voiced discourse' by women business leaders in the UK

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Abstract

This article considers whether using leadership language may be one under-explored reason why there continues to be a significant lack of women at executive level. Do women make less of a linguistic impact in the boardroom than men? By analysing linguistic data from senior management meetings and follow-up interviews in seven multinational UK companies, we suggest that senior women and men use a very similar range of linguistic strategies to lead their teams *except* in one key respect. Women appear to monitor and regulate their use of language more than men, adjusting what they say in the light of their colleagues' concerns and agendas. This use of 'double-voiced discourse' (Bakhtin, 1994/1963) enables women to survive in a male-dominated business world, but this can sometimes make their voice 'harder to hear'. However, double-voiced discourse is also a form of linguistic expertise and potentially might offer women leaders a strategy for success.

Keywords

double-voiced discourse, gender, interactional sociolinguistic analysis, leadership discourse, linguistic expertise, senior women, workplace talk

Introduction

Reflecting on that meeting (.) what I found I was doing (.) was going straight back at him and I can remember doing that on the table actually and being as (.) trying to be as firm back as he was in his attitude to me and using a bit of humour umm (1) and if necessary interrupting him

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in full flow to just try and break it a bit (1) but I'm not very (.) I don't feel as though I'm very good at that kind of thing (1) I'm sort of learning how to do it.¹ (Managing Director; female; Logistics company)

These are the words of Paula, a managing director of a leading UK company, who is talking about a meeting she has recently had with her boss, the Chief Executive Officer. Her reflections were expressed in an interview that formed part of a Research Council study on gender and the language of leadership in senior management meetings in the UK. For a non-linguist and business leader, Paula shows a keen awareness here of the kind of language she *should* be using to be effective in this context. She says she needs to sound assertive ('trying to be as firm back as he was in his attitude to me'); and implies that she needs to adjust or 'accommodate' (Giles and Coupland, 1991) her language to match and mirror her boss's degree of forcefulness and directness. She finishes by suggesting that sounding 'firm' but mixing this with 'humour' is an acquired skill, one that she is weak at, and still needs to learn. This level of critical self-reflection about leadership language was fairly typical of the sample of women leaders we interviewed, but rather less typical of an equivalent sample of male leaders. We therefore wanted to know why senior women were apparently more reflective and self-critical about their use of leadership language than men. Could this be connected in any way to women's continuing minority status at very senior level (Vinnicombe et al., 2010), where women leaders are known to be under greater scrutiny than men (e.g. Fletcher, 1999; Kanter, 1993)? Did senior women's keener awareness of their own linguistic practices perhaps indicate a sense of 'conversational insecurity' (Fishman, 1978) and a need to compensate for this in a male-dominated business world? Or alternatively, and more positively, was it a gendered recognition of the value of linguistic expertise to effective leadership?

The purpose of this article is to explore findings from our research study which indicate that the use of language may offer one significant reason why senior women still struggle to make it to the boardroom and survive there, both in the UK and elsewhere. The government sponsored, annual *UK Female FTSE Board Report* (Vinnicombe et al., 2010) found that only 12.5 per cent of board directors in the top 100 British companies are women, a figure that has changed marginally since the report's inception in 1999. It seems that business leadership continues to be at least one professional domain where gender differentiation on the basis of assumed biological sex is evident. On this basis, we would argue that gender can be made 'relevant' as a category for scholarly scrutiny (Swann, 2002). Broadly, our study supports recent gender and language research (Baxter, 2010; Holmes, 2006; Mullany, 2007) that men and women leaders deploy very similar or at least overlapping linguistic strategies to enact leadership effectively in business settings. This might indicate that gender is not a particularly relevant category in terms of how the business of leadership gets linguistically enacted. However, our current study found one emerging distinction. While senior men appear to draw in relatively unproblematic ways upon a diverse range of linguistic strategies to achieve the transactional, relational and transformational goals of leadership (Terjesen et al., 2009), women leaders appear more alert to the 'threat potential' of using language inappropriately in their view. There is evidence that senior women self-reflexively allow colleagues' utterances to permeate, guide, shape and influence their own discourse, but also draw upon this self-reflexivity to use linguistic expertise as a powerful leadership resource. Senior women

show that they refer to, and take account of the concerns and agendas of colleagues for the dual purpose of demonstrating personal power as leaders and developing strong team relationships. But this imperative for linguistic self-scrutiny may have a price: it requires senior women to devote energy, time and effort to watch over and regulate their language use, which not all women heading for senior positions may be prepared to do. This self-reflexivity about language use, theorized by us as ‘double-voiced discourse’ (Bakhtin, 1994/1963) might be viewed as a gendered strategy for survival within a male-dominated business world. However, it might also be seen potentially as a strategy for success. Women leaders might find themselves in a stronger position to progress to the boardroom if they were to acquire the linguistic expertise of double-voiced discourse. Drawing on a study of 14 audio-recorded senior management meetings in leading UK companies, seven led by women and the other seven led by men, as well as upon supplementary interview data, this article will explore whether senior women’s use of double-voiced discourse is a strategy for survival or for success.

For the purposes of this article, we define the term ‘leader’ in line with current organizational studies literature that adopts a *social constructionist* understanding of leadership (e.g. Kets de Fries et al., 2010), not as essentialist attributes but as socially situated sets of practices that are often collaboratively enacted by leaders in team contexts. On a practical note, all the leaders in our study were at main board director level or one level below, all managing their own teams of senior people.

Background

This research study initially arose from the critical discourse analysis (CDA) imperative to combine ‘scholarly and social responsibilities’ (Van Dijk, 2001: 96). Baxter gained personal experience of the lack of women at senior management level when she had worked as a consultant with the marketing department of a UK multinational company, and had observed how few of the senior marketing managers with whom she worked were women. Despite more than 35 years of equal opportunities and educational reforms in Britain, and increasing numbers of women in middle management, the statistical reality is that there is still a small minority of women in senior leadership positions. Men continue to occupy the most powerful roles in most national and multinational companies, not just in Britain but worldwide, whereas women are still a rare presence in boardrooms. As the *Female FTSE Board Report* comments:

2010 saw another year of barely perceptible change in the representation of women in leadership positions of UK plc’s Top 100 companies. . . . Overall, the percentage of women on FTSE 100 boards is 12.5%, showing a three year plateau. The number of companies with no female directors has decreased to 21 and the number of companies with more than one woman on the board has returned to the 2008 figure of 39. Only 13% of new appointments went to women. (Vinnicombe et al., 2010: 8)

This state of play has changed only slightly over the past decade, with the share of female directors increasing from 4.6 per cent in 1997 to 6.1 per cent at the start of 2007, and finally to the figure of 12.5 per cent in 2010. Theresa May (the incumbent UK Home Secretary and Minister for Women and Equality at the time of writing) has commented

that this is ‘not just about gender’ but that the exclusion of women leads to a loss of productivity and performance in the organization, and that ‘the UK needs to make the most of everyone’s talents and that more balanced corporate boards must be better for everyone – investors, employers, employees and customers’ (see Vinnicombe et al., 2010: 6).

Clearly, a whole range of social, economic and politically gendered practices contribute to the maintenance of the so-called ‘glass ceiling’, as testified by the considerable literature on gender and organizations (see Schein, 2007, for overview). However, little attention has so far been devoted to possible *linguistic* explanations, perhaps because there is a sense in which these might offer retrogressive and therefore controversial implications of ‘conversational insecurity’ (Fishman, 1978) on the part of women. Moreover, from a social constructionist perspective, linguistic (and paralinguistic) interactions are perceived as principal means by which leadership is enacted and achieved (Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson, 1999; Baxter, 2003; Holmes, 2006; Mullany, 2007; Schnurr, 2008), primarily because leaders spend their lives engaging in various forms of linguistic interaction with their colleagues within business meeting settings (Handford, 2010). Our study suggests that leadership language continues to be an under-estimated factor in making sense of the experiences of the senior women and men who occupy this gendered space.

Gender and the language of leadership

Research in the field of language and gender has shown that leadership is perceived as an intrinsically masculine construct (e.g. Angouri, in press; Cameron, 2006; Holmes, 2006; Koller, 2004; Schnurr, 2008; Wodak, 1997). Because leadership is strongly associated with masculinity, women in leadership positions are marked as ‘the other’ in relation to the male norm and therefore judged to be less ‘fit’ or competent for the role. In her classic work, Kanter (1993/1977) argued that in male-dominated settings (that is, where 15 per cent or fewer are women), female leaders are more visible and conspicuous than males; they stand out in stark contrast to men. She theorizes that they are ‘tokens’ – symbols rather than individuals – who become the object of unwanted attention and critical scrutiny. She describes this extra attention as a ‘two-edged sword’ in that ‘upper level women become public creatures’ who are:

... forced into the position of keeping secrets and carefully contriving a public performance. They cannot afford to stumble. (Kanter, 1993/1977: 213–14)

Even the view that women have a ‘female advantage’ because ‘effective leadership is congruent with the ways in which women lead’ (e.g. Eagly and Carli, 2007: 810) has often not benefitted women in male-dominated environments where they experience criticism for being egregious. Other theorists have conceptualized female leadership rather differently. Holmes (2006) has shown that effective female leaders are able to draw expertly on a repertoire of linguistic strategies stereotypically coded both ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’, but tend to be positioned by whether they work in a masculine or feminine ‘community of practice’ (CoFP). Such strategies help women leaders to overcome the classic ‘double bind’ whereby they are negatively judged by their colleagues if they

are either too assertive or too tentative. Indeed, Mullany (2007) found numerous examples in her studies of management meetings whereby males use *co-operative* strategies and females use *competitive* strategies, dependent on the community of practice (CofP). Building on this, Mullany (2007) argued that theorists should take greater account of the norms and conventions of different CofPs, as well as institutional status, role and corporate discourses, in order to achieve a more finely grained understanding of how business communities 'do leadership'. Baxter (2010) has theorized that whole corporations are gendered. In a 'male-dominated' corporation women leaders still face many prejudices about their competence, whereas in gender-balanced or 'gender-multiple' corporations they are better positioned to be valued and to achieve career success. Thus, micro-linguistic practices, contextual factors and wider corporate discourses may contribute to positioning women differently and unequally within business leadership roles and discursive practices.

An earlier study by Baxter (2008) explored the ways in which senior people discursively construct their sense of leadership identities through the medium of interview narratives. Ten male and ten female senior leaders were asked in one-to-one interviews to reflect on what makes a good leader in the context of business meetings. One finding of this study was the noticeable tendency by senior women to reflect critically upon their *linguistic* practices as leaders, often indexed by scrutinizing, self-referential language. This finding prompted the decision to conduct an empirical research study upon which this article is now based.

Double-voiced discourse (DvD)

The phrase 'double-voiced discourse' was originally coined by the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975) in relation to the study of literature and in particular to the novels of Dostoevsky. Over the course of his long writing career, Bakhtin's thoughts on the subject of double-voiced discourse (henceforth DvD) and the wider, better known concept of 'heteroglossia' were complex, varied and changing. In this article, we draw our theorizations of DvD from an essay entitled 'Double-voiced discourse in Dostoevsky' (Bakhtin, 1994/1963), in which he defined and discussed the concept of DvD in some detail. In this essay, Bakhtin was primarily interested in the relationship of authors to their literary creations in the form of narrative, characterization and stylization, theorizing this as a 'metalinguistic' (or 'stylistic') approach to the study of literature. However, he also makes clear that DvD is a common feature of ordinary, interactive speech throughout the above essay, as in this example:

Someone else's words introduced into our own speech inevitably assume a new interpretation and become subject to our evaluation of them; that is, they become double-voiced. (Bakhtin, 1994/1963: 106)

In relation to speech interaction, Bakhtin (1994/1963) distinguished between two broad types of discourse. Single-voiced or 'monologic' discourse is referentially orientated and seeks in a straightforward way to name, inform, express and represent the object or topic to which it refers. Alternatively, double-voiced or polyphonic discourse 'is directed both

towards the referential object of speech as in ordinary discourse, and toward another's discourse, towards someone else's speech' (Bakhtin, 1994/1963: 105).

However, double-voiced discourse is more than simply the inherent responsiveness of interlocutors to interactive speech, and more than simply another name for reflexive talk as discussed in diverse ways by applied linguists such as Bell (1984), Giles and Coupland (1991) and others. It is also more than a knowing version of 'intertextuality' in which all 'texts are woven out of other literary texts, not in the conventional sense that they bear the traces of "influence" but in the more radical sense that every word, phrase, or segment is a reworking of other writings which precede or surround the individual work' (Eagleton, 1983: 138). DvD may indeed rework other texts in this way, but it is altogether a more conscious and purposeful strategy to serve a double agenda. In our data, senior women talked about and demonstrated a heightened awareness of, and responsiveness to, the concerns and interests of their colleagues, which were then reflected in the different ways they adjusted their language use to serve both their *own* purposes and those of their team. This sense of self-other orientation for a calculated purpose is captured by Bakhtin's explanations of DvD, where he explains that the spoken word is:

. . . directed towards its referential object, is at the same time reacting intensely to someone else's word, answering it and anticipating it. An element of response and anticipation penetrates deeply inside intensely dialogic discourse. Such a discourse draws it in, as it were, sucks in to itself other people's replies, intensely reworking them. The semantics of dialogic discourse are of an utterly special sort. (Bakhtin, 1994/1963: 105)

Furthermore, the feature that makes DvD particularly distinct from simple, reflexive talk, or a self-consciously used set of discourse strategies, is that it contains a 'hidden polemic', an intention that is partially concealed. Bakhtin defined three sub-types of DvD, but it is the *third* sub-type that is most pertinent to our theorization because it specifically relates to manipulation within spoken interaction: that is, DvD as 'the word with a sideways glance at someone else's hostile word' (Bakhtin, 1994/1963: 108). In Bakhtin's view, this sub-type of DvD has an *antagonistic* intention as a reaction to the 'threat potential' of other people's words:

In a hidden polemic, the author's discourse is directed toward its own referential object as is any other discourse, but at the same time every statement about the object is constructed in such a way that, apart from its referential meaning, a polemical blow is struck at the other's discourse on the same theme, at the other's statement about the same object. (Bakhtin, 1994/1963: 108)

In the context of our research, we suggest that senior women's greater use of the 'hidden polemic' of DvD may be partly driven by the visibility and conspicuousness of their minority position. As Kanter (1993/1977) famously argued, senior women 'stand out' as exceptions to the norm of male leadership. Within this context, a female leader's words and actions may be under greater scrutiny than those of their male counterparts who represent the male-dominated, majority group. In such a setting, women may use DvD as a response to the threat potential of this greater scrutiny. DvD is therefore an expression of a judgement call, a kind of linguistic 'second guessing' of the intentions of other speakers which enables senior women constantly to adjust their language in order to

make the 'right' impact on colleagues. It is arguably a strategy for survival in a man's world.

Various discourse analysts (e.g. Coupland, 2007; Rampton, 1995; Sheldon, 1992) have drawn on versions of DvD as a rich source for theorizing linguistic interactions in context, which have also helped us to refine its value for analysing our data. For example, Sheldon (1992) used the concept to explain a gender difference she noticed in the ways in which US primary school children appeared to handle conflict with their peers, the boys preferring a more direct, confrontational, 'single-voiced' approach and the girls opting for a more mediated, 'double-voiced' approach which did not simply support familiar gender stereotypes of female co-operation, tentativeness or passivity:

The orientation to others does not mean that the speaker necessarily acts in an altruistic, accommodating or even self-sacrificing manner. It means rather that the speaker pays attention to the companion's point of view, even while pursuing her own agenda. As a result, the voice of the self is enmeshed with and regulated by the voice of the other. (Sheldon, 1992: 99)

The value of Sheldon's work lies in her suggestion that DvD is a highly sophisticated strategy which allowed these girls to consolidate relationships with their female peers while furthering their own agendas. However, there is a downside: in constantly mediating their own language use in order not to appear overly confrontational or deferential, their dialogic voice, according to Sheldon (1992), was sometimes 'harder to hear'. Applying this finding to our own study, did this mean that the language of senior women might also be harder to hear on occasions, and therefore deemed less 'effective'?

The research study

The study aimed to explore whether the use of leadership discourse is a possible reason why women fail to progress to boardroom level and succeed at this level. Using a semi-ethnographic approach (Silverman, 2000), a small research team² spent periods of time within seven leading private sector UK companies in order to gather rich and detailed insights about the contexts and CofPs in which female and male leaders work. We conducted case studies of companies from a cross-section of business sectors comprising manufacturing, engineering, mining, retailing, entertainment, logistics and insurance. Within each business, we observed and audio-recorded at least two senior management meetings, one led by a female leader and the other run by a male leader of equivalent seniority. As there were two observers, we were able to supplement the audio-recordings with detailed notes on paralanguage and compare our observations. As meetings often lasted all day, participants quickly relaxed in our presence, so that any possibility of the 'observer's paradox' (Labov, 1966) was mitigated after the first hour or so. We followed up our observations by interviewing the leader and several of their colleagues on a one-to-one basis immediately after the meeting, generating 48 interviews in total. We invited participants to reflect on their use of language to achieve their stated goals, as well as upon the linguistic interactions between people. More specifically, we asked them to evaluate who they considered was 'effective' in the meeting, and who was less so, as well as to explain what

they meant by ‘being effective’ in this context. Thus, notions/criteria of leadership ‘effectiveness’ were generated by the participants themselves.

We applied well-established principles from qualitative research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) to the collection and analysis of our data. Rather than testing a hypothesis, qualitative research (often but not exclusively) sets out to find the theory implicit in the data and encourages an emergent methodology of both deductive and inductive approaches as each becomes applicable to different stages of the study. In this spirit, we aimed to be responsive to the insights that emerged from the data but also to apply theory developed from Baxter’s (2008) previous interview-based study and from other literature. For example, we noticed in the interview data that women leaders showed a raised awareness of their use of linguistic strategies as a means of ‘doing leadership’ effectively, as discussed above. One way this was indexed was by senior women’s use of explicit *comparisons* with equivalent male leaders (viewed apparently as a standard), as in this example where Sue, a managing director, is talking about how she writes emails:

S: so I’ve been (.) I’ve been reading how I’ve written it and then before I’ve sent it (.) I’ve scrolled back through and thought (1) how would (.) how would Dave write this e-mail?

We found *no* instances in the interview data of male leaders comparing their language use with equivalent women. We also noticed evidence of a heightened or pre-meditated language use by women leaders in particular within meetings, when experiencing more difficult interactions with colleagues. We wondered if this was relevant to our theorization above that senior women use DvD as a survival strategy when experiencing a possible threat to their authority, or more positively to achieve the goals of leadership in a male-dominated domain. For example, we noticed that certain female leaders showed a particular sensitivity to their audience, which they appeared to express almost dialogically. In the following example, Jenny, a managing director of a leading UK company, is conducting a monologic presentation on the restructuring of the company (DvD evidence underlined):

J: (.) err I think really this is the top-line level structure that you will have seen and some of the questions and I thought thoughts that might be in your minds is (.) err what’s going to be the role of the Deputy Group HR Director it was certainly one that was in mine so err I’ll pose and answer it as best I can for you guys

Here, Jenny has anticipated the team’s possible concerns and criticisms in relation to the new, restructuring proposals, and makes her response to these explicit in the course of her presentation. By doing this, she pre-empts and dilutes the possible criticisms that her team members might have made.

At a mid-way point in collecting our data, we began manually to code and categorize (Silverman, 2000) the linguistic evidence of double-voiced discourse in our transcripts. We supplemented this with discourse-analytical methods derived primarily from Interactional Sociolinguistics (e.g. Holmes, 2006; Schiffrin, 1994), which focus on the finely-grained micro-analysis of what speakers actually say at the level of lexical and grammatical choices, turn-taking and paralanguage. This helped us to identify what we might mean by heightened or pre-meditated language use, which we have theorized as

double-voiced discourse. It also helped us to develop a more ‘critical’ (Wodak, 1997) perspective on our data in the sense of alerting us to signifiers of unequal gender relations in this context.

If we take our refined definition of the term ‘double-voiced discourse’ (DvD) to mean a judgement call about how to make the ‘right’ linguistic impact with colleagues, how did we identify evidence of DvD in our data, and how was it used by senior women? Through our use of qualitative analysis, we coded any instances of language that first, were identified by senior people themselves in their interviews, second, appeared to draw attention to themselves, and third, seemed to contain a ‘hidden polemic’ or threat potential. From this coding, we noticed that DvD could potentially take a number of linguistic forms – as politeness, humour, implicature, meta-pragmatic or self-referential comment, hedging, assertiveness, repair and ‘role-breaking’ (that is, stepping out a discursive frame in order to comment on it). In short, DvD in this context incorporated a range of interactive strategies from highly assertive, ‘impactful’ language to more mitigated, inclusive linguistic forms.

Our coding of both interview and meeting transcripts led to the emergence of four ‘core categories’ (Glaser, 1998), which encapsulated differing ‘reasons’ for the use of DvD by leaders. These were:

- Anticipatory: to anticipate and dilute possible criticism
- Authoritative: to heighten impact and display personal power, especially if this was threatened
- Corrective: to correct or repair a mistake or error, usually their own
- Mitigating: to reduce authority and build rapport with their team

In order to show how we identified indicators of DvD within each of the above core categories, and to demonstrate how a leader uses DvD in action, we have selected a section of data from the transcript of a senior management meeting in a multinational manufacturing company, for the analysis that follows below.

Analysing our data using double-voiced discourse

The context is that Gina, managing director of the Western European Region, is co-leading the meeting with seven of her directors (six male and one female; all white European). She has just learnt from the finance director that their budget shows a ‘spare’ £1.8m that technically doesn’t belong to them. She fears that her team will be accused of hiding this sum and may therefore be penalized by their immediate superiors, so she is far from happy. The following four extracts occurred in sequence and are all taken from the team discussion that ensues. These demonstrate the way Gina draws upon all four of the above DvD strategies, sometimes in intertextualized ways, in order to negotiate a difficult incident with her team as effectively as possible. In reflecting upon this incident afterwards, Gina explained that it was important that she demonstrated personal power because the team had made a grave mistake and she needed to show ‘who was boss’. At the same time, she wanted to keep her colleagues ‘on-side’ – she did not want to upset or alienate them unduly in the process.

Extract 1: Anticipatory DvD

Key: G = Gina, Managing Director (female); E = Elisa, Human Resources Director (female); T = Tony, Country Manager (male).

G: see my problem Martin is it won't be (.) because we'll end up as we did last year (.) accruing (.) and we can't accrue (.) the days of accruing are gone (.) do you know (.) and we're asking the Area for money (.) right (.) scenario (.) OK? (.) that's not scenario it's bloody fact (.) we went in April (.) we asked for two point something million (.) we come back into the business two weeks later and we find out shit we shouldn't have asked for anything because we have the money do you know (.) and that's like literally within a month (.) so I'm ner::vous in terms of going forward so really I suppose what I'm saying is I mean it's down to the brand side and the guys need to go through and redo what they need between now and the end of the year (1) and that needs to be taken into account in the financial forecasting¹

In this extract, Gina is giving an unpopular order to her team: that they will need to redo their financial forecast for the quarter to exclude the spare £1.8m. However, rather than giving the order upfront, she prepares the ground by using a number of anticipatory linguistic strategies. She begins with an anticipatory clause ('see my problem Martin') that is meta-pragmatic: it serves to warn colleagues of the order she is about to give, but it also makes a direct, personal appeal to Martin, her fiercest critic on this matter. By naming him, she invites him to share her view of the prospective problem before she explains it. She continues to prepare the ground by offering a visualization of the background to the problem using narrative structures ('we went in April (.) we asked for two point something million . . .'), which encourages colleagues to see things from her perspective. Having evoked the background, she expresses her emotional reaction to the problem ('I'm ner::vous in terms of going forward'), which again might create sympathy but signals a reason for the indirect order which is about to follow ('the guys need to go through and redo what they need between now and the end of the year').

Gina's use of anticipatory DvD here indicates that she has predicted that the team will not be happy with the order that she eventually gives. Consequently, she uses various linguistic strategies to prepare the ground, to forewarn her colleagues of what she is about to say, and to create a level of sympathy for her leadership decision.

Extract 2: Authoritative DvD

G: understand (.) it does it does but I don't agree (.) because the guys did a- wh-did a did a financial forecast (.) they f****d it up (.) they have to do it properly (.) it's as simple as that (.) and if I'm sitting in a Board meeting and I turn round and say 'ah yeah but I don't have time to do this I don't ha-' (.) no (.) give me a break lads (.) you said to me you don't have time (.) sorry (.) do it right in the first place and then we're alright (2) they didn't do it right in the first place (1) otherwise we wouldn't have the 1.8 million

E: [I know that (. .)

G: [I'm telling you we'll be in serious danger of losing that losing it after having been to the Board two months ago (2) not good (.) not good (.) so it's not about me dressing it up for them or anything (.) they're all big guys (.) just do it properly

This extract comes after several members of the team have disagreed with Gina's decision despite her attempts to use reasonable argument. Here she switches into a more authoritative mode of leadership to defend her unpopular decision and demonstrate personal power, which is indexed by a number of linguistic strategies. Throughout, she uses meta-pragmatic language to signify her position as leader. She begins with the command 'Understand' to gain people's attention, followed by the meta-pragmatic statement 'I don't agree' to emphasize her viewpoint directly. At the start of her second turn, she says 'I'm telling you' which also reinforces her position of authority by calling attention to the warning she is giving. Additionally, Gina uses strong taboo language ('they f****d it up'), perhaps for shock effect to express her disapproval, which makes her 'stand out' linguistically as the only member of the meeting to swear. She deploys strong judgemental terms ('not good (.) not good') to express her opinion of their actions, and finally uses bald commands ('just do it properly') to make clear the actions she expects from the team in the future. Throughout, however, she uses reported speech to convey that she has thought of their concerns ('you said to me you don't have time (.) sorry (.) do it right in the first place'), even if the outcome is to dismiss these.

Gina's use of authoritative DvD here signifies that she has assessed that her authority is not being sufficiently respected and that she needs to demonstrate that she can be decisive and make an impact. Her use of a dialogic style (via reported speech) suggests that this is a self-reflexive leadership strategy which has taken opposing viewpoints into account and moved on to a synthesized solution.

Extract 3: Corrective DvD

- G: sorry guys I don't see anything (.) I haven't been shown anything else (.) I've seen nothing else (.) that's all I've seen and all I've seen is I go to the Board (.) ask for 2 and a half million (.) hope to f**k nobody asks me well how are you doing without the money do you know? So I make up some story about re-phrasing that's what I see OK? So (.) for me that's reality (.) so that's why we need to see month on month and anyway it's good practice we need to be doing it because: once we understand the figures month on month on this table then we know what we are doing with the business (.) it's a hell of a long time since I brought that regime in and it's important for all of us anyway (.)
- E: it's decision-making
- G: it's decision-making yeah it is (.) it is yeah (.) OK? But I understand what you're saying it isn't that I'm not listening to you or anything like that but I have to do to do what I see

In this extract, Gina's use of language indexes a realization that she may have offended members of the team, and she therefore attempts to correct or 'repair' the threat potential to the relationship without conceding her authority. In her first turn, she makes an apology ('sorry guys') and then develops a lengthy rationale of her proposed new budget policy. She does this by encouraging the team to visualize an imaginary scenario that might put her in a difficult position, commenting self-referentially, 'for me that's reality'. She then develops her case for a new policy. This is received sympathetically by a colleague who comments 'it's decision-making', which has the implicature that leaders must make decisions even if they are unpopular. Gina builds on this by repeating the words 'It's decision-making' as they manifestly support her case. She then seeks agreement with colleagues through her phatic comment 'it is yeah' followed by the interactive

tag 'OK?'. In her final utterance ('but I understand . . . do what I see'), she role-breaks by stepping out of the frame of the discussion in order to comment on it. She shows that she can see the matter from her colleagues' perspective by voicing what she perceives to be their concerns ('it isn't that I'm not listening to you or anything like that'). She then makes a self-referential comment about the demands of leadership upon her ('but I have to do what I see'), which encourages colleagues to empathize with her subject position.

Gina's use of DvD here indicates that she is aware of the alienating effect of an unpopular decision upon her colleagues. In order to repair the possible damage to team relationships, she role-breaks by standing outside the leadership role in order to comment on it. In this context, DvD enables a leader both to enact the role and to distance herself from it in order to maintain good relationships with colleagues.

Extract 4: Mitigating DvD

- G: yep? So that you need to come back and say exactly what you feel is best so we actually sit down and discuss it and review [. . .]?
- T: yep
- G: yes?
- T: yeah that's a fair point
- G: because that's standing out (.) OK then (.) alright now shall we have a break for five minutes? (.) you think that's a good idea? (.) good (.) it's like pulling teeth (*laughs*) it's supposed to be the easy:: part of it (1) it's supposed to be the nice part of it (4) um?

This extract occurs right at the end of the discussion about the new budget policy and towards the end of this part of the meeting. Gina is keen to seek agreement for a final decision, and she is also concerned to finish the meeting on an inclusive and friendly note. Her use of the tag question 'yep?' followed by a second tag question 'yes?' achieves agreement and acceptance from Tony ('yeah that's a fair point').

Her final turn continues to index her purpose of mitigating her authority over the team, signified by the discourse markers 'OK then' and 'alright now' which help to slow down the pace and mark a move towards 'social' interaction (Holmes, 2006). She follows this with two further questions, but has to answer the latter question herself ('you think that's a good idea? good (.)'), which indicates that she is struggling to reduce the social distance between her and her team. She then makes a joke ('it's like pulling teeth'), and on realizing that this strategy has not broken the tension, she then role-breaks and comments humorously on the difficulty of the process ('it's supposed to be the nice part of it (.) um?').

Gina's use of DvD here indexes a shift from her position as an authority figure to a team colleague. In order to make this shift, she moves quickly from a direct, assertive style of engagement to a more indirect and inclusive one. However, there is some indication in this exchange that she is not entirely successful. Her use of a dialogic style that compels her to respond to her own comments ('you think that's a good idea? (.) good') and to laugh at her own joke ('it's like pulling teeth (*laughs*)') suggests that while other voices are keenly influencing her utterances, she is unable to turn this into a participatory exchange on this occasion.

In her follow-up interview, Gemma commented about this incident:

I found this a tricky matter to negotiate (.) I was trying my best not to upset the team but I know I did so (.) but in the end I had to show who was boss (*laughs*)

Discussion and concluding remarks

In her article about how US school children handle conflict and threat, Sheldon (1992) argued that while males tend to use single-voiced discourse in which the primary orientation is to the self, females displayed a double orientation towards both the self and members of the group. In our own data, we did not find evidence of this simple gender dichotomy. We *did* find examples where male leaders used strategies of DvD to manage the demands of leadership, but the incidences of use were fewer and less varied than in the female data. While our study has yet to conduct a supplementary, quantitative investigation of this pattern, it *has* found that there is a relationship between the use of DvD in the meeting data and a corresponding level of self-reflexivity about language use in the interview data. In cases where leaders, male and female, expressed anxiety about how they 'came across' to their peers, these individuals were more likely to use DvD as a leadership strategy. However, a clear gender difference in the interview data was that women tended to *compare* their leadership language with that of their male colleagues (as we saw in Sue's comment above), whereas there were no cases of senior men comparing themselves with women. We would argue that this is because women and men continue to be positioned differently and unequally within a male-dominated management structure (Terjesen et al., 2009), where senior women are under greater scrutiny than their male counterparts. One linguistic consequence of this, we suggest, is that senior women draw upon the compensating resource of DvD, which enables them to use leadership discourse strategies with a greater delicacy, discernment and adeptness than has been previously recognized in the field of gendered talk in the workplace (Angouri, in press; Baxter, 2003; Cameron, 2006; Holmes, 2006; Koller, 2004; Schnurr, 2008; Wodak, 1997).

We propose that the four types of DvD illustrated above offer a linguistic dimension to explanations of why women have a greater challenge than men to reach the most senior positions in business corporations. In an earlier study, Baxter (2008) argued that senior women use DvD as a self-regulatory mechanism to monitor, police, review and repair the way they appear and sound to their colleagues in order to avoid negative judgement. The linguistic expertise required to deploy such context-appropriate DvD strategies demands extra time, effort and energy, which might be seen as too much 'work' for some women. Furthermore, in line with Sheldon (1992), the use of DvD may have the effect of diluting the impact of words spoken, and consequently, the leadership message may be 'harder to hear' and have less apparent impact. If this is the case, DvD may offer a linguistic reason why women still struggle to 'make it to the top'.

Our current study supports this particular thesis in all respects except one. We would now posit that DvD is not simply a restrictive, self-regulatory strategy which mutes the leadership message, but alternatively, might be a powerful resource for developing the linguistic expertise of *all* leaders, whatever their gender. While this possibility might be more challenging for women in male-dominated (rather than gender-balanced) contexts to accomplish, our data suggest that female leaders can use DvD to their distinct advantage. In one interview, Nicola, a managing director of a logistics company, talked about how she capitalized on her knowledge of what individual team members needed from her as a leader so that they could function more effectively in meetings. This in turn helped her to fulfil her business and leadership agendas, as she explains here:

N: Alec would be the first to say and he's told us this many times that he's he onl- he works really really well when he feels in a supported (.) recognized space and so you have to tell Alec sev- many times that's great that's fantastic umm but could you just look at this

Nicola is a senior director in a male-dominated environment who has consciously developed her responsiveness to the voices of colleagues into a linguistic strategy for effective leadership. She was universally regarded as an excellent leader by her colleagues, both male and female.

So, we conclude that while DvD serves as a survival strategy for most senior women who work in male-dominated business contexts, it could also be a strategy for success. Female leaders might find themselves in a stronger position to progress to the boardroom if they were to acquire the linguistic expertise of double-voiced discourse. But until corporate institutions are more gender-balanced and sympathetic to women at leadership level, only the most determined, reflective and appropriately trained women are likely to develop the use of double-voiced discourse to their advantage.

Note

1. I have used a standard Conversation Analysis transcription system for both interview and meeting data:
 - (.) micro-pause
 - (1) pause of specified number of seconds
 - [overlapping speech or interruption
 - (laughs) paralinguistic features
 - emphasis
 - :: drawn out speech
 - ? rising intonation
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