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Grammatical Framing of Gender-Based Harassment in Japanese Media: Pragmatic Motivations and Responsibility

This study examines how Japanese media outlets covertly ‘frame’ (Fillmore 1976; Enfield 2023) gender-based harassment through grammatical choices, revealing pragmatic motivations underlying linguistic framing strategies. Drawing on Fillmore’s concept of framing as structured ways of interpreting experiences, this study analyses coverage of former Prime Minister Taro Aso’s controversial remarks about Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa in January 2024, using framing analysis of four major newspapers.

The analysis focuses on transitive verb constructions with Aso and Kamikawa as grammatical subjects, exploring how linguistic agency and structural transitivity serve pragmatic functions in constructing responsibility. As linguistic framing influences how situations are understood and responsibility is assigned, the study reveals how grammatical choices direct readers toward preferred interpretations.

Progressive outlets employed transitive constructions to emphasise Aso’s responsibility while treating Kamikawa distinctly: Asahi minimised her grammatical agency to frame institutional constraints, while Mainichi constructed her as agentive yet criticised her restrained response. Conservative outlets used contrasting strategies, with Sankei employing sophisticated reframing that backgrounded problematic elements while foregrounding positive interpretations.

This research demonstrates how grammatical framing achieves pragmatic goals in gendered political discourse, highlighting the ‘double burden’ faced by women politicians who experience both original harassment and subsequent judgment of their response strategies.

