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The Relativity of Linguistic Strategies: Rethinking Power and Solidarity in Gender and Dominance

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Introduction

In analyzing discourse, many researchers operate on the unstated assumption that all speakers proceed along similar lines of interpretation, so a particular example of discourse can be taken to represent how discourse works for all speakers. For some aspects of discourse, this is undoubtedly true. Yet a large body of sociolinguistic literature makes clear that, for many aspects of discourse, this is so only to the extent that cultural background is shared. To the extent that cultural backgrounds differ, lines of interpretation and habitual use of many linguistic strategies are likely to diverge. One thinks immediately and minimally of the work of Gumperz (1982), Erickson and Shultz (1982), Scollon and Scollon (1981), and Philips (1983). My own research shows that cultural difference is not limited to the gross and apparent levels of country of origin and native language, but also exists at the subcultural levels of ethnic heritage, class, geographic region, age, and gender. My earlier work (Tannen 1984, 1986) focuses on ethnic and regional style; my most recent work (Tannen 1990b) focuses on gender-related stylistic variation. I draw on this work here to demonstrate that specific linguistic strategies have widely divergent potential meanings.[1]

This insight is particularly significant for research on language and gender, much of which has sought to describe the linguistic means by which men dominate women in interaction. That men dominate women as a class, and that individual men often dominate individual women in interaction, are not in question; what I am problematizing is the source

and workings of domination and other intentions and effects. I will show that one cannot locate the source of domination, or of any interpersonal intention or effect, in linguistic strategies such as interruption, volubility, silence, and topic raising, as has been claimed. Similarly, one cannot locate the source of women's powerlessness in such linguistic strategies as indirectness, taciturnity, silence, and tag questions, as has also been claimed. The reason one cannot do this is that the same linguistic means can be used for different, even opposite, purposes and can have different, even opposite, effects in different contexts. Thus, a strategy that seems, or is, intended to dominate may in another context or in the mouth of another speaker be intended or used to establish connection. Similarly, a strategy that seems, or is, intended to create connection can in another context or in the mouth of another speaker be intended or used to establish dominance.

Put another way, the "true" intention or motive of any utterance cannot be determined from examination of linguistic form alone. For one thing, intentions and effects are not identical. For another, as the sociolinguistic literature has dramatized repeatedly (see especially McDermott & Tylbor 1983, Schegloff 1982, 1988, Erickson 1986, Duranti & Brenneis 1986), human interaction is a "joint production": everything that occurs results from the interaction of all participants. A major source of the ambiguity and polysemy of linguistic strategies is the paradoxical relationship between the dynamics of power and solidarity. This is the source that I will explore here.

Overview of the Chapter

In this chapter I first briefly explain the theoretical paradigm of power and solidarity. Then I show that linguistic strategies are potentially ambiguous (they could "mean" either power or solidarity) and polysemous (they could "mean" both). Third, I reexamine and expand the power and solidarity framework in light of cross-cultural research. Finally, I demonstrate the relativity of five linguistic strategies: indirectness, interruption, silence versus volubility, topic raising, and adversativeness (that is, verbal conflict).

Theoretical Background

Power and Solidarity

Since Brown and Gilman's (1960) introduction of the concept and subsequent elaborations of it, especially those of Friedrich (1972) and Brown and Levinson ([1978]1987), the dynamics of power and solidarity have been fundamental to sociolinguistic theory. (Fasold [1990] provides an overview.) Brown and Gilman based their framework on analysis of the use of pronouns in European languages which have two forms of the

second-person pronoun, such as the French *tu* and *vous*. In English the closest parallel is to be found in forms of address: first name versus title-last name. In Brown and Gilman's system, power is associated with nonreciprocal use of pronouns; in English, the parallel would be a situation in which one speaker addresses the other by first name but is addressed by title-last name (for example, doctor and patient, teacher and student, boss and secretary, building resident and elevator operator). Solidarity is associated with reciprocal pronoun use or symmetrical forms of address: both speakers address each other by *tu* or by *vous* (in English, by title-last name or by first name). Power governs asymmetrical relationships where one is subordinate to another; solidarity governs symmetrical relationships characterized by social equality and similarity.

In my previous work exploring the relationship between power and solidarity as it emerges in conversational discourse (Tannen 1984, 1986), I note that power and solidarity are in paradoxical relation to each other. That is, although power and solidarity, closeness and distance, seem at first to be opposites, each also entails the other. Any show of solidarity necessarily entails power, in that the requirement of similarity and closeness limits freedom and independence. At the same time, any show of power entails solidarity by involving participants in relation to each other. This creates a closeness that can be contrasted with the distance of individuals who have no relation to each other at all.

In Brown and Gilman's paradigm, the key to power is asymmetry, but it is often thought to be formality. This is seen in the following anecdote. I once entitled a lecture "The Paradox of Power and Solidarity." The respondent to my talk appeared wearing a three-piece suit and a knapsack on his back. The audience was amused by the association of the suit with power, the knapsack with solidarity. There was something immediately recognizable in this semiotic. Indeed, a professor wearing a knapsack might well mark solidarity with students at, for example, a protest demonstration. And wearing a three-piece suit to the demonstration might mark power by differentiating the wearer from the demonstrators, perhaps even reminding them of his dominant position in the institutional hierarchy. But wearing a three-piece suit to the board meeting of a corporation would mark solidarity with other board members, whereas wearing a knapsack in that setting would connote not solidarity but disrespect, a move in the power dynamic.

The Ambiguity of Linguistic Strategies

As the preceding example shows, the same symbol—a three-piece suit—can signal either power or solidarity, depending on, at least, the setting (e.g., board meeting or student demonstration), the habitual dress style of the individual, and the comparison of his clothing with that worn by others in the interaction. (I say "his" intentionally; the range of meanings would be quite different if a man's three-piece suit were worn by a woman.) This

provides an analogue to the ambiguity of linguistic strategies, which are signals in the semiotic system of language. As I have demonstrated at length in previous books, all linguistic strategies are potentially ambiguous. The power-solidarity dynamic is one fundamental source of ambiguity. What appear as attempts to dominate a conversation (an exercise of power) may actually be intended to establish rapport (an exercise of solidarity). This occurs because (as I have worded it elsewhere) power and solidarity are bought with the same currency: The same linguistic means can be used to create either or both.

This ambiguity can be seen in the following fleeting conversation. Two women were walking together from one building to another in order to attend a meeting. They were joined by a man they both knew who had just exited a third building on his way to the same meeting. One of the women greeted the man and remarked, "Where's your coat?" The man responded, "Thanks, Mom." His response framed the woman's remark as a gambit in a power exchange: a mother tells a child to put on his coat. Yet the woman might have intended the remark as showing friendly concern rather than parental caretaking. Was it power (condescending, on the model of parent to child) or solidarity (friendly, on the model of intimate peers)? Though the man's uptake is clear, the woman's intention in making the remark is not.

Another example comes from a letter written to me by a reader of *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*. A woman was at home when her partner arrived and announced that his archrival had invited him to contribute a chapter to a book. The woman remarked cheerfully how nice it was that the rival was initiating a rapprochement and an end to their rivalry by including her partner in his book. He told her she had got it wrong: because the rival would be the editor and he merely a contributor, the rival was actually trying to solidify his dominance. She interpreted the invitation in terms of solidarity. He interpreted it as an expression of power. Which was right? I don't know. The invitation was ambiguous; it could have "meant" either.

The Polysemy of Power and Solidarity

The preceding examples could be interpreted as not only ambiguous but polysemous. The question "Where's your coat?" shows concern *and* suggests a parent-child constellation. The invitation to contribute a chapter to a book brings editor and contributor closer *and* suggests a hierarchical relationship.

One more example will illustrate the polysemy of strategies signaling power and solidarity. If you have a friend who repeatedly picks up the check when you dine together, is she being generous and sharing her wealth, or is she trying to flaunt her money and remind you that she has more of it than you? Although the intention may be to make you feel good by her generosity, her repeated generosity may nonetheless make you feel

bad by reminding you that she has more money. Thus both of you are caught in the web of the ambiguity of power and solidarity: it is impossible to determine which was her real motive, and whether it justifies your response. On the other hand, even if you believe her motive was purely generous, your response is nonetheless justified because the fact that she has this generous impulse is evidence that she has more money than you, and her expressing the impulse reminds you of it. In other words, both interpretations exist at once: solidarity—she is paying to be nice—and power—her being nice in this way reminds you that she is richer. In this sense, the strategy is not just ambiguous with regard to power and solidarity but polysemous. This polysemy explains another observation that initially surprised me: Paules (1991) reports that waitresses in a restaurant she observed over time are offended not only by tips that are too small, but also by tips that are too large. The customers' inordinate beneficence implies that the amount of money left is insignificant to the tipper but significant to the waitress.

Brown and Gilman are explicit in their assumption that power is associated with asymmetrical relationships in which the power is held by the person in the one-up position. This is stated in their definition: "One person may be said to have power over another to the degree that he is able to control the behavior of the other. Power is a relationship between at least two persons, and it is nonreciprocal in the sense that both cannot have power in the same area of behavior" (p. 254). I have called attention, however, to the extent to which solidarity in itself can be a form of control. For example, a young woman complained about friends who "don't let you be different." If the friend says she has a particular problem and the woman says, "I don't have that problem," her friend is hurt and accuses her of putting her down, of acting superior. The assumption of similarity requires the friend to have a matching problem (Tannen 1990b).

Furthermore, although Brown and Gilman acknowledge that "power superiors may be solidary (parents, elder siblings)" and "power inferiors, similarly, may be as solidary as the old family retainer" (p. 254), most Americans are inclined to assume that solidarity implies closeness, whereas power implies distance.[2] Thus Americans regard the sibling relationship as the ultimate in solidarity: "sister" or "brother" can be used metaphorically to indicate closeness and equality.[3] In contrast, it is often assumed that hierarchy precludes closeness: employers and employees cannot "really" be friends. But being linked in a hierarchy necessarily brings individuals closer. This is an assumption underlying Watanabe's (1993) observation, in comparing American and Japanese group discussions, that whereas the Americans in her study saw themselves as individuals participating in a joint activity, the Japanese saw themselves as members of a group united by hierarchy. When reading Watanabe, I was caught up short by the term "united." My inclination had been to assume that hierarchy is distancing, not uniting.

The anthropological literature includes numerous discussions of cul-

tural contexts in which hierarchical relationships are seen as close and mutually, not unilaterally, empowering. For example, Beeman (1986) describes an Iranian interactional pattern he dubs "getting the lower hand." Taking the lower-status position enables an Iranian to invoke a protector schema by which the higher-status person is obligated to do things for him or her. Similarly, Yamada (1992) describes the Japanese relationship of *amae*, typified by the parent-child or employer-employee constellation. It binds two individuals in a hierarchical interdependence by which both have power in the form of obligations as well as rights vis-à-vis the other. Finally, Wolfowitz (1991) explains that respect/deference is experienced by Suriname Javanese not as subservience but as an assertion of claims. The Suriname Javanese example is particularly intriguing because it calls into question the association of asymmetry with power and distance. The style Wolfowitz calls respect-politeness is characterized by both social closeness and negative politeness.[4] It is hierarchical insofar as it is directional and unequal; however, the criterion for directionality is not status but age. The prototypical relationship characterized by respect politeness is grandchild-grandparent: a relationship that is both highly unequal and very close. Moreover, according to Wolfowitz, the Javanese assume that familial relations are inherently hierarchical, including age-graded siblings. Equality, in contrast, is associated with formal relationships that are also marked by social distance.

We can display these dynamics as a multidimensional grid of at least (and, potentially and probably, more) intersecting continua. The closeness/distance dimension can be placed on one axis and the hierarchy/equality one on another. (See Figure 7.1.) Indeed, the intersection of these dimensions—that is, the co-incidence of hierarchy and closeness—may account, at least in part, for what I am calling the ambiguity and polysemy of power and solidarity.

Similarity/Difference

There is one more aspect of the dynamics of power and solidarity that bears discussion before I demonstrate the relativity of linguistic strategies. That is the similarity/difference continuum and its relation to the other dynamics discussed.

For Brown and Gilman solidarity implies sameness, in contrast to power, about which they observe, "In general terms, the *V* form is linked with differences between persons" (p. 256). This is explicit in their definition of "the solidarity semantic":

> Now we are concerned with a new set of relations which are symmetrical; for example, *attended the same school* or *have the same parents* or *practice the same profession*. If A has the same parents as B, B has the same parents as A. Solidarity is the name we give to the general relationship and solidarity is symmetrical. (257; italics in original)
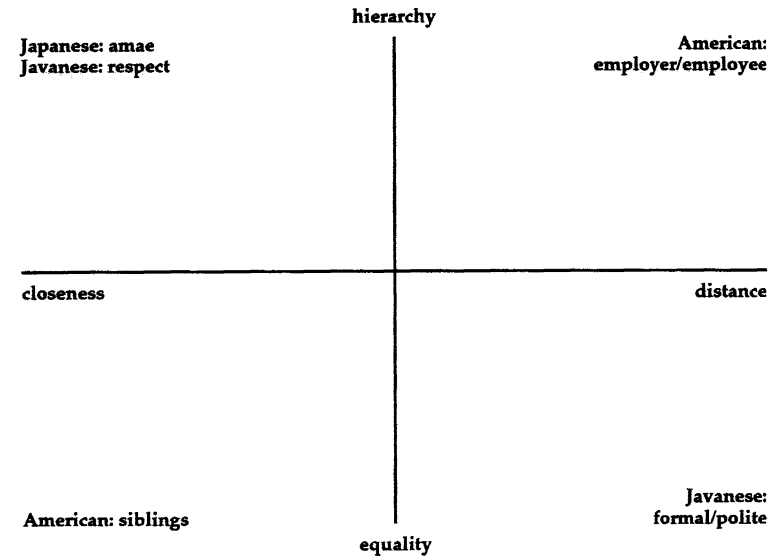
Fig. 7.1 The intersecting dimensions of closeness/distance and hierachy/equality.

The similarity/difference continuum calls to mind what I have discussed elsewhere (Tannen 1984, 1986) as the double bind of communication.[5] In some ways, we are all the same. But in other ways we are all different. Communication is a double bind in the sense that anything we say to honor our similarity violates our difference, and anything we say to honor our difference violates our sameness. Thus a complaint can be lodged: "Don't think I'm different." ("If you prick me, do I not bleed?" one might protest, like Shylock.) But a complaint can also be lodged: "Don't think I'm the same." (Thus, for example, women who have primary responsibility for the care of small children will be effectively excluded from activities or events at which day care is not provided.) Becker (1982:125) expresses this double bind as "a matter of continual self-correction between exuberance (i.e., friendliness: you are like me) and deficiency (i.e., respect: you are not me)." All these formulations elaborate on the tension between similarity and difference, or what Becker and Oka (1974) call "the cline of person," a semantic dimension they suggest may be the one most basic to language: that is, one deals with the world and the objects and people in it in terms of how close (and I would add, similar) they are to oneself.

As a result of these dynamics, similarity is a threat to hierarchy. This

is dramatized in Harold Pinter's play *Mountain Language*. Composed of four brief scenes, the play is set in a political prison in the capital city of an unnamed country that is under dictatorial siege. In the second scene, an old mountain woman is finally allowed to visit her son across a table as a guard stands over them. But whenever she tries to speak to her son, the guard silences her, telling the prisoner to tell his mother that it is forbidden to speak their mountain language in the capital. Then he continues:

GUARD

. . . And I'll tell you another thing. I've got a wife and three kids. And you're all a pile of shit.

Silence.

PRISONER

I've got a wife and three kids.

GUARD

You've what?

Silence.

You've got what?

Silence.

What did you say to me? You've got what?

Silence.

You've got *what?*

He picks up the telephone and dials one digit.

Sergeant? I'm in the Blue Room ... yes ... I thought I should report, Sergeant ... I think I've got a joker in here.

The Sergeant soon enters and asks, "What joker?" The stage darkens and the scene ends. The final scene opens on the same setting, with the prisoner bloody and shaking, his mother shocked into speechlessness. The prisoner was beaten for saying, "I've got a wife and three kids." This quotidian statement, which would be unremarkable in casual conversation, was insubordinate in the hierarchical context of brutal oppression because the guard had just made the same statement. When the guard said, "I've got a wife and three kids. And you're a pile of shit," he was claiming, "I am different from you." One could further interpret his words to imply, "I'm human, and you're not. Therefore I have a right to dominate and abuse you." By repeating the guard's words verbatim, the prisoner was then saying, "I am the same as you."[6] By claiming *his* humanity and implicitly denying the guard's assertion that he is "a pile of shit," the prisoner challenged the guard's right to dominate him.[7] Similarity is antithetical to hierarchy.

The ambiguity of closeness, a spatial metaphor representing similarity

or involvement, emerges in a nonverbal aspect of this scene. In the performance I saw, the guard repeated the question "You've got what?" while moving steadily closer to the prisoner, until he was bending over him, nose to nose. The guard's moving closer was a kinesic/proxemic analogue to the prisoner's statement, but with opposite effect: he was "closing in." The guard moved closer and brought his face into contact with the prisoner's not as a sign of affection (which such actions could signify in another context) but as a threat. Closeness, then, can mean aggression rather than affiliation in the context of a hierarchical rather than symmetrical relationship.

The Relativity of Linguistic Strategies

The potential ambiguity of linguistic strategies to mark both power and solidarity in face-to-face interaction has made mischief in language and gender research, wherein it is tempting to assume that whatever women do results from, or creates, their powerlessness and whatever men do results from, or creates, their dominance. But all the linguistic strategies that have been taken by analysts as evidence of dominance can in some circumstances be instruments of affiliation. For the remainder of this chapter I demonstrate the relativity of linguistic strategies by considering each of the following strategies in turn: indirectness, interruption, silence versus volubility, topic raising, and adversativeness, or verbal conflict. All of these strategies have been "found" by researchers to express or create dominance. I will demonstrate that they are ambiguous or polysemous with regard to dominance or closeness. Once again I am not arguing that these strategies *cannot* be used to create dominance or powerlessness, much less that dominance and powerlessness do not exist. Rather, my purpose is to demonstrate that the "meaning" of any linguistic strategy can vary, depending at least on context, the conversational styles of participants, and the interaction of participants' styles and strategies. Therefore we will have to study the operation of specific linguistic strategies more closely to understand how dominance and powerlessness are expressed and created in interaction.

Indirectness

Lakoff (1975) identifies two benefits of indirectness: defensiveness and rapport. Defensiveness refers to a speaker's preference not to go on record with an idea in order to be able to disclaim, rescind, or modify it if it does not meet with a positive response. The rapport benefit of indirectness results from the pleasant experience of getting one's way not because one demanded it (power) but because the other person wanted the same thing (solidarity). Many researchers have focused on the defensive or power benefit of indirectness and ignored the payoff in rapport or solidarity.

The claim by Conley, O'Barr, and Lind (1979) that women's language

is really powerless language has been particularly influential. In this view women's tendency to be indirect is taken as evidence that women don't feel entitled to make demands. Surely there are cases in which this is true. Yet it can easily be demonstrated that those who feel entitled to make demands may prefer not to, seeking the payoff in rapport. Furthermore, the ability to get one's demands met without expressing them directly can be a sign of power rather than of the lack of it. An example I have used elsewhere (Tannen 1986) is the Greek father who answers, "If you want, you can go," to his daughter's inquiry about going to a party. Because of the lack of enthusiasm of his response, the Greek daughter understands that her father would prefer she not go and "chooses" not to go. (A "real" approval would have been "Yes, of course, you should go.") I argue that this father did not feel powerless to give his daughter orders. Rather, a communicative system was conventionalized by which he and she could both preserve the appearance, and possibly the belief, that she chose not to go rather than simply obeying his command.

Far from being powerless, this father felt so powerful that he did not need to give his daughter orders; he simply needed to let her know his preference, and she would accommodate to it. By this reasoning, indirectness is a prerogative of the powerful. By the same reasoning, a master who says, "It's cold in here," may expect a servant to make a move to close a window, but a servant who says the same thing is not likely to see his employer rise to correct the situation and make him more comfortable. Indeed, a Frenchman who was raised in Brittany tells me that his family never gave bald commands to their servants but always communicated orders in indirect and superpolite form. This pattern renders less surprising the finding of Bellinger and Gleason (1982, reported in Gleason 1987) that fathers' speech to their young children had a higher incidence than mothers' of both direct imperatives (such as "Turn the bolt with the wrench") *and* implied indirect imperatives (for example, "The wheel is going to fall off").

The use of indirectness can hardly be understood without the cross-cultural perspective. Many Americans find it self-evident that directness is logical and aligned with power whereas indirectness is akin to dishonesty as well as subservience. But for speakers raised in most of the world's cultures, varieties of indirectness are the norm in communication. In Japanese interaction, for example, it is well known that saying "no" is considered too face-threatening to risk, so negative responses are phrased as positive ones: one never says "no," but initiates understand from the form of the "yes" whether it is truly a "yes" or a polite "no." And this applies to men as well as women.

The American association of indirectness with female style is not culturally universal. Keenan (1974) found that in a Malagasy-speaking village on the island of Madagascar, women are direct and men indirect. But this in no way implies that the women are more powerful than men in this society. Quite the contrary, Malagasy men are socially dominant—and

their indirect style is more highly valued. Keenan found that women were widely believed to debase the language with their artless directness, whereas men's elaborate indirectness was widely admired. In my own research (Tannen 1981) I compared Greeks and Americans with regard to their tendency to interpret a question as an indirect means of making a request. I found that whereas American women were more likely to take an indirect interpretation of a sample conversation, Greek men were as likely as Greek women, and more likely than American men *or women,* to take an indirect interpretation. Greek men, of course, are not less powerful vis-à-vis women than American men.

Indirectness, then, is not in itself a strategy of subordination. Rather, it can be used by either the powerful or the powerless. The interpretation of a given utterance and the likely response to it depend on the setting, on individuals' status and their relationship to each other, and also on the linguistic conventions that are ritualized in the cultural context.

Interruption

That interruption is a sign of dominance has been as widespread an assumption in research as in conventional wisdom. Most frequently cited is West and Zimmerman's (1983) finding that men dominate women by interrupting them in conversation. Tellingly, however, Deborah James and Sandra Clarke (this volume), reviewing research on gender and interruption, do not find a clear pattern of males interrupting females. Especially significant is their discovery that studies comparing amount of interruption in all-female versus all-male conversations find more interruption, not less, in all-female groups. Though initially surprising, this finding reinforces the need to distinguish linguistic strategies by their interactional purpose. Does the overlap show support for the speaker, or does it contradict or change the topic? I explore this phenomenon in detail elsewhere (Tannen 1989b) but I will include a brief summary of the argument here.

The phenomenon commonly referred to as "interruption," but more properly referred to as "overlap," is a paradigm case of the ambiguity of power and solidarity. This is clearly demonstrated with reference to a two and a half hour dinner table conversation that I have analyzed at length (Tannen 1984). My analysis makes clear that some speakers consider talking along with another a show of enthusiastic participation in the conversation (solidarity, creating connections); others, however, assume that only one voice should be heard at a time, so for them any overlap is an interruption (an attempt to wrest the floor, a power play). The result, in the conversation I analyzed, was that enthusiastic listeners who overlapped cooperatively, talking along to establish rapport, were perceived by overlap-resistant speakers as interrupting. This doubtless contributed to the impression reported by the overlap-resistant speakers that the cooperative overlappers had "dominated" the conversation. Indeed, the tape and transcript also give the impression that the cooperative overlappers

had dominated, because the overlap-aversant participants tended to stop speaking as soon as another voice began.

It is worth emphasizing the role of balance in determining whether an overlap becomes an interruption in the negative or power-laden sense. If one speaker repeatedly overlaps and another repeatedly gives way, the resulting communication is asymmetrical, and the effect (though not necessarily the intent) is domination. But if both speakers avoid overlap, or if both speakers overlap each other and win out equally, there is symmetry and no domination, regardless of speakers' intentions. Importantly, though, and this will be discussed in the last section under the rubric of adversativeness, the very engagement in a symmetrical struggle for the floor can be experienced as creating rapport, in the spirit of ritual opposition analogous to sports. Further, an imbalance can result from differences in the purpose for which overlap is used. If one speaker tends to talk along in order to show support, and the other chimes in to take the floor, the floor-taking overlapper will tend to dominate.

Thus, to understand whether an overlap is an interruption, one must consider the context (for example, cooperative overlapping is more likely to occur in casual conversation among friends than in a job interview), the speakers' habitual styles (for example, overlaps are more likely not to be interruptions among those with a style I call "high-involvement"), and the interaction of their styles (for example, an interruption is more likely to occur between speakers whose styles differ with regard to pausing and overlap). This is not to say that one cannot use interruption to dominate a conversation or a person, only that it is not self-evident from the observation of overlap that an interruption has occurred, or was intended, or was intended to dominate.

Silence Versus Volubility

The excerpt from Pinter's *Mountain Language* dramatizes the assumption that powerful people do the talking and powerless people are silenced. This is the trope that underlies the play's title and its central theme: By outlawing their language, the oppressors silence the mountain people, robbing them of their ability to speak and hence of their humanity. In the same spirit, many scholars (for example, Spender 1980) have claimed that men dominate women by silencing them. There are obviously circumstances in which this is accurate. Coates (1986) notes numerous proverbs that instruct women, like children, to be silent.

Silence alone, however, is not a self-evident sign of powerlessness, nor volubility a self-evident sign of domination. A theme running through Komarovsky's (1962) classic study, *Blue Collar Marriage*, is that many of the wives interviewed said they talked more than their husbands: "He's tongue-tied," one woman said (p. 13); "My husband has a great habit of not talking," said another (p. 162); "He doesn't say much but he means what he says and the children mind him," said a third (p. 353). Yet there is

no question that these husbands are dominant in their marriages, as the last of these quotes indicates.

Indeed, taciturnity itself can be an instrument of power. This is precisely the claim of Sattel (1983), who argues that men use silence to exercise power over women. Sattel illustrates with a scene from Erica Jong's novel *Fear of Flying*, only a brief part of which is presented here. The first line of dialogue is spoken by Isadora, the second by her husband, Bennett. (Spaced dots indicate omitted text; unspaced dots are a form of punctuation included in the original text.)

"Why do you turn on me? What did I do?"

Silence.

"What did I do?"

He looks at her as if her not knowing were another injury.

"Look, let's just go to sleep now. Let's just forget it."

"Forget what?"

He says nothing.

. . .

"It was something in the movie, wasn't it?"

"What, in the movie?"

". . . It was the funeral scene. ... The little boy looking at his dead mother. Something got you there. That was when you got depressed."

Silence.

"Well, *wasn't* it?"

Silence.

"Oh come on, Bennett, you're making me *furious*. Please tell me. Please."

The painful scene continues in this vein until Bennett tries to leave the room and Isadora tries to detain him. The excerpt certainly seems to support Sattel's claim that Bennett's silence subjugates his wife, as the scene ends with her literally lowered to the floor, clinging to his pajama leg. But the reason his silence is an effective weapon is her insistence that he tell her what's wrong. If *she* receded into silence, leaving the room or refusing to talk to him, his silence would be disarmed. The devastation results not from his silence alone but from the combination of his silence and her insistence on talking, in other words, the interaction of their differing styles.[8]

Researchers have counted numbers of words spoken or timed length of talk in order to demonstrate that men talk more than women and thereby dominate interactions. (See James and Drakich [this volume] for a summary of research on amount of talk.) Undoubtedly there is truth to this observation in some settings. But the association of volubility with dominance does not hold for all settings and all cultures. Imagine, for example,

an interrogation, in which the interrogator does little of the talking but holds all the power.

The relativity of the "meaning" of taciturnity and volubility is highlighted in Margaret Mead's (1977) discussion of "end linkage," a concept developed jointly by Mead, Gregory Bateson, and Geoffrey Gorer. Their claim is that universal and biologically constructed relationships, such as parent-child, are linked to different behaviors in different cultures. One of their paradigm examples is the apportionment of spectatorship and exhibitionism. In middle class American culture, children, who are obviously the weaker party in the constellation, are expected to exhibit while their more powerful parents are spectators; in contrast, in middle- and upper-class British culture, exhibition is associated with the parental role and spectatorship with children, who are expected to be seen and not heard.

Furthermore, volubility and taciturnity, too, can result from style differences rather than speakers' intentions. As I (Tannen 1984, 1985) and others (Scollon & Scollon 1981, Scollon 1985) have discussed at length, there are cultural and subcultural differences in the length of pauses expected between and within speaking turns. In my study of the dinner table conversation, those who expected shorter pauses between conversational turns began to feel an uncomfortable silence ensuing while their longer-pausing friends were simply waiting for what they regarded as the "normal" end-of-turn pause. The result was that the shorter pausers ended up doing most of the talking, another sign interpreted by their interlocutors as dominating the conversation. But their intentions had been to fill in what to them were potentially uncomfortable silences, that is, to grease the conversational wheels and ensure the success of the conversation. In their view, the taciturn participants were uncooperative, failing to do their part to maintain the conversation.

Thus silence and volubility, too, cannot be taken to "mean" power or powerlessness, domination or subjugation. Rather, both may imply either power or solidarity, depending on the criteria discussed.

Topic Raising

Shuy (1982) is typical in assuming that the speaker who raises the most topics is dominating a conversation. However, in a study I conducted (Tannen 1990a) of videotaped conversations among friends of varying ages recorded by Dorval (1990), it emerged that the speaker who raised the most topics was not always dominant, as judged by other criteria (for example, who took the lead in addressing the investigator when he entered the room). In a twenty-minute conversation between a pair of sixth-grade girls who identified themselves as best friends, Shannon raised the topic of Julia's relationship with Mary by saying, "Too bad you and Mary are not good friends anymore." The conversation proceeded and continued to focus almost exclusively on Julia's troubled relationship with Mary.

Similarly, most of the conversation between two tenth-grade girls was about Nancy, but Sally raised the topic of Nancy's problems. In response to Nancy's question "Well, what do you want to talk about?" Sally said, "Your mama. Did you talk to your mama?" The ensuing conversation focuses on happenings involving Nancy's mother and boyfriend. Overall, Sally raised nine topics, Nancy seven. However, all but one of the topics Sally raised were questions focused on Nancy. If raising more topics is a sign of dominance, Sally controlled the conversation when she raised topics, although even this was subject to Nancy's collaboration by picking them up. It may or may not be the case that Sally controlled the conversation, but the nature of her dominance is surely other than what is normally assumed by that term if the topics she raised were all about Nancy.

Finally, the effect of raising topics may also be an effect of differences in pacing and pausing, as discussed with regard to my study of dinner-table conversation. A speaker who thinks the other has no more to say on a given topic may try to contribute to the conversation by raising another topic. But a speaker who was intending to say more and was simply waiting for the appropriate turn-exchange pause will feel that the floor was taken away and the topic aggressively switched. Yet again, the impression of dominance might simply result from style differences.

Adversativeness: Conflict and Verbal Aggression

Research on gender and language has consistently found male speakers to be competitive and more likely to engage in conflict (for example, by arguing, issuing commands, and taking opposing stands) and females to be cooperative and more likely to avoid conflict (for example, by agreeing, supporting, and making suggestions rather than commands). (Maltz & Borker [1982] summarize some of this research.) Ong (1981:51) argues that "adversativeness" is universal, but "conspicuous or expressed adversativeness is a larger element in the lives of males than of females."

In my analysis of videotapes of male and female friends talking to each other (Tannen 1990a), I have begun to investigate how male adversativeness and female cooperation are played out, complicated, and contradicted in conversational discourse. In analyzing videotapes of friends talking, for example, I found a sixth-grade boy saying to his best friend,

> Seems like, if there's a fight, me and you are automatically in it. And everyone else wants to go against you and everything. It's hard to agree without someone saying something to you.

In contrast, girls of the same age (and also of most other ages whose talk I examined) spent a great deal of time discussing the dangers of anger and contention. In affirming their own friendship, one girl told her friend,

> Me and you never get in fights hardly,

and

> I mean like if I try to talk to you, you'll say, "Talk to me!" And if you try to talk to me, I'll talk to you.

These examples of gendered styles of interaction are illuminated by the insight that power and solidarity are mutually evocative. As seen in the statement of the sixth-grade boy, opposing other boys in teams entails affiliation within the team. The most dramatic instance of male affiliation resulting from conflict with others is bonding among soldiers, a phenomenon explored by Norman (1990).

By the same token, girls' efforts to support their friends necessarily entail exclusion of or opposition to other girls. This emerges in Hughes's (1988) study of girls playing a street game called foursquare, in which four players occupy one square each and bounce a ball into each other's squares. The object of the game is to eliminate players by hitting the ball into their square in such a way that they fail to hit it back. But this effort to "get people out" is at odds with the social injunction under which the girls operate, to be "nice" and not "mean." The girls resolved the conflict, and formed "incipient teams" composed of friends, by claiming that their motivation in eliminating some players was to enable others (their friends) to enter the game, since eliminated players are replaced by awaiting players. In the girls' terms "getting someone out" was "nice-mean," because it was reframed as "getting someone [a friend] in." This dynamic is also supported by my analysis of the sixth-grade girls' conversation: Most of their talk was devoted to allying themselves with each other in opposition to another girl who was not present. So their cooperation (solidarity) also entails opposition (power).

For boys power entails solidarity not only by opposition to another team, but by opposition to each other. In the videotapes of friends talking, I found that all the conversations between young boys (and none between young girls) had numerous examples of teasing and mock attack.[9] In examining preschool conversations transcribed and analyzed by Corsaro and Rizzo (1990:34), I was amazed to discover that a fight could initiate rather than preclude friendship. In the following episode, a little boy intrudes on two others and an angry fight ensues. This is the way Corsaro and Rizzo present the dialogue:

> Two boys (Richard and Denny) have been playing with a slinky on the stairway leading to the upstairs playhouse in the school. During their play two other boys (Joseph and Martin) enter and stand near the bottom of the stairs.
>
> Denny: Go!
>
> (Martin now runs off, but Joseph remains and he eventually moves halfway up the stairs.)
>
> Joseph: These are big shoes.

> Richard: I'll punch him right in the eye.
>
> Joseph: I'll punch you right in the nose.
>
> Denny: I'll punch him with my big fist.
>
> Joseph: I'll- I- I-
>
> Richard: And he'll be bumpety, bumpety and punched out all the way down the stairs.
>
> Joseph: I- I- I'll- I could poke your eyes out with my gun. I have a gun.
>
> Denny: A gun! I'll- I- I- even if-
>
> Richard: I have a gun too.
>
> Denny: And I have guns too and it's bigger than yours and it poo-poo down. That's poo-poo.
>
> (All three boys laugh at Denny's reference to poo-poo.)
>
> Richard: Now leave.
>
> Joseph: Un-uh. I gonna tell you to put on- on the gun on your hair and the poop will come right out on his face.
>
> Denny: Well.
>
> Richard: Slinky will snap right on your face too.
>
> Denny: And my gun will snap right-

Up until this point I had no difficulty interpreting the interaction: the boys were engaged in a fight occasioned by Joseph's intrusion into Richard and Denny's play. But what happened next surprised and, at first, perplexed me. Corsaro and Rizzo describe it this way:

> At this point a girl (Debbie) enters, says she is Batgirl, and asks if they have seen Robin. Joseph says he is Robin, but she says she is looking for a different Robin and then runs off. After Debbie leaves, Denny and Richard move into the playhouse and Joseph follows. From this point to the end of the episode the three boys play together.

At first I was incredulous that so soon after their seemingly hostile encounter, the boys played amicably together. Finally I came to the conclusion that for Joseph picking a fight was a way to enter into interaction with the other boys, and engaging him in the fight was Richard and Denny's way of accepting him into their interaction—at least after he acquitted himself satisfactorily in the fight. In this light, I could see that the reference to poo-poo, which occasioned general laughter, was the beginning of a reframing from fighting to playing.[10]

Folklore provides numerous stories in which fighting precipitates friendship among men. One example is the Sumerian Gilgamesh epic, as recounted by Campbell (1964:87–92). Enkidu, a hairy man who lives with wild animals, is created by the mother-goddess to tame Gilgamesh, a god-king who has grown too arrogant and tyrannical. A hunter who

encounters Enkidu appeals to Gilgamesh for help in subduing him. Gilgamesh sends the temple prostitute to lure Enkidu away from his wild animal companions. When the prostitute tells Enkidu about Gilgamesh,

> his heart grew light. He yearned for a friend. "Very well!" he said. "And I shall challenge him."

When they meet:

> They grappled, locked like bulls. The doorpost of the temple shattered; the wall shook. And, at last, Gilgamesh relented. His fury gone, he turned away. And the two, thereafter, were inseparable friends. (p. 89)

When Enkidu dies, Gilgamesh is distraught. In this legend, fighting each other is the means to establishing lifelong friendship.[11]

A modern-day academic equivalent is to be found in the situation of fruitful collaborations that began when an audience member publicly challenged a speaker after his talk. Finally, Penelope Eckert (p.c.) informs me that in her research on high school students (Eckert 1990) she was told by boys, but never by girls, that their close friendships began by fighting.

These examples call into question the correlation of aggression and power on one hand, and cooperation and solidarity on the other. Again the cross-cultural perspective provides an invaluable corrective to the temptation to align aggression with power as distinguished from solidarity. Many cultures of the world see arguing as a pleasurable sign of intimacy. Schiffrin (1984) shows that among lower-middle-class men *and women* of East European Jewish background, friendly argument is a means of being sociable. Frank (1988) shows a Jewish couple who tend to polarize and take argumentative positions, but they are not fighting; they are staging a kind of public sparring, where both fighters are on the same team. Byrnes (1986) claims that Germans find American students uninformed and uncommitted because they are reluctant to argue politics with new acquaintances. For their part Americans find German students belligerent because they provoke arguments about American foreign policy with Americans they have just met.

Greek conversation provides an example of a cultural style that places more positive value, for both women and men, on dynamic opposition. Kakava (1989) replicates Schiffrin's findings by showing how a Greek family enjoy opposing each other in dinner table conversation. In another study of modern Greek conversation, Tannen and Kakava (1992) find speakers routinely disagreeing when they actually agree and using diminutive name forms and other terms of endearment—markers of closeness—precisely when they are opposing each other.[12] These patterns can be seen in the following excerpt from a conversation that took place in Greece between an older Greek woman and me. The woman, whom I call Ms. Stella, has just told me that she complained to the police about a construction crew that illegally continued drilling and pounding through the siesta hours, disturbing her nap:

Deborah: Echete dikio.
Stella: Ego echo dikio. Kopella mou, den xero an echo dikio i den echo dikio. Alla ego yperaspizomai ta symferonta mou kai ta dikaiomata mou.

Deborah: You're right.
Stella: I am right. My dear girl, I don't know if I'm right or I'm not right. But I am watching out for my interests and my rights.

My response to Ms. Stella's complaint is to support her by agreeing. But she disagrees with my agreement by reframing my statement in her own terms rather than simply accepting it by stopping after "I am right." She also marks her divergence from my frame with the endearment "kopella mou" (literally, "my girl," but idiomatically closer to "my dear girl").

In another conversation, one which, according to Kakava, is typical of her family's sociable argument, the younger sister has said that she cannot understand why the attractive young woman who is the prime minister Papandreou's girlfriend would have an affair with such an old man. The older sister, Christina, argues that the woman may have felt that in having an affair with the prime minister she was doing something notable. Her sister replied,

> Poly megalo timima re Christinaki na pliroseis pantos.

> It's a very high price to pay, *re* Chrissie, anyway.

I use the English diminutive form "Chrissie" to reflect the Greek diminutive ending *-aki*, but the particle *re* cannot really be translated; it is simply a marker of closeness that is typically used when disagreeing, as in the ubiquitously heard expression "Ochi, re" ("No, *re*").

Conclusion

The intersection of language and gender provides a rich site for analyzing how power and solidarity are created in discourse. But prior research in this area evidences the danger of linking linguistic forms with interactional intentions such as dominance. In trying to understand how speakers use language, we must consider the context (in every sense, including at least textual, relational, and institutional constraints), the speakers' conversational styles, and, most crucially, the interaction of their styles with each other.

Attempts to understand what goes on between women and men in conversation are muddled by the ambiguity of power and solidarity. The same linguistic means can accomplish either, and every utterance combines elements of both. Scholars, however, like individuals in interaction, are likely to see only one and not the other, like the picture that cannot be seen for what it is—simultaneously a chalice and two faces—but can only be seen alternately as one or the other. In attempting the impossible task of

keeping both images in focus at once, we may at least succeed in switching from one to the other rapidly and regularly enough to deepen our understanding of the dynamics underlying interaction such as power and solidarity as well as gender and language use.

NOTES

This chapter is a significantly revised, rewritten, and enlarged version of a paper entitled "Rethinking power and solidarity in gender and dominance," in Kira Hall, Jean-Pierre Koenig, Michael Meacham, Sondra Reinman, & Laurel A. Sutton (Eds.) *Proceedings of the 16th Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistic Society* (519–529). Berkeley: Linguistics Department, University of California, 1990. The rethinking and rewriting were carried out while I was in residence at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey, for which I am grateful to Clifford Geertz and the other faculty members of the Institute's School of Social Science.

1. I use the term "strategy" in its standard sociolinguistic sense, to refer simply to a way of speaking. No implication is intended of deliberate planning, as is the case in the common parlance use of such expressions as "military strategy." Neither, however, as Gumperz (1982) observes, are linguistic strategies "unconscious." Rather they are best thought of as "automatic." That is, people speak in a particular way without "consciously" thinking it through, but are aware, if questioned, of how they spoke and what they were trying to accomplish by talking in that way. This is in contrast to the "unconscious" motives of Freudian theory about which an individual would be unaware if questioned. (For example, most men would vigorously deny that they want to kill their fathers and marry their mothers, but a Freudian might claim that they do, only this wish is unconscious.)

2. I myself have made the observation that asymmetry is distancing whereas symmetry implies closeness, for example, with regard to the ritual of "troubles talk" and the way it often misfires between women and men (Tannen 1990b). Many women talk about troubles as a way of feeling closer, but many men frequently interpret the description of troubles as a request for advice, which they kindly offer. I have observed that this not only cuts off the troubles talk, which was the real point of the discourse, but also introduces asymmetry: if one person says she has a problem and another says she has the same problem, they are symmetrically arrayed and their similarity brings them closer. But if one person has a problem and the other has the solution, the one with the solution is one-up, and the asymmetry is distancing—just the opposite of what was sought by initiating the ritual.

3. This assumption is made explicit by Klagsbrun (1992:12), who writes, in a book about sibling relationships, "Unlike the ties between parents and children, the connection among siblings is a horizontal one. That is, sibs exist on the same plane, as peers, more or less equals." This comes immediately after she gives a pivotal example of how frustrated she was as a child by always being bested by her older brother. It is clear from the example that she and her brother were not equals: that he was older, and that he was male, were crucial factors in their rivalry and in his unbeatability. Much of the rest of Klagsbrun's book illustrates the fundamental inequality of siblings.

4. Negative politeness, as discussed by Brown and Levinson ([1978]1987), entails honoring others' needs not to be imposed on.

5. Scollon (1982:344–345) explains that all communication is a double bind because one must serve, with every utterance, the conflicting needs to be left alone (negative face) and to be accepted as a member of society (positive face). The term "double bind" traces to Bateson (1972).

6. I have demonstrated at length (Tannen 1987, 1989a) that repeating another's words creates rapport on a metalevel: It is a ratification of the other's words, evidence of participation in the same universe of discourse.

7. After the oral presentation of this paper both Gary Holland and Michael Chandler pointed out that the prisoner may be heard as implying the second part of the guard's statement: "and you're a pile of shit."

8. This scene illustrates what Bateson (1972) calls "complementary schismogenesis": each person's style drives the other into increasingly exaggerated forms of the opposing behavior. The more he refuses to tell her what's wrong, the more desperate she becomes to break through his silence. The more she pressures him to tell her, the more adamant he becomes about refusing to do so.

9. Some examples are given in Tannen (1990a, 1990b). Whereas the boys made such gestures as shooting each other with invisible guns, the girls made such gestures as reaching out and adjusting a friend's headband.

10. Elsewhere (Tannen 1990b:163–165) I discuss this example in more detail and note the contrast that the boys fight when they want to play, and the girl avoids disagreeing even when she does in fact disagree.

11. I was led to this legend by Bly (1990:243–244). In Bly's rendition, Gilgamesh is motivated by a desire to befriend Enkidu, the wild man.

12. Sifianou (1992) independently observes the use of diminutives as solidarity markers in Greek conversation.

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8

Who's Got the Floor?

CAROLE EDELSKY

Introduction

Though originating as and concluding with an analysis of gender and language, this study is primarily an initial investigation into that interactional structure known as "the floor." As such, it also entails a re-view of "turn." Using inferred participants' meanings rather than technical definitions, "floor" and "turn" were defined and two kinds of floors were identified in five informal committee meetings. One was the usual orderly, one-at-a-time type of floor; the other, a collaborative venture where two or more people either took part in an apparent free-for-all or jointly built one idea, operating "on the same wavelength."

The present chapter will follow an order that reveals how a piece of sociolinguistic research was conducted when both variables and hypotheses were allowed to emerge from the data (Glaser & Strauss 1967). It will also demonstrate that data analysis begins well before the traditional "data analysis stage" in research; that is, that transcribing data is at once problematic, intuition-producing, and fraught with often unreported yet important decisions. The sequence of presentation will be: (a) the original reasons for and initial procedures in the study; (b) the impetus (transcription display problems and the existence of collaborative floors) for the eventual research questions (defining the floor and describing two types, and investigating gender differences in relation to floor types); (c) a critical review of the literature dealing with floors and turns; (d) answers to the definitional questions regarding floor (and turn); (e) procedures for pre-