

twoPower Maneuvers and Connection Maneuvers
in Family Interaction

Family interaction¹ has long been the object of study by scholars in a wide range of fields, but their ranks have been joined by linguists and linguistic anthropologists relatively recently. Prominent among these have been researchers concerned with understanding children's acquisition of language, such as Shoshana Blum-Kulka (1997) and Elinor Ochs and her colleagues and students (Ochs et al. 1996; Ochs & Taylor 1992a, 1992b, 1995; Ochs et al. 1992). My own interest in family interaction (Tannen 2001, 2003b) has developed out of my continuing focus on the language of everyday conversation in general and of interpersonal relationships in particular (Tannen 1984, 1986, 2007 [1989]). In extending my analysis of conversational discourse to the domain of family dis-

1. The power connection grid was first presented in Tannen (1994) and is reproduced here with permission from Oxford University Press. The theoretical background on power and solidarity as it applies to mothers is based on sections previously included in Tannen (2003b). The introductory sections and parts of the analysis of the "homecoming" example also appear in Tannen (2003a). The rest of this chapter is appearing here for the first time. I would like to thank the generous and open-hearted families who participated in the project; the research assistants who shadowed the families, transcribed the tapes, and directed me to examples that matched my interests; and Shari Kendall, who ran the project and without whom I would never have undertaken it in the first place.

course, I draw upon and contribute to two theoretical frameworks I have been developing for a number of years: first, the ambiguity and polysemy of power and solidarity (Tannen 1994), and second, the linguistic framing of verbal interaction (Tannen & Wallat 1993 [1987], Tannen 1996). I have been developing these frameworks both as a continuation of my overriding goal of understanding what drives interactional discourse and also as a corrective to the widespread tendency to focus on power in discourse. I have argued that in studying interaction, we need to understand power (or hierarchy, or control) not as separate from or opposite to solidarity (or connection, or intimacy) but as inseparable from and intertwined with it. Because relationships among family members are fundamentally hierarchical and also intensely connected, family interaction is an ideal site for exploring the complex interrelationship between power and solidarity.

In the present chapter, I begin by briefly recapping my theoretical framework of power and solidarity. Those who have encountered this discussion elsewhere are encouraged to skip to the next section, wherein I explore the intertwined nature of power and solidarity in the context of the crucial family role of mother. I then examine excerpts from three extended tape-recorded conversations that took place among two of the families in the Work and Family Project in order to demonstrate how exploring the interplay of power and connection adds to our understanding of the linguistic strategies found in family interaction. In each case, I demonstrate that the conversational strategies used by the mother and father are simultaneously, and inextricably, both “power maneuvers” and “connection maneuvers.” My analysis and discussion thus add to our understanding of the discourse analysis of interaction in general and to the specific understanding of family discourse.

The Ambiguity and Polysemy of Power and Solidarity

Many researchers have analyzed interaction, in the family as elsewhere, as a struggle for power. For example, Watts (1991:145), in a book entitled *Power in Family Discourse*, defines power as “the ability of an individual to achieve her/his desired goals.” Similarly, in a book about family conversation, Varenne (1992:76) explains, “The power we are interested in here is the power of the catalyst who, with a minimal amount of its own

energy, gets other entities to spend large amounts of their own.”² Millar et al. (1984) write of “control maneuvers” and note that in family therapy, “Conflict takes place within the power dimension of relationships.” My claim is that family interaction (including conflict) also takes place within the intimacy dimension, and we can also speak of—indeed, need to speak of—“connection maneuvers.”

Elsewhere (Tannen 1994), I explore and argue for what I call the ambiguity and polysemy of power and solidarity—or, in different terms, of status or hierarchy on one hand and of connection or intimacy on the other. By “ambiguity” I mean that any utterance can reflect and create either power or solidarity. By “polysemy” I mean that any utterance can reflect or create both at once. Here I briefly recap this analysis.

In conventional wisdom, as well as in research tracing back to Brown & Gilman’s (1960) classic study of power and solidarity, Americans have tended to conceptualize the relationship between hierarchy (or power) and connection (or solidarity) as unidimensional and mutually exclusive.³ (See figure 2.1.) In other words, the assumption is that particular utterances reflect relationships governed either by power or by solidarity.

Family relationships are at the heart of this conception. For example, Americans frequently use the terms “sisters” and “brothers” to indicate “close and equal.” So if a woman says of her friend, “We are like sisters,”

power	solidarity
asymmetry	symmetry
hierarchy	equality
distance	closeness

Figure 2.1. *Unidimensional view of power and connection*

2. Blum-Kulka (1997), whose book *Dinner Talk* compares American, Israeli, and American-Israeli families, discusses parents’ dual and sometimes conflicting needs both to socialize their children in the sense of teaching them what they need to know and at the same time to socialize with them in the sense of enjoying their company. This perspective indirectly addresses the interrelationship of power and connection in the family.

3. I have struggled, through many papers, with the best way to acknowledge Brown & Gilman’s original conception of power and solidarity without misrepresenting it, especially given my objections (Tannen 1998, 2002) to the academic convention of obligatorily posing one’s work in opposition to work that came before. On one hand, Brown & Gilman acknowledge that relationships can be both equal and solidary, or unequal and solidary, yet they also claim that power governs asymmetrical relationships where one is subordinate to another, whereas solidarity governs symmetrical relationships characterized by social equality and similarity.

the implication is, “We are as close as siblings; there are no status games, no one-upping between us.” In contrast, hierarchical relationships are assumed to preclude closeness. Thus, in military and workplace contexts, most Americans regard it as self-evident that friendships across levels of rank are problematic and discouraged if not explicitly prohibited.

I suggest that in reality the relationship between power (or hierarchy) and solidarity (or connection) is not a single dimension but a multidimensional grid. (See figure 2.2.)

This grid represents the dimensions of hierarchy and of connection as two intersecting axes. One axis (I represent it as a vertical one) stretches between hierarchy and equality, while the other (which I represent as a horizontal axis) stretches between closeness and distance. A single linguistic strategy can operate on either axis to create power, connection, or both. For example, in conversation, if one person begins speaking while another is speaking, the resulting overlap of voices is ambiguous in that it can be an interruption (an attempt to display or create power or status over the other speaker) or a cooperative expression of enthusiastic listenership (an attempt to display or create solidarity or connection). It is also polysemous in that it can be both, as when speakers share a conversational style by which an aggressive mutual struggle for the floor is enjoyed as friendly

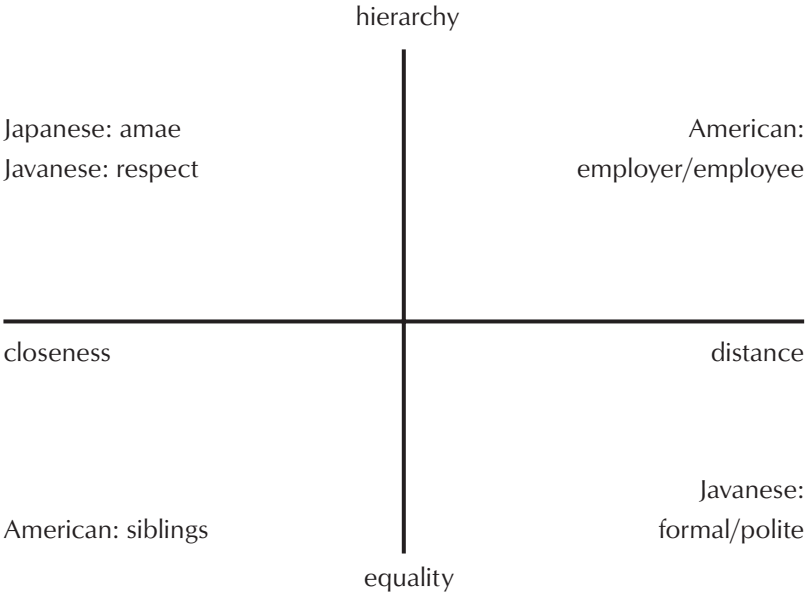


Figure 2.2. Multidimensional model

competition. To the extent that two speakers enjoy such competitive conversations, power entails solidarity.

In the context of family interaction, imagine an interchange in which one person announces, “I’m going to take a walk,” and a second replies, “Wait, I’ll go with you. I just have to make a phone call first.” This request could be intended (or experienced) as a power maneuver: the second person is making the first wait before taking a walk. (The tendency to experience being made to wait as a power play is captured in the expression, “Just a dime waiting on a dollar.”)⁴ But the request could also be intended (or perceived) as a connection maneuver: a bid to take a walk together, to express and reinforce the closeness of the relationship. Thus it is ambiguous with regard to power and solidarity. It is also polysemous, because it is an inextricable combination of both. The motive of walking together, a bid for closeness, constitutes a limit on the other’s freedom of movement. Indeed, living with another person in a close relationship inevitably requires accommodations that limit freedom. Thus solidarity entails power.

Mother: A Paradigm Case of the Ambiguity and Polysemy of Power and Connection

If the family is a key locus for understanding the complex and inextricable relationship between power (negotiations along the hierarchy-equality axis) and connection (negotiations along the closeness-distance axis), nowhere does this relationship become clearer than in the role of a key family member, mother. It surfaces both in the language spoken to mothers and the language spoken by mothers. For example, Hildred Geertz (1989 [1961]:20), writing about *The Javanese Family*, notes that there are, in Javanese, “two major levels of language, respect and familiarity.” (I would point out that, in light of the grid presented above, these are two different dimensions: respect is situated on the hierarchy-equality axis, whereas familiarity is a function of the closeness-distance axis.) Geertz observes that Javanese children use the familiar register when speaking with their parents and siblings until about age ten or twelve, when they gradu-

4. I heard this expression from Dave Quady, a manager at a company at which I was doing research on workplace interaction; he told me that a colleague of his had used the expression to capture their frustration when they found themselves waiting to see a higher ranking colleague.

ally shift to the respect register in adulthood. However, Geertz adds, “Most people continue to speak to the mother in the same way as they did as children; a few shift to respect in adulthood” (22). This leaves open the question whether mothers are addressed in the familiar rather than the respect register because they receive less respect than fathers, or because their children feel closer to them. I suspect it is both at once, and that each entails the other: feeling closer to Mother entails feeling less intimidated by her and therefore less respectful; feeling less need to demonstrate respect paves the way for greater closeness.

Although the lexical distinction between respect and familiar registers is not found in the English language, nonetheless there are linguistic phenomena in English that parallel those described by Geertz in Javanese. Ervin-Tripp et al. (1984) looked at the forms of “control acts” in American family discourse in order to gauge power in that context. They found that “effective power and esteem were related to age” (134). Again, however, “the mothers in our sample were an important exception to the pattern . . .” (135). The authors note that mothers in their caregiving role “received nondeferent orders, suggesting that the children expected compliance and believed their desires to be justification enough.” As with Javanese, one could ask whether American children use more bald imperatives when speaking to their mothers because they have less respect for them, or because they feel closer to them, or (as seems most likely) both. In other words, American children’s use of nondeferent orders to their mothers, like Javanese children’s use of the familiar register with their mothers, is both ambiguous and polysemous with regard to power and solidarity.

Power Lines—or Connection Lines—in Telling Your Day

Both Blum-Kulka (1997) and Ochs & Taylor (1992a, 1992b, 1995) identify a conversational ritual that typifies talk at dinner in many American families: a ritual that Blum-Kulka dubs “telling your day.” When the family includes a mother and father (as the families recorded in both these studies did), American mothers typically encourage children to tell their fathers about events experienced during the day.

Ochs & Taylor give the examples of a mother who urges a child, “Tell Dad what you thought about gymnastics and what you did,” and another who prompts, “Chuck did you tell Daddy what happened at karate when

you came in your new uniform? What did Daisy do for you?" (1992b:310). Ochs & Taylor note that in a majority of the instances recorded in their study, fathers responded to the resultant stories by passing judgment, assessing the rightness of their children's actions and feelings, and thereby setting up a constellation the researchers call "Father knows best." The family power structure, Ochs & Taylor observe, is established in these story-telling dynamics. Just as Mother typically prompted a child to tell Daddy what happened, older siblings were much more likely to urge younger ones to tell about something that happened than the other way around. Children were most often "problematizees"—the ones whose behavior was judged by others. Rarely were they "problematizers"—the ones who questioned others' behavior as problematic. This situates children firmly at the bottom of the hierarchy. Fathers were situated at the top of the family hierarchy, as they were the most frequent problematizers and rarely were problematizees. In keeping with the findings of Ervin-Tripp et al., mothers found themselves in the position of problematizees (the ones whose behavior was held up for judgment) as often as they were problematizers (the ones who were judging others).

In this revealing study, Ochs & Taylor identify a crucial dynamic in middle-class American families by which the family exhibits a power structure with the father at the top and the mother somewhere above the children but below the father. They further show that mothers play a crucial role in setting up this dynamic: "Father as problematizer," they argue, is "facilitated . . . by the active role of mothers who sometimes (perhaps inadvertently) set fathers up as potential problematizers—by introducing the stories and reports of children and mothers in the first place and orienting them towards fathers as primary recipients" (1992b:329). For me, the word "inadvertently" is key. I argue that the "Father knows best" dynamic results from gender differences in assumptions about the place of talk in a relationship, and that it reflects the inextricable relationship between power and connection. In this view, the mother who initiates a "telling your day" routine is trying to create closeness and involvement by exchanging details of daily life, a verbal ritual frequently observed to characterize women's friendships, as I explain elsewhere (Tannen 1990). For her it is a connection maneuver. Thus when she encourages her children to tell their day to their father, she is trying to involve the father with the children in much the way she herself creates involvement.

A father, however, who does not routinely ask, "How was your day?" is not necessarily evincing lack of interest in being close to his children.

Rather, he likely does not assume that closeness is created by the verbal ritual of telling the details of one's day. So fathers, looking elsewhere for reasons that their wives are urging their children to report their activities, may well conclude that they are being asked to evaluate and judge the children's behavior. Thus it is not the mothers' initiation of the "telling your day" routine in itself that sets fathers up as family judge. Instead, the "Father knows best" dynamic is created by the interaction of divergent gender-related patterns.⁵ A linguistic strategy intended as a connection maneuver functions simultaneously as a power maneuver—one, however, that compromises rather than enhances the mother's power, or status, in the interaction and in the family. This outcome results from the ambiguity and polysemy of power and solidarity.

All the examples that follow illustrate the complex interweaving of power maneuvers and connection maneuvers in family interaction. I argue that understanding the interplay of these dynamics adds to our understanding of the linguistic strategies that characterize family interaction, many of which are examined and analyzed in succeeding chapters in this volume.

Power and Connection in Giving Directions

The first example comes from the family composed of Janet, Steve, and their three-year-old daughter Natalie. (The excerpt was transcribed and identified for analysis by Philip LeVine.) In the interchange, Janet is trying to get Steve to do something—a chore needed for the good of the family. Insofar as she is trying to influence Steve's actions, she may be seen as exercising a power maneuver. Insofar as the action is not for her personal benefit but for the good of the family, she may be seen as carrying out a connection maneuver. Moreover, the way in which she goes about trying to influence Steve's behavior mixes connection with power.

5. Among the many scenarios of male/female interaction that I describe in my book *You Just Don't Understand*, one of the most frequently cited and widely recognized (by readers) is an interchange in which a woman tries to initiate a "how was your day" routine and is met with advice rather than matching experiences. I attribute this to the ritual nature of the routine for many women, and their assumption that the routine expresses and creates closeness. Not recognizing or sharing the routine, many men hear the recitation of daily problems as a request for advice. This may well be the pattern evinced in the examples Ochs & Taylor report. Moreover, unlike many mothers, a father may not regard closeness as the most important barometer of his relationship with his children. See Henwood (1993) for evidence that women tend to judge the mother-daughter relationship by how close it is. There is no parallel evidence that men regard closeness in the same way.

The couple is planning to apply for a credit card. Janet has filled out the application, but she feels it should be copied before it is mailed. Since Steve has access to a copy machine at work, she asks him to take the materials with him to work the next day, copy the application, attach a voided check as required, and mail it. However, the way in which she asks Steve to do this offends him, and his protest in turn offends her. This is how the exchange goes:

- (1) Janet: Okay, so you'll have to attach the voided check here,
after you make the Xerox copy. Okay?
((Steve takes the papers))
Okay just- Please get that out tomorrow.
I'm counting on you, bubbles.
I'm counting on you, cuddles.
- Steve: Oh, for Pete's sake.
- Janet: What do you mean by that?
- Steve: What do YOU mean by that?
- Janet: Oh, honey, I just mean I'm COUNTING on you.
- Steve: Yes but you say it in a way
that suggests I can't be counted on.
- Janet: I never said that.
- Steve: I'm talking about your TONE.

When Steve protests (*Oh, for Pete's sake*) the way Janet reinforced her request (*I'm counting on you, bubbles. I'm counting on you, cuddles.*), he explains that he hears his wife as implying that he is unreliable (*you say it in a way that suggests I can't be counted on*). Janet protests against his protest: *I never said that*. Elsewhere (Tannen 2001) I have characterized this verbal maneuver as “crying literal meaning”: Janet claims responsibility only for the message of her utterance—the literal meaning of the words spoken—and denies (*I never said that*) the “metamessage,” that is, the many meanings implied by the way she said those words, which Steve refers to generally as her “tone.”

This interchange is a complex web of power maneuvers and connection maneuvers. The detailed instructions Janet gives Steve (*you'll have to attach the voided check here, after you make the Xerox copy*) reinforce the power-maneuver aspect of her giving him an assignment. They suggest a parent giving directions to a child who hasn't enough life experience to know exactly how to carry out an assigned task. (Bear in mind that the power dynamic inherently reflects the hierarchical nature of parent/child

relations.) When she repeats the request (*Please get that out tomorrow*) and follows up with the reminder, *I'm counting on you*, then repeats that reminder, she further reinforces the hierarchical dynamic. When Steve protests, he makes clear that he is experiencing the way in which Janet frames her request as a power maneuver.

Janet's discourse, however, also includes terms of endearment ("bubbles," "cuddles") that signal the couple's closeness and the affection she feels for Steve. Indeed, the frequent use of these and other highly stylized expressions of affection is part of this couple's "familylect," as Cynthia Gordon (2003) has observed, and using elements of their familylect metaphorically signals the couple's closeness. Indeed, I surmise that Janet's use of the connection-maneuver terms of endearment are intended to override the power-maneuver aspect of her giving and repeatedly reinforcing directions to Steve. (For readers who may react negatively, as Steve did, to Janet's mixing of power and connection in this way, I note that in the end Steve did forget to copy and mail the credit card application.)

The Ambiguity and Polysemy of Power and Connection in a Homecoming Encounter

Kendall (2006) has identified homecomings as a frequent site of conflict in the discourse recorded by families in our study. Although at first glance a parent's return home might seem to be occasion for unmitigated celebration, in reality Kendall found that the change in participants and circumstances constitutes potential stress, which is aggravated when family members differ in their moods and expectations. The next example took place among Kathy, Sam, and their daughter, Kira. The development of the tension and the way that Kathy and Sam manage it are a fascinating blend of connection maneuvers and power maneuvers.

The exchange (which was transcribed and identified for analysis by Alexandra Johnston, the research team member who shadowed Sam) takes place in the family's home at the end of the day, immediately before and after Sam's return from work. Earlier, Kathy picked Kira up from day care, arrived home with her, and gave her dinner. Now Kathy has heard the arrival of Sam's car and prepares their two-year-old (but largely preverbal) daughter for her father's arrival. When Sam enters the house and sits down to eat a snack, Kira tries to climb onto his lap. Sam,

however, is tired and hungry and reacts with annoyance, which makes Kira cry. Sam immediately modifies his way of talking to Kira in order to mollify her, but the effect of his initial rejection is not so easy to repair. Kathy then mediates the interaction between father and daughter. (In the transcript, Kathy's reference to "pop" is to a "juice pop"—frozen juice on a stick.)

(2) Kathy: Daddy's home.

Kira: Da da .

Kathy: Daddy's going to be home in a minute.

Kira: Da da pop.

Da da pop.

Da da pop.

Kathy: You gonna give Da da a pop?

Kira: Yes.

Shoes. Shoes. ahh.

Kathy: You gonna tell Daddy to take his shoes off?

((Father comes home, 5 minutes' intervening talk))

((Kira tries to climb onto her father))

Sam: I'm eating! ((very irritated))

Daddy eats. ((more apologetic))

((Kira begins to cry))

Da da eats.

((Kira cries))

You wanna come up?

Kira: Oo ee yeah ((cries))

...

Kathy: She got her feelings hurt.

Sam: How come Ki-Ki gets to eat

and Daddy doesn't get to eat?

...

Kathy: I think she just wanted

some Daddy's attention.

((Kira cries))

You were missing Daddy today, weren't you?

((Kira cries))

You were missing Daddy, weren't you?

((Kira cries))

Can you say,

“I was just missing you Daddy,
that was all?”

Kira: < *crying* > Nnnnoo.>

Kathy: “And I don’t really feel too good.”

Kira: < *crying* > Nnnnoo.>

Kathy: No, she doesn’t feel too good either.

. . . ((*intervening talk; logistics*))

Kathy: Why are you so edgy?

Sam: ’Cause I haven’t eaten yet.

Kathy: Why didn’t you get a SNACK
on the way home or something?
Save your family a little stress.

Kira: Mm mm

Kathy: Yeah give us a break, Daddy.

We just miss you.

We try to get your attention

and then you come home

and you go →

ROW ROW ROW ROW. ((*rhymes with “how”*))

Kira: Row! Row!

Among the many aspects of this interchange that are of interest, I will focus on the interplay of power and solidarity, or control and connection, in both Kathy’s and Sam’s utterances.

Consider first Sam’s exchanges with Kira. The way in which Sam’s rejection of Kira’s bid to climb onto his lap (*I’m eating!*) sparks Kira’s ongoing and not easily mollified crying illustrates Varenne’s (1992:76) definition of power (which I cited at the outset) as the influence “of the catalyst who, with a minimal amount of its own energy, gets other entities to spend large amounts of their own.” Sam immediately attempts to repair the damage first by explaining his reaction (*Daddy eats*) and then by inviting Kira to sit on his lap after all (*You wanna come up?*). These attempts to soothe his daughter’s feelings are progressively more slanted toward connection, in both form and content. In content, Sam’s utterances go from rejecting Kira’s physical approach (*I’m eating!*) to inviting it (*You wanna come up?*). At the same time, the paralinguistic features of his utterances—the tone in which he speaks—go from the snappish annoyance of his first reaction (described by the transcriber as “very ir-

ritated”) to a more modulated tone (“more apologetic”) to a highly modulated invitation to do just what he was rebuffing. In this way, the tone in which Sam speaks also progresses from the power-laden rebuff to a solidarity-focused invitation.

Perhaps most intriguing is the progressively closer connection to his daughter that is constituted by the indexicality of the lexical realizations by which Sam refers to himself. In his first utterance (*I’m eating!*), Sam uses the first person singular pronoun to represent himself from his own point of view just as his rejection of Kira’s attempt to climb onto his lap reflects his own feelings of hunger and fatigue. In his next utterance (*Daddy eats*), he refers to himself as “Daddy,” a noun that reflects his daughter’s, not his own, perspective. (To himself, he is “I.” To her, he is “Daddy.”) Just as he is beginning to take into account her feelings, his point of view is shifting to reflect her point of view linguistically as well. Finally, Sam’s perspective moves closer to Kira’s—indeed, merges with hers—as he refers to himself in the baby-talk register that she herself uses to refer to him (*Da da eats*). Thus each succeeding utterance linguistically creates a progressively closer connection to his daughter, even as his authority to determine whether or not she climbs onto his lap reflects the power he holds over her. In this way, Sam’s utterances constitute connection maneuvers as well as power maneuvers.

In the succeeding section of this interchange, Kathy steps in to mediate the interaction between Sam and Kira. Here, too, the form of Kathy’s utterances reflects progressively closer alignments with her daughter, even as the stance she takes up as mediator between her husband and daughter positions her as the expert on Kira’s emotions and how they should be managed—in other words, a position of power. (See Johnston this volume and Kendall this volume for discussions of how Kathy often comments on Sam’s caretaking of Kira, thus constituting herself as chief caregiver, although they share primary caregiving responsibilities.)

As we saw with Sam, Kathy’s repeated explanations of why Kira is crying move progressively closer to Kira’s point of view. In the first line (*She got her feelings hurt*), Kathy speaks about Kira to Sam; in this utterance, mother and daughter are linguistically distinct. She next addresses Kira directly (*You were missing Daddy, weren’t you?*), bringing herself into direct alignment with the child. She then models for Kira what she might say to articulate her own feelings (*Can you say, “I was just missing you, Daddy, that was all?”*). Here she animates Kira’s feelings, but linguistically

marks the fact that she is doing so by beginning “Can you say?” This introducer separates her point of view from her child’s, even as she is articulating the child’s perspective.

Kathy’s next line (“*And I don’t really feel too good*”) continues to merge Kathy with Kira linguistically, as Kathy is speaking but says “I,” meaning Kira. This may be interpreted either as still modified by “Can you say?” or as a new, “ventriloquized” utterance, in which Kathy is not just suggesting to Kira what she might say but is actually speaking *as* Kira. In any case, Kathy is expressing Kira’s point of view using the first person pronoun. Finally, she mitigates her alignment with Kira and re-orientates to Sam by addressing him and referring to Kira rather than animating her (*No, she doesn’t feel too good either*). Kathy thus moves progressively closer to Kira, discursively, by gradually shifting from referring to Kira in the third person to ventriloquizing her—that is, merging her persona with Kira’s by animating Kira’s voice. Moreover, by communicating to both Kira and Sam in the same utterances, Kathy is connecting the three of them as a family.

Kathy’s explanation of why Kira is crying (*She got her feelings hurt*) is an indirect criticism of Sam because it entails the assumption that a father should not hurt his daughter’s feelings. After a short spate of intervening talk, Kathy makes this injunction more explicit.

Although the “we” in “*We just miss you*” could conceivably indicate that Kathy and Kira both miss Sam, the continuation (*We try to get your attention . . .*) makes clear that Kathy is speaking for (and as) Kira. Then, still speaking as Kira, she mimics how Sam comes across from Kira’s point of view: *you go ROW ROW ROW ROW*. In this utterance, Kathy is animating Kira animating Sam. So the linguistic strategy by which Kathy tells Sam that he should alter his behavior (a control maneuver) also linguistically merges the three of them (a connection maneuver).

By speaking *as*, *to*, and *through* Kira, Kathy creates connection between Kira and her father, explains Kira’s feelings both to Sam and to Kira herself, explains to Sam why he’s been unfair to Kira, and aligns herself with her daughter as a team. (She could have aligned with Sam by telling their daughter to let Daddy eat, as another mother in our study did in the same situation.) At the same time, she exercises power by positioning herself as the authority on Kira’s emotions, as well as how Sam should relate to Kira. Finally, by speaking for Kira, who cannot yet speak, she enters into the alignment between Sam and Kira and thus frames the three of them as a single unit, a family. Thus both Kathy’s and Sam’s participation in this exchange can be understood as subtle and complex blends of power maneuvers and solidarity maneuvers.

Power Maneuvers and Solidarity Maneuvers in an Argument

The next and final example comes from the same family as the preceding one. (It too was transcribed and identified for analysis by Alexandra Johnston.) On the surface, the interchange is a power struggle over who will control the making of popcorn. Yet even this unmistakable series of power maneuvers is shot through with connection maneuvers.

The interchange begins one evening when Kathy is in the kitchen, and Sam is in another room watching their daughter Kira. Sam calls out to Kathy:

- (3a) Sam: Kathy! Kath! Let's switch.
 You take care of her.
 I'll do whatever you're doing.

With this, Sam makes a bid to switch places with Kathy. Insofar as he is seeking to influence her actions—both to stop her doing what she is doing and to get her to take over what he has been doing—Sam's utterance is a power maneuver. It is impossible to know his motives, but it seems likely that he wishes to turn over the caretaking of Kira to Kathy. Kathy resists Sam's suggestion, explaining her resistance with reference not to the caretaking of Kira but rather to the task she is performing in the kitchen. Moreover, the reason she gives for resisting Sam's bid to trade places rests on his incompetence at popcorn making:

- (3b) Kathy: I'm making popcorn.
 You always burn it.
 Sam: No I don't!
 I never burn it.
 I make it perfect.
 ((He joins Kathy in the kitchen))
 You making popcorn?
 In the big pot?
 Kathy: Yes, but you're going to ruin it.
 Sam: No I won't.
 I'll get it just right.

To the extent that Kathy deflects Sam's request to influence her actions, as well as the extent to which she impugns his competence, Kathy's moves are

power maneuvers. However, to the extent that she rests her case on the chances for a successful batch of popcorn for everyone to eat, she frames her refusal as a connection maneuver: it will redound to the good of the family if Kathy makes the popcorn rather than Sam. (In contrast, had she resisted Sam's request by saying, "I don't want to watch Kira; I like making popcorn and want to keep doing it," her utterance would have been more uniformly a power maneuver: wanting to control her own actions for her own good.)

In the interchange that follows, Kathy uses their daughter Kira as a resource in her communication with Sam. (Elsewhere I examine the use of nonverbal children [Tannen 2003a] and pets [this volume] as resources in communication between adults.) Kathy proposes a compromise between her preference and Sam's by suggesting that she can take care of Kira and also make the popcorn at the same time. By proposing a compromise, Kathy performs a power maneuver (resisting Sam's request to relinquish popcorn making to him) mixed with a connection maneuver (both acceding to Sam's request and also establishing a direct alignment with Kira.) Rather than addressing this proposal directly to Sam, she frames it as a suggestion to Kira, within earshot of Sam:

- (3c) Kathy: You wanna help Mommy make popcorn?
Kira: Okay.
Kathy: Let's not let Daddy do it.
Kira: Okay.
Kathy: Okay, come on.

By framing her resistance to Sam's proposal as an invitation directed to Kira, Kathy avoids direct confrontation with Sam and establishes a direct connection to Kira. This is another sense in which her utterance is not only a power maneuver (resisting his bid to control her actions) but also a connection maneuver (establishing connection with Kira and avoiding direct confrontation with Sam).

Sam, however, does not accept this compromise. Furthermore, his ensuing conversational moves focus more and more on Kathy's accusation that he habitually burns popcorn when he prepares it:

- (3d) Sam: I know how to make popcorn!
Kathy: Let's hurry up so Daddy doesn't . . .
Sam: I can make popcorn better than you can!

In this and succeeding moves, Sam ups the ante from “I know how” to “I can do it better than you” to “You are an incompetent popcorn maker,” with the result that the interchange begins to take on the character of an argument:

- (3e) Sam: I cook every kernel!
Kathy: No you won't.
Sam: I will too!
I don't!
It's never burned!
It always burns when you do it!
Kathy: Don't make excuses!
Sam: There's a trick to it.
Kathy: I know the trick!
Sam: No you don't, 'cause you always burn it.
Kathy: I DO NOT! What are you, crazy?

From the conversation alone, it is impossible to know whose claims are accurate: whether it is Kathy or Sam who has a history of success at making popcorn. Evidence accrues in the interchange, however, that Kathy is right about Sam's tendency to burn the popcorn:

- (3f) Kathy: Just heat it! Heat it! No, I don't want you. . .
Sam: It's going, it's going. Hear it?
Kathy: It's too slow.
It's all soaking in.
You hear that little. . .
Sam: It's not soaking in, it's fine.
Kathy: It's just a few kernels.
Sam: All the popcorn is being popped!

Kathy's injunctions to Sam to *Just heat it! Heat it!* are power maneuvers insofar as she is trying to get him to alter his actions. They are also connection maneuvers to the extent that she is trying to ensure an outcome that will benefit the entire family (edible popcorn rather than burned unpoppered kernels of corn in the pot). Sam, however, resists her suggestions for how to adjust his popcorn making and denies her claims about the ominous nature of the sounds emanating from the pot.

Given Sam's resistance to following her suggestions, Kathy again tries to wrest control of the popcorn making in an indirect way. She reminds Sam of another task he is obligated to perform:

- (3g) Kathy: You gotta take the trash outside.
Sam: I can't, I'm doing the popcorn.
Kathy: I'll DO it,
I'll watch it.
You take the trash out
and come back in a few minutes and—
Sam: Well, because it'll burn!

One might describe this move on Kathy's part as a power maneuver masquerading as a connection maneuver. Were Sam to initiate the performance of another obligation, Kathy's offer to watch the popcorn while he's taking out the trash would be a connection maneuver. However, given the history of this interaction, Sam does not perceive it that way.

It isn't long before Kathy gets to say, "See, what'd I tell you?" Her contention that it is Sam, not she, who habitually burns popcorn is supported by the outcome: burned popcorn. But Sam doesn't see this result as a reason to admit fault:

- (3h) Sam: Well, I never USE this pot.
I use the other pot.
Kathy: It's not the pot! It's you!
Sam: It's the pot.
It doesn't heat up properly.
If it did, then it would get hot.
Kathy: Just throw it all away.
Sam: You should have let me do it from the start.
Kathy: You DID it from the start!
Sam: No, I didn't.
You chose this pan.
I would've chosen a different pan.

The way this interchange ends seems unremittingly a power maneuver: although he did indeed burn the popcorn, Sam assigns fault to the pot and to Kathy for having chosen the pot. Where, one might ask, is a connec-

tion maneuver detectable here? Intriguingly, the burning of popcorn and the relative blame assigned to people and pots becomes a reference point for family solidarity.

The “popcorn fight” entered this family’s lore because I described and analyzed it in a book (Tannen 2001) that Sam and Kathy had occasion to read.⁶ Four years after this conversation took place, I was visiting the family again in order to follow up our original study and to interview Kathy in connection with another study.⁷ As Kathy and I were talking in the living room of their home, Sam appeared with a mischievous grin on his face and said, “Did you hear we settled the popcorn argument? It was the pot.” Kathy responded with puzzlement: “What?” Sam reminded her of a recent occasion when the popcorn had burned because of the pot. “That was a different pot,” Kathy replied. We all laughed at the reminder of the mundane argument that had entered not only family lore but the public domain. It was a way for the couple to signal connection not only to each other, but also to me: the popcorn fight was a reference point not only to an experience that Kathy and Sam had shared, but one that linked me to the family as well. In this sense, Sam’s reference to the popcorn fight was a connection maneuver. But to the extent that he was still (though somewhat playfully) claiming his innocence despite the fact that he had burned the popcorn, Sam’s remark was also a power maneuver.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined three extended interchanges that took place among two of the families that participated in our study of family interaction. In each case, I have demonstrated that the utterances of both speakers can be understood as complex and subtle combinations of power maneuvers and connection maneuvers. Whereas there is ample prior research examining family interaction as apparent or subtle struggles for power—understood as each speaker’s desire to determine her or his own actions and influence the actions of the other—I have argued here that a less examined but equally pervasive and important pattern is the struggle for connection, which may be understood as each speaker’s desire to

6. In keeping with my standard practice, I showed the analysis to Sam and Kathy before I included it in my book in order to make sure that I got it right and that they felt comfortable with my using their words in this way.

7. The book for which I interviewed Kathy is on mother-daughter conversations.

reinforce and not undermine the intimate connections that constitute their involvement with each other as members of a family. Being in hierarchical relation to each other does not preclude being close, and being closely connected does not preclude being involved in struggles for power. Quite the contrary, being members of a family entails both struggles for power and struggles for connection.

The creation of both power relations and solidarity relations in a single interchange could be seen as evidence for the ambiguity of power and solidarity. In other words, a given utterance could be intended or perceived as establishing either power or solidarity. In this regard, recall that in the first example, Janet is giving Steve detailed and repeated instructions about how to prepare and mail a credit card application; in the second example, Kathy is indirectly criticizing Sam for making their daughter cry; and in the third example, Kathy is trying first to retain control of the activity of making popcorn and then to influence Sam's execution of the same activity. To the extent that Janet and Kathy are trying to alter their spouses' behavior, they are engaging in power maneuvers. However, insofar as they are trying to achieve results that will benefit the family as a whole rather than themselves as individuals, their moves can be understood as connection maneuvers.

Janet's and Kathy's utterances are ambiguous with respect to power and solidarity to the extent that they can be understood either as creating and expressing power relations or as creating and expressing solidarity relations. However, in most of the cases I discussed, speakers' utterances could be seen as creating and expressing both power and solidarity at the same time. Thus, when Janet tried to get Steve to follow her instructions in mailing the credit card application, she was both exercising power and exercising connection. The connection aspect was reinforced by her use of terms of endearment ("bubbles," "cuddles"). And when Kathy tried to explain to Kira as well as to Sam why he made her cry, and how Kira might better manage and express her emotions, Kathy was both creating and expressing her authority as chief childcare provider and also creating and expressing solidarity among the three as a family. Finally, when Kathy exerted efforts to involve Kira in making popcorn, she was acceding to Sam's suggestion that she take over watching Kira at the same time that she was trying to maintain control of popcorn making.

I am suggesting, then, that whenever researchers examine interaction for evidence of power negotiations, they ask themselves how the utterances examined also create and express solidarity relations. I am suggesting,

moreover, that considering both power and solidarity provides for a deeper and more accurate understanding of family interaction, and that family interaction is an ideal site for exploring and better understanding the ambiguity and polysemy of power and solidarity. When we find ourselves identifying power maneuvers, our understanding of the interaction will be more accurate if we also seek to identify connection maneuvers and to understand how the two types of maneuvers relate to each other and intertwine.

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