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**Rethinking Power and Solidarity
in Gender and Dominance**
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In analyzing discourse, many researchers assume that all speakers proceed along similar lines of interpretation. But Gumperz 1982 makes clear that this is so only to the extent that cultural background is shared. To the extent that cultural backgrounds differ, lines of interpretation are likely to diverge. My own research shows that cultural difference is not limited to the gross and apparent levels of nationality and native language, but exists at the subcultural levels of ethnic heritage, class, geographic region, age, and gender. My earlier work focused on ethnic and regional style. My most recent work focuses on gender; I draw on this work here to demonstrate that utterances have widely divergent potential implicatures, because of the ambiguity of power and solidarity.

Power and Solidarity. Since Brown and Gilman's 1960 pioneering study, and the subsequent contributions of Friedrich 1972 and Brown and Levinson [1978]1987, the concepts of power and solidarity have been fundamental to sociolinguistic theory. (Fasold 1990 provides an overview.) Power is associated with nonreciprocal forms of address: a speaker addresses another by title-last-name but is addressed by first name. Solidarity is associated with reciprocal forms of address: both speakers address each other by title-last-name or first name. Power governs asymmetrical relationships where one is subordinate to another; solidarity governs symmetrical relationships characterized by social equality and similarity. My own contributions (Tannen 1984, 1986), exploring the relationship between power and solidarity as it emerges in conversational discourse, claims that although power and solidarity, closeness and distance, seem at first to be opposites, they also entail each other. Any show of solidarity necessarily entails power, in that claiming 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.

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. On one level, the suit represented power, the knapsack solidarity. But power and solidarity are bought with the same currency. Wearing a knapsack would mark solidarity at, say, a protest demonstration. Wearing a three-piece suit to the demonstration would mark power by differentiating the wearer from the demonstrators, perhaps even reminding them of his superordinate position in an institutional hierarchy. But wearing a three-piece suit to the board meeting of a corporation would mark solidarity, and wearing a knapsack in that setting would connote not solidarity but disrespect: still

and expressed can be the same, so intentions such as dominance cannot be correlated with linguistic strategies. Rather, the "meaning" of any strategy depends on context, the conversational styles of participants, and the interaction of their styles and strategies with each other.

Similarity and Difference. Harold Pinter's most recent play Mountain Language, composed of four brief scenes, is set in a prison in the capital city of an unnamed country. In the second scene, an old mountain woman is finally allowed to see 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 their mountain language is forbidden. Then he continues:

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

PRISONER: I've got a wife and three kids.

GUARD: You've got 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 and oppressive context 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." By repeating the guard's words verbatim, the prisoner was saying, "I am the same as you." (I have demonstrated at length [Tannen 1987, 1989a] that repeating another's words creates rapport on a meta level.) The guard was asserting his own humanity and denying the prisoner's; 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. Similarity is antithetical to hierarchy.¹

The ambiguity of closeness, a spatial metaphor representing similarity or involvement, is seen 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 is a nonverbal analogue to the prisoner's statement, but with opposite effect: he was "closing in." The guard moved

Interruption. That interruption is a sign of dominance has been as widespread an assumption in research (for example, Leet-Pellegrini 1980) as in conventional wisdom. A frequent finding (for example, West and Zimmerman 1983) is that men dominate women by interrupting them in conversation. Tellingly, however, Deborah James and Janice Drakich (personal communication), reviewing research on gender and interruption, discovered that studies comparing amount of interruption in all-female vs. all-male conversations find more interruption, not less, in the all-female ones. 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? Elsewhere (Tannen 1989b, 1990c) I explore at length the problems inherent in the claim that interruption can be identified by mechanical means and give examples of conversations in which there is overlap but no interruption and interruption but no overlap.

This is not, however, to say that interruption never constitutes dominance nor that men never interrupt or dominate women. Fictional discourse provides an example of a situation in which it is and one does. In a short story by Lorrie Moore, Zoe is talking to a man she has just met at a party. He asks, "What's your favorite joke?" When she begins, "A man goes to a doctor," he interrupts: "I think I know this one. A guy goes into a doctor's office, and the doctor tells him he's got some good news and some bad news -- that one, right?" It is obvious that this is not right, because Zoe's joke is "about the guy who visits his doctor and the doctor says, 'Well, I'm sorry to say, you've got six weeks to live.'" But instead of saying "No," Zoe says, "I'm not sure. This might be a different version," leaving open the door for him to tell his joke, which turns out to be not only different but offensively obscene. This interruption does seem dominating because it comes as Zoe is about to tell a joke and usurps the floor to tell it.

The point, then, is that in order to understand the "meaning" of an interruption, or, indeed, whether an overlap is an interruption, one must consider the context, speakers' styles, and the interactive frame -- that is, what the speakers are trying to do by their communication.

Silence vs. 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, rob 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. Again, there are surely circumstances in which this is accurate. Coates 1986, for example, notes numerous proverbs that instruct women, like children, to be silent.

speaking turns. In my study of 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 appropriate time to take a turn. The result was that the shorter pausers ended up doing most of the talking, another sign interpreted by their interlocutors as dominating the conversation. Again, their intentions were not to dominate but to fill in what to them were potentially uncomfortable silences, that is, to grease the conversational wheels and ensure a successful conversation. In their view, the taciturn participants were uncooperative, failing to do their part to maintain the conversation. So silence and volubility, too, may result from style differences and may imply either power or solidarity.

Topic-raising. Shuy 1982 is typical in assuming that the speaker who raises the most topics is dominant. However, in a study I conducted (Tannen 1990a,b) of videotaped conversations among friends of varying ages recorded by Dorval 1990, it emerged that the speaker who raised the 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). To illustrate: in a 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.

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?" In the twenty-minute conversation, Sally raised nine topics, Nancy seven. However, all but one of the topics Sally raised were questions focused on Nancy. If, as Shuy and others assume, 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 Sally.

Finally, the effect of raising topics may also be an effect of differences in pacing and pausing, as discussed above 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, potentially more interesting one. 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

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. In examining pre-school conversations transcribed and analyzed by Corsaro and Rizzo 1990, I was amazed to discover that a fight can be a way of initiating rather than precluding friendship. In one episode, a little boy intrudes on two others and an angry fight ensues in which they threaten to punch and shoot poop at each other, and to snap a Slinky in each other's faces. By the end of the episode, however, the three boys are playing together amicably. Picking a fight was the third boy's way of joining the play of the other two.

These examples call into question the correlation of aggression and power on one hand, and cooperation and solidarity on the other. Doubt is also cast by a cross-cultural perspective. For example, many cultures of the world see arguing as a pleasurable sign of intimacy. Schiffrin 1984 shows that among working 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 start 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 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 1989 find speakers routinely disagreeing when they actually agree, and using diminutive name forms and other terms of endearment -- markers of closeness -- just when they are opposing each other. In the following excerpt, for example, I express agreement with my interlocutor, an older Greek woman who has just told me that she complained to the police about a construction crew that illegally continued drilling and pounding through the siesta hours:

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 dikaionata mou.

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