

The Display of (Gendered) Identities in Talk at Work

In *Reinventing Identities. The Gendered Self in Discourse*. (1999).
Bucholtz, Mary, A.C. Liang, Laurel
A. Sutton (eds). New York: Oxford
University Press.

Over the course of my career analyzing interaction, I have found myself repeatedly returning to *framing* as the theoretical and methodological approach that sheds most light on what individuals are doing when they interact. In this chapter I suggest that the framing approach is also enlightening for understanding the relationship between language and gender. One of the chief crafters of the theoretical construct of framing, Erving Goffman (1974), wrote a key paper that has been overlooked by those concerned with language and gender: a 1977 essay entitled "The Arrangement Between the Sexes." Though not focused on language per se (the focus on language did not appear in Goffman's work until later, with the articles collected in *Forms of Talk* [1981]), the 1977 essay provides a theoretical framework that is strikingly consonant (prescient, you might say) with the notion of gendered identity as display that is the theme of this volume.

In this chapter, I suggest a theoretical approach that combines Goffman with my own earlier work, then illustrate with examples of workplace conversations between, on the one hand, two men, and, on the other, three women. In both cases, the conversants are of different ranks. When people talk to each other at work, the hierarchical relations among them are likely to be in focus: Talking to a boss is different from talking to a subordinate, and speakers are relatively aware of these alignments. The effect of hierarchical relations on communication in this setting has been a focus of my research. I have also been interested in how gender patterns interact with the influence of hierarchical relations; that, too, is a subject addressed here (see Tannen 1994c for my earlier explorations of these topics).

While focusing on speakers' relative status, I also illustrate a number of theoretical points that I have developed elsewhere (Tannen 1994b). First, I argue that

linguistic strategies are both ambiguous and polysemous; with this in mind, I show how the strategies used by the speakers in these examples are used and interpreted, and I explore their relation to the speakers' genders. In the process, I attempt to bring together two theoretical frameworks and make the following points about them: (1) understanding language and gender is best approached through the concept of framing; and (2) framing is a way of simultaneously balancing the dimensions of status and connection.

Finally, I hope in this chapter to offer a corrective to two misconceptions that have surfaced in the literature. The first is that status and connection are mutually exclusive poles. My claim is that they both are at play at every moment of interaction; they dovetail and intertwine. The second misconception is that a "cultural-difference" approach to gender and language and a "dominance" approach are mutually exclusive and opposed to each other. My claim is that dominance relations and cultural influences of all types (gender-related as well as other influences, such as geographic region, ethnicity, class, age, sexual orientation, and profession) are at play at every moment of interaction; they too dovetail and intertwine.

Sex-class-linked framing

I have put the word *gendered* in parentheses in the title of this chapter to reflect my conviction that often it is preferable to look at ways of speaking that pattern by gender out of the corner of the eye rather than head-on. The reason I believe that this is the most productive way to look at gender is captured by Goffman's (1977) terminology. Unfortunately, however, this very terminology muddies the waters, because Goffman uses the term *identity* to mean the opposite of the sense in which it is used in this volume. For Goffman, *identity* refers to the notion against which he was arguing—one which would be roughly equivalent to what today is (sneeringly) referred to as "essentialized" notions of gender. Goffman's use of *identity* is more or less the noun corresponding to the adjective *identical*: the assumption that women and men behave in ways that are necessarily linked to their biological gender. It is like identity relations in formal logic.

In Goffman's terms, ways of talking that pattern by gender are not "sex-linked" but "sex-class-linked," where *class* refers not to social class but rather to set theory, as in "the class of women" and "the class of men":

In referring to an attribute of gender, it is easy to speak of matters that are "sex-linked" (or "sex-correlated") in order to avoid the more cumbersome locution, "sex-class-linked." And, of course, it is very natural to speak of "the sexes," "cross-sex," "the other sex," and so forth. And so I shall. But this is a dangerous economy, especially so since such glossing fits perfectly with our cultural stereotypes. (1977:305)

In other words, you might say that "the class of women" and "the class of men" are social categories, whereas "women" and "men" are biological categories. Certain behaviors in certain cultures are more likely to be associated with the "class" of women

or the "class" of men. This association is real, but it does not mean that every individual in the class will exhibit those behaviors. Associating the behaviors with every member of the class rather than with the class itself is, in Gregory Bateson's (1972) terms, an error of logical types. This difference in logical types is, I believe, what Goffman intends by distinguishing the concept *sex-linked* (which he rejects) from the concept *sex-class-linked* (which he supports). It is, in Goffman's elegant phrasing, a "dangerous economy" because the behavior comes to be thought of as an individual phenomenon, as if it were linked to a chromosome, rather than as a social phenomenon that links (in the minds of members of that culture) individuals who display those behaviors with that class. In current terminology, this error in thinking, about which Bateson wrote extensively, could be called "essentializing"—although I caution against the use of this term since it has, in recent years, devolved into a kind of academic name-calling (as Emily Nussbaum [1997:24] aptly and wittily put it: "that generic gender studies j'accuse!").

In a way, Goffman's distinction between *sex-linked* and *sex-class-linked* parallels the distinction commonly made today between *sex* and *gender*—the former being regarded as a biological phenomenon, the latter as a socially constructed one. It is wise, however, to bear in mind that this distinction, although compelling in the abstract, is problematic in the particular. As Stephen Jay Gould emphasizes, biology and environment are inextricably intertwined: "It's logically, mathematically, philosophically impossible to pull them apart" (quoted in Angier 1993:B1).

A similar point is made by Eleanor Maccoby, who notes that the practice of using the word *gender* to refer to culturally determined characteristics and the word *sex* for biologically determined ones serves to reinforce a false ideology that biological and cultural factors can be distinguished:

Some writers attempt to distinguish the biological aspects of sex from the social aspects by using the terms *sex* for the one and *gender* for the other. This usage is not adopted here, on the assumption that the two factors interact in any psychological function that we might want to consider. Furthermore, uncovering the biological and social connections to behavior is a major research objective, not something to be assumed at the outset through the choice of terminology. (1988:755)

While bearing these cautions in mind, we can note that Goffman's distinction between *sex-linked* and *sex-class-linked* is roughly parallel to the biological versus cultural or sex versus gender distinction, since *sex-linked* refers to the assumption that a particular behavior is linked to every individual of a given sex, whereas *sex-class-linked* associates the behavior with the group identity—the "class" of women or the "class" of men as they are constructed in a given culture.

In another essay concerned with gender, Goffman introduces another set of terms to capture this distinction—and here is where the use of the term *identity* can be confusing to current readers. He explains that ways of talking and behaving that are associated with gender are a matter not of identity but of *display*. By this he means that the behavior is not a reflection of the individual's nature (identity) but rather of some performance that the individual is accomplishing (display):

Instead of having to play out an act, the animal, in effect, provides a readily readable expression of his situation, specifically his intent, this taking the form of a "ritualization" of some portion of the act itself, and this indication (whether promise or threat) presumably allows for the negotiation of an efficient response from, and to, witnesses of the display. (1979:1)

In other words, *identity* here is like identity relations in philosophy: $A = B$, because they are, by nature, the same thing. *Display*, in contrast, refers to the symbolic nature of human interaction, the "ritualized" performance of behaviors that represent culturally recognizable situations, intentions, or activities. Interaction, then, is a "ceremony" made up of "rituals," which Goffman defines as "perfunctory, conventionalized acts through which one individual portrays his regard for another to that other" (1979:1). Herein lies Goffman's key notion of *face*—individuals' concern with how they come across to others.

Goffman goes on to explain that "emotionally motivated behaviors become formalized—in the sense of becoming simplified, exaggerated, and stereotyped," and consequently, more efficient. Again, an explanation of terms is needed. Goffman's use of the term *stereotyped* is not like the one most often encountered in common parlance—the tendency to attribute unfounded negative generalizations to individuals associated with a particular social group—but rather refers to the ceremonial nature of human interaction: Behaviors are "stereotyped" in that they become associated with culturally recognizable meanings. For example, crying comes to indicate feelings of sadness and laughter feelings of amusement. These conventions are culturally relative—witness the confusion created in cross-cultural communication between Westerners who regard laughter as a stereotyped expression of amusement and Asians who regard it, in some situations, as a stereotyped means of covering embarrassment or other social discomfort.

Crucially, Goffman continues, such displays "provide evidence of the actor's *alignment* in a gathering, the position he seems prepared to take up in what is about to happen in the social situation" (1979:1). He elaborates:

Displays don't communicate in the narrow sense of the term; they don't enunciate something through a language of symbols openly established and used solely for that purpose. They provide evidence of the actor's alignment in the situation. And displays are important insofar as alignments are. (1979:1)

Alignment, then, is a type of framing: By talking in particular ways, speakers display their attitudes toward interlocutors, the situation, and the material being talked about. *Alignment* refers to what Bronwyn Davies and Rom Harré (1990) call *positioning*: how ways of speaking demonstrate and create the context and the relationships among speakers.

This is a radically different view of language than is common not only in language and gender research but also in the field of linguistics in general, in which language is seen as a code. As A. L. Becker (1995) argues, the "code" metaphor gives us an inert concept of language, much like the "conduit" metaphor for language that Michael Reddy (1979) has described. In contrast, Becker suggests we think of lan-

guage as *linguaging*—a way of *doing* something. Framing, then, is one thing we do with language—displaying our alignments.

Our tendency to locate gender differences in the individual rather than in the relation among individuals in a group also reflects American ideology. In this spirit, Maccoby (1990) points out that when she and Carol Jacklin published their classic survey *The Psychology of Sex Differences* in 1974, they concluded that research had uncovered no significant sex differences. Looking back in 1990, however, Maccoby notes that this finding, besides reflecting the ideological climate of the times, emerged because the studies they had surveyed were looking for differences in individual abilities—for example, testing children for their mathematical skills. When subsequent research (their own and others') examined the behavior of girls and boys in interaction, highly significant patterns of difference became evident, such as the tendency of little boys to monopolize toys when they played with girls.

Even power itself tends to be conceptualized by Americans as inherent in an individual, in contrast to members of other cultures who tend to conceptualize it as a social phenomenon. Patricia Wetzel (1988) points out that the Japanese see power as a matter of connection—the individual's place in a hierarchical network. In other words, individuals don't "have" power as a personal attribute but rather gain it as a function of their relations to others. In my own framework (Tannen 1994b, c), I have pointed out that power and solidarity are intertwined: Having a wide network of friends on whom you can call enhances your power to get things done.

The most fruitful approaches to examining gender and language, then, do not try to link behavior directly to individuals of one sex or the other but rather begin by asking how interaction is framed—in Goffman's terms, what *alignments* speakers are taking up; in the terms of Davies and Harré (1990), how speakers are *positioning* themselves with respect to the situation—and then ask where women and men tend to fall in this pattern of framing. This captures the "performance" or "display" aspect of gendered patterns, which is, after all, the aspect that most truly reflects how verbal and other forms of behavior really work in interaction.

In one such study, Frances Smith (1993) compares the sermons of four women and ten men in a preaching lab at a Baptist seminary. She began by determining the various "footings" the preachers took in relation to the texts they were interpreting. In other words, she asked how they positioned themselves in relation to the material they were preaching about and the task they were performing. One footing she identified was a style in which speakers foregrounded their authority by putting themselves "on record" as interpreters of the text and by calling attention to the fact that they were in the position of authority, interpreting the text for the audience. To emphasize that the gender pattern is a tendency, not an absolute divide, Smith illustrates this "on-record" style with a sermon performed by a woman, Meg; however, she notes that Meg was the only woman who adopted this style, along with four men. For example, Meg posed a question and then said, "I've done a lot of thinking about that and I came up with several possible reasons." At another point Meg said, "I'd like to insert something here." Using a different style, another woman spoke as if she were telling a story to a group of children. She began, "A little boy grew up in a Samaritan village. He had a happy childhood and sometimes his parents would take him to the neighboring villages, to market, or occasionally they might even go to Galilee to the

sea for a vacation." A third woman, rather than stepping outside the text to comment on it in her own voice, retold the story in a literary register. For example, she said, "The clarity of the directions that God gave him were as a stab in his heart." The fourth woman simply downplayed her authority by maintaining a "low-profile" stance.

By asking first what alignments the preachers took up in relation to their audiences and to the material about which they preached, and only then asking which alignments were adopted by the women and men in her study and what linguistic strategies were associated with those alignments, Smith arrived at a much fuller understanding of gender patterns than she would have if she had asked only what linguistic features appeared in the sermons preached by the women and men. The footings assumed by the women in her study—the ways they positioned themselves with respect to their audiences and their material—tended to background rather than foreground their authority.

In another exemplary study, Elisabeth Kuhn (1992) examines the classroom discourse of professors at American and German universities. She noticed that the American female professors she taped were more assertive in giving their students direct orders at the beginning of the term. This finding initially surprised her, but she eventually realized that it was because they spoke of "the requirements" of the course as if these were handed down directly from the institution and then told the students how they could fulfill them. For example, one female professor said, "We are going to talk about the requirements." Kuhn contrasts this with the male professors in her study, who also handed out lists of requirements in the form of syllabi but made it explicit that the syllabi represented decisions they personally had made. For example, one man said, "I have two midterms and a final. And I added this first midterm rather early to get you going on reading, uh, discussions, so that you will not fall behind." In Smith's terms, this professor put himself "on record" as the authority who authored the requirements. Thus an apparently unexpected verbal behavior—women's speaking more assertively than men—was explained by the alignments they were taking up in relation to the course requirements and the students they were addressing. Both Smith's and Kuhn's findings are consistent with Shari Kendall's (1993) observation that women often create and display their authority in ways that downplay rather than emphasize it.

The approach I am describing as related to framing is also found in Elinor Ochs's essay "Indexing Gender" (1992). Ochs argues that rather than seeing gender-related patterns of behavior as individuals' direct expressions of gender (or sex), we should regard such behavioral patterns as associated with identifiable stances that, in a given cultural context, become associated with being female or male.¹ I see this notion of *stances* as parallel to Goffman's concept of *the class of women* or *the class of men*.

Finally, I borrow Gregory Bateson's (1979) concept of *the corner of the eye* to capture the idea that some phenomena are understood best when they are not looked at directly but rather come into view when some other aspect of the world is the object of direct focus. This is the sense in which I am suggesting that the relation between gender and language may be best understood when the focus of attention is on framing.² Framing, which more closely captures participants' senses of what is going on in an interaction, also captures more closely the relationship between language and gender.

power	solidarity
hierarchy	equality
distance	closeness

Figure 11.1. A unidimensional model of status and connection

Status and connection

The second aspect of the theoretical framework I am proposing here is the notion of status and connection as intertwined, ambiguous, and polysemous rather than mutually exclusive and opposed to each other. I have developed this idea at length elsewhere (Tannen 1994b). The discussion in this section is condensed from that source.

In research and in conventional wisdom, Americans have had a tendency to conceptualize the relationship between status and connection as unidimensional and mutually exclusive. This can be illustrated in the form of a continuum with two opposite poles (see figure 11.1). This conceptualization underlies Americans' use of the terms *sisters* and *brothers* to indicate 'close and equal', so that "We are like sisters" or "They were like brothers" implies not only closeness but also "there are no status games here." In contrast, hierarchical relationships are assumed to preclude closeness. Thus in my own interviews and observations in work settings, I was frequently told that being friends with subordinates or superiors is either impossible or problematic.

I have suggested that what we are dealing with is really not a single dimension but a multidimensional grid (see figure 11.2). This grid illustrates that hierarchy/equality is one axis, and closeness/distance another.³ Americans seem to conceptualize relationships along an axis that runs from the upper right to the lower left: from hi-

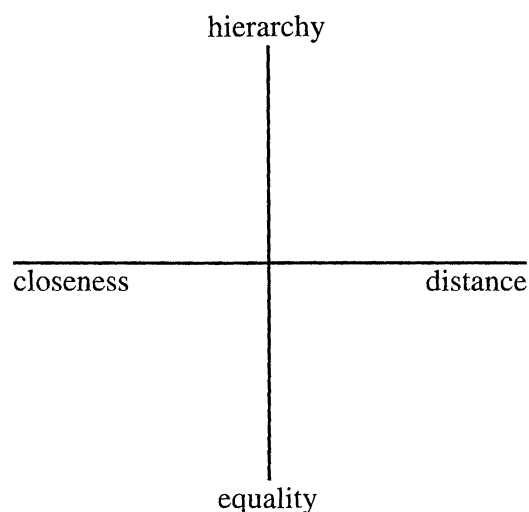


Figure 11.2. A multidimensional model of status and connection

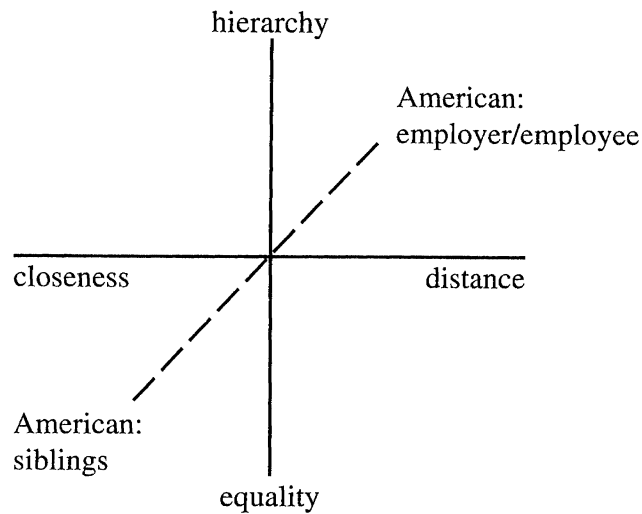


Figure 11.3. The American model of status and connection

erarchical and distant to equal and close. We put business relations in the upper right quadrant and family and close friendships in the lower left (figure 11.3). In contrast, Japanese, Chinese, and Javanese tend to conceptualize relationships along an axis that runs from the upper left to the lower right: from hierarchical and close to equal and distant. The archetype of a close, hierarchical relationship for members of these cultures is the mother-child (or grandparent-grandchild) constellation (figure 11.4).⁴ The locus of equal relationships, in this schema, is not found in the intimate family context but rather at work, among colleagues of the same rank and seniority.

Complicating matters further, or perhaps reflecting the complex relations represented by these grids, linguistic strategies are both ambiguous and polysemous in exhibiting status and connection in interaction. In other words, a given utterance may

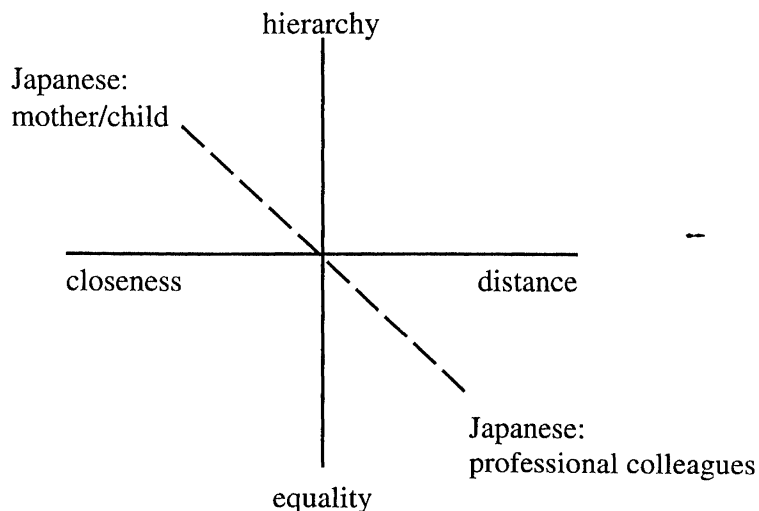


Figure 11.4. The Japanese model of status and connection

be intended or interpreted in terms of connection or of status (whence ambiguity), or it may reflect elements of both at the same time (whence polysemy).

Workplace examples

In this section I present two examples of workplace interaction—one among men and the other among women—in order to illustrate how the speakers balance status and connection and to suggest that their ways of speaking are sex-class-linked and best understood through a theory of framing.

The first example is from a conversation taped by Lena Gavrusseva (1995).⁵ The conversation, which took place in the office of a local newspaper, involved John, the editor-in-chief, and Dan, a recently hired writer. Dan was walking past John's office, spied him sitting at his desk with his door open, and stepped in to engage in friendly chat, which he initiated by asking, "What are you scowling at, John?" In response, John launched into a discourse about problems involving someone's computer (making it into an amusing anecdote about how the computer exploded), in the course of which he referred to Dan's computer in the following way:

John: You just have that little shitburner of an XT.

Soon after, John asked Dan, "How is your computer?" and the following conversation ensued:⁶

- Dan: It sucks. I mean
John: Why?
Dan: I- 'Cause it doesn't
John: Why, it's slow?
Dan: No, it's not that.
It's just like there are all sorts of keys
that don't work and stuff.
John: What do you mean keys that don't work.
Dan: Like the caps lock doesn't work.
John: It can- You want it to?
Dan: No, it doesn't.
John: You want it to?
Dan: Okay.
John: All right. What else would you like?
Dan: um I don't know. It was just sort of-
John: No no no, come on.
Dan: Like I can't turn it off because
John: You would like-
you'd like to be able to turn it off?
Why? 'Cause it bothers you?
Dan: and it's it's frozen up on me
like three times.

- John: Yeah?
- Dan: Yeah.
- John: Like is there a pattern?
- Dan: No, I mean maybe there is
I haven't noticed it.
I- I don't know.
It hasn't done it for about a week or so,
so don't worry.
I'm just griping.
I'm just griping.
I've never-
I've got no particular complaints
because it- all I need to-
I'm not I'm not one of these,
I'm not a computer junkie
so I don't really care.
- John: So if you want your caps lock key to work
there's no problem.
I can come in and do that.
- Dan: No, I don't really need a caps lock.
- John: It'll take me twenty-five seconds.
- Dan: I'd like to s-
Okay I challenge you to do it.
I think it's broken.
I challenge you, John Ryan.
- John: Yes, the John Ryan challenge?
(2-second pause)
You are a fool if you think
you can challenge *me*, Mr. Computer!

In this interaction, connection-focused banter turned into a statusful (and stressful) interchange because of hierarchical relations. During playback, Dan told Gavruseva that he intended his remark *It sucks* in the spirit of what sociolinguists would call troubles talk—a ritual exchange of woes in the service of solidarity. In choosing the vulgar verb *sucks*, he took his cue from John's use of the term *shitburner*. Because Dan intended his remark in this spirit, he averred, he was taken aback when John treated his remark as a literal complaint and offered to fix his computer. Because of the paralinguistic and prosodic quality of John's offers—fast-paced and overbearing, from Dan's point of view—Dan became increasingly uncomfortable, a discomfort that peaked when John proclaimed that he could fix the problem in 25 seconds. It is also possible (although there is no way to know for sure) that John was putting Dan back in his place because he perceived Dan's use of profanity as cheeky or that he felt obligated, as the boss, to do something about a problem brought to his attention, regardless of the spirit in which it was mentioned. In any case, Dan told Gavruseva that he felt John was "showing him up" and putting him "on the spot." Gavruseva observes that John was framing Dan as a supplicant.

At this point, Dan restored balance by playfully challenging his boss, and the boss agreed to the shift in alignment by playing along. I suggest that in the excerpt that follows, Dan's reframing signaled to the boss that he had stepped over a line and that John tacitly agreed to redress the imbalance of power by bonding with Dan as two men who can talk indelicately and can align themselves in opposition to women.

Knowing that John had been suffering from an intestinal ailment, Dan shifted the topic to John's health. John's surprise at the topic shift (and frame shift) is evidenced in his initial response, *What's that?*:

-
- Dan: How are you feeling today, John?
- John: What's that?
- Dan: How are you feeling? Are you still-
- John: um Actually my guts started grinding
and I thought, "Hey, it's back,"
but I had like a heavy night last night.
I mean I went to bed at six,
and only came out to
like piss and drink water,
and eat a can of tuna fish.
I mean it was bad.
I get a gastro-intestinal thing
at both ends.
It was it was spewing.
It was violent.
- Dan: (laughing) Not simultaneously.
Please tell me no.
- John: No no no but it was intense.
And it made me so glad
that there was no girlfriend around,
nobody could take care of me.
There's only one fucking thing I hate
it's being sick
and somebody wants to take care of me . . .

With his query about John's health, Dan redirected the conversation away from talk that framed Dan as subordinate (both because he needed to report his problems to John and because John declared himself able to fix in 25 seconds a problem that Dan was unable to fix) in favor of a conversation that framed John as potentially one-down (a sufferer of embarrassing physical ailments). John went along with the reframing by recounting the symptoms of his intestinal distress. By talking explicitly about body functions gone awry, he seems to be positioning Dan as an equal—they are now two men who can talk openly about such topics, which they might not do if women were present. John then goes further toward aligning himself with Dan, man to man, by referring to how annoying women can be when a man is sick. Moreover, the very act of choosing the topic and having John accede to it reframes Dan as higher in status than he was in the preceding interchange. At the same time, how-

ever, as Gavruseva pointed out to me, John is still positioning himself as someone who does not need help. In this example, then, Dan and John reflect and negotiate their relative status while apparently engaging in office small talk.

Contrast this with the following segment that was taped by Janice Hornyak (in preparation) in connection with her study of discourse in an all-woman office. Tina had been telling a story when June, the mail clerk, entered the office to deliver the mail. Tina stopped her narrative and invited June into the room, and into the interaction, by commenting on her clothing. The other women joined in:

- June: Hi.
 Tina: Hey! Ah, we gotta see this getup.
 Come on in.
 Heather: C'mere June!
 Tina: She she she's uh ... that's cute.
 Heather: Lo:ve that beau:tiful blou:se!
 Janice: Hey, high fashion today.
 Tina: Cool.
 June: Hi ... I had the blouse /?/
 and didn't know what to wear it with.
 And I just took the tag off
 and /?/ said /?/
 I'm gonna wear it with a vest.
 Tina: And that hair too.
 Janice: Oh that's neat.
 Heather: Is that your Mom's?
 [Tina laughs]
 June: No I got this from uh /?/
 Tina: What is it?
 June: /It's from/ Stylo.
 Tina: I've heard of it.
 June: The one in Trader Plaza
 that has all that wild stuff.
 Heather: What'd you do to your hair?
 June: Added /?/.
 Judith said you just are bored,
 you have to do something.
 [All laugh]

At first glance, this too is an instance of office small talk, or what I have called *rapport talk* (Tannen 1990) to refer to conversational discourse in which the phatic function seems to override the informational. Nonetheless, relative status is a pervasive influence on this interaction as well. The complimenting ritual is initiated by Tina, who is the manager of the office and also the daughter of the company's owner. She is the highest-status person in the interaction. June, the mail clerk (and also the intruder into the office), who is the object of the complimenting, is the lowest-status person present. Complimenting June on her clothing was a resource by which Tina

could include her in the conversation, even though Tina did not want to include June in the interrupted narrative event, as she might have done if a status equal or friend had entered unexpectedly. In other words, complimenting June on her clothing was a conventionalized ritual that Tina could use as a resource to attend to her as a person, even as Tina failed to include June in the storytelling event that her arrival interrupted. Importantly, one could not imagine their alignment reversed: June would not likely have entered with the mail and called out to Tina regarding her clothing. As with John in the computer-fixing segment, in this interaction the highest-status person controlled the framing of the interaction.

The other two speakers' participation can be arrayed along the status dimension as well. Heather is next in status under Tina, and she follows Tina's lead with alacrity. Hers is the most extreme expressive intonation, in contrast to the subdued international contours used by June and by Janice, who is a temporary office worker (and the researcher). Thus Janice and June, who have the lowest status, are also the lowest-key in their paralinguistic contours.⁷ Keeping a low profile paralinguistically is an element of demeanor that creates and reflects their lower status in this encounter. Furthermore, both of Janice's contributions are immediate ratifications of a superior's comments:

Heather: Lo:ve that beau:tiful blou:se!

Janice: Hey, high fashion today.

...

Tina: And that hair too.

Janice: Oh that's neat.

Thus, at the same time that Janice is aligned with Heather and Tina as a complimenter of June's clothing, she is also positioning herself as subordinate, or at least not superior, to them insofar as her contributions are subdued echoes and ratifications of theirs rather than initiations of utterances that reframe the interaction.

In summary, these two examples illustrate parallel ways of balancing status and connection in interaction. The ways that the speakers created connection also reflected and created their relative status. Or, to reverse this statement, the ways that they negotiated their relative status also reflected and created connections among them. We are not dealing with an either/or choice: *Is status or connection at play?* Instead, we see that every moment of the interactions exhibited complex interrelations among the two dimensions.

Moving to the second main point of this chapter, the linguistic patterns exhibited in these examples, which negotiate both status and connection, are also sex-class-linked. It is not coincidental and haphazard that the first conversation is characterized by vulgarity; play challenge; displays of helping, expertise, and needing no help; and bonding against women and that it took place among men with no women present. Nor is it coincidental and haphazard that the second conversation is characterized by lengthy complimenting; focus on clothing and shopping; balancing of display and gaze; and expressive intonation and that it took place among women with no men present. Imagining these two conversations taking place among speakers of the other gender yields the stuff of comic theater or of sexual and gender transgression (in the

latter regard, see Rusty Barrett, chapter 16, this volume). Patterns associated with gender are pervasive in the interactions, reflected on a range of levels including vocabulary, topic, intonation patterns, and the whole array of alignments that can be considered in the domain of framing.⁸

It is well to recall at this point that ways of conventionalizing the balance of hierarchy and connection are culturally relative. I have no intention of implying that the conversations presented in these examples would be typical in other cultures. Cultural relativity is particularly apt in connection with the element of spectatorship versus display that emerges in the second example. Margaret Mead (1977) notes that there are cultures in which higher social status is associated with display and lower status with spectatorship, as in the British assumption that adults speak whereas children should be seen and not heard. In other cultures these alignments may be reversed, as when American children are called upon to display their talents for onlooking adults ("Show Aunt Ann and Uncle Harry how you can say your ABCs"). This dynamic is evidenced in the women's conversation, in which the higher-status women take the role of spectators to the lower-status woman's display of her clothing. This is reminiscent of an example discussed by Goffman (1981:124–125) in which President Nixon reframed journalist Helen Thomas as "domestic" and "sexual" rather than "professional" by interrupting a press conference to remark on her wearing pants, asking her to "turn around" so that he could appraise how well they suited her, and inquiring as to whether her husband approved of that mode of dress. Here, too, the discourse is sex-class-linked: It seems far less likely that the display of clothing had the sexual overtones in the all-women context that it clearly had in the press conference, in which Thomas was asked to "pirouette" (in Goffman's terms) for a male president in front of an audience of male reporters and cameramen (who, we are told, roared with laughter at the president's wit).

Discussion

Dramatic evidence that gendered patterns of behavior are a matter of display, not identity, lies in the autobiographical writing of a woman with autism, Donna Williams. In her books *Nobody Nowhere* (1992) and *Somebody Somewhere* (1994), Williams explains that despite her inability to understand what people were saying and doing, she was able to function in the world by imitating others. She regarded her convincing performances not as expressions of her own self, whom she calls Donna, but as the creations of two imaginary personas that she calls her "characters" or "façades": one named Willie and the other named Carol. Williams explains that, until she was well into her 20s, she had lived in her own world of autism, which she calls "my world," yet managed to function in "the world" as "the characters I called Carol and Willie (my 'the world' façades) . . ." (1994:6). She maintained these outward personas, Williams writes, until "progressively, Donna was seen in smaller and smaller snapshots until there was no longer anything visible left of her" (10).

According to Williams, "Willie started life as a pair of green eyes under my bed when I was two years old" (1994:7); "Carol came along a year and a half after Willie" and was "based on a little girl I met only once in the park" (9). Although she gave

them female and male names respectively, and Carol was based on a particular little girl, Williams never explicitly mentions the characters' sex and gives no reason to believe that she herself thought of them as quintessentially female and male. Yet her account of how they spoke and acted through her mouth and body reads like a caricature of stereotypically female and male styles. A small sampling of a much larger repertoire follows.

Willie went for interviews; Carol held down jobs. "Willie was the scholar. Carol was a repertoire of stored-up 'social' skits" (19–20). Willie was a speed reader who accumulated facts to impress people; Carol smiled, cocked her head, and filled the air with social chatter. Willie was strong, feared nothing, and was always in control. He appeared indifferent, responsible, and detached. Carol was "all that people wanted her to be: a smiling, social imp. . . . With language echoed from storybook records, TV commercials, and stored conversations, Carol could buy my way through life . . ." (9–10). Carol had a "cheery" facade (10). Willie seized upon key words and elaborated them (40). "As Carol," Williams explains, "I never had to understand anything that happened. I just had to look good" (89). When she determines to confront the world without invoking her characters, Williams panics: "Carol could have looked at him and laughed. Willie could have imparted his latest store of interesting information" (13). "Willie wasn't there to help me understand, depersonalize, and deny. Carol wasn't there to make me laugh and pretend nothing mattered" (69).

Carol, above all, smiled:

Smiling works wonders though—smile and people think you can do almost anything, you know. (1994:42)

Mockingly I put on a disturbing minute-long medley of action replays of Carol smiles, poses, and witty lines. (1994:47)

Carol is always ready to entertain with "quick jokes, clever lines and a smile—always the smile" (1994:55). Looking back on her earlier life, Williams focuses on the role of Carol's smiling in allowing others to exploit and abuse her:

I burned with the injustice of having been taught to put a smile on the face of hatred. I raged silently with the memory of how others justified what they'd done as long as I did as I was told and smiled, always smiled. (1994:56)

People could do the most atrocious things as long as they smiled peacefully at me. A smile always called for a smile and unintentionally I not only let them get away with murdering Carol again and again but my innocent smile seemed to tell them it was okay. (1994:111)

Goffman's comments on smiling provide an explanation for Williams's behavior in the role of Carol. He includes smiling (like the head-cocking in which Williams also engages as Carol) as a form of "ritualization of subordination" linked with the female sex class:

Smiles, it can be argued, often function as ritualistic mollifiers, signaling that nothing agonistic is intended or invited, that the meaning of the other's act has been understood and found acceptable, that, indeed, the other is approved and appreciated. Those who warily keep an eye on the movements of a potential aggressor may find themselves automatically smiling should their gaze be "caught" by its object, who in turn may find little cause to smile back. In addition, a responding smile (even more so an appreciative laugh) following very rapidly on the heels of a speaker's sally can imply that the respondent belongs, by knowledgeability, at least, to the speaker's circle. All of these smiles, then, seem more the offering of an inferior than superior. In any case, it appears that in cross-sexed encounters in American society, women smile more, and more expansively, than men. . . . (1979:48)

Norma Mendoza-Denton (1996) reports that the gang girls she studied refrained from smiling as part of their "macha" style. Bonnie McElhinny (1995) makes a similar observation concerning female police officers, who assume a demeanor they consider appropriate to their professional role—a role previously associated with the male sex class. Williams's ability to take on the personas of both Willie and Carol, as needed, supports Goffman's claim that gender is not a matter of identity—inherent modes of behavior that are "given off" helter-skelter—but of display: chosen from a range of possible behaviors and linking speakers to others of a sex class. That Williams was apparently unaware that in Willie and Carol she was performing male and female roles is evidence of the wider phenomenon that people are often unaware that their ways of speaking are sex-class-linked.

This unawareness makes our task as researchers all the more challenging. Barbara Johnstone (1995) discovered this attitude when she interviewed four prominent and successful Texas women who do a great deal of public speaking: a union leader; a former congresswoman; a journalist, writer, and musician; and an attorney. Johnstone notes that when she asked them where they thought their speaking styles came from, all four denied that their being female affected their ways of speaking, although they all readily acknowledged the influence of being Texan. The lawyer was typical in saying that her success as a litigator was unrelated to being female but simply reflected her being "herself": "People have told me that they think that I'm successful in the courtroom because I can identify with the jury, that the juries like me. And I haven't ever figured out why, except that I try to smile, and I try to just be myself. And I don't put on any airs" (1995:197).

Much could be said about this woman's ability to "identify" with the jury, her likability, her not putting on any airs, and the relation of all these patterns of behavior (and the language attitudes they reflect) to female sex-class-linked behavior. But what leapt out at me was her saying that she tries to smile. Her certainty that this behavior has nothing to do with her gender but just reflects her being "herself" should not impede our ability to understand the extent to which her way of being herself is sex-class-linked. Donna Williams's performance as Carol aside, a cursory glance at female and male news anchors and television news correspondents, or a random assortment of women and men in a social situation, will confirm that women tend to smile more than men. (One must never cease to emphasize that this is not to claim that every individual woman necessarily smiles often nor that every individual man

257

does not; however, it is clearly the case that women are expected to smile more often than men are and that women are seen as severe and lacking in humor if they do not smile, whereas men who do not smile often are not likely to meet with negative reactions as a result.)

Johnstone's study provides evidence that individuals may not be aware that their styles are sex-class-linked; some may even take offense at the suggestion that they are. Others, however, may be aware of such linkage but nonetheless be reluctant to admit it. Mona Harrington (1994) describes a group of female attorneys who left large law firms to start their own. The women told Harrington that they believe they practice law differently than they were able to when working for large traditional firms. They said that they represent clients not by being as aggressive and confrontational as possible but by listening, observing, and "reading" opponents better. One pointed out that in taking depositions, she gets better results by adopting a "quiet, sympathetic approach" (1994:186), charming witnesses into forgetting that the attorney deposing them is their adversary, than by grilling witnesses and attacking them. Yet when interviewed by the press, these same women do not mention their different styles, not even to explain how well they work. Instead, they stress that they are "tough" litigators and seasoned veterans of traditionally contentious legal settings. The reason, they explained, was that if they told the truth about their styles, they would be dismissed as soft and weak. Their conclusion has been that they can't talk about it: "You have to just *be* it, and develop a reputation" (1994:187).

It is nothing new for linguists to recognize that speakers often cannot or will not accurately describe how they speak or why and that researchers must draw conclusions from observation, not self-report (although interviews with speakers may well provide further material for observation). Researchers in the field of language and gender need to be especially attuned to this dilemma. We want to describe and understand linguistic behavior that patterns by gender, and we want to listen to those we study, but speakers who exhibit gendered patterns may be unaware of the influence of gender on their styles and may resist acknowledging that influence even if they are aware of it. At the same time, we need to beware of a range of dangers that can follow from describing gendered patterns, even if those descriptions are accurate. For example, patterns can be misread as norms, and anyone who finds a behavior unappealing can hear its description as a slur. I believe that the theoretical construct of framing, or the sex-class-linked nature of the relationship between language and gender, can provide a solution to this dilemma.

Conclusion

I have attempted to show that understanding language and gender is best approached through the concept of framing, by which gendered patterns of behavior are seen as sex-class-linked rather than sex-linked, as a matter of display rather than of identity, in Goffman's terms. With reference to analysis of two examples of workplace discourse, I have shown that framing allows us to see how speakers simultaneously balance the dimensions of status and connection. Thus these dimensions are not mutually exclusive poles but rather are both at play in every moment of interaction.

Finally, by showing, first, the interrelation between status (that is, dominance) and connection, and, second, the role of culture in negotiating both, I have demonstrated that it is a misconception to regard a "cultural" approach to gender and language (such as that advanced in my own work, as well as the earlier work of Daniel Maltz and Ruth Borker [1982]) as opposed to and irreconcilable with a "dominance" approach (which sets out to show how gender-associated language patterns reflect the dominance of women by men). Rather, culturally mediated framing conventions provide unique ways of negotiating relationships along both the status dimension of hierarchy/equality and the connection dimension of distance/closeness—in sex-class-linked ways.

TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

Line breaks are intended to capture the rhythmic chunking that characterizes speech.

A hyphen indicates abrupt cutting off of breath, as in a false start.

Underline indicates emphatic stress.

Three spaced dots (. . .) indicate ellipsis. The speaker's turn did not end at this point.

Three unspaced dots (...) indicate pause of approximately a half second.

: indicates elongation of preceding vowel.

/?/ indicates inaudible utterance.

/Words/ in slashes indicate uncertain transcription.

NOTES

This chapter is a revised version of a paper originally presented at the Third Berkeley Women and Language Conference and published in the conference proceedings (Tannen 1994a). A somewhat different version is also included in the paperback edition of my book *Gender and Discourse* (Tannen 1994b).

1. Interestingly, this leaves open the question of whether women and men who speak in ways associated with the other gender may not be indexing the other gender. It seems clear that this is so when gay men refer to each other as *she* or *Miss*. But is it also the case when heterosexuals or lesbians and gay men who are not "out" speak in ways associated with the other gender? In this volume, William Leap (chapter 13) and A. C. Liang (chapter 15) provide two different starting points for investigating this question.

2. The corner-of-the-eye concept is further explored by Mary Catherine Bateson in her book *Peripheral Visions* (1994). For a related notion, see Mary Bucholtz's (chapter 18, this volume) advocacy of "quick-cut camerawork" as a metaphor for language and gender research methodology.

3. After developing this framework, I discovered that Peter Mühlhäusler and Rom Harré (1990) came up with a similar one.

4. For Javanese, see Clare Wolfowitz (1991); for Japanese, see Takeo Doi (1973); my source for Chinese has been Ron Scollon (personal communication).

5. Gavruseva taped the conversation in connection with a seminar I taught in the fall of 1993 at Georgetown University. The initial part of the analysis presented here, which illuminates the power relations between the two speakers, is taken from Gavruseva's term paper,

written for that seminar and later presented at the 1995 annual meeting of the Linguistic Society of America in New Orleans. Her analysis, however, did not extend to the second part of the conversation, beginning *How are you feeling today, John?* This section of analysis is my own interpretation of the conversation she taped and transcribed.

6. Dialogue is presented in lines representing breath groups rather than undifferentiated paragraphs because this more closely resembles the way in which spoken language is realized and perceived.

7. Although I am here focusing on hierarchical relations as the key variable, other influences on conversational style are, as always, operative. Hornyak points out that Heather is from the South, and her style of speaking calls that to mind for everyone who hears her (see Cynthia McLemore [1991] on Southern women's intonation). On the other hand, June is African American, and it is possible that her style would exhibit more paralinguistic variation if she were talking to peers (for other elements of African American women's conversational style, see Marcyliena Morgan, chapter 1, this volume).

8. Jennifer Coates (chapter 6, this volume) explores a similar range of linguistic dimensions in her work on British girls' friendship talk; she likewise finds that both status and connection are accomplished in the girls' conversations and that as they grow older these are achieved in what I am calling sex-class-linked ways. The negotiation of status and connection is also found in the interaction of the Latina girls studied by Norma Mendoza-Denton (chapter 14, this volume).

REFERENCES

- Angier, Natalie (1993). An evolving celebrity. *New York Times* (February 11):B1.
- Bateson, Gregory (1972). *Steps to an ecology of mind*. New York: Ballantine.
- (1979). *Mind and nature*. New York: Ballantine.
- Bateson, Mary Catherine (1994). *Peripheral visions*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Becker, A.L. (1995). *Beyond translation: Essays toward a modern philology*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Davies, Bronwyn, & Rom Harré (1990). Positioning: Conversation and the production of selves. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior* 20(1):43–63.
- Doi, Takeo (1973). *The anatomy of dependence*. Tokyo: Kodansha.
- Gavruseva, Lena (1995). Constructing interactional asymmetry in employer-employee discourse. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Linguistic Society of America, New Orleans.
- Goffman, Erving (1974). *Frame analysis*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- (1977). The arrangement between the sexes. *Theory and Society* 4(3):301–331.
- (1979). *Gender advertisements*. New York: Harper & Row.
- (1981). *Forms of talk*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Harrington, Mona (1994). *Women lawyers: Rewriting the rules*. New York: Knopf.
- Hornyak, Janice (in preparation). Shifting between personal and professional frames in office discourse. Ph.D. diss., Georgetown University.
- Johnstone, Barbara (1995). Sociolinguistic resources, individual identities, and public speech styles of Texas women. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 5(2):183–202.
- Kendall, Shari (1993). Constructing competence: Gender and mitigation at a radio network. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Association for Applied Linguistics, Baltimore.
- Kuhn, Elisabeth D. (1992). Playing down authority while getting things done: Women professors get help from the institution. In Kira Hall, Mary Bucholtz, & Birch Moonwomon (eds.), *Locating power: Proceedings of the Second Berkeley Women and Language Conference*. Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Women and Language Group, 318–325.

- Maccoby, Eleanor (1988). Gender as a social category. *Developmental Psychology* 24(6):755-765.
- (1990). Gender and relationships: A developmental account. *American Psychologist* 45(4):513-520.
- Maccoby, Eleanor E., & Carol N. Jacklin (1974). *The psychology of sex differences*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Maltz, Daniel N., & Ruth A. Borker (1982). A cultural approach to male-female miscommunication. In John J. Gumperz (ed.), *Language and social identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 196-216.
- McElhinny, Bonnie (1995). Challenging hegemonic masculinities: Female and male police officers handling domestic violence. In Kira Hall & Mary Bucholtz (eds.), *Gender articulated: Language and the socially constructed self*. New York: Routledge, 217-244.
- McLemore, Cynthia Ann (1991). The pragmatic interpretation of English intonation: Sorority speech. Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin.
- Mead, Margaret (1977). End linkage: A tool for cross-cultural analysis. In John Brockman (ed.), *About Bateson*. New York: Dutton, 171-231.
- Mendoza-Denton, Norma (1996). "Muy macha": Gender and ideology in gang-girls' discourse about makeup. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Association for Applied Linguistics, Symposium on Gendered Discourse Communities, Chicago.
- Mühlhäusler, Peter, & Rom Harré (1990). *Pronouns and people: The linguistic construction of social and personal identity*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Nussbaum, Emily (1997). Inside publishing. *Lingua Franca* (December/January):22-24.
- Ochs, Elinor (1992). Indexing gender. In Alessandro Duranti & Charles Goodwin (eds.), *Rethinking context: Language as an interactive phenomenon*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 335-358.
- Reddy, Michael (1979). The conduit metaphor: A case of frame conflict in our language about language. In Andrew Ortony (ed.), *Metaphor and thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 284-324.
- Smith, Frances Lee (1993). The pulpit and woman's place: Gender and the framing of the "exegetical self" in sermon performances. In Deborah Tannen (ed.), *Framing in discourse*. New York: Oxford University Press, 147-175.
- Tannen, Deborah (1990). *You just don't understand: Women and men in conversation*. New York: Ballantine.
- (1994a). The sex-class-linked framing of talk at work. In Mary Bucholtz, A. C. Liang, Laurel Sutton, & Caitlin Hines (eds.), *Cultural performances: Proceedings of the Third Berkeley Women and Language Conference*. Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Women and Language Group, 712-728.
- (1994b). The relativity of linguistic strategies: Rethinking power and solidarity in gender and dominance. In Tannen, *Gender and discourse*. New York: Oxford University Press, 19-52.
- (1994c). *Talking from 9 to 5: Women and men in the workplace—Language, sex, and power*. New York: Avon.
- Wetzel, Patricia J. (1988). Are "powerless" communication strategies the Japanese norm? *Language in Society* 17:555-564.
- Williams, Donna (1992). *Nobody nowhere: The extraordinary autobiography of an autistic*. New York: Times Books.
- (1994). *Somebody somewhere: Breaking free from the world of autism*. New York: Times Books.
- Wolfowitz, Clare (1991). *Language style and social space: Stylistic choice in Suriname Javanese*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.