

# DEBORAH TANNEN

He Said, She Said

Instructor's Package



INTO THE CLASSROOM

**MEDIA**

# Teaching Guide

---

This guide is intended to provide an outline, as well as suggested uses and discussion/writing questions, for **Deborah Tannen: He Said, She Said**.

The following pages provide general notes for each section, with key quotes from the video, as well as suggested discussion questions relevant to the section.

The program is divided into seven parts, each clearly distinguished by a section title during the program (with the exception of the first section).

## Structure:

**Seven-part video for easy reference:**

- 1. Boys & Girls**
- 2. Status & Connection**
- 3. Directness & Indirectness**
- 4. Public Talk & Private Talk**
- 5. Ritual Opposition**
- 6. Conversational Style**
- 7. Conclusion**

The division of the program into sections will allow you to selectively view desired portions of the presentation, to pause for discussion between appropriate sections, or to view the program in its entirety.

Total running time for this program is approximately 50 minutes.

(Note: **Deborah Tannen: In-Depth**, the optional companion presentation to **Deborah Tannen: He Said, She Said**, runs approximately 25 minutes.)

# BOYS AND GIRLS

---

Deborah Tannen sets her stage by proposing that we think of conversations between men and women as cross-cultural communication, in the sense that women and men grow up in different worlds. Girls and boys not only play differently but also learn to use language in very different ways.

In this section, Tannen shows video clips of a naturalistic experiment demonstrating the different physical alignments that boys and girls establish when they talk to each other. The clips shows pairs of five year olds, ten year olds, and fifteen year olds talking to their same-sex best friends.

***(from the video:)***

*And what you see is that, at each age, the girls face each other and have a kind of direct gaze that they create. They keep looking at each other the whole time that they're talking to each other. And what you see with the boys (the little ones, the older ones, and the oldest ones), is that they sit either at angles or parallel and they look around the room [rather than directly at each other].*

Tannen then explains that as children grown into adults, these same patterns continue, leading men and women to misjudge each other's intentions. A woman talking to a man who does not look directly at her gets the impression that the man is not listening, because that's what it would mean if she were looking around the room when her best friend was talking to her.

This example sets the theme that is developed throughout the presentation: If you talk to others whose conversational styles are similar to yours, you are safe to conclude that they mean what you would mean if you spoke in that way. But when conversational styles differ, as they often do between women and men, this conclusion can lead to misinterpretation, misjudgment, and miscommunication.

## **Discussion topics related to this section:**

- Describe the key distinction between the ways boys and girls sit when talking to their best friends.
- Why does Tannen open with this example? How does this pattern set the stage for the rest of her analysis of communication between women and men?

## **Suggestion for outside assignment:**

Go to an open area at lunchtime or any other location where men and women are talking casually with friends, one on one. Take notes describing the physical alignments you observe. Tannen's experiment showed only same-sex pairs talking. What do you observe when cross-sex pairs talk to each other?

# STATUS AND CONNECTION

---

In this section, Tannen shows candid video footage of girls and boys at play in order to illustrate the different ways they use language.

Girls tend to socialize in pairs, and a common theme is telling secrets. A girl's best friend is the one she tells everything to. Girls are critical of other girls who act as if they're better than the others.

For boys, activities are central. Their best friends are the ones they do everything with. Boys frequently play-fight, and they use language to negotiate their status in the group. Giving orders and making them stick raises a boy's status.

*"The same effort that the boys are putting into proving that they can top each other, the girls are putting an equal amount of effort into proving that they're the same. Even if they're not."*

These *conversational rituals* learned in childhood become the basis for conversational rituals habitually used by women and men. The girls learn to downplay status differences and focus on connection, whereas boys learn to focus on status differences and create connection through goodnatured competition.

**(from the video:)**

*Very often, walking away from the same conversation, women and men will have different interpretations. And often it's because the women are focusing on the question of connection (i.e. "Is this way of speaking bringing us closer or putting us farther apart?"). And very often men are coming to the same conversation looking at a different axis and with a different question (i.e. "Is this conversation putting one of us in a one-up or a one-down position?"). So the same way of speaking can be interpreted very differently depending on whether you're looking at it from the perspective of status or of connection.*

Having introduced the contrasting focus on status and connection, Tannen shows how these different perspectives explain behavior of each sex that puzzles the other: asking directions and apologizing.

The popular truism that men don't like to stop and ask for directions actually was first described by Tannen in *You Just Don't Understand*. She explains here that the act of asking for help makes many men uncomfortable because it puts them in a one-down position, so it makes sense for them to spend a little (or a lot of) time finding their way on their own.

**(from the video:)**

*What about the injunction women are so frequently told, "Don't apologize. It's not your fault." (because she said, "I'm sorry.") But very often women say "I'm sorry" not as an apology, but to mean "I'm sorry that happened." However, men often interpret this as "she thinks it's her fault."...*

*There you have it again. “I’m sorry” as in “I’m sorry that happened” is a way of taking the other person’s feelings into account. It’s acknowledging the connection.*

*But if you think of it as apologizing because you’re taking blame, because you think you did something wrong, it’s putting you in a one-down position. So you would avoid apologizing if you could...*

*I think that explains in part why (and we have research that shows that it is true) women do say, “I’m sorry” more frequently than men do.*

### **Discussion topics related to this section:**

- What is the key distinction Tannen makes about the character of boys’ and girls’ play?
- Discuss Tannen’s examples of boys and girls at play. What do these examples demonstrate about the use of language to negotiate status and establish connection? (Bear in mind that the same way of speaking can do both at once.)
- Tannen argues that boys and girls both are interested in status and connection, but that the difference lies in which dimension they focus on and how their conversational rituals address these concerns. How do girls manage differences in status? How do boys create connection through competition for status?
- Citing the examples of asking directions and apologizing, discuss the various reasons men and women give for asking directions (or not) and for apologizing (or not).
- Can you think of other examples where the same conversation can look very different depending on whether it is approached from the perspective of status or of connection?

### **Suggestion for outside assignment:**

Go out and observe children at play. (Some possible sites are a local day care center, a school yard, a child’s party, any public play areas, a toy store, etc.) Take notes and discuss whether you see the patterns Tannen describes.

# **DIRECTNESS AND INDIRECTNESS**

---

Tannen begins this section with an illustration. A man and woman are driving home. She asks, "Are you thirsty? Would you like to stop for a drink?" He answers, "No." Later it turns out that she is annoyed because she wanted to stop.

He complains, "Why do you play games with me? Why didn't you just tell me you wanted to stop?" She complains, "We never do what I want anyway. We always do what you want." She feels that she showed interest in his preference by asking her question, whereas he showed that he didn't care what she preferred by answering "No."

Tannen shows that this impasse is caused by different conversational rituals regarding decision-making.

***(from the video:)***

*I suspect that when she asked, "Would you like to stop for a drink?" she probably did not expect a yes/no answer. She probably expected something like, "I don't know. How do you feel about it?" And then she could say, "I don't know. How do you feel about it?" ...*

*(Because) she doesn't know whether or not she wants to stop for a drink until she knows how he feels about it. By asking him, she was showing that she was taking his feelings into account. From her point of view, when he said, "No," he was doing the opposite. He was showing that he was not taking her feelings into account.*

Tannen then discusses how different habits with regard to indirectness can make the same conversation look very different to each person — and how his and her conversational styles are at the core of this miscommunication.

He assumes that a decision is made by starting specific and negotiating out: He begins by saying "No," but if she isn't happy with that decision, she will say so, and they will eventually arrive at a conclusion that satisfies both.

Her way of reaching a conclusion that satisfies both is to ask a general question about his preference, and then negotiate in, taking everyone's feelings into account.

So for him the direct answer "no" was the starting point of a negotiation, but for her it meant the end of negotiation — and the end of the conversation.

***(from the video:)***

*Just the kind of answer that he's giving her [a "yes/no" answer] is the kind of answer he wants from her — but it's not the kind of answer she wants from him. And so it's not the kind of answer she's giving him. [He wonders why she doesn't just tell him what she wants. She feels like he doesn't care.]*

Closing this section, Tannen stresses that, despite conventional wisdom (and her own research), it is not the case that women are always indirect and men always direct.

Though women are often indirect when getting others to do things, men are more often indirect in other contexts, such as admitting fault, apologizing, talking about having been hurt, and so on.

### **Discussion topics related to this section:**

- In this section Tannen introduces the terms “message” and “meta-message.” Define and discuss these terms.
- Define and discuss how Tannen uses the concept “negotiating out” and “negotiating in” with regard to making decisions.
- In this context, discuss how a “yes/no” answer can have different meanings to different people.
- Discuss whether Americans of different ethnic backgrounds may have different conversational rituals regarding directness and indirectness.
- Can you think of other examples of different habits regarding directness and indirectness?
- When does Tannen suggest men are more likely to be indirect than women? Relate these patterns back to the perspectives of status and connection.

### **Suggestion for outside assignment:**

Interview your friends and family about what frustrates them in dealing with family members, friends, or romantic partners of the other sex. Does indirectness or directness play a role? Do these patterns also reflect relative focus on status and connection?

# PUBLIC AND PRIVATE TALK

---

In this section, Tannen introduces the terms “public speaking” and “private speaking” or “public and private talk,” where she uses “public” and “private” in particular ways. She demonstrates that the perspectives of status and connection are at the core of the kinds of talk women and men expect and practice in each realm.

A vignette illustrates this point: A woman asks a man, “How was your day?” and receives a minimal reply. She presses, “Didn’t anything happen?” and he demurs, “Same old rat race.” Later they go out to dinner with friends, and he regales the group with an amusing story of something that happened at work.

She is dismayed: Hearing the story as a member of a large audience makes her feel that she is not special; it is a violation of their closeness. But when they were alone, he didn’t feel the need to amuse her with a story — that’s private speaking. He didn’t even recall the story until he felt the responsibility to hold his own in a group — that’s public speaking.

These different assumptions about public and private speaking grow out of different understandings of the comfort of home:

***(from the video:)***

*At the end of the day from her point of view:*

*Like a lot of women she feels she really has to watch it when she’s out in the world. Because if you say the wrong thing you could hurt somebody’s feelings. You could spark a conflict. People could think you’re too aggressive if you talk too much. But, at home, you’re completely comfortable with the person you feel close to. So, you’re free to talk.*

*But, he’s feeling:*

*“I’ve had to use language all day out there to make sure that I get the respect I deserve; to make sure people take me seriously; to show what I know; to argue when I have to. Now I’m home with somebody I’m completely comfortable with. I have nothing to prove. I’m free not to talk.” And so just the thing that she wants to do to show “we’re close” is just the thing he wants not to do to show we’re close (i.e. “We’re close, we don’t have to talk. We know we love each other.”)*

Next Tannen introduces “troubles talk” — a kind of “rapport talk” that many women use to create connections with each other. Like sharing secrets, telling troubles is a fundamental way that many women create and maintain friendships.

Deepening our understanding of status and connection, Tannen here explains that knowing other women’s secrets and troubles enhances a woman’s status.



**(from the video:)**

*Because your best friend is somebody you tell things to, if you tell another woman your troubles, that creates your friendship. In fact, if you find out that your friend had a problem in her life and she didn't tell you about it, you feel that that's clipping the wings of the friendship.*

*And I have had women tell me that [this often presents] a problem: For example, if two women share problems and then somehow one of them doesn't have a problem anymore, the friend can actually feel [the friendship has been violated.] One woman told me that "When women are friends, they don't let you be different. If she tells me she has a problem and I say that's not a problem for me, she says 'You're putting me down.'"*

*So, it's not that women don't care about being one-up or one-down. It's that they're not focused on it and take different kinds of evidence as being put down. And that can sometimes present a challenge to women which is "you better have a problem to tell me."*

Tannen then explains that because men don't typically use troubles talk as a connection ritual, they think they are being asked to find a solution to the problem.

Here Tannen describes an encounter she had with a taxi driver that illustrates this point.

**(from the video:)**

*He said, "I'm watching television. She says to me, 'What should my brother do?'" And he looked at me in the rearview mirror and he said, "Her brother's 35. Why should I give him advice?" So she wanted to do troubles talk. I guess she didn't have any troubles of her own, so she borrowed her brother's troubles. Just to talk about it.*

*[From his perspective], "if you tell me troubles, you want me to fix them." So, [from his perspective] she's asking for advice. Furthermore, she's asking for advice for her brother. Furthermore, her brother is 35. He doesn't need advice. So again, it's this awareness of hierarchy and he doesn't want to be one-up to her brother (i.e. "I'm not older than he is. I'm not responsible for him. I don't have to tell him what to do.")*

*So that was a clear example of how troubles-talk is something that would be a very good kind of talk for women and a very peculiar kind of talk for many men.*

Next Tannen turns to the question, "Who talks more, women or men?" She begins by identifying a contradiction: Common jokes and stereotypes have women talking too much, but research consistently finds that men talk more than women.

Tannen explains that her notion of public and private speaking accounts for this contradiction. She lays the groundwork for her explanation with an anecdote in which

a man does all the talking at a meeting — then says of his wife, “She’s the talker in our family.” In fact, she’s the talker when they’re home, and he’s the talker when they’re at a meeting.

**(from the video:)**

*So for her, talk comes into its own when you’re one on one with someone you feel close to. And for him, talk comes into its own when you’re in a group where you have to make a contribution. . . .*

*And it’s the difference in conversational styles or rituals that creates the imbalance. So if women and men both were speaking up in private or both were speaking up in public, you wouldn’t find the imbalance. But because in [public] one is and in [private] the other is, you do have that imbalance.*

**Discussion topics related to this section:**

- Discuss the scene in which a woman and a man answer the question “How was your day?” Why do they often give such different responses?
- What is “troubles talk”? How do women tend to use it? Why would men tend not to engage in this kind of talk? Refer to the perspectives of status and connection in your discussion.
- How does Tannen define and distinguish “public talk” and “private talk?” With reference to these concepts, how do women’s and men’s uses of language often differ?
- How would Tannen account for both impressions — that women talk more than men, and that men talk more than women?

**Suggestion for outside assignment:**

In several of your classes, note each time a class member speaks, for how long, and what they say. Looking over your notes later, determine who spoke more often and longer, women or men students? Does this differ in different classes? If so, what could account for the differences? Do the same for private-speaking situations, such as one-on-one conversations or group conversations with friends. Compare your findings and discuss what could account for them.

# RITUAL OPPOSITION

---

Tannen previously showed that troubles talk is a conversational ritual common among women that men do not share and therefore take literally.

In this section, Tannen illustrates a conversational ritual that is common among men, which women do not share and therefore tend to take literally. That is ritual opposition.

Reminding her audience of the video clips they saw of little boys play-fighting, Tannen notes that boys often use mock aggression, such as teasing and rough-housing, to create connection with friends, whereas girls seldom do.

*“It’s very typical for little boys to play fight. Little girls will fight, but they don’t fight for fun. They fight because they’re angry at each other and there is a real conflict.”*

Tannen then further explains this difference with reference to how boys and girls play, then shows how these patterns carry into adulthood where men use mock aggression and ritualized opposition in situations that women do not.

Tannen cites the familiar playground scene in which a little boy who likes a little girl pulls her pigtails and gives her a shove — and is surprised and disappointed when she runs away instead of shoving him back and joining him in play. A similar dynamic is set in motion when a man shows good will toward a woman by teasing her, and she takes offense.

For men, teasing and verbal one-upmanship are a kind of mock aggression that can create connection. Because women don’t tend to use ritual aggression in this way, they often interpret the gesture, which was intended to bring them closer, as if it were intended to push them farther apart.

***(from the video:)***

*[A woman and a man] go together somewhere as a couple. She says something and he begins disagreeing and arguing with her. Afterwards she accuses him of disloyalty. “You’re supposed to be on my team. You shouldn’t be arguing with me.” From his point of view, it was meant to be part of the intellectual excitement.*

*A Japanese woman was married to a man who was French. She said she cried through the first two years of their relationship because he kept picking fights with her and she would just be hurt and cry. And finally, one day she’d just had it and she lost her temper, and he was so happy. “Oh, wow,” he said, “now I feel really close to you.”*

*That’s because his idea of a good relationship is one with a lot of dynamic argument or dynamic opposition. From his perspective, we talk about ideas and we fight and then we make up. It’s fun. And that’s basically the idea for many boys: Fighting is a way you start the interaction, then you re-frame it or re-key it as play.*

In concluding this section, Tannen proposes that by understanding each other's conversational rituals, we can either take part in them, or at least better understand rather than misinterpreting their intentions. It also gives you a basis to talk about what happened rather than banging your head against the wall of different conversational rituals.

### **Discussion topics related to this section:**

- What is “ritual opposition”? Connect this idea back to the way girls and boys play as children. Also relate this concept to the perspectives of connection and status. How does ritual opposition play a role in negotiating status and creating connection?
- What examples does Tannen give to illustrate misunderstandings that arise when conversational rituals of opposition are not shared. Can you think of others?
- What does Tannen mean by “re-frame” and “re-key”? Can you think of examples where re-framing helped improve a situation?

### **Suggestion for outside assignment:**

If you are interested in the concept of ritual opposition, read the chapter on gender differences in Tannen's book *The Argument Culture*.

Alternatively, go back to your notes of watching girls and boys at play. Did you observe any fights? Were they ritual or literal? Also go back to your notes of observing women and men students in class and in social situations. Were any of the comments you wrote down oppositional in nature? Were more of these from women or from men?

## **CONVERSATIONAL RITUALS**

In this section, Tannen brings it all together. She presents examples from everyday life, showing how the perspectives of status and connection motivate conversational rituals that typify women and men and also underlie the miscommunications that result when rituals are not shared.

Tannen's framework explains the common complaints of women about men, “He doesn't tell me anything,” and “He doesn't listen to me.” These complaints result in part from different assumptions about the role of talk in a relationship.

*“It's all focused on ‘talk’ because, for many women, talk is the glue that holds a relationship together. And he feels “I tell you everything.” And she says, “You don't tell me anything.” It's a different definition of ‘what's anything to tell.’”*

Given this difference, she feels their closeness depends on a kind of talk that he sees no need for and doesn't have much practice doing.

To make matters worse, the very kind of talk she feels would create connection — telling troubles — is a kind of talk that he feels would put him in a one-down position, showing weakness. Again, their different conversational rituals, and their differing focus on status and connection, hold the keys to their frustration.

Next, Tannen addresses a common complaint made by men about women they are close to: "She nags me."

Here again men's focus on status holds a key. From this perspective, a person who tells another what to do is the boss, putting the other in a one-down position. That is why it is important to many men to feel that they are doing things of their own free will.

Tannen describes a typical scenario in which their different assumptions about being told what to do turns her into a nag:

***(from the video:)***

*[She asks him to do something.] Well, he's going to do it. He's just going to wait a little while. So she thinks, "I guess he didn't realize I really wanted him to do it so I better tell him again. Well each time she tells him again, he becomes more determined to wait a little bit longer to prove that he's doing it because he wants to, not because she told him to do it. And so she ends up being a nag in response to his reaction to being told what to do. So these are different interpretations about what it means to be told what to do.*

Here, Tannen shares an anecdote further illuminating this paradox:

***(from the video:)***

*[I was on] a radio talk-show. There was a woman hosting the show and it was in Washington, D.C. A man called in and he said, "My wife and I get along wonderfully because we both agree there can only be one boss in the family and that's me."*

*Well the talk-show host was a woman. That got her and she gave a very impassioned, eloquent speech about how we're equals and nobody is boss.*

*The next caller said, "That's what wrong with you women. You want to dominate us." And the talk-show host said, "I think I'm going to scream." And she did. She screamed into the microphone. And that was my first reaction; this makes no sense.*

And then I realized. He said, "My wife and I believe only one person can be boss." But her premise is 'we can be equal, nobody has to be boss.' But he didn't accept that premise. He thought somebody is always going to be on top. Well, if you believe that, then anyone who doesn't want to be subordinate wants to be dominant. And I think that really is at the heart of a lot of misunderstandings between women and men.

### **Discussion topics related to this section:**

—Tannen describes a scenario in which a woman is turned into a nag by the difference in their styles. Explain how this works. Discuss how the perspectives of status and connection play roles.

—Tannen concludes that men often feel women are trying to dominate them when women think they are trying to be equal. Discuss how this happens. Do you think true equality is possible?

# CONCLUSION

---

In this final section, Tannen reminds us that gender is not the only factor influencing conversational styles; others include regional background, class, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, profession, and individual personality.

Tannen then addresses the danger of analytical generalizations. For one thing, they can be perceived to reinforce stereotypes. Acknowledging this danger, Tannen proposes that there is greater danger in ignoring patterns than in describing them, because ignoring them results in the non-dominant or minority group having their own conversational styles labeled “wrong” or “bad” — by themselves as well as by others. People end up blaming each other, themselves, or the relationship.

Tannen also proposes that an understanding of conversational style differences leads to greater mutual respect as well as greater understanding between women and men.

Tannen concludes on an optimistic note: Understanding the patterns and processes of conversational style gives us greater control over our own lives and our interpersonal relationships.

## **Discussion topics:**

- What affects conversational style in addition to gender? Which influences do you think are the most important?
- Discuss Tannen’s claim that understanding conversational style differences can remove the burden of right and wrong.
- Thinking of your own life, why is it important to understand conversational rituals and conversational style?

## **Suggestion for outside assignment:**

If you are interested in conversational style differences that result from influences other than gender, read Tannen’s book *That’s Not What I Meant!*





# Teacher's Classroom Strategies Should Recognize that Men and Women Use Language Differently

by Deborah Tannen

-The Chronicle of Higher Education, June 19, 1991

When I researched and wrote my latest book, *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*, the furthest thing from my mind was reevaluating my teaching strategies. But that has been one of the direct benefits of having written the book.

The primary focus of my linguistic research always has been the language of everyday conversation. One facet of this is conversational style: how different regional, ethnic, and class backgrounds, as well as age and gender, result in different ways of using language to communicate. *You Just Don't Understand* is about the conversational styles of women and men. As I gained more insight into typically male and female ways of using language, I began to suspect some of the causes of the troubling facts that women who go to single-sex schools do better in later life, and that when young women sit next to young men in classrooms, the males talk more. This is not to say that all men talk in class, nor that no women do. It is simply that a greater percentage of discussion time is taken by men's voices.

The research of sociologists and anthropologists such as Janet Lever, Marjorie Harness Goodwin, and Donna Eder has shown that girls and boys learn to use language differently in their sex-separate peer groups. Typically, a girl has a best friend with whom she sits and talks, frequently telling secrets. It's the telling of secrets, the fact and the way that they talk to each other, that makes them best friends. For boys, activities are central: Their best friends are the ones they do things with. Boys also tend to play in larger groups that are hierarchical. High-status boys give orders and push low-status boys around. So boys are expected to use language to seize center stage: by exhibiting their skill, displaying their knowledge, and challenging and resisting challenges.

These patterns have stunning implications for classroom interaction. Most faculty members assume that participating in class discussion is a necessary part of successful performance. Yet speaking in a classroom is more congenial to boys' language experience than to girls', since it entails putting oneself forward in front of a large group of people, many of whom are strangers and at least one of whom is sure to judge speakers' knowledge and intelligence by their verbal display.

Another aspect of many classrooms that makes them more hospitable to most men than to most women is the use of debate-like formats as a learning tool. Our educational system, as Walter Ong argues persuasively in his book *Fighting for Life* (Cornell University Press, 1981), is fundamentally male in that the pursuit of knowledge is believed to be achieved by ritual opposition: public display followed by argument and challenge. Father Ong demonstrates that ritual opposition — what he calls “adversativeness” or “agonism” — is fundamental to the way most males approach almost any activity. (Consider, for example, the little boy who shows he likes a little girl by pulling her braids and shoving her.) But ritual opposition is antithetical to the way most females learn and like to

interact. It is not that females don't fight, but that they don't fight for fun. They don't ritualize opposition.

Anthropologists working in widely disparate parts of the world have found contrasting verbal rituals for women and men. Women in completely unrelated cultures (for example, Greece and Bali) engage in ritual laments: spontaneously produced rhyming couplets that express their pain, for example, over the loss of loved ones. Men do not take part in laments. They have their own, very different verbal ritual: a contest, a war of words in which they vie with each other to devise clever insults.

When discussing these phenomena with a colleague, I commented that I see these two styles in American conversation: Many women bond by talking about troubles, and many men bond by exchanging playful insults and put-downs, and other sorts of verbal sparring. He exclaimed: "I never thought of this, but that's the way I teach: I have students read an article, and then I invite them to tear it apart. After we've torn it to shreds, we talk about how to build a better model."

This contrasts sharply with the way I teach: I open the discussion of readings by asking, "What did you find useful in this? What can we use in our own theory building and our own methods?" I note what I see as weaknesses in the author's approach, but I also point out that the writer's discipline and purposes might be different from ours. Finally, I offer personal anecdotes illustrating the phenomena under discussion and praise students' anecdotes as well as their critical acumen.

These different teaching styles must make our classrooms wildly different places and hospitable to different students. Male students are more likely to be comfortable attacking the readings and might find the inclusion of personal anecdotes irrelevant and "soft." Women are more likely to resist discussion they perceive as hostile, and, indeed, it is women in my classes who are most likely to offer personal anecdotes.

A colleague who read my book commented that he had always taken for granted that the best way to deal with students' comments is to challenge them; this, he felt it was self-evident, sharpens their minds and helps them develop debating skills. But he had noticed that women were relatively silent in his classes, so he decided to try beginning discussion with relatively open-ended questions and letting comments go unchallenged. He found, to his amazement and satisfaction, that more women began to speak up.

Though some of the women in his class clearly liked this better, perhaps some of the men liked it less. One young man in my class wrote in a questionnaire about a history professor who gave students questions to think about and called on people to answer them: "He would then play devil's advocate . . . i.e., he debated us. . . . That class really sharpened me intellectually. . . . We as students do need to know how to defend ourselves." This young man valued the experience of being attacked and challenged publicly. Many, if not most, women would shrink from such "challenge," experiencing it as public humiliation.

A professor at Hamilton College told me of a young man who was upset because he felt his class presentation had been a failure. The professor was puzzled because he had observed that class members had listened attentively and agreed with the student's observations. It turned out that it was this very agreement that the student interpreted as failure: Since no one had engaged his ideas

by arguing with him, he felt they had found them unworthy of attention.

So one reason men speak in class more than women is that many of them find the “public” classroom setting more conducive to speaking, whereas most women are more comfortable speaking in private to a small group of people they know well. A second reason is that men are more likely to be comfortable with the debate-like form that discussion may take. Yet another reason is the different attitudes toward speaking in class that typify women and men.

Students who speak frequently in class, many of whom are men, assume that it is their job to think of contributions and try to get the floor to express them. But many women monitor their participation not only to get the floor but to avoid getting it. Women students in my class tell me that if they have spoken up once or twice, they hold back for the rest of the class because they don’t want to dominate. If they have spoken a lot one week, they will remain silent the next. These different ethics of participation are, of course, unstated, so those who speak freely assume that those who remain silent have nothing to say, and those who are reining themselves in assume that the big talkers are selfish and hoggyish.

When I looked around my classes, I could see these differing ethics and habits at work. For example, my graduate class in analyzing conversation had twenty students, eleven women and nine men. Of the men, four were foreign students: two Japanese, one Chinese, and one Syrian. With the exception of the three Asian men, all the men spoke in class at least occasionally. The biggest talker in the class was a woman, but there were also five women who never spoke at all, only one of whom was Japanese. I decided to try something different.

I broke the class into small groups to discuss the issues raised in the readings and to analyze their own conversational transcripts. I devised three ways of dividing the students into groups: one by the degree program they were in, one by gender, and one by conversational style, as closely as I could guess it. This meant that when the class was grouped according to conversational style, I put Asian students together, fast talkers together, and quiet students together. The class split into groups six times during the semester, so they met in each grouping twice. I told students to regard the groups as examples of interactional data and to note the different ways they participated in the different groups. Toward the end of the term, I gave them a questionnaire asking about their class and group participation.

I could see plainly from my observation of the groups at work that women who never opened their mouths in class were talking away in the small groups. In fact, the Japanese woman commented that she found it particularly hard to contribute to the all-woman group she was in because “I was overwhelmed by how talkative the female students were in the female-only group.” This is particularly revealing because it highlights that the same person who can be “oppressed” into silence in one context can become the talkative “oppressor” in another. No one’s conversational style is absolute; everyone’s style changes in response to the context and others’ styles.

Some of the students (seven) said they preferred the same-gender groups; others preferred the same-style groups. In answer to the question “Would you have liked to speak in class more than you did?” six of the seven who said “yes” were women; the one man was Japanese. Most startlingly, this response did not come only from quiet women; it came from women who had indicated they had spoken in class never, rarely, sometimes, and often. Of the eleven students who said the amount they

had spoken was fine, seven were men. Of the four women who checked “fine,” two added qualifications indicating it wasn’t completely fine: One wrote in “maybe more,” and one wrote, “I have an urge to participate but often feel I should have something more interesting/relevant/wonderful/intelligent to say!!” I counted my experiment a success. Everyone in the class found the small groups interesting, and no one indicated he or she would have preferred that the class not break into groups. Perhaps most instructive, however, was the fact that the experience of breaking into groups, and of talking about participation in class, raised everyone’s awareness about classroom participation. After we had talked about it, some of the quietest women in the class made a few voluntary contributions, though sometimes I had to insure their participation by interrupting the students who were exuberantly speaking out.

Americans are often proud that they discount the significance of cultural differences: “We are all individuals,” many people boast. Ignoring such issues as gender and ethnicity becomes a source of pride: “I treat everyone the same.” But treating people the same is not equal treatment if they are not the same.

The classroom is a different environment for those who feel comfortable putting themselves forward in a group than it is for those who find the prospect of doing so chastening, or even terrifying. When a professor asks, “Are there any questions?,” students who can formulate statements the fastest have the greatest opportunity to respond. Those who need significant time to do so have not really been given a chance at all, since by the time they are ready to speak, someone else has the floor.

In a class where some students speak out without raising hands, those who feel they must raise their hands and wait to be recognized do not have equal opportunity to speak. Telling them to feel free to jump in will not make them feel free; one’s sense of timing, of one’s rights and obligations in a classroom, are automatic, learned over years of interaction. They may be changed over time, with motivation and effort, but they cannot be changed on the spot. And everyone assumes his or her own way is best. When I asked my students how the class could be changed to make it easier for them to speak more, the most talkative woman said she would prefer it if no one had to raise hands, and a foreign student said he wished people would raise their hands and wait to be recognized.

My experience in this class has convinced me that small-group interaction should be part of any class that is not a small seminar. I also am convinced that having the students become observers of their own interaction is a crucial part of their education. Talking about ways of talking in class makes students aware that their ways of talking affect other students, that the motivations they impute to others may not truly reflect others’ motives, and that the behaviors they assume to be self-evidently right are not universal norms.

The goal of complete equal opportunity in class may not be attainable, but realizing that one monolithic classroom-participation structure is not equal opportunity is itself a powerful motivation to find more-diverse methods to serve diverse students — and every classroom is diverse.

Deborah Tannen is professor of linguistics at Georgetown University and author of the best-selling *You Just Don’t Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* (William E. Morrow & Company, 1990).

# **The Relativity of Linguistic Strategies:**

## **Rethinking Power and Solidarity**

### **in Gender and Dominance<sup>1</sup>**

**Deborah Tannen**

**Georgetown University**

#### **Introduction**

In analyzing discourse, many researchers operate on the unstated assumption that all speakers proceed along similar lines of interpretation, so a particular example of discourse can be taken to represent how discourse works for all speakers. For some aspects of discourse, this is undoubtedly true. Yet a large body of sociolinguistic literature makes clear that, for many aspects of discourse, this is so only to the extent that cultural background is shared. To the extent that cultural backgrounds differ, lines of interpretation and habitual use of many linguistic strategies are likely to diverge. One thinks immediately and minimally of the work of Gumperz (1982), Erickson and Shultz (1982), Scollon and Scollon (1981), and Philips (1983). My own research shows that cultural difference is not limited to the gross and apparent levels of country of origin and native language, but also exists at the subcultural levels of ethnic heritage, class, geographic region, age, and gender. My earlier work (Tannen 1984, 1986) focuses on ethnic and regional style; my most recent work (Tannen 1990) focuses on gender-related stylistic variation. I draw on this work here to demonstrate that specific linguistic strategies have widely divergent potential meanings.<sup>2</sup>

This insight is particularly significant for research on language and gender, much of which has sought to describe the linguistic means by which men dominate women in interaction. That men dominate women is not in question; what I am problematizing is the source and workings of domination and other interpersonal intentions and effects. I will show that one cannot locate the source of domination, or of any interpersonal intention or effect, in linguistic strategies such as interruption, volubility, silence, and topic-raising, as has been claimed. Similarly, one cannot locate the source of women's powerlessness in such linguistic strategies as indirectness, taciturnity, silence, and tag questions, as has also been claimed. The reason one cannot do this is that the same linguistic means can be used for different, even opposite, purposes, and can have different, even opposite, effects in different contexts. Thus, a strategy that seems, or is, intended to dominate, may in another context or in the mouth of another speaker be intended or used to establish connection. Similarly, a strategy that seems, or is, intended to create connection, can in another context or in the mouth of another speaker be intended or used to establish dominance.

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

## Overview of the Chapter

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

# Theoretical Background

---

## Power and Solidarity

Since Brown and Gilman’s (1960) introduction of the concept and subsequent elaborations of it, especially those of Friedrich (1972) and Brown and Levinson ([1978]1987), the dynamics of power and solidarity have been fundamental to sociolinguistic theory. (Fasold [1990] provides an overview.) Brown and Gilman based their framework on analysis of the use of pronouns in European languages which have two forms of the second person pronoun, such as the French *tu* and *vous*. In English, the closest parallel is to be found in forms of address: first name vs. title-last name. In Brown and Gilman’s system, power is associated with nonreciprocal use of pronouns; in English, the parallel would be a situation in which one speaker addresses the other by first name but is addressed by title-last name (for example, doctor and patient, teacher and student, boss and secretary, building resident and elevator operator). Solidarity is associated with reciprocal pronoun use or symmetrical forms of address: both speakers address each other by *tu* or by *vous* (in English, by title-last name or by first name). Power governs asymmetrical relationships where one is subordinate to another; solidarity governs symmetrical relationships characterized by social equality and similarity.

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

In Brown and Gilman’s paradigm, the key to power is asymmetry, but it is often thought to be formality. This is seen in the following anecdote. I once entitled a lecture “The Paradox of Power and Solidarity.” The respondent to my talk appeared wearing a three-piece suit and a knapsack on his back. The audience was amused by the association of the suit with power, the knapsack with solidarity. There was something immediately recognizable in this semiotic. Indeed, a professor wearing a knapsack might well mark solidarity with students at, for example, a protest demonstration. And wearing a three-piece suit to the demonstration might mark power by differentiating the wearer

from the demonstrators, perhaps even reminding them of his dominant position in the institutional hierarchy. But wearing a three-piece suit to the board meeting of a corporation would mark solidarity with other board members, whereas wearing a knapsack in that setting would connote not solidarity but disrespect, a move in the power dynamic.

## **The Ambiguity of Linguistic Strategies**

As the preceding example shows, the same symbol — a three-piece suit — can signal either power or solidarity, depending on, at least, the setting (for example, a board meeting or student demonstration), the habitual dress style of the individual, and the comparison of his clothing with that worn by others in the interaction. (I say “his” intentionally; the range of meanings would be quite different if a man’s three-piece suit were worn by a woman.) This provides an analogue to the ambiguity of linguistic strategies, which are signals in the semiotic system of language. As I have demonstrated at length in previous books (see especially Tannen 1984, 1986, 1990), all linguistic strategies are potentially ambiguous. The power-solidarity dynamic is one fundamental source of ambiguity. What appear as attempts to dominate a conversation (an exercise of power) may actually be intended to establish rapport (an exercise of solidarity). This occurs because (as I have worded it elsewhere) power and solidarity are bought with the same currency: The same linguistic means can be used to create either or both.

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

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

## **The Polysemy of Power and Solidarity**

If ambiguity denotes meaning one thing or another, polysemy denotes meaning one thing and another — that is, having multiple meanings simultaneously. The question “Where’s your coat?” shows friendly concern and suggests a parent-child constellation. The invitation to contribute a chapter to a book brings editor and contributor closer and suggests a hierarchical relationship.

One more example will illustrate the polysemy of strategies signalling power and solidarity. If you have a friend who repeatedly picks up the check when you dine together, is she being generous and sharing her wealth, or is she trying to flaunt her money and remind you that she has more of it than you? Although the intention may be to make you feel good by her generosity, her repeated generosity may nonetheless make you feel bad by reminding you that she has more money. Thus both of you are caught in the web of the ambiguity of power and solidarity. It is impossible to determine which was her real motive, and whether it justifies your response. On the other hand, even if you believe her motive was purely generous, you may nonetheless feel denigrated by her generosity because the fact that she has this generous impulse is evidence that she has more money than you, and her expressing the impulse reminds you of it. In other words, both interpretations exist at once: solidarity — she is paying to be nice, and power — her being nice in this way reminds you that she is richer. In this sense, the strategy is not just ambiguous with regard to power and solidarity but polysemous. This polysemy explains another observation that initially surprised me: Paules (1991) reports that waitresses in the restaurant where she did ethnographic field work were offended not only by tips that were too small, but also by tips that were too large. The customers' inordinate beneficence implies that the amount of money left is insignificant to the tipper but significant to the waitress.

Brown and Gilman are explicit in their assumption that power is associated with asymmetrical relationships in which the power is held by the person in the one-up position. This is stated in their definition:

One person may be said to have power over another to the degree that he is able to control the behavior of the other. Power is a relationship between at least two persons, and it is nonreciprocal in the sense that both cannot have power in the same area of behavior" (p. 254).

I have called attention, however, to the extent to which solidarity in itself can be a form of control. For example, a young woman complained about friends who "don't let you be different." If the friend says she has a particular problem and the woman says, "I don't have that problem," her friend is hurt and accuses her of putting her down, of acting superior. The assumption of similarity requires the friend to have a matching problem.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, although Brown and Gilman acknowledge that "power superiors may be solidary (parents, elder siblings)" and "power inferiors, similarly, may be as solidary as the old family retainer" (p. 257), most Americans are inclined to assume that solidarity implies closeness, whereas power implies distance.<sup>4</sup> Thus Americans regard the sibling relationship as the ultimate in solidarity: "sister" or "brother" are often used metaphorically to indicate closeness and equality.<sup>5</sup> In contrast, it is often assumed that hierarchy precludes closeness: employers and employees cannot "really" be friends. But being linked in a hierarchy necessarily brings individuals closer. This is an assumption underlying Watanabe's (1993) observation, in comparing American and Japanese group discussions, that whereas the Americans in her study saw themselves as individuals participating in a joint activity, the Japanese saw themselves as members of a group united by hierarchy. When reading Watanabe, I was caught up short by the term "united." My inclination had been to assume that hierarchy is distancing, not uniting.



The anthropological literature includes numerous discussions of cultural contexts in which hierarchical relationships are seen as close and mutually, not unilaterally, empowering. For example, Beeman (1986) describes an Iranian interactional pattern he dubs “getting the lower hand.” Taking the lower status position enables an Iranian to invoke a protector schema by which the higher status person is obligated to do things for him or her. Similarly, Yamada (1992) describes the Japanese relationship of *amae*, typified by the parent-child or employer-employee constellation. It binds two individuals in a hierarchical interdependence by which both have power in the form of obligations as well as rights vis a vis the other. Finally, Wolfowitz (1991) explains that respect/deference is experienced by Suriname Javanese not as subservience but as an assertion of claims.

The Suriname Javanese example is particularly intriguing because it calls into question the association of asymmetry with power and distance. The style Wolfowitz calls respect-politeness is characterized by both social closeness and negative politeness.<sup>6</sup> It is hierarchical insofar as it is directional and unequal; however, the criterion for directionality is not status but age. The prototypical relationship characterized by respect politeness is grandchild-grandparent: a relationship that is both highly unequal and very close. Moreover, according to Wolfowitz, the Javanese assume that familial relations are inherently hierarchical, including age-graded siblings. Equality, in contrast, is associated with formal relationships that are also marked by social distance.

We can display these dynamics in the following way. The model that reflects American assumptions conceptualizes power and solidarity as opposite ends of a single continuum simultaneously representing symmetry/asymmetry, hierarchy/equality, and distance/closeness. (See Figure 1.) In contrast, the cross-cultural perspective suggests a multi-dimensional grid of at least (and, potentially and probably, more) intersecting continua. The closeness/distance dimension can be placed on one axis and the hierarchy/equality one on another. (See Figure 2.) Indeed, the intersection of these dimensions — that is, the co-occurrence of hierarchy and closeness — may account, at least in part, for what I am calling the ambiguity and polysemy of power and solidarity.

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

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

*Now we are concerned with a new set of relations which are symmetrical; for example, attended the same school or have the same parents or practice the same profession. If A has the same parents as B, B has the same parents as A. Solidarity is the name we give to the general relationship and solidarity is symmetrical. (p. 257)*

The similarity/difference continuum calls to mind what I have discussed elsewhere (Tannen 1984, 1986) as the double bind of communication.<sup>7</sup> In some ways, we are all the same. But in other ways we are all different. Communication is a double bind in the sense that anything we say to honor our similarity violates our difference, and anything we say to honor our difference violates

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

As a result of these dynamics, similarity is a threat to hierarchy. This is dramatized in Harold Pinter's play *Mountain Language*. Composed of four brief scenes, the play is set in a political prison in the capital city of an unnamed country that is under dictatorial siege. In the second scene, an old mountain woman is finally allowed to visit her son across a table as a guard stands over them. But whenever she tries to speak to her son, the guard silences her, telling the prisoner to tell his mother that it is forbidden to speak their mountain language in the capital. Then he continues: (Spaced dots indicate omitted text; unspaced dots are a form of punctuation included in the original text.)

GUARD

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

Silence.

PRISONER

I've got a wife and three kids.

GUARD

You've what?

Silence.

You've got what?

Silence.

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

Silence.

You've got what?

[He picks up the telephone and dials one digit.]

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

The Sergeant soon enters and asks, "What joker?" The stage darkens and the scene ends. The final scene opens on the same setting, with the prisoner bloody and shaking, his mother shocked into speechlessness.

The prisoner was beaten for saying, "I've got a wife and three kids." This quotidian statement, which would be unremarkable in casual conversation, was insubordinate in the hierarchical context of brutal oppression because the guard had just made the same statement. When the guard said, "I've got a wife and three kids. And you're a pile of shit," he was claiming, "I am different from you." One could further interpret his words to imply, "I'm human, and you're not. Therefore I have a right to dominate and abuse you." By repeating the guard's words verbatim, the prisoner was then saying, "I am the same as you."<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> Similarity is antithetical to hierarchy.

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

## **The Relativity of Linguistic Strategies**

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

## Indirectness

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

The claim by Conley, O'Barr and Lind (1979) that women's language is really powerless language has been particularly influential. In this view, women's tendency to be indirect is taken as evidence that women don't feel entitled to make demands. Surely there are cases in which this is true. Yet it can also be demonstrated that those who feel entitled to make demands may prefer not to, seeking the payoff in rapport. Furthermore, the ability to get one's demands met without expressing them directly can be a sign of power rather than of the lack of it. An example I have used elsewhere (Tannen 1986, this volume Chapter 5) is the Greek father who answers "If you want, you can go," to his daughter's inquiry about going to a party. Because of the lack of enthusiasm of his response, the Greek daughter understands that her father would prefer she not go and "chooses" not to go. (A "real" approval would have been "Yes, of course, you should go.") I argue that this father did not feel powerless to give his daughter orders. Rather, a communicative system was conventionalized by which he and she could both preserve the appearance, and possibly the belief, that she chose not to go rather than simply obeying his command.

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

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

The American tendency to associate indirectness with female style is not culturally universal. The above description of typical Japanese style operates for men as well as women. My own research (Tannen 1981, 1984, 1986) suggests that Americans of some cultural and geographic backgrounds,

female as well as male, are more likely than others to use relatively direct rather than indirect styles. In an early study (see Chapter 5) I compared Greeks and Americans with regard to their tendency to interpret a question as an indirect means of making a request. I found that whereas American women were more likely to take an indirect interpretation of a sample conversation, Greek men were as likely as Greek women, and more likely than American men or women, to take an indirect interpretation. Greek men, of course, are not less powerful vis a vis women than American men.

Perhaps most striking is the finding of Keenan (1974) that in a Malagasy-speaking village on the island of Madagascar, women are seen as direct and men as indirect. But this in no way implies that the women are more powerful than men in this society. Quite the contrary, Malagasy men are socially dominant, and their indirect style is more highly valued. Keenan found that women were widely believed to debase the language with their artless directness, whereas men's elaborate indirectness was widely admired.

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

## **Interruption**

That interruption is a sign of dominance has been as widespread an assumption in research as in conventional wisdom. One rarely encounters an article on gender and language that does not make this claim. Most frequently cited is West and Zimmerman's (1983) finding that men dominate women by interrupting them in conversation. Tellingly, however, Deborah James and Sandra Clarke (1993), reviewing research on gender and interruption, do not find a clear pattern of males interrupting females. Especially significant is their observation that studies comparing amount of interruption in all-female vs. all-male conversations find more interruption, not less, in all-female groups. Though initially surprising, this finding reinforces the need to distinguish linguistic strategies by their interactional purpose. Does the overlap show support for the speaker, or does it contradict or change the topic? I explore this phenomenon in detail in Chapter Two of this volume, but I will include a brief summary of the argument here.

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

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

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

## **Silence 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, robbing them of their ability to speak and hence of their humanity. In the same spirit, many scholars (for example, Spender 1980) have claimed that men dominate women by silencing them. There are obviously circumstances in which this is accurate. Coates (1986) notes numerous proverbs that instruct women, like children, to be silent.

Silence alone, however, is not a self-evident sign of powerlessness, nor volubility a self-evident sign of domination. A theme running through Komarovsky's (1962) classic study of *Blue Collar Marriage* is that many of the wives interviewed said they talked more than their husbands: "He's tongue-tied," one woman said (p. 13); "My husband has a great habit of not talking," said another (p. 162); "He doesn't say much but he means what he says and the children mind him," said a third (p. 353). Yet there is no question but that these husbands are dominant in their marriages, as the last of these quotes indicates.

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

“Why do you turn on me? What did I do?”

Silence.

“What did I do?”

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

“Look, let’s just go to sleep now. Let’s just forget it.”

“Forget what?”

He says nothing.

...

“It was something in the movie, wasn’t it?”

“What, in the movie?”

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

Silence.

“Well, wasn’t it?”

Silence.

“Oh come on, Bennett, you’re making me furious. Please tell me. Please.”

The painful scene continues in this vein until Bennett tries to leave the room and Isadora tries to detain him. The excerpt certainly seems to support Sattel’s claim that Bennett’s silence subjugates his wife, as the scene ends with her literally lowered to the floor, clinging to his pajama leg. But the reason his silence is an effective weapon is her insistence that he tell her what’s wrong. If she receded into silence, leaving the room or refusing to talk to him, his silence would be disarmed. The devastation results not from his silence alone but from the interaction of his silence and her insistence on talking, in other words, the interaction of their differing styles.<sup>10</sup>

Researchers have counted numbers of words spoken or timed length of talk in order to demonstrate that men talk more than women and thereby dominate interactions. (See James and Drakich 1993 for a summary of research on amount of talk.) Undoubtedly there is truth to this observation in some settings. But the association of volubility with dominance does not hold for all settings and all cultures. Imagine, for example, an interrogation, in which the interrogator does little of the talking but holds all the power.

The relativity of the “meaning” of taciturnity and volubility is highlighted in Margaret Mead’s (1977) discussion of “end linkage,” a concept developed jointly by Mead, Gregory Bateson, and Geoffrey Gorer. The claim is that universal and biologically constructed relationships, such as parent-child, are linked to different behaviors in different cultures. One of their paradigm examples is the apportionment of spectatorship and exhibitionism. In middle class American culture, children, who are obviously the weaker party in the constellation, are expected to exhibit while their more

powerful parents are spectators. (Consider, for example, the American child who is prompted to demonstrate how well s/he can recite the alphabet for guests.) In contrast, in middle and upper class British culture, exhibition is associated with the parental role and spectatorship with children, who are expected to be seen and not heard.

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

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

## **Topic-raising**

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

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



topic. But a speaker who was intending to say more and was simply waiting for the appropriate turn-exchange pause will feel that the floor was taken away and the topic aggressively switched. Yet again, the impression of dominance might result from style differences.

## **Adversativeness: Conflict and Verbal Aggression**

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

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

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

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

***Me and you never get in fights hardly,***

and

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

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

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

other in opposition to another girl who was not present. So their cooperation (solidarity) also entails opposition (power).

For boys, power entails solidarity not only by opposition to another team, but by opposition to each other. In the videotapes of friends talking, I found that all the conversations between young boys (and none between young girls) had numerous examples of teasing and mock attack.<sup>11</sup> In examining pre-school conversations transcribed and analyzed by Corsaro and Rizzo (1990:34), I was amazed to discover that a fight could initiate rather than preclude friendship. In the following episode, a little boy intrudes on two others and an angry fight ensues. This is the way Corsaro and Rizzo present the dialogue:

Two boys (Richard and Denny) have been playing with a slinky on the stairway leading to the upstairs playhouse in the school. During their play two other boys (Joseph and Martin) enter and stand near the bottom of the stairs.

Denny: Go!

(Martin now runs off, but Joseph remains and he eventually moves halfway up the stairs)

Joseph: These are big shoes.

Richard: I'll punch him right in the eye.

Joseph: I'll punch you right in the nose.

Denny: I'll punch him with my big fist.

Joseph: I'll-I-

Richard: And he'll be bumpety, bumpety and punched out all the way down the stairs.

Joseph: H-I'll-I could poke your eyes out with my gun. I have a gun.

Denny: A gun! I'll-I-I even if-

Richard: I have a gun too.

Denny: And I have guns too and it's bigger than yours and it poo-poo down. That's po poo.

(All three boys laugh at Denny's reference to poo-poo.)

Richard: Now leave.

Joseph: Un-uh. I gonna tell you to put on-on the gun on your hair and the poop will come right out on his face.

Denny: Well.

Richard: Slinky will snap right on your face too.

Denny: And my gun will snap right-

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

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

At first I was incredulous that so soon after their seemingly hostile encounter, the boys played amicably together. Finally I came to the conclusion that for Joseph picking a fight was a way to enter into interaction with the other boys, and engaging him in the fight was Richard and Denny's way of accepting him into their interaction — at least after he acquitted himself satisfactorily in the fight. In this light, I could see that the reference to poo-poo, which occasioned general laughter, was the beginning of a reframing from fighting to playing.<sup>12</sup>

Folklore provides numerous stories in which fighting precipitates friendship among men. One such is attributed by Bly (1990:243-4) to Joseph Campbell's account of the Sumerian epic Gilgamesh. In Bly's rendition, Gilgamesh, a young king, wants to befriend a wild man named Enkidu. When Enkidu is told of Gilgamesh,

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

Bly paraphrases the continuation: "Enkidu then travels to the city and meets Gilgamesh; the two wrestle, Enkidu wins, and the two become inseparable friends."<sup>13</sup>

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

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

Greek conversation provides an example of a cultural style that places more positive value, for both women and men, on dynamic opposition. Kakava (1989) replicates Schiffrin's findings by showing how a Greek family enjoy opposing each other in dinner table conversation. In another study of modern Greek conversation, Tannen and Kakava (1992) find speakers routinely disagreeing when they actually agree, and using diminutive name forms and other terms of endearment — markers of closeness — precisely when they are opposing each other.<sup>14</sup> These patterns can be seen in the following excerpt from a conversation that took place in Greece between an older Greek woman and the author. The woman, whom I call Ms. Stella, has just told me that she complained to the police about a construction crew that illegally continued drilling and pounding through the siesta hours, disturbing her nap:

Deborah: Echete dikio.

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

Deborah: You're right.

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

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

The following conversation is also taken from Tannen and Kakava (1992). It is, according to Kakava, typical of her family's sociable argument. The younger sister has said that she cannot understand why the attractive young woman who is the prime minister Papandreou's girl friend would have an affair with such an old man. The older sister, Christina, argues that the woman may have felt that in having an affair with the prime minister she was doing something notable. Her sister replied,

Poly megalos timima re Christinaki na pliroseis pantos.

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

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

## Conclusion

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

interaction of their styles with each other.

Attempts to understand what goes on between women and men in conversation are muddled by the ambiguity and polysemy of power and solidarity. The same linguistic means can accomplish either, and every utterance combines elements of both. Scholars, however, like individuals in interaction, are likely to see only one and not the other, like the picture that cannot be seen for what it is — simultaneously a chalice and two faces — but can only be seen alternately as one or the other. In attempting the impossible task of keeping both images in focus at once, we may at least succeed in switching from one to the other rapidly and regularly enough to deepen our understanding of the dynamics underlying interaction such as power and solidarity as well as gender and language use.

## Notes

1. This chapter is a significantly revised and enlarged version of a paper entitled “Rethinking Power and Solidarity in Gender and Dominance,” which was published in *Proceedings of the 16th Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society*, edited by Kira Hall, Jean-Pierre Koenig, Michael Meacham, Sondra Reinman, and Laurel A. Sutton, 519-29. Berkeley: Linguistics Department, University of California, Berkeley, 1990. An earlier, slightly different version appears in *Gender and Conversational Interaction*, which I edited and which was published by Oxford University Press in 1993. The initial rethinking and rewriting were carried out while I was in residence at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, N.J. The further revisions which I made to the version that appears here were carried out while I was a fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences in Palo Alto, California.

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

3. This example is taken from Tannen (1990).

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

5. This assumption is made explicit by Klagsbrun (1992) in a book about sibling relationships, who writes, "Unlike the ties between parents and children, the connection among siblings is a horizontal one. That is, sibs exist on the same plane, as peers, more or less equals." But Klagsbrun gives a pivotal example of how she was frustrated as a child (and continues to be hampered, as an adult) by always being bested by her older brother. It is clear from the example that she and her brother were not equals, because of the age differential — and, one might argue, the gender differential.

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

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

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

9. Following the oral presentation of this paper at the Berkeley Linguistic Society in 1989, both Gary Holland and Michael Chandler pointed out that the prisoner may be heard as implying the second part of the guard's statement: "and you're a pile of shit."

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

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

12. Elsewhere (Tannen 1990:163-5) I discuss this example in more detail and note the contrast that the boys fight when they want to play, and the girl avoids disagreeing even when she in fact disagrees.

13. Another element of this epic, as Bly recounts it, is that Gilgamesh lures Enkidu away from the wild animals with which he had been happily living by sending a temple prostitute who throws off her clothes at the appropriate moment. She is simply the vehicle for the two men to get together. Much could be said about this aspect of the epic, but my purpose here is only to draw attention to the way the men use fighting as a means to friendship.

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



10573 W. Pico Blvd.

#162

Los Angeles

California 90064

800.732.7946

