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Edited by
Ruth Wodak

SAGE Publications 1997
London • Thousand Oaks • New Delhi
INTRODUCTION: SOME IMPORTANT ISSUES IN THE RESEARCH OF GENDER AND DISCOURSE

Ruth Wodak

1 THEORETICAL DEBATES IN FEMINIST LINGUISTICS: QUESTIONS OF SEX AND GENDER
Deborah Cameron

2 GENDER, POWER AND PRACTICE: OR, PUTTING YOUR MONEY [AND YOUR RESEARCH] WHERE YOUR MOUTH IS
Victoria DeFrancisco

3 GENDER AND RACISM IN DISCOURSE
Nora Räthzel

4 GENDER AND LANGUAGE IN THE WORKPLACE
Shari Kendall and Deborah Tannen

5 IDEOLOGIES OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE LANGUAGE IN SOCIOLINGUISTICS
Bonnie McElhinny

6 GENDER, DISCOURSE AND SENIOR EDUCATION: LIGATURES FOR GIRLS, OPTIONS FOR BOYS?
David Corson

7 DIFFERENCE WITHOUT DIVERSITY: SEMANTIC ORIENTATION AND IDEOLOGY IN COMPETING WOMEN'S MAGAZINES
Suzanne Eggins and Rick Iedema

Contributors vii

British Library Cataloguing in Publication data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 0 7619 5098 2
ISBN 0 7619 5099 0 (pbk)

Library of Congress catalog card number 97-069196

Typeset by Mayhew Typesetting, Rhayader, Powys
Printed in Great Britain by Redwood Books, Trowbridge, Wiltshire

First published 1997

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>'IT'S A GAME!': THE CONSTRUCTION OF GENDERED SUBJECTIVITY</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alyson Simpson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>TALKING POWER: GIRLS, GENDER ENCULTURATION AND DISCOURSE</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Amy Sheldon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>WOMEN'S FRIENDSHIPS, WOMEN'S TALK</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jennifer Coates</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>STORY-TELLING IN NEW ZEALAND WOMEN'S AND MEN'S TALK</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Janet Holmes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Index</td>
<td>294</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9

TALKING POWER: GIRLS, GENDER ENCULTURATION AND DISCOURSE

Amy Sheldon

Children's worlds are arenas in which power, privilege and access are created, sought after, won and lost. Language is a major resource which allows children to make their way through the world. Language is also a powerful medium for teaching cultural novices, such as children, the community's tacit and dominant (that is, hegemonic) prescriptions for constructing gender (see Connell, 1987: 183ff for a discussion of gender hegemony). One of the major contributions of research on children's language is that it reveals how competent preschool children are with language, correctly encoding not only linguistic features, but also pragmatic and social features. Young children have a working knowledge of appropriateness, that is, of how talk should fit the context and addressee (Andersen, 1990; McTear, 1985). It should not be surprising, therefore, that young children's social uses of language would reflect tacit understanding of cultural prescriptions for the linguistic enactment of power and gender. I will discuss how gender can be 'done' in children's discourse, and will provide some examples. I will also discuss some of the challenges for future research on gender and discourse.

Theorizing gender differences

When we seek to understand how gender is reflected in discourse, and how discourse serves to maintain - or resist - gender arrangements, we need a working understanding of what the concept 'gender' means, what the local gender norms are, what the nature of discourse is, and what the local discourse practices are. In just about all cultures, females and males are theorized as being different from each other. This simply reflects a culturally constructed definition of gender as difference, usually dichotomous, polar differences rather than categories which have some area of overlap. Thus, speakers of English don't ordinarily notice anything peculiar about expressions such as 'the opposite sex', or 'the
same sex', since these reflect shared, cultural beliefs that gender is about difference, if not dichotomy.

In addition, gender polarities are value-laden. Most cultures are androcentric rather than egalitarian or gynocentric. This is reflected in language. For example, even in an expression like 'androgyneous', which refers to a balancing or mix of masculine ('andro-') and feminine ('gyn-') characteristics, the component which refers to masculinity occupies initial position in the word. There is no word 'gynandrois' in English. As reflected in English, male symbolism, male speakers, and masculine ways of speaking are considered normative and natural. Women as speakers and women's ways of speaking are seen as not fitting the norm and are often disparaged. The relative absence of positive feminine symbolism in language ordinarily goes unnoticed. Coates [1993: 16], in her review of academic writing and folkloric beliefs about women's and men's ways of speaking in English over the last few hundred years, sums up this systematic linguistic privileging as The Androcentric Rule 'Men will be seen to behave linguistically in a way that fits the writer's view of what is desirable or admirable; women . . . will be blamed for any linguistic state or development which is regarded by the writer as negative or reprehensible.'

Whereas gender polarization and androcentrism reflect and perpetuate a culture's definition of gender as difference, we can ask how and when these principles are learned and how they shape human interaction. Language is a powerful medium for teaching and perpetuating culture. Cultural prescriptions about gender norms are reflected in the tacit linguistic and social practices of mundane, everyday conversations. However, a culture's gender ideology often takes the form of sketchy, oversimplified stereotypes. Are these stereotypes or prescriptions actually reflected and perpetuated in the context-sensitive discourse behaviours of hundreds, thousands, or millions of complex and diverse real females and males? What is the relationship between a community's gender norms and the behaviour of complex human beings in complex social situations? What model of gender should guide our research?

Critical discussions of gender theory have pointed out the descriptive inadequacy of theorizing gender as a dichotomy and of assuming that the categories 'woman/girl' and 'man/boy' refer to either natural or homogeneous social categories [for example, Bem, 1993; Connell, 1987; Deaux and Kite, 1987; Hare-Mustin, 1988; Scheman, 1997]. These critiques of gender theory provide a cautionary message for sociolinguistic research which seeks to interpret gender in discourse. A complex enough understanding of gender as well as of the social matrix of language use are necessary in order to avoid perpetuating gender stereotypes in research, as recent critiques from researchers in the field of language and gender have also maintained (for example, Bing and Bergwall, 1996; Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992; 1995; Freed, 1995; Goodwin, 1980; 1995; Sheldon, 1992a; 1996b; Sheldon and Johnson, 1994; Thorne, 1990; Wodak and Benke, 1997).

Gender and conflict

One of the arenas in which the difficulties involved in interpreting gender in discourse are apparent is the study of gender differences in children's conflict talk. Conflict is a contest of wills. Gender ideology in many cultures gives males the license to argue in direct, demanding, and confrontative ways, with unmitigated rivalry. Girls and women do so at the risk of being called 'bossy', 'confrontational', 'bitchy', 'difficult', 'big-headed', or worse for the same behaviours that boys and men can garner praise for being 'manly', 'strong', or 'assertive'.

The gender ideology in many North American communities requires girls and women to 'be nice', or risk censure from peers and adults. Sachs [1987] finds that preschool girls have already learned to say things with a smile, pursuing their agenda and interests within the constraint that they not cause too much stress or jeopardize interpersonal harmony in their intimate groups. Baran [1987] hypothesizes that the pressure experienced by working-class and immigrant girls in London to not be adversarial or outspoken steers many away from competitive school subjects, such as science, shutting down future career choices. The pressure on teenage girls in a Detroit high school to find social success by constructing a pleasing, non-offensive personality [Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1995: 491] is part of this same theme. In communities in which there is a prescription that girls 'be nice', and where friendship ties are a crucial source of girls' social status and inclusion, it is clear that girls must learn to skilfully negotiate 'niceness', or risk censure. Being 'nice', which for females often means not being adversarial, is a norm that women are expected to adhere to, even if they have achieved institutionally derived status (see Sheldon and Johnson, 1994: 40-1 for an example).

Discussions of gender differences in verbal conflict management

The cultural ideology that frames gender differences in terms of polarities, and which is governed by a principle of androcentrism, is reflected in some previous descriptions of gender differences in the verbal management of conflict. Male groups and male conversations have been described in terms of competition and hierarchy [for example, Goodwin, 1980; Goodwin and Goodwin, 1987; Maltz and Borker, 1982]. Female groups and female conversations have been characterized in an 'opposite' manner as cooperative and egalitarian [Kalík, 1975; Maltz and Borker, 1982]. Although many aspects of children's conflicts have been
that girls were maladaptive in a world in which conflict is all around us and is unavoidable. But what if, instead of using prescriptions for hegemonic masculine conflict to define what we are looking for, we approached feminine conflict with the hypothesis that it will be adaptive to an androcentric gender order in which engaging in obvious conflict is a liability for girls and women? The outlines of a story of girls' effectiveness at managing conflict under such conditions might begin to take shape.

Ethnographies of speaking are important tools to get at the everyday practices of speech communities. Discourse studies have a great deal to contribute to our understanding of how gender is actually 'done' in the world. Recent studies of the discourse of girls and boys in the early, middle and teenage years leave no doubt about the importance of competition and the existence of oppositional talk in girls' social interaction. These studies underscore the importance of explaining the relationship between gender and context. Interactions are governed by the conversational norms and practices of the local community. Goodwin's studies of the playground games of girls from the Central American community in Los Angeles (1995), and of street games of African-American girls in urban Philadelphia (1980), contradict the notion [see Lever, 1976] that girls' gaming behaviour and their concomitant talk is in any way sugar-coated or deficient when compared with boys'. In these activities in these speech communities, girls' arguments are 'richly textured'. They are as direct and unmitigated as boys' arguments, and their competitiveness can be as fierce.

To illustrate how cultural and situational differences can shape different contexts for talk, note that Goodwin's findings contrast with those of Hughes [1988], who found middle-class, white girls' playground conflict talk to be highly mitigated. In a study of talk in school, Camras [1984: 263] notes that between preschool and second grade, socially dominant middle-class girls learn to 'mask their exercise of power during conflicts with polite language'.

As researchers broaden the contexts in which conflict talk is studied, we find more variation. In a study of siblings in unstructured play at home [DeFhart, 1996] a great deal of similarity between girls' and boys' discourse and conflict talk was found. Girls used a higher rate of unmitigated imperatives, prohibitions and directives than have been found in girls' peer play [Sachs, 1987]. Both girls and boys used a lower rate of mitigated forms, such as joint directives, pretend directives and permission questions, than had been found in studies of peer play. Killen and Naigles [1995] find that girls and boys also use more similar speech patterns to negotiate conflict when they play in mixed-sex groups, while a comparison of speech patterns in same-sex groups show greater divergence and contrast between girls and boys.

The conclusion we might draw from this research is that if we looked at talk in enough different contexts within a culture and across cultures,
we could show that girls and boys have the same discourse competencies, although they may draw on them differently, as their culture allows, depending on the context for talk and the sex of their co-participants. In some cultures, street play and playground games might allow girls to engage in tougher talk than they could do in classrooms or more formal settings. Sibling imaginative play at home in a white Midwestern American community seems to be a context in which girls can use less mitigated talk than they might attempt if they were playing with friends. We need more of these cross-context and cross-cultural comparisons.

Another way that recent work has challenged prior thinking about gender and discourse is studies which have demonstrated that girls often use a complex style of dispute talk, so that they can display themselves as nice and be powerful at the same time. This seems to be an accommodation to a gender system which values feminine silence and propriety (in comparison with what is allowed males). Research is finding that girls’ competitive and oppositional behaviours often co-occur with cooperation and mitigation (Eckert, 1990; Goodwin, 1980; Hughes, 1988; Modan, 1994; Sheldon, 1992; Sheldon and Johnson, 1994). In addition, studies of the discourse of Jewish women (Modan, 1994; Schiffrin, 1992), Greek women (Kakavá, 1994), Samoan women (Ochs, 1987), Tzeltal-speaking Tenesapan women (Brown, 1993), and others, show that women’s freedom to be oppositional in discourse (compared with men), and the contexts for it, varies from culture to culture. Gendered speech is culturally relative to, and historically situated in, a community’s cultural practices. Looking at speech communities across cultures and languages (or dialects), therefore, is an essential step to seeing the range of adaptations in female and male discourse behaviours.

**Restoring a more complex perspective: double-voice discourse**

My own programme of research with a community of Midwestern American preschoolers (Sheldon, 1990; 1992a; 1996a; Sheldon and Johnson, 1994) questions the view that females are not effective at managing conflict, or that they lack a competitive dynamic, when compared with males. I come to this work not only as a linguist but as the mother of daughters, having spent countless hours watching girls interacting as siblings, in friendship groupings at home, on the playground, and watching girls and boys inside a child care centre and in school classrooms. In the remaining part of this chapter I turn to an illustration of this complex conflict talk style, which I call ‘double-voice discourse’ (Sheldon, 1992a: 99). I argue that the claim that girls are not as effective as boys in pursuing their agendas when faced with opposition is false. Quite the contrary, girls in this community were extremely skilled in managing dissent. They got their agendas met without running amok of feminine cultural prescriptions to ‘be nice’ and to ‘get along’.

It is my hypothesis that double-voice discourse is characteristic of solidarity-based groups – male or female – which are relationship-based, and in which harmony and collaboration are especially valued. Since ‘being nice’ is a gender prescription for girls in the Midwestern culture (as well as other cultures), my hypothesis is that this talk style is used more frequently by girls. However, boys do use it too when they have the same social goals. Double-voice discourse is a form of problem solving through dialogue in which the speaker demonstrates an orientation to the addressee’s interests and goals. It is a conflict style in which the ‘voice’ of mitigation and social sensitivity is bound up with the ‘voice’ of self-interest and egocentricity. Direct confrontation is regulated so as not to get out of hand. Getting along relatively harmoniously and collaborating are highly valued norms in girls’ groups. Unmitigated confrontation is, therefore, socially risky female behaviour because it flouts norms for feminine behaviour. By using double-voice discourse, girls can skilfully navigate between Scylla and Charybdis in dangerous social waters, adhering to gender prescriptions yet acting powerfully at the same time. Double-voice discourse is an important discourse practice that shapes and regulates girls’ power struggles.

In groups and contexts, such as boys’ indoor play groups, or girls’ and boys’ street play, where interaction might not be closely regulated by the goal of maintaining solidarity but where individual performance and achievement are legitimated and foregrounded, direct and aggressive forms of conflict talk, and the direct expression of confrontation and competition, may be socially acceptable. I call this latter talk style ‘single-voice discourse’. Interactors have the single orientation of pursuing their own self-interest without orienting to the perspective of the partner or tempering their self-interest with mitigation. The following are illustrations of these two styles. Double-voice discourse is a more elaborate and linguistically more complex style than single-voice discourse. This is not surprising, given the more complex agenda and the deep intersubjective waters which are being navigated.

The theory of double-voice discourse reorients the debate about gender differences in talk from one described simplistically in terms of gendered polarities to one that reframes the issues and behaviours in a more complex way. Double-voice discourse reflects the active engagement of the speaker, usually female, but not necessarily so, in verbal power plays and competition for access and privilege. It embodies conflict mediation skills in which the speaker confronts without appearing confrontational, clarifies issues without backing down, and uses linguistic mitigators to soften the blow, while pursuing her (or his) own wishes and making their agenda matter. In double-voice discourse, the
speaker is responsive to the companion’s point of view even while pursuing her own agenda. Self-assertion is mitigated and contextualized, but nevertheless effective.

The research

The conversations to be discussed here come from 36 middle-class, predominantly white, three-, four- and five-year-old preschool children in the Minneapolis–St Paul area of Minnesota. They were grouped into all-girl or all-boy triads and videotaped during unsupervised play at their day care centre for more than thirteen hours (Sheldon, 1990 and 1992a, contain discussions of the procedures used). The examples of conflict discussed here both involve one child’s attempts to enter the play of another child. The conflicts include disagreements about sharing playthings. Entry into play with another child is often a difficult achievement even for socially competent children, and it is a process which often gives rise to conflict (Corsaro, 1981; Garvey, 1984).

Aggravated conflict talk among preschool boys

By way of contrast, consider an example of a dispute from a boys’ triad that fits a familiar, hegemonic masculine cultural model of conflict, in which insistence and brute force can be acceptable strategies for trying to get what one wants. Examples of men in such conflict are not infrequent on television and in the movies. Linguistically aggravated and physically aggressive conflict exchanges of the sort in Example 1 have been found more often in boys’ interaction than in girls’ in this and other communities [see Goodwin, 1980; Leaper, 1991; Miller et al., 1986; Sheldon, 1990; 1992a]. This conflict talk style uses direct, unmitigated, confrontational speech acts (also found for girls by Goodwin, 1980; Goodwin and Goodwin, 1987; 1995; DeHart, 1995; Killen and Naigles, 1995).

Examples 1: Boys’ single-voice discourse. ‘That’s my phone’

Charlie (4.0) and Tony (4.1) are together. Tony is sitting on a small foam chair/couch and is pushing the buttons on a touch tone phone base that is on his lap. Charlie is nearby. (Emphasized words are capitalized.)

1 Tony: I pushed two squares [giggles], two squares like this. [pushes phone buttons]
2 Charlie: [comes closer, puts his fist up to his ear and talks into an imaginary phone] Hello!
3 Tony: [puts his fist up to his ear and talks back] Hello.
4 Charlie: [picks up the receiver that is on Tony’s chair] No, that’s my phone!

In this conflict each child tries to physically overpower the other in order to use the telephone. Neither child negotiates or tries to verbally persuade the other for a turn. No one voluntarily reconciles their wishes with the other child’s. Insistence escalates rather than ends the opposition and leads to aggressive responses and a forceful resolution. Only a limited range of problem solving strategies are tried here. This pattern of conflict management among boys is discussed further by Coie (1987) and D. Shantz (1986).

Double-voice discourse in girls’ conflict talk

The girls in the larger sample in this study also engaged in directly insistent confrontations, but in the more than six hours of social play that was recorded with the girls, no oppositional exchanges were found in their groups that even compared with Example 1, whereas similar instances of highly aggravated talk, insistence, or physical force occurred in other boys’ examples. (For a further discussion of gender differences see Sheldon and Johnson, 1994.) Girls’ solidarity-based conflict often involved a great deal of verbal mediation and negotiation, demonstrated a variety of verbal problem solving strategies, and showed an awareness of the other person’s needs while trying to achieve one’s own ends. As a result, some of the girls’ exchanges became very long and verbally complex.

The following episode demonstrates the elaborate linguistic and interactional skills that four-year-old girls can use and the difficult and artful work they do in mediating opposition. It also shows the workings of a peer culture which contradicts cultural stereotypes that portray girls as passive, yielding, weak, or conflict-avoidant. Instead, we see a culture in which girls do resist and oppose one another in order to further their own wishes. This is one of several long episodes co-constructed by girls’ groups in this study.
Example 2: Girls' double-voice discourse. A negotiational tour de force: 'Nurses gotta do shots'

This conflict takes place between Arlene [4.9] and Elaine [4.6]; Erica [4.2] is present briefly. They have been pretending that some dolls are sick children and they are nurses who are caring for them. A conflict develops over who will use some medical implements that are in the room. Elaine, who started enacting the role of nurse earlier than Arlene did, wants to keep control of the equipment. But Arlene wants to use something too. (Various techniques of double voicing are underlined and loud speech is indicated by capital letters. In addition, there are various techniques of unmitigated self-assertion.)

1 Arlene: Can I have that- that thing? [referring to the blood pressure gauge in Elaine's lap] I'm going to take my baby's temperature.

2 Elaine: [looking up from talking on the telephone] You can use it- you can use my temperature. Just make sure you can't use anything else unless you can ask. [turns back to talking on the telephone]

In 1, Arlene asks permission to use the blood pressure gauge. She gives a reason for her request. In 2, Elaine gives qualified agreement. She lets Arlene use the thermometer with restrictions, telling her to ask before she uses anything else. Although the girls are competing for goods here, there is an attempt to allow for a fair distribution. Elaine shows some flexibility by offering a concession, establishing 'a middle ground which moves toward the other position but still opposes it' (Vuchinich, 1990: 126). However, a mutual opposition subsequently unfolds.

3 Arlene: [picks up thermometer from a nearby table and takes her baby's temperature] Eighty-three! She isn't sick. Yahoo! May I? [she asks Elaine, who is still on the telephone, if she can use the needleless hypodermic syringe]

4 Elaine: No, I'm gonna need to use the shot in a couple of minutes.

5 Arlene: But I need this though. [asks in a beseeching tone, picks up the hypodermic syringe]

6 Elaine: [firmly] Okay, just use it once.

In 3, Arlene makes a polite request to use Elaine's syringe, 'May I?', but in 4, Elaine denies the request with a flat 'no' followed by a qualification of her refusal; she explains that she will need to use the shot soon. In 5, Arlene returns with an opposing move, adopting Elaine's reason, insisting that she also 'needs' it, softening her demand with 'though' while she picks up the contested syringe. In 6, Elaine reluctantly agrees to let her use it, again offering a concession that establishes a middle ground, but she firmly constrains the use to 'just' one time.

7 Arlene: [whispers] Arlene, let's play doctor.

8 Arlene: [to Erica] No, I'm gonna give her a shot on the- 

9 Elaine: Hay, I'm the nurse. I'm the nurse. [she puts down the phone and comes over to Arlene and the crib in which her doll is lying] Arlene, remember, I'm the nurse, and the nurses gotta do shots, remember?

10 Arlene: But I get to do some.

11 Elaine: Just a couple, okay?

In 8, Arlene starts giving her baby a shot, but in 9 Elaine wants to be in control of the syringe. First she responds directly. She addresses Arlene by name and requests that Arlene 'remember' Elaine's role. 'I'm the nurse,' Elaine asserts. She has adopted Arlene's pretend play frame of reference. Having a common frame of reference is a useful strategy for gaining entry to Arlene's play because it increases mutual involvement. This also provides a rationale for Elaine's access to the syringe: nurses have a certain role to play, namely, they 'gotta do shots.' She follows this justification with a tag question 'remember?' which is intended to elicit agreement. It does elicit Arlene's token agreement and a request for another concession in 10 when Arlene says 'But I get to do some.' This is a mitigating response, here called a yes-but strategy, in which agreement prefaces disagreement (discussed further in Sheldon, 1992a; 1996a; Pomerantz, 1984). It is a partial agreement and partial disagreement, in which Arlene backs off a bit, acknowledges that Elaine will use the syringe, yet still pursues her own agenda and states her intention to use it too. The yes-but strategy allows for an appearance of agreement, while the partners continue to negotiate their action plans. In 11, Elaine again offers a concession, telling Arlene that she can do 'just a couple.' She follows this directive with a tag question that solicits agreement, 'okay?', although Arlene offers none. All of Elaine's concessions with constraints allow her to hold onto her own agenda while accommodating her partner's agenda also. This is a form of double-voice discourse. However, although Elaine is accommodating Arlene's wishes, competition between the girls is actually escalating and intensifying because Arlene is pressing to keep control of the syringe for her own use and to administer to the doll in other nurse-like ways. The opposition over who has exclusive rights to administer to the doll grows. Whereas in 3 Arlene started out by asking permission to use the needle ('May I?'), she has now moved to directly asserting what she'll do, as in 12.

12 Arlene: I get to do some more things too. Now don't forget- now don't touch the baby until I get back, because it IS MY BABY! [said to both of the other girls] I'll check her ears, okay? [puts down the syringe and picks up the ear scope]

13 Elaine: Now I'll- and I'll give her- I'll have to give her [the same doll] a shot. [picks up the syringe that Arlene has put down]
Arlene: There can only be ONE thing that you- that- NO, she- she only needs one SHOT.

Elaine: Well, let's pretend it's another day that we have to look in her ears together.

At this point Elaine wants to give the doll a shot but in 12 Arlene has ordered her not to touch 'her' baby. She announces she is not constrained in what she can do with the baby and that she will check the baby's ears. As Elaine has done previously, Arlene adds a tag question, 'okay?', a marker that solicits agreement. Although Elaine does not directly respond to the tag question, she continues to act as a participant. In 13, she renounces her plans to give a shot, 'Now I'll- and I'll give her- I'll have to give her a shot.' In two indirect statements in 14, in which no agent is mentioned, and the responsibility for deciding who gives a shot is vaguely expressed, Arlene tries to cut Elaine out of the action by stating that 'There can only be ONE thing' and the baby 'only needs one SHOT'. Both girls are equally determined to have their own way. In 15, Elaine tries to get Arlene to consider an alternative in which they can both participate. She reframes the situation and responds in multiply mitigated ways. She opens with a delay, 'Well'. She uses a joint directive 'let's' and introduces a new pretend scenario: she displaces the time to 'another day' and the medical problem to her 'ears', in an effort to induce cooperation on a combined agenda, that is, that 'we' will work 'together'.

In 16, the conflict continues to heat up. In answer to Elaine's suggestion that they look in the doll's ears together, Arlene replies with a token agreement, 'yeah but', and nevertheless continues to demand to examine the ears herself, directly ordering Elaine not to 'shot her'.

Arlene: No, no, yeah but I do the ear looking. Now don't SHOT-[lowering her voice but still insisting] DON'T SHOT HER! I'm the one who does all the shots, 'cause this is my baby!

Elaine: [whispers] Well- I'm the nurse and nurses get to do the shots.

Arlene: [spoken very intensely] An' me'- And men- well, then men get to do the shots too even 'cause men can be nurses. [taunting, slightly sing-song] But you can't shot her.

In 17 Elaine continues to mitigate by delaying, 'Well', and countering with a reason for why she should give a shot, 'nurses get to do the shots.' In 18, Arlene counters with a competing justification, that is intended to take some of the force out of Elaine's claim: 'well, then men get to do the shots too even 'cause men can be nurses'. Arlene indirectly questions whether Elaine, as a female, has an exclusive right to give shots. Arlene again orders her somewhat indirectly not to give a shot, 'But you can't shot her.'

In 19, Elaine insists 'I'll have to shot her', and also continues to offer a concession, that she will give the shot 'after you look in the ears'. When Erica says that Arlene 'already shot her', Elaine assertively persists within the pretend frame, inventively countering (by noting a shortcoming in Arlene's procedure) in 21 that 'she didn't do a shot on her finger', that is, that Arlene missed a spot and it needs to be done by Elaine. Thus, Elaine resists Arlene's attempts to exclude her, and instead creatively offers alternatives in which she can share in the action too.

Although both girls are developing a complex negotiation in double-voice discourse, Arlene, however, is gaining more in this struggle than Elaine is. In line 24, Arlene persists: she intensely, directly and threateningly orders Elaine to stop, 'Now DON'T YOU DARE!' Arlene doesn't shout, but instead mutes her voice by lowering it. As the confrontation reaches its peak of insistence, the girls' voices get lower and lower, not louder and louder with anger. In 25, Elaine directly orders Arlene, in an even lower voice:

Elaine: [voice lowered more than Arlene's but equally intense] Stop saying that! [pause] Well, then you can't come to my birthday!

Finally, Elaine leaves Arlene at the crib and goes back to the table.

As Elaine and Arlene escalate their dispute with words, instead of raising their voices in shouts or screams, which happens in the boys' example, their speaking voices paradoxically become more and more muted. There is a lack of consonance between the girls' angry words and their quieter and quieter tone. It is a dramatic example of the mitigation of the voice of self in their double-voice discourse. It seems that the muting of their speaking voices allows them to escalate the directness of their words and the confrontational nature of their demands and assertions. Notice also in 25 that the kind of threat that Elaine uses is one of social ostracism, 'you can't come to my birthday', not one of physical attack which we saw in Example 1, 'I'll rock the couch like this.'
Gender differences in use of double-voice discourse

I have described a vivid example of double-voice discourse to give the reader a sense of the linguistic and interactional phenomena that may be involved. One can ask how characteristic double-voice discourse is for the preschool girls in this study compared with the boys. Two coders compared transcripts of half the girls in this study [nine] to those of half the boys in the study [nine]. The girls were eight months younger, on average, than the boys. Although the boys had more mutual conflicts (56%) than the girls (44%), more of the girls' conflicts were sites for double-voice discourse (60%) than the boys' were (45%) (see Sheldon, 1992a for further details.) In addition, in more than thirteen hours of conversational interaction, no boys' conflict has been found which comes close to matching the girls' for elaborateness or length of double-voice discourse. On the other hand, there are a number of similar complex examples of girls' conflicts, both long and short, which contain elaborate examples of double-voice discourse.

Double-voice discourse as a powerful persuasion mode

The negotiation of the conflict between Elaine and Arlene is an example of the linguistic and pragmatic complexity that is often involved in double-voice discourse. The girls use multiple argument strategies which involve a variety of linguistic devices that can be used to soften conflict in order to be effective. In this example, Arlene was successful in getting what she wanted in part because Elaine was willing to negotiate numerous concessions. For the most part, the girls resist without being confrontational, justify themselves rather than give in, and use linguistic mitigators while trying to get what they want. Although both girls use double-voice discourse, the differences in how much they use and when they use it reflect differences in their ongoing successes in getting their way during the negotiation.

Double-voice discourse enabled the girls to have an extensive interaction even though they disagreed. It extended their involvement with one another as they negotiated access to the syringe, and particularly as Elaine tried to balance her own interests with Arlene's interests. It allowed play to go on without disruption.

Conclusion

The analysis of the conflict episode between Arlene and Elaine raises a number of issues for the study of gender and discourse. First, it demonstrates the communicative competence, attainable in early childhood, which these girls display in attempts to get their agendas met when they are faced with opposition (that is, 'managing conflict'). Instead of finding girls avoiding conflict or incompetent at resolving it, we find preschool girls who go to great lengths to develop complex ways to negotiate their dissent, maintaining involvement and avoiding social breakdown. They are skillfully using a variety of language resources to mediate and overcome opposition. The exchange between Arlene and Elaine demonstrates the challenge of self-assertion: staking out one's point of view or goal, motivating it with justifications in an attempt to persuade or reflect the person who is opposing the speaker, communicating in clear verbal terms, all the while maintaining a modicum of 'niceness'. This work requires a great degree of attentiveness to discourse processes in order to properly frame responses, and to maintain thematic cohesion and relevance. Responses are produced to a partner's prior move and are framed to accommodate or distance the partner's next move.

The length of the girls' negotiations reflects Elaine's persistence in creating conditions which will overcome Arlene's resistance and convince Arlene to accept her. It also shows an awareness of her partner's needs, and the utility of framing her needs in terms of her partner's and providing justifications [see Kyriatzi, 1994 for a discussion of gender differences in preschoolers' use of justifications]. The length of the negotiation is also an index of the importance to Elaine of joining in play with Arlene as well as the complexity of the social task they are trying to accomplish. The girls demonstrate a variety of problem solving strategies. This example is one of a number of long conflict episodes found in this study, primarily in girls' discourse. Such episodes are extremely complex for analysts to work with. But if we want to understand discourse practices in girls' groups then we have to pay attention to these longer and more elaborate oral texts.

Second, whereas these girls' conflict talk is not directly confrontational in the ways that boys' conflict can be, any claim that girls or women operate within an ethic of unalloyed 'harmony', 'cooperation', or 'collaboration' [Kolb, 1992; Leaper, 1991; Miller et al., 1986] must be rethought in the light of such examples of elaborate verbal work. There are dialectical forces operating in conflicts. Example 2 shows that the achievement of equilibrium and the construction of reciprocity is a delicate and fluid process that proceeds simultaneously in the dual directions of self-assertion and mitigation.

Third, the close analysis of conflict reveals complexities of human interaction that should make us cautious in undertaking evaluations or making generalizations about females and males which are drawn from studies using measures of central tendencies based on aggregated data and which do not describe actual interactions in any detail. Long and complex interactions, which are rarely studied in developmental conflict research, not only give us important insights into social processes, but also raise questions about individual variation, which as yet have not been well addressed in the gender and discourse literature. Analysis of such interactions demonstrates the wisdom of resisting simple labels
for gendered behaviour. Our understanding of gender can be well served by explicit and extensive analysis of examples. This chapter provides the kind of situation-specific sequential analysis that is called for [for example, in Putallaz and Sheppard, 1992] in order to better understand children's social competence.

Fourth, Arlene and Elaine are not equally successful in getting their agendas met. One reason why this example is so interesting is because of what it shows us about girls' resistance to opposition. Whereas Elaine's accommodation in the face of opposition may be familiar to those of us in this culture [or similar ones], and whereas her accommodation certainly fits cultural stereotypes of female behaviour, the tenacity and resistance that are shown here in different ways by each girl as she pursues what she wants is a subject that is hardly discussed in the literature on the discourse of girls and women [exceptions have been noted in the work of Goodwin, for example 1980]. In our collective cultural imagination, as well as in the conflict literature, we have a clearer sense of females as accommodating and flexible than we have of females as resisting and defending self-interest, particularly someone like Arlene.

When gender is defined as a polarity, such a framework doesn't theorize competition and control in female interaction, or harmony and cooperation in male interaction. Hence, we do not expect to find non-theorized behaviours for either category, such as resistance and competition among girls. This discussion shows that on both empirical and theoretical grounds a dualistic framework for theorizing gender is inadequate. We need to reframe our thinking about girls and women so that we can begin to see the constructive and powerful ways that they put opposition and resistance to work in their discourse and social interactions. We also need to see beyond the hegemonic stereotypes for boys and men.

I have demonstrated that close analysis of discourse can form a partnership with the construction of feminist theory and a more sophisticated theory of gender. Discourse analysis is a powerful tool that can reveal the complexity of everyday practices that are involved in 'doing gender', and can call into question generalizations about gender differences [about boys as well as girls] that simplify rather than reveal the intricacies of human behaviour.

Discourse is a complex human activity. Close analysis of the negotiation for access and control in the discourse of girls' social interaction can help us to reconsider claims about girls' management of dissent and expressions of power. It also brings the study of child language squarely into the middle of feminist theory-making.

This chapter has illustrated the sort of investigation that is necessary to counteract stereotypical and androcentric views of gender [both folkloric as well as academic] which privilege male talk and discount or overlook female talk. A culture prescribes norms of gender appropriateness.

However, we do not have enough empirical work to understand how, why, and when speakers accommodate to or resist these norms in social interaction. Some of the greatest challenges to future research on discourse and gender will be these: [1] developing a richer concept of gender that is consistent with the complexity and diversity of female and male behaviours in the world; [2] incorporating work on the discourse of gender resisters and reformulators, or those whose talk appears to not fit gender norms; [3] increasing our data base by studying more speech communities, and more varied ones, so that we can observe cross-community similarities and differences in discourse norms and practices; [4] studying the discourse of individuals who have experienced gender desocialization or resocialization, such as individuals in transgender communities but also individuals whose attitudes towards gender change in the course of a lifetime and who take up different alignments to gender stereotypes, norms, and practices; and [5] demonstrating the role that context plays in gendering discourse, for example, comparing the behaviour of individuals across contexts in which their speech might vary. There is much exciting work to be done.

Notes

Parts of this paper are from Sheldon [1992b].

References


Puttallaz, Martha and Sheppard, Blair (1992) ‘Conflict management and social competence’, in Carolyn U. Shantz and Willard W. Hartup (eds), Conflict in
In this chapter I shall explore the links between gender, talk and friendship. Having friends is something most of us take for granted. This means that the things we do in order to make friends and to sustain friendship are so much part of our everyday social practice that they are pretty much invisible to us. But doing friendship is a significant accomplishment: some people find it difficult, or get it wrong; others never grasp what it means to be 'a friend'.

Friendship, according to recent research, involves some or all of the following components: taking part in shared activities; developing a sense of trust and mutual support; being able to relax and 'be yourself'; having your sense of who you are validated [see Faderman, 1985; Hey, 1996; Johnson and Aries, 1983a; Kennedy, 1986; O'Connor, 1992; Wulff, 1988]. But friendship varies from group to group, and seems to be gendered. Contemporary accounts of male and female patterns of friendship [Johnson and Aries, 1983a; 1983b; Pleck, 1975; Miller, 1983; O'Connor, 1992; Seidler, 1989] suggest the following contrasts: women's friendships are characterized by intimacy, mutual self-disclosure and a focus on talk, while men's friendships are characterized by sociability, a lack of self-disclosure, and a focus on activity.

The distinction between intimacy and sociability comes from the work of Joseph Pleck, who argues that, in the case of the American male, friendships are more important than intimate: 'Male sociability is closely connected with male sex-role training and performance and is not characteristically a medium for self-exploration, personal growth or the development of intimacy' (1975: 233). Stuart Miller says in the preface to his book on men's friendships: 'Most men . . . will admit they are disappointed in their friendships with other men . . . [these] are generally characterized by thinness, insincerity, and even chronic wariness' (1983: xi). The findings of these American researchers are echoed by Victor Seidler, a social theorist working in Britain. Seidler argues that 'masculinity is an essentially negative identity learned through defining itself against emotionality and connectedness' (1989: 7), and goes on: 'We [that is, men] learn to identify our sense of self so