

DISCOURSE CONTROL AND LEADERSHIP IN SPANISH CONFLICT TALK

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Resumen

Este trabajo estudia la influencia del género en la dinámica discursiva de cinco grupos mixtos de hablantes jóvenes chilenos en situaciones de discurso informal.

El estudio trata de descubrir las estrategias discursivas usadas por los participantes, y de correlacionarlas con variables tales como el estatus del hablante, el género, su rol dentro del grupo, los sistemas valóricos sustentados, etc., para determinar de qué forma y en qué grado el género incide en marcar el control del discurso y el liderazgo dentro del grupo.

También busca descubrir qué tipos de relaciones interpersonales se evidencian a partir de la dinámica de la argumentación, y determinan, por ejemplo, la consideración hacia los demás, el respeto, la autoimagen, etc. Se descubrió que los hablantes varones parecen tener ventajas en el control de la discusión en grupos mixtos, mediante el uso de determinadas estrategias, lo que les significaba una asignación de turnos más frecuentes, una mayor extensión en los turnos y, en general, una influencia más fuerte dentro del grupo, al compararlos con sus iguales femeninos.

Abstract

(The influence of gender on the dynamics of Chilean argumentative discourse was examined for three different gender ratio groups.

Males did have a small advantage in terms of discourse control, as they tended to dominate in balanced gender ratios and were favoured by both males and females in terms of utterance abortion. Under these circumstances, the female discourse style may appear to be in disadvantage on the surface but it could be interpreted as a beneficial strategy to maintain healthy dynamics in the group.

Discourse control is a complex issue that not only needs to consider how strategies are used, but the reasons why they are employed, and the role particular participants play.)

INTRODUCTION

Gender has been shown to influence the ways females and males comport themselves during discourse and the linguistic strategies they select (Lakoff 1975, Kramerae 1978 and Thorne *et al.* 1975). This in turn has a profound effect on the dynamics of discourse and its outcomes.

Of particular relevance is argumentative discourse, where the outcomes achieved are dependent on the process of negotiation carried out. If one gender plays a more active role in this process, it may have an advantage in terms of increased benefits.

This investigation focuses on those linguistic strategies and components of argument which specifically influence the dynamics of this discourse type, and the degree to which gender affects them. This issue is examined within the context of informal argument carried out by native Chilean Spanish speakers living in their own country.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Two of the most important concepts in argumentative discourse are those of power and negotiation. Participants who wield power have greater access to the floor (Edelsky 1993) and to more frequent turns. They are able to control the direction of discourse and other participants' responses (Thomas 1990). Power, however, is not a fixed variable, as it can be negotiated throughout discourse. The concept of argumentative discourse can in fact be described as a process of negotiation, which mediates participants' rights and obligations, along with the argument's development and resolution. This depends on cooperation just as much as competition (Schiffrin 1985).

Of the many variables that affect discourse in general, ethnicity is of particular importance to argumentative discourse in terms of its social function and interpretation. While many studies have investigated the discourse of white, middle class Anglo-Saxons, several studies are notable in their work with Black Americans (Abrahams 1975, 1976; Kochman 1970, 1979, 1981, 1983; Labov 1972), Jewish Americans (Schiffrin 1984; Tannen 1979, 1981, 1983, 1984), and Hispanics (García 1989, 1992; Cordella 1990, 1991, 1992, 1996). Both García and Cordella have found that Hispanics employ certain linguistic strategies which serve to emphasise solidarity.

With regard to gender, one of the pioneering studies on male and female language differences was carried out by Lakoff (1975). She linked the social status of women to their less privileged access to powerful linguistic strategies and documented their particular style

of discourse. This prompted numerous other studies (Kramerae 1974, 1975, 1977, 1978, 1981; Thorne & Henley 1975; Key 1975; Siegler & Siegler 1976; Kramerae, Thorne & Henley 1978; Baird & Bradley 1979; Maltz & Borker 1982; Coates 1986; Tannen 1990, 1993, 1994) which generally categorised females as more sensitive and emotive in their behaviour and strategy selection while males were more assertive and ambitious. Conflict arose as to what extent these descriptions were accurate and under what conditions.

Accounting for the above gender differences has also been problematic. Lakoff (1975) and Spender (1980) have hypothesised theories based on the influence of social power or status; Maltz & Borker (1982) have emphasised the effect of socialisation on male and female roles; and Tannen (1990, 1993, 1994) has referred to the differing value systems held by each gender and the way they signal meaning in conversation.

Gender and discourse control has been a focus of investigation, with West (1979); Zimmerman & West (1975); West & Zimmerman (1977, 1985) correlating the use of interruptions with male dominance. Their findings were subsequently supported and contested by others (Murray 1985, 1988; Murray & Covelli 1988). Other strategies relating to conversational dominance were also the subject of analysis: Fishman (1977, 1978) for example, investigated how males control the topic and Tannen (1993) emphasised the ambiguity of linguistic devices.

These studies have presented us with a still incomplete picture of argumentative discourse and how factors such as gender and ethnicity affect strategy selection and argument dynamics.

THE INVESTIGATION

We recorded the argumentative discourse of twenty participants in their third and fourth year of study at the Universidad de Chile in Santiago, Chile.¹ Students were organised into five groups according to their friendship networks and asked to discuss the topic: "What are the situations of discrimination that a woman experiences in this society?" The students had been friends for at least two to three years. Participants were only recorded in one conversation.

Groups' informal conversations were recorded at the university during lunchtimes for periods of approximately ten minutes and par-

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ticipants then answered questionnaires regarding their discussion and their opinions on argumentative discourse in general.

The conversations of three of the five groups will be discussed in this article. The groups are represented as follows:

G1: comprised three males and one female (symbolised by ([3] ([1])

G2: comprised three females and one male (symbolised by ([3] ([1])

G3: comprised two males and two females (symbolised by ([2] ([2])

The strategies and elements focused on in this article will be: the negotiation of consensus, self repetition, questions, short and long turns, and utterance abortion. They have been selected because they may show leadership and discourse dynamics in the group. The term “dominant” will be used throughout to mean the person who plays the most active role in the conversation

METHOD

The mean and variability of linguistic strategy use were compared within and between genders across groups. Variability was expressed as the coefficient of variation (CV= standard variation/mean) being a measure of variability relative to the mean. The larger the value of the coefficient of variation, the more the members of the same sex in the group varied in their use of linguistic strategies compared with members of other groups. Comments are given only in those cases where differences were most evident.

LINGUISTIC STRATEGIES AND DISCOURSE ELEMENTS

The Negotiation of Consensus - through redefining their positions, group members negotiate a new common stance. The reaffirmation of this stance unites the group in opposition. For example:

EXAMPLE 1:

G2 (([1] ([3])

(1: cuando yo voy a salir entonces la (1) tú como la hija (1) tú como la la hija tiene que servirle al papá cuando [llega]

(1: [claro]

(2: claro

(3: claro

- (1: when I'm going out then the (1) you as the daughter (1) you as the the daughter have to serve your father when he [arrives]
 (1: [for sure]
 (2: for sure
 (3: for sure

TABLE 1
Mean value

G1	M [3]	M [1]	G2	F [3]	M [1]	G3	M [2]	F [2]
	3	1		3.3	7		3.5	2

TABLE 2
Coefficient of Variation

Males in G1 M [3] F [1]	Females in G2 F [3] M [1]	Males in G3 M [2] F [2]	Females in G3 M [2] F [2]
0.56	0.15	0.20	1.40

Males appear to employ consensus building more often than females. This tendency is clearly exhibited across all three groups. At the same time, female variability in strategy use increases greatly in a balanced gender ratio (G3).

Questions - speakers test others' convictions and commitment, while stating their own. They stress the relationship between speakers. For example:

EXAMPLE 2:

G5 (([1] ([3])

- (1: claro que tú dices que son profesionales [que sé yo (1) pero qué área cachái
 (1: [sí]
 (2: qué área (1) qué qué qué cubre (1) dime que o sea [dime] son todas secretarias no son
 (1: qué áreas son las son las más tradici[onales]
 (3: () la mujer
 (2: todas pero la mayoría [cubren este aspecto]
- (1: of course you say that they are professionals [or whatever (1) but what area right
 (1: [yes]

- (2: what area (1) what what what does it cover (1) tell me what or it is [tell me] are they
 (1: what areas they are they are the most tradi[tional]
 (3: () the woman
 (2: all secretaries they all aren{t but the majority [cover this area]
 (3: for sure

TABLE 3
Mean value

G1	M [3]	F [1]	G2	F [3]	M [1]	G3	M [2]	F [2]
	4	8		2	0		4.5	0.5

TABLE 4
Coefficient of Variation

Males in G1 M [3] F [1]	Females in G2 F [3] M [1]	Males in G3 M [2] F [2]	Females in G3 M [2] F [2]
0.50	0	0.77	1.40

Females appear to use this strategy more often overall, as illustrated by G1 and G2. This tendency is not exhibited in a balanced gender ratio, although females variability increases greatly in G3.

Self Repetition - the speakers reiterate their own utterances in order to demonstrate involvement, clarify their own position and give emphasis to their argument. For example:

EXAMPLE 3:

G3 (([2] ([2])

(1: sí (1) o [sa] tradicionalmente o sea (1) este [es] el rol que tradicionalmente se le da

(1: yes (1) or [well] traditionally or well (1) this [is] the role that traditionally is given to her

TABLE 5
Mean value

G1	M [3]	F [1]	G2	F [3]	M [1]	G3	M [2]	F [2]
	21	23		10	16		27	10

TABLE 6
Coefficient of Variation

Males in G1 M [3] F [1]	Females in G2 F [3] M [1]	Males in G3 M [2] F [2]	Females in G3 M [2] F [2]
0.57	0.20	0.20	0

This is generally a male preferred strategy, as seen in G2 and G3 although the trend is reversed in G1. The highest variability is present in the group composed of one female and three males.

Long and Short Turns - a turn is defined as the holding of the floor with the intention of making a substantial contribution. Strategies such as backchannelling, along with unsuccessful attempts to take the floor, are therefore not counted as turns. A turn ends when another speaker takes over the floor.

Turns appeared to be of two general lengths: those consisting of one short utterance and those the length of two utterances or more.

TABLE 7
Mean Value of Long Turns

G1	M [3]	F [1]	G2	F [3]	M [1]	G3	M [2]	F [2]
	4.3	6		2.3	6		7.5	4.5

TABLE 8
Coefficient of Variation for Long Turns

Males in G1 M [3] F [1]	Females in G2 F [3] M [1]	Males in G3 M [2] F [2]	Females in G3 M [2] F [2]
0.11	0.21	0.28	0.46

Males have more long turns on average than females, except in G1. Females are the most variable in their use of long turns, although both sexes increase their variability in G3.

TABLE 9
Mean Value of Short Turns

G1	M [3]	F [1]	G2	F [3]	M [1]	G3	M [2]	F [2]
	31.3	40		20.6	17		21.5	14.5

TABLE 10
Coefficient of Variation for Short Turns

Males in G1 M [3] F [1]	Females in G2 F [3] M [1]	Males in G3 M [2] F [2]	Females in G3 M [2] F [2]
0.28	0.22	0.29	0.53

In contrast to the trend regarding long turns, females always have more short turns than males, except in G3. Again, females are the most variable in G3.

Utterance Abortion - when a speaker terminates his/her turn after a second participant has tried to take the floor. The first speaker may allow the second person to continue (self abort their utterance) or be forced to stop speaking due to the second person's persistence (abort their utterance in favour of another).

TABLE 11
Mean Value

G1	M [3]	F [1]	G2	F [3]	^ [1]	G3	^ [2]	F [2]
	9	10		4	2		4.5	2.5

TABLE 12
Coefficient of Variation

Males in G1 M [3] F [1]	Females in G2 F [3] M [1]	Males in G3 M [2] F [2]	Females in G3 M [2] F [2]
0.11	0.42	0.46	0.28

On average, females tend to abort their utterances more than males, except in G3, where the male utterance abortion rate is somewhat higher. Males are the most variable gender in a balanced sex group but the least variable when they are majority.

It is important to take into account in whose favour females and males abort their utterances. The following table illustrates this relationship, where the first row indicates the utterance aborter and the second row those participants in whose favour the utterances are aborted:

TABLE 13
G1 Utterance abortion preferences

M [1]	M [2]	M [3]	F [1]
5 to F [1] 2 to M [2] 2 to M [3]	4 to F [1] 2 to M [1] 1 to M [3] & self	6 to M [2] 4 to F [1]	7 to M [2] 2 to M [3] 1 to self

M [1] and M[2] abort their utterances fairly equally in favour of both sexes, while M [3] favours males slightly. ([2] and ([1] receive by far the most preferences.

TABLE 14
G2 Utterance abortion preferences

F [1]	F [2]	F [3]	M [1]
2 to F [2] 1 to F [3]	3 to M [1] 2 to F [3] 1 to F [1]	2 to F [2] 1 to F [1]	1 to F [2] 1 to F [3]

Two of the three females (F [1] and F [3]) abort their utterances only in favour of their sex, while F [2] favours males and females equally. F [2] and F [3] receive the most preferences.

TABLE 15
G3 Utterance abortion preferences

M [1]	M [2]	F [1]	F [2]
3 to M [2] 2 to F [1] 1 to self	2 to M [1] 1 to F [1]	2 to M [2] 1 to M [1]	2 to M [1]

Both M [1] M [2] tend to abort theirs utterances slightly more often in favour of the other male. Both females only favour the males. M [1] and M [2] receive an equal amount of preferences.

DISCUSSION

a) Discourse Control

The question arises as to whether females or males are at an advantage or disadvantage, given their strategy selection and manipulation of discourse elements. The fact that males often negotiate consensus and use self repetition probably aids them in gaining longer turns and therefore temporarily dominating the floor. Yet females also have access to powerful strategies, such as questioning and the use of frequent short turns, although the benefits these bring are different and probably more indirect in terms of discourse control.

Clearly one situation where females may be at a disadvantage is in the balanced gender ratio group. This grouping means females always have less opportunity to employ strategies and less access to the floor, even when they are dominating in all other situations. It is interesting to observe that the frequency of strategy use like consensus building, questioning and long turns is higher in males than females. Yet female participants show a higher variability in the usage of those strategies which may be a result of compensating for less frequent use. This may indicate that one female in the group feels the need to balance the discourse dynamics and diminish the power/control element that males could otherwise exercise.

The issue of utterance abortion also has strong implications for female and male dominance. Females do abort their utterances more often, and when in the majority, they favour themselves. In any other situation however, they favour males. Males, on the other hand, abort their utterances less frequently and are more egalitarian in their preferences. This situation changes however, for when the gender ratio is balanced, males favour themselves.

This means females are again disadvantaged in a balanced gender ratio group due to male behaviour, and disadvantaged in other minority groupings because of their own discourse style.

b) Leadership and the Role of the Individual

The data in this investigation has shown that key individuals have a significant effect on discourse control and the dynamics of argumentative discourse.

In the group G1 (M [3] F [1]), F1 was a dominant participant despite being the only female present. She consistently equalled or outnumbered the strategy use of both males and females, across all groups, and had significantly more long turns than any other female

and some males. Her total of short turns outnumbered every other participant in the investigation, along with that of her utterance abortions. The influence she had on her group's discourse was therefore very significant, and evidence of the attention she commanded is seen in her group's pattern of utterance abortion. All three male participants aborted a significant number of utterances in her favour, with one of the highest aborters being the most dominant male.

In G3 (M [2] F [2]), M2 was a dominant participant most of the time. He had the greatest number of long and short turns within his group, as well being as the highest user of several linguistic strategies. He hardly ever aborted his utterances to others, but two of the other three participants aborted in favour of him, and his total was the highest. This male was a popular student with many friends, a high scholastic achiever and highly regarded both by teachers and students, which obviously afforded him extra discourse advantages.

Individual discourse style and leadership status are important factors to be taken into consideration, as they can provide speakers with additional advantages and change the dynamics of argument. This idea suggests the need for a refinement of the usual classification of participants by sex, giving emphasis to the individual characteristics that both females and males bring into the discourse.

In analysing the role of females and males with regard to Chilean Spanish argumentative discourse control and dynamics, we hypothesised that while both genders have equal access to powerful linguistic strategies and discourse elements, males probably have an advantage in balanced gender ratios and in terms of utterance abortion. The discourse style preferred by females may actually be disadvantageous to them in this area. This idea is supported by Fishman (1978), who argues that the female discourse style (in Anglo-Saxon discourse) tends to give more power to males while at the same time depriving females.

In a balanced gender ratio group, females do not dominate, even when employing their preferred strategies and discourse elements. This does not appear to be due to higher than average male participation, but because females significantly limit their contributions. Female modulation of linguistic strategies was also found by Forbes and Cordella (in press) where the gender ratio in the group played an important role for the determination of the frequency and variability use of the strategies. Another possible explanation is that females modulate their speech according to the addressee (as Cordella [1990] and Cordella, Large & Pardo [1995] have found), although it is unclear why they feel it is necessary to do so in this particular situation. Perhaps this can be partly attributed to the factor of indi-

vidual personality and leadership. Within this group M [2] was who exerted considerable influence over the discourse and had a high status. His presence may have induced the females to alter their discourse style to some extent, especially in the case of F [1], who aborted most of her utterances in his favour. Similarly, F [2] was a more passive participant, who always aborted her utterances in favour of M [1].

Utterance abortion can provide valuable clues as to which participants are dominating the discourse. Females have a tendency to abort their utterances more often than males, thus providing males with more opportunities to hold the floor. While this deprives women of turns on an individual basis, it also creates a faster, more dynamic discourse. Women may therefore be making a substantial contribution to argumentative discourse in general.

It is interesting to note that the above tendency is reduced in G3, precisely where females are limiting their strategy use and contributions. Clearly, while females are prepared to alter their discourse style and have fewer turns, they are determined to finish them and complete their contributions.

In terms of utterance abortion preferences, males and females behave very differently. When in the majority, males are prepared to make great concessions towards females, thus showing consideration towards the minority speaker. However, in a balanced gender ratio they clearly see little need to favour the opposite sex, giving their preferences to each other.

Females on the other hand, operate under a different set of constructs. They favour themselves when in the majority, as might be expected, yet diminish their preferences towards each other until they are non-existent in the balanced gender ratio. This technique works against them, given that males are not prepared to make concessions towards them either. The result is that females have a reduced role to play in the discourse.

In hypothesising that there may be some situations where males and females dominate argumentative discourse, care must be taken in interpreting what this means. Young Chileans themselves regard argumentative discourse as a non-threatening activity, (as indicated by the questionnaire results),² and those who participate fully by holding the floor are working towards a positive social end. They therefore do not necessarily interpret dominance as being negative (Cordella 1996). The underlying cooperation, understanding of others and knowl-

² Refer to Appendix 1.

edge of how different strategies work, serve to diminish the element of power often found in the argumentative discourse of Anglo-Saxon culture, and mean that others are evaluated in a positive light.

Neither strategy dominance or gender advantage necessarily correspond to increased discourse control. Members of the other sex can, and frequently do, react by employing the same strategy to counteract the control element (G1 F [1]'s use of self repetition for example) or by diminishing their support. When either gender takes control of the floor, it is because the other group members are cooperating with them to a certain extent, and conceding their right to a turn. In this way, argumentative discourse is both a process of cooperation and opposition, generally balanced by the role each gender plays. While males and females are potentially equal in terms of their access to power and participation in the discourse, certain situations may push the balance in favour of males. The manner in which this is evaluated is dependent upon cultural values.

Appendix 1

Questionnaire results

The following results were taken from a thirteen question survey given to all twenty participants after their taped discussions. Questions 1, 2, and 3 were rated on a numerical scale of 1 to 5, where 1 represents the most positive response and 5 represents the most negative response. Beside each result the corresponding scale ranking has therefore also been included.

1. How do you generally feel discussing conflictive issues with others?
40% felt very comfortable (Ranking 1)
40% felt comfortable (Ranking 2)
20% were neutral (Ranking 3)
2. How did you feel during the conversation that recently took place?
65% felt very comfortable (Ranking 1)
30% felt comfortable (Ranking 2)
5% were neutral (Ranking 3)
3. How did the others act towards you in the conversation that recently took place?
70% felt the other participants had acted very favourably towards them (Ranking 1)
25% felt they acted favourably (Ranking 2)
5% were neutral (Ranking 3)

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