

Russian women's high involvement conflict style

The paper analyses the highly competitive conflict style of Russian women based on a corpus of casual conversations. Conflict style captures the socially meaningful performance of the conversational activities of disagreeing and arguing embedded in the conversational genre of *oppositional argument* (Schiffrin 1985). Dissensions convey a speaker's "oppositional stance (verbal or non-verbal) to an antecedent verbal (or non-verbal) action" (Kakava 1993: 36). Any action that expresses the non-acceptance of a turn and elicits further negotiations in the form of arguments can be defined as dissension. Non-acceptance of a prior turn can refer to the form of the utterance, the speech act in the turn, the truth of the proposition or to the relevance of the utterance.

Culture as well as gender may predispose speakers to a specific conflict style (Kakava 2001). Conflict styles are constrained by and reflect culture- and group-specific evaluations of risk, aggression, emotional involvement, etc. (cf. Schiffrin 1984, Tannen 1998). Style functions as a *complex contextualization cue* (Selting 1995) indexing social identity (Kallmeyer 1995) or modes of interaction etc. Interactional stylistic conceives style as a holistic *gestalt* constituted by several devices on each level of interaction (Selting 1997, 2001). So the main question will be: What performances of dissensions contextualize the competitive mode of arguing? The following features of dissensions on different levels of interaction contribute to the expression of speaker's and the creation of listener's involvement:

- 1.) On the level of conversational organisation (turn taking, preference): Tying techniques such as *wording* or *format tying* (Goodwin 1990, Schwitalla 2002, Kotthoff 1993) mark cohesion between adjacent dissent turns. Often dissensions are realised as interruptions, placed in overlap or simultaneously. Furthermore dissensions show a preferred turn design – the preference shifts to dissension. These features are typical of a more aggressive mode of conflict talk (cf. Kotthoff 1993, Gruber 1998).
- 2.) On the propositional level: Speakers enhance polarity between dissent turns. Strong adversative or contrastive relations are common (contradiction, rejection, irrelevance). These can additionally be strengthened and stressed by the use of discourse markers (*net*) or epistemic particles (*že*).
- 3.) On the level of action: Non-acceptance is often conveyed by challenging speech acts such as relevance questions, irrelevancy claims, rhetorical questions or strong contrastive assertions. Perpetuated strong dissensions build insisting sequence that convey sustained disagreement and prevent topical progression as well as the continuation of action completely blocking any negotiation.

The analysed Russian women's preference to use these dissension techniques reveals an attitude of *agonism* defined by Leung (2005: 13) as "conventionalized aggression or being combative for the sake of it". They seem to enjoy conflict at the same time not perceiving it as a threat to their relationships or as an expression of genuine aggression. This is rather untypical of female conflict behaviour (cf. Tannen 1998), and so far has been described as characteristic of other mainly ethnically or socially defined speech communities (e.g. Schiffrin 1984, Blum-Kulka/Blondheim/Hacohen 2001, Kakava 2002). This once more underlines the importance of sociolinguistic fieldwork for genderlinguistic analyses.

Examples

(1) marked cohesion by wording, contradiction placed in overlap

1 [L1:] prepodavala ukrainskuju literaturu v škole ona polučila novyj
2 učebnik i ona (?po imeni?) avtora voobščé [ne znaet èto
3 I : [èto sovremennye
4 normal'no?
5 potomu čto èto oni [sovremennye avtory
6 L1: [èto ne sovremennye èto 15yj 16yj vek tam
7 17yj potom chodili OTKOPALI ponimaete? prosto dostali iz glubi

(2) marked cohesion by wording, epistemically strengthened contradiction (“že”) prefaced by a relevance question (“počemu?”), preferred turn design

1 Al: DA I VOT ÈTO KOROČE razvitie **vy ne**
2 **videli** vot čto dal'se proizchodit'
3 S : **=počemu? my že videli** [kak
4 Z : [my videli my videli kak èta baba odelas'
5 krasivo i pošla

(3) preferred turn design, dissension by challenging question

1 Se: a esli A ESLI muž fermer? on vseгда
2 doma praktičeskij sidit
3 Ju: **=kak on mozet postojanno sidet' doma?** nu esli on zanimaetsja
4 rabotoj sel'skim chozjajstvom on kak raz i ne SIDIT ()

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