33 Discourse and Conflict

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0 Introduction

In the past, the linguistic means of conducting conflict among adults did not receive much attention in either linguistic or anthropological linguistic research, in part because, as Briggs (1996) puts it, conflict constitutes a type of "disorderly discourse." As a result, either researchers did not venture into this form of "backstage language behavior" (Goffman 1959) or this kind of data was not easily gathered. Consequently, several studies exist that talk *about* conflict (e.g. Watson-Gegeo and White 1990), but few focusing on a turn-by-turn analysis of how conflict is conducted among adults, except among adults in interaction with children. Only recently has conflict generated much-needed interest which has provided us with some new insights and directions.[1]

Initially, researchers focused on the structural properties of arguments or disputes, but gradually the focus shifted to more contextual strategies, and more recently, scholars are investigating how the self or selves is or are constituted through conflict and how ideology is constructed and reflected through conflict talk.

This chapter will discuss research that has been conducted on language and conflict, broadly defined as any type of verbal or nonverbal opposition ranging from disagreement to disputes, mostly in social interaction. The discussion will not include cases of "language conflict" – in other words, conflict over language choice, e.g. Nelde (1997). The chapter will cover representative research that has been done on: (1) the structural properties of conflict; (2) the communicative strategies of conducting conflict; (3) conflict negotiation and resolution; and (4) the meanings of conflict. In the conclusion, some recent trends and future directions in the area of conflict talk will be outlined.

1 Structural Properties of Conflict

The structural elements of different types of conflict are the focus of this section. Whereas some studies center on the structure of disputes or arguments and their

components, others investigate the sequential organization of disagreement, and its status in social interaction. Almost no study limits itself to examining just the structural properties of conflict, but what these studies share is their interest in unearthing how conflict or disagreement is initiated and how it develops.

One of the earlier studies on children's conflict is Brenneis and Lein's (1977) investigation of role-played disputes among white middle-class children in the first, third, and fourth grades from an elementary school in Massachusetts. They found that the children's argumentative sequences fell into three structural patterns: repetition, escalation, and inversion. They also identified "stylistic tactics" (suprasegmental elements) that characterized the tone of the children's exchanges. A reciprocal redundancy was noted between content and style. The shorter and more repetitive the content exchange, the more stylistically elaborate it was. Conversely, the more semantically complex exchanges were not stylistically elaborate.

In a subsequent study, Lein and Brenneis (1978) investigated whether the features of arguments observed in their study from New England would be used cross-culturally, so they examined arguments in three speech communities: white American middle-class children from a small town in New England (the same as in their 1977 study), black American children whose parents were migrant harvesters, and Hindi-speaking Fiji Indian children from a rural community. As in their previous study, they used role-played arguments as data. No significant differences were found in terms of content and style of disputes among the three different communities, even though there was some variation regarding the use of stress.

The three communities, however, differed in their organization of arguments, particularly in the turn-taking system. The Indian children showed a much higher tolerance for overlapping talk than did the black children, who had no instances of it. White children showed organization patterns similar to those of the black students. The occasional cases of overlap that were recorded among the white children occurred when a speaker was perceived to have finished his or her utterance.

Higher tolerance for overlaps and interruptions in the course of arguments have been reported in adult studies as well for some cultures and specific contexts, for example among Greeks (Kakavá 1993a), Tzotzil speakers (Haviland 1997), British broadcast news (Greatbatch 1992), and talk-radio shows (Hutchby 1992).

The development of verbal disputing in part-Hawaiian children from their childhood to their adolescence was examined by Boggs (1978). Boggs used tape-recorded data which came from three sources: naturally occurring conversations among 5-year-olds recorded by their mothers, recordings of children's interactions at a kindergarten, and conversations among older boys and girls at their school and during camping trips. Boggs found that a pattern of disputing – direct contradiction prefaced by "not" – was very pervasive not only among the 12-year-olds but even among the 5-year-olds; he called it a "contradicting routine." However, for the 12-year-olds, the pattern seemed to be turning into what he called "situational joking," where disputants would end up laughing with each other.

The structural patterns of a dispute, Boggs reports, were similar to the ones described by Lein and Brenneis (1978). Contradicting routines started with assertions, challenges, and threats followed by contradiction, and then by another round of assertions or challenges or insults. If an insult was followed by a counterinsult, the dispute was likely to end.[2]

Maynard (1985a) focused on what constitutes an oppositional move besides a verbal action. He investigated the initial stage of an adversative episode, the so-called "antecedent event," basing his analysis on the videotaped recordings of first-grade reading groups of white middle-class native speakers of English. Maynard shows that bodily and presuppositional claims are integral parts of an oppositional move. However, Maynard claims an oppositional move does not always prompt a dispute, so he calls such a move "argumentative" to indicate that it has a potential to provoke a dispute but may not end up doing so.

Marjorie Harness Goodwin (1983, 1990a, 1990b, and in collaboration with Charles Goodwin, in Goodwin and Goodwin 1987, 1990) has produced some of the most detailed ethnographic analysis of disputes among African American children and young teenagers (from the ages 4 to 14). Goodwin (1983) and Goodwin and Goodwin (1987) examine forms of opposition that were expressed as either correction or disagreement. Contrary to studies which argued that disagreement is usually prefaced or mitigated (see the discussion of Pomerantz 1975, 1984, below), children were found to use several lexical, syntactic, and phonological properties, such as substitutions and format tying (partial or total repetitions at the phonological, syntactic, and semantic level) to initiate and sustain an opposition. Goodwin (1983) termed this form of disagreement which enhances polarity "aggravated." This type of opposition was also found in studies among adults in Taiwanese (Kuo 1991), Greek (Kakavá 1993a), and Korean (Song 1993).

In her influential studies with data from adults, Pomerantz (1975, 1984) introduced the term "dispreferred-action turn shape" to refer to second assessments that display features such as silence or delays after an assessment has been introduced. Building on the notion of preference, as introduced by Sacks (1973), she defines an action as dispreferred if it is not "oriented to" the talk as it was "invited" to be. These dispreferred actions are structurally marked, displaying what she calls "dispreference" features such as "delays, requests for clarification, partial repeats, and other repair initiators, and turn prefaces" (Pomerantz 1984: 70). She argues that when conversants feel that they are expected to agree with an assessment, yet disagree, they usually express their disagreement with some form of delay. Some of the forms of delay that she lists are initial silence in response to forthcoming talk and repair initiators.[3]

Subsequent studies have examined specific contexts and have reported findings contrary to Pomerantz's. Atkinson and Drew (1979), in their study of judicial discourse, found that after accusations, the preferred response is an unmitigated disagreement. This is consonant with Bayraktaroğlu's (1992) finding in Turkish troubles talk. Bayraktaroğlu reports that during troubles talk, the weakness displayed by the disclosing party is met with disagreement to repair the interactional equilibrium. Similarly, in psychotherapy groups, Krainer (1988) posits that the expression of discord is expected, since disagreement, complaints, and dissatisfactions should be discussed "in the open." She found both strong and mitigated challenges in her data. The strong challenges were intensified by prosodic emphasis and other intonational features and included overt features of negation, negative evaluative lexical items, etc. Pauses, requests for clarifications, and "discord particles" such as *well* marked mitigated challenges.

Kakavá (1993a, 1993b) and Kotthoff (1993) also provide counterevidence to the structural markedness of disagreement. Kakavá finds that in casual conversations

among Greeks, disagreements do not often display dispreference markers, a finding that is echoed in Kotthoff's study on conversations among Chinese and German speakers. Moreover, Kotthoff found that within the context of an argument, concessions displayed the dispreference markers that Pomerantz had identified, once a dissent-turn sequence was established. Thus, these two empirical studies confirmed a claim that Bilmes (1988) had earlier made about the preferred status of disagreement within the context of an argument.

Furthermore, Greatbatch (1992) argues that in the context of British television news interviews, the notion of preference is suspended due to the positioning and design of the turn allocation. Since the moderator controls the turn-taking, interviewees never address each other directly, which, Greatbatch posits, allows unmitigated disagreement to occur. Myers (1998), however, found that participants in focus groups issued unprefaced disagreement when disagreeing with the moderator, but not when they disagreed directly with another participant, in part because the moderator encouraged disagreement.

Finally, another study addresses the concept of preference and the shape that oppositional turns take, but in a different medium: computer-mediated communication. Baym (1996) investigates agreement and disagreement patterns in a mostly female newsgroup. The disagreement patterns she discovered matched those suggested by Pomerantz, but some major differences emerged due to the medium, gender, context, and interactive goals: disagreements included quoting, were linked to previous discourse, and had pervasive elaboration. Interestingly, accounts and justifications emerged with agreements, and not just disagreements, as the notion of preference predicts.

This section has provided an overview of some representative studies from children's and adults' oppositional discourse which had as one of their main foci the structural properties of a conflict episode. Whereas some studies focused on the structure of a larger unit such as a dispute or argument, others investigated the types of features that one could expect once a disagreement has been issued. Furthermore, we have seen that in recent studies (Greatbatch, Kakavá, Kotthoff, Baym), researchers have pointed out how contextual constraints (e.g. situation or speech event) can affect the structural form disagreement turns take. These constraints and others are further explored in the following section.

2   Communicative Strategies of Conducting Conflict

The studies reviewed in this section indicate the researchers' interest in exploring not just textual features of conflict or argument but discourse-level phenomena as well, including irony, joking, stories, reported speech, etc. Another aspect that distinguishes these studies is that they examine macro- and microcontextual factors to determine the effect they have on the oppositional strategies chosen; for instance, cultural interactional rules, style, and gender, as well as speakers' interactional goals.

Schiffrin (1985) focuses on the organization of an argument, and she identifies two types of arguments: rhetorical and oppositional. By rhetorical she refers to a "discourse through which a speaker presents an intact monologue supporting a

disputable position." Oppositional is defined as "discourse through which one or more speakers support openly disputed positions" (1985: 37). She finds that both types of arguments share the same discourse properties in that a speaker, in order to support his or her position, will try to undermine another speaker's. This is accomplished, Schiffrin claims, through the constant "negotiation of referential, social, and expressive meanings" (1985: 45).

Johnstone (1989; see also Johnstone 1986) claims that certain styles correlate with certain persuasive strategies, which speakers choose depending on the context. She proposes three types of persuasive strategies: quasilogic, presentation, and analogy. Quasilogic is based on the assumption that persuasion can be achieved by using a type of informal reasoning. Presentation involves the processes of moving and involving the listener in order to persuade. Finally, analogical persuasion is based on the assumption that "by calling to mind, explicitly or implicitly, traditional wisdom, often in the form of parable- or fablelike stories", people will be persuaded by undertaking "abductive leaps between past events and current issues" (1989: 149). These three strategies are then mapped onto three corresponding styles based on "conceptual correlates." The quasilogic style seems to be dominant in western culture but not exclusively. Presentational and analogical styles correspond to eastern cultures, and especially, to the older and more religious tradition.

Even though Johnstone creates these broad correspondences between strategies, style, and culture, she does not claim that culture will determine linguistic choices made in rhetorical situations. Instead, she suggests, culture may predispose people toward a particular strategy. Therefore, she believes that cross-cultural misunderstandings have their root not merely in different styles but instead in people's failure to adapt to and understand different persuasive strategies.

Silence has been found to be a strategy used in conflict talk either to disengage from or to intensify a conflict. Examining the role of silence in an Italian village, Saunders (1985) suggests that silence is comparable to extreme noise in some cases. People may opt for silence rather than confront someone when the potential for conflict is high. In contrast, they prefer direct confrontation for trivial forms of conflict. Tannen (1990a) supports Saunders's conclusion about the functional equivalency of noise and silence by investigating the role silence played in the British play *Betrayal*, by Harold Pinter, and in the American short story "Great Wits," by Alice Mattison. Both genres displayed a similar view about the destructive nature of direct confrontation. In *Betrayal*, the playwright used pauses to indicate escalations of conflict, but used silence where characters actually confronted "potentially explosive information" (1990a: 260). By way of comparison, in the short story "Great Wits," breaching silence at highly confrontational moments resulted in irreparable damage to the protagonists. Tannen suggests that some cultural underpinnings are present in the two genres; British playwrights tend to mask negative emotion by the use of pauses and silence, whereas American writers have their characters "express strong negative emotion loudly and explicitly" (1990a: 273).

The following three studies (Kuo 1991; Kakavá 1993a; Song 1993) have two common features: (1) they investigate a broad range of argumentative strategies in three different cultures, and (2) they classify strategies as aggravated or mitigated (see Goodwin 1983) and account for the variation by examining interpersonal, situational, and cultural constraints.

Kuo (1991) studied means of negotiating conflict in Taiwanese casual friends' conversations and parliamentary interpellations. Regarding overall argumentative strategies, she found that participants in the sociable arguments among friends employed several forms of aggravating disagreement. Formulaic expressions, initiations of disagreement latching to each other's talk with the Chinese equivalent of the contrastive marker *but*, uncooperative interruption, and wh-questions with partial repetitions and substitutions marked forthcoming disagreement. In the parliamentary interpellations, sarcasm and accusatory questions were added to the list of forms and types of disagreement.

Kakavá (1993a) and Song (1993) provide a qualitative analysis of the linguistic strategies of engaging in conflict in two different cultures: Greek and Korean, respectively. Some of the strategies found in the Greek data were direct disagreements sometimes accompanied by figurative kinship terms, contrastive repetition, sarcasm, personalization of an argument, accounts, and stories.[4] In Korean, Song lists formulaic expressive adverbials, repetition, code-switching, silence, and personal experience stories among others.

Whereas the studies just reviewed dealt with the culture-specific strategies of conducting conflict mostly from a qualitative perspective, Muntigl and Turnbull (1998) examine quantitatively the conversational structure of disagreement sequences and how it relates to the negotiation of face. They claim that facework is a major determinant of the type of turn sequence a speaker will use. They initially identify four major types of disagreement, ranked from most to least aggravated: irrelevancy claims, challenges, contradictions, and counterclaims. They then found that the more a second turn threatens the face of the speaker who made a claim as a first turn, the more likely it is that the third turn will contain further support of that first speaker's claim.

Centering on popular public discourse, McIlvenny (1996) explores the different strategies used by hecklers of Hyde Park speakers, and the driving forces behind these evoked participation frameworks. He demonstrates that through an arsenal of linguistic strategies, participants in this public oratory become active interpreters of meaning, at times supporting a speaker's or a participant's talk, while at other times contesting it with heckling and disaffiliative responses. McIlvenny also claims that one-upmanship and loss of face are the driving interactional forces behind these types of public debates, which additionally illustrate how different types of collective responses can emerge as a result of the constant shifting of alignments.

Gender as a factor contributing to the emergence of specific patterns of oppositional discourse is the main focus of the following studies. Goodwin (1990a, 1990b; Goodwin and Goodwin 1987) reports that African American boys' and girls' argumentative strategies tend to be rather similar in many ways, but she also observes some qualitative differences. Girls have argumentative skills equal to the boys' but the girls also use some more extended types of arguments than the boys. One of them is what she terms "he-said-she-said," a type of accusation behind someone's back that may lead to the ostracism of the offending girl. In terms of the stories boys and girls tell in disputes, Goodwin (1990a, 1990b) finds two patterns: boys use stories to sustain a dispute, and they alter their participation framework according to a social hierarchy. In contrast, Goodwin notes, girls employ stories to transform the alignments of the participants. The "instigating" stories jeopardize the participation framework of a girl, since she is often shunned for days or months.

Sheldon (1996) refers to a discourse strategy that she has termed "double-voice discourse," a type in which the speakers orient themselves toward the addressees' interests and goals.[5] Sheldon (1996) maintains that girls engage in this type of discourse, which manifests itself as both mitigation and concern for self-interest. In contrast, boys employ "single-voice" discourse, which is characterized by direct and aggravated forms of talk. Nevertheless, she also suggests that each type of discourse can be used by either boys or girls as long as they share the social goals associated with each style.

In a series of studies, Tannen (1990b, 1994, 1998) has provided numerous examples of the different strategies boys and girls (and later, men and women) use to engage in conflict in casual and professional settings. Although, as she constantly reminds the readers, not all females and males behave similarly, she maintains that patterns of gender-specific preferences exist and that these need to be identified, since people experience normative pressures to act according to their gender. Tannen claims that boys and men tend to engage in direct confrontations or use opposition as a way of negotiating status, whereas girls and women tend to seek at least overt expression of agreement and avoid direct confrontations. Often boys' and men's use of conflict is ritual (in her terms, "agonism"), such as playful roughhousing among boys, and men's use of verbal challenges as a way of exploring ideas ("playing devil's advocate"). However, Tannen also notes that other contextual parameters, such as conversational style, emergent context, and interactive goals, can affect the engagement or disengagement from confrontation irrespective of gender.

A rather similar empirical finding from another culture is reported in Makri-Tsilipakou's (1991) study of spontaneous, tape-recorded conversations among Greek couples and friends. She reports that in her study women expressed disagreement indirectly, off-record, using intraturn delays, hedges, and pre-disagreement tokens, which were followed by weak disagreements. Women tended to use more upgraders, and they accompanied their disagreement with qualifications and accounts. Men, however, usually used interturn delays, in the form of either silence or insertion sequences, and they postponed their disagreement over several turns. When they expressed disagreement, it was usually strong, bald-on-record, and unaccounted for.[6] Makri-Tsilipakou (1994b) also shows, though, how through scorn, ridicule, or disapproval Greek women engage in the public destruction of the face of their male spouses, partners, friends, or relatives to "protest" their discontent with them.

The women of Tenejapa, Mexico, are also found to use conventionally indirect means to be impolite when engaging in disputes in court cases in Brown's (1990) study. The Tenejapa women use rhetorical questions issued with irony "sarcastically to be impolite," to indicate "lack of cooperation, disagreement, hostility," Brown reports (1990: 123). However, in a qualitative study, Kakavá (1994b) finds that irony was used similarly by both Greek men and women to attain the goal reported in Brown's study: to express disagreement.

In another medium, computer-mediated communication, Herring (1994, 1996a, 1996b, Herring et al. 1995) finds that women posting messages on e-mail lists tend to disagree by cushioning their disagreements with affiliative comments, posing questions rather than making assertions. In contrast, men posters tend to use an adversarial style (putting down a participant while promoting their own claims). She also finds that both men and women are more interested in exchanging views than information.

Interestingly, though, her evidence suggests that listserve members of the minority gender shift their style in the direction of majority gender norms to fit in with the rest (Herring et al. 1995: 82).

Although the studies reviewed take into account different aspects of gendered patterns in opposition, Hasund (1996) claims that research on gender and conflict cannot be complete unless it takes into account class and social network, as well as other factors.[7] Based on a qualitative analysis of a section of the COLT (Corpus of London Teenage Language) data, Hasund argues that there is a correlation between class, gender, and forms of opposition. She reports that working-class teenage girls issued more oppositional turns than middle-class ones, and also tended to use more aggravating strategies. Additionally, the strategies that were used differed by type. Working-class girls' oppositions dealt with sexual promiscuity and obscenity, taking the shape of ritual insults. In contrast, middle-class girls exchanged oppositions over trivial or serious issues, and subsequently cushioned these oppositions by mitigated turns. However, Hasund also reports that there was a lot of intraspeaker variation in the data, which was accounted for by factors such as communicative style and degrees of intimacy present in the participants' relationship.

This section explored some representative features and strategies of engaging in conflict and the combination of contextual factors affecting the form they take. The next section will examine how interactants negotiate conflict and what the main patterns of conflict resolution in social interaction have been.

3   Conflict Negotiation and Resolution

How children negotiate conflict or resolve it has been the focus of several studies. A seminal paper is that of Eisenberg and Garvey (1981), who examined videotaped play sessions of 48 dyads of already acquainted preschoolers and 40 dyads of unacquainted preschoolers who met at a laboratory and were observed through a one-way mirror. Children rarely used "nonadaptive" strategies, that is, insistence, repetition, or paraphrase of their utterance. Instead they employed "adaptive" strategies, such as supporting their moves with reasoning, justifications, and requests for clarification to resolve their conflicts.

Building on his earlier research, Maynard (1986) focuses on the dynamics involved in multiparty disputes among children, using as data videotaped sessions of reading groups. He points out that some disputes may start as two-sided, yet end up being multiparty. Different "parties" may, invited or uninvited, align with a displayed position, stance, claim, or counterposition, and may challenge a particular position "for different reasons and by different means" (1986: 281). He also found fluid patterns of collaboration in this type of dispute that depended upon the children's emergent alignments.

Qualitative cultural differences of negotiating disputes were reported in Corsaro and Rizzo's (1990) study of American and Italian nursery school children between the ages of 2 and 4. Italian children had many more disputes involving claims than the American children had, and these disputes were often unresolved and rather lengthy. Corsaro and Rizzo argue that the claim disputes in the Italian data displayed the

element of *discussione*, that is, the "enjoyment of argumentation," which they compare to the aggravated disagreement found in Goodwin (1983, 1990a) and Goodwin and Goodwin (1987). This element also manifested itself in the "dispute routines" found only in the Italian data. During these routines, Italian children engaged in a "skillful performance" to tease, enacting "complex, stylistic, and aesthetically impressive routines" (Corsaro and Rizzo 1990: 40). This "emphasis on style" characterized all Italian children's disputes in contrast to the American ones.

Looking at conflict termination turns from a sequential approach, yet drawing inferences from the notion of face, Vuchinich (1990) found that "stand-off," the case where participants drop the issue at stake and change the speech activity, was the most common type of conflict termination in his data. He examined terminal exchanges from 64 video- and audiorecordings of black and white American family dinners and he proposed five termination formats: "submission," when a participant "gives in" and accepts the participant's position; "dominant third-party intervention"; "compromise"; "stand-off"; and "withdrawal." Differences by generation were also observed due to power differences (parents versus children), but Vuchinich acknowledges that in some of the arguments that ended with parent–child stand-offs, power was not a prominent factor, since they were sociable arguments (Schiffrin 1984). Vuchinich also accounts for the higher frequency of stand-offs, the lack of compromise, or the inability to reach consensus by attributing a desire to the participants to keep their positions, yet not lose face.

Vuchinich's finding in terms of the most common type of conflict termination (i.e. stand-off) is consonant with what Genishi and di Paolo (1982) observed in their study of upper-middle-class children's disputes in a classroom setting. It was found that resolutions were not usually attained but arguments tended to be diffused.

The negotiation of conflict through different activities is the focus of Schiffrin's (1990) study. She investigates the role of two speech activities – expressing an opinion and telling a story – within the context of an argument, in which participants can be competitive yet cooperative, negotiating the values of "truth" and "sincerity" by adjusting the participation framework of talk. Opinions were found to have the paradoxical nature of both starting and finishing an argument. By way of contrast, stories provided support to a speaker's claim and invited the audience to share responsibility with the "principal" (Goffman 1981).

Maintaining one's belief or opinion by denying or contesting contradictory evidence in conflict resolution is the strategy that Mehan (1990) examines in her study of a psychiatric exam – what she refers to as "oracular reasoning." She demonstrates that this type of strategy is used by both doctors and patients, but it is the doctors' reasoning that prevails because of their institutional authority.

The role a third party plays in conflict resolution is explored in Maley's (1995) work. He investigates Australian courts and divorce mediation sessions and finds that these two different contexts affect the nature and the purpose of the activity and even shape the discursive practices involved. Whereas the adjudication context of the court case lends itself to direct and powerful intervention by a judge, the mediation context is characterized by indirect types of intervention by the mediator, who lacks both power and authority to control the outcome of the mediation. Maley also notes that the judge may act as a mediator but the mediator cannot act as a judge. This echoes in part Philips's (1990) argument about a judge's role in American court cases.

She presents evidence that the judges' interactional moves vary from merely mediative to adjudicative, depending on the context.

Conflict resolution strategies and the way that gender affects the strategies chosen are the research area of the following studies. Sheldon (1990, 1996) analyzed the conflict talk of 3-year-old friends in same-sex triads, and found that the strategies used by the two groups confirmed proposals made by Maltz and Borker's (1982) anthropological linguistic model of gender-marked language use and Gilligan's (1987) psychological framework. In Sheldon's study, the children were videotaped while playing with toys. The two disputes (one representative triad for each gender) that she analyzed displayed different discourse strategies. The girls used patterns of opposition–insistence–opposition sequences. However, they also used a variety of means to reach a negotiation (e.g. reasons). The boys' dispute was much more extended and with more opposition–insistence–opposition sequences than the girls'. In contrast to the girls' strategies, the boys did not "*jointly negotiate* a resolution" (1987: 27), even though they did offer some compromises.

This finding echoes comparable observations from a study that focused on six female teenagers. In an ethnographic study of six adolescent females, Eckert (1990) found that even when their ideas differed, the girls tried through negotiation to achieve consensus so that their cooperation would remain intact.

Different types of confrontation and negotiation of conflict were observed in Eder's (1990) study. She conducted ethnographic work with white adolescent females from working-class and lower-working-class families in a middle-school setting and obtained audio- and videotapes of 59 students from sixth to eighth grade. Focusing on the direct exchanges of conflict, she found that teenagers would use several strategies to resolve normative conflict, but the most successful one was the strategy that addressed "the real issues behind the conflict" (1990: 81). Eighth graders were found to be the most skillful in handling conflict resolution and insulting exchanges. Those students belonged to more stable social groups. She suggests that that could be the reason why they felt more comfortable engaging in direct confrontation with their familiar peers. Furthermore, social class seemed to play a role, Eder observes, since ritual insulting was more common among students from working and lower classes, where being "tough" was more highly regarded than being "polite."

As shown from the studies reviewed, although participants may choose different strategies to negotiate conflict based on their gender, yet more often than not, and irrespective of gender, conflict tends not be resolved. In some cases, it seems that engagement in conflict is pursued for its own sake for reasons that are more thoroughly examined in the next section.

4   The Meanings of Conflict

The studies reviewed in this section offer suggestions about the situated, cultural, and social meanings of conflict, a step that brings us closer to how conflict is viewed in different societies and by different groups.

Status negotiation has been one of the most commonly cited meanings of conflict talk among children and adults. Maynard (1985b), using the same data as in his

previous study (Maynard 1985a), claims that conflict among children latently functions to "develop their sense of social structure and helps reproduce authority, friendship, and other interactional patterns that transcend single episodes of dispute" (1985b: 220).

A clearer association between conflict and status is found in Emihovich's (1986) study. Using an ethnographic perspective, she examined the role of disputes among white and black boys of two integrated kindergartens in a medium-sized urban city. Following Mitchell-Kernan and Kernan's (1977) argument, she claimed that the reason arguments occur during children's play is because children view argumentative talk as "status assertion." The use of directives in their play challenges their status and their opposition to these challenges is a means of defending it. An important aspect of the boys' disputes was to establish a dominance hierarchy which helped them frame their role in a relationship (who the leader was) and the outcome of disputes (usually the "tough" one would use physical means and end a dispute).

Katriel (1985) finds the ritual *brogez* ("being in anger") to function as a form of "status competition" among Israeli children who belong in the same "social sphere." *Brogez*, she reports, is a type of ritual insult and threat similar to *sounding* in African American discourse (Abrahams 1962; Labov 1972; Kochman 1983), which allows both girls and boys in same-sex groups to vent their anger and hostility through "ritually constrained interactional channels" (Katriel 1985: 487). It is also used as a means to discover social hierarchies (e.g. who has leadership qualities).

Venting one's anger in a nonconfrontational manner or just being antagonistic in ritual insults or verbal duelings has also been reported in other cultures, for example Turkish (Dundes et al. 1972), Chamula Indian (Gossen 1976), Cretan (Herzfeld 1985), Balinese (Sherzer 1993), Yoruba (Omoniyi 1995), and Cypriot (Doukanari 1997).[8]

Some of the cultural and social constraints of ritual insult are reported in Heath's (1983) ethnographic study. She reports that whereas working-class black school-age boys and girls engaged in exchanges of insults and play songs, white children of the same class did not. First- or second-grade females did not engage in one-liners, couplets, or verses, (forms of insults and play songs) the way the boys did, until they were in upper primary grades. Girls preferred physical confrontation in challenges of peer relations with groups of girls from other communities, but they used verbal challenges with friends or girls with whom there was no confrontation in status relations.

Moving from ritual insults to ritualistic oppositional stances in casual conversations, the following studies demonstrate that opposition is positively valued by certain cultures and subcultures. Israelis have been found to engage in direct confrontation, which may strike a foreigner as rude, yet for Israelis, *dugri* "straight" talk has a positive norm, Katriel (1986) maintains (see also Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1984). Goffman's (1967) rule of considerateness, Katriel claims, is not commensurate with *dugri* speech. Her explanation is that Sabra Israelis place more emphasis on "true respect – rather than consideration" (Katriel 1986: 17). The speaker's assumption is that a listener "has the strength and integrity required to take the speaker's direct talk as sincere and natural" (1986: 117).

Schiffrin (1984) provides linguistic and cultural evidence to show that disagreement among East European Jews is not an action that threatens social interaction, but instead is a form of sociability. This claim is reached after the examination of arguments among adults of a lower-middle-class East European Jewish community

in Philadelphia, where Schiffrin conducted sociolinguistic interviews. Building on Simmel's (1961) notion of sociability, she defines sociable argument as a "speech activity in which a polarizing form has a ratificatory meaning" (Schiffrin 1984: 331). Schiffrin found that the participants were constantly nonaligned with each other, yet managed to maintain their intimate relationships.[9]

A similar positive evaluation of conflict has been reported for some other cultures and subcultures, for example Byrnes (1986), Kotthoff (1993), and Straehle (1997) for Germans, Kakavá (1993a, 1993b, 1993c) for Greeks, Kochman (1981) for African Americans, and Tannen (1990b, 1994, 1998) for men. In addition, some studies report a positive evaluation of conflict in some contexts, for example, in friendly conversations in Taiwanese (Kuo 1991) and in Korean (Song 1993).

Investigating ritualistic forms of opposition, Tannen (1998) examines practices from domains as diverse as the press, law, politics, and education. She demonstrates that all of these domains are permeated by forms of agonism, or ritualized opposition. She offers examples from other cultures that have not valorized the direct expression of conflict, among them the Chinese and Japanese, who traditionally view the open expression of conflict more negatively.

Jones (1990), however, finds in her study of Japanese conversations that the norm of harmony seems to be a myth, since the participants in her study used agonistic stances such as explicit expressions of conflict and sustained disagreement, and they rarely compromised. However, the norm of harmony did impose a constraint on the emotional expression of conflict in conversations. Only when the interaction became too "hot" did the participants reframe the interaction or change topics.

In summary, conflict has been viewed as a means to negotiate status, in particular among males, and it has been evaluated as either positive or negative, depending on one or more of the following factors: culture, gender, class, or situational context.

5   Conclusion: Recent Trends and Directions in Conflict Research

Recent studies of conflict build on the properties already reviewed. For example, they discover either structural features or interactional strategies, but they also seek to describe the social roles participants take in the course of an argument or they seek to delineate what other resources participants will use to construct an oppositional format. Furthermore, some studies observe a fluidity of opinions or attitudes, and alignments. Thus these studies seek to discover how opinions, roles, identities, and consequently ideologies are constructed, supported, or contested through conflict talk.

Billig (1989) presents qualitative evidence from a family's discourse that people who hold strong opinions display a variability of attitudes which, he claims, presupposes "that the speaker has access to culturally produced variability of views" (1989: 219). A similar type of variability is reported in Kakavá (1994b), who found that the participants in a casual Greek conversation constructed gendered ideologies which at times subscribed to cultural ideology but at other times contested it.

Competing voices also emerge in Kulick's (1993) study of women in Gapun.[10] He investigates how these women use *kros*, a form of conflict talk aired in public, to

construct their identities. He argues that the women who engage in this type of talk confirm stereotypes about women as disruptive or in need of control, but they also undermine these stereotypes by constructing identities of powerful personae who can "publicly speak and demand hearing" (1993: 534).

Brody (1996) demonstrates another type of balancing act among Tojolab'al women. During barter, Tojolab'al women skillfully straddle the line between competition and cooperation to balance their competing needs: to achieve the highest economic benefit of the transaction, yet retain their communal identification by invoking shared values. Sidnell (1998) reports on a similar yet different type of collaboration and competition among women of an Indo-Guyanese village. He examines how the spatial description and place formulation enter the arena of conflict as both its locus and its resource in the production of oppositional formats and participant structures. The women in his study seem to use the social and interactional construction of space to exercise and contest social power. Significantly, the women had to jointly collaborate, despite their differences, on creating an interactional space to voice concerns over space, morality, and gender.

What one can conclude from all the studies reviewed is that some of the features and strategies used to engage in conflict are shared among diverse languages (see for example structural repetition in English, Taiwanese, Greek, and Korean; overlaps in Chiapas, Greek, etc.; and silence in English and Korean), whereas others may not be shared, or at least there is not sufficient evidence that they are shared (e.g. personal analogy in Greek; Kakavá 1994a). What also emerged is that certain strategies are indexical to contextual constraints such as speech event (family talk versus parliamentary interpellations, for example), face, or gender. Since linguists have always searched for universals or implicational universals, it could be viable, if other microstudies of conflict are conducted, to create a matrix of commonly shared structural and interactional features and produce a typology of them across different contexts. Muntigl and Turnbull's (1998) work, for example is a first step toward correlating the force of a subsequent claim and face considerations. Will their claims hold in other cultural settings and contexts?

Furthermore, no study has focused on the nonverbal means of conducting conflict (i.e. gestures and facial expressions), although Maynard (1985a), Goodwin (1994), Taylor (1995), and Ochs and Taylor (1995) refer to some nonverbal oppositional stances in their papers. Consequently, there is a lacuna as to how nonverbal means of expressing conflict can index the linguistic means of expressing conflict and vice versa. Could some gestures or postures constitute argumentative icons, and how do these vary by culture? Kendon (1992, 1993), for example, demonstrates how the closed fist accompanies argumentation in Italian, while Goodwin (1994) shows a postural oppositional stance among Hispanic girls. Future research can attempt to provide these missing links, which could grant a much more integrated typology of the means of engaging in conflict.

Another area that needs further investigation is how conflict is evaluated in a particular society and/or context. This line of research will shed more light on theoretical frameworks that view disagreement either as a threatening act that needs to be avoided at any cost (Pomerantz 1984; Heritage 1984; Brown and Levinson 1987; Leech 1983) or as a positive action that enhances sociability (Simmel 1961). While we do have evidence from some cultures for either the positive or negative evaluation of

conflict (e.g. Schiffrin 1984; Keenan 1974), researchers have started to question whether conflict can have either a positive or a negative value in a particular culture. Tannen (1993b), for example, has argued and shown that conflict can be potentially polysemous, in that it can create solidarity or power. As we also saw, gender (e.g. Tannen 1990b, 1994) and interactional context have emerged as important factors affecting the value conflict has. It seems that we still need to furnish more qualitative, within- and across-contexts research to study not just how conflict works but also how it is evaluated.

Just as recent work in sociolinguistics has shifted its attention to individual speaker variation (Rickford and McNair-Knox 1994; Johnstone 1996), we need to have more studies on both intra- and interspeaker variation to explore the mechanisms that lead a speaker to use one strategy over another in the course of the same or different conflict episode.[11]

An area that further needs exploration is women's conflicts, as Kulick (1993) also points out. It has often been assumed that conflict, argument, and opposition are a male domain. However, as Kulick (1993) and Sidnell (1998) show, a microanalysis of women's types of oppositional discourse, coupled with ethnographic research, is capable of discovering the multiplicity of women's voices as they emerge through discourse. It is through these types of analyses that we can learn more about not just what conflict is and how it is managed but also whether it is an act of subversion or compliance to cultural norms and expectations.

Due to the emergence and flourishing of computer-mediated discourse, researchers have begun to investigate forms, patterns, and meanings of conflict in this medium as well. As in the studies of noncomputer-mediated discourse, gender differences have been reported for listserves (see Herring 1994, 1996a, 1996b; Herring et al. 1995, for example, reviewed above). The area that has not yet been investigated is that of synchronous computer-mediated conversations (SCMCs). These real-time interactions, where users simultaneously log on to remote servers to engage in conversation, provide researchers with a new frontier of investigation: how conflict is managed through these texts that in some ways mirror conversations of verbal interaction, yet are distinctive due to their specific nature. Some preliminary findings indicate that conflict management, if present at all, is handled differently in these chat rooms (Edwards 1999). If indeed that is the case, it is important to explore what makes these types of SCMCs different and what the contributing factors are.

Finally, over a decade ago, Grimshaw (1990) urged researchers of conflict to explore the full range of texts available and not limit themselves to local or familiar loci of conflict but discover the processes that govern international disputes as well. It seems to me that his call is as pertinent now as it was then. Although as discourse analysts we have shed light on conflict management at home and in the workplace, we have not shifted our attention to international types of dispute, where the ramifications and consequences are even more dire, as we have recently experienced. Tannen (1986: 30) once wrote, referring to cross-cultural communication: "Nations must reach agreements, and agreements are made by individual representatives of nations sitting down and talking to each other – public analogs of private conversations. The processes are the same, and so are the pitfalls. Only the possible consequences are more extreme." We need to refocus our energies on these public conversations, which turn out to be more problematic than the ones we have already investigated, if we want to increase our contributions to humankind.

NOTES

1   See for example papers cited in Brenneis (1988) and Grimshaw (1990), and recent PhD dissertations such as Meyer (1996); Dorrill (1997); Scott (1998); among others discussed below.

2   See also similar types of observations for adults in Millar et al. (1984); Coulter (1990); Antaki (1994).

3   See also Levinson (1983) for a more detailed list of dispreference markers.

4   See also Tannen and Kakavá (1992); Kakavá (1993b, 1993c, 1994a, 1995).

5   See also Sheldon (1990) for a thorough overview of research on children's conflicts.

6   See also Makri-Tsilipakou (1994a) for a discussion of similar interruption patterns and disagreement.

7   See also Eder's (1990) study discussed in section 3.

8   See also discussions of verbal dueling in McDowell (1985) and Tannen (1998).

9   See also Modan (1994).

10   See also Kulick (1992).

11   See some preliminary findings in Kakavá (1995); Hasund (1996).

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