REPETITION AND GENDER IN ROMANIAN CONVERSATIONAL DISCOURSE

Diana Hornoiu
Universitatea *Ovidius* Constanța

Repetiția în stilul conversațional al femeilor în limba română (Rezumat)

Lucrarea îşi propune identificarea funcțiilor repetiției în stilul conversațional al femeilor în limba română. Cadrul teoretic este oferit de perspectiva etnometodologică a analizei conversației şi a limbajului conversațional. Lucrarea demonstrează omniprezența repetiției în stilul conversațional al femeilor în limba română. Fragmentele de conversație analizate ilustrează următoarele funcții ale repetiției: ratificarea contribuției interlocutorului, persuadarea interlocutorului, răspuns minimal cu rol în exprimarea acordului cu interlocutorul. Toate aceste funcții pot fi incadrate în rîndul strategiilor politeții pozitive de stabilire a acordului conform modelul pragmatic al politeții stabilit de Brown şi Levinson (1987). Împreună cu întrebările fatice, repetiția este o strategie eficientă de menținerea fluxului conversațional şi construire unei relații amiabile în măsura în care dorința de a lua parte la conversație poate fi echivalată cu disponibilitatea față de relația stabilită între interlocutori în şi prin conversație.

1. Introduction

This corpus-based paper focuses on the functions of repetition and its frequency in female conversational discourse in Romanian. It starts from the premise that repetition is relatively frequent among members of cultures that place positive value on keeping the flow of conversation going and that women use language to build and maintain relationships of closeness and support. Since taking part in conversation is equivalent to being part in of a relationship and repetition is a way of keeping the flow of conversation going, this paper aims at testing the hypothesis that Romanian women, when engaging in same-sex conversations, show a preference for consistent use of self- and allo-repetition and paraphrase and that the functions served by repetition on the interactional level are instrumental in achieving and maintaining connection between self and others. Thus we would expect women to make use of repetition and paraphrase as a means of providing backchannel response, signalling active listenership, ratifying another's contribution and enlisting the addressee's support for one's own views.

2. Theoretical framework

Research has shown that repetition is instrumental in creating discourse. Language is less freely generated and more pre-patterned than is generally acknowledged. However, this is not tantamount to saying that speakers automatically produce language only by repeating chunks of discourse previously heard. Rather, pre-

BDD-A3627 © 2003 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:08:25 UTC)

patterning is a source for creative use of language. This is achieved through the interplay between fixity and novelty[1].

Repetition is omnipresent in naturally occurring conversational discourse where it serves several functions in the process of creating meaning. Firstly, it facilitates the production of more language more fluently. For individuals and cultures that value verbosity and wish to avoid silences in casual conversations (i.e., for those displaying high-involvement conversational styles) repetition is a convenient resource for producing ample talk, both by providing material for talk and by enabling talk through automaticity. Secondly, repetition, with or without variation, facilitates comprehension, by providing semantically less dense discourse. If some of the words are repeated less new information is conveyed than if all words carried new information. This redundancy benefits both the speaker and the addressee: the speaker benefits from some relatively dead space while thinking of the next thing to say, whereas the addressee benefits from the same dead space while absorbing what is being said. As a result, the addressee receives new information at roughly the same rate the speaker is producing it. Thirdly, repetition is a cohesive device, in that repetition of sentences, phrases and words links new utterances to earlier discourse and shows how ideas presented in a discourse are related to each other[2].

In addition to these three functions discussed above that refer to the production of meaning in conversation, repetition also functions on the interactional level of talk where it serves several purposes, among which we can mention: getting or keeping the floor, showing listenership, providing back-channel response, stalling, gearing up to answer or speak, savouring and showing appreciation of a good line or a good joke, persuasion, linking one speaker's ideas to another's, ratifying another's contribution and including in an interaction a person who did not hear a previous utterance[3]. Repetition is thus instrumental in accomplishing social goals and managing conversation since it not only ties parts of discourse to other parts, but it also bonds participants to the discourse and to each other, linking individuals in a conversation and in relationships.

By facilitating production, connection and interaction, repetition serves an over-arching purpose of creating involvement. It provides a resource to keep talk going, where talk itself is a sign of willingness to interact, to serve a positive face sending thus a meta-message of involvement.

---

[1] D. Tannen, *Talking voices: repetition, dialogue, and imagery in conversational discourse, Cambrigde*: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] *Ibid.*

BDD-A3627 © 2003 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:08:25 UTC)

Conversations recorded by various researchers indicate that although all conversations exhibit a certain amount of repetition some are particularly rich in repetitions. Researchers document the pervasiveness of repetition in those language varieties that are said to evince features of a high-involvement conversational style. In view of the above considerations we would expect repetition to be culturally variable.

Since repetition of sentences and ideas is a means of keeping talk going, the relative frequency of repetition could be correlated with the cultural value placed on the presence of talk in interaction. This is supported by the relative infrequency of repetition, as well as formulaic expressions, among members of cultures that place relative positive value on silence in interaction. In striking contrast are the talk-valuing cultures whose members have been observed to use a lot of syntactic repetition[4].

Although no scholar, so far as I know, has focused exclusively or intensively on repeating strategies in gender related conversational styles, we would expect gender groups to make use of self- and allo-repetition in characteristic ways. Research on language and gender has shown that female conversational style in English can be characterised as collaboration-oriented or affiliative, as opposed to men's style which has been described as competition-oriented or adversarial. Among other things, women use language to create and maintain relationships of closeness and support[5]. This would be equivalent to approaching interpersonal relationships from the care orientation. The care orientation focuses on maintaining the connection between self and others in intimate groups, and on defining self in the context of the relationship[6]. Terms used by other researchers to describe this focus are *communion, affiliation, empathy, interdependence* and *involvement*[7]. This perspective pays more attention to the needs of others. A person who operates from the care orientation (1) assumes and values connection between self and others; (2) shows greater tolerance of, compassion for and responsiveness to others; (3) emphasises understanding and communication through listening and speaking, hearing and being heard; (4) seeks agreement and tries to respond to everyone's needs[8].

The above discussion allows us to transpose Gilligan's *care orientation* into a hypothesis about the relative frequency of repetition and the functions it serves in

---

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] D. N. Maltz and R. A. Borker 'A cultural approach to male-female miscommunication'. In J. Gumperz (ed) *Language and Social Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982

[6] C. Gilligan, 'Moral orientation and moral development'. In Eva Feder Kittay & Diana T. Meyers (Eds.), *Women and moral theory*, Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield, 1987

[7] D. Bakan, *The duality of human existence: An essay on psychology and religion*, Chicago: Rand McNally, 1966; A. Eagly, *Sex differences in social behaviour: A social-role interpretation*, Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1987

[8] C. Gilligan, *op. cit.*

BDD-A3627 © 2003 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:08:25 UTC)

female conversational style. Since repetition not only ties utterances together, but also links individual speakers in a conversation and in relationships, we would expect women to show a preference for a consistent use of self- and allo-repetition particularly as a means of providing back-channel response, showing active listenership, persuading the addressee, ratifying another's contribution and including in an interaction a person who did not hear a previous utterance. The next section aims at testing this hypothesis for Romanian female conversational style. The theoretical framework used in this paper, conversation analysis, constitutes an approach to the study of naturally occurring conversations derived from ethnomethodology, a sociological perspective pioneered by Garfinkel and applied to conversation most notably by Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson.

3. Method

The present study is based on fieldwork among female students living in Constanta. The data for this study consists of 2 hours of conversation between best friends in their homes. The informants belong in one age-group (20-25). I asked some of the participants to pair up with their same-sex best friend and talk about 'stuff' in a familiar setting. They had the right to censor the taped material before I heard it.

My primary concern in gathering the data was to avoid the constraints inherent in a one-to-one interview where the interviewer is present. Therefore I chose not to be present while the informants were engaged in conversation hoping that the constraints produced by the informants' knowledge that they were being observed could thus be alleviated and that the normal patterns of group interaction would direct attention away from the tape recorder. I am satisfied that the material represents natural conversation and that there was no undue awareness of the recorder. The tapes sounded natural to me, like conversation between my friends and me. All five women also reported that they soon began to ignore the tape recorder. Moreover, they were apologetic about the material, calling it trivial and uninteresting, just the ordinary affaires of every day life.

4. Analysis of data

On the interactional level of speech, repetition accomplishes various social goals and is instrumental in managing the business of conversation. Repeating the words, phrases, or sentences of other speakers (a) accomplishes a conversation, (b) signals one's response to another's utterance, (c) provides evidence of one's own participation, (d) shows acceptance of others' utterances, of their participation and of their personality. All these send a meta-message of involvement[9]. In what follows I exemplify a range of functions served by repetition of words, phrases and clauses in

[9] D. Tannen, *op. cit.*

BDD-A3627 © 2003 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:08:25 UTC)

conversation, namely participatory listenership, ratifying listenership, providing back-channel response, and persuading the addressee.

Ratifying listenership

In the following example[10] Maria and Iulia have been comparing McIntosh computers to IBM compatibles.

(1)

1 Maria: păi da' asta-i bine asta-i bine că de multe ori mi s-a-ntâmplat să::=
2 Iulia: =**să-nchizi din greşeală**
3 Maria: **să le-nchid din greşeală** ştii
4 Iulia: ((laughs)) da şi p'ormă=
5 Maria: =<u>înne</u>::bunești **să nu mai găseşti**
6 Iulia: da **să nu mai găseşti**

In line 1 Maria starts explaining why she finds a certain characteristic of the programs running on McIntosh computers very useful. Line 1 ends in a subordinate conjunction. Iulia interrupts Maria and produces in line 2 a clause that is syntactically and semantically consistent with Maria's turn in the previous line. Maria's repetition with slight variation (changing from 2nd to 1st person) in line 3 ratifies Iulia's contribution. In line 4 Iulia agrees with Maria and starts mentioning a related aspect (*da şi p'ormă* 'yes and then'). However, she is interrupted by Maria whose contribution in line 5 is syntactically consistent with the adverb phrase used by Iulia in line 4. Iulia's exact repetition in line 6 ratifies Maria's contribution.

This short conversational exchange provides an excellent example of what Sacks has called *collaboratively built sentences*[11]. In fact (1) consists in one complex sentence that is jointly produced by both speakers without making any syntactic or semantic inconsistencies (*păi asta-i bine asta-i bine că de multe ori mi s-a-ntâmplat să le-nchid din greşeală ştii da şi p'ormă înnebunești să nu mai găseşti*). Speakers frequently make use of this strategy when they want to show through this playing with the syntactic features of an utterance that they are close to each other, that they belong in the same social group. Moreover, the ratifying repetitions in lines 3 and 6 reinforce the idea that what they want is to be with each other, to be part of the relationship.

In line 1 of excerpt (2) Iulia uses a couple of questions to introduce another topic for discussion. She asks Maria whether Bogdan, Maria's husband, has finished organizing a certain concert. Maria answers that Bogdan is still busy with the concert and, in order to provide evidence as to how busy Bogdan is, she lists several activities that Bogdan has to do, by using three self-repetitions with slight variation in lines 5 and 6 (*du-i la hotel*, *du-i să facă probe*, *du-i să facă aia*)

[10] Throughout the paper the items under discussion are given in bold type.
[11] H. Sacks, *Lectures on Conversation*, Vol. 1&2, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1992

BDD-A3627 © 2003 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:08:25 UTC)

(2)
1 Iulia: bogdan?= ce face? a terminat cu concertu'?=
2 Maria: =eh bogdan =nu sâmbătă
3 Iulia: =aha
4 Maria: tre' să– îți dai seama că aleargă ca nebunu' până vin ă:ia
5 ia-i p-ăi:a **du:-i la** hotel pu:ne-i la mâncare până nu ştiu ce
6 **du:-i să [facă** probe **du:-i să facă** a:ia=
7 Iulia: **[**pe cine = pe cine la hotel?
8 Maria: =păi p-ăia care cântă
9 Iulia: da' ce **vin din țară**? trupe?
10 Maria: păi **vin din țară**
11 **unii vin din** timişoara
12 **unii vin din** bucureşti
13 **unii vin** °(craiova)

After a couple of more questions whose main function is to keep the flow of conversation going rather than to ask for information or clarification, proving thus Iulia's interest in the topic, she enquires in line 9 about the whereabouts of the bands performing in the concert (*vin din țară?*). Maria ***ratifies*** Iulia's contribution in line 9 by repeating it in line 10 (*vin din țară*) and incorporating it into her own narrative. She then lists the cities from which the bands come by making use of three self-repetitions in lines 11-13; she sets up a paradigm in line 11 and slot in new information:

unii vin din Timişoara
unii vin din Bucureşti
unii vin din Craiova

The establishment of the pattern allows Maria to utter whole new sentences while adding only the names of the cities as new information. This is a convenient way of producing more language, more fluently and therefore of carrying on the conversation with relatively less effort.

Showing participatory listenership

Another commonly used type of repetition is the exact or slightly varied repetition of a previous speaker's utterance. The following example comes from the same conversation:

(3)
1 Maria: şi **le dau ăstora le dau drumu' şi cazare** ştii
2 **[drumu' cazare** şi masă

BDD-A3627 © 2003 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:08:25 UTC)

3 Iulia: **[drumu' le plătesc le plătesc drumu'** la ăştia
4 Maria: mhm
5 Iulia: da
6 Maria: sunt vreo trei care vin
7 unu vine din bucureşti-
8 deci **o trupă vine din** bucureşti
9 **o trupă vine din** timişoara
10 şi **o trupă** (nu-ş' de unde vine)

Iulia's repetition in line 3 (*drumu' le plătesc le plătesc drumu' la ăştia*), echoing Maria's utterance in lines 1-2 (*şi le dau ăstora drumu'*) seems to be a way for Iulia to participate in the interchange by showing **listenership and acceptance** of Maria's utterance. In lines 11-13 and 8-10, separated by a page and a half of transcript, Maria repeats the clauses with slight variation. By restating her contribution, she continues to take part in conversation even though she has nothing new to add. As these examples show, repetition provides a means of keeping talk going, where talk itself is a sign of involvement, of willingness to interact, serving thus a positive face.

Back-channel response

In excerpt (4) Maria is explaining how she managed to find some information on the Internet that proved useful for an essay on Herman Hesse. Iulia is signalling her interest in the topic by producing back-channel signals in lines 2 and 4 and asking a question which asks for information (*aha şi ăsta cu referatele unde l-ai găsit?* 'aha and this one with essays where did you find it?')

(4)

1 Maria: am intrat pe yahoo de am luat de acolo ce s-a putut
2 Iulia: mhm
3 Maria: şi p'ormă am intrat şi pe alta vista ştii?
4 Iulia: aha şi ăsta cu referatele unde l-ai găsit?
5 Maria: ă::: ăsta pe alta vista mi se pare că este înțelegi
6 Iulia: da
7 Maria: şi mi-am luat de acolo ăăă să mai îmi printez
8 ştii ce vreau să-mi caut? textu' on line
9 ca să pot **să i-l citez** lu' asta
10 Iulia: **să-l dai citat**

Once she has got the piece of information that she needs, Iulia ratifies Mara's contribution by saying *da* 'yeah'. In line 8 Maria mentions her intention of searching for a certain novel on line so that she could quote from it. In line 11 Iulia repeats (*să-l dai citat*) what Maria said in the previous line (*să i-l citez*) with slight variation changing from 1st to 2nd person. By repeating not only Maria's idea but also her words and syntactic pattern, Iulia's contribution is a ratification of Maria's. Moreover, since

BDD-A3627 © 2003 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:08:25 UTC)

Iulia's repetition in line 10 follows three minimal responses in lines 2, 4 and 6, it shows interest and acceptance of Maria's idea, and therefore it can be viewed as another back-channel response indicating agreement.

Persuading and achieving alignment

Another extremely common type of repetition in all-female discourse is the exact or slightly varied repetition of one's own words within the same turn or across several turns used with a view to persuading the addressee of the correctness of the speaker's argument.

In (5) Rodica seeks hearer endorsement of a generalisation. Previously Rodica has expressed her dissatisfaction towards the medical system in Romania. As she does not know whether this is a position Anca is aligned with, she offers one of her acquaintances' experience as evidence that would support her point.

(5)

1 Rodica: şi spunea ce nenorocire e in spital cum trebuie de la poartă
2 **trebuie să stai cu banii-n mână**
3 **portar asistentă infirmieră tot tot**
4 a doua zi la fel **portar asitentă infirmieră tot tot**
5 altfel nici nu se uită
6 Anca: de ce **ca [să intri** ?
7 Rodica: **[ca să intri** că orele de vizită– nu ştiu au ei un interval
8 şi cred că sunt anumite zile mai ales la ginecologie ştii
9 că probabil acolo e internată
10 şi **trebuie să le umpli buzunarul** şi mai mult– mai puțin de zece mii nu suporta
11 spunea că au cheltuit **o <u>grămadă</u> de bani**
12 în primul rând **banii chirurgului** apoi **banii anestezistului**
13 Anca: unde măi? <u>aicea</u>-n constanța?
14 Rodica: <u>da</u>:: deci ăştia sunt plătiți separat **cel care operează** cel care o s-o aiba în grijă şi cel
15 Anca: **anestezistul**
16 Rodica: şi **anestezistul** da plus asistentele
17 io ştiu de la mătuşă-mea de astă vară
18 ca **să-i schimbe** perfu::ziile **să-i schimbe** so::nda şi aşa mai departe
19 **trebuia să le dai bani**

While quoting in lines 1-5 her acquaintance who argued that she had to tip hospital porters and nurses, Rodica makes use of the first self-repetition to draw her addressee's attention to a piece of information that is important for understanding why the story is being told. Consequently, Anca asks a question in line 6 (*ca să intri*, 'in order (for to them) to (let you) enter') which then Rodica ratifies by repeating the

BDD-A3627 © 2003 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:08:25 UTC)

subordinate clause of purpose and by incorporating it in her own story. After restating in line 10 (through paraphrase) the idea that one has to tip the medical staff (*şi trebuie să le umpli buzunaru* , 'and one has to stuff their pockets with money'), she carries on with her story introducing a related idea in lines 11 and 12, tipping doctors (*banii chirurgului, banii anestezistului)*, which then expanded in line 14 (*ăştia sunt plătiţi separat cel care operează cel care o s-o aibă-n grijă)*. From this point on, Rodica's argument is structured by a series of self-repetitions and paraphrases as each turn-constructional unit picks up a word or a phrase from a previous one making thus the fabric of conversation and contributing to the main point of her argument. In line 15, Anca signals her active listenership by completing Rodica's utterance. Her contribution is ratified by Rodica in line 16 where she repeats the noun phrase (*anestezistul*, 'the anaesthetist'). In order to support her point, that one has no choice but to spend a lot of money on tipping the medical staff, she gives further evidence in lines 17-19 where she mentions her aunt's experience (*ca să-i schimbe perfuziile ca să-i schimbe sonda trebuia să le dai bani*).

This excerpt shows how repetition and paraphrase bound various episodes or points within a larger conversation, operating thus as a kind of theme-setting at the beginning and forming a kind of coda at the end (see lines 2-4 and 19). It also demonstrates that repetition is instrumental in attempting to convert the addressee to one's own side in an argument.

5. Concluding remarks

This paper documents the pervasiveness of repetition for female conversational style in Romanian and confirms the hypothesis that women show a preference towards consistent use of self- and allo-repetitions and paraphrases as a means of *providing back-channel response, showing active listenership, ratifying another's contribution*, and of *persuading and enlisting support for one's views.* Repetition is thus one of the resources by which conversationalists jointly create a discourse and a relationship.

This is in keeping with research on female conversational style in English which has been characterized as collaboration oriented or affiliative, i.e. focusing on the relationship. Together with asking questions, repetition is instrumental in keeping the flow of conversation going and creating interpersonal involvement when taking part in conversation is equivalent to being part of a relationship.

Appendix: Transcription conventions[12]

[12] The transcription conventions used for the conversations included in this paper as well as in the corpus on which my research on language and gender is based are adopted with some changes from Ochs, Schegloff and Thompson (eds.), *Interaction and Grammar*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp.461-65. One important difference between these conventions and the ones cited above is that capital letters are neither used in the

BDD-A3627 © 2003 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:08:25 UTC)

<u>seven</u>	Underscoring indicates emphatic stress
((laughs))	Double parentheses indicate paralinguistic features
( )	empty parentheses indicate that no 'hearing' was achieved
[	In front of two serially produced utterances, the bracket indicates that they start simultaneously
(hello)	Single pairs of parentheses indicate that the transcriber is not sure about the words contained therein
becau–	A short dash indicates a cut-off of the prior word or sound
=	The equal sign indicates latching, i.e., no interval between the end of a prior and start of a next piece of talk
(5)	Numbers in parentheses indicate pauses in seconds
°	The degree sign indicates that the talk following is marked as being quiet or soft**.**

The punctuation marks are not used grammatically, but to indicate intonation.

.	The period indicates a falling, or final, intonation contour, not necessarily the end of a sentence.
?	Similarly, a question mark indicates rising intonation, not necessarily an interrogative sentence.
,	A comma indicates continuing intonation, not necessarily a clause boundary.
::	Colons are used to indicate the prolongation or stretching of the sound just preceding them. The more colons, the longer the stretching. On the other hand, graphically stretching a word on the page by inserting blank spaces between the letters does not indicate how it was pronounced; it is used to allow alignment with overlapping talk.

REFERENCES

Bakan, D, *The duality of human existence: An essay on psychology and religion,* Chicago: Rand McNally, 1966;

Eagly, E, *Sex differences in social behaviour: A social-role interpretation,* Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1987

Gilligan, C., 'Moral orientation and moral development'. In Eva Feder Kittay & Diana T. Meyers (Eds.), *Women and moral theory,* Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield, 1987

beginning of turns nor for new turn constructional units. Nor are they used at the beginning of proper nouns. Capital letters are used to indicate some form of emphasis.

BDD-A3627 © 2003 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:08:25 UTC)

D. N. Maltz, D.N. and Borker, R.A. 'A cultural approach to male-female miscommunication'. In J. Gumperz (ed) *Language and Social Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982

Ochs, Schegloff and Thompson (eds.), *Interaction and Grammar*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp.461-65.

Sacks, H, *Lectures on Conversation*, Vol. 1&2, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1992

Tannen, D. *Talking voices: repetition, dialogue, and imagery in conversational discourse, Cambrigde*: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

BDD-A3627 © 2003 Ovidius University Press
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.216.169 (2026-11-07 03:08:25 UTC)