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Ethnicity in Interaction: The State-of-the-Art

Zsuzsanna AJTONY

Sapientia University
Department of Humanities
ajtonyzsuzsa@yahoo.com

Abstract. This paper is a work-in-progress on the nature of ethnicity as viewed from an interactional sociolinguistic point of view. Given the goal of our main research, which concentrates on the ethnical bias of literary characters in general, and dramatic genre in particular, we focus our attention on ethnic identities as visible through face-to-face interaction. As the corpus of our main research (G.B. Shaw's plays), a dialogic corpus of texts, belongs to the dramatic genre, it is an ideal field for micropragmatic analysis. It is known from the sociolinguistic literature (Wardhaugh, Trudgill, Romaine, etc.) that language is the primary and most overt marker of ethnic identity, therefore it is not to be discussed here. Other, more covert markers of ethnicity will be addressed, like conversational strategies as consequences of speech acts, markers of power and solidarity, politeness and impoliteness, face, role, turn-taking issues, gender stereotypes. This study offers a theoretical summary which would be applied in later text-based analyses.

Keywords: ethnicity, interactional sociolinguistics, drama, micropragmatics, speech acts, politeness

1. Introduction

As drama is the primary scene for face-to-face conversation, it is reasonable to take into consideration the basic principle that stands on the foundation of every human interaction: cooperation. It is the language philosopher Paul Grice's basic assumption (26 onwards) that in conversation each participant will attempt to contribute appropriately, at a required time, to the current exchange of talk. Participants in a conversation obey the so-called Cooperative Principle. Grice formulates this in the following way:

> Make your conversational contribution such as is required at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged. (26)

This Cooperation Principle is elaborated in the form of four sub-principles (maxims) falling under the general categories of Quantity (appropriate amount of information), Quality (telling the truth), Relation (relevance) and Manner (clarity). For the sake of a maximally efficient exchange of information, all these maxims are supposed to be observed. However, they sometimes fail to be fulfilled, they may be violated, opted out, clashed or flouted. But in certain cases, the so-called 'conversational implicature' (CI) arises from the context, which is an additional, unstated meaning of an utterance that has to be assumed in order to maintain the Cooperative Principle. A CI is basically the notion that an utterance may literally mean one thing as uttered, while implying (or meaning) quite another thing as understood (Cornilescu and Chițoran 102), i.e. what is said is not what is meant and vice versa, what is meant is not what is said.

Research on conversational analysis (or ethnomethodology of conversation) has greatly benefited from these insights. Examples of such analysis can be found in the discussion of conversational strategies in Gumperz (*Discourse Strategies*, *Language and Social Identity*) and Tannen ("New York Jewish", "Ethnic style") which will be discussed in the following.

2. Conversational strategies

Since speaking is interacting, being able to interact also implies some sharing (Gumperz, *Discourse Strategies* 29). Members in a communicative situation interpret what is being said in forms of judgement of intent. "All such interpretations presuppose shared social knowledge, yet this knowledge is not usually overtly verbalized. Rather, it serves as an input for judgements of what the speakers want to achieve" (Gumperz, *Discourse Strategies* 35).

It is the sharing of conversational strategies that creates the feeling of satisfaction which accompanies and follows successful conversation: the sense of being understood, being "on the same wavelength", belonging, and therefore sharing identity. Conversely, a lack of congruity in conversational strategies creates the opposite feeling: of dissonance, not being understood, not belonging, and therefore of not sharing identity. This is the sense in which conversational style is a major component of ethnicity (Tannen, “Ethnic Style” 217).

An individual learns conversational strategies in previous interactive experience, and chooses certain and rejects certain other strategies made available. In other words, the range of strategies familiar to the speaker is socially determined, but any individual’s set of habitual strategies is unique within that range. For example, research has shown that New Yorkers of Jewish background often use overlap—i.e. simultaneous talk—in a cooperative way; many members of this group talk simultaneously in some settings without intending to interrupt (Tannen “New York Jewish”). This does not imply that all New Yorkers of Jewish background use overlap cooperatively. However, a speaker of this background is more likely to do so than someone raised in the Midwest. And it is even more unlikely that such simultaneous talk will be used by an Athabaskan raised in Alaska (according to the findings of Scollon and Scollon 1983, qtd. in Tannen “New York Jewish”), who has shown that Athabaskans highly value silence and devalue what they perceive as excessive talk).

Similarly, Tannen’s study (“Ethnic style”) investigates social differences in expectations of indirectness in certain contexts by Greeks, Americans and Greek-Americans, tracing the process of adaptation of this conversational strategy as an element of ethnicity. According to Tannen, these ethnic groups express their intentions in different ways (sometimes directly, sometimes indirectly) and this frequently leads to communicative misunderstandings, their interaction not always being successful.

3. Markers of power and solidarity

Speakers—generally—position themselves in relation to others by using specific linguistic forms that convey social information. A single utterance can reveal much about a speaker: his or her background, place of birth or nation of origin, social class, or even social intent, i.e. whether s/he wants to appear friendly or distant, familiar or deferential, superior or inferior (Gumperz, “The Speech Community” 220). Linguistic choices can create and maintain relationships of **power and solidarity**.

Power is a degree to which one interlocutor is able to control the behavior of the other. There are many personal attributes that are potential bases of power in interpersonal relationships: physical strength, age, wealth, sex, profession, or institutionalized role in the church, government, or family. These attributes of power index non-reciprocal, asymmetrical relationships. They are non-reciprocal because both interlocutors cannot have power over the same type of behavior, and they are asymmetrical because they represent relations such as “older than . . .”, "parent of . . .", "employer of . . .", "richer than . . .", etc., i.e. the superior says one form but receives another, and likewise for the subordinate.

Emblematic for such relationships is the use of T/V pronouns discussed in detail by Brown and Gilman in their early study (255, 257). They discuss the "*pronouns of power and solidarity*" which are basically markers of social distance. They presented the distinction between familiar and deferential pronouns of address (in German we would use either 'Sie' or 'du', in French 'Vous' or 'tu', the Italian 'Lei' and 'tu', the Spanish 'Usted' and 'tu', the Latin 'vos' and 'tu') as a system for establishing and maintaining interpersonal relations directly embedded into grammar (Joseph 59). Being unfamiliar with these differences may also be a cause for cultural misunderstanding. In languages where this distinction does not exist (e.g. English) addressing someone by the formal or informal '*you*' may cause a serious miscommunication and maybe lead to the breakdown of communication and the relationship at all.

Very much significant and intrusive here are the various culture-bound customs in *forms of address*, such as mentioning the forenames and surnames (maybe even the title and other attributes) of the addressee, having eye contact with them whilst the act of addressing, as well as other social niceties. In such cases cultural differences are present as it is a question of differing cultural value systems. The frequent use of the name serves in some cultures as an expression of interest in or respect towards the communication partner; in other cultures it can be a token of a certain intimacy; again in other cultures mentioning a proper name can even be forbidden. In written communication there are differing norms governing whether one may/should use the forename (with or without a surname) when addressing someone, whether one may/should abbreviate it or omit it completely, whether an explicit address is usual at the opening of a letter and whether substitute forms (e.g. passives) may/should be used.

Closely connected to the discussion on forms of address, Bargiela et al. have drawn our attention to *naming strategies* in first-time, dyadic encounters which are potentially delicate interactional moments, particularly in intercultural settings. Whilst in intracultural encounters, norms are often assumed to be shared, and if they appear to be clashing, they can be renegotiated relatively easily, in intercultural encounters, different tacit and often conflicting interactional norms and assumptions are usually at work, which speakers tend to take for granted until misunderstanding arises. The phenomenon of 'ethnocentricity' is likely to occur, i.e. the assumption that 'our way must be everybody else's way, too'. Ethnocentric interactants are unaware of their listeners' cultural profiles, and collaterally they are unaware of their own culture-bound preferences, too. In other words, it is temptingly easier to behave with members of other cultures as if they belonged to our own. Moreover, this ethnocentric tendency is more clearly noticeable in contact situations between language users of unequal international status. This is especially true for the phenomenon of ‘Eurocentrism’ (a form of implicit ethnocentrism) and Anglocentrism (a form of implicit Eurocentrism). In this context, stereotypes act as a form of hypothesised paradigm for linguistic behavior against which individual members of that culture can position themselves; i.e. stereotypes may be a point of reference for a member of another culture to employ.

The discussion in Bargiela et al. makes clear that decisions about naming strategies and politeness when meeting members of other cultures may be fraught with difficulty. It is not simply the hierarchical relations between participants as individuals, as Scollon and Scollon (“Intercultural Communication” 49) suggest, but rather “it is the global relations between *languages* (and their historical legacy) which have an impact on the way that individuals interact with each other. . . . [I]ntercultural communication is one where great tact and thoughtfulness need to be brought into play” (Bargiela et al.)

Solidarity, on the other hand, can be achieved in interactions where interlocutors share some common attribute—for instance, attendance at the same school, work in the same profession, membership in the same family, etc. In contrast to ‘power language’, *reciprocal linguistic forms* are used to express and create the relationship of solidarity. While non-solidarity forms express distance and formality, solidarity forms express intimacy and familiarity (Brown and Gilman 258). This relationship is symmetrical in that if Speaker A has the same parents or attended the same school as Speaker B, then B has the same parents, attended the same school as A. It is important to note that not every shared personal attribute creates solidarity. For example, two people who have the same colour eyes or same shoe size will not automatically have an intimate relationship. But they should share political membership, family, religion, profession, sex, birthplace or other common attributes “that make for like-mindedness or similar behaviour dispositions”, the likelihood of a solidarity relationship increases. Similarly, **sharing ethnicity and bilingualism may be grounds for solidarity**. [1]

Just as linguistic choices create and maintain power and solidarity dimensions of role relationships, speakers can also use language to indicate social allegiances, i.e. which groups they are members of and which groups they are not. When people want to be considered part of a particular social group, they express their alignment with that group in different ways, one of which is “talking like” other members of that group. Within a society or a culture group, speech patterns become tools that speakers manipulate to group themselves and categorize others with whom they are interacting.

As seen above, studies on linguistic expressions of power and solidarity contribute extensively to a clearer insight into conversational analysis. They offer

[1] My emphasis.

us possibilities to see how speakers can grammatically and pragmatically express social distancing and social relationships when having conversational interactions.

4. Social maxims. The Politeness Principle

Grice's maxims mentioned above (section 1) cover only the communication of information, i.e. they establish those rules which enhance the efficient exchange of information in order to establish truth. Nevertheless, sociologists like Goffman, and linguists like Halliday have often stressed that communication may have other purposes as well. Grice himself also mentions non-conversational maxims, which are "aesthetic, social, or moral in character" (47, qtd. in Cornilescu and Chițoran 118) and gives an example of such a universal maxim: 'Be polite!' These researchers contend that speakers may also want (or primarily want) to communicate 'socially'; they want to be efficient, and therefore cooperative, in establishing social contacts. The efficiency of social communication depends on the mutual satisfaction of the participants' social needs as stated in 'social maxims'. These social maxims relate to the same CP as a principle of efficient rational action. This is how we arrive at the study of politeness phenomena, as a reflection of another constitutive aspect of the human being, man's social nature. Leech (131), as well as Cornilescu and Chițoran (119) show that there is also a so-called Politeness Principle pervading most conversations and this interacts with the Cooperation Principle.

The 'social maxims' that fall under the Politeness Principle reflect norms of social interaction. In their salient book, it is Brown and Levinson who suggest that social interaction is that domain of social structure which is relevant for the interface of language and social structure. They consider that interaction is, on the one hand, the expression of social relationships, and it is built out of strategic language use, on the other. They identify *strategic message construction* (i.e. the choice of an adequate communicative strategy, and hence, of a certain message form) as the key locus of the interface of language and society (Cornilescu and Chițoran 120).

In their book entitled *Politeness: some universals in language usage*, Brown and Levinson take up the politeness maxim mentioned in Grice (28), as well as the Maxim of Tact (as one kind of politeness) mentioned by Leech (131). In conformity with Grice's maxims, they offer guidelines for achieving maximally efficient communication, although politeness is exactly a source of deviation from rational efficiency and is communicated precisely by that deviation. They argue for a pragmatic analysis of politeness which involves a concentration on the amount of verbal "work" which individual speakers have to perform in their utterances in order to counteract the force of potential threats to the "face" of the hearer. Goffman approached the individual self through the notion of **face** as "the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact" ("Interaction" 5). In other words, face is the term to describe the public self-image which the speaker or the hearer would like to see maintained in the interaction.

Brown and Levinson's approach is more refined. They state that "face is something that is emotionally invested, and that can be lost, maintained or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to in interaction" (66). They define "face" as "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" (61). A threat to a person's face is termed a Face Threatening Act (FTA) and by their nature, it runs contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or of the speaker (70). Such threats generally require a mitigating statement or some verbal repair (politeness), otherwise a breakdown of communication will ensue. In Brown and Levinson's view, face consists of two related aspects: negative face and positive face (61). They see politeness primarily as a matter of communicative strategies adopted by speakers in their conversations in order to solve these 'face-problems' without conflict. FTAs that appear to impede the addressee's independence of movement and freedom of action threaten their negative face, whereas those which appear as disapproving of their wants threaten their positive face. Examples of the former include orders and requests, suggestions, advice, etc., whereas examples of the latter might be expressions of disapproval or disagreement. Thanks, acceptance of thanks, or offers, and so forth threaten the speaker's negative face in that they accept a debt and humble their own face. Apologies (i.e. regretting a prior FTA), acceptance of compliments, and so on threaten the speaker's positive face in that they may feel that such activities have to be played down or reciprocated in kind.

Basically the two scholars make a distinction between two extreme communicative strategies (Cseresnyési 58): one which is called '*bald on record*', where an FTA is presented in unmitigated form and the second which is called '*off-record'* (out of game), where the speaker does not openly state the FTA or does so in an ambiguous way (Brown and Levinson 70). These two extremes are further decomposed. In their model, in case of an FTA (for example, a demand) there may be two kinds of redress or mitigation: one is called '*positive politeness*', which is basically approach based and '"anoints" the face of the addressee by indicating that in some respects, S[peaker] wants H[earer]'s wants (for example, by treating him/her as a member of an in-group, a friend, a person whose wants and personality traits are known and liked)' and '*negative politeness*', which 'is essentially avoidance-based and consists . . . in assurances that the speaker . . . will not interfere with the addressee's freedom of action'. To sum up the above, we can say that:

- *bald on record* is characterized as open admission of an FTA;

- *positive politeness* is concerned with demonstrating closeness and affiliation (for example, by using compliments);
- *negative politeness* is concerned with distance and formality (for example, through the use of apologies, mitigation, and hedges); and
- *off-record* is an attempt to avoid overtly committing an FTA, through the use of indirectness, ambiguous utterances, or silence.

Thus, as Mills (59) points out, "politeness is viewed as a form of strategic behavior which the speaker engages in, weighing up the potential threat to the hearer, the degree of familiarity with the hearer, the power relationship between them, and modifying the utterance accordingly."

The degree of the risk of loss of face is determined by the cumulative effect of three universal social variables which, according to Brown and Levinson (79), are:

- D—the social distance between the participants;
- P—the relative power between them;
- R—the absolute ranking of imposition in the particular culture.[2]

Although Brown and Levinson claim the phenomenon of politeness to be universal, they also recognise that "the content of face will differ in different cultures (what the exact limits are to personal territories, and what the publicly relevant content of personality consists in)" (Brown and Levinson 62). In other words, their politeness model allows for certain *cross-cultural variation*, which is revealed in diverse politeness strategies specific to one culture/ethnic group or another. They call this variation **ethos** of communication and they define it as "the affective quality of interaction characteristic of members of a society" (Brown and Levinson 243). Extending the distinction between positive and negative politeness strategies (discussed above) to larger social strata, they make a distinction between positive and negative politeness cultures and societies. As they state, "complex, stratified societies will exhibit both kinds of politeness, with perhaps upper classes having a negative politeness ethos and lower classes a positive politeness ethos" (Brown and Levinson 245).

Consequently, if types of social relationship are repetitive throughout a society, i.e. these relationships are stable and constant, certain generalizations can be made about that particular society. Hence the distinction between *positive-politeness cultures*, where the general level of imposition and social distance is low, while relative power is not great (e.g. the western part of the USA), and *negative-politeness cultures*, with high values of D, R (rating of imposition) and P

[2] More recent research (cf Brown and Gilman 1989, Kasper 1990) supports the assumption that these variables are the basic determinants in social interaction, but suggests that their treatment by Brown and Levinson is simplistic because the lack of power does not necessarily elicit greater politeness, and because 'distance' has to be distinguished from 'affect', which appears to be a more powerful variable (in: Sifianou 34)

(e.g. the British society). "[I]n some societies interactional ethos is generally warm, easy-going, friendly; in others it is stiff, formal, deferential; in others it is characterized by displays of self-importance, bragging and showing off; in still others it is distant, hostile and suspicious." (Brown and Levinson 243). Therefore the "warm", positive politeness cultures have an ideal of small values for D, P and R which give them their "egalitarian, fraternal ethos", while the "standoffish" negative politeness cultures have an ideal of large values for D, P and R which give them their "hierarchical, paternal ethos" (Brown and Levinson 247).

Although we can distinguish societies according to the predominant ethos in daily talk-in-interaction, it should not be implied that societies as a whole or that various social groups within a complex society can clearly and exclusively be categorized as being either positively or negatively polite. Rather, they can be categorized as *relatively* more positive politeness oriented or *relatively* more negative politeness oriented, according to the type of ethos which is given more play (Hornoiu 27)[3].

In a very interesting study on the comparison of politeness in Greek and English language and culture, Maria Sifianou investigates both the conversationalized request patterns and preferences for modification in the two languages. She arrives at the conclusion that Greeks tend to prefer more positive politeness strategies, such as in-group markers, more direct patterns and in general, devices which can be seen as attempts to include the addressee in the activity. They also tend to use constructions which sound more optimistic about the outcome of the request. The English, on the other hand, seem to prefer negative politeness devices as far as both structures and modifications are concerned. *Conventional indirectness*, the chief characteristic of negative politeness, is *equated with politeness*, and this contributes to the elaboration of the structure and the tentativeness of the message. Pessimism expressed by means of negative constructions in also frequent. Linguistic pessimism versus linguistic optimism is perhaps the major difference between positive politeness and negative politeness societies (Brown and Levinson 126, 173).

5. Impoliteness and the language of drama

So far issues to do with politeness have been considered: how speakers use linguistic strategies in order to maintain or promote harmonious social relations.

[3] This idea seems to be in line with what language theory calls "linguistic relativity" advocated by Sapir and Whorf discussing the interrelationship and the uniqueness and distinctiveness of each language on which the real world or culture is built. Hymes (1966:116), however, presents a different version of 'linguistic relativity' when he says that 'cultural values and beliefs are in part constitutive of linguistic relativity' whereas for Whorf it was the structure of language which in part determined thought and culture (cf. Sifianou 44).

However, there are times when people use linguistic strategies to attack face **intentionally**—to strengthen the face threat of an act. Culpeper ("(Im)politeness" 85) uses the term 'impoliteness' to describe this kind of linguistic strategy and defines it as "a type of aggression" ("(Im)politeness" 86). He considers that "the key difference between politeness and impoliteness is a matter of (the hearer's understanding of) *intention* [4]: whether it is the speaker's intention to support face (politeness) or to attack it (impoliteness)" (86).

Culpeper also draws attention to the fact that the study of impoliteness is particularly useful in the study of drama. Aggression has been defined as the key concept of intentional impoliteness, and it is aggression that has been "a source of entertainment for thousands of years" (86). It is interesting to notice that while "real life" impoliteness is restricted and rare, in fiction and drama it abounds and we are likely to interpret such kind of behavior as a *message* from the author about an aspect of the fictional world which will be of future consequence.

In the case of drama, this aggression often takes place in dialogue. It is not surprising that the courtroom has provided the basis for so many plays. Here prosecutors are licensed to aggravate a witness's face. "The courtroom provides a socially respectable and legitimate form of verbal aggression" (Culpeper 86). In drama, the use of impoliteness in dramatic dialogues serves several purposes, as stated by Culpeper: characterization (tensions between characters develop their character) and the plot itself (plot develops from a state of equilibrium, through a state of disequilibrium, to the re-establishment of equilibrium).[5] The researcher analyzes a fragment from the film entitled "Scent of a Woman" and comes to the conclusion that impoliteness is crucial to the construction of character, both Charlie's and the Colonel's.

The study of politeness and impoliteness is of crucial importance for our analyses as well, as Shaw's characters display an entire set of positive and negative politeness strategies as well as impolite linguistic behavior. As we focus our attention on ethnic stereotypes, intuition leads us to think that the ethnic British character's communicative strategies will be indirect, i.e. belonging to negative politeness culture while others ethnicity characters will be of positive politeness culture, for the sake of dramatic tension.

6. Face, Role, and Personal Identity

Starting from the sociological concept of 'face' introduced by Goffman (see section 3 above), he also defined the notion of 'role' as an occupation that

[4] Emphasis belongs to the cited author
[5] Verbal conflict can be a symptom of disequilibrium in dramatic dialogue (Culpeper 86)

individuals may take up in social interactions. He defined this notion in the following way:

> . . . What Smith possesses as a person or individual is a personal identity: he is a concrete organism with distinctively identifying marks, a niche in life. He is a selfsame object perduring over time and possessing an accumulating memory of the voyage. He has a biography. As part of this personal identity, he claims a multitude of capacities or functions – occupational, domestic, and so forth . . . I shall use the term “role” as an equivalent to specialized capacity or function, understanding this to occur both in offstage, real life and in its staged version. (Goffman, “Frame Analysis” 128-9)

Or to quote another definition,

> Role is defined as “the occupation by an individual of a discursive position, conferring a set of socially warranted linguistic and non-linguistic rights and duties which legitimate the performance of certain categories of act: non-verbal, illocutionary and interactive. The enactment of a role is the dynamic expression of a situationally salient aspect of the individual’s social identity. (Riley 99)

Goffman is concerned with the interrelationship between role and personal identity, which could be completed with the notion of membership categorization, i.e. a person realizes a role if s/he conceives him/herself as a member of a given category and consequently assumes the obligations entailed by this category membership. This is in line with Labov and Fanshel’s argument (qtd. in Weizman 156) who have pointed out that “There are many obligations that a person must fulfil in order to be seen as performing his normal role in society with full competence”.

At this point the question may arise: which of the social identities that can be applied to participants, are relevant to understanding their interactional conduct? The answer proposed by CA (conversation analysis) researchers, following Sacks and Schegloff (“Reflections”, “In another context”), is that identities should be investigated to the extent that they are “made relevant” by the speaker, and have consequences for the interaction. Roles, these ‘situationally salient facets of social identity are manifested by the performance of particular kinds of communicative acts, requiring specific forms of knowledge for their competent performance or interpretation’ (Riley 122). Roles can be put on like hats and based on the context, speakers can decide ‘which hat to wear’.

Roles can be made relevant in many ways, and in varying degrees of explicitness. Weizman suggests viewing as challenging any verbal behavior which might be interpreted as saying or implying that the addressee has not fulfilled his or her role appropriately, or failed to fulfil any component of it. In this respect, role includes both interactional and social (institutional) obligations. Following Weizman's study, it could be argued that by challenging one's addressee through ironic criticism (which is frequently the case in interactions of Shaw's characters), the speaker orients towards the (interactional or social) role he/she plays, and by having recourse to irony, one orients towards the interactional role of one's target. Challenge and ironic criticism are therefore indirect ways of making roles relevant.

There is another distinction that has to be taken into consideration: the difference between social roles, inherent in any type of real life discourse, and interactional roles. **Social (institutional) roles** have to do with the obligation pertaining to the speaker's status and activities, such as being a politician, a physician, a friend, a colleague, a journalist, etc. Any active member of society fulfils more than one social role, but it is usually the case that only one role in this repertoire is relevant for a given situation, and it is by virtue of this role that the person takes part in the conversation. **Interactional roles,** on the other hand, have a more specialised use. They have to do with the speaker's rights and obligations *within the interaction*.[6] In institutional discourse where power relations are unequally distributed (e.g., employer-employee, doctor-patient, interviewer-interviewee exchanges), interactional roles are often asymmetrically distributed (Weizman 161).

Similarly, taking this role and membership category relationship into consideration, we may argue that a person will consider him/herself belonging to a certain ethnic group if s/he has realized his/her role of being of a certain ethnic affiliation, i.e. if s/he acts according to the demands of this role. All in all, roles can be considered as the repertoire of a person's linguistic behavior.

7. Ethnicity and turn-taking

Another aspect where ethnicity can be traced in micro-sociolinguistic studies is the issue of turn-taking. As several linguists (Mey 1993), have already argued, there are more or less strict universally valid turn-taking rules that all conversationalists have to follow, such as yielding the right to speak to the other partner(s) in the conversation when the so-called TRP-s (Transition Relevance Points) occur, i.e. all those points in the conversation where a 'natural' transition of the right to speak to the next speaker may occur. This flow of conversation may be interrupted and insertions may happen at all times, many of the actual phenomena

[6] Emphasis in the original.

are related and due to a particular culture. For instance 'telephone intrusions' are much more familiar in the US than in Europe and they cannot be properly understood without some insight into the particular pragmatic presuppositions that are at work.

Another such universal is that a question of any kind usually requires an answer which gives dynamism to the conversation. However such a simple question like "How are you?" may be easily misunderstood if there is an intercultural difference between conversationalists. If in one culture this question does not regularly need an answer, as it is interpreted as a simple form of greeting, an instance of phatic communication (in the Jakobsonian sense), in another culture this may be misunderstood, the respondent giving a detailed account of his / her bodily and mental state of health.

8. Ethnicity and gender stereotypes

If we are to observe communicative competence, i.e. how language is used in a given society, it is essential to incorporate social and cultural factors into the linguistic description. In this context we may have an insight into the gender differences, into what is appropriate for men and women as speakers. Jennifer Coates, for instance, describes the British stereotypes that exist in people's minds (folk knowledge) about these communicative competences: that women talk more than men, that women 'gossip', that men swear more than women and that women are more polite (Coates 107).

At a stereotypical level, politeness is often considered to be a woman's concern, in the sense that stereotypes of how women in general should behave are in fact rather a prototypical description of white, middle-class women's behavior in relation to politeness (Mills 203). The teaching and enforcement of 'manners' are often considered to be the preserve of women. Femininity, that set of varied and changing characteristics which have been rather arbitrarily associated with women in general, has an association with politeness, self-effacement, weakness, vulnerability, and friendliness. This manifests itself in the type of language practices which Lakoff (1975) described as 'talking like a lady'. Women's linguistic behavior is often characterized as being concerned with co-operation (more positively polite than men) and avoidance of conflict (more negatively polite than men). This characterization is based on the assumption that women are powerless and display their powerlessness in language. These "womanly" forms of politeness are markers of their subordination. The stereotypic view considers femininity as a civilizing force, mitigating aggression of strangers, while masculinity is stereotypically associated with directness and aggression. Books on courtesy and etiquette state that politeness or concern for others is stereotypically associated with middle-class behavior. Furthermore, politeness is often associated within *English-speaking communities* with being deferent, which Brown and Levinson have classified as negative politeness, often associated with powerlessness, and care for others, which is associated with stereotypes of femininity.[7]

Research on gender and politeness has also shown that the above-mentioned stereotypes do not apply to all women in all cultures. These so-called ‘polite’ and ‘impolite’ utterances may have a range of different interpretations. Kharraki (2001), for example, analyses Moroccan women and men bargaining in Arabic dialect. The interactional power of these women contrasts quite markedly with the stereotypes which many Westerners have of passive, deferent women within the Arab world.

Similarly, Mills’s example (227-8) of a dialogue between a New Zealand white, middle-class, middle-aged woman and a white, middle-class, younger British woman is a case in point. Since social distance between them is fairly low and the power relations are fairly evenly balanced, they seem to be displaying a very feminine form of speech behavior in thanking and apologizing excessively. However, thanking and praising the received present several times is misinterpreted by the person who offered the present. Instead of accepting the thanks and praise, this woman interprets the host’s moves as a sign that she is interested in hearing more about the special present and she then continues discussing it. The host, however, stated that what she was trying to do was to get her guest to sit down so that they could start lunch. Of course, the reason for this misinterpretation is not necessarily the difference in their ethnicity, but it may be one of its reasons.

As we have seen, naturally research often challenges ethnic and gender stereotypes, proving exactly the opposite. In our analysis we are trying to find examples of Shavian male and female characters who behave according to the stereotypes of their gender and some who do not, i.e. who act exactly the other way round as to what is expected from them, whether they are responsible for more interruptions, whether it is men who are more polite, women who swear more and whether there are any ethnical aspects of this phenomenon.

9. Conclusion

From the studies revised above we can conclude that a speaker not only fulfills the ideational and textual functions of language, but he also embodies its interpersonal function. He is a social person as well, whose linguistic acts are embedded in social acts. In choosing a strategy of communication, speakers have to

[7] This is in line with our findings in the literature about conventional indirectness mentioned in section 3.

take into account the relevant weight of three goals (wants) (following Brown and Levinson, Cornilescu and Chițoran):

a) the want to communicate the content of the face-threatening act and to obtain one's illocutionary aim;
b) the want to be efficient or urgent;
c) the want to maintain Hearer's and Speaker's face to any degree.

Social maxims play a major role in choosing an adequate 'communicative strategy'. This will determine choice of a certain message form, of a certain "way of putting it" to perform a certain speech act in a given situation. "The study of the strategies makes us understand why a given linguistic form is efficient for the job in which it is employed. Linguistic strategies appear as means of satisfying communicative and face-oriented ends in a coherent, well-organized system of rational practical reasoning" (Cornilescu and Chițoran 122). The issues and studies discussed above prove to be useful working tools in analysing the ethnic markers of the Shavian characters' language and are considered to be exemplary models for our analyses.

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