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**Discourse variation and social comfort: A study of topic
initiation and interruption patterns in the dinner conversations
of preadolescent children**

Greenwood, Alice, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1989

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DISCOURSE VARIATION AND SOCIAL COMFORT

A Study of Topic Initiation and Interruption Patterns
in the Dinner Conversations of Preadolescent Children

by

Alice Greenwood

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in
Linguistics in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City
University of New York.

1989

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Abstract

DISCOURSE VARIATION AND SOCIAL COMFORT

by

Alice Greenwood

Adviser: Professor Ed Bendix

Discourse strategies, like other kinds of linguistic behavior, can be shown to vary for individual speakers in a motivated way. Through an examination of the friendly talk of a small group of preadolescent children, variation is shown to reflect feelings of social comfort and acceptance by the other members of the group. In an analysis of topic introduction and interruption patterns of the same girls and boys across several conversations, it was established that the gender of the participants was not a salient factor in discourse style variation. Rather, feelings of being an outsider to the group or being extremely comfortable in the group interaction was shown to have specific language reflexes. Equality in the numbers of topics introduced by the members of the conversational group reflects feelings of group solidarity; inequality indicates lack of cohesion in the group. Interruption patterns, which have been correlated with hostility and aggressive behavior, are here demonstrated to be a signal of intimacy and familiarity.

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I. INTRODUCTION

This dissertation shows that discourse style for individual speakers varies as the social demands of the conversational context vary. Through an examination of topic introduction and interruption patterns for a group of speakers across several social contexts, it will be argued that social and linguistic familiarity and feelings of friendship and social comfort can be linked to particular discourse style. Interruption, which has been associated with dominance strategies and conversational control, particularly in language and gender research, is here seen as a marker of comfort, a relaxation of watching one's manners. The amount of topic introductions also serves as an index to social comfort and discomfort. The number of one speaker's contributions to the total number of topics introduced discloses social information about that speaker's relationship to the group. Variation of discourse features reflects how the speaker feels about a particular conversation, especially, how integrated she feels with the group. It will be established that variation of discourse functions actually does occur for a single speaker in similar speech events.

In this chapter I will discuss how the study was conducted and briefly present how the data were collected and analyzed. The participants will be identified and introduced. I will then review the general research that is pertinent to the issues of the study. The specific research on topic introduction and interruption patterns will be reviewed in the chapters devoted to the discussion of those variables.

I. 1. The Study

I studied the preadolescent children of one family with their friends during one kind of speech activity, dinner table conversation. Three of the children in this study are my own which gives me unique access to their histories (like Halliday 1973 and Kennan 1974) and the other children are very well known to me, as are their parents and the community in which we all live. I believe that this position allows me to overcome the observer's paradox as much as possible, and I am confident that my data represent natural speech.

The setting of the social interaction was kept constant: dinner at my home. It is a social occasion where the only "play" the children can indulge in is verbal. I audiorecorded 6 dinner conversations of my children and various of their friends. In each case there were no adults

present and the tape recorder was out of sight. I had told the children in advance that I would like to do some taping but they were not aware of the actual time the machine was on.

The children are white, ages 11-14, who live in a middle-class suburb of New Jersey. They have professional parents; both the mothers and fathers work outside the home. The children have been in school together for various amounts of time. They have been friends and played outside of school together, also in varying degrees.

Three of the children, Dara, David, and Stephanie, are siblings. Because they have been talking together all their lives, they form a good example of in-group language (Thakerar, Giles, and Cheshire 1982). They have a shared social and linguistic background and are familiar enough with each other's methods of talk that they can infer easily what is going on conversationally (Gumperz 1982a). Since they form such a unit, the way they change their style around other, less intimate acquaintances is revealing. They have to (and do) use more elaborated conversational techniques with outsiders than they do with each other.¹

Each dinner guest was invited by one of the children. I prepared the dinner, then left the room. I was in an adjacent room and made notes about what was going on. The children believed themselves to be unobserved and were not aware they were being taped. They all later agreed to let me

use the tape and didn't seem too interested in why or what for.

Each dinner had unique and distinct qualities. Some were clearly more fun than others, as indicated by amounts of laughter, simultaneous talk, unnatural silly voices, and time spent at the table. I analyzed each conversation for numbers of topics introduced and interruption patterns for each child involved and then compared the children's style across conversations for variation.

The children were interviewed as to whom they liked having dinner with and why. They were asked to try and define "fun" and failure in this social situation. These interviews established who each child enjoyed being with at dinner and why. That evaluation was used as a standard of "most comfortable." Variation from most comfortable was used as an index to "less comfortable." In this way, particular discourse functions are associated with social comfort and successful communication.

This study involves several lines of inquiry. My intention is to:

- investigate the use of discourse functions in the conversation of a small group of preadolescent children;

- establish that individuals vary their discourse style in similar social contexts, depending on how they feel about the group;

-examine claims about sex differences in discourse style;

-illustrate how discourse variation interacts with social and psychological information.

I. 2. The Participants

DAVID is 12 years old, the twin brother of DARA, and older brother of STEPHANIE, age 11. At the time of the taping he is on vacation from his boarding school. David and Dara are in 7th grade, at a middle school; Stephanie is in 5th grade at an elementary school. David has entered boarding school this year because the private elementary school he had been attending ended in 6th grade. ² His sisters have not seen him in a month and are excited to have him home. In his absence, Dara and Stephanie have developed all kinds of verbal routines at the table for the amusement of themselves and any audience. The three siblings are accustomed to using the table as an arena for amusement. Meals in their house last a long time and conversation is plentiful.

ADAM, 11, is a family friend who lives in a different neighborhood. The four children have known each other all their lives and have been together on many occasions and for long periods of time (weekends, vacations). Adam and David are best friends. Adam, who has a sister, is very

comfortable with David's sisters and treats them as family too.

JIHAD, 14, is David's friend from his previous school. Classmates for two years and very good friends, they played many afternoons together and had many sleepovers. Since he has been at David's house so much, and eaten many meals there, Jihad is also comfortable with Dara and Stephanie. However, he has no siblings, is 14, and is not as comfortable with the girls as is Adam. For instance, Adam frequently includes Dara and Stephanie in his play with David; Jihad never does. Jihad and Dara go to the same school, although Jihad is in a higher grade.

MAX, 14, is also a friend of David's from elementary school. He is an only child. His parents are actors and his manner is very theatrical. He now goes to a local prep school. Dara, Stephanie, and Jihad go to local public schools. Max was never as close to David as was Jihad, nor is he as familiar with the family as either of the other boys. He has been at the house only a few times, for a few meals and a couple of sleepovers. David has been at Max's house once or twice. The children have not seen each other for almost half a year.

SARAH, 13, is a very good friend of Dara's. They have been friends for about five years and have spent a lot of time together. David and Stephanie are very familiar with her also. At the time of the taping, Dara and Sarah have

been in the same class for 7 months, have spent lots of time together after school; they are on the same soccer team and attend the same religious school. They speak on the phone every day. 3 Sarah has known David as long as she has Dara but has had little interaction with him during the last few years, and has not seen him for many months because he has been away at school. Sarah and Stephanie are very familiar with each other since Sarah often spends time at Dara's house and Stephanie is frequently part of their play.

ELLIE, 13, is a new friend of Dara's. They have only begun to be friends in the last few months. They share a class in school and have friends in common. This taping is the first time Ellie has been to the house and the first meal she has ever had with Dara.

JANE, 12, has been a friend of Dara's for a few months. She also is in the same class at school and on the same soccer team. She and Dara call each other frequently. Jane and Ellie are very good friends with each other. This is the third time Jane has been to the house and shared a meal with Dara.

I. 3. General Comments on the Study and the Participants

I have chosen to look at the language of preadolescent not only because I have access to their backgrounds, social and linguistic, but also because the language of school-age children has been neglected, sociolinguistically, outside

the classroom and laboratory. The language of preadolescent should be a source of special interest for a linguist because at this point in a child's development language (langue) has been acquired in close to adult form, but the use (parole) and function of language is often distinct from adult usage.

There are some striking differences between the language behavior of preadolescent and that of adults. The table talk of the children that I have observed has particular characteristics. There is singing (especially among girls), burping and farting noises (especially among boys), lots of laughter (both boys and girls), false voices and mimicry, high volume, and other qualities associated with younger children's conversational style.

However, there are also many qualities of adult talk: a steady stream of conversation, coherence in topic flow, turn-taking and awareness of the conversational rights of others (e.g. "let him finish"). The preadolescent age group provides an excellent bridge for observing what is left over from young children's speech and what has been acquired as conversational style, moving toward adult forms.

David, Dara, and Stephanie, perhaps because they are so close in age and development, are extremely involved with each other socially. Although they each had friends at school, they rarely looked outside the family for peer play until several years ago. David had been going to a local

cooperative school where he was in the same class (though a grade lower) as Max and Jihad. Jihad and David started playing sports after school several days a week in the past two years, after David's sisters refused to play with him.

At the time of the taping, David has begun seventh grade at a boarding school, Jihad has moved to the public middle school and Max to the local prep school. David is home for winter vacation and his family and friends seem impressed with his "away from home" status.

I. 4. Relevant Research

That children, and maybe adults, change their discourse style depending on who they talk to is not a very interesting claim. Sociolinguistic theory, however, has not developed a framework for how to examine such variation or analyze the effect discourse variation has on the conversational behavior of the group. In this study, I will show that discourse functions vary, for the same speaker in a similar social context, and that the variation carries the same kinds of social information that phonological and grammatical variation does. In particular I will pay attention to how an individual creates for herself a sense of fun and well-being, or marks self-consciousness through modification of discourse strategies.

David and Dara are twins, male and female; an examination of their style offers a good opportunity to

investigate issues raised in the sociolinguistic literature on the conversational style of males and females. It is not at all clear when some of these claimed characteristics, such as that of males to interrupt females (Zimmerman and West 1975; West and Zimmerman 1983), and to raise many more topics than get successfully discussed (Fishman 1983), come into the conversation of speakers. Even if it can be empirically established that girls and boys have different speaking styles, it is still necessary to discover what happens when boys and girls talk to each other.

Since this study involves the social information attached to linguistic variation, I will briefly review the findings of the early variation studies of Labov (1966), Trudgill (1972), and others. Later research involving small social groups, in particular that of Milroy (1980), Cheshire (1978), Gal (1978), and Nichols (1983), offers important information on the kinds of motivations that underlie language styles and will be discussed in a separate section.

Since all these variation studies conclude that there are some differences in the ways females and males use language, I will review Goodwin's (1980) work on preadolescent and Maltz and Borker's (1982) hypothesis of male-female miscommunication. If the children in this study can be shown to have different discourse strategies due to gender, as these researchers suggest, and these strategies

can be shown to impede successful communication, the ideas of Maltz and Borker will receive substantial support. Finally, since I make use of the interactional model of conversational analysis, I will summarize Gumperz's (1982a) approach.

I.4.1. Early variation studies

Sociolinguistics has always been concerned with how social and linguistic variation interrelate. The correlational studies of the early 1960s and 1970s (Fischer 1958; Labov 1972; Trudgill 1974; Shuy, Wolfram, and Riley 1968) established that what had appeared to be random and "free" variation was actually a predictable pattern of language use. Linguistic variation was found to correlate with such social factors as the social class of the speaker (Labov, Trudgill), the sex of the speaker (Fischer, Trudgill, Labov), the education level (Shuy, Wolfram, and Riley), and such social-psychological categories like how people felt about belonging to a particular region or social group (Labov). These studies charted variation from vernacular to standard language forms. Through an examination of primarily phonological and grammatical variables, the sociolinguist was able to classify the speaker as part of a particular social group. All the studies of linguistic variation found sex differences in

language; women spoke "better," used more prestige forms than men, regardless of social class.

Trudgill established that women wanted to speak "better" by using self-evaluation tests. Men wanted to speak with more vernacular forms than they actually used. Trudgill concluded that there must be a different kind of prestige, "covert," attached to nonstandard forms. That is, the prestige form accepted as high status by the larger community is not always accepted by a particular subgroup of speakers. Sometimes in-group language, the kind of language forms that seem to establish and maintain solidarity, outweigh those forms that can be thought to establish and maintain superior social position. Trudgill's explanation for why women used higher prestige forms was that as the second highest status group they had to speak better to acquire more status. Men, who had more real-world status, didn't have to bother with such niceties, and, in fact, were attracted to the macho culture of the lower working class, and their language norms.

Subsequent research looked at how variation signalled identity, both self and group. This research not only examined language forms as they exhibited variation from standard but took a much more ethnographic approach. Milroy (1980), Cheshire (1978), Gal (1978), and Nichols (1983) have shown how the social goals of a particular group have language reflexes, not only on the standard-vernacular axis,

but on large discourse factors, like which code is used in a particular situation (Gal) or how the social goals of men and women affected their language forms.

I.4.2. Variation as a function of social groups

The work of Milroy, Cheshire, Gal, and Nichols is particularly appropriate to this study because they show how the social needs of the speakers explain variation in language style.

Milroy's work in Belfast (1980) approaches variation from a different starting point than the earlier correlational studies. Rather than begin with a linguistic variable that seemed to have social information attached to it (as Labov did with post-vocalic r), she began her analysis of the speech community by participating in the social life of each of the areas she wanted to study. She paid special attention to who the individuals in the community talked to and found that the kinds of social interactions people had with various members of their community affected the amount of vernacular forms in their speech.

She developed a social network analysis that evaluated individuals' personal contacts. People involved with each other in many different ways - kin, neighbors, friends, coworkers - are defined as being part of a "dense" and "multiplex" network. People whose relationships are in

separate areas of their life have a more "open" and "uniplex" network. Through an analysis of the specific phonological and grammatical characteristics of each community's vernacular style, Milroy found that dense, multiplex networks served as norm-enforcing mechanisms for nonstandard forms. She also found that men in these working-class Belfast communities had greater network strength than women. Thus their language had more vernacular forms.

It can be seen that the same linguistic fact - women use greater amounts of prestige forms than men - can be understood and interpreted from many different angles. Milroy's explanation is much more rooted in the social interaction of the speech community than Labov's and Trudgill's. She stresses that who one talks to and how often affects language style, within the same social class.

Cheshire's (1978) study on the phonological variation of youngsters in Reading, England, concludes that it is complex social and personality factors such as how integrated one feels to the peer group that determines linguistic variation. Cheshire found that the social organization of the male and female peer groups led to differences in style. The boys formed hierarchical groups and were very involved in status negotiations within the group. Girls tended to pair off, as best friends, and were less involved in large group social dynamics. Her results are very similar to Goodwin's (1980) in Philadelphia.

Gal's (1978) study of linguistic change occurring in a bilingual community in Austria analyzed code differences rather than phonological variables and found gender was the relevant variable here too. She showed that women's social goals were leading them to speak German, whereas men's social needs kept them speaking the local dialect. Thus the different social needs and goals of men and women had linguistic ramifications.

Nichols' (1983) work in rural South Carolina also shows that when the social goals of males and females differ, their language forms differ. She found that the work women were doing encouraged more conformity to standard norms than the work of the men in the community. Nichols' results also supports Milroy's network analysis because she describes the male population as having a much denser network than the female.

Nichols points out that boys and girls at around ten years old are separated into distinct social groups. Until that age, they play together and their language characteristics are indistinguishable. However, when girls start doing female social things and boys start moving into the adult male world, language differences appear. This, says Nichols, is due to the different kinds of work women and men have access to and do in the community, and the different language demands that coincide with the work.

Nichols's work shares some of the ideas of Maltz and Borker.

The above studies show that linguistic variation reflects social and psychological information. In this study I propose to use discourse variation as an indicator of social information. Discourse strategies are not readily imposed on a standard-vernacular axis. I propose a comparable continuum where more or less use of a discourse function correlates with how comfortably integrated each speaker feels to the conversational group. Since my study involves a mixed-sex group of preadolescent, and I am examining variables that have been noted in the literature on language and gender differences, I will review Goodwin's and Maltz and Borker's work on sex differences in language use.

I.4.3. Goodwin and Maltz and Borker

Goodwin's (1980) work with Philadelphia working class black preadolescent shows that girls and boys have different discourse styles due to the different social organizations of the groups. Boys develop a hierarchical social structure which results in particular discourse styles. They have abrupt topic changes; they make accusations directly, they brag and use insults easily without hostility. Girls try to minimize status differentials and so do a great deal of negotiation. They build on each others' comments, do not

argue directly, and form private coalitions that are intricately reorganized over time.

Goodwin concludes that sex differences in language use occur because children play in same-sex peer groups and that the organization of the groups is quite different. The different social organization leads to doing different things with words.

Goodwin (and also Goodwin and Goodwin 1987) points out that each kind of speech event has its own language particularities. It makes no sense to make large sweeping generalizations of the language use of males and females out of context. Every speech event for every social group has its own context for analysis.

However, Maltz and Borker (1982) do generalize on Goodwin's research. Their work on male-female miscommunication addresses the issue of how communication problems arise. They suggest that children's conversational style has a great deal to do with adult miscommunication. Building on Gumperz's work on the different discourse styles of different ethnic groups (1982a, 1982b), they point out that since boys and girls play in almost exclusively same-sex peer groups for many years, each sex is, and should be considered, a distinct subcultural group. Basing their hypothesis on Goodwin's results, these researchers say that boys and girls develop different styles of conversational interaction and when, as adults, they begin to converse with

members of the opposite sex, they run into the same problems other subcultures encounter in trying to talk to one another - an inability to correctly identify each other's discourse signals.

For example they suggest that males and females might have a different interpretation of the meaning of the backchannel response "umhmm." Men may see this as a statement of agreement whereas women use this as a way of saying that they're attending to what's being said. If this is true, then women see men's lack of backchannel response as inattentiveness and men see women's use of it as constant agreement. Miscommunication results.

But the subcultural approach to male-female miscommunication does not take into account much of what has been claimed to be differences rooted in power and dominance issues of a patriarchal social structure. Most of the research on gender differences in language has dealt only with adult speech, from the top down as it were, claiming that men dominate and bully women in conversation as they do in other spheres of social interaction (Thorne and Henley 1975, Thorne, Kramarae and Henley 1983).

If Maltz and Borker are correct, then there should be quite noticeable discourse styles developed in boys and girls. They should, by playing in same sex peer groups, have communication difficulties when they speak together as children. Preadolescent speech, particularly mixed-sex

groups in friendly, casual speech around a dinner table, should expose these discourse differences. This study will address discourse differences in girls and boys mixed-sex conversations.

I.4.4. Gumperz's interactional approach to conversation

Gumperz has been at the forefront of efforts to develop a technique to analyze conversation. In his work on conversational interaction and sources of miscommunication (1982a), he insists that each conversation has to be seen as a specific interaction. Assertions of conversational principles cannot be applied from one set of circumstances to another. What is general, he says, is the method for interpreting what is going on in conversation. A successful conversation occurs when participants share not only code but interpretive strategies and contextual cues for determining what is meant by particular language forms in specific instances.

Gumperz has shown that even when people share the same language, unless they share the same interpretations of discourse strategies, like systems for signalling intent, identifying speech acts, and cues for inference, miscommunication will result. Successful conversation can be evaluated by judging if the response is appropriate to an interchange. If so, each conversationalist has interpreted

the contextual signals correctly. Successful communication, then, is determined by the appropriateness of the response.

Inference is at work constantly. The participants infer what is going on, that is, what kind of communicative activity are they engaged in. They have to infer what is required from them for the conversation to be successful. All the participants in a communicative event have to agree on what the event is - are they chatting, arguing, relaying information, telling a joke, getting to know each other. This information must be inferred from contextual cues (paralinguistic and prosodic) and from knowledge and experience, both social and linguistic.

Since conversation is interactive and social knowledge is being interpreted and reinterpreted as the conversation proceeds, Gumperz uses the concept of speech activity (following Levinson 1978) to describe how conversationalists negotiate their goals in time-bound actual interchanges. Speech activities not only describe what is going on (chatting about the weather, telling a joke), but also imply certain expectations about the linguistic form of the interchange. Speech activities function as guidelines to interpretation and intent, and help participants identify the goals to be shared in the communication. In chatting, for instance, topics can change frequently; in a lecture, however, the topic is more highly constrained. It is through the identification of specific

speech activities that social knowledge is used for interpretation. Speech activities are identified as a function of ethnic and communicative background.

Each conversation has to be looked at as a specific social interchange among particular people who have particular social strategies and communicative techniques. The social community of the participants has to be understood as well as the social context of the interaction. If there are any differences in the discourse characteristics of the speakers, the relevant variables have to be sought within the particular sociolinguistic community. Gumperz relies on ethnic background to establish speech norms. An Indian speaker of English has different contextualization cues and interpretive strategies than a West Indian or Jamaican speaker.

But different norms can define small social groups as well. These children, especially David, Dara, and Stephanie, share interpretive strategies and linguistic and social background. Yet subtle differences in discourse style among the participants lead to different degrees of conversational success or failure, depending on the social makeup of the group. Conversational norms and expectations must be shared for the most successful interactions, but in addition, there must also be a willingness on the part of the participants to join someone else's norms.

Gumperz assumes that if the speech activity is identified correctly, all the participants will be equally committed to its success. However, as will be seen in C2, a conversation with David, Dara, Stephanie, and Max, this is not always the case. Speakers, if their goal is something other than successful communication, can refuse to engage in the appropriate response. It is my contention that this willingness to participate in another's norms serves as a marker of friendship and intimacy. Successful interaction occurs when participants modify their style to others in the group. Unsuccessful interaction occurs when participants do not or can not engage in the others' norms.

In the next chapter I will show how the boys and girls used topic introduction differently across conversations. Several conversations with the same participants will be analyzed and discussed. It will be argued that the social makeup of the group determines variation in discourse style. In Chapter 3 I will show how interruption patterns also vary according to the group makeup. It will be claimed that the children do not use an idiosyncratic style, but that they vary their style as the social demands of the situation change. In Chapter 4 the implications of the discourse variation seen in Chapters 2 and 3 will be discussed. Through the children's evaluations of these dinners, discourse variation will be shown to serve as an index to

social comfort and discomfort. The final chapter will review the most important conclusions of the study and suggest work for future research.

Notes

1. Basil Bernstein (1972) comments on how members of the same family use a "restricted code" because they can rely on shared experiences, but must use a more "elaborated" code with strangers.

2. At the time of the taping, David has been in boarding school for one term. His conversational habits have not undergone any significant change.

3. David and his friends never chat on the telephone. They call each other to make appointments, but rarely talk for more than a few minutes. Dara spends up to half an hour on a call with a friend.

II. TOPIC

In this chapter I will propose a definition of topic introduction and uptake that will enable me to count how many successful topics are introduced by each of the participants. I will examine in some detail the dinner conversations of David, Dara, and Stephanie, with a good friend, Adam (C1), and a very casual friend, Max (C2). The differences in the social relationship of the members of the group will be shown to be reflected in the variation of the discourse strategies of the constant members of the group.

To confirm that social business is being enacted anew with each conversation and is characterized through discourse functions, I will look at the numbers of topics introduced in another conversation with a good friend of Dara's, Sarah, and a good friend of David's, Jihad (C3). As a comparison, I will then examine how Dara and David, in particular, vary their style when Sarah is not part of the group, but Jihad is (C4).

To address some of the issues that arise about gender differences in the strategies of introducing topics, I will lastly examine an all-girl group, Dara and two casual friends, Ellie and Jane (C5), to see how the makeup of the group affects Dara's style. I will conclude with some of the

implications that arise from the analyses of these conversations.

II.1. Theoretical issues

Defining "topic" is problematic. Keenan and Schieffelin (1983) put forth a cogent definition in their discussion of how children manage discourse topics. They say topic is "the proposition (or set of propositions) about which the speaker is either providing or requesting new information" (68). They stress how important shared background is in the establishment of topic for children (also Garfinkel 1967). Camaioni (1979) points out that if children come from different sociocultural backgrounds, their conversational interaction will be difficult and problematic.

These researchers in child development have come to exactly the same conclusion as Gumperz: shared linguistic and sociocultural background is fundamental to successful communication.

One of the issues that is being addressed in the current study is the shared background of girls and boys. The work of Goodwin and Maltz and Borker, discussed in the previous chapter, suggest that different peer relationships might lead to different styles of discourse management.

II.1.1 Fishman

Research in the literature of adult conversation has claimed that males and females do have different strategies. Fishman's work on topic introduction and uptake (1978, 1983), based on the tape recorded conversations of three white, middle-class, professional, married couples is certainly the most often cited. Since her adult group seems not dissimilar to the children in this study, at least in size and background, her results are of interest.

She found that women raised many more topics than men. Of the 47 topics raised by women, only 17 were successful, that is, responded to. Of the 28 topics raised by men, all but one was responded to. She defines topic initiation as an utterance that has "a different subject from the utterance preceding it" (1983:96). She concludes that men control when, how, and what happens in conversation, and they ignore women's attempts to raise topics. Women, according to her, work much harder to make conversation happen.

Every remark, Fishman points out, is dependent on the hearer's willingness to engage and interact with the speaker. The great disparity she finds between women and men in the area of topic is, she believes, a microcosm of the larger power inequities between the sexes. Men deny women their conversational rights. Women do the "shitwork" of

conversation as they do the menial tasks in other areas of life. 1

There are some problems in Fishman's discussion of gender differences in topic introduction. The sample is very small and her results should not be generalized to male and female speech styles. The language norms of the particular speech community she investigated and the conversational background of the couples are not described. The participants were aware of the tape recorder, and although they said they forgot about it (to the point of one couple starting to make love with it on), it is difficult to assess the effect their knowledge had on the naturalness of their speech. Also, they were able to turn the tape on and off at will. Finally, the power and dominance issues that Fishman concludes are the controlling variables for topic introduction may be the result of her ideological position and not really the outgrowth of her analysis.

But even allowing for the possibility of other interpretations to her data, her results are striking. The great disparity she found between the numbers of topics raised by adult females and males has to be accounted for somehow. If women are doing "women's work" in conversation with regard to raising topics, will girls do the same thing - raise many more topics than boys and have many more failures of uptake? Preadolescent girls and boys are so involved with their sex role identity that it seems possible

to find a reflection of adult gender-linked speech characteristics.

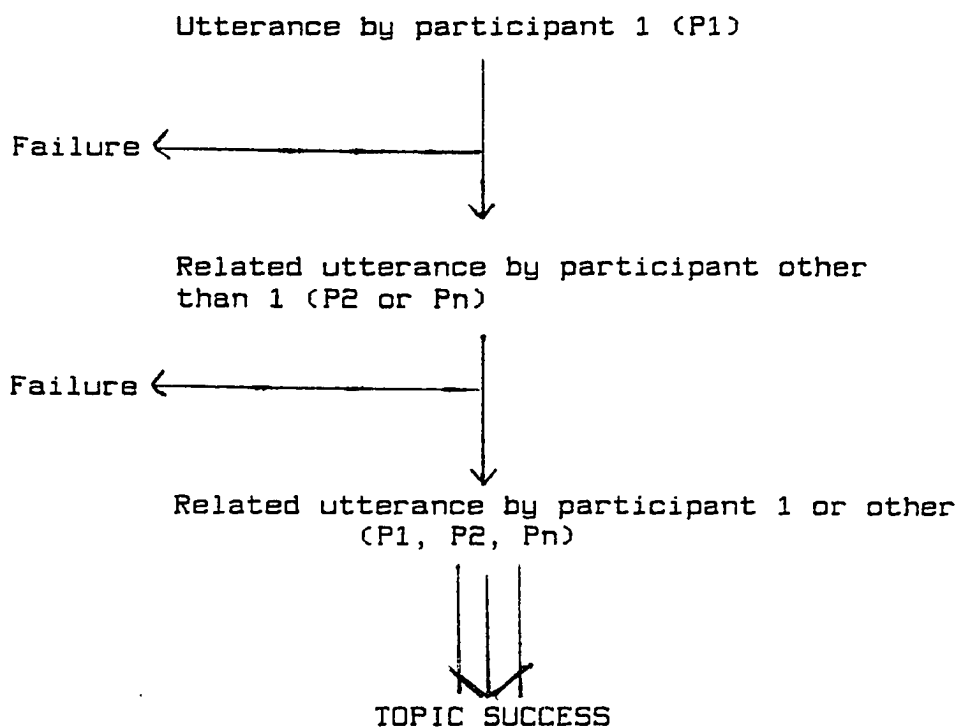
II.1.2. Defining topic introduction and uptake

In order to discuss and count who introduces topic in the dinner conversations of the subjects of this study, some definition, even an arbitrary one, is necessary. Topic is generally understood to be what is being talked about (Tannen Forthcoming; Scheffrin 1987; Wardhaugh 1986). But if one wants to count the number of topics, an operational definition is useful. Since I am interested in comparing speakers, not discussing topic as a complex discourse variable, a simple mechanical formulation will serve the purpose.

I propose that a topic be considered as introduced successfully if there is uptake. Topic success is defined as an utterance that is followed by two utterances that are related by meaning to the initial utterance. Children introduce and change topics frequently: a subject that is responded to in two (2) subsequent turns seems more focused and attended to than a simple statement-response pair. My definition stresses the interaction of the participants. Topic success, in this formulation, is an utterance that must generate a reaction for at least the space of two turns. A turn may be a minimal response, or it may be

laughter. The initial speaker can be responsible for the second response, but not the first.

Schematically, topic success is:



(Figure II.1)

According to this definition, an interchange like:

Pass the salt. (P1)
Here. (P2)

would not be counted as a topic, but

Pass the salt. (P1)
Here. (P2)
It stinks without salt. (P1 or Pn)

would be.

Even this mechanical definition is full of problems. How can one know that an utterance is "related to" a previous one? And is my perception the same as the children's? Yet in order to compare participants' use of this discourse variable, there has to be a countable measure. An example from the transcripts illustrates what was considered to be topic introduction and what was not.

The following interchange occurs toward the beginning of a dinner with David, Dara, Stephanie, and David's friend Adam (C1). The children are serving themselves, there is simultaneous talk, no one voice can be heard above the others. There's laughter. Stephanie gets the attention of the others.

(1) Steph (referring to the baked potato on her plate): It's like an eggplant. Have you ever noticed - eggplants, when you hit them, they go boom, boom. They make a hollow sound.

David (in a voice that sounds fancy): I don't see why anyone would care to eat an eggplant...except you.

Steph: I never eat eggplants. I just knock on them.

Laughter.

In this exchange, "eggplant" is introduced in the first utterance and is then used again in the two subsequent ones. The repetition of the word relates the utterances to each other.

Following the laughter, Dara says,

(2) Dara: Yeah. I make kluskies (shredded stuff).

Then there is a slight pause. Next,

(3) David: You know what else I do?

Dara: Don't mention it.

Examples (2) and (3) would not be counted as topic introductions because there are not two related turns following. I suppose it could be argued that the big topic under discussion is something like "things to do with food," but since we are really comparing styles of topic introduction and uptake, only specifically related turns will be counted.

Topic failure is also very tricky to define. I counted as topic failure only those initial utterances that required a response and failed to get one. For instance, "Ya know what?" is an attempt to introduce a topic. If such a remark was not reacted to, in two turns, it was considered a failure. Expressions like, "It was sooo funny" seem to be looking for a response also. If there was no uptake, it was considered a failure.

For the purposes of this study, which focuses on WHO introduces HOW MANY topics, no distinction is made between

topics that reflect the immediate situation (e.g. about food) or those more abstract from the immediate situation (e.g. a movie). For counting and comparing purposes, the actual subject of the interchange is irrelevant.

II.2. C1: Adam, David, Dara, Stephanie

The first taped conversation (C1) was at dinnertime with David, Dara, Stephanie, and Adam (see Participants). The general tone of the 34-minute meal was one of hilarity. There was a great deal of laughter, giggling, noisemaking, singing, and funny voices. The mood is very happy, the tone of the talk raucous, and the goal of the interchanges seemed to be one of amusement. The children were trying to make each other laugh. A typical topic introduction would be, "it was soooo funny...."

II.2.1. Data

The number of topics introduced by each child was:

Adam: 9
David: 9
Dara: 8
Stephanie: 9

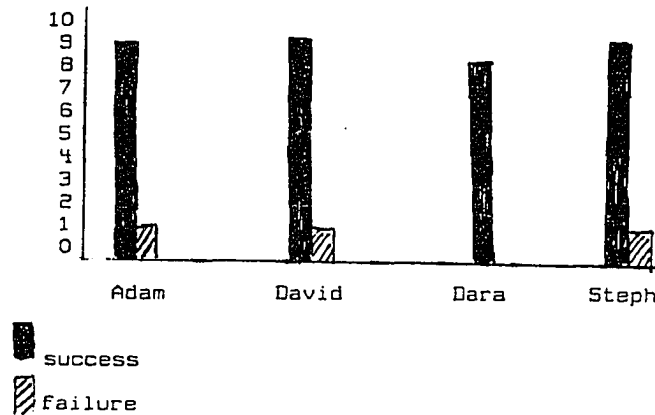
Stephanie, Adam, and David each had one topic failure.

(See Figure II.2)

Topic Introduction in C1

(Figure II.2)

of topics



To get a sense of the kinds of topics introduced and as examples of what was considered topic and uptake, I will give examples from the transcript.

Dara has been singing, when David introduces a new topic:

- (4)
1. David (to Adam): Jihad is so like funny. I like Jihad. You should meet Jihad.
 2. Dara: He's gross. Adam, you would not like Jihad.
 3. David: Oh, he would like Jihad. Jihad is hysterically funny.

David introduces this topic without any apparent connection to what was going on previously. The two-turn response is connected through "Jihad." After this small interchange, Dara resumes her song.

connected through "Jihad." After this small interchange, Dara resumes her song.

Another instance of topic introduction occurred when Stephanie began singing:

- (5) 1. Steph (singing): Monday potatoes,
Tuesday potatoes, Wednesday
and Thursday potatoes. Friday
again there's potatoes.
Saturday's special, there's potato kugel,
Sunday again
there's potatoes.
2. Dara (joining the song): Sunday again
there's potatoes.
3. David: Oh, will you shut up with potatoes!
4. Dara: It's a song.
5. Steph (singing): Saturday's special
there is baked potatoes.
6. Dara (singing): Sunday, again there's
potatoes.
7. Adam: Where'd you hear the song?
8. Dara: Hebrew school.
- Laughter and pause.

I counted this interchange as one topic, credited to Stephanie. She began to sing with no apparent connection to what was going on previously. In fact, there was a short pause before she began. Dara's uptake of the song was clearly related to Stephanie's utterance, and David's reaction of "shut up with potatoes" was also directly related by the use of "potatoes" to Stephanie too. It may be

argued that when Adam asks where they learned the song (7), a new topic is introduced, but I felt it was so tied into the preceding utterances that the topic wasn't closed until the laughter and pause.

Comparing the numbers of topics introduced yields very different results than Fishman's. In this conversation the 2 girls and 2 boys introduce virtually the same number of topics, and the girls certainly do not have more instances of topic failure than the boys. Gender differences on number of topics introduced are not found.

II.2.2. Discussion

It is my contention that any "explanation" of these results would be premature. Until the same children can be observed in other contexts, we have no way to judge if this is "typical" of their style. At this point, only tentative suggestions can be made.

These results could be completely idiosyncratic to this particular group in this situation and should not be considered typical of girl-boy interactions. Or, unlikely but possibly, this age group, 11 and 12 year olds, may be too young to be involved in the kind of sexual power and dominance issues that Fishman finds revealed. Perhaps issues of inequality between the sexes do not pertain to family relationships, and this group is like a family. Or, if

sexual politics are going on, it is not reflected in this kind of discourse strategy.

These numbers can also be interpreted as a reflection of the way these children feel about each other, and may illustrate how they take care of each other. The four children feel themselves to be social equals; they like each other. By allowing each member of the group to raise topics and by responding to each other's topics, they were taking care of each other conversationally. No one person was ignored or left out of the interaction. No one was monopolizing the talk. There was equality and balance in their interaction. For this particular social group, equality in the numbers of topics introduced may represent a caring, close family style.

Whatever the explanation, gender of speaker does not seem to be the distinguishing variable. The data show that there are at least some instances of conversation where boys and girls use discourse functions the same way. Feelings of intimacy, familiarity, and affection might account for the equality observed in this particular interchange.

II.3. C2: Max, David, Dara, Stephanie

The second taped conversation (C2) with Max was quite different, although three of the four children were the same. David had not seen him for almost 6 months and invited him to "eat over." Max is not an intimate friend. Dinner

lasted 25 minutes. There was much less laughter and general silliness in this interaction. There was no singing, or vulgar, scatological jokes. Max is not an intimate friend.

The setting was identical with the dinner with Adam (C1). The gender balance, 2 girls, 2 boys, also was the same. The family to nonfamily ratio was also the same as in C1.

II.3.1. Data

Although so many of the variables are similar to the dinner with Adam, there is a completely different pattern of numbers of topics introduced: (See Figure II.3)

Max: 10

David: 3

Dara: 2

Stephanie: 3

David and Dara each had one failure.

Two results are immediately obvious: the disparity in topic introduction among the children, and the differences between C2 and C1. Since the only variation between C2 and C1 is in the participants, it must be the makeup of the group that accounts for the difference. The three family members are relatively balanced as to topic introduction. The nonfamily member, Max, does not conform to the other members of the group.

Topic Introduction in C2

(Figure II.3)



II.3.2. Discussion

This social occasion was uncomfortable for the children. David said to Max, "You don't seem to be having fun." Dara was aware that Max was "mad" at them. Max said, "It used to be fun here. You guys didn't beat up on me." The first few minutes of the dinner established the tone of the conversation for the duration of the meal.

The children are passing food around from platters. Dara is coughing; Max is playing with the telephone on a nearby counter. There is low muttering that is indecipherable on the recording.

Stephanie begins the conversation:

- (6) 1. Steph (complaining): There wasn't any potatoes in this pirogen.

2. Max (sarcastic): Oh, come on - a hollow pirogen - I really doubt it.
3. Dara: It's mixed in with the dough, Stephanie.
4. Steph: Oh.
5. Dara: Yes there is.
6. David: Not in mine.
7. Max: There's tons of potatoes.
8. Dara: Yeah, look it.
9. David: There's not in one of mine.
10. Max: (sarcastic): This is why we need a big sour cream bowl, so I get aggravated. This reminds me of that stupid thing in the Munster Show.
11. Dara: Whaat?
12. Max: You guys don't watch any TV at all! Don't you know anything about current events?
13. Steph: Yes, we know lots about current events.
14. Max: Okay, do you know what (and he goes on to pose questions about the upcoming Presidential race).

We can see, looking at this initial interchange about the missing potatoes in the pirogen, that Max's style is at odds with the others. His intonation is sarcastic from his first comment (2). He "really doubts" Stephanie's claim. Dara, I think sensing that Stephanie might be put off by Max's comment, offers her sister a less contentious response.

Then Dara discovers there are potatoes in hers (5) and David comments that, like Stephanie, there are none in his

(6). Max takes issue with him (and by extension Stephanie) saying there are "tons of potatoes" in his (7). Dara is with Max (8); David becomes very precise and accurate (perhaps as a reaction to Max's hyperbolic "tons"); in "one" of his, he can't find any potatoes (9).

From what Max says next about the sour cream bowl, we can infer that he was reaching for it or serving himself from it. He once again adopts a sarcastic intonation and says that he is getting "aggravated" (10). He introduces a new topic about the Munster Show (10). Dara responds to him, but she has no idea what he's talking about (11).

Max refers to them as "you guys," and distances himself from the group. They don't watch TV (12). His next comment about "current events" is meant to be a joke. Max is smart: he knows that the Munster Show has little to do with current events. But Stephanie doesn't see the humor; in fact, she responds as if to a challenge (13). Max then begins asking testlike questions to the group and they continue to have more trouble.

Max seems to be taking on the others, both with his tone and his comments. The numbers of topics introduced reflect this. Max has a great many more than the other three, and the three family members have similar amounts.

There are several possibilities for how to interpret this inequality of number of topics introduced. The most obvious is that Max, as an outsider, is really unfamiliar

with the group socially and conversationally and is thus clumsy about integrating himself. Or, his personal conversational style is very different from theirs, more sarcastic, "cooler." It is possible that in his peer group Max's style is typical.

Still another interpretation is that he is more mature than the others and is involved in adopting a more aggressive male speech style. He is perhaps reacting to the mixed-sex makeup of the group and trying to act like a "boy." Also, it is possible that he's just a conversational bully, who likes to control the flow of talk (Fishman 1983).

Another way to look at this information is from the point of view of the family members. Perhaps the other three children are trying to make him feel welcome - he is a guest in their home - and are deferring to him and responding to his remarks (which would increase the amount of topics counted for him).

Probably some combination of these interpretations is correct. However, once again gender does not seem to be the determining variable. Whichever way one interprets these results, it is obvious that a formulation like "boys bully girls" conversationally doesn't account fully for what's going on, particularly if the two dinner conversations are compared.

II.4. C1 and C2 Compared

Since the group dynamics seem to be the relevant factor in the number of topic introductions, it seems worthwhile to examine each conversational group closely. If we can pinpoint the difference in either the attitude of the participants toward each other or toward the conversation, it might be helpful in understanding why the number of topics should be so different.

Happily, there is a point of comparison for the two conversations. Dara and Stephanie have a routine that Dara offers to both Adam and Max. The girls adopt a particular voice which they consider "fancy." Dara sets Stephanie up to introduce herself as Betty; her last name is a tongue twister: Bettybitabitofbitterbutter.... The speed at which Stephanie can articulate this and the incongruity of the dramatics, a fancy woman with a tongue twister for a last name, make the girls laugh. Adam and Max react quite differently.

II.4.1. "Betty" routine for Adam, C1

This interaction takes place about 15 minutes into the dinner. Dara and Stephanie have been singing a song about potatoes that they both know.

- (7) 1. David (his mouth full of potatoes, and in a barely audible voice): "Betty."
2. Dara: What?
3. David (more clearly): Betty.

4. Dara: Okay. Watch this, Adam.
5. Stephanie is pretending to be our piano teacher, named Betty Rosenblum. I'm pretending not to know her last name.
6. David: Did you call her up?
7. Steph: Yup.
8. David (in a funny voice, as if he is pinching his nose): Did you say, are you Betty?
9. Dara: Okay, Adam. Watch.
(There's some noise from the others.)
10. Dara: Watch.
11. David: Look, Adam. Watch.
12. Steph: Waaaatch!
13. Dara (in funny voice): Excuse me, miss. Are you Betty?
14. Steph (in falsetto): Yeeees.
15. Dara (in same funny voice): Betty, who?
16. Steph (very rapidly): Bettybitabitofbitterbutter...
17. Dara (laughing): Her lips are moving faster than the words are coming out.

Everyone laughs.

When David initially says "Betty" without any other explanation, Dara knows exactly what he's taking about. So does Stephanie. People who have much conversational interaction take these kinds of shortcuts. Adam must be aware that they are talking about something that they share as a group and that he doesn't.

The verbal routine itself, for these children, functions as a joke, that is, a formulated speech event with specific voices and characteristics, with a clearly announced beginning ("...pretend..") and end (laughter) whose purpose is to amuse listeners.

Dara sets up the routine for Adam, the outsider. She says "pretending" twice (line 5). This explicit statement of what she is doing is, I believe, characteristic of children's speech and not of adults'. Children, even preadolescent children, discriminate explicitly between real and pretend.

It is obvious that the three family members are familiar with this routine and they are trying to enlist Adam's attention and interest. They each say, "watch" (9, 10, 11, 12). "Watch" evidently means pay attention, listen. Adam has given no verbal response to Dara's initial "watch" so perhaps the others aren't sure of his attention. That they each use the same word aligns them as a group. I'm not sure what a verbal response to "watch" is supposed to be, but evidently Adam is not signalling attention. All three call for his attention before the routine begins. The routine is signalled by the funny voices.

Adam's response of laughter, joining in with the others, is the appropriate and looked-for response, and the conversation moves on to another topic. Adam's willingness to do his part, to laugh, incorporates him into the group.

He has interpreted the goal of the speech event correctly; the conversational interaction is, for everyone, successful.

II.4.2. "Betty" routine for Max, C2

However, when Dara tries to do the same routine for Max, she is met with an entirely different response. Max and Dara were not able to converse happily. The "Betty" routine affords a glimpse of some of the problems the children had with each other.

This conversation occurs about 5 minutes into the dinner. The interchanges up to this point have not been smooth. The four children have been talking about current events, a topic introduced by Max. Max has been telling the others that his family is "best friends" with Olympia Dukakis.

- (8)
1. Dara: How do you know Damon (Dukakis)?
You're not in the same school.
 2. Max: I'm sorry. From now on I'll transfer
to Glenfield (the name of Dara's
school) so I can be in the same
school as Damon.
 3. Dara: I was wondering...it didn't seem
like=
 4. Max: =I didn't know it was a rule. From now
on I'll remember I can't be friends
with someone who doesn't go to my
school.
 5. Dara: No, it's just=
 6. Max (in mock anger): =I hate you, David!
I'm leaving.

7. Steph laughs.

8. David: I know why you hate me but I don't care to say why.

This interchange illustrates the kinds of problems Max and Dara are having. He is coming on very strong. She is not able to combat his style with one of her own. In 3 and 5 she can't even finish what she is trying to say. Max's "I'm sorry" and "I didn't know it was a rule" that he could only be friends with those people in his school is much more intense, I think, than Dara has bargained for. When he yells, "I hate you, David" (6), he is reminding the others that he is friends with David and they don't go to the same school. Thus, Dara's remark about how he knew someone in her school evoked in Max a somewhat belligerent response.

David knows Max has been kidding when he said he "hated" him, but evidently he feels that Max is not being friendly. His comment that he knows why Max hates him is brushed off by all of them, but the aftertaste is still unpleasant. Right after the above exchange Max begins coughing very loudly and in dramatic fashion. Stephanie has told him to cover his mouth.

Dara, in the Betty voice, unconnected to what has been going on previously in the dinner, looks at Stephanie and says:

- (9)
1. Dara: Betty what?
 2. Steph (in her Betty voice): Betty Bup.
 3. Steph giggles.
 4. Dara: I hear Mrs. Rosenblum.
 5. Max: Sooooo?
 6. Dara: Are you Betty?
 7. Max (returning to previous topic): Do you know what, uh, whatever his name is Dukakasises...
 8. Dara (repeating words Max has used to her before): But that's not half as important as who..
 9. Max: =Katie
 10. Dara: That's not half as important as uh who dropped out of ...
 11. Max: =I know that too.
 12. Dara: So why did you say "more importantly"?
 13. Max: Because it is more important.
 14. Steph: To Dukakis maybe.
 15. Max: I told you, they dropped out of the race. Who cares about them any more?
 16. Dara: It's important to know who was in it.
 17. Steph: It's more important to Dukakis who's who...
 18. Max: =What? You're afraid I'm gonna vote for someone who dropped out or something.
 19. Dara (screechy): Nooo. I don't vote. I'm sorry. I'm not eighteen yet but ...
 20. Max: =You look it.

21. Dara: Ah. Thank you. That is the highest compliment. I look more like it than...
22. Max: -Yeah, actually.
23. Steph: There's a nice relation going between six and eighteen.
24. Dara (funny voice): Yes. Six times three. Ya know and uh, uh-
25. Dara: Stephanie, do it.
26. Max: It used to be fun here. You guys didn't beat up on me.
27. Dara: Stephanie, come on. Before he gets mad at us.
28. David (in a special voice of another routine): Come on. Don't be such a stupid idiot.
29. Dara: Listen to this. Max, listen.
30. Dara (in Betty voice): Stephanie, are you Betty?
31. Steph: I am not Betty.
32. Dara: Stephanie. Do it!
33. David: No. Come on. Do it, Steph.
34. Steph: You say to me: "Stephanie, are you Betty?"
35. Dara (in Betty voice): Ste- No. Are you Betty?
36. Steph (in Betty voice): No.
37. Dara: Stephanie, do it.
38. Steph: No.
39. Dara: Come on.
40. Steph: No.
41. Dara (whining): Stephanie.

42. David: It's so funny, Steph.
43. Dara: It's sooo funny. Listen...
44. Steph: All right. All right.
45. Dara: All right.
46. Dara: Watch this.
47. Max: Is it as funny as a...
48. David laughs.
49. Dara: Our piano teacher is named Betty Rosenblum. She's an idiot. She's prim and proper. So I go (in Betty voice), Excuse me, are you Betty?
50. Steph (in a voice from yet another routine): Yes.
51. Dara: Stephanie, don't talk like Clu.
52. Steph: Oh, yes.
53. Dara (in Betty voice): Betty who?
54. Steph (in Betty voice): Bettybitabitofbitterbutterbut..
55. David, Dara, and Stephanie laugh.
56. Max: Whaaaat?
57. David, Dara and Stephanie laugh hysterically.
58. Dara: I said, Betty who, like you say Betty Cohen. Then she says, Bettybitabitofbitter...
59. David: [Did anyone eat from this yet?
60. Max: No. Actually, what I was going to say was can I try that soup? It looks quite good.
61. Dara: Listen, listen, listen, listen.
62. Max: Say it in slow motion, okay?

63. Steph: Betty bought a bit of bitter butter and she said this butter's bitter. If I put it in my batter, it will make my batter bitter. So Betty bought a bit of better butter to...
64. Dara: [You never heard that before?
65. Max: No. Never.
66. Dara: Max, seriously?
67. Max: Seriously.
68. Dara: It's like the famous to-
69. Steph: -tongue twister.
70. Max: No. The famous tongue twister is: Peterpiperpicked..
71. Dara: [Same thing. It's like that. It's like that one.
72. Max: You keep interrupting me.
73. Dara: It's like saying...It's like saying, Peter Who? Peter piper picked....It's like her last name.
74. Max: It doesn't make any sense at all.
75. Dara: It's funny.
76. Max: What is Peter? Who is anything?
77. David and Steph laugh.
78. Dara: Listen to this. We'll do it in slow motion. Come on. Watch.
79. David laughs hysterically.
80. Dara: David, shut up!
81. David laughs.
82. Max: Stephanie who?
83. Dara: Stephanie, just Stephanie.
84. Dara, David, and Stephanie laugh.

85. Dara: Stephanie is pretending to be our piano teacher, Betty Rosenblum and I'm pretending to be someone who doesn't know her last name. So I say (in Betty voice): Excuse me. Are you Betty?
86. Steph: Yes.
87. Dara (in Betty voice): Betty who?
88. Max: But if you don't know who she is, how are you asking her name?
89. Steph: Maybe I have a nameplate on me that says "Betty".
90. Max: Okay.
91. Dara: Okay. Watch.
92. Dara (in Betty voice): Excuse me. Are you Betty?
93. Steph (in Betty voice): Yees.
94. Dara (in Betty voice): Betty who?
95. Steph: It's no fun in slow motion.
96. David: It's not good in slow motion.
97. Dara: Okay. Are you Betty?
98. Steph: Yes.
99. Dara: Betty who?
100. Steph: Bettyboughtabitofbitterbutterbut
101. Dara laughs.
102. David (laughing): I love it.
103. Dara (in Betty voice): I thought you were Betty Rosenblum.
104. Steph: No. That's my sister.
105. (pause)
106. Dara: Do you get it?

107. Max:(fake loud laughter) Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!
Ha!

108. Steph laughs.

109 David: Max, you don't seem to be
enjoying=

110. Max: =Oh, it's real fun.

The failure of this routine is in contrast with its success in the dinner with Adam. A close analysis reveals how this group is having trouble interacting. In line 5 Max interrupts the "Betty" routine. Dara's new voice has not signalled for him that a joke is in progress or, if it has, he is not interested in letting Dara get on with it. Dara tries to pursue the fun, reintroducing "Betty" (line 6) but Max introduces a new topic. They begin to spar.

Max asks a question to which he knows the answer. This testlike question is directed to Dara, as a kind of challenge. Dara tries to one-up him, saying "it's not as important ..." (8). Max continues as if Dara has never spoken (9), interrupting her with the answer to his question, "Katie." Dara tries to return to where she was and gets father along in her sentence before Max interrupts her to say he knows the answer to her question (which was unasked) as well as to his own.

"I know that too" (11).

When Dara and Max disagree about the importance of knowing who dropped out of the Presidential race, Stephanie says that Dara is right (17). Max takes issue with them, sarcastically asking if they're afraid he'll vote for someone who isn't running (18). Dara becomes upset. Her voice becomes high-pitched and whiney. ² She tells Max she's not eighteen and he interrupts her and personalizes the conflict, "You look it" (20). Dara twists Max's remark into a mock compliment, "Ah, thank you" (21).

Stephanie tries to redirect the exchange, saying something about the number "eighteen" (23). Dara moves into her "fun" voice, responding to Stephanie's attempt at silliness (24). Dara asks Steph to "do it" which refers to the Betty routine. Since the routine is a family routine, moving into it now will align her with her siblings and remove Max from the interaction.

Dara makes the assumption, correctly, that Stephanie knows what she wants. This is very in-group language.

Max at this point says he's feeling abused, "It used to be fun here. You guys didn't beat up on me" (26). Once again Max sees the others as a group to which he doesn't belong, "you guys." He is not feeling good about the interaction either. I'm not sure why he feels attacked, "beat up" at this point. Perhaps he feels shut out of their routine.

Dara correctly interprets what's going on, Max is getting "mad" at them (27). She is hoping that a funny

routine at this point will change that. Significantly, Dara has incorporated the others, especially Stephanie, in Max's antagonism, "before he gets mad at us," although she was the only one to be actively engaged with him.

At this point, 28 lines after the beginning of this exchange, David joins in. Max is his friend and his guest; he has been uncharacteristically quiet. Here, he joins with Dara to ask Steph to do the routine.

Stephanie, however, is reluctant to perform. Perhaps she senses a hostile audience in Max or feels the timing is wrong for the introduction of the joke. She feels less pressure to entertain Max in this way. I think she feels that Max may be critical, as he was with Dara. It takes 14 tries (from line 30 to 44) for David and Dara to convince Stephanie to get on with it. Max is informed that something "funny" is to follow (42, 43). Dara goes into her part, Stephanie does hers. The three family members laugh (55).

But Max doesn't participate in the joke; he says he doesn't understand it, "What?" (56). Either he really doesn't understand what's funny, or he is holding himself aloof from the game, making himself an outsider for other reasons.

Dara tries to reclaim Max's attention from the food: "listen, listen, listen listen" (61). Max agrees he will attend to her (62). Stephanie replays her part in slow

speed. Max again doesn't react. Dara can't believe it, "You never heard that before" (64) and attempts to explain the joke. Max still doesn't participate and in fact says that he knows a better tongue twister, "Peterpiperpicked..."(70). When Dara interrupts him to continue her explanation (71), Max protests that she "keeps" interrupting him (72), although this is the first instance. (This interchange will be discussed in Chapter III on interruption.)

Max insists that he doesn't understand what's required of him - to find the routine funny "because it doesn't make sense" (74). But since it's been made explicit that it is "funny" and "pretend," he might be indicating here a desire not to participate, at least, not their way.

When Max says, "who is anything!" (76), David and Stephanie start laughing. I think they are laughing at what they see to be Max's version of the fun, i.e., not understanding. David keeps laughing at Max's mock-frustration. I think David sees the silliness of Dara's continued attempt to have Max do what she wants, laugh, when Max is clearly not willing or able to do so.

Dara introduces the routine again (85), saying that it involves "pretend" two times. Max interrupts the routine with a question that shows he's not really willing to "pretend." "But if you don't know who she is, how are you asking her name" (88). Stephanie offers him what he seems to

require, a rational, if silly, explanation, "maybe I have a nameplate" (89) and he agrees to let Dara proceed. "Okay."

In 92, Dara starts yet again, in slow motion so that Max will understand, but David and Stephanie complain that she is taking the joke away and it is "no fun" trying to do it like that. Dara tries again and the girls laugh (97). Max doesn't react; there is a pause (105). Dara questions his lack of response, "Do you get it" (106) and then Max offers a clearly fake laugh. His fake laughter indicates that he knows perfectly well what the others want and expect from him. The fakeness of his response indicates that he is not willing to participate in the game.

David quite accurately articulates the unspoken affect, "You don't seem to be enjoying..." (109), and Max sarcastically says that he finds the interaction "real fun" (110).

Max was not willing to engage in their in-group routine. He made it as difficult as possible for them. Their fun was not his fun. Gumperz (1982) says that successful communication depends on the joint interpretation of what is going on in the conversation. Here, Max knows what is going on. Dara is trying to amuse him. It's not a question of not understanding, but of not being willing to join in.

This seems to me to be what people talk about when they say that someone was giving them "a hard time" in an interchange. Not only do participants in an interchange have

to recognize what is going on conversationally, they have to be willing to participate in what is going on.

Dara, also, was not willing to let the routine drop when it must have been obvious to her that success was not going to come easily. She was hoping to defuse an awkward situation with laughter. She doesn't want Max to be mad (27). The routine functions, for Dara, to lighten the tone of the interchange. If everyone is laughing, then everyone is friends. Either this kind of conversational principle doesn't seem to be true of Max's style, or he doesn't want to be friends.

It may also be that Max doesn't want to take a back seat in the conversation; his large number of topic introductions suggest that he wants to lead the conversation. In the Betty routine, in which he has been cast as the audience, he asserts himself frequently - unlike Adam.

II.4.3. Discussion of "Betty" routine

To David, Dara, and Stephanie, a good time is laughing. Adam seemed to agree and was willing to join in. They shared a common conversational goal. However, Max is not willing to join in. He is, and seems to make himself, conversationally an outsider. He wants to be the star, not the audience. He wants to lead the conversation, not be an equal participant. In this interchange, he can't. But overall, he did. He controlled most of the talk by

controlling most of the topics. This dinner was not a successful one; it was, according to the three family members, not fun. After this dinner, Dara said that Max was a "boring pig" and she didn't want to see him again.

Another way to account for these data is to relate topic control to the psychosocial makeup of the interactants in the group. The social psychologists of language (Giles, Robinson and Smith 1980; Thakerar 1982) claim language as a badge of self- and group identification. When conversationalists want to signal solidarity, they accommodate their language so that it approaches the language of others in the group. This can refer to discourse style as well as vocabulary and syntax. A group shares criteria for finding the same jokes funny.

The members of C1 function as a group. When the members of the group feel socially comfortable, secure in their friendship, as with Adam, numbers of topics introduced are relatively equal. The members of C2, with Max do not function successfully as a group, whether from lack of experience or lack of desire is not clear. Max's style is not compatible with those of the other group members. Had he been more eager to please, to be within the group, he may have joined in and not held himself apart.

II.5. C3: Jihad, Sarah, David, Dara and Stephanie

Since I am suggesting that discourse functions like topic introduction and uptake be examined for the same speakers across similar kinds of conversations to see how variation indicates social information about the group, the more instances of conversation looked at, the more information disclosed. In the next section, I will look at more conversations with some of the same speakers and look for possible gender differences in discourse strategies.

The third taped conversation (C3) includes Jihad, Sarah, David, Dara, Stephanie. Sarah is a good friend of Dara's; Jihad, a good friend of David's. They have each been invited to "sleep over." The five children have never been together as a group.

Dinner conversation was light and happy. There was a lot of laughter, funny voices, funny noises, exclamations. There were many instances of joint development of topic. 3 Someone would say a few words and someone else would expand it into a topic. The number of topics introduced in C3 reveal yet another pattern and suggest other group dynamics.

II.5.1. Data

The number of topics introduced were:

Jihad: 11

Sarah: 1

David: 8

Dara: 13

Steph: 9

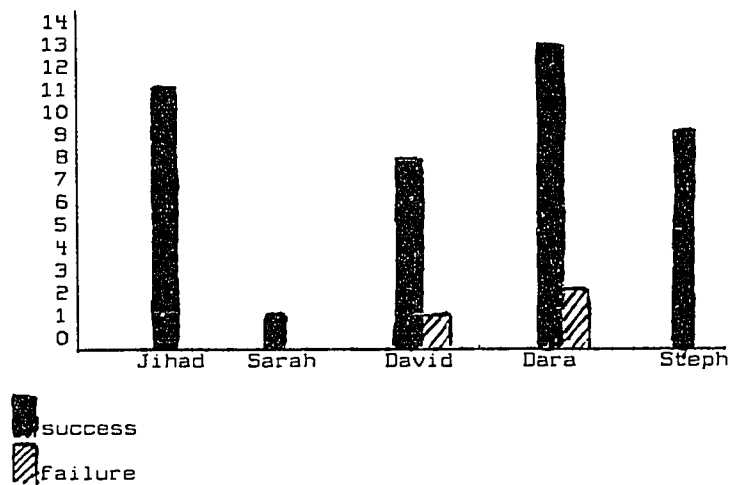
Dara had two topic failures. David had one.

(See Figure II.4)

Topic Introduction in C3

(Figure II.4)

of topics



There are several interesting points of comparison between these numbers and the others. The number of topics raised by Dara, David, and Stephanie is much closer to the number of topics raised by them in C1, with Adam. These numbers give more evidence that with Max they were subdued, and that their normal style is to be more conversationally

active. David and Stephanie introduce almost the same number of topics as each other.

Dara, however, introduces more than her brother and sister; in fact, more than anyone else. And since she had two topic failures, she actually tried to introduce 15 topics. Is there a way to explain why she should be more involved in this conversation than in either of the others discussed? Since only the participants have changed, we must look to the social makeup of the group for an explanation of variation.

11.5.2. Discussion

Sarah is Dara's friend, Jihad is David's. Dara is much more familiar with Jihad than Sarah is. David, Dara, Stephanie, and Jihad have had dinner together many times. Dara, I think, feels that she has some "hostess" responsibilities. She wants dinner to be fun, and she wants her friend to be comfortable. She doesn't dominate the conversation, as Max clearly did in C2, but she seems to be very active in keeping the conversation going.

Sarah's amount of topic introduction (1) further suggests that Dara may be working harder than normal in this conversation. Sarah is quiet, not actively engaging with the others, at least not as far as introducing topics. Dara tries to draw her into the talk several times. For example, she says, "Sarah, do you know....?" and remarks about a

person in their school. Sarah commented on whatever was discussed; she just did not initiate the conversation. Because she is Dara's friend and her guest, Dara might well have been aware of her conversational reticence and tried to fill the breach.

There are several possibilities as to why Sarah should have had a style so out of balance with the rest of the members of the group. It may be her personal style, but as we shall see in C6, we have some evidence that this is not the case. More likely, it is the social makeup of the group that is causing her discourse style to be what it is. The most obvious explanation is that Sarah feels a little self-conscious and uncomfortable in this group. She doesn't really know Jihad, and hasn't seen David for a long time. She is neither socially or conversationally familiar with the group.

Gender may play a part in this conversation. Sarah has no brothers and has little interaction with boys of her own age. They may represent a real "other" group for her and so she withdraws.

II.6 C4: Jihad, David, Dara, Stephanie

In order to see how much Sarah's presence influenced Dara's behavior, and that of the whole group, I recorded another dinner conversation (C4) without her. This conversation had 4 participants: Jihad, David, Dara,

Stephanie. Like the dinners with Adam (C1) and Max (C2) there were 2 girls and 2 boys, and one outsider to the family group, a male friend of David's.

Jihad's relationship to the girls is different from either Adam's or Max's. Jihad, although a close friend of David's, is a year older and a year ahead in school. David, in fact, looks up to him, as Adam, who is a year younger than David, looks up to him. For Dara and Stephanie, Jihad is very much their brother's friend, rather than a friend of the family, like Adam. But they are much more familiar with Jihad than Max. They have had lots of dinners together.

II.6.1. Data

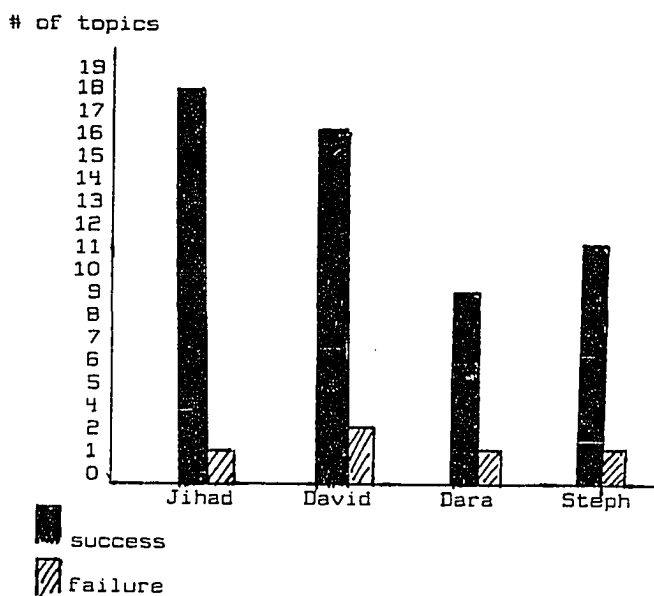
The conversation was a happy and successful one as indicated by the large amount of laughter, funny noises and silly voices. In this conversation, there were more topics raised than in the others. The interaction lasted 26 minutes. The number of topics introduced were:

Jihad: 19
David: 16
Dara: 9
Stephanie: 11

Stephanie, Dara, and Jihad had one topic failure each; David had two. (See Figure II.5)

Topic Introduction for C4

(Figure II.5)



II.6.2. Discussion

Jihad was clearly very active and involved. He didn't dominate the conversation, as Max did. Although the number of topics introduced by Jihad was large, it was not out of keeping with the others in the group. David, also, was very actively engaged. The two boys were in much more control of the conversation than either girl. But since we've seen in C3, with Sarah and Jihad, that this isn't always the case, gender alone can not be the determining variable.

When this dinner is compared with the one with both Sarah and Jihad (C3), the constant participants, David,

Dara, and Stephanie show variation of style. The inclusion or exclusion of Sarah affects Dara's verbal behavior and also David's. When Sarah is not present, and Jihad is, David is much more involved. He and Jihad take over the talk. Without Sarah, and with Jihad, Dara is much less involved.

The variation of Dara's conversational behavior supports the interpretation that she was working overtime for Sarah, trying to make her comfortable. She could also, however, have sensed some discomfort in her brother, and been working overtime for him too.

It is curious that Dara and Stephanie were so conversationally inactive in this conversation. Perhaps Jihad, because of his age, personality, gender, or "coolness" is the leader of this group. He and David are talking to each other about things that exclude the girls. Many of their utterances are counted as topic introductions because one of the girls asks for explanation, "What's that?" to a comment made by one of the boys.

The girls acknowledge the friendship between the two boys; they don't feel uncomfortable with it. They do not really withdraw from the conversation, but they don't actively try to engage them or try to manage the talk.

If this conversation, C4, were the only data used for analysis, a theory could be developed about the relative passivity of girls and the aggressiveness of boys in conversational interaction. We see that the entire

repertoire of the individual speakers should be accessible to the researcher, and variation from one conversation to another offers information on how linguistic and social factors interact.

II.7 CS: Dara, Ellie, Jane

The four conversations discussed so far have been mixed-sex groups. The data on topic introduction have been significantly different from Fishman's. In these conversations, females do not introduce many more topics than males, nor do they have a higher incidence of topic failure.

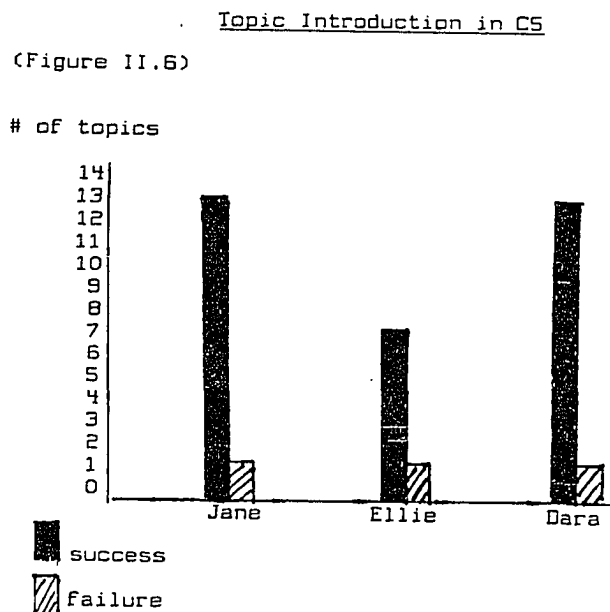
One way to ascertain the effects of mixed-sex groups on conversation is to look at the same participants in same-sex groups. I taped Dara and two girlfriends at the dinner table (CS) and the conversation was quite different in style and tone than in the mixed-sex groups. The participants here were Dara, Ellie, and Jane. They had never been together as a group before at the dinnertable. Although they are friends, they have not had a great deal of interaction.

There are other important differences between this conversational group and the preceding ones. There were only three members in the interaction, Dara had no siblings with her, and these girls are not so familiar to her. The tone of the conversation was quite different from the others. There were many pauses between topics. Discussions around

individual topics were much longer than in the other three conversations. There were no funny voices or routines, possibly because Dara had no one to cast in the roles of supporting actors.

Another characteristic of this dinner conversation was how much conversational support the girls gave each other. When, for example, one girl would say, "This is so funny," the others would start laughing, even before the anecdote was related. When the story was told, one of them would say, "that's really funny."

II.7.1. Data



The numbers of topics introduced were:

Jane: 13

Ellie: 7

Dara: 13

Each girl had one failure. (See Figure II.6)

II.7.2. Discussion

Dara's level seems to be consistent with what we suggested was her "hostess" style. She introduced a great many topics. These girls are her guests and she does feel responsible that they enjoy themselves with her.

Dara and Jane seem much more aligned with each other than either one does with Ellie. In fact, Ellie did seem to be on her own. The following excerpt is typical of the kind of talk that was going on. The girls were discussing different movies that they had recently seen.

- (10)
1. Dara: Moonstruck!
 2. Jane: I saw it.
 3. Ellie: It was so good. I saw it with her (referring to Jane).
 4. Jane: Oh yeah, that's right.
 5. Ellie: It was so good.
 6. Dara: I didn't like it too much.
 7. Jane: Neither did I.
 8. Ellie: I loved it.

9. Jane: Well it's the kind of movie you love after you've seen it.
10. Dara: Right. It's kind of boring while you're watching it.
11. Ellie: I didn't think it was boring at all.
12. Dara: I thought it was cute at the end, when she meets her father at the opera, and he goes we don't know you, goodbye, and what ... (and she tells a long anecdote from the movie)

The girls have a difference of opinion. Ellie has liked the movie and the others have not. When Dara asserts her difference, Jane aligns herself with her, "neither did I" (6,7). When Ellie doesn't join them, but sticks to her original opinion of loving it, Jane and Dara try to find a way to agree (9,10). Ellie, however, is not to be sidetracked or accommodated, "I didn't think it was boring at all" (11) and Dara ends up talking about the "cute" part of the movie. Both Dara and Jane seem to be trying to differ from Ellie but avoid antagonism. On the contrary they both try to find a way to join her.

Dara and Jane ally themselves together not only by articulating having the same views, but perhaps unconsciously, establishing a connection through a similar use of a discourse function, in this case, topic introduction.

II. 8. Conclusions and Implications

In contrast to Fishman's conclusions, there is no evidence from these conversations that gender plays a significant role in affecting the numbers of topics introduced. Fishman looked at dyadic conversation between married adults; the number and relationship difference between her work and this might make a crucial difference in the results. Research results can not be assumed to apply to all kinds of relationships and interactions.

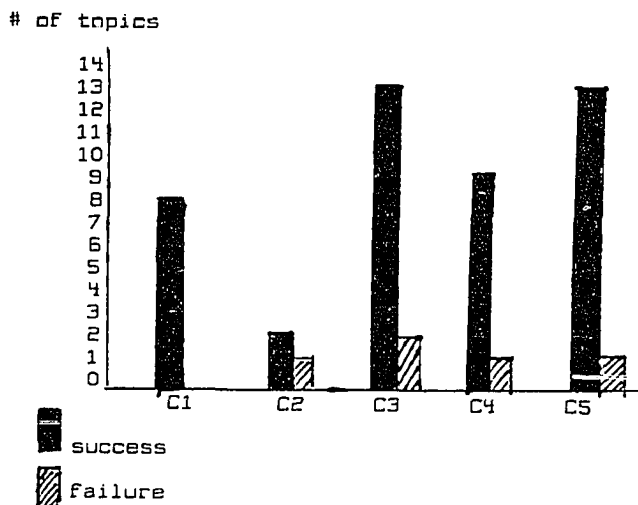
The data presented here suggest that individuals adapt their conversational style to the group - the membership and the goals. Since the setting and circumstances are the same in each conversation, we can assume that it is the members of the group that determine how the conversation works.

Since Dara was a member of every conversational group, looking at the variation in her amounts of topic introduction illustrates that it is certainly more than individual style that accounts for number of topics. In each conversation, she introduced the following numbers of topics: (See Figure II.7)

C1 (Adam): 8
C2 (Max): 2
C3 (Jihad, Sarah): 13
C4 (Jihad): 9
C5 (Ellie, Jane): 13

Dara's Topic Introduction

(Figure II.7)



When David is hosting one of his good friends, Dara introduces similar numbers of topics, 8 and 9. When she is hosting her own friends, Sarah in C3 and the two girls in C5, she introduces more, 13 in each case. When she feels uncomfortable and ill-at-ease, she only introduces 2. Using several conversations allows us to develop some notions about Dara's (and the others') particular strategy in topic introduction.

I am claiming that comparison of the number of topics introduced provides an index to: a) the relative comfort of individual members in the specific group; b) the relative

dominance and passivity of certain members of the group, and
c) the overall cohesiveness of the group.

I suggest that we can use the number of topics raised by individual members of a group as a telling index of which members feel external to the group. In C2 Max was so out of balance in the numbers of topics introduced that we posited that he felt like an outsider. In C3 Sarah is also noticeably out of balance with the others, and we are suggesting that the reason is also that she doesn't feel a comfortable part of the group.

A very interesting line of inquiry for future research would be to investigate if when girls were uncomfortable in a group, they were conversationally passive whereas boys under the same circumstances were conversationally aggressive, as measured by their number of topic introductions. Such data would provide support for those researchers who believe that boys and girls do different things with words (Maltz and Borker 1982; Goodwin 1980) and that males are more aggressive conversationally as they are in other areas of life. But my contention is that it would be the discomfort or "out of the group" feeling that would dictate the style, not the gender or the subculture.

However, before such research can be done, it must be argued and established that topic introduction and other discourse functions do reflect the social and psychological attitudes of the members of a group.

. In sum, the data presented in this chapter show that:

- variation in use of particular discourse functions does occur across conversations for individual speakers;

- the social makeup of the group motivates the variation;

- the balance of the use of the discourse function among the members of the group signals cohesiveness with the group;

- a subset of the group that has a balance in their discourse function signals cohesiveness of that subset;

- imbalance in the amount of the discourse feature in relation to the group signals a lack of group identification, an "outsider" feeling;

- a slight imbalance might reveal a desire to rectify the balance by taking over another's role.

In the next chapter I will examine these same conversations for another discourse function, interruption patterns, to see how these data and that interact.

Notes

1. Sattel (1983) and Zimmerman and West (1983) agree that men bully women conversationally by controlling topic through silence and lack of uptake.

2. Dara hears Max's "I'll vote" as an accusation that she would vote.

3. Edelsky (1981) talks about joint floor development in large group conversations; she points out that floor taking and holding is very complex in nondyadic groups.

III. INTERRUPTION

In this chapter I will propose a three-prong definition of interruption so that various patterns can be examined across the five conversations. Theoretical issues, particularly Zimmerman and West's studies on interruption will be reviewed and evaluated. I will suggest various problems that occur in trying to identify interruption in nondyadic groups. Using the operational definition, I will present data on the interruption styles of each of the participants in these conversations. It will be established that individuals vary their interruption style according to the social demands of the conversation. A definition for a "dominating" and "withdrawn" conversational participant will be offered, as well as some criteria for evaluating a successful and an unsuccessful interaction.

III. 1. Theoretical issues

Interruption is another discourse function that can serve as an index to social behavior. Interruption is especially interesting because it is an area of conversation that has been claimed to reveal gender differences (Zimmerman and West 1975; West and Zimmerman 1983; Esposito 1979).

But interruption is not a unitary, easily measurable phenomenon. On the contrary, there is some difficulty in defining exactly what interruption is. Although conversationalists can generally tell whether or not they've been interrupted, it is not clear what they are using as criteria. Interruption can be defined from many perspectives, for example, from a purely structural definition (Zimmerman & West 1975) to a psychological one (Bennett 1981).

III. 1.1. Zimmerman and West

Zimmerman and West, pioneers in the field of gender differences in interruption patterns, use the structural model of conversation developed by Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson (1974). Using a simple turn-taking model of how speakers change, West and Zimmerman define interruption as any intrusion into a speaker's turn which occurs at least two syllables before the juncture of a unit type (1983).

Their findings have been generally cited. Mary Talbot (1988) says, "Zimmerman and West's studies are standard material in discussion of language and gender; there is scarcely a book or course in the field which does not refer to them" (113). 1

Their original study (1975) was with casually occurring friendly dyadic conversations obtained in various public meeting places around a middle class, midwestern university.

They found that men interrupt women much more than they interrupt each other or than women interrupt either other women or men. In cross-sex dyads, they found that men performed 96% of the interruptions, a startlingly high figure. They repeated their study (West and Zimmerman 1983) using strangers speaking in a laboratory setting (with the same general population of white, middle-class university students) and obtained similar results. Men interrupted women 75% of the time.

They analyze these interruption patterns as reflecting the larger inequities in sexual relations. Men disregard and belittle women through interruption and enact in this interactional way their dominance and power strategies. Interruption is one of the small insults that men use to keep women in a subordinate position. West and Zimmerman (1977) compared the above patterns of interruption with those between adults and children and concluded that both women and children have restricted rights in speech.

A limitation in the work of Zimmerman and West is that they do not distinguish types of interruption. Some interruptions express excitement and enthusiasm, that is, are supportive to the speaker, whereas other kinds of interruption are or might be hostile. Interruptions could be caused by involvement in the talk or be related to personality traits such as dominance (Rogers and Jones 1975) or confidence and anxiety (Natale, Entin, and Jaffee 1979).

The distinction between supportive and hostile interruption cannot be accounted for with a purely structural definition of interruption.

Murray and Covelli (1988) take issue with Zimmerman and West's results because they feel that a structural definition based on simultaneous talk is hopelessly inadequate to explain the complexities of interruption. They are particularly adamant that interruption patterns can not and should not be analyzed without regard to context and changes in context.

Murray (1985) says there are no absolute criteria for even establishing what an interruption consists of, certainly not a mechanical one. Speakers interpret interruption, says Murray, according to their expectations of what an appropriate amount of talk would be. Different kinds of conversations allow for different perceptions of what interruption is and what an appropriate turn is.

Murray further suggests that if there are any gender differences in interruption, it may be that males and females have different standards of what an interruption is. His point is similar to Matlz and Borker's theory that females and males develop different discourse strategies for how to use and interpret discourse functions.

III.1.2. Bennett

Bennett (1981) offers the most extreme contrast to Zimmerman and West's work, positing that interruption is much too psychologically complex for a structural definition, that it must be interpreted in individual context of the specific discourse. Interruption, for him, implies antagonism and conflict. Therefore it is the perception of the conversationalists as to what is occurring that defines interruption. Bennett points out that what might be seen as a interruption in one setting might be perceived as an accidental overlap in another.

Further, each conversational setting has its own obligations and expectations. For instance, is an interviewer supposed to be more courteous, i.e., interrupt less, than the interviewee? Or does the interviewer have less obligation to be polite because the information being elicited is all important? For Bennett, interruption is rudeness, and rudeness occurs whenever a speaker has not been allowed to complete a message - even if there is a pause or natural break. Interruption can and must be interpreted within the particular discourse by the participants of the discourse.

III.1.3. Beattie

Beattie (1981) tries to improve on Zimmerman and West's definition of interruption and yet retains structural definitions as workable. He distinguishes between interruption that succeeds in changing the speaker and interruption that attempts to get the floor unsuccessfully. He also distinguishes between interruptions where simultaneous speech occurs and where it does not. "Simple" interruption is defined as a successful attempt to take over the talk. There is simultaneous speech and the speaker's utterance is incomplete. This is what Zimmerman and West measure in their studies. When there is no simultaneous speech and the speaker has not completed the utterance, Beattie labels that "silent" interruption. "Butting-in" interruption occurs when someone tries to interrupt using simultaneous speech but is unsuccessful in changing the speaker.

Beattie's formulation has advantages over the simple Zimmerman and West definition in that he is able to account for different types of interruption structurally. His study differs from the work of Zimmerman and West in important ways. He investigates interruption in nondyadic groups, in a structured, competitive context. Analyzing patterns of interruption in university tutorials in England, he finds interruption prevalent, accounting for over 1/3 of the

speaker switches. He finds that students interrupt tutors more than the other way around and he finds no sex differences in interruption patterns, even the simple interruption measured by Zimmerman and West.

The difference between dyadic interaction and group interaction might well account for the difference between his results and Zimmerman & West's. This, in itself, is important because it focuses our attention on how the numbers of the participants in verbal interaction can affect patterns of verbal behavior. In dyads, turntaking techniques should be a lot neater than in large groups, where it is not so easy to pass the floor along; it must be grabbed.

Another important difference is that a tutorial situation is not friendly conversation. Context, as well as number, has particular conventions and expectations, and also affects patterns of discourse behavior. Researchers must be careful not to generalize across contexts. If dominance is enacted through interruption, as Zimmerman and West suggest, why is it that the students interrupted the tutors, who are clearly in the more powerful position?

Beattie suggests that the students are trying to make an impression and believe an aggressive technique would be looked on favorably. Therefore, in addition to the number of participants and the context of the interaction, the social and psychological goals of the participants must be taken into account. For instance, it is possible that in friendly

cross-sex dyadic interaction, members of each gender group are involved in presenting themselves as either female or male, and thus trying to distinguish themselves stylistically, whereas in a student situation women and men are not "doing gender" (West and Zimmerman 1987) but are presenting themselves in some other, less gender-specific, way, as intellectuals or scholars.

III. 2. Defining Interruption

Interruption clearly cannot be defined simply. Patterns of interruption vary across situations and contexts and are affected by the numbers of members of the group and the social goals of the speakers. It is too complex a discourse phenomenon to be considered simply a marker of dominance or superior status.

Researchers need to explore:

- under what circumstances do men interrupt women,
- do women allow themselves to be interrupted and if so under what conditions,
- what kinds of interruption show solidarity with the speaker and what kinds don't,
- what effect does all this have on the interaction of the group?

In analyzing the interruption patterns in the dinner conversation of preadolescents, I wish to suggest some ways to connect discourse behavior and social behavior. These

data cannot be used to declare how all boys and girls generally use interruption. They may, however, show how a discourse function like interruption can be analyzed across conversations to demonstrate how the same children use different patterns depending on the social makeup of the group.

Because of the impact of Zimmerman and West's results on the thinking of those working in gender differences in language, I propose to compare what happens in these conversations with their data. Zimmerman and West don't suggest how these patterns are acquired, but surely if, as they claim, women and men have such different styles of interruption when they are involved in mixed-sex conversations, there should be some evidence of these differences in preadolescent interaction. If girls are modeling their behavior on women, then we should find that girls allow themselves to be interrupted; if boys are developing the conversation patterns of men (as Esposito 1979 claims), we should see boys interrupting girls, using the simple definition of invasion of turn space, more than any other pattern. These data do not confirm Zimmerman and West's findings.

I will show, as in the topic introduction section, that the variable, gender, is one that is too broad to have real explanatory power. Conversational style must be examined in

particular context to determine what the style means to the individual participant.

III. 2.1. An operational definition of interruption

In order to compare interruption patterns across conversations, we have to have an operational definition that will enable us to count instances of interruption. I am not attempting to define interruption as a complex discourse function here, but only to chart individual variation for speakers across contexts. Because we are looking at behavior here, our working definition of interruption must be very specific.

Interruption will be defined as occurring when three conditions are met:

- (1) the speaker has the attention of the entire group;
- (2) the speaker's turn is intruded upon before the end of the utterance or message;
- (3) the result of the intrusion is to turn the talk away from the speaker to another; that is, the speaker loses the floor prematurely.

This definition tries to deal with several issues that occur in group conversation. The first condition, having the attention of the group, is an important one for nondyadic groups. Parallel conversations frequently take place. Or, while someone has the floor, one member of the group will begin a conversation with another member, underneath the

main speaker. This doesn't actually interrupt the speaker, who can continue talking to the attentive members of the group.

The second condition is of necessity vague. I don't propose to count syllables before the end of the unit type. (Indeed, I don't understand how Zimmerman and West decide where the end of a unit type comes before the end.) There are instances of interruption, as Bennett points out, where the speaker is pausing either for breath or thought. Any utterance will be considered an intrusion if the speaker has not completely finished her or his turn and relinquished the floor.

The third condition tries to account for the effect of interruption and hopefully will distinguish between supportive and nonsupportive types of interruption. If, for example, someone breaks in with, "Oh yeah, I know what you mean," and the initial speaker continues talking, that will not be considered an interruption. For this third condition to be met, the speaker has to switch as a result of the intrusion. Intrusions that serve to support the speaker, show understanding and encouragement, are also extremely revealing. They, by their nature, don't remove the floor from the speaker. These kinds of intrusions are sometimes called backchannel responses and are indications of involvement and support for the speaker. Since they function so differently from the kinds of interruption that change

the speaker prematurely, and yet are intrusions into another's turn, and as such structurally interruptions, they should be examined as well.

Since I am interested in the social interactional effect of these discourse bits, especially as to how they are used by boys and girls, it makes sense to look at both kinds. I will call the takeover intrusion Interruption and the supportive intrusion Support. To count as Support, the first two conditions must be met but not the third.

A third kind of interruption is the Attempted Interruption, that is, an intrusion that is not supportive, that attempts to take the floor away but is unsuccessful. This lack of success could be due to the strength of the speaker, that is, her or his unwillingness to relinquish the floor, or to the lack of force of the Attempted Interruption.

In an Attempted Interruption as in a Support, the first two conditions must be met but not the third. In both the Support and the Attempted Interruption, the speaker retains the floor following an intrusion. The way to distinguish between these two intrusions is by their content. In a Support there is no attempt to take over the floor; the comment is completely self-contained. In an Attempted Interruption there is an attempt to control the floor. The comment tries to redirect the talk but the floor is not relinquished. So if there is an attempt at topic change, it

will be considered Attempted Interruption; if there is no topic change, it will be considered Support.

Interruption occurs when:

- a) Speaker has attention of group
- b) Speaker's turn is intruded upon
- c) Speakers change as a result of intrusion

Support occurs when:

- a and b are satisfied but not c.

The intrusion is a self-contained remark; there is no attempt to take the floor.

Attempted Interruption occurs when:

- a and b are satisfied but not c.

The intrusion is an attempt to redirect the talk from the speaker.

Defining interruption in this three-part way offers an advantage over other, earlier analyses of conversational politics. Taken together in a conversation, the different types of interruption should provide some objective criteria for measuring the success of the interchange, and through comparison, a look at the social dynamics of the group.

Further, we shall be able to see if children are behaving in ways that the results of Zimmerman and West's work would have us anticipate. If in fact the boys are doing

the vast majority of either Interruptions or Attempted Interruptions, and the girls of Support, we will be confirming their results. If not, it will be useful to try and determine what is going on. Interruption can be shown to be doing more than expressing status in the group.

III. 2.2. Problems in applying the definition to the conversations

The children in these conversations have certainly been told by their parents not to interrupt adults or their siblings who are speaking. There is, then, some form of censure to interruption for them. But it is not clear whether the children understand this to cover both kinds of interruption: the kind that derails the conversation (Interruption), and the kind that shows enthusiasm (Support).

The motivation underlying interruption can be varied. It may include a simple lack of attention to what is going on, or a determination to have one's voice heard over another's. It could be a sense of urgency, or as Tannen (1982) has suggested, it could be an ethnic conversational style. My point is that discourse style is dynamic; participants react to specific situations differently. Style occurs within discourse, not across it.

Counting interruptions in these conversations points up some problems of group conversation, especially with

children. There is a good deal of vying for the floor which sounds like lots of interruption but isn't. There is also some parallel talk going on. Two of the group are talking and the other two start talking between themselves, not joining in the first pair but not interfering with it either. Also, singing will not be considered an utterance because I am not sure what kind of conversational function is being accomplished. When someone starts to talk in the midst of another's song, it will not be considered interruption.

Another problem that hinders a neat account of interruption types and patterns occurs in nondyadic groups. For instance, the third dinner conversation (C3) with 5 people is very difficult to analyze for interruption patterns. It was not a problematic conversation; in fact it was as successful as the others in terms of laughter and pleasure. However, comparing a conversation of 4 people to a conversation with 5 people, particularly for an interactive discourse technique like interruption, presents problems. The additional participant means that there is more trouble in getting the attention of the whole group; there is a lot of simultaneous speech. Vying for the floor seems more difficult with 5 participants too, and there are many instances of parallel speech. It's as if the expansion from 4 to 5 tips some sort of subtle balance and cannot be

considered a single conversation, especially for purpose of interruption.

An example of a problem that arises in this conversation that is not apparent in any of the other dinners is that of timing and overlaps. A speaker addresses a remark to the entire group (condition one for interruption: having the attention of the entire group). Then the response is up for grabs. Sometimes two people will respond to the remark but the timing will be different, so that structurally it will look like an Attempted Interruption but in context is an overlap.

An example of this follows. The children have been talking about Mel Brooks and the movie Spaceballs.

- (1) 1. Dara: He's very Jewish, Stephanie.
 2. David: Who?
 3. Dara: [Mel Brooks.
 4. Steph: [Mel Brooks.
 5. David: Mr. Dark Helmet? Isn't he the one who's reading it?
 6. Steph: Mel Brooks is the president of space balls.
 7. Dara: [That was Yoghurt.
 8. Dara: Yoghurt is Mel Brooks.
 9. David: I didn't say he wasn't.
 10. Steph: (Loud) [Yoghurt is not Mel Brooks!
 11. Jihad: [Yes he is!
 12. Dara: [They're the same.

Dara begins this sequence by addressing a remark to Stephanie. According to the Sachs, Schlegoff model, Stephanie or Dara should be the next speaker. However, when David asks for clarification, both Dara and Steph answer him (3 and 4). Questions are problematic in large groups because anyone can answer a question thrown out in general. David responds with a question which both Steph and Dara again answer (6 and 7). Looked at structurally, it appears as if Dara was interrupting Stephanie because she began to speak before Stephanie was finished. But in context Dara is responding to David. The timing of her response is just slower than Stephanie's. The same confusion can be seen in 9 and 10 when Steph and David both react to Dara's remark (8) with slightly different timing.

The above example illustrates how a structural definition of interruption would have misleading results. There is no smooth passage of the floor from one speaker to another. It is not clear who, in particular, should respond since the whole group is being addressed. Therefore everyone has the right to respond. When there is more than one response, an overlap like the above can occur. The context, however, makes it clear that two people are responding to the same statement. Also, the remark is addressed to the person who had the previous turn and not to the one who is speaking when the overlap occurs. Therefore, the data based

on a completely structural concept of interruption, like Zimmerman and West's, should be reexamined.

Another problem in analyzing interruption in conversational groups larger than 2 or 3 is that there are instances of intrusion that look somewhat like an Attempted Interruption structurally but don't function as one. Someone speaks during someone else's turn but the remark is not addressed to the speaker, so it is not really a Support or an Attempted Interruption; the remark is self-contained, without relationship to what is being said. Structurally, such utterances are nonetheless intrusions:

- (2) Steph: You could spend hours reading this thing
and chew and
Dara: [Can I have some napkins?
Steph: chew (and she continues)

A dinner has permissible intrusions like this (Schegloff 1968). Immediate needs like passing a napkin or salt are tolerated within a speaker's turn. Probably each social situation has something that is tolerated in the specific situation that would seem like an interruption in another context.

Another difficulty that occurs with groups larger than four is how hard it is to involve the entire group in a single conversational topic. There were many examples of utterances that could only be addressed to one or two other

members of the group. For instance, Dara asked Jihad if he knows someone at school and they discuss it. Since Stephanie and David don't go to that school they are unable to participate, and they are forced into a very passive position. Can we then say that Dara has the attention of the entire group? Structurally she did. No one else was speaking. But I'm not sure everyone was engaged either. Or Jihad asked David something about skiing, an activity the girls don't participate in. This conversational situation is not possible in dyads.

An advantage of multiple conversations involving the same speakers is that we are able to see which conversational rules break down with increasing numbers of participants. Perhaps conversational rules need to be modified for large groups, especially turntaking rules. Four and 5-member conversational groups do not work the same way as 2 and 3.

Another issue that complicates a neat look at interruption patterns is that sometimes there is no structural intrusion, yet a person's turn is effectively cut off.

Interruption patterns say more about the tone of the conversation than how status is negotiated. In the following excerpt Stephanie is disregarded and ignored; but she is not interrupted. Numerous times she tries to speak and is totally ignored. But because she is not aggressive about it,

does not perform Attempted Interruptions, there is no way to account for it structurally.

The following interaction is typical:

- (3) 1. Steph: We were talking about recycling paper because we have this thing in our school about recycling paper.
2. Dara: Ah!
3. Steph: [And...
4. Jihad: [So does my mom.
5. David: Really? Really?
6. Jihad: Um hum.
7. Dara: Oh, recycling. We put all our cans in one garbage and off of our boxes.
8. Jihad: You do?
9. Dara: You have to put all your tin or aluminum in one garbage can.
10. Steph: You know what? You know what?
11. Jihad: We throw it down the table and whatever can it goes to.
12. Dara: [Where do you sit?
13. Steph: [Listen!
14. Jihad: At a long table at the end, so I just slide it down.
15. Dara: It's at the door, right at the door. There's two yellow garbage cans.
16. Jihad: But I don't do that.
17. Dara: Oh, well, usually people don't have cans...Why was it so full of soda the other day? Were they selling soda? The whole thing was full of lots and lots of soda.

18. Jihad: Maybe it's from a few weeks.
19. Dara: Maybe it's from the teachers.
20. Steph: Well, anyway, so he was telling us what we could put in it and what we couldn't and he said we could put tissues (and she tells a long story).

It has taken Stephanie 20 turns to regain the floor after she lost in at the beginning of the interaction. Yet there was no interruption. When Jihad comes into the conversation (4), he is responding to Steph's initial remark about recycling. Stephanie tries to reclaim the floor, "You know what? You know what? (10) but gets no response. Jihad and Dara don't acknowledge that she has spoken at all. In 13 she tries again to reclaim the floor, "Listen," but she and Dara speak simultaneously and Dara's utterance, not Stephanie's, is responded to by Jihad. She waits, it seems, for Jihad and Dara to finish their interchange before she speaks up. When she begins again (20), with "Well, anyway," it is a marker that she is continuing what she started.

Stephanie is in an unenviable position in this group. She is the youngest in the group, and even a year can be quite meaningful at this age. She is the younger sister, and not a twin. She does not have a dinner guest and both her siblings do. She does not go to the school that three of the older children attend. She might be relinquishing her floor rights and not be able to aggressively pursue her own conversational interests until she gets acknowledgement of

permission, so to speak, from the others. By being unwilling to engage with her and by not responding to her, the others may have signalled that she is the low person on this totem pole and that she is to keep her place. Or she may not be as skilled as the others in conversational management techniques.

Example 3 shows that status can be negotiated in ways other than through interruption patterns. It is possible that the Zimmerman and West interpretation, that the more dominant party bullies his way into the talk of the less powerful, is valid only for dyadic conversation. In this group Steph is the least powerful, but there is no way to know that by simply examining who is interrupting whom. Stephanie's style suggests that it may be the passivity of the low status person, the unwillingness or inability to force herself into the conversation, that is as important as the more aggressive, interruptive style.

In spite of all these difficulties defining interruption, as long as a constant criteria is used, a comparison of an individual's style across conversations is still possible. Variation in interruption patterns should reflect the same kinds of social information as were suggested in the topic introduction chapter.

III. 3 C1: Adam, David, Dara, Stephanie

When we examined the conversation of the three family members and Adam (C1) for topic introduction, we concluded that this was a very well-balanced group, with no one member dominating the conversation and with the children relating well to each other.

III.3.1. Data

Examining the kinds of intrusions that occurred in C1, we have:

I: 0

Support: 10

Dara Supports David

Steph -- David

Dara -- David

Dara -- David

David -- Dara

David -- Adam

David -- Dara

David -- Dara

Steph -- Adam

Attempted Interruption:1

Adam -- Dara

The Supports occur in an interesting pattern:

Adam 0

David 4

Dara 3

Steph 2.

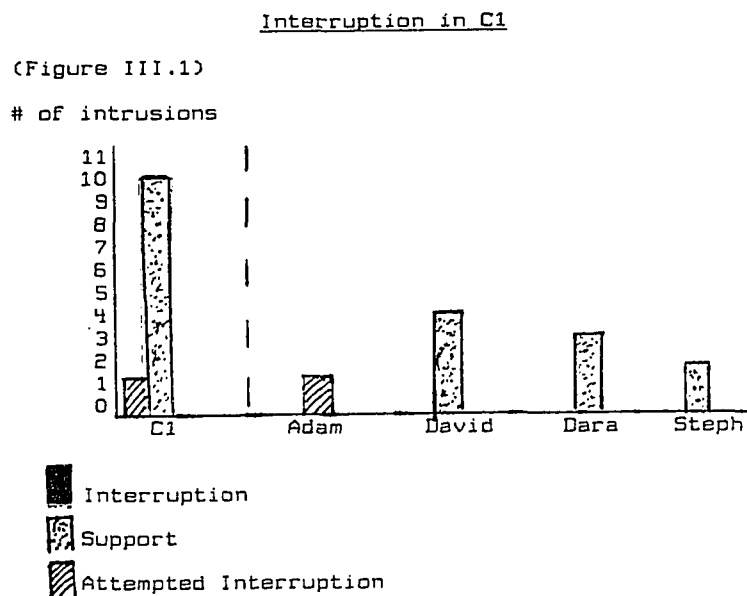


Figure III.1. shows the type of intrusions that occurred by category and participant. The three members of the same family have a similar pattern; the outsider to the family is different.

Remarkably, there are no instances of real Interruption, only Support intrusions which signal active listenership and involvement. There was balance in the number of topic introductions with the participants in this conversation and the interruption patterns here further underscore the cohesive nature of the interaction.

A typical interchange with Support occurs in the following excerpt. David has been telling a story about his

Japanese friend, Shinzo, who is delighted to discover that two staff members have had sex in the house where they live.

(4) David: He's so thrilled! I mean, his face is radiant with

Dara: That's so funny - his face radiant.

David: joy when he told me...

Dara has spoken before David's turn is over, but she has not attempted to turn the talk away from David; on the contrary, her intrusion serves to let him know that his story is being appreciated.

III. 3.2 Discussion

We can tell from the order of the intrusions who is holding the floor and who is actively listening. David is holding the floor at the beginning of the dinner and his sisters, especially Dara, are interacting positively with him. They are very attentive and supportive. When others take the floor, David is the primary involved listener. Either this is an idiosyncratic conversational style of David's (which we will be able to see when we examine the other conversations) or he is particularly interested in what Dara is saying.

We can use the number and percentage of Support intrusions to document which of the interactants seems the

most involved with each other. If disruptive Interruptions can be said to illustrate status differentials, then Support intrusions can certainly measure feelings of connectedness. In this conversation we would have to conclude that Dara and David were the most involved with each other.

Adam makes the one Attempted Interruption and has no instance of any other kind of involvement. Perhaps in Adam's family this kind of intrusion is not permitted or condoned. Or he is more passive, or he is unfamiliar with this family style. That the three family members have such a similar pattern and the nonfamily member a different one suggests that Adam really does not feel himself a total part of the group and can't accommodate his style to the others.

In these data, once again, gender does not seem to be a controlling variable. There is no evidence that girls do more backchanneling than boys or receive less support when they speak. It certainly does not seem useful to count interruptions and then divide by gender.

There is also no evidence that boys interrupt girls. There are many possible explanations as to why Zimmerman and West's results are not confirmed here. This is a larger group. This is family talk, not casual encounters. The participants are younger; perhaps their adult style is not fully developed. Or, most realistically, something about this conversation is discouraging Interruptions and encouraging Support comments. Again, comparisons with other

conversations, with some of the same participants should be informative.

III. 4. C2: Max, David, Dara, Stephanie

The conversation with Max (C2) was the least successful conversation as reported by the children. If the hypothesis that discourse style varies in single individuals as social needs vary is correct, then this conversation should show quite a different pattern from the one with Adam as it did in the topic introduction section.

III.4.1. Data

The interruption types and patterns do show very different things going on here. The results:

Interruption: 6

Steph -- Max
Max -- Dara
Max -- Dara
Steph -- Dara
Dara -- Max
Max -- David

Support: 1

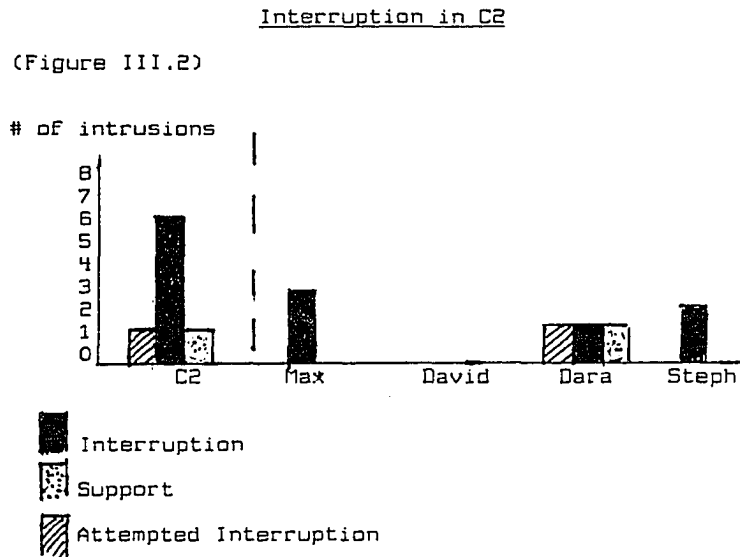
Dara -- Max

Attempted Interruption: 1

Dara -- Max

The difference is apparent. There are many instances of Interruptions: intrusions that meet the three conditions of interrupting a speaker and taking the floor, and there are

very few (1) indications of active Support. (See Figure III.2)



The numbers for each child show a variation from the previous pattern.

Max Interrupts 3

David 0

Dara 1

Steph 2.

Max gets Interrupted 2

David 1

Dara 3

Steph 0.

Max interrupts Dara more than the others.

The number of interruptions is small, but it is still noticeable that David, who did so much Support in the dinner with Adam should be so conversationally inactive here. The one instance of Support was Dara on Max and the one Attempted Interruption was also Dara on Max.

An example of the Interruption occurring here is in the following exchange. In the "Betty" routine already transcribed in the Topic introduction chapter, Max has been talking about the Presidential election.

(5) Max: What? You're afraid I'm gonna vote for someone who dropped out or something.

Dara (screechy): Nooo. I don't vote. I'm sorry. I'm not eighteen yet but ...

Max: =You look it.

Dara: Ah. Thank you. That's the highest compliment. I look more like it than

Max: =Yeah, actually.

Max Interrupts Dara twice here. "But" and "than" are certainly not junctures. Dara does not protest.

III. 4.2. Discussion

We can see that the three constant children, David, Dara, and Stephanie, do not exhibit the same patterns of interruption that they did in the dinner with Adam and are not using similar patterns to each other. This proves they do not have idiosyncratic discourse styles that remain

unchanged across conversations. Therefore, there is something about this particular conversation that has elicited these particular patterns.

As we saw in Chapter 2, Dara and Max have trouble talking to each other. Max, who was extremely dominant in the conversation, introducing the largest number of successful topics and so controlling most of the talk, also does the greatest amount of Interruptions. Since Max held the floor most of the time, that he is interrupted only twice seems not a large number.

There are several possible reasons to account for Max's Interruptions, in fact the same reasons that could have caused him to introduce most of the topics. He may be conversationally insensitive and like to hear himself talk. If he feels ill at ease in the group, being controlling may be his way of coping with discomfort. It may be a quality of his personal style and not hostile or aggressive conversational behavior. His lack of familiarity with the conversational style of the other members of the group put him at a disadvantage. The other children's change in style was, I believe, in response to Max's assertive behavior.

When Dara talks, Max interrupts her. She does not protest. When Dara Interrupts Max, for the first time, he protests that she is "always interrupting" him. After this exchange Dara is very quiet and actually leaves the table

for about 5 minutes, I think as a direct result of his protest.

After Dara leaves the table, the conversation proceeds more smoothly. There are no interruptions for 15 minutes. The conversation could be less problematic because the personal problem between Max and Dara has now been removed. Or it may be that the remaining children, David, Max, and Steph, are learning each other's timing, or simply gaining ease and confidence in the social occasion.

David was not involved in any of these intrusions. His lack of involvement suggests his discomfort with the situation. Max, who was his guest, was not having a good time. David says several times "You don't seem to be having fun," so he is definitely aware that Max is not integrating with the others. Also, David's own discomfort may be compounded because his friend was having trouble with his twin sister. David may not have acquired the conversational subtleties needed to help people out of awkward moments or to mediate between two parties who are having conversational trouble. Or it may simply have been distressing for him to sense that both his friend and his sister were not having a good time.

There is no reason to suppose that each of the participants in the conversation had similar interpretations of what was going on. That there exists multiple interpretations of the data supports Gumperz's view that

conversation is constructed on the spot, among participants who may have to negotiate stylistic as well as social differences in situ. Multiple explanations lead to information about how individuals vary their style, and how a particular style interacts with a particular social situation.

The difference in David style of interruption in C1 and C2 shows that when he feels awkward, he is usually inactive. His interruption pattern in C3 shows yet another pattern.

III.5. C3: Jihad, Sarah, David, Dara, Stephanie

Although there may be significant differences in conversational rules for groups larger than four, a comparison of interruption patterns is still useful for our purposes because we can see which children are changing their style.

III.5.1. Data

The amount and type of interruptions were:

Interruptions: 4

Dara -- Steph
 Jihad -- Dara
 Jihad -- Steph
 Steph -- Dara

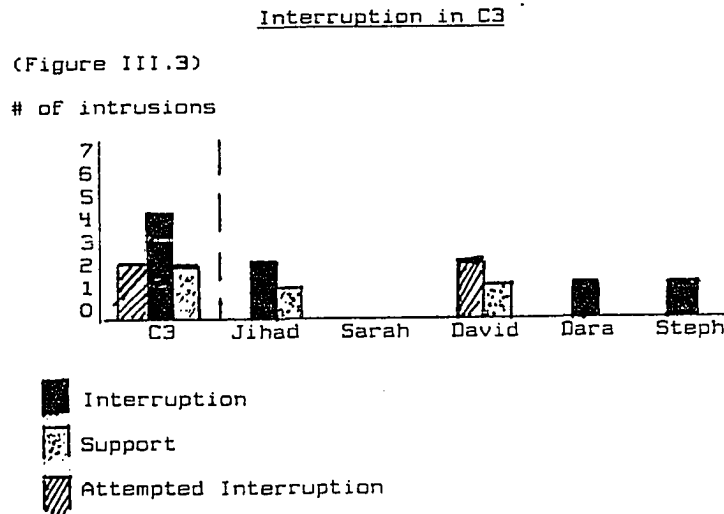
Supports: 2

David -- Dara
 Jihad -- Steph

Attempted Interruptions: 2

David -- Steph
 David -- Dara

Considering the number of participants involved, 5, this seems like a small number of intrusions. (Figure III.3)



In this conversation, only the females (2 of the 3) were intruded upon, and David and Jihad account for the majority of the intrusions (6 of 8). Dara and Stephanie Interrupt each other.

The Support intrusions were done by boys on girls, as were the Attempted interruptions. Jihad and David were the most active interrupters.

Sarah is noticeably absent from these data as she was in the section on topic introduction. We can define a "passive" or "withdrawn" participant in an interaction as

one whose discourse styles are not evident. This is a nice mechanism for defining what it means, linguistically, to be withdrawn.

III.5.2. Discussion

In this conversation, when David Attempts to take the floor from his sisters, they both shout him down. They raise their voices as a means of assuring that the floor remains theirs. However, when Jihad attempts to interrupt them, neither puts up such a fight. In fact, Jihad seizes the floor using the same technique - loudness. Perhaps it is the family relationship that makes the girls secure enough to shout down their brother but not the nonfamily member. Or it could be that Jihad is older, an outsider and guest, and is therefore reacted to differently. His outsider status could cause the girls to treat him with more courtesy and formality than they would a family member. Or they could be less comfortable with him conversationally and their discomfort could take the form of passivity (which Dara and David seemed to do in their uncomfortable interaction with Max). Thus it is not clear if it is the gender of the interrupter or the relationship among the interactants which influences the pattern.

Another way to interpret the data would be to posit that both David and Jihad tried to interrupt the girls, but only Jihad succeeded. It could be that Jihad can exert more

control over the conversational flow because he is male and beginning to engage in dominance patterns with girls. And, as pointed out, he is older and perhaps has greater experience in conversational politics. And as an outsider to the family group he is not able to accommodate to their style. Which of these explanations may be the most salient here is undetermined.

III. 6. C4: Jihad, David, Dara, Stephanie

With a view toward sorting through the merits of these possible explanations, the dinner with the three constant participants, David, Dara, Stephanie, and Jihad, with Sarah not present may be helpful. The absence of Sarah:

(1) reduces the number of conversationalists to that of C1 and C2,

(2) keeps the gender balance equal at 2 and 2,

(3) retains the same family-to-guest ratio of the other two conversations.

III.6.1. Data

The intrusions here show a different pattern from when Sarah was present: (See Figure III.4)

Interruptions: 3

Dara -- Jihad

Jihad -- Dara

Jihad -- Steph

Supports: 3

Jihad -- Dara

Steph -- Jihad

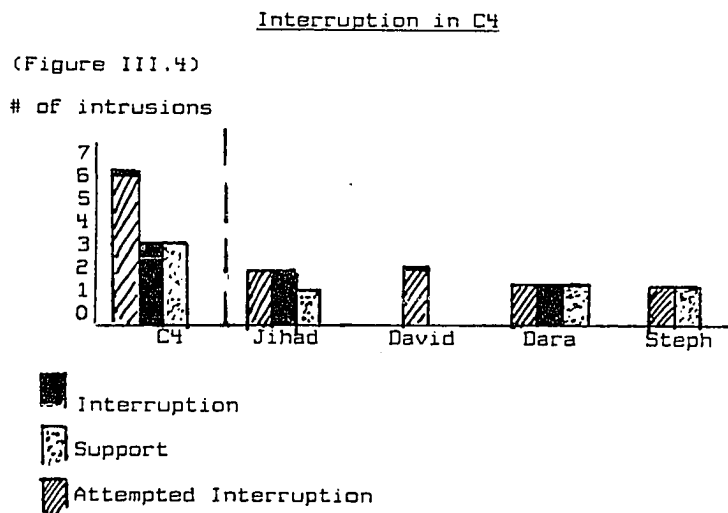
Dara -- Jihad

Attempted Interruptions: 6

Jihad -- David
 David -- Steph
 Dara -- Steph
 Steph -- Jihad
 Jihad -- Dara
 David -- Jihad

Comparing these numbers with the dinner with both Sarah and Jihad (C3), we see the amounts of Interruption and Support are similar, but there is a large increase in Attempted Interruptions.

The data here show no significant gender distinctions. Both males and females do the three types of intrusions. The children who appear to be most involved with each other are Jihad and Dara. They account for 5 of the 12 interchanges.



III. 6.2. Discussion

There are many more Attempted Interruptions in this conversation than in any of the others. Several possibilities suggest themselves. Attempted Interruptions may be a sign of lively and involved conversation. The children attempt frequently to introduce themselves into the conversational flow. They are unsuccessful either because the speakers assert themselves and keep the floor or the intruders back out when they realize the floor is not up for grabs.

Another possibility is that these participants feel so comfortable with each other socially and conversationally that they don't feel they have to relinquish the floor to each other. Or it could be bad timing, that the children are not skilled at monitoring each other's turns. When there is no obvious sign, like a raised voice, it is hard to be sure which is the correct interpretation.

The Attempted Interruptions can reflect feelings of social comfort and equality. If this is true, then C1 with Adam would have to be reinterpreted. Although that conversation was also extremely friendly and comfortable, it was quite unlike this one in the way the children interrupted each other.

If we interpret a large amount of Attempted Interruptions as indicating social equality, then we would

have to conclude that Adam doesn't feel as conversationally equal to the other three as does Jihad. Or, that Jihad's more interactive style and intrusive style influences the tone of the talk so that everyone else feels permitted to violate or attempt to violate another's turn. Taken together with the information on how these participants managed topic introduction, it is clear that Jihad is dominating, although not aggressively, the interaction. He is very vocal, he does 2 of the 3 Interruptions, and attempts to get the floor out of turn twice.

III. 7. General discussion

If we examine the patterns of interruption in the dinners with Adam (C1), Max (C2), and Jihad (C4), we see each interaction has different characteristics. In C1, there are only Supports, indications of active listenership and encouraging, companionable remarks. In C2, the problematic dinner with Max, there are mostly Interruptions, with little Support. In C4, also a very friendly interaction, there is a preponderance of Attempted Interruptions. Attempted Interruptions might be viewed as signs of active participation by the nonspeaker and conversational tenacity on the part of the speaker, who doesn't relinquish the floor or faulty conversational management. But since we don't see this fault in the other conversations, the latter

interpretation seems less likely. Jihad, who is two years older than Adam, is much more involved in the talk.

When in C3 an extra child, Sarah, female, is included, although her presence is nowhere revealed in the interruption analysis, the numbers of each type of intrusion for the same participants also undergo variation. In that case only the girls are interrupted or intruded upon. The boys seem to be able to speak undisturbed. One way of accounting for this kind of data, other than the previously discussed one of the number of conversationalists, is that with Sarah there, it becomes more of a social than a family occasion. There are two nonfamily members.

There may well be more social work being done and gender may be relevant here. Jihad and Sarah are 14 and 13 respectively. They are unfamiliar with each other socially and conversationally, although they are certainly prepared to participate as friends in the dinner. There may be a little more showing off on the boys' part, or a little more work on the part of the two family girls to make it seem friendly to everyone. As we suggested in the topic analysis, Dara is doing Sarah's work here conversationally in order to make the interaction pleasant. These are very suggestive possibilities and illustrate how discourse material can be instrumental in linking social and linguistic data.

III. 8. C5: Ellie, Jane, Dara

To see if there is a "girl" style for this group, we can examine the all-girl conversation, C5, for any differences in interruption patterns from these four mixed-sex groups.

From what we have seen to be the kinds of information that controlled interruption patterns in this group we might predict that there would not be much Interruption. The girls have not spent a lot of time talking together. They are not close enough or good enough friends to ignore the impoliteness of Interruptions. They do not have enough experience talking with each other to be able to feel secure that they know each other's rhythms. That being the case, we should not be surprised to find many instances of Attempted Interruptions. They also have a big interest in acting like friends, in being close to each other. Because they are very responsive and "nice" to each other, we should also expect many Supports.

III.8.1. Data

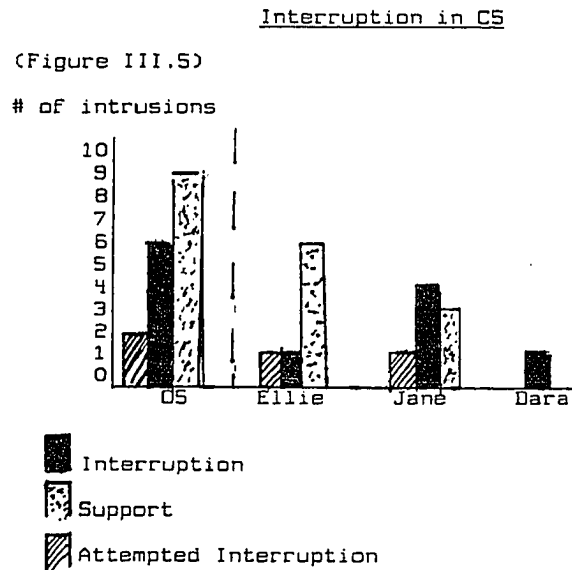
The interruption patterns for C5 were:

(See Figure III.5)

Interruptions: 6
 Jane - Dara
 Dara - Jane
 Jane - Ellie
 Jane - Dara
 Jane - Ellie
 Ellie - Dara

Supports: 9
 Ellie - Dara
 Ellie - Dara
 Jane - Dara
 Ellie - Dara
 Jane - Dara
 Ellie - Dara
 Jane - Dara
 Ellie - Jane
 Ellie - Dara

Attempted Interruptions: 2
 Ellie - Dara
 Jane - Dara



These numbers show yet another pattern of Interruption. Although the pattern in CS is unique, it is not dramatically distinct from all the others to make any claims about all-girl and mixed-sex group distinctions.

III. 8.2. Discussion

We can make some inferences about the social attitudes of the interaction by comparing this conversation with the others. We see a great number of Supports which we interpreted as a signal of friendship and connectedness in the first conversation. But, unlike the dinner with Adam, in this conversation there is also a large number of Interruptions, as much as in C2 with Max. Taken together this pattern is suggestive. These girls are unfamiliar with each other conversationally, as indeed Max was with the family group. But unlike the conversation with Max, they were anxious to show friendship to each other. We said in C1 that the large preponderance of Supports signalled friendship. Thus we can say that in C5 we have an unfamiliar conversational group, marked by Interruptions, attempting to signal connectedness and friendship, marked by Support.

We can further examine the individual style of the participants and show how it relates to the social relations of the group. Dara was holding the floor through most of dinner. The large number of Supports occur during the first half hour of dinner, after which the other kinds of intrusions begin. Dara might be monopolizing the talk for several reasons. She feels she is the hostess and that it is her responsibility to amuse her friends. The number of Supports show her guests were responsive to her. And she may

also be uncomfortable conversationally and socially and responding to her internal discomfort with loquaciousness.

However, a more valid interpretation, it seems to me, is that with Max she sensed hostility, and here she is aware of acceptance. It is only because we can judge her behavior across several conversations that we are not led to a superficial conclusion. Furthermore, it's possible that it is precisely the large number of Supports occurring while she is talking that might inform her of this acceptance.

As she has been at a party, she is telling funny stories about it. These Supports are "really," "I know," "That's so funny," etc. The large number of Supports indicate interest in the topic as well as respect for the speaker.

We find a noticeably larger number of total intrusions here than in the other conversations. There are three possibilities why this interaction may be different. First, the number of conversationalists is smaller than in the other interactions; the group has only three people. Three people may have to interact more quickly with each other, and there may be greater pressure to contribute. A second difference is in the gender makeup of this group; the group is entirely female. The third difference here is that these girls have had less experience talking together than the other groups. This is their first social interaction of this type.

The order in which these intrusions occur is not revealed in the list, but they in fact cluster with the Supports occurring initially, followed by the Interruptions. They may be using language styles to bring themselves together, a characteristic that has been said to be true of all-girl groups (Goodwin 1980).

III.9. Conclusions

In this chapter we have data that prove that participants change their interruption patterns across conversations. The social dynamics of the interaction seem to motivate the style. For instance, we suggested that Dara felt hostility from Max and this was reflected in a particular conversation pattern: a large number of Interruption and few Supports. When the conversational interaction produced a large number of Supports as well as Interruption, as in the conversation with the three girls, Dara, Ellie and Jane (CS), we suggested that Dara sensed friendship and the dinner was much more successful. Thus different patterns of interruption have both explanatory and predictive power for a particular group when examined across conversations.

Conversational "dominance" can be understood as controlling discourse behavior in relation to the other participants. Max introduced the majority of topics, and did the most Interruptions. He did no Support and no Attempted

Interruptions, where he might have backed off when he realized another's turn was going on. It is a possibility that this style signals conversational hostility.

The data here in no way confirm Zimmerman and West's results. Both the males and females here engage in Interruption and Support. However, Sarah's lack of interruption of any sort, combined with her lack of topic initiation could be a gender-related response to a socially uncomfortable situation. However, we suggested that David was uncomfortable in the conversation with Max; and like Sarah, he also was very uninvolved in the interaction, with no instances of Interruption.

Zimmerman and West and others have interpreted interruption patterns as a reflection of social status and dominance differences among the participants. That may very well be true. However, it may be true only in one context and not in another, with a different social group. My data indicate that group dynamics, including status differentials, is renegotiated in each conversation. The main interruptee in one conversation can be the main interrupter in another.

It certainly does not capture what is going on in this conversation to say males interrupt females because they are enacting dominance strategies. If this is the case, it may be that for social or other reasons, females do not force

themselves into conversations, especially when there is a question about how they will be received.

That Dara is quiet after Max interrupts her and she doesn't protest supports Matlz and Borker, Goodwin and Murray who suggest that there might be a different attitude and interpretation of the uses of interruption. It strikes me as interesting that if the conversation with Max were the only one to be analyzed, or I suspect if these four children were the subjects of a more comprehensive study, the results would look like they confirm Zimmerman and West's and Fishman's work. This conversation does show that females get interrupted by males and don't protest verbally when they do.

A suggestive line of inquiry for future research would be to test if when one party, male, shows dominance in conversation, do the females defer to him? Or, if there are boys around, do the girls behave in a way that would align them to each other, in a different way. This suggestion is not really borne out by the conversation with Sarah and Jihad. If the data in C3 were the only results used, we would have concluded that boys interrupt girls; here we see that that would have been misleading.

The interactional model of conversation better explains these data than the interpretation that relies on gender politics. Many researchers have generalized about the behavior of males and females as if they were constants

(West and Zimmerman 1983; Maltz and Borker 1982). But the data here show that examining the same conversationalists in slightly different groups show that gender is only one of several variables that may motivate discourse style. This research shows that girls and boys vary their discourse behavior depending on the personal dynamics of each conversation.

Maltz and Borker's model of conversational differences between the sexes would predict that the girls in this group, Dara, Sarah, and Stephanie would use different discourse styles than David, Adam, Jihad, and Max. I think the role of gender is overextended here. Maltz and Borker's formulations might be more useful in encounters of acquaintances than for good friends in mixed-sex groups that have lots of experience talking together. In other words, the data here show that the styles of boys and girls are not so dissimilar from each other.

Dara and Sarah are certainly part of an all-girl subcultural group. They talk to each other frequently, are united in close social relationships, school, after-school activities, religious groups, parties, etc. Maltz and Borker predict that as a result they should have developed similar discourse styles. We don't find that here. In fact, Sarah and Dara can't be compared on either of the discourse features that we have examined, topic introduction or on styles of interruption. Perhaps the mixed - gender nature of

the group that is causing the differentiation. But according to Maltz and Borker, the girls should have still been more like one another than other pairs. Perhaps Maltz and Borker are correct in their assessment of what children do with language, but it is only true in same sex groups.

The ones with the most similar style are David and Dara. We might conclude that family style is more powerful than gender style in this group.

Notes

1. Talbot, although acknowledging Zimmerman and West's influence, call their work "embarrassing."

IV. DISCOURSE VARIATION AND SOCIAL COMFORT

In Chapters 2 and 3 the discourse styles of topic initiation and interruption were shown to vary for individual speakers across similar contexts. In this chapter I will argue that what motivates the variation for each participant is how accepted and socially comfortable she or he feels in the group.

Direct interviews with the children establish that when they feel well-liked and socially secure they relax their conversational manners and enjoy themselves; when they feel awkward due to lack of familiarity, they are quiet. There are no gender differences in the norms established for comfortable, successful conversations and awkward, unsuccessful conversations.

In this chapter I will use Dara's most comfortable social interaction, a conversation with Sarah and Stephanie (C6) to determine her vernacular or most relaxed style. Variation from that style with regard to topic initiation and interruption should reflect how she manipulates different social situations. I will compare her style to David's for possible gender differences in vernacular style.

Finally I suggest how Milroy's 1980 network model can be applied to small homogeneous groups of mixed-sex preadolescent conversation. Discourse variation from

vernacular to most formal reflects the social comfort of the members of the interaction.

IV.1. Interviews with the children

I asked each of the children to discuss with me who they liked to have dinner with and why. 1 They all expressed exactly the same idea: they were most comfortable being with those friends who they knew the best, over the longest period of time, and felt the most friendship for and acceptance from.

IV. 1.1. The girls' standard of conversational comfort and discomfort

Since Dara participated in all the taped conversations, we can use her as an example of how to establish this index of social comfort in conversation by way of looking at discourse variation. I interviewed her as to how she felt about having dinner with various friends and her answers were so typical and informative that a partial transcript of Dara's interview follows.

1. Q: Who of the following would you rather have over for dinner, in order of preference: Jihad, Sarah, Adam, Ellie, Max, Jane?

Dara: Sarah, Adam, Jihad, Jane, Ellie and Max.

2. Q: Why Sarah first?

Dara: Because she's my friend.

3. Q: What does this mean? Why is it better to have a friend over for dinner?

Dara: Because you get to talk to them.

4. Q: And...

Dara: And you know them very well.

5. Q: And that means what?

Dara: That means that I've known her since I was little and we have the same sense of humor.

6. Q: And what about Adam, who was second?

Dara: I know him almost as long as Sarah and he's much more fun than any of my other wanky friends.

7. Q: Why Max last?

Dara: Because I consider him a boring pig.

8. Q: Why?

Dara: Because he's very rude.

9. Q: What makes him rude?

Dara: Last time he came over, he started bugging David that he was bored. I didn't like him.

10. Q: Now, another question. When someone is at your house for dinner, how should you behave?

11. Dara: Depends who it is.

12. Q: IF it's Sarah.

Dara: Crazy. Cause Sarah acts the way I do because she's crazy, because she knows me. So I wouldn't worry about my manners very much.

13. Q: What about someone like Ellie?

Dara: I would worry about my manners because Ellie would go around talking to people probably.

14. Q: Now, what would your manners be like at dinner? What are good manners and not good manners?

- Dara: Good manners is eating your food and not putting your knees up and not starting to laugh and making vulgar jokes like I would do with Adam and Sarah.
15. Q: Why would you do it if it wasn't good manners?
- Dara: Because they know me. They're not going to think I'm an idiot.
16. Q: Uh huh. When you're at someone's house for dinner, how would you behave?
- Dara: Be very quiet and eat everything on your plate.
17. Q: Why?
- Dara: So they think you're a polite person.
18. Q: When you're at Sarah's house for dinner, how do you behave?
- Dara: Very talkative and eat everything on your plate.
19. Q: Why talkative at Sarah's?
- Dara: Because I know her family.
20. Q: Uh huh. And that makes you feel better?
- Dara: Yeah. And they know me, actually.
21. Q: So, whose house would you feel most comfortable in?
- Dara: Out of all of those? Sarah's and Adam's.
22. Q: And the least comfortable?
- Dara: Ellie, um, just by myself?
23. Q: Yeah.
- Dara: The least comfortable?
I don't know. I wouldn't feel the least comfortable at Max's house even though I don't know him, because we're not involved with them. Ellie I wouldn't because she's my friend. Jane's maybe because her father and mother have a high opinion of everybody. Sarah, I wouldn't. Adam's I wouldn't.

Dara's reaction to the question how would she behave when someone came to dinner (11) is revealing: "Depends on who it is." Such a response indicates that she realizes that she changes her style according to who is present. Dara says that she likes Sarah as her favorite dinner companion because she has a long history of interaction with her ("I've known her since I was little" (5)) and thus feels free to act "crazy" and not "worry" about her "manners." Having "fun," acting silly without fear of censure is how Dara defines relaxed friendship. Adam has the same qualifications as Sarah. He's "fun" and she knows him almost as long as Sarah.

Dara tells us that she has different behavior with friends who she feels secure with and those others from whom she is wary of censure. Manners are the opposite of fun and acting crazy. Watching your manners, not "making vulgar jokes" is what you do when you worry about how people would talk about you, like Ellie. Dara doesn't have to worry about what Adam and Sarah are going to think "because they know" her. Being polite is a way to ensure not being thought an idiot.

When I interviewed Sarah (see Appendix for interviews), she said very much the same thing as Dara. She says when she's with Dara, "I can say whatever I want, be as rude as I want, and not care cause they know I'm only joking." Like Dara, when she feels that she is liked and accepted, she

doesn't have to worry about what she says and she can carry on without being thought an idiot.

Stephanie also had a similar response. Stephanie said she would like to have Sarah as a dinner guest because she feels "most at home" with her, like she's her friend too. A good time for Stephanie, just like Dara, is "to joke around and laugh a lot." Adam would be her next choice because she's "used to him." She would like to have Jane the least as a dinner guest because "she hardly ever comes over so I wouldn't know what to do." Clearly, familiarity breeds comfort.

Stephanie says that it's fun when Adam comes over because David makes him laugh a lot. She also said that when she was with someone who she didn't know very well, she would put on good manners and not joke around and be polite and quiet.

IV. 1.2. The boys' standard of comfort and discomfort

The responses of the four boys, Adam, David, Jihad, and Max show some differences from the girls. In each case when I asked them "what makes a good dinner," they all referred to the food. The girls never talked about food at all. Either the question was taken completely literally - a good dinner is a dinner where the food is good - and since all three of them did it, such literalness may be characteristic of boys at this age, or food plays a more important role in

successful dinnertime interaction for these boys than for the girls.

When I asked David which person he would best like to have over for dinner, he said Adam "because he's my age and my friend and he's fun to make laugh." Jihad would be second "'cause he makes me laugh." The boys and girls in this group share a norm for a good time - laughing.

David continued by saying he would like least to have Ellie as a guest "'cause I don't know her." He says nothing about her being a girl. When I asked David what a good conversation would be like, he said one "where we make jokes and crack on each other." When I asked how he would behave if he had to go to Ellie's house for dinner, he said he probably wouldn't talk.

Adam said it was "fun" to come to our house for dinner because "David's funny...I guess everybody's funny." When I asked Adam what kind of person he'd like to have at his house for dinner he said his friends "'cause they're the people I know and spend the most time with and I'm not totally out of whack with them." He said he would invite his "friends" for dinner because he could "have the most fun" with them and "make jokes, the kind we couldn't make around adults." This sounds very like Dara saying it's fun to make vulgar jokes and to be with someone who shares your sense of humor.

Jihad, when asked what type of person he'd most like to have dinner with, said "funny" with lots of jokes. If he was forced to have dinner with someone he didn't like, he also would be "very quiet."

Max, after he also discussed the menu, said that a good time at dinner would be full of conversation. If he was uncomfortable, he would be quiet and try to hurry it along. The person who he would like to have for dinner at his house is his friend from kindergarten who he feels very close to because they "have a good time and laugh a lot."

IV. 1.3. Discussion of the interviews

Clearly for this group, girls and boys, involvement, laughter, and joking is a signal of pleasure and fun, and quiet, polite behavior a signal of discomfort and lack of familiarity. These particular norms need not be thought to be universal, even to this age and social group. But these children share norms and are aware that a good time has certain characteristics and a bad time, others. It's possible that the boys aren't as concerned with the social element of dinner as the girls are (although they fully share the norms for a good time) because they all spoke immediately and lengthily on the food.

These children are also very conscious of the fact that they change their behavior depending on how well integrated they feel to the group. Quiet, for all the children, meant

they were unfamiliar or uncomfortable in the interaction. Their comfort and security seems to be directly related to familiarity and frequency of interaction.

Therefore Maltz and Borker's contention that groups that are unfamiliar with each other in childhood will have trouble communicating in adulthood is verified by the children's perceptions of their own behavior. However, these data show that it is not the difference in gender that makes for the discomfort, but the social conditions of not being part of the same group over a period of time. Thus Dara and Stephanie are comfortable with Adam because they have been interacting with him over a long period of time, and less comfortable with Max who they have little experience with.

IV. 2. Topic initiation and comfort

Since Dara, Sarah, and Stephanie have agreed that being with each other is the most fun and comfortable, we can examine a dinner conversation with these three children to specifically identify the qualities of the interaction and the concomitant discourse style that define success.

I tape recorded such a dinner with the three girls (C6). There was a tremendous amount of laughter and involvement. The most noticeable quality about this conversation was the amount of "voices" used. Dara and Stephanie have funny routines that they do to amuse themselves and others (like the Betty routine). These routines involve pretending to be

other people and this game is signalled by adopting funny voices. Of the 26 minutes of conversation, 15 minutes were spent in funny voices. Of particular interest was that Sarah, who doesn't use this style of play in her own family (according to her parents), was brought into the fun and adopted funny voices. These routines are silly and vulgar and make the girls laugh. That Sarah is so willing to participate and adopt the style of the family play indicates how close she is to the others and how willing to accommodate herself to their style of fun.

Dara's comfort with this conversation is signalled by her amount of talk, laughter, and the funny routines. Her discourse strategies here should be typical of her vernacular or most relaxed style.

Dara spoke and laughed (it was impossible to measure laughter separately since it was so entwined with talking) for a total of 9 minutes. Since it was a three-member conversation, 9 minutes is approximately 1/3 of the total interchanges. Thus measured, her involvement was what I have been calling balanced.

IV. 2.1. Topic introduction in C6: Dara, Sarah, Stephanie

I examined this conversation for the two discourse functions, topic initiation and interruption patterns.

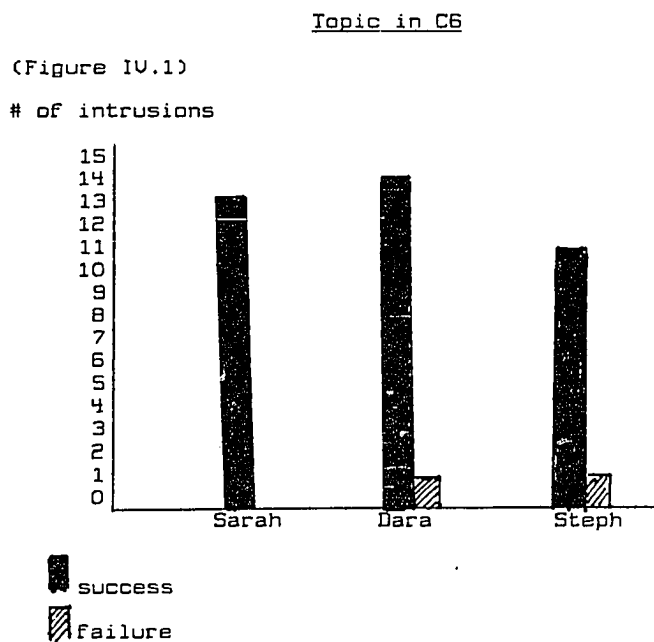
The number of topic introduction for each girl was:

Dara 14

Sarah 13

Stephanie 11.

Both Dara and Stephanie had one topic failure. (See Figure IV.1)



Since so much of the conversation was spent in the routine, which I counted only as one topic, this is a great number of topic introductions. There are many topics introduced and responded to, and there is no dramatic imbalance among the contributions of the participants. The relative balance in the numbers of topic introduction of the conversational participants in this very happy interaction

suggests that balance among the participants is an important ingredient. When one person is either monopolizing the topics (like Max in C2) or totally removed (like Sarah in C3), it suggests that the conversation is awkward for at least some of the members.

It should be noted that Sarah is just about as involved as Dara is here, which is in contrast to her involvement when the two boys, David and Jihad, were present (C3). We can conclude she feels much more relaxed and comfortable with Dara and Stephanie because in her interview she said she would have fun with Dara and be quiet with strangers. However, once again it is impossible to ascertain if it is the maleness of the two boys which makes her uncomfortable, or her lack of familiarity with them.

IV.2.2. Comparison of Dara's style across conversations

Comparing this conversation to the others for topic introduction allows us to make several interpretations of the kinds of interactions that were going on. If we reexamine the other conversations and focus on one child, Dara, who participated in all of them, we can measure how her variation of discourse style signals social comfort and friendly feeling. As Dara said, when she is very comfortable conversationally, she is very actively involved.

Each of these conversations has its own program. The most comfortable conversation with Dara, Sarah, and

Stephanie (C6) was full of funny routines. The conversation with Adam (C1) was full of funny routines and sexual jokes. With Max (C2), there was no overt marker of fun: little laughter, no jokes, routines that didn't work. In the conversation with five children (C3) with David, Dara, Stephanie, Sarah, and Jihad, the "fun" was less verbal than in the other two. The fun in this interaction was in playing with the food. They had snow peas and they were shooting the peas out of the pods at each other and thinking it was hilarious.

The conversation with Adam, David, Dara and Stephanie (C1) lasted 34 minutes, which was the longest recorded. Dara contributed 9:32 minutes, which shows active involvement. In this interaction with Adam, Dara introduced 8 of the 35 topics, almost 1/4 of the total. She said, in the interview, that she feels comfortable with Adam, almost as much as Sarah and she has fun with him. Thus, we have further support for our contention that in this group, in this setting, relative balance amongst the participants as far as topic introduction is concerned, is a sign of a successful interaction.

Also, her involvement, with a boy present, further suggests that gender is much less salient for conversational comfort than frequency of interaction and social familiarity.

In the conversation with Max (C2), who she reports "is a boring pig" on the basis of this interaction, she only introduces 2 of the 18 topics, 1/9 of the total. She is actually withdrawn here conversationally. Of the 23 minutes this dinner lasted, Dara only spoke for 4 minutes. That she doesn't or couldn't work herself into the conversation underscores what she says about being "quiet" with someone she doesn't trust or who she feels may condemn her.

Taken together with Dara's interview, her lack of participation in the conversation (C2) as a whole and the lack of balance in topic introduction indicate her discomfort with the social situation.

In the 5-person conversation (C3), with Jihad and Sarah, Dara speaks for 8 minutes of the 27 minute conversation, a bit less than 1/3 and introduces 13 of the 42 topics, almost 1/3. Dara is doing more than her equal share here. Sarah, as previously noted, was not participating at all and Dara, I have suggested, was making up for her friend's lack of involvement by doing more conversational interaction.

I believe Dara senses Sarah's discomfort and is working overtime, doing Sarah's part as well as her own to keep the conversation flowing. It is consistent with Dara's feeling that "quiet" indicates discomfort that she would think Sarah was uncomfortable because she was so quiet. Dara felt that she had some extra hostess responsibilities with Sarah there. Certainly the variation of her discourse style from

C6, the most successful conversation, and the others, suggests that she was overengaged in this conversation.

She certainly had the most hostess responsibilities in the conversation with Ellie and Jane (C5). It was her least familiar social occasion. She had no members of her family with her and these girls, although friends at school, had never been over to her house before.

The quality of the conversation was again unique. There was no "fun"; no routines or funny voices or vulgar, sexual stories or throwing of food. The three girls really talked to each other. That is, they developed topics more fully than in any of the other conversations, where it seems more accurate to say remarks were just being exchanged. The turns were much longer and there were some pauses between topics. There was less laughter and joking around. Instead of laughing, curiously, they spoke about how "funny" and "hilarious" certain things were.

The conversation is distinguished from the unpleasant interaction with Max by the amount of Dara's involvement. This three-member conversation lasted 23:28 minutes and Dara spoke for a total of 7:37, a little more than 1/3, neither monopolizing the conversation or being withdrawn. However, as to topic introduction, she introduces almost 40%, 13 of 33 topics. Again I interpret this imbalance as hostess responsibilities. When the conversation flags, she asks the girls if they had seen a movie, and they discuss that. At

another time, she asks them if they are enjoying the food, and they respond to that. Since we know that Dara's style is to be engaged when she is having a successful interaction, it is not surprising that she should work hard at engaging her friends, with whom she can't really relax and be silly and vulgar, which she says is the most fun.

So if we take her at her word, this conversation, C5, is her most demanding. She doesn't feel at ease enough to be silly; she doesn't have the support of her family with their comfortable and funny routines. She is actually working on making this interaction successful. Her overanxiousness for success can be seen in her amount of topic introductions.

IV. 2.3. Comparing Dara and David's topic initiation and comfort

A look at David's style may show any gender differences in how discourse functions are used within this group. When David was very comfortable with his best friend and his sisters, in C1, he introduced almost 25% of the topics (9 of 35). This is well-balanced for a 4-member conversation. He is neither monopolizing the talk or withdrawn. We have previously suggested that balance, for this group, male and female, is a sign that all is going well in the interaction.

In C2, with Max, David introduced only 3 of 18 topics, about 16%. This was a less successful dinner, and David was less engaged. Max was monopolizing the talk and David might

have been being a good host and friend by allowing his guest to hold forth. C2 was for David in some ways like Dara's dinner with Ellie and Jane (C5). David was with someone who he was not especially intimate with. He was, we saw, aware that Max was not enjoying himself, yet he did nothing active to dispel the friction in the interaction.

Unlike Dara, who worked overtime to keep her friends engaged, David is most conversationally uninvolved in C2. He knows Max is having trouble with his sister and he remains quiet. David is either not very skilled in conversational and social manipulation, or feels less responsible to "fix up" the trouble than Dara would. C2 is the only conversation where David does not contribute an appropriately balanced number of topics.

It's very possible that the difficulties in this interaction were from lack of familiarity with Max's style. There is nothing gender-linked about this because David had the same reaction as Dara to Max; he was quiet and uninvolved.

Max, however, may have been trying to entertain the children. When interviewed, he said a successful dinner was one in which there was a lot of talk, one in which he talked a lot. His style, at this dinner, was very voluble. By his own terms, he was having a good time, talking a lot. However, he was sarcastic. He said for example when Stephanie coughed, "And now you can spit in my food. Oh,

good." I suspect that for Max and his close friends, sarcasm is accepted as fun.

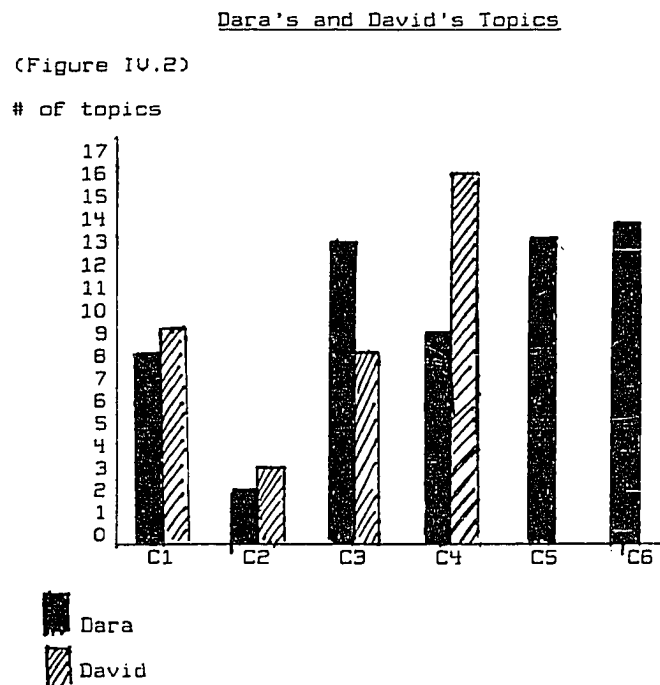
Jihad, in fact, did some of the same thing. When he asked Dara to pass him the milk, he said he wanted the milk so that he could read the label. However, everyone laughed at Jihad. None of the children laughed at Max. His style was too unfamiliar for them. There was no sarcasm in any conversation with the girls (C6, 4). Nor was there any in C1. The close family style, for this group, does not include sarcasm.

Max might well have been confused by his lack of success in the conversation. He says as much when he thinks he is being funny and the others are not responding to him: "You say you want nonsense, and then you don't laugh." He is trying to entertain and amuse the others; "I'm just trying to be a silly boy." His style, however, is unsuccessful with this group. They feel he is not nice, or as Dara says, "rude." But it's quite possible that Max was trying to be friendly, and his style of banter was too unfamiliar to be successful.

In C3, with Jihad and Sarah, the 5-member conversation, David introduced 20% (8 of the 42 topics). Jihad, like Max, was very verbally engaged; but in this conversation, David does not withdraw. We can conclude that he felt more comfortable with Jihad and Sarah. Dara was extremely

involved in this conversation and it's possible that David was responding to Dara's style.

When David interacts with Jihad and his sisters (C4) and not Sarah, he introduces 16 of the 55 topics, a bit more than 25%. Dara and Steph are less engaged in this conversation, but David does not seem to feel it his duty to fill the breach. Figure IV.2. illustrates Dara and David's number of topic introductions across the conversations.



IV. 2. 4. Conclusions and implications

From information on how topic introduction functions for these children we are not able to point to any significant differences in behavior that is related to

gender. Both girls and boys seem to share norms for how they feel when comfortable and involved, and how they respond conversationally to social discomfort ("quiet"). For both David and Dara a balance of the members of the group in the number of topic introductions reflects social comfort. A suggestive difference is that Dara worked harder, that is, was very active conversationally, when she had sole responsibility for her friends. Unfortunately, there is no taped conversation of David without his sisters, in a comparable situation.

These data show how subtle are the interlocking of linguistic and social factors. Analyses that proclaim massive stylistic differences between males and females based on single interactions need to be reexamined.

IV. 3. Interruption

As we look at other discourse information, we should be able to refine our ideas about what was going on socially. The data on interruptions should also serve as a mechanism to evaluate how engaged and comfortable the children are with each other. Since we have established a standard of comfort for Dara, the data on C6, with Sarah and Stephanie, should reveal her interruption pattern when she is at her most relaxed and unselfconscious, actually her vernacular discourse style. We can then note variation from this style as a way to gauge how she is feeling socially.

IV. 3.1. Interruption in C6: Dara, Sarah, Stephanie

The number of Interruptions in this highly successful interaction is very high: (See Figure IV.3)

Interruptions: 17

Dara - Sarah
 Dara -- Sarah
 Steph -- Dara
 Dara -- Sarah
 Steph -- Sarah
 Steph -- Sarah
 Dara -- Sarah
 Sarah -- Steph
 Steph -- Dara
 Sarah -- Dara
 Steph -- Dara
 Sarah -- Steph
 Steph -- Dara
 Dara -- Steph
 Steph -- Dara
 Steph -- Dara
 Dara -- Steph

Supports: 3

Steph -- Dara
 Steph -- Dara
 Steph -- Sarah

Attempted Interruptions: 2

Steph -- Dara
 Steph -- Sarah

Dara Interrupts Sarah 4 times, Stephanie 2 times.
 Sarah Interrupts Stephanie 2 times and Dara 1 time. Neither girl has any instance of a Support intrusion or an Attempted Interruption.

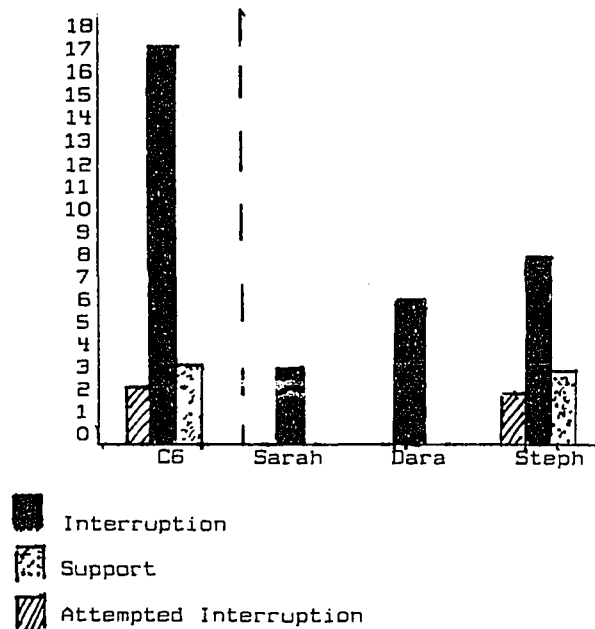
Stephanie's patterns are very suggestive. Stephanie Interrupts Dara 6 times, Sarah 2 times. She Supports Dara 2 times and Sarah 1 time. She Attempts to interrupt Dara and

Sarah one time each. She has almost double the number of interruptions as Dara and much more than Sarah.

Interruption in C6

(Figure IV.3)

of intrusions



These numbers reveal that in a happy, successful conversation there is a great deal of intruding among the three girls. That this conversation involves only three might make these patterns quite different than when there are four or more, but it can certainly be compared to C5, Dara and her two friends. Interruption, then, for this group can be seen as a sign of involvement and ease with each other.

On the basis of one conversation it can't be claimed that girls, when together, interrupt each other very frequently, but it is striking how much more engaged Sarah

and Stephanie are here than in any of the other interactions. If this is not "girl" style, it is certainly relaxed, vernacular style for these girls.

Stephanie's large number of Interruptions suggest that she is being aggressive about fitting herself into this conversation. In the other conversations she was taking more of a back seat. Here she is actively thrusting herself into the interaction.

I think it would be a mistake to draw the conclusion that it is the mixed-sex makeup of the other conversational groups that cause Stephanie's more passive role. The evidence on C1 works against this where she behaves just like everyone else. Just as she says, she feels the most relaxed with Sarah, and her style here illustrates her relaxed and unselfconscious style.

IV.3.2. Comparison of Dara's Interruption style across conversations

If the pattern established in C6 is Dara at her most comfortable, then looking at the other conversations for variation from C6 should give us an index of Dara's relative social comfort. Her pattern of Interruption for all the conversations is:

C1 (Adam): 0
C2 (Max): 1
C3 (Jihad, Sarah): 1
C4 (Jihad): 1
C5 (Ellie, Jane): 1
C6 (Sarah): 6

With Sarah and Stephanie, she Interrupts 6 times; in C2, C3, C4, and C5 she only Interrupts once (1) in each. In C1 there was no instance of Interruption. As well as having an usual amount of Interruptions, in C6 Dara has no instances of Supports or Attempted Interruptions.

These numbers should not be considered out of relation to each other. Sarah also has no instances of either Attempted Interruption or Supports. It is the congruence of patterns and behavior that indicates how successful the interaction is.

Dara's interruption patterns fluctuate. Although her style in her most comfortable conversation is an unusual pattern for her, it is in keeping with the other girls' involvement. We know that she was very happy and comfortable in the interchange with Sarah and Stephanie, not only because she said she would be but by the amount of involvement and laughter and fun. We then have to interpret this interruption pattern, high in Interruptions, low in Supports and Attempted Interruptions as nonhostile, and one which is used when she is very engaged and unselfconscious. She is, in her own terms, not watching her manners.

We can look back at C2 and see the reason she might have been taken aback when Max censured her for interrupting him. She really stopped engaging in the conversation after that. Perhaps she felt stymied; she had to watch how she spoke.

And as she reported about herself, when she's uncomfortable, she's quiet.

Another advantage of examining the same participant's discourse behavior over several conversations is that we can describe some of the repertoire of uses and what role the discourse functions plays in the social interaction. From C6, we can say that Dara, when relaxed, Interrupts. This is not to say that she always interrupts or even that it is characteristic of her friendly style. But we can claim that Dara interrupts her friends at times, and she doesn't seem to use interruption as a weapon of hostility or dominance.

Why should her pattern in C6 be so different from that of C1, with Adam, who she claims to be relaxed with? A possibility is that she isn't as relaxed with Adam as with Sarah, and the interaction was less involving for her. Perhaps she did not feel herself so central in C1. Adam is really David's friend and David was really the focus of the interaction because he had just come home from school and was telling funny stories about people there. She was, I think, being courteous to him, and interested in what he was saying. This is borne out by the fact that her 3 Supports were all on David. Analyzing her style of discourse with regard to Interruption, then, indicates that she was involved and active in C1, but not at her most socially relaxed. She was sensitive to her brother's needs. 2

In C2, the troublesome conversation with Max, Dara Interrupts Max once, but she gets Interrupted 3 times. She Attempts to interrupt Max once and Supports him once. All of her intrusion are with Max. That she allowed him to Interrupt her 3 times and was unable to balance it out by interrupting him put her at a disadvantage. She is not relaxed here, nor is she taking care of anyone else. Again, it is the congruence of the participants' style that suggests harmonious interaction.

In C3, with Jihad and Sarah, we suggested that Dara felt some social obligation and was trying to entertain and perhaps make up for her friend's conversational passivity. She Interrupts Stephanie here once. Again, she is not at the center of the stage or at her most comfortable. In C4 with Jihad and without Sarah she also Interrupts once.

We can conclude that generally Dara is sensitive to that politeness feature of Interruption because the only time she allows herself rampant use of Interruption in an interaction is at her most comfortable.

Interruption, then, has at least two discourse interpretations for Dara. On the surface, she knows interruption is not polite, and when she is called to account for interrupting (by Max), she feels criticized. That is, she seems aware that considerate speakers do not Interrupt. On a deeper level, however, when she is most relaxed and without fear of censure, she does Interrupt, as

we can see from her interchange with Sarah and Stephanie. As she says, she can act however she wants, without watching her manners.

Therefore, it can be established, that for this particular speaker, in this particular setting, interrupting is not a sign of dominance or of a feeling of superiority, but of relaxed vigilance of politeness, a relaxation that can only occur with intimate friends at the most trustworthy level. That a single discourse function can have several levels of function is borne out from this analysis too.

IV 3.3. Dara and David's Interruption patterns compared

The most comfortable conversation for David would be with Adam, C1. He said in his interview that Adam would be his favorite dinner guest. In that conversation there was no Interruption at all. If we follow the same kind of reasoning we used for Dara, then we would have to conclude that David's vernacular style is not interrupting but giving Support (4 of 10). In C2, with Max, he does no intrusions of any sort. Since this pattern is so different from C1, with regard to Supports, we have further reason to think his lack of involvement comes from discomfort.

In C3, his pattern is again changed. He does 1 of 2 Support comments, and Attempts to interrupt his sisters 2 of 2. Attempted Interruptions may be another sign of comfort, or family style. The problem with analyzing Attempts is that

it is difficult to determine if David backed off when he saw his sisters were not willing to relinquish their turn, or his sisters refused him entrance to their turn.

The conversation with Jihad, C4, should be the closest to C1 in style since David is fondest of Jihad after Adam. However, it isn't. He does no Interruptions, which is characteristic, but he does no Supports either. He does Attempt to interrupt twice (2 of 6).

We can conclude that in friendly talk, David, unlike Dara, doesn't Interrupt; when he is comfortable socially, he tries to get the floor and fails, either due to a lack of aggressiveness on his part, or even a failure to monitor correctly another's turn.

IV. 3.4. Discussion and implications

Comparing David and Dara's Interruption patterns, particularly their vernacular style show some differences. It is undetermined whether these differences are gender-related. Unfortunately we have no interaction with David and his friends, and no sisters. If we did, there might be more reason to claim a "boy" style in interruption. But even with the data that we have, there is no evidence that David's style is more aggressive and competitive than Dara's. Zimmerman and West's results are in no way confirmed here.

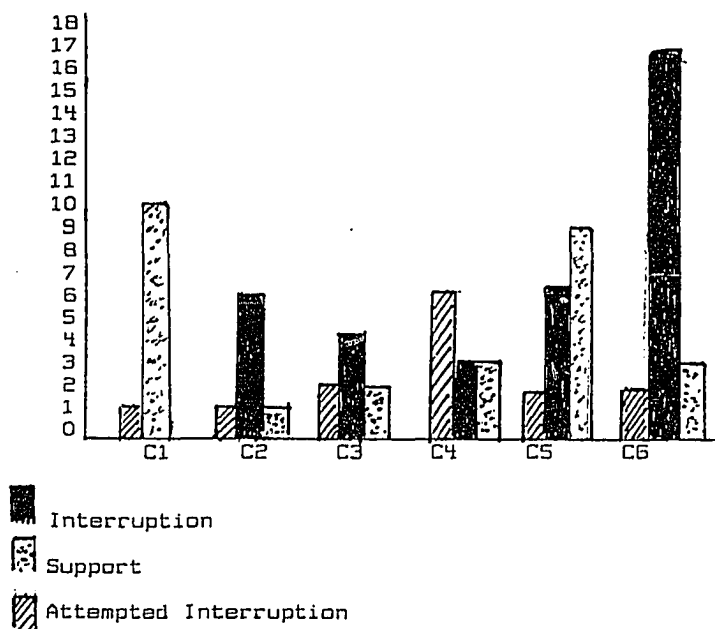
Figure IV.4 illustrates how each of the conversations has its particular quality. All of them except C2 were happy

and successful conversations. It is not the amount of the discourse function that is significant, but the relative congruence of the participants and their attitude toward the discourse strategy that establishes successful interaction.

Interruption Patterns in C1-C6

(Figure IV.4)

of intrusions



IV.4 Conclusions

These preadolescent children have norms, apparently their own, for what constitutes a successful and an unsuccessful interaction within a particular setting. The standards for success and failure can be documented in two ways:

a) by asking the speakers when they have the most fun or feel the best about an interaction, and then

b) observing such an interaction to identify the particular discourse functions in action.

The same technique can be used for establishing norms for unsuccessful or failed interactions. In this way a particular discourse function can be understood for a particular speaker for a particular speech event. These norms can vary for different participants. Max, for instance, may well have different norms for what constitutes "fun" than David, Dara, and Stephanie.

Each discourse function, then, has both an analytic and predictive function. An observer can document a successful interaction, and also, as in this case, if the function relates to social comfort or feelings of trust and familiarity, predict how interactions will work amongst friends and relative strangers. The conversational norms for each group must be established before an analysis of how discourse features function can offer useful information.

A social group is identified through interaction. Close friends, who have lots of interaction, may have different conversational norms with each other than with casual friends. These data certainly suggest that this is the case.

Vernacular discourse style for a particular child in a particular group can be ascertained by:

a) having a full ethnographic background on her past social and linguistic behavior,

b) interviewing her directly about who she feels comfortable with, and

c) observing her discourse style in interactions in her self-defined comfortable group.

The childrens' focus on familiarity and comfort confirms Maltz and Borker's and Gumperz's claims that shared linguistic and social background lead to the most successful communication.

Milroy (1980) shows how those people who are the most involved with each other's lives share communicative styles. Her point is that language serves to both signal and preserve the in-group nature of the community. Those people who are less involved with the group (like Max) will not have the same kinds of linguistic signals so readily at their disposal. Their lack of in-group status is thus reflected and maintained through verbal interchanges.

For instance, Dara, when she conforms to family style, unites herself with the family network, with its routines, funny voices, and private jokes. But when she is relating closely to her peers, she makes use of different stylistic devices in her discourse, which may signal peer group or gender group style.

Investigating how each child uses a particular discourse function, we can identify differences in style that may lead to problem spots in exchanges. A conspicuous lack of integration to the other participants' style suggests lack

of integration into the social group. Thus, when Max is much more active and aggressive in both topic initiation and interruption, he is, as Adam says, "out of whack" with the group. When Sarah is quiet, doing no topic initiation or interruption, as she is with David and Jihad (C3), it signals that she feels unfamiliar with the group and uncomfortable.

When one participant's style is quite deviant from the others, then it signals some form of social trouble. When, whatever the pattern, it is shared by the others, it seems to signal social integration.

Thus when Dara, Sarah, and Stephanie Interrupt each other, or David, Adam, Dara and Stephanie Support each other, it is the congruence of the behavior that signals cohesion in the group.

The analysis offered here suggests new possibilities in the understanding of the conversational and social functions of individual discourse features. Speakers may have a continuum of style, from most formal and polite good manners, used when the social situation is unfamiliar or unfriendly, to a relaxed and intimate style, when the participants feel secure in the social relationships with the other participants.

Gender, if it is meaningful as a variable, is so in relation to how girls and boys respond to the group. If Dara feels that her interaction with Max isn't successful, I am

claiming that it is her unfamiliarity with him, socially and linguistically, that influences her style, not his maleness. Since she doesn't respond with the same awkwardness to Adam or Jihad, we must conclude that gender is only part of the social makeup of the interaction.

I have tried to show here how a small group conversation can be analyzed. Each group should be looked at uniquely. A specific social group may have frequent interaction, due to family or other circumstances. For example, Adam is a part of a familiar social group for Dara, whereas Max is not. Sarah is a very close friend of Dara's, and Ellie is not. It must be an analytic question whether a particular group has had a great deal of interaction or not. Frequency of communication and degree of friendship, not gender, have been shown to be salient variables in how discourse functions are used.

It is, I think, unhelpful to an understanding of how discourse functions in conversation to make overgeneralized conclusions about how large groups of people use a particular function. Work like Fishman's (1978, 1983) on topic introduction and Zimmerman and West's (1975) on Interruption should be reexamined in light of this methodology.

An individual's language style reflects how that individual feels about the membership of a particular group

at a particular time. Once variability of individual discourse features is established as a possibility, as we have done here, it is the next step to link this study with other studies that show how variability is based on comfort, familiarity, frequent interchanges and sense of community. Closely knit networks, in Milroy's terms, share communicative preferences and it is the degree of integration into the group that will have subtle language reflexes. Here we can see that this works for small children's groups too.

Notes

1. It should be remembered that I know most of these children for many years. I asked them if they would help me with a school project and they were all quite willing.

2. Dara, although David's twin, has taken on the role of the older sister; she frequently takes care of him.

V. CONCLUSION

In the previous chapter an argument was presented that variation in discourse style is closely connected to feelings of social comfort and familiarity. The participants were shown to be aware of their ability to engage in different types of conversational techniques, depending on how well they knew the other participants. It was shown, through an examination of Dara's style across 6 conversations, that at her most comfortable and socially relaxed, her amount of Interruption was very high. She was not interrupting as a weapon of dominance or hostility. She was not "watching her manners" because she knew she was well-liked and didn't have to behave politely. Therefore, in this study, high numbers of interruption is a sign of intimacy. This finding is at odds with Zimmerman and West, and the other researchers on interruption patterns, all of whom equate interruption with rude behavior. The other data suggest that Dara knows that it is "rude" to interrupt other speakers; she rarely does it. So that we have established that for Dara, in the context of friendly conversation, interruption has a social and an intimate form.

Through an analysis of both topic initiation and interruption patterns with the other children, it has been shown that when the participants used similar styles, no matter what the pattern was, group cohesion was signalled.

When one or more participants used a style that was atypical, it was a signal that something was going wrong for that participant in that interchange. Either they could not or would not fit themselves into the overall style of the group or they felt uncomfortable with the social interaction. In either case, the interaction was not successful for them.

In this study I have taken issue with those researchers who have claimed that speakers have particular styles of discourse that are associated with group style, especially male and female groups. Discourse styles have been shown to be dynamic, varying for individual speakers in response to the social needs of the particular situation. Thus, when Dara felt that she had to do extra hostess work to ensure her friend's comfort, she introduced a great many topics. When she felt disliked and unsuccessful, as with Max, she introduced very few topics.

The methodology used in this study: interview, direct observation, and analysis of particular discourse functions across several conversations in the same social setting for the same speaker, has shown how linguistic style and social features interact. Research dependent on a single interaction of a speaker could easily cause misleading results.

Norms of discourse behavior have to be analytically discovered, not imposed by the researcher. Each social group

may develop its own strategies for what feels like integrated, friendly talk, and what doesn't. It was suggested that Max's sarcastic style was not in keeping with the others' norms of friendly conversation. Thus, he seemed unfriendly and the conversation was difficult for all the participants. It is quite possible, however, that sarcasm is accepted as friendly interaction in Max's 'closest peer group.

I have suggested that identifying group norms is not enough to ensure successful communication. Participants have to be willing to engage in another's norms. If they don't, then the other participants may sense hostility, a desire not to be part of the group. Max was not willing to participate in the "pretend" routine, but Sarah was willing to adopt "funny" voices for the time of the interaction. It is possible that such sharing of norms is what creates the feeling of "being a friend" in conversation, that feeling of being known and accepted that all the children said they enjoyed the most. Refusing to engage with the group, particularly when it seems willful, signals a lack of friendship. Thus, the social relationship is created through the interaction, not only reflected by it.

There was no evidence of distinct gender-related styles of discourse for the males and females in this study. Both David and Dara, when uncomfortable with the interaction with Max, were quiet and uninvolved conversationally. When David

was with his friend Jihad, he was very actively engaged. When Dara was with her friend Sarah, she was very actively engaged. The data here suggest that if there is a gender style that these children use in their same sex play, they use a different style for their at-home, family interactions.

A possible gender-related difference in the conversational styles of these children is that girls may work harder to make successful conversation happen than boys. Dara seems to be more committed to making sure her friends are conversationally comfortable than David. This intriguing suggestion needs further research.

A specific suggestion for future research would be to investigate the same children in other kinds of speech activities and situations, like a classroom, to see how their discourse style changes. Another suggestion would be to manipulate the social demands of the situation and examine how discourse features change when, for instance, a complete stranger visited, of the same or opposite sex.

This study has provided suggestive material for the position that:

- preadolescent children do not have particular discourse styles, even of friendly speech;

- issues of gender are less salient than issues of friendship and familiarity;

-the social climate of each interaction is developed through conversation and defined within conversation;

-that boys and girls from the same background develop norms to recognize and signal friendly and unfriendly conversational style.

As was shown in this dissertation, discourse functions vary in relation to social demands and considerations. Claiming that gender motivates discourse styles is too broad a statement to have much explanatory power. Intensive analysis of one social group across conversations reveals group and individual norms of behavior. Such an analysis has both explanatory and predictive potential.

Appendix 1Conversations and Participants

- C1: Adam, David, Dara, Stephanie
- C2: Max, David, Dara, Stephanie
- C3: Jihad, Sarah, David, Dara, Stephanie
- C4: Jihad, David, Dara, Stephanie
- C5: Ellie, Jane, Dara
- C6: Sarah, Dara, Stephanie

Appendix 2Notes on transcription

Brackets represent simultaneous speech:

David: Can I have some?
Steph: [chew and chew.

Equal signs are used to show that the next speaker starts precisely as the current speaker finishes:

Max: You look it=
Dara: =Oh, thank you.

Parenthesis are used for explanations on the transcriptions:
Dara (singing): Monday potatoes...

Punctuation marks are used for intonation, not necessarily grammar:

Dara: Really!

Appendix 3Interview with Adam

Question: When you're at our house for dinner, what's it like?

Answer: Like David's funny; the jokes, umm... I guess everybody's funny.

Q: What would you say makes the difference between a good dinner and a bad dinner.

A: Well, if it looks like a regular hamburger I'm probably gonna eat it. But if it looks like it's gonna jump out at me, I'm not gonna eat it.

Q: I'm not actually talking about the food, I'm talking about the company.

A: What makes good company food?

Q: No, what makes a good time at dinner as opposed to not a good time. For instance, if you're having friends over for dinner, no adults, just friends, what would make it a fun dinner?

A: Pizza.

Q: Not the food, the company. Who would you invite for dinner to have the most fun.

A: My friends.

Q: Why?

A: Because I can have the most fun with them.

Q: What would be fun at dinner?

A: Well jokes. Like jokes we couldn't make around elderly people.

Q: And if you were going to describe a very unfun dinner, with kids, what would it be?

A: Well, it would probably be the nerds of the class.

Q: Why would that be unfun?

A: Because they are nerds.

Q: Explain, please.

A: They're not fun. They'd talk about something like science, or something wierd like that.

Q: Of all the people who you know, who is the person you would like to have over for dinner?

A: Do you want it like uh.. a lot of people. Like David or my school friends?

Q: Why?

A: Cause they're the people I know and spend the most time with. You know, I'm not totally out of wack with them, I know what's happening.

Q: What about.. are all your school friends boys or would you have girls over too?

A: Mostly boys, I'd say. There are a couple of girls but I'm not going to mention names because there are elderly people listening to this tape.

Q: Why more boys than girls?

A: No, I'm not saying that. I'd invite as many girls as boys.

Q: And would the dinner be the same?

A: It'd be more fun.

Q: Why?

A: Cause if you made a joke about men being better than females I mean, a fight would break out about something like that.

Q: So in a perfect world a perfect dinner would have who?

A: Like maybe ten, no.... I think about 7 boys and 7 girls and no adults no matter what.

Q: And in the worst possible dinner?

A: Can I say names?

Q: They won't mean anything to me so just tell me what kind of person.

A: The nerds, as I explained before.

Q: The nerds are people who are not your friends?

A: Yeah, well everybody calls them nerds for a reason I'm not gonna say again. And there are some girls I really hate that I would never invite over if my life depended on it.

Q: What if you found yourself having dinner with one of those girls who you wouldn't invite over for your life, how would you behave?

A: Well, I'd probably leave the table as much as I could. And I'd try not to look at her face and I'd make her take the bill (!)

Q: No, you're in your own house.

A: Oh.

Q: Would you talk to her.

A: Well, I guess I'd have to. I'd be a good host. But I wouldn't exactly have the time of my life.

Q: What does it mean to be a good host?

A: I mean be considerate, act nice, don't say that I want to have dinner with you, and don't say I like you.

Q: But when you're with your friends, you don't say I like you, I like you, either.

A: No. You say other things, but again I'm not going to say cause there are expletives in there.

Q: Okay, thank you.

Appendix 4Interview with David

Q: In the following list, who would you like to have over for dinner the best: Jihad, Sarah, Adam, Ellie, Max, Jane.

A: Adam

Q: Why?

A: Because he is my age and my friend and he's fun to make laugh.

Q: Who would you like to have second?

A: Jihad.

Q: Why?

A: Cause he makes me laugh.

Q: Who would you like to have last?

A: Probably.. read me the list again, probably Ellie.

Q: Why?

A: Cause I don't know her.

Q: Uh-huh. So when you have your friends over that you like to have over for dinner, how is it that you behave?

A: I eat.

Q: So what's the difference who's there then? What kind of conversation is what I want to know.

A: Well, we talk about the food and we talk about things we did that day and we make jokes and we crack on each other.

Q: What makes one conversation better than another so that you know you are having a good time?

A: Well, who I'm having it with, for one thing, or if it's an interesting or fun conversation, obviously.

Q: If you were going to go to anybody's on that list's house for dinner, who would you like to go to?

A: Probably Sarah's house.

Q: Why?

A: Because they probably have the best food.

Q: What about Adam?

A: Well, at Adam's house the food isn't too good.

Q: So the food is as important as the company?

A: Uh huh, almost. But I wouldn't go to Ellie's house though.

Q: Why not?

A: Because I don't know her. I wouldn't go to any stranger's house.

Q: If you were to go to Sarah's house, how would you behave at dinner?

A: I'd eat.

Q: And...? Anything else special you like to do at someone else's house?

A: Do I do anything else special? Umm. Nothing I could think of.

Q: And what if you were forced to go to Ellie's for dinner, how would you behave?

A: I probably wouldn't talk.

Q: How come?

A: Cause I wouldn't have fun at all. It would be stupid.

Q: You wouldn't make jokes or anything?

A: I might if there was an opportunity.

Q: Uh huh. Thank you.

Appendix 5Interview with Sarah

Q: IF you were going to invite people to dinner, who would be, of all your friends, who would you have over for dinner?

A: Dara and ...Kristin.

Q: You can make an order of preference. Why Dara and Kristen?

A: Well because I know if I invited Dara and Jane, then something would happen. Someone would get mad. IF I invited Jane and Ellie, someone would get mad. Jane and anybody... I don't feel I would be comfortable just inviting Dara and Ellie. Or Kristen and Ellie. Or I would invite Dara and Kristen. Or if they were busy, I'd invite Katie and Helena.

Q: You could only have one person if you wanted.

A: Or just Katie. But I wouldn't invite Elise, cause Elise wouldn't come.

Q: Why?

A: Cause she likes to be at home.

Q: Who is the person you would least like to have over for dinner?

A: I'd, probably, I don't know. Probably Ellie.

Q: Why?

A: I don't know. When I'm alone with Ellie I feel awkward.

Q: What makes you feel awkward?

A: I don't know. It's just cause something about Ellie. She doesn't make me feel comfortable.

Q: Don't you know her all your life?

A: Yeah, still...

Q: Are you not friends?

A: Yeah, we are friends, but I just... Ellie alone never.

Q: What about boys? Any boys?

A: Well, I could invite like Jeff and Katie or Jake and Jeff and Katie. Someboy like that. But I'd never invite Jane with a boy. Cause she'd flirt her heart out. Yeah. Or I'd invite Max. But I wouldn't invite Max with anybody.

Q: You can just have one person.

A: Yeah, cause nobody likes Max. Or if I invited Max, I could invite Max and Josie, together.

Q: So what would you say makes a good dinner as opposed to a rotten dinner?

A: Well, good conversation. I mean if there's no conversation then you just feel awkward. Good conversation and food ususally helps. And... that's probably about it.

Q: I don't know if you remember once you were with David and Jihad and Dara and Stephanie for dinner. Do you think that was a nice group?

A: I think it was fine. I don't know. I could just listen to everybody else make jokes and just laugh.
Um hmm.

Q: Do you feel that you know Jihad well enough?

A: I mean, it's not like I know Jihad very well, but I don't mind him.

Q: All right. So what makes good conversation?

A: You don't want to sit there and think, what do I say next. You just want to have the thing over with so you don't have to think of anything to say.

Q: Whose house would you like to go to dinner? Whose house would you be happiest at for dinner?

A: Dara's, cause I feel close friends with her.

Q: And the worst?

A: Pia's.

Q: Why?

A: Because it smells funny and I don't know her family.

Q: And how do you behave when you're at a dinner?

A: Well, it depends greatly. I mean if it's somebody I don't know very well, I'd just sit there and not say much, probably. If it's like Dara, I can say whatever I want. Be as rude as I want and not care cause I know that I'm only joking.

I'd probably be very polite with somebody I don't know.

Q: What would polite be?

A: Saying please and thank you and not being rude.

Q: Okay. Thanks.

Appendix 6Interview with Jihad

Q: What I'm trying to figure out is what makes a good time for kids at dinner. Being that you've been a dinner guest at our house and had a good time, the question is if you were going to have a good time with kids at dinner, no adults, what would it be like?

A: I don't know.

Q: Who would you be with?

A: I don't know.

Q: What type of person?

A: Funny.

Q: Do you have funny friends?

A: Some of them.

Q: And so let's say you invited your funny friends over for dinner, what would the conversation be like?

A: There'd be alot of inside jokes probably.

Q: uh huh. How many people do you think you'd have?

A: Five or six.

Q: All boys or boys and girls?

A: Wouldn't matter.

Q: The girls know the inside jokes too?

A: It depends. Some of them do.

Q: So invent for me a good dinner.

A: I don't know.

Q: Okay. Pretnd you're in our house for dinner, and I'm not around and imagine that it's fun. What's going on?

A: I don't know. I guess we're eating and telling jokes. I don't know.

Q: Do you tell jokes or you receive jokes?

A: Both.

Q: If you could imagine yourself in the worst of all possible dinner situations, what would it be like?

A: Dressed up with a bunch of people, adults, around me.

Q: And with no adults. A kid worst.

A: People I didn't like.

Q: What kind of person is that?

A: Someone I don't get along with.

Q: And what if you were forced to eat with them. How would you behave?

A: Quietly, I guess.

Q: Do you think the opposite is true, that you would be noisy with the people you like?

A: Probably.

Q: Of the people you know, whose house do you feel the most comfortable in?

A: Either yours or the Browns.

Q: Who are the Browns?

A: They live down the street.

Q: A friend of yours too. And the least?

A: Like a new house that I'd never been there before.

Appendix 7Interview with Stephanie

Q: Who of the following people, in order, would you like to have over for dinner: Jihad, Sarah, Adam, Ellie, Max, Jane?

A: Uh- Sarah, I guess.

Q: How come?

A: I don't know. I feel most at home with Sarah. And she's not one of David or Dara's friends. She kinda like my friend too. I don't know. She's just fun.

Q: And what do you do when she's over for dinner?

A: We joke around and laugh alot. And have a good time.

Q: And who would you like to have next?

A: In that list? Let me see.

Q: Jihad, Sarah, Adam, Ellie, Max, Jane.

A: Adam.

Q: Why?

A: I don't know, we're used to him. And he comes over alot. And he's rather amusing.

Q: And how is dinner when he is there?

A: Usually, messy.

Q: Who would you like to have the least?

A: The least? Well, I wouldn't mind having any of them. I'd like to have the least, Jane, I guess.

Q: Why?

A: Because...I don't know. It's just that she hardly ever comes over. So I wouldn't know what to do.

Q: Why is it different than when Sarah comes over?

A: Because Sarah comes over all the time, and I've known Sarah.

Q: What about the two boys, Jihad and Max?

A: It's not so bad when they come over cause you could still have a good time. But they're mostly David's friends.

Q: As opposed to Adam?

A: Well, Adam is David's friend too, but it's fun when Adam comes over because David makes him laugh alot.

Q: When someone is at your house for dinner, how should you behave? To have a good time.

A: I don't think about it really. I just kinda say whatever comes to my mind.

Q: And what if you go to someone's house for dinner?

A: Then I put on good manners.

Q: What are good manners?

A: Like, I say 'thank you' and 'please' and I eat as much as I can and I put my napkin on my lap and I take my plate and everything.

Q: Umhmm.

A: Do you mean conversation-wise? Well, it depends if the parents are eating dinner.

Q: No. The parents aren't eating.

A: Well, then I'll just discuss with Tara whatever comes into my head, and maybe I won't have such good table manners. (Tara is Steph's best friend.)

Q: Okay. Thank you very much.

Appendix B

Interview with Max

Unfortunately the actual tape of the interview with Max was damaged and I was unable to transcript our conversation verbatim, but I did take notes. The following represents several segments of the interview:

Q: Who would you like best to eat dinner with?

A: Charlie.

Q: Who's Charlie?

A: He's my best friend. I've known him since kindergarten; I practically live at his house.

Q: What's dinner like when you're with Charlie?

A: We talk a lot and joke around.

Q: How would you behave if you were in a dinner situation where you were uncomfortable?

A: I'd probably hurry up and try and get it over with.

Q: And?

A: I certainly wouldn't talk a lot cause that would make it longer.

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