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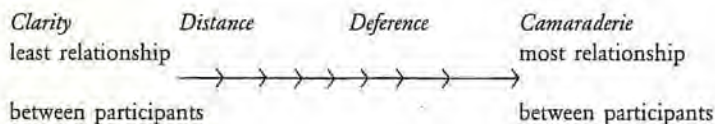
This article will discuss the communicative styles of two Catalan participants in a cross-cultural dinner table conversation. The Catalan men present extremely similar stylistic features in their speech which stem from a shared emphasis on rapport and involvement, namely cooperative overlapping, expressive paralinguistic features and ingenious content. After an overview of theoretical approaches to communicative style, three samples from a two-hour-long conversation will be analyzed.

Communicative styles. Common sense dictates that individuals and groups show recurrent specific features in their habitual ways of talking. Thus, a whole set of these features—syntactic and lexical choices, paralinguistic and suprasegmental traits, rhetorical strategies, pace, voice, turn-taking organization, and so forth—make a personal or collective way of talking identifiable. In other words, these features make up what Gumperz and Tannen refer to as individual and social styles.¹ These styles do not refer to something additional in the core linguistic structure, but they are “all the ways speakers encode meaning in language and convey how they intend their talk to be understood”.²

¹ See John J. Gumperz and Deborah Tannen, “Individual and social differences in language use”, in *Individual Differences in Language Ability and Language Behaviour*, eds. C.J. Fillmore, D. Kempler, and W.S.Y. Wang (New York: Academic Press, 1979).

² See Deborah Tannen, “New York Jewish Conversational Style”, in *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 30, 136.

Communicative styles present internal coherence; that is, they enable the hearer to expect that some cooccurrence of the speaker's linguistic feature will take place. Thus, for instance, an individual's communicative style will convey the ways in which s/he is aware of the addressee's presence in a given interaction. Lakoff suggests four idealized strategies that would represent the continuum of ways the speaker might present himself to others. The four points are: (1) *Clarity*. The expression of factual information is the most important issue. In everyday ordinary conversation this strategy is very unlikely to take place. (2) *Distance*. The aim is to inspire separateness and privacy. Hostility is mainly expressed by means of irony, sarcasm, impersonality rather than by means of sheer antagonism. (3) *Deference*. The aim is to avoid imposition. Deference allows interaction as long as there is no direct confrontation: hostility, for example, is expressed through questions, pauses, and glazes. (4) *Camaraderie*. The aim is to acknowledge interrelationship. Participants tend to express their feelings toward one another rather freely. "The idea is to be totally open, though openness in this mode is as politeness is to the others—it can be conventional, though this is not perceptible to people who don't use this mode as an ideal."³ Moving left to right on this continuum (below) demonstrates a growing awareness of the addressee's presence:



³ See Robin Lakoff and Deborah Tannen, "Communicative strategies in conversation. The case of 'Scenes from a Marriage'", in *Proceedings of the Fifth Annual Meeting of the Berkeley Linguistics Society*, (1979), 582.

The particular communicative competence rules of a given individual or group will enable a speaker to choose a strategy on this continuum according to his/her own cultural, social and ethnic background, and according to the specific context where the interaction occurs. These implicit communicative competence rules will make it possible for the speaker to produce his/her own contribution and to interpret the contributions of other speakers.

Camaraderie. This is the most recurrent strategy in the conversation being analyzed. Camaraderie means that mutual involvement interrelationship, open communication (friendly or hostile) is what really matters during an interaction. Being on the same wave length as the addressee is more important than the content of the interaction. In the case of a choice between clarity and camaraderie, "the choice between seeming (to one as well as to others) fuzzy-minded and seeming impersonal",⁴ conversationalists whose preferred strategy is establishing camaraderie would opt for the former.

Brown and Levinson refer to this camaraderie strategy with the term "positive politeness techniques", and consider them "a kind of social acceleration where S(peaker) indicates that he wants to come closer to H(earer)".⁵ These two scholars have identified two goals of conversation: negative and positive face. Positive face is the need to be approved of by others; negative face is the need not to be imposed upon. Overlap-favoring speakers

⁴ See Robin Lakoff, "Stylistic strategies within a grammar of style", in *Language, Sex and Gender*, eds. J. Orasanu, M. Slater, and L. Adler. *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 327 (1979), 63.

⁵ See Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson, "Universals in language usage: politeness phenomena", in *Questions and Politeness*, ed. E. Goody (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

such as those in the conversation under analysis, honor above all positive face.

Communicative styles in a dinner table conversation. Before proceeding to the analysis of three samples of the two hour-long dinner table conversation, the relevant background information will be provided.

Three couples in their early thirties and late twenties participate in the conversation: Joan and Robert, two Americans born in the Washington, D.C. area, where the dinner took place; Albert, from Catalonia, and Elena from Italian Switzerland (both lived for several years in French Switzerland so they interact privately in French); and Maria and Josep, both from Catalonia. These three couples met in Albert and Elena's apartment and the common language throughout the conversation was English, even though whole dialogues were in Italian, French and, above all, Catalan.⁶ Elena, the Italian Swiss, usually speaks Catalan when she interacts with the Catalan couple. Joan speaks also Italian. Not surprisingly, then, code-switching will be the norm through most of the conversation.

⁶ Generally non-English speaking participants switch to Catalan, French, or Italian, just when they communicate privately with some other non-English speaker throughout the conversation, e.g. requests for bread, offerings, short comments on the Catalan music they listened to during the dinner table conversation. In some cases, however, such as in text No 3, there is linguistic divergence from the English speakers. This behavior was probably interpreted negatively by these English-speakers. See an application of the concepts of linguistic convergence and divergence to the Catalan linguistic area in Howard Giles, and Maria Ros, "The Valencian language situation: an accommodation perspective", *Review of Applied Linguistics*, 44 (1979), 3-24.

There is a paradoxical constraint on non-native speakers with limited fluency in English. Actually they don't have the necessary linguistic tools in order to show involvement and camaraderie. For instance, they do not master English

The American couple and the Catalan couple did not know each other before the dinner. The deepest personal relationships had taken place among the women (Elena with Joan; Elena with Maria). Indeed Elena had organized the meeting, Josep and Albert, the Catalan men whose communicative styles will be studied in this article, had just once met at a dinner in the same apartment several weeks before, and Robert was a complete stranger for all the non-American participants.

The dinner conversation was lively and entertaining—four of the six participants, those I could talk to, agreed that the meeting had been agreeable and participative. An involvement context had been created.

After looking over the transcript of the dinner conversation, I realized that both Josep and Albert showed particularly similar communicative styles. I summarize their common stylistic features under two main characteristics: first, highly *cooperative contributions* (overlapping, latching, repetitions, echoings, choral repetition, persistence, fast rate of speech), and second, a continuous *exhibition of wit and ingenuity* by means of hyperboles, irony, and above all, expressive paralinguistic features such as

registers enough (colloquialisms and slang), so they fail to send the appropriate signals to get across the metamessage of rapport. In our conversation, Josep and Albert know mainly academic registers. They began reading English before they spoke it. Besides this factor, their Romance first language increases the possibility they choose Latinate words instead of more usual forms.

Both, Josep and Albert lack find it difficult to translate their conversational styles in English—when being indirect (irony, sarcasm) they run the risk of being (and they often are) misunderstood. Not surprisingly then, Josep and Albert shift to Catalan when they show enthusiasm or when they make jokes or verbal games. Virtually all Catalan speakers are bilingual either Catalan/Spanish or Catalan/French. For them as for Elena, the Italian speaker who lives in German/French Fribourg in Switzerland, switching different languages back and forth is nothing but unusual in their everyday verbal behavior.

expressive phonology, pitch and amplitude shifts and marked voice quality. Both participants, Josep and Albert, recognize their communicative strategies to each other over and over and interact so cooperatively that they improvise sketches in a rather versatile way. In other words, they feel that they are on the same wave length and they confirm this impression throughout the conversation. The following will exemplify these communicative styles.

1. *Cooperative contributions.* In text No 1 Albert begins in line 1 by referring to the insufficient quality of his spoken English. Josep in line 2 interprets Albert's previous comment ("I hear myself speaking English") as a self-derogatory evaluation of his English skills and makes a hyperbolic comment. He suggests ironically that the tape of the conversation might be useful for teaching English. Albert recognizes Josep's intention, and cooperates with him to build a "humorous scaffolding", an escalating hyperbole. Repetition, persistence and overlapping, all contribute to this cooperation. Observe first in text No 1 how Josep and Albert repeat the same lexical items, namely *excellent*, and *model*, in a sort of mutual echoing.⁷

⁷ This conversation was transcribed from taperecordings. I was both participant and observer. The transcription conventions shown below follow those developed by Gumperz, Chafe and Tannen:

...half second pause

underline indicates emphatic stress

: lengthened vowel sound

| marks high pitch on word

┌ marks high pitch on phrase, continuing until punctuation

p spoken softly (piano)

f spoken loudly (forte)

/??/ inaudible segment

┌ Brackets connecting lines show overlapping speech

┌ Two people talking at the same time

TEXT No 1

- (1) A I hear myself speaking English →
 (2) J ↙ In fact, that's for
 (3) an English Language Institute. That's for models of
 (4) English → ↘ I thought that our English would be
 (5) A ↙ Uh Uh ↘
 (6) J an excellent →
 (7) A ↙ an excellent model →
 (8) J ↘ for foreign students
 (9) A an excellent example, (laughs)
 (10) J ↘ a new English, a new model for
 (11) A ↙ how ↘
 (12) J ↙ native speakers ↘ yes, don't tell me the
 (13) A ↙ what you don't have to do ↘
 (14) J real (laughter, 4sec) truth... of that! ↘
 (15) A ↙ No, no... It's rather hard anyway ↘
 (three seconds pause; another topic begins)

Both participants' speech also represents what Tannen calls cooperative sentence building,⁸ for listeners take part in what is clearly someone else's sentence. This is the case in the following text No 2, where Albert and Josep overlap each other, but complete their utterances by being persistent.⁹ There are no pau-

Brackets with reversed flaps ↘ indicate latching (no intraturn pause)

⁸ See Deborah Tannen, "When Is an Overlap Not an Interruption?. One Component of Conversational Style", in *The First Delaware Symposium on Language Studies*, Eds. Robert J. Di Pietro, William Frawley, and Alfred Wedel (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1983), 121-122.

⁹ Observe we speak about overlappings, not about interruptions. Overlap is an etic category which refers to observable coincidences of speech by two participants in a given interaction whereas interruption is an emic category, an overlap which is interpreted to be an obstructive device in a given conversational setting. See *ibid.*, 120.

ses between turns. Rather, every turn latches the previous one. Observe also that the “escalating hyperbole” is made up of a list of positive features that Josep attributes to their English skills, namely “a good English model”, “a new English” and even “a new model for native speakers” in line 12. Albert breaks this hyperbolic list by turning to his initial intention: he overlaps Josep’s turn in line 12 and turns what was an exaggerating appraisal into a deprecating assessment, “don’t tell me the real truth of that”.¹⁰

2. *Exhibition of wit and ingenuity.* Text No 2 below is also an instance of talk where cooperative contributions occur. In this case these contributions are also ingenious and witty.

Elena has just made a private comment to her husband, Albert, in French. They have chosen a language that some participants do not understand. After this comment in French Josep comes out and utters a rhetorical warning addressed to both Elena and Albert. Josep requests them not to talk in French by talking French himself: “the tape recorder doesn’t work in French” (lines 1,2).

Since this point through line 15 both Josep and Albert construct a “humorous scaffolding” again. Throughout this chunk of conversation, latches, interruptions, repetitions, echoings are recurrent. Observe, for example, the echoings in lines 7 through 11.

¹⁰ In most Catalan conversations I have analyzed, appraisals are expected to be answered by means of self-deprecating comments. These deprecating comments base on formulaic conventions which are not shared by mainstream American speakers. Misinterpretations are therefore recurrent in cross-cultural encounters. See an overview of the topic for a general audience in Deborah Tannen, *That’s Not What I Meant! How Conversational Styles Makes or Breaks Your Relations with Others* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1986).

- (7) Josep "C'est anglaise
 (8) Albert _____ L'anglaise"
 (10) Albert "rien à faire
 (11) Josep _____ L'rien à faire"

This "humorous scaffolding" seems to be a quick mental association contest. Lines 13 to 15 epitomize this feature. Josep says that the tape-recorder might be Japanese and laughs. Albert latches Josep's turn and adds simply, "Sony", a Japanese tape-recorder brand name. Then, there is a four-seconds pause and John reinitiates the general conversation by talking in English.

TEXT No 2

- (1) J Ne parlez pas en français que la cassette ne marche
 (2) pas en français!
 (3) A _____ L'Ne comprend pas français la cassette?
 (4) J _____ Elle
 (5) ne parle pas en français L'
 (6) A _____ L'Oh, mon Dieu!
 (7) J _____ L'C'est anglaise
 (8) A _____ L'anglaise
 (9) J et alors elle ne parle anglais et
 (10) A _____ L'rien à faire L'
 (11) J L'rien à faire
 (12) A _____ L'O.K.
 (13) J _____ L'C'est anglaise, c'est japonaise,
 (14) bien sûr! (laughter)
 (15) A _____ L'Sony
 (.....)
 (16) Joan Do you have a hole there?

Further expressive features can be analyzed in text No 2 above. Josep's initial warning in line 1 is uttered in an impersonal, distant, machine-made French, as if the tape-recorder were

speaking. This ridiculizing playful performance triggers the “humorous scaffolding”. Later on, in line 6, Albert reacts to Josep’s personification of the tape recorder by means of an exclamation, “Oh, mon Dieu!”, uttered in a high pitch. Albert’s exclamation contributes to the jocular tune of the dialogue because it is usually a female expression in French.

Let us now examine another fragment of this conversation in text No 3 which shares similar characteristics. Joan tells a narrative on her stay in Italy several years ago. Suddenly, Josep comes out, interrupts Joan’s narrative and wonders “What’s that?” with high pitch. This exclamative rhetorical question has been triggered by the fact that there is a chocolate bar on the table with a picture of Switzerland on it. This Josep’s disruptive question (bear in mind it has been uttered in Catalan, a language neither Joan nor Robert can understand at all) attempts making fun of Elena, the Italian Swiss participant who is very proud of her Swiss roots. Albert, Elena’s husband, knows Elena’s Swiss chauvinism as well, recognizes Josep’s intention and incorporates his mockery towards Elena. Observe how both Josep and Albert call attention to the Swiss chocolate bar by exclaiming: “Switzerland!, Switzerland!” in lines 1 and 2 below:

TEXT No 3

- (1) J Oh, què és això? → $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{Suïssa!, això és, el més} \\ \text{[Switzerland! it's that, the most} \end{array} \right.$
 [Oh, what's that?]
- (2) A Suïssa!
- (3) J important és Suïssa. →
 [important is Switzerland]
- (4) A $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{¿són de contrabandu, eh, nanus!} \\ \text{[they are smuggled, boys, listen!]} \end{array} \right.$
- (5) J Suïssa italiana?
- (6) M $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{— És contrabandu, agh! Oh!} \\ \text{[They are smuggled! Wow!]} \end{array} \right.$

- (7) J És de contrabandu?
[Are they smuggled?]
- (8) A Sí, sí, o sigui que és més bona encara,
chh?> [Yes, yes, that is, it is even better, isn't it?]
- (9) J És allò de l'afany del prohibit, no?
[We desire what's forbidden, right?]
- (10) A ↳passada, l'Elena, l'ha passa-
[passed through, Elena passed]
- (11) da sota de la faldilla, agh, agh (laughter, 2 sec.)
[it under her skirt, agh, agh]
- (12) J It's an illegal chocolate, that !?/
(13) they didn't pay taxes
- (14) A ↳they are all scared, Elena>
- (15) Jo ↳That's illegal?
- (16) Jo agh, agh! Agh!
- (17) A ↳No, No-! it's légal, it's légal (laughs)
(acc.)
- (18) Jo I told you my illegal chocolate story in Canada?
(19) A ↳Yes ↳
- (20) Jo I wanted to bring some chocolate (a long story goes on)

In line 4 Albert introduces a new element by making the other participants believe that the chocolate has been smuggled. The mental association between “xocolata” (chocolate) and smuggling is not odd at all in this language where “xocolata” refers to marihuana in slang varieties. Albert introduces this new topic very effectively. He assumes the role of a smuggler in a ridiculizing way: he addresses the others with the address form “nanos”, a term used among teenager peer groups, and, thus, simulates being a youngster who is boasting of having stolen some cookies from the supermarket as his peer group watches. In line 6 below, Maria intervenes with an enthusiastic exclamation and with what Goffman calls a *response cry*, “the condensed truncated form of a discretely articulated non-lexicalized expression”:¹¹ “Agh, oh!”.

¹¹ See Erving Goffman, “Response cries”, *Language*, 54, No 4 (1978), 801.

Maria shows by means of these exaggerated paralinguistic features in her speech that she has recognized the humorous intent of Josep and Albert's comments and wishes to contribute to it. In other words, Maria has interpreted the *contextualization cues*, those constellations of surface features of message forms (formulaic expressions, prosodic and paralinguistic signals, facial and gesture signs) by which speakers signal and listeners interpret what the activity is. In other words, "any aspect of the surface form of utterances which when mapped onto message content, can be shown to be functional in the signalling of interpretative frames".¹²

Observe another general characteristic of the conversation. Josep and Albert show a recurrent tendency towards humorous and teasing genres. Thus, for instance, in line 10 above, Albert overlaps Josep and introduces a new hyperbolic, exaggerating element in the chocolate story:

- (10) Albert L_—passada, l'Elena l'ha passa-
 [*passed through, Elena passed*
 (11) da sota de la faldilla, agh, agh, (laughter, 2 sec.)
 it under her skirt, agh, agh]

Elena here is the object of mockery. She, like the other

¹² See John J. Gumperz, "Sociocultural knowledge in conversational inference", in *Linguistics and Anthropology. Georgetown University Roundtable on Languages and Linguistics 1977*, ed. M. Saville-Troike, (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1977), 199. Sociocultural knowledge allows the speakers to evaluate aspects of the surface structure of a message by relating them to message meaning and sequencing patterns. When a difference of interpretation happens it tends to be seen in attitudinal terms contextualization cues. Since sociocultural conventions are highly context-bound and learned only through intensive formal contact under conditions allowing maximum feedback such as home and peer settings, contextualization cues are likely to be misinterpreted by speakers who do not share the same ethnic and cultural background.

two women in the conversation, hardly ever makes witticisms. This observation agrees with those observations by Coser already in 1960 in staff meetings in a mental hospital where men's "status was signaled by making witticisms and women's subordination by laughter".¹³ That is, Albert and Josep's continuous exhibition of wit and ingenuity would be not only a signal of rapport and involvement, but also a dominance indicator.

Finally, Joan utters a rhetorical question "I told you my illegal chocolate story in Canada?" in line No 18 to call attention to the story she is about to start. I label this question rhetorical because Joan is not interested in getting an answer. Albert answers affirmatively to the question but she goes on to tell a second chocolate story. Josep and Albert's "humorous scaffolding" is over.

Conclusion

If individuals behave within two poles when interacting –within the need for involvement (camaraderie) and the need for independence (clarity)– Albert's and Josep's communicative styles tend clearly toward the pole of camaraderie and involvement.

The analysis of three fragments of a two hour-long dinner table conversation has shown how both Catalan male participants, Josep and Albert, establish a smooth common rhythm in their "humorous scaffoldings" and use consistently similar devices to create rapport and empathy.

¹³ See Barrie Thorne, and Nancy Henley, "Difference and dominance: an overview of language, gender and society", in *Language and Sex, Difference and Dominance*, Eds. B. Thorne and N. Henley (Rowley, Massachusetts: Newbury House, 1975), 17.

In spite of the fact that the verbal behavior of the other participants might be conditioned by other factors (Maria masters English in a lesser degree than Josep and Albert; Elena's fluency in Catalan and English is limited), I think one can conclude that Josep's and Albert's communicative styles are similar because they share similar ethnic and gender backgrounds. I suggest as well that these communicative styles which create involvement might be characteristic of many Southwestern European males.

It is clear, however, that it is impossible to make accountable statements about ethnicity if only based on some participants who took part in a dinner table conversation. More research is needed to determine the ethnic and cultural correlates of conversational styles.

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