

Male Talk in a Creole-Speaking Community

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I Introduction*

Although women's speech practices are often viewed as deviant from the norm, it is interesting that most of the recent studies in discourse analysis have either focused on women's talk or on speakers in mixed groups rather than on male speakers exclusively, even though their practices are supposed to establish the norm. What has generally been analyzed and discussed in the literature so far is cross-sex talk and communication or women's oral exchanges. In keeping with that trend, I have studied the power women hold in an Afro-Limonese Creole-speaking community of Costa Rica, as expressed by their speech. In Herzfeld 1997 (160-167) I showed that the linguistic behavioral strategies of Limonese Creole women, tied to their cultural and social structure, establish some kind of a collaborative influence in a group. They do so to demonstrate solidarity among themselves while assuming characteristics of strength and power in reference to men. Here, to break the pattern of taking males' talk for granted, I will concentrate exclusively on the organization of their talk in the same creole speech community mentioned above.

II Relevance of the Cultural Background

Nowadays, research on gender and conversation constitutes a growing body of inquiry. However, in many studies gender differences seem to have been accepted as a given, without regard to social or relational contexts (De Francisco 1998:176). I believe that broad generalizations cannot be made unless evidence from a wide range of speakers and cultures is accumulated.

To illustrate, if sociolinguistic studies are going to use 'power' as an explanation in the comparative analysis of females' and males' speech, it will be necessary to explore issues related to power in the value system and ideology of the speech community that is being studied.¹ An attempt needs to be made to link greater encompassing social hierarchies to the less-assuming, day-to-day interactions among the speakers of a community. In this particular study, the understanding of the nuances of power exercised in a creole-speaking community by both males and females, in the macrocosm of public life as well as in the microcosm of personal relations, is essential to gain an awareness of the social roles of their gender identity. According to this view, the relationship between language and gender is such that, on the one hand, languages reflect society so that social divisions on gender grounds are present in patterns of language use, however, at the same time, languages embody different world views (Talbot 1998:15).

The focus of this study is a speech community of 55,000 speakers of Limonese Creole (Norval Smith 1995:341). This is an English-based creole spoken by an Afro-Antillean community which settled mainly on the eastern lowlands of the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica, Central America, during the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Afro-Costaricans, as members of a minority, exercise limited power in Limon, but do occupy a few certain positions which are

considered important in the life of the white, Spanish-speaking majority, whether they are in the socio-political or economic organizational structure or in the domestic arena ² As their roles are acquired and developed, people use language according to the demands experienced This paper will attempt to explore whether power is exercised by Afro-Costarican male speakers of Limonese Creole, and if so, how it is expressed in their speech vis-à-vis other males ³ To that effect, the discourse of some members of that community will be analyzed, focusing on the use of turn-taking in formal and informal structures

To begin with, it will be important to determine how the conversational floor is constructed in the organization of an all male conversation, and the relationship between the different speakers' contributions As will be seen, a preliminary analysis of samples of speech shows that there are differences in the use made of interactional resources between English-based creole speakers and standard English speakers Males who communicate with other males in Limonese Creole—rather than stick to a "one-at-a-time floor" as their white, English-speaking counterparts tend to do (Coates 1997 127)—engage in a collaborative floor which allows for overlaps, shared construction of utterances, and minimal responses, among other linguistic consequences

III The Turn-Taking Model

The framework most widely used for analyzing conversations is based on Saks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) who suggest that speech exchange systems in general are arranged to ensure that (1) one party speaks at a time, and (2) speaker change recurs According to that model, the distribution of turns is allocated to speakers in such a way as to respect the interlocutor's rights and obligations The model provides systematic initiation, continuation, and alternation of turns in everyday conversation ⁴ However, more recently, some analysts have pointed out that not all conversational practices are accounted for by this model (Coates 1997 109, Chafe 1994, 1995, Coates 1989, 1991, 1994, Edelsky 1981, Falk 1980)

For Limonese speakers, it is especially relevant to take into account 'alterations' to the turn-taking rules, such as the phenomena of interruptions, simultaneous speech, the occurrence and distribution of overlap among categories of speakers, among other linguistic practices While viewed from the point of view of the turn-taking model, the interference of the turn-space of a current speaker (the 'singly' developed floor in Edelsky's 1981 terminology) constitutes a violation of the rules (West and Zimmerman, 1998 168), the 'collaborative' developed floor considers that interruptions accomplish a number of communicative acts In face-to-face interactions, this incursion into the other's space may exhibit dominance and exercise control, i.e. power, over the other speaker, or it may also signify that "separate voices [are] articulating different melodies at once" (Chafe 1995 4), i.e. alliance Thus the floor may be potentially open to all participants simultaneously, involving both the co-construction of utterances and overlapping speech (Coates 1997 109) One could argue that conversations in Limonese Creole contain both cooperative and competitive elements, the latter, if not for control of the floor itself, for getting the approval of others As we review the examples that follow, it will be apparent that the function of overlap and interruptions in verbal exchanges, shared constructions, and minimal responses, particularly in conversations between parties of equal status, are quite revealing of the subtlety of the interlocutors' relationship

IV Discussion of findings

A Overlap and Interruption

Contrary to what the Sacks, *et al* (1974) model of turn-taking propounds as its central tenet, (i.e. one speaker speaks at a time, and participants cooperate in the orderly transition of turns from one speaker to another), the extracts that follow illustrate the opposite claim. Overlap, which I define as the action of participants in conversation by which they do not wait for an orderly switch of turns, but instead jump into the conversation prior to encountering Transition Relevance Places (or /TRP/ in Sacks *et al* terminology), occurs commonly among Limonese male speakers.

An example of a conversation between two males, Frank and Olin, (F and O from here on) of approximately 23 years of age (excerpted from Tape 6A2/35) follows⁵. In this exchange, there is a civilized confrontation between the two friends, it is apparent that Frank feels disappointed by the actions that have led Olin to be terminated in his job by his boss, and he therefore expresses the need for his friend to be reconciled with his boss.

F--/bot akodn to wat ay andestan tuw/ dem se/ im a neva layk yuw/

F--But according to what I understand too, they say, he did not like you.

O--/ay siy dat/ in paat im neva layk miy/ ?im dwon av tu tel miy fa miy tu nwo dat/

O--I see that, in part (in a way) he did not like me, he does not have to tell me for me to know that.

F--/wot ay biliyv/ afta wen yuw nwo in neva layk yuw/ yuw av tu siy de we/ luk de we myek im layk yuw/

F--What I believe, after when you know he did not like you, you have to see the way, look (for) the way (to) make him like you.

O--/ahal/ am not gowen [bay im-

O--ahal/ I am not going to [buy him-

F-- [no/ a down miyn yuw bay im/ yuw yuw lukin iz frenship/ wot yuw se bow dat?/

F-- [No, I don't mean you (should) buy him, you (what) you (are) looking (for) is friendship, what (do) you say about that?

The significance of overlap occurring in such an environment follows from speaker F's having targeted the starting of his stream of speech before the completion by the current speaker, as a planned intrusion into the internal structure of the speaker's utterance, prior to a possible transition place. However, while F admonishes his friend by bringing up that O's boss does not like him, and thus shows "superiority" toward O, by judging him and evoking some kind of power over him, the overriding tone used is one of sympathy. His overlapping speech shows, in a polyphonic way of talking, a form of male bonding also expressed by F when he prefaces his advice with "I believe" and ends his appeal with a request for O's opinion on his suggestion.

B Shared constructions

Later in the same conversation, an excerpt from 6A3/45 shows an occurrence of a shared construction. This may again be interpreted as an example of a contribution to a collective narrative, of talk whose main goal is to maintain friendship, rather than be considered as an inappropriate expression of dominance. This extract demonstrates that the joint expression of shared ideas takes precedence over the individual voice.

F--/ay biliyv if yuw di wat mista salas want yuw tu duw/ ay tink yuw en im wudn av no trabel/
F--I believe (that) if you did what Mister Salas wants you to do, I think you and him wouldn't have (any) no trouble

O--/ya/ bot salas nwo ay di de wek/ yuw ken aks im/ disipliyn/ no problem wid im/
/de wek/ ay [komplay wid de wek /

O--Ya, but Salas knows (that) I did the work/ you can ask him, discipline, (it is) no(t) (a) problem with him, the work, I [comply with the work

F-- /[komplay wid de wek /
F-- [comply with the work

O--sho
O--sure

C Minimal Responses

In the same vein, the next excerpt of tape 6A5/84, shows that the short responses uttered by F are not so much to acknowledge the current speaker's right to the floor as an acceptance of an excuse given by O for not having done a day's worth of work. The minimal responses highlighted (such as *mhm*, and *yeah*) give back-channel support to the speaker.

F--/tel miy/ wat yuw wez duwin dis manin?/
F--Tell me, what were you doing (did you do) this morning?

O--/aal rayt/ dis manin e lot woz duwin/ a gow siy-/ wat de man de nyem?
O--All right, this morning, (I) was doing (did) a lot this morning. I go (went to) see- What (is) the name of the man?

F--/wish wan?/
F--Which one?

O--/niyl/ a gow siy niyl /
O--Neal, I go (went to) see Neal

F--/ya. /
F--yeah. .

O--/an a sidown de/ fi bowt a awa /
O--And I sit (sat) down there for about an hour

F--/mhm/

F--mhm

O--/wen yuw iye from de show/ de man tel miy/ mos kom bak/ kom bak monday/

O--When you hear from the shout, the man tells me, must come back, come back Monday

/im av miy bowt a mont an a ?af/ gow an kom bak/ gow an kom bak/ an *dlay-l*

He has me about a month and a half, "go and come back," "go and come back," and *dlay*

/im kyaan giymiy not'n positiv/ kyaan giymiy notin/ kyaan shwo op/

He can't give me nothing positive, can't give me nothing, he can't (doesn't) show up,

/iyvin dow ye ?af a wyet/ an yuw wot yuw duwin?/

even though you have to wait And you what are you doing?

D Other Cases of Overlap

Frequently, simultaneous talk occurs when the next speaker over-anticipates a TRP (Transition Relevant Place), or when the next speaker misses his turn by prematurely starting his remarks, and then giving up his turn for the benefit of whoever is already talking. It seems that overlap of this sort does not interfere with comprehension and it demonstrates how speakers can easily speak and listen at the same time (Coates 1997: 114). Examples follow. Excerpt from Tape 8B15 is a conversation between L, male, 54 years old, and O, male 25 years old in which the TRP is over-anticipated.

O--/layk se now/ wol piypel se layk/ "a it waz tu gow so"/, , , , yuw biliyv da tin/

layk it jes woz tu hapin so?/=

O--That is now, old people say that, "it was to go so (that way)" Do you believe that thing, like it just was to happen so? =

L--

= /wel eee/ mek a siy /

L--

= Well, hmm, let me see

In the next excerpt, Tape 6A7, E and P, two young males are talking about the future, and the possibility of getting a job after their high-school graduation. At one point, although E interrupts P by overlapping, seemingly anxious to get the floor, he only says "Take it easy man" and allows P to continue his remarks. Later P mistimes his turn by over-anticipating a TRP, and probably tired of hearing the same hedge (i.e. "you understand?"), jumps in too early saying "sure," but, in spite of his eagerness to respond, does not keep the floor.

E--/ if yuw gow bay de yuniversity an yuw stodiyl/ yuw andestand?/ de dye afta tumara

E-- If you go to the university and you study, you understand? the day after tomorrow

yu ?af e gud profeshon an yuw kyan get e guwd wek/ an get e gud salary/

you have a good profession and you can get a good work (job), and get a good salary,

yu kyan myentyen yosef an e family tuw/ yuw andestan de plye?

you can maintain yourself and a family too, you understand the play?

P-- / yuw ?af ada pylesız dat yuw kyan iyven send de piypel dem/ now luk/ not dat yuw
P-- you have other places that you can even send the people, now look, not that you

a gowen get fa everbody ız dat/ bıkaz /
are going to get (jobs) for everybody is that, [because...

E-- [tek it iyzyı man/ bot evrybodyı want tu wek
<laughter>

E-- Take it easy man, but everybody wants to work
<laughter>

P--aarayt/ dats truw everybodyı lukin dem bred/

P--all right, that's true, everybody (is) looking (to make a living) for their bread

E--/aarayt/ yuw andestan? /=

E--All right, you understand? =

P-- = /sho/

P-- = Sure

E--/so aarayt/ luk/ yuw fiyl glad tu sey yuw kom owt kalij

E--So, all right, look, you (will) feel glad to say (that) you (have) come out (of) college (high school)

E Other Features of Men's Talk

1 Topic

There is considerable evidence that women and men tend to discuss topics in same-sex groups that are different from each other (Coates 1997: 119). Topic has profound consequences for other linguistic choices. In terms of floor-holding patterns, non-personal topics encourage one-at-a-time floor-holding because these topics lend themselves to what Coates (1997: 120) calls "expertism." There are many examples in my data that show monologues, i.e. a stretch of conversation where one speaker holds the floor for considerable time, as if he were the "expert" on the subject. In the example that follows, excerpted from Tape K1B19, a young man named Prince, 21, talks about the consequences of a hurricane that devastated Honduras when he was transitorily there, and how, if it were to hit Limon, it would affect the city even in a worse way, since it is already going through difficult financial times.

P--/a weking gow owva dyer an/ diay/ yuw affu sıy disasta/ kasi de wola di town no?

P--I (was) working, (and I went) go over there and, diay, you have to see (the) disaster, kasi the whole (of the) town, no?

/an dem se mosı rown sevin towzın persın ded/ an dem berıy
and they say more (or less) around seven thousand persons (are) dead, and they buried

/wan an tap a wan anada an som- aal anda tryı/ an aal dwoz tın /
one on top of (one) another and some- all under (a) tree, and all those things

/wel/ ay sorry/ bikaz if wan a dat kom iyer / in limon/ not iyvin try /
Well, I('m) sorry, because if one of that (those) comes here, in Limon, not even (the) tree,

/nor stwon nar hows/ yuw wuda siy/ bikaz limon iz a smal likl town and tin/
/yuw andestan?/
nor stone nor house you would have seen, because Limon is a small little town and things,
you understand?

/an wi dwon gan/ not iyvin gon fi elp wi/ bikaz ay shor/ bot *estados unidos* wil help wiy/
and we don't gone not even gone to help us, because I (am) sure/ but *Estados Unidos*
will help us

/bikaz/ bway dat/ dis wat gowen /an bway/ yuw jest neva siy it egen/ bikaz rayt now de wel
because/ boy that this what (is) going and boy, you just don't see it again, because right
now the world

/komin tu a en/ bikaz luk an aal dwoz tin/ di rays gon op/ di brynz gon op/ di fowl-/
(is) coming to an end, because, look and all those things, the rice (has) gone up, the beans
(have) gone up, the fowl-

/wel yu aftu se every jiyises krays tin gon op/ an iz limon/ yuw aftu se limon tin iz wana di dyra
tin dem/
Well, you have to say every Jesus Christ thing (has) gone up, and (it) is Limon, you have to
say Limon things is one of the dearer things (Limon is one of the dearer towns)

/bikaz luk an *pinito* woz fwo chienj/ try chienj/ it gon tu yet fifty/ yet seventy fayf/ eh?
because, look at *Pinito* (trade mark), (it) was four and some, three and some, it (has) gone
(up) to eight fifty, eight seventy five, eh?

/piypel gown ded fi ongrny in limon ier bway ay telin yu/ yuw siy/ wen no- /
people (are) going to die of hunger in Limon here, boy, I am telling you, you('ll) see, when no-

/man gowen staat tiyf/ wes komin /an tu krismas now/ yuw aftu woch owt /
men (are) going (to) start stealing/ the worse is coming, (and) at Christmas (time) now, you
have to watch out

His interlocutor responded with a minimal acknowledgment of the gist of the monologue, not really making a bid to gain the floor from Prince, who continued with another monologue on a related subject (omitted here because of space and time constraints)

2 Questions

Quite frequently, questions are asked in pursuit of information. This kind of dialogue offers some speakers the opportunity to answer, "playing the expert" (Coates 1997: 120) as they supply the information requested quite at length. In other cases, it encourages a quick series of turn-exchanges. On Tape 5A0, E and I, two young males are chatting, the question E asks is answered by I as if he were "playing the expert"

E--/tel miy bowt wen you gow tu park/ wat you duw in park?/

E--Tell me about when you go to (the) park, what (do) you do in (the) park?

I--/bway/wen ay gow park/ wen ay gow park/ ay luk pon dem san xose gerl dem/ bway/

I--Boy, when I go (to the) park, when I go (to the) park, I look at them San Jose girls, boy,

/bikaz dem gerl luk nays/ yuw nwo/bway/ ay dwon now way/ ay siy de difrens/

because those girls look nice, you know, boy, I dont now why, I see the difference

/a dem from de limon gerl dem/ bway/ de gerl dem nays/ no? ay gow speshal tu siy if

(between) them from the Limon girls, boy, the girls are nice, no? I go especially to see if

ay kyan kyach wan a dem/ entinde?

I can catch one of them, entinde?

Further on in the same dialogue, however, the questions obtain quick answers and the floor is consistently offered to the addressee

E--/wat yuw kuk ?/

E--What (do) you cook?

I--/wel / ay kyan se ay kuk aal de taym /

I--Well, I can say I cook all the time

E--/yuw in de wiyk, if yuw kuk- /

E--You in the week, if you cook-

I--/ya in de wiyk/ a layk som taym/ a kuk domplin/ yuw nwo?/ dashiyn/ entinde? /

I--Yeah in the week, I like some times, I cook dumplings, you know? dashin, entinde?

/dem dem bush fuwd wat wat giy yuw ability/ entinde? rondon tuw bway

the bush food that that gives you ability, entinde? rondon too, boy

E--ah/ ow rondon kuk?

E--Ah, how (do you) cook rondon?

I--/rondon/ yuw aftu gryeta de kwokwonat an put it in/bway/ an it ton rondon/ plenty

I--rondon, you have to grate the coconut and put it in, boy, and it turns rondon Plenty

/a dem spanish gel dem/ dwon nwo wat dat/ dem dem se iz payzen /

of the Spanish girls, don't know what that (is), they say (it) is poison

E--/emmm/ yuw dwon kuk notin/ layk se/ speshal on sondey?/

E--emmm, you don't cook (anything), that is, special on Sunday?

I--/layk so/ sondey yes/ sondey aaa every sondey a kuk/ a kuk/ rays an byinz an

I--That is, Sunday, yes, Sunday aaa every Sunday I cook, I cook rice and beans, and

fowl miyt wit salad/ wit aal klaas a salad
fowl meat with salad, with all kinds of salad

E--dat miyn a kyan kom an get som/ sondey den?
E--that means I can come and get some, Sunday then?

I--sho/ yuw kyan kom
I--sure, you can come

E--aal rayt/ a goin paas arown
E--all right, I am going to stop by

I--yes!
I--yes!

V Concluding Remarks

In this paper I have attempted to show that Limonese creole males talking to friends do not organize their talk along the lines of the one-at-a-time model outlined by Sacks *et al*. Only when men hold a conversation which consists of question-answer sequences, the model seems to function to demarcate the speakers' roles at the same level of power, guaranteeing the orderly exchange of turns. This is also true of the conversation in which a speaker permits those with expert knowledge to hold forth.

Furthermore, I would like to suggest that even if male Limonese speakers compete with each other, as all males are supposed to be socialized to do, they are basically engaged in a collaborative enterprise aimed at solidarity, as shown above. Contrary to most claims for all-white male conversations, in which there is lack of overlap (Coates 1997: 112), the all-male exchanges among Limonese creole speakers reproduce in every day, colloquial scale, what happens at the all-encompassing societal level: the need to reinforce the bonds within the group by creating a collaborative floor, an activity in which all speakers participate. Similar to what occurs among females, in Limonese creole males' talk, the group takes priority over the individual, and the men's voices combine to construct a shared text. It seems that overlap in all male talk is clearly supportive: the other speaker is not making a bid for the floor, and while the contributions are rather more elaborate than simple minimal responses, they fulfill the same function and defuse the potential for such turns to be interpreted as interruptions.

It may very well be that the Limonese Creole speakers' desire to keep the group's identity intact is reflected in the use they make of their language. It may also be true that since women and men share linguistic and interactional resources, they choose to draw on these similarly, precisely because conversational organization accomplishes far more than just the mechanics of turn-distribution (Coates 1997: 127), therefore, the collaborative floor helps, in this case, to preserve the group's mother tongue, in its struggle to resist the influence of outside pressures to abandon it.

NOTES

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1 The binary oppositions of language/gender built around the classifications of interactions between males and females as powerful/powerless, competitive/cooperative in middle class, white, Anglo-Saxon America are misleading even for that group, and therefore need further scrutiny

2 Even though today there are a handful of successful professional Afro-Limonese who have been given key managerial positions (for example, in the banking industry, and in JAPDEVA, Junta de Administración Portuaria de la Vertiente Atlántica), for the most part they have remained working class members. On the other hand, mixed marriages, which were unheard of some twenty years ago, are much more common in the social fabric of the capital of the Province of Limón

3 This is a preliminary attempt at determining males' relationships as expressed in their speech, in the future, statistical studies as well as comparative analyses of male talk with females should be conducted

4 The model is further characterized by what Saks *et al.* (1974) call "unit-types" which can consist of words, phrases, clauses, or sentences. They are projective, providing sufficient information prior to their completion to allow the hearer to anticipate an upcoming transition place. These scholars visualize the mechanism for transitions as an ordered set of rules speakers use to achieve an order of interaction, thus the alternation of speakers is accounted for, as are some gaps, some overlaps, variable length of turns, and other occurring features of observed conversations (West and Zimmerman 1998: 167)

5 All the examples used in the paper were collected during frequent field trips I made to Limón, from 1973 to the present. They are casual interactive conversations among Limonese speakers recorded by myself and my assistant, Mr. Owen Hammond. The names of the speakers have been changed. The transcription conventions used for the data are as follows:

a A slash (/) at the beginning and end of the chunk of talk indicates a phonemic transcription and it also marks the end of the tone group, e.g.

/ya/ bot salas nwo a di de wek/

b A question mark (?) indicates that the chunk of talk is phrased as a question, e.g.

/wat yuw woz duwin dis monin?/

c A square bracket indicates the start of overlap between utterances, e.g.

[komplay wid de wek /

d The symbol () indicates that material has been omitted or that there is a short pause, e.g.

/ay go siy niyl /

e A hyphen indicates an incomplete word or utterance, e g

/bay im-/

f Angled brackets enclose additional information, e g

<laughter>

g An equal sign is used when two speakers' utterances do not seem to be separated by any gap, e g

*/andestan?/ =
= /sho/*

h Italics are used in the text to indicate Spanish words

/dlay/

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