Reflecting Power and Solidarity through the Relativity of Linguistic Strategies in Divergent Movie

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Abstract

Movie as a means of communication has something to deliver to its viewers. These days there are numerous movies regarding how women appear to be the powerful ones and provide an impact to its society. Therefore, women as the subordinate group in society are assumed as the subjects of whatever they do results from, or creates, their powerlessness (Tannen, 1993) in contrast to men with their dominance. Numerous researches also indicate that women in their interaction tend to establish rapport as the exercise of solidarity. This study aims to observe the women’s face-to-face interaction focusing on how the relativity of linguistic strategies occur during the interaction. Five linguistic strategies suggested by Tannen (1993) applied in this study are indirectness, interruption, silence, topic raising, and adversativeness. Using Divergent movie as the object study in understanding the paradoxical relationship between power and solidarity, the writers chose three female characters: Tris, Christina, and Jeanine. In order to obtain the appropriate findings, this study used qualitative research. The results show that among those five linguistic strategies, indirectness emerges as the highest number of linguistic strategy employed by the female characters in which it potentially has its relativity in the usage. However, the relativity of adversativeness strategy is not be found. Furthermore, this study suggests that in some cases women employ certain linguistic strategies to demonstrate the solidarity which can possibly be the way they assert their power as well.

Keywords: Divergent, female characters, interaction, linguistic strategies, power and solidarity

Introduction

Once power and solidarity are mentioned, they perhaps drive people’s attention towards social status in society. Power is usually associated with something which relates to control, authority, independence, and an extension of involvement, whereas solidarity is linked to the way people pursue an affiliation with others (Tannen, 1986). The practice of power and solidarity can be depicted through the social relationship. Parents-children, teacher-student, employee-employer are the instances of asymmetrical relationship where one is subordinate to another and it creates power dimension. On the other hand, practicing solidarity is how to be friendly with others, how to establish connection, and how to show support. That is what so called as symmetrical relationship is governed by solidarity in demonstrating the equality and similarity (Tannen, 1993).

However, the power and solidarity dimension actually emerges in the way man and woman use language. The study conducted by West and Zimmerman (1975) pointed out that “men tend to use dominance, directness, and control, while women are more likely hesitant, indirect, emotional, and uncertain in their language use” (Holmes & Mayerhoff, 2003). Labov observes that it is due to the speech communities which women and men engage during the childhood (Wood, 2007). As a matter of fact, how men use language illustrates their power. Unlike man, women attempt to be more considerate and polite as what Holmes (2008) argues that “women as a subordinate group must speak carefully and politely” (Holmes, 2008). Again, being polite also indicates solidarity due to the aim of politeness is to maintain the connection with others.

The predicate as the subordinate group subconsciously situates women as the powerless representative. It illustrates that women do not possess any power to be dominant in society. Since feminism emerges in opposing the sexist oppression towards women, the gender equality becomes an interesting issue to be brought in discussion. Moreover, another form to display the phenomena in society is through movies. A
movie entitled *Alice Doesn’t Live Here Anymore* (1975) is mentioned as the one of the first movie that was praised as “feminist” (Monaco, 2009). The other movies which closely relate to “feminist” are *The Portrait of A Lady* (1996), *Lara Craft: Tomb Raider* (2001), *The Iron Lady* (2011), and *Divergent* (2014).

As this present study is concerned with a sociolinguistic field, this study aims to demonstrate that the role of women as the “guardian” of the society – keep the peace with solidarity - while at the same time protecting their right to own voices as a form of power, can also be presented through the linguistic elements. Therefore, in order to portray the paradoxical power and solidarity suggested by Tannen (1993), the writer used movie as the object of the study due to the realization that movie is not only a commodity to be consumed but also to be learned. *Divergent* is a based-on-novel movie which was released in 2014 and written by Veronica Roth. It depicts the power of woman named Tris who lives in a futuristic world in which the society is divided into five factions (IMDb). This movie illustrates the struggle of Tris who does not fit into any of those factions. This present study can contribute to better understanding about women’s role in the society and how they manage to demonstrate themselves through the use of linguistic strategies which relate to either their asserted power or practice of solidarity. It is due to the fact that people are usually unaware or get misled towards the true intention of others in employing certain strategies. Therefore, a research question that can be formulated in this study is how power and solidarity are reflected through the relativity of linguistic strategies in *Divergent* Movie

**The Relativity of Linguistic Strategies**

Tannen (1993) in her book entitled “*Gender and Conversational Interaction*” demonstrates that some linguistic strategies such as interruption, topic, raising, and silence, which are commonly claimed as the linguistic strategies in dominating the interaction, are also able to mark the solidarity. On the other hand, those linguistic strategies which mark powerlessness such as indirectness can possibly indicate the practice of power. She suggests the term relativity of linguistic strategies because she believes that “specific linguistic strategies have widely divergent potential meanings” (Tannen, 1993). Five linguistic strategies suggested by Tannen (1993) are as follows:

**Indirectness**

Linguists describe indirectness as the way people mean what they do not exactly say (Tannen, 1986). In other words, people do not explicitly say what they want to say, rather they make an inference to say the implied meaning of their intention. Yet being indirect in the way people speak during the interaction does not merely mean they are powerless to directly say what they intend to say. Indirectness indicates either power or solidarity which can be indicated through setting, individual status and relationship to each other, and also the linguistic conventions that are ritualized in the cultural context (Tannen, 1993).

**Interruption**

Interruption is the violation of turn-taking rules of conversation (Coates, 2013). West and Zimmerman (1975) state that an interruption takes place when the second speaker begins speaking while the first speaker is in the middle of a word or simply does not finish the talking yet (Tannen, 1990). An interruption is significantly claimed as the strategy which people employ to dominate the floor during the interaction and display power. However, according to Tannen (1993) this linguistic strategy also happens as a form to display solidarity to what speaker’s saying. Thus in order to obtain a comprehensive interpretation about interruption, it becomes necessity to consider the context, the speaker’s habitual styles, and the interaction of their styles (Tannen, 1993).

**Silence**

There are some terms which describe what silence means in interaction. It can be assumed as lack of talk, long pauses, a sign of malfunction in conversation (Coates, 2013), and an absence of expression (Eckert & Ginet, 2003). In addition, employing silence during an interaction attempts to possess varied possibilities such as to communicate respect, comfort, support, disagreement, or uncertainty (Wardhaugh, 2006). Whether or not silence indicates power or solidarity, it depends on the circumstances – who is speaking, who they are speaking to, and in what social context (Coates, 2013).
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Topic Raising

Topic raising is a term when someone, during conversation, attempts to talk about something new or to offer another topic to be discussed. Cited on Tannen (1993), Shuy (1982) assumes that a speaker raising the most topic dominates a conversation. However, introducing or raising a new topic is not simply associated with dominance as not all topic raising is successfully accepted by the other participants to a further discussion (Coates, 2013). In addition, a participants’ style is also a component in assessing the topic raising issue. The differences in pacing and pausing result as the evidence (Tannen, 1993).

Adversativeness: Conflict and Verbal Aggression

As the term suggests, it is commonly employed by men due to their natural behavior which are prone to assume life as a contest, thus it results the competitiveness in themselves. A form of disagreement, opposition, command, and provocation become an obvious indication of adversativeness. The gendered style in cross-cultural interaction and the cultural style become important elements which determine whether or not the employment of adversativeness in interaction is a form or power or solidarity.

Those five strategies above are also used by Arliyan (2014) to observe a gay couple in the movie entitled “I love You Philip Morris”. He aimed to analyze the motive of the gay couple in employing the linguistic strategies. Unlike that study, this present study is focuses on how women employ the strategies in order to display either power or solidarity, or furthermore, to assign both power and solidarity during their interaction. Another study conducted by Kim (2015) entitled “Women’s talk, mothers’ work: Korean mothers’ address terms, solidarity, and power” is also similar with this present study. Examining the paradoxical relationship of power and solidarity, Kim (2015) used address terms instead of linguistic strategies in achieving that.

Methods

This study is a qualitative study which focuses more on a research mode emphasizing on the subjective truth. It supports the belief that there is an implied meaning behind human’s behavior such as their thought, feelings, and perception (Burns, 2000). Regarding this present study purpose which is to examine the possible explanation about power and solidarity practices, qualitative is appropriate in analyzing the data.

The writer chose Divergent movie due to the concept of the movie which demonstrates five different virtues in which the producer chose female as the lead character of the movie. Moreover, based on the New York Times, this movie is a best seller novel which does not only show the female protagonist but also the female antagonist.

In order to obtain the precise understanding about power and solidarity practiced by women, this study chose three female characters. They are Tris - who is the lead character of the movie, Christina – Tris’ friend during the initiation in Dauntless, and Jeanine – the antagonist of the movie. Moreover, Christina’s role as Tris’ friend and Jeanine’s role as the leader of Erudite provided an interesting notion of power and solidarity dimension.

Examining and deciding which part of the movie indicated the usage of linguistic strategies were actually required a lot of attention and understanding about each of the linguistic strategies. However, in conducting this study, the writer copied the script of Divergent movie from springfieldspringfield.uk to help her in categorizing the linguistic strategies applied. While watching the movie which ran for 139 minutes, the writer read the script and noted the scene in which the chosen three female characters employed the linguistic strategies. The writer could determine certain linguistic strategies applied through the context displayed on the movie, the words said by the characters from the script, the interaction occurred, and the expression demonstrated by the characters. Then in reflecting the aim of the study, the writer observed the relativity regarding power and solidarity through the way the linguistic strategies were used during the interaction.

Due to the object of the study which is a movie, the writer divided the movie into some scenes based on the setting. Thus to gain the precise findings regarding the power and solidarity practiced by female characters, purposive sampling was applied to determine which data or scene could be examined. There were three aspects in deciding which scenes are appropriate:
1. The scenes where the chosen three female characters participated.
2. The scenes where the three female characters chosen employed the linguistic strategies.
3. The scenes where the relativity of linguistic strategies in regard to power and solidarity occurred.

Based on the three criteria above, the samples of this study were composed of 11 out of 68 scenes namely scenes 8, 9, 20, 29, 30, 31, 33, 34, 38, 46, and 67.

**Findings**

*Figure 1: Comparison of the linguistic strategies and their relativity*

Figure 1 shows that there are only four out of five linguistic strategies are employed by the chosen three female characters as the topic raising strategy has a different indicator in determining its relativity. According to Tannen (1993), topic raising strategy is determined by the quantity of topics raised during an interaction. However, as the object of this study is a movie, the topic raising strategy is examined based on the scenes that show that the three female characters chosen raised the most topic in one scene. Indeed out of the 68 scenes on the *Divergent* movie, the writer finds that there are 68 topics raised by the chosen female characters in which six of them fail to be discussed. Yet there are 5 scenes whose relativity regarding power and solidarity are observable. They consist of 18 topics.

As presented in figure 1, there are 58 linguistic strategies employed by the three female characters and only nine relativity of its usage can be identified by the writer in regard to the paradoxical relationship of power and solidarity. However, none of the nine relativity is from the adversativeness strategy. Indeed indirectness becomes the most frequent linguistic strategy employed which possesses any relativity regarding power and solidarity.

**Discussion**

Some of the relativity of linguistic strategies proposed by Tannen (1993) are not found in the three female characters’ utterances in the *Divergent* movie. Apparently, they employ all of the five linguistic strategies. However, the writers do not find any relativity in the way they employ adversativeness namely conflict and verbal aggression. As a common belief which states that adversativeness may be employed by men in presenting their solidarity to other men. However, it seems to be different from women. The collected data show that when women employ such strategy, they mean it. Women tend to use it in a real context which means they rarely employ the strategy to aim different purposes. The moment they use the adversativeness strategy seems to be the moment they vocalize their disagreement, provocation, and command which perhaps either create any conflict with others or attempt to demonstrate their power. The gendered style of women who tend to be cooperative and avoid conflict suggests that adversativeness is not the strategy they employ in maintaining the connection but they would use it to show their power. Claiming their power by either voicing their disagreement or issuing command make them use the adversativeness strategy in a serious matter. As a result, the relativity in regard to power and solidarity in using adversativeness strategy is hardly found.

Similar with the other two strategies which are interruption and silence, women seem clear in the way they employ those strategies. In silence, as the chart shows, the case apparently demonstrates the same issue as the adversativeness strategy. Women often employ this strategy, yet the indication of their silence
seems to be clear in either showing their solidarity or asserting their power. However, in the case of interruption, the female characters in this movie rarely employ this strategy. This fact perhaps supports the notion that women do not usually interrupt and they are the ones who get more interruption (West and Zimmerman). The subordinate role which might stick to the women possibly provides a significant factor of why they rarely do interruption during their interaction with others. Furthermore, in regard to power and solidarity, women do not employ interruption perhaps in order to demonstrate their solidarity. They value the turn exchange in conversation due to their thoughtfulness to other participants. Thus it could also be the reason why they employ other strategies instead of interruption in attempting to dominate or display their power.

In contrast, indirectness becomes the highest number of linguistic strategy found by the female characters which shows the relativity in its usage. It depicts the fact that behind the indirect utterance employed by women, they could mean something different. In regard to the paradoxical relationship of power and solidarity which is the relativity of the usage, women tend to use indirectness in claiming their power. It perhaps due to the indirectness that would come out as less rude and less arrogant, even though the aim in employing the strategy is to demonstrate power. Women are believed to employ this strategy more than men as they are a subordinate group which has less power to directly state the words. This study which focuses more on women indicates that indirectness is mostly depicted in order to demonstrate power rather than the powerlessness. However, in some cases indirectness seems to be employed to demonstrate the solidarity without any indication of powerlessness in the form of politeness. The elements such as participants, setting, social status of the participants help to obtain the precise examination in determining where the indirectness belongs.

**Excerpt 1**

**Context:** Tris, Caleb, Andrew, and Marcus are in Dauntless. They attempt to stop Jeanine from creating the chaos in Abnegation. Under the simulation, Dauntless is controlled by Erudite to look for Divergent in Abnegation. Jeanine assumes that Abnegation is undermining the faction system and breaking the laws by harboring the Divergent. All the event in Abnegation is controlled by Jeanine from Dauntless. That is the reason why Tris is there. Surprisingly, Tris meets Peter who is in charge to guard the area. Tris asks Peter where Jeanine position is, but Peter refuses to provide any information. Then Tris fires Peter to force him providing any information.

**MARCUS** : Did you really need to shoot him?

**TRIS** : Every minute we waste, another Abnegation dies and another Dauntless becomes a murderer.

Marcus is the leader of Abnegation and he is way older than Tris. Instead of directly responding to Marcus’s inquiry about the shooting with “Yes, I need to shoot him because we do not have much time to solve the mess”, Tris employs indirectness to defend herself. As Lakoff (1975) argues that one of the two benefits of employing indirectness, is payoff in self-defense. By acknowledging the unexpected response from Marcus, she attempts to defend herself by stating the fact. Furthermore, Tris attempts to be as polite as possible because she realizes that Marcus is way older than her. Intending to be polite is the form of solidarity. However, it is not only solidarity which Tris intends to perform, but also power. By indirectly stating the urgent fact they face, she claims her power and demands Marcus to understand her aggressive action. She knows that there will be more death of Abnegation and it is Dauntless who will be the faction taking the responsibility. She would not let that happen because she is sure she can do something about that.

Another linguistic strategy, which according to Tannen (1993), demonstrates and can be a sign of power is topic raising. The number of topics raised by someone during an interaction becomes the indicator namely the more someone raises the topic, the more dominant she/he is. However, the significance of the topic raised and how other participants response to the topic takes a great account in determining whether the one who raises the most topic is dominant or not. In this study, the paradoxical relationship of power and solidarity emerges as a result of topic raising employed as different participants have different intentions in raising the topics. In addition, it is claimed that women in particular are as the
agent who tends to be more cooperative, employed topic raising as the means of establishing the connection or embracing other participants to join the conversation. The number of their topic raising, which is proven in this study, does not solely claim their power. Yet it also does not mean their number of topic raising does not affect their power as it provides the notion of power. Moreover, the initial intention and the result of the topic raising also become the significant elements in observing the paradoxical relationship between power and solidarity. Topic employed raising are mostly used to show their considerateness and break the awkwardness.

**Excerpt 2**

**Context:** Tris, Christina, and Will are in health center of Dauntless. Christina and Will accompany Tris after she gets beating from Peter during the fight. They are talking about Tris’ condition and provide support for Tris because Eric has declared that Tris is out from Dauntless as a result of her loss of the fight.

| CHRISTINA  |  |  |
|------------|  |  |
| TRIS       |  |  |
| WILL       |  |  |
| TRIS       |  |  |
| CHRISTINA  |  |  |
| TRIS       |  |  |
| WILL       |  |  |
| CHRISTINA  |  |  |
| TRIS       |  |  |

There are five different topics raised by the two female characters, Tris and Christina. Indeed Tris raises more topics than Christina. She raises three topics, while Christina originally raises one topic which is the first one in commenting Tris’ condition. The last topic raised by Christina apparently is the topic raise in responding to Tris’ action. She will not raise it if only Tris did not move from her bed. The quantity of the topic raising shows that Tris has raised more topics. However, based on the participants’ style, the function of Tris in raising the new topic is because she thinks that Will and Christina have no more to say. They show their sympathy to what has happened to Tris. Thus in order to fill the awkwardness, Tris raises another topic. It can be concluded that by raising more topic than the other participants in the interaction, Tris does not want to demonstrate the power, rather she attempts to switch the topic to another new one in order to keep the conversation going.

**Conclusion**

The five linguistic strategies proposed by Tannen (1993) are used by the three female characters in *Divergent* movie. However, the study only focuses on the relativity of linguistic strategies employed in regard to power and solidarity. Therefore there is no relativity to occur in the adversativeness strategy. The way women employ the adversativeness strategy seems to be the intention to certainly express their disagreement, opposition, and command. It is in contrast with men who commonly use this strategy to present their solidarity. Therefore, the four linguistic strategies show the their relativity regarding power and solidarity clearly. The paradoxical relationship between power and solidarity comes from the relativity of each of the linguistic strategies which is based on the belief that certain strategy has widely divergent potential meaning. Thus it can be seen from the ambiguity and polysemy of each linguistic strategies. It provides a notion that there is no clear-cut which signifies that a certain strategy commonly claimed as the source of powerlessness cannot be the source of power. However, a certain strategy which obviously emerges as the sign of domination, can possibly indicate solidarity as well.

As for the future study, it will be more challenging to conduct the study in the natural situation. Even though, it is necessary for a researcher to put more effort to dig the true intention of those who employ the linguistic strategies. In order to obtain the more comprehensive findings, interview perhaps offers the solution in gaining deep understanding. Furthermore, this present study does actually not intend to challenge any certain paradigm which spreads in the society. This study is more likely to demonstrate that
the potential meaning behind the linguistic strategies is possible and it occurs as Tannen (1993) has claimed before. For women, the way they interact is still dominated by the solidarity as what the society believe them as they are.

References