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HUNGARIAN-GREEK COMMUNICATIVE STRATEGIES IN RESPECT OF GENDER

1. Introduction

Gender linguistics, which undertakes research into the discrepancies of male and female discourse, is coming to the fore. It clusters data in connection with the application of diverse modalities – speech, writing, computerized communication – used by the two sexes via various channels, in different cultures, subcultures, and public life. (Huszár 2009)

My research focuses on the relevance and the discrepancies of mono – and bilingual discourse on diverse linguistic levels as regards gender.

This study touches upon the communicative strategies of the two sexes i.e. the occurrence of exclamatives, swear words, question tags, minimal responses, overlaps, compliments, hedges, directives, topic changes and problemsolving.

The focus of the research centres on Hungarian-Greek bilingual discourse as it is indispensable in shedding light on the results of other Greek corpus linguistic and culture-anthropological aspects.

1.1. Greek linguistic and anthropological references

If a researcher is examining bilingualism being entwined with genderlinguistics, it is indispensable to study the norms, social expectations and culture-anthropological aspects of the subculture, along with the research of linguists and anthropologists concerned with the minority.

Several anthropologists have examined the communicative strategies of the Greeks, such as *Friedl* who noted that Greek people are keen on verbal quips and niceties of expressions. He conducted most of his research in Boetia – a village in Central-Greece – and concluded that arguments characterized their discourse. (Friedl 1962) According to him, Greek villagers identify Greek ethnicity with an affection for freedom and they are reluctant to get instructions from anyone. Their maxim „12 Greeks, 13 commanders” conveys this message as well. (Kakava 2002)

According to *Aschenbrenner*, passionate debate, frenzied verbal duels and the free expression of emotion, opinion and disagreement are all common in Greek discourse. As an anthropologist, *Aschenbrenner* carried out field work in one of the Peloponnesos villages of south-west Greece, and concluded that they manifest their emotion, agreement and disagreement freely, which gives village life a unique spiritual character. Disagreement is nurtured in children from their early childhood. Villagers do not only let themselves manifest their emotions and disagreements explicitly, but are fond of others doing so as well. They expect social interaction to

exceed a relatively tranquil verbal exchange of views. Thus, not only gossip and chatting can be heard but heated arguments as well. (Kakava 2002)

Vasillou highlighted emotionally active, competitive and rousing arguments in Greek discourse. (Kakava 2002). The same is reflected in *Mackridge's* research, who calls attention to „πηγαδακι” (heated, fierce public debate in public places). The fierce debate, which is used by Greeks in the heat of disagreement, is natural for them. Mackridge also highlights impassioned, agonistic debates as well. (Kakava 2002). According to *Kochman*, Greek men outthink, outtalk and outstyle the other participant, they preserve polarity, grab the floor in communication, and use irony quite frequently. (Kochman 1981:24)

Alexandra Georgakopoulou highlighted the usage of floor-bidding, floor-holding, analogy, personalization, delaying disagreement, question repeats (which help to remain neutral), interrupted questions, polite markers and convoluted turns with rhetorical acts as general phenomena in Greek discourse. She shed light on the frequency of ironic yes or no questions, mitigated and indirect disagreements, subtle speechcraft, and minimizing self-commitment. Both the usage of discourse markers which initiate the debate, and the repetition of questions which hinder the disagreement are rhetoric questions, which represent a challenge for the present interlocutor. As a reaction, by using sudden, interruptive questions, the speaker calls attention to previously uttered remarks which are faulty, in his/her view. (Georgakopoulou 2000) *Georgakopoulou* concludes that both delayed and mitigated disagreements are the preferred and frequently used strategies in Greek interaction. All the above mentioned strategies are applied for hindering explicit disagreement. When studying code switching, she claimed that the setting of recording the utterances is significant, because the leisurely atmosphere and conviviality that comes from food and drink consumption as well as the informal interaction around the table are integrally linked with the participants' seamless shifts into liminal scenarios. It also shapes the salience of humorous talk and joke-telling sessions as the primary activity. (Georgakopoulou 2009:477)

Christina Kakava also conducted research from a genderlinguistic aspect in connection with the linguistic discrepancies of the two sexes. Carrying out classroom-research, she experienced monological arguments, whereas within families, members matched wit, used figurative kinship terms and interactional rituals. According to her, disagreement is a social practice, which is preferred, expected and allowed in Greek culture. It conveys positive value, just like in Eastern-European Jewish communities. From a genderlinguistic aspect, in her opinion, *Greek women* have an inclination to react, and **use nicknames and mitigating strategies**. They **personalize** („... if you were him, what would you do?”), and use **competitive overlaps**. She claims that Greek females tend to **oppose** and use **sarcasm, competitive overlap and sustained disagreement**. They use **challenging view alignments, endearment forms, and contrastive repetition and interactional rituals**. Firstly, they disagree, and only subsequently they give account. They put the other speaker into an **analogical situation** and raise **ironic „yes or no questions”**. They tend to **change deictic centre, and personalize**. On

the other hand their *male* counterparts are inclined to use more **interjections**, **elliptical questions** and **upgrade assessment**. Males **retain position**, compete for interactionally negotiable goods and **maintain an opposing stance**. (Kakava 2002:1557) They use **lexical and structural repetition of adversative rounds**, and **competitive overlaps** as well. They **compete for ideas**, **match wits**, and with the help of an „I think” hedge (which mitigates), they **reiterate disagreement**. Males try to **regain floor**, **use irony**, **sarcasm** and **indirect opposition** and they **push to be heard**. (Kakava 2002). In Kakava’s view, Greek culture may predispose its people towards the open expressions of opposition. (Kakava 2002:1564)

Kakava found interjection and elliptic questions on the father’s side when carrying out research into family conflicts, whereas women used mitigating strategies and diminutive forms, such as: „παιδακι μου” meaning „my child”. On the other hand, the linguistic specific endearment forms and promotive commitment were also present. They created indirect disagreement by using sarcasm, which is more effective from a strategic point of view, because it implies deeper negative feelings. The disagreements were followed by a comment, mitigation, and personalization which were mutually expected. The other strategy is when the interlocutor presents an analogy with the help of a metaphor, with which she interprets directness and confusion. She achieves this situation by positioning the other interlocutor into an analogous situation. When she raises ironic „yes or no questions”, she will be less direct than in open disagreement. Although she applies strong strategy from the aspect of laying herself less open to others.

In Kakava’s studies, males preserved their position, and had **fierce debates**. Nevertheless, the participants do not endanger their personal relationship during the interaction, which suggests that disagreement is expected, accepted in Greek discourse and does not threaten their solidarity. (Kakava 2002). *Mariathi Makri* shares this opinion in respect of solidarity when claiming that the Greek experience solidarity in disagreement even though they appear to be at each other’s throat as they shout and gesticulate a lot. She highlights that Greek people are extremely sociable, but also fiercely independent. As a positive politeness culture, they place a high value on social interaction and involvement, yet they immensely cherish their freedom. (Makri 2003)

Considering these studies, it is worth examining the extent to which my bilingual data correspond and are relevant to the current literature on gender linguistics.

1.2. Gender studies referring to communicative strategies

Under the concept of communicative strategies we mean a well-planned series of actions, aimed at achieving certain objectives through the use of communication methods techniques and approaches.

Several gender linguists were indulged in the frequency of communicative strategies such as *Holmes*, who examined 484 **compliments** in his New-Zealand corpus, which outcome was 51% usage among women, whereas 21%, among men.

Fishman shed light on the usage of **question tag**, and revealed, that women used three times more than men in his corpus. He also examined the occurrence of **hedges** like „I think, I’m sure, you know, sort of” when analysing a 52 hour long conversation between American couples, and concluded, that women used five times more „you know” discourse marker than men. (Coates 1993)

Despite many proverbs conveying that women are more gossipy, some linguists claim, that men also contribute to the float of **gossip information** to a great extent.

Nicholas Emler examined the discourse of 300 interlocutors, and claimed, that it was men, who used two times more gossip information than women. (Emler 1994)

Considering **swear words**, *Gomm* examined British participants and highlighted three times more usage of swear words from men than from women, just like in *Coates’* New York corpus.

West, Engle and *Milroy* focused on the frequency of **directives** in discourse. *West* analysed doctor-patient interactions, and drew the attention on imperatives used mainly by male doctors, whereas females applied mitigated strategies and used „let’s”. *Milroy* also claimed, that even in kindergarten, most girls are inclined to compromise and maintain the interpersonal harmony, whereas boys use more imperatives and tend to be tyrannical. This attitude outlines **problemsolving** which was researched by *Leet Pellegrini* who emphasized tactful, collaborative, mitigating attitude from women in conflicts, whereas assertive floor-holding and dominance from men.

1.3. Bilinguals and their communicative strategies

According to *Grosjean*, bilinguals are those persons, who use two languages – separately or together- for different purposes in different domains of life, with different people. Bilinguals can not ignore either language, since these languages can crop up anytime in any interaction. Bilingualism is the use of two (or more) languages in one’s everyday life. (Grosjean 1992). The functions of codeswitching are the adaptation of the interlocutor to the new circumstances, and social norms, and to make the message more successful, effective and authentic. Regarding communicative strategies, contextual, metaphorical and situational codeswitchings can be experienced as strategies for instance in case of Sub-Carpathian Hungarians. These are conscious strategies in order to express solidarity, humour or linguistic defiance against the interlocutor. (Márku 2010)

2. Research material and methods

My research is based on gender discrepancies of spontaneous manifestation of two case studies. One of these case studies comprises the discourse of Hungarian monolingual participants and the other, Hungarian-Greek bilingual participants. My objective was to examine the extent to which bilingual male and female utterances differ in respect of phonetic, lexical, syntactical levels and communicative strategies and whether figures correspond to the monolingual

outcomes and the relevances of the related literature. I wondered whether it is men, who intend to use more phonetical and syntactical mistakes, more interruptions, overlaps, swear words, directives and assertive style, or, it is women who are inclined to use more „feminine adjectives”, more exclamatives, question tags, minimal responses, compliments, hedges and gossip information as most of the related gender studies claim. I also wanted to know whether I will have the same frequency of usage of the above mentioned factors regarding the two sexes in case they are monolinguals or bilinguals. My hypothesis was, that there will be less gender discrepancies in case of bilinguals because they are more adaptable, and tolerant individuals than the monolinguals. The attitude and the views of those persons who are exposed to two languages from early childhood is more flexible, and they are more capable of adapting to each other, because they are „forced” to consider more point of views during the communication. I conducted a case study by recording a two hour long spontaneous manifestation of discourse with dictaphone of Hungarian-Greek participants. The population consisted of five friends – three men and two women – in their twenties. They were well-known to one another with some of them living in Beloianisz, and the rest in Budapest and have at least one parent who is Greek. The Greek parents immigrated to Hungary in the fifties, escaping from the Greek civil war. Their children were born in Hungary and were exposed to the Greek language from their early childhood due to one Greek parent, nursery and primary school, where the Greek language was taught. Greek grammar and lexemes were consciously taught to them in these institutions. (Alekos, Nikos, Benji acquired the language in Beloianisz, while Diamandula and Eleni in Budapest). After finishing primary school they did not participate in Greek education, though, due to their interactions with the Greek parent and the everyday life of the subculture of Beloianisz village, they were exposed to Greek language stimuli.

I recorded their discourse in a car, and in a restaurant, as I had previously recorded the interactions of five – two women and three men – monolingual participants as well. Both the monolingual and the bilingual participants were in their twenties, well-known friends to one another. Since, my objective was to compare the figures deriving from the monolingual corpus to the bilingual one and to the related literature, I had to ensure equivalent circumstances during the recording of the bilingual discourse. The figures I intended to compare, was the ratio between the uttered results of women and men concerning phonetic, lexical, syntactic and communicative strategic diversities. The number of the population does not reflect a representative sample because the space of a car is restricted, nevertheless I tried to counterbalance this situation by analysing the discrepancies of the two genders on multiple levels i.e. phonetic, lexis, syntactic and communicative strategy. In this study, I solely focus on the latter one, namely: exclamatives, swear words, minimal responses, question tags, overlaps, compliments, hedges, directives, topic changes, gossip information, interruptions and problem solving used by the two sexes. After recording the manifestation of discourse, a bilingual transcription was carried out,

which was followed by the comparison of the above mentioned aspects in respect of monolingual outcomes and the related literature.

3. Results of the bilingual corpus

When analyzing the communicative strategy, I first examined the frequency of **exclamatives** in respect of gender, of which women used more. (see table 1) The biggest linguistic discrepancies considering gender in my corpus were represented by minimal responses and **swear words**. Males used five times more swear words than females. (see table 1) This ratio is not so astounding from the aspect of diverse socialization as boys, or as girls from early childhood. Other norms are allowed and expected from society e.g. more misbehaviour is accepted of a boy, moreover, they have more inclination to show off in a group and to grab the floor with their competitive style even if they have to swear or interrupt. (Coates 1993)

Interruption is face-threatening, and conveys an assertive style that breaks the flow of the communication, and results in turn-taking. Several empirical gender studies proved that in mixed-gender conversations, males tend to interrupt females more, which was reflected in my corpus as well. (Coates 1993) Whereas in the case of monolinguals, males interrupted four times more than females, in the bilingual corpus the difference was far less. (see table 2) At this point we can state, that in case of any gender research, culture-anthropological aspects must also be considered. It is indispensable to examine what social status the population of the corpus belongs to, what kind of social norms and expectations they have to meet, and how they were socialized within the particular subculture. In case of Greek people, the society itself predisposes them to express their disagreement explicitly, and to use verbal duels, which results in the usage of interruptions; regardless of whether the interlocutor is a man or a woman. Whereas in the monolingual corpus, men competed for floor-holding while women were pushed backwards, and barely contributed to the flow of communication, in the bilingual corpus, highlighting the genuine Greek, Mediterranean virtue, women did not remain silent and participated actively in the discourse, which is reflected in the proportion of interruptions.

Gossip and verbosity have a negative connotation, and basically it is women to whom these are attributed- as cited in many proverbs and sayings throughout history. In contrast to this, both in my monolingual and bilingual corpus, males used twice as much gossip information as females. (see table 2)

Shedding light on a **communicative strategy** I examined **question tags**, the usage of which may express uncertainty – only in some cases, calling someone to account – but basically it refers to hesitation and requires reinforcement. Women used question tags more, together with the expression: „ναι”-meaning „yes”, expecting positive feedback from the other participant (see table 2).

Minimal response itself, conveys positive feedback and empathy and only in some cases indifference. It suggests that the listener pays attention and reinforces the interlocutor. Females' more emotional and empathic endowment is reflected in

their more usage of a minimal response, that is six times more than their male counterparts'. (see table 2).

Overlap does not express as assertive a style as interruption, since the listener anticipates and finishes the sentence of the previous interlocutor. Regarding emphatic ability, one may think that it is basically women who apply more overlaps, yet both the literature and the figures of the two corpora justify that men use more overlaps:

N: „Akkor az...[Then, it is...]

D: Τριάντα είναι; (Harminc?)” [Thirty?]

N: „És akkor hallottam, hallottam egy ilyet... egy ilyen rockszámban is: „Έτσι κι εμείς ποτέ δεν κάνουμε χωριό..” (így mi soha sem fogunk sokasodni, falut csinálni) hogy [And then I heard, heard such a... such a in a rock song: „, so we will never increase, „make a village”]

E: sokasodjunk, valami ilyesmi...”[increase, or something like that]

D: „Nem madártej, hanem.. [Not floating island, but]

B: πουλί-γάλα (madárnak a-teje)” [bird's milk]

In the bilingual discourse, women used two times more **compliments** than men, and in the monolingual corpus, women used six times more compliments than men. According to surveys, women are not reluctant to express their praise, and the reason is that they tend to communicate on maternity, child rearing, personal problems, appearance and clothing. (Coates 1993) Thus, more compliments can be traced in their discourse. In the monolingual research males did not utter any compliments, whereas in the bilingual one, fifteen times. At this point, we can experience the culture-anthropological aspects again, namely the Greek virtue, the expectation of the society and the explicit manifestation of not only disagreement but emotions as well.

In the case of monolinguals, the ratio of **topic change** was 62:78 (women: men), whereas in the bilingual corpus, it was 99:99. The Greek-Hungarian females were active in the discourse and were not pushed into the background, which suggests that the norms within the subculture are reflected in the outcomes of topic change as well (see table 2).

Considering **hedges**, I concentrated on the utterances of: „tudod, ilyen, olyan” – meaning: „such, sort of, you know”. Though there was no significant distinction in respect of the number of hedges, it was men who used it more frequently. (see table 2) It is striking that the occurrence of **directives** was higher in the case of women, knowing that men tend to grab the floor and use assertive style. There are several hints about men who manifest their status by explicit instructions and offensive directives from their early childhood in kindergarten groups in mixed-gender conversations, as was revealed by Goodwin who studied 90 playgroups. (Coates, 1993)

Finally, I have examined **problemsolving**, compromise, evading techniques and mitigating strategies. In case of bilingual participants, when two people are confronted, women would rather have changed topic, promoted each other, agreed, praised, used mitigating strategy, or trivialized. Men apologized, used humour as reconciliation, or repeated the previously uttered wisdom. They also used topic change, had instructive comments, and adapted. Although they provoked and used verbal quips, none of the real conflicts remained unsolved. Whereas in the monolingual corpus, more conflicts were open, men were not willing to reconcile and bilinguals were more tolerant and flexible. Nevertheless, the last conflict from the examples proved to be the most heated, when Eleni inquires about the origin of a tree, and does not accept any reply. Even in this debate, the interlocutor applies an evading technique by using a topic change in order to lessen tension.

D: „Durva, akkor én nem hallgatom. [If it’s obscene, I won’t listen to that]

B: Nem szabad. [We shouldn’t]

N: Nem illik. Nem illik. Halljuk a vonaton, κάθομαι στο τρένο (ülök a vonaton), vagy ξέρω εγώ μέσα στα χωράφια... Εκεί γίνεται. (tudom, a szántóföldön beszélnek így, ott lehet.) [It is not in a due manner. It is not in a due manner. We can hear it on the train, I’m sitting on the train, or, I know, they speak such a way on the plough-land, it is allowed there]

N: Εκεί γίνεται. Στο τραπέζι δεν γίνεται. (Ott lehet. Az asztalnál nem lehet.)” [It is allowed there. At the table, you are not allowed to do so.]

D: „Engem sért. Ha nem vagyok tolakodó. Πολλά έχετε ακόμα να μάθετε. (Még sok tanulnivalótok van.) [It offends me. If I’m not indiscreet. You’ve got much to learn]

E: Tudod a mondást: fiatalság bolondság...” [You know the saying: crazy young.]

E: „Milyen fa van a Belóban a főutcán, ami olyan illatos? [What kind of tree is there in Belo, in the main street which is so fragrant?]

B: Ecetfa. [Sumac]

E: Menj már innen! [Come on!]

B: Mondom. [True]

E: Nem ecetfa, hát az ecetfa az nem ez! [It is not a sumac, the sumac is not like this]

B: De! [It is!]

E: Ez jázmin illat, hát az ecetfa az nem ez! [It smells like jasmine, the sumac is not like this]

B: Minden a, vagy akác. [Everything, a, or, acacia]

E: Ne! Maradj már Benji, az akácot ismerem, az ecetet ismerem, egyszerűen olyan illata van mint a jázminnak! [Don’t! Come on Benji, I know what acacia looks like, I know sumac, it simply smells like jasmine.]

N: Lehet, hogy hársfa, van hátul egy hársfa. Benji lehet, hogy keveredik a sok szag [It may be a linden-tree. Look Benji, fragrance may mix]

E: Ezt most komolyan csináljátok, hogy nem ismerem a hársfát? Nem, a amikor megyünk ki a térről a domb fele. [Are you kidding and suppose I don’t know linden-tree? No, when we leave the square and approach the hill.]

B: A domb felé? [The hill?]

N: Az lehet, az lehet, hogy dzindzi. [It might be, it might be dzindzi]

E: És jázmin illata van. [And it smells like jasmine.]

N: Az dzindzi, dzindzi [It is dzindzi, dzindzi]

E: Mi az a dzindzi? [What is dzindzi?]
 N: Olajfa, Beloianisz-i olajfa.[Olive-tree, tree from Beloianisz]
 E: Maradj már! Most hülyére vesztek? Én ismerem az olajfát is. [Come on! Do you think I'm an idiot? I know what olive-tree looks like]
 N: Na most ahogy mész a faluban, [Well, as you walk in the village,]
 D: Στο χωριό, στο χωριό μιλάτε; (A faluról, a faluról beszéltek?) [About the village, are you talking about the village?]
 N: Για το Μπελογιάννη. (Beloianisz-ról.)” [About Beloianisz]

4. Conclusion

Focusing on communicative strategies, the results of the corpus – only with slight differences- justify the literature of gender discrepancies. Bilingual men used more overlaps, interruptions and swear words than women. There was floor-bidding, and they wanted to be heard. Women used more compliments, exclamatives, question tags and minimal response. Contradiction with the literature could be traced in respect of having more directives from women and men gossiping. Considering culture anthropological aspects, irony, repetition, polite marker, interjection, analogy and verbal quips were present. Nevertheless the number of fierce, heated debates and unsolved conflicts was not significant. Both men and women were inclined to compromise and employ a mitigating and evading strategy. Anytime they provoked with the help of analogy, repetition, agreement and wit, at last, they reconciled. Bilinguals treated conflicts in a flexible way, they manifested their disagreement, and even women were active participants of the interaction, which is supported by their equivalent topic change with men, and the slight difference between the number of interruptions. Therefore, in the bilingual corpus, the number of interruptions and topic changes were not proved to be clear cut gender markers as in case of monolinguals.

Summing up, we might state that micro and macro contextual aspects and the culture anthropological attributes of the examined population have to be considered as well. The Greek / Mediterranean virtue in line with the expectation of society in favour of open expression of disagreement can result in diverse outcomes in respect of monolingual gender discrepancies, regardless of whether the circumstances in the two corpora were the same.

Last but not least, let me finish with an anecdote experienced by a Greek linguist, Christina Kakava, when talking to an American professor married to a Greek wife:

Christina Kakava: „I am investigating whether disagreement is a dispreferred action.”

American professor: „ That’s what I thought until I met my wife.” (Kakava 2002:1537)

Exclamatives	Fem.	Male
Júj! [my goodness!]	2	---
Jaj! [ow!]	1	1
Hú! [ugh!]	5	2
Ne! Ne már! Nehogy már! [come on!]	4	1
Úr Istenem! Uram, atyám! Κυρία! (Uram!) [goodness me!]	3	1
Jaj Istenem! [goodness gracious!]	---	2
Na! Nana! Na tessék! ρε! (Hé!) [hey!]	4	7
Hagyjál már! [stop it!]	4	---
A! A! [ah!]	3	2
Fú! [wow!]	---	2
Ú! οχ! (ό!) [oh!]	---	2
Total	26	20
Swear words	4	25

Table 1. The number of exclamatives and swear words in the bilingual corpus

Communicative strategy	Fem.	Male
Question tag :ναι (ugye) [isn't it?]	17	10
Minimal response: ναι (aha, ühü) [yeah]	39	7
Overlap	6	23
Compliment: μπράβο (brávó) πολύ ωραία (nagyszerű) [well done]	28	15
Hedges: ilyen, olyan, tudod, δισταδής (izé) [sort of, you know]	49	68
Directives	36	15
Topic change	99	99
Interruption	289	326
Gossip information	21	55

Table 2. The number of communicative strategic elements in the bilingual corpus

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