# Linguistic Power Wielding and Manipulation Strategies in Group Conversations Between Turkish-Danish Children

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#### 1. Preface

A conversation is more than just an exchange of information. A conversation is also a social event in which the participants perceive themselves as individuals and as a group. In a conversation the interactants negotiate social relations and identities. Thus, every linguistic act can be seen as a social act. My study concerns the linguistic power wielding in group conversations among bilingual children and adolescents.

In bilingual conversations one of the pragmatic linguistic means of negotiating power relations and identities is of course the choice of language. This is also the main subject of the study of Jørgensen (1993) who presents a wiew on the linguistic power wielding in group conversation in which he combines code-switching theories with Kjøller's (1991) concepts of linguistic power wielding. Kjøller claims that schools ought to teach children how to exercise linguistic power:

Being able to read and write is a far cry from being able to get one's way. In the school one learns depressingly little about how to go about pressing one's will through. (Kjøller (1991, 20) translated by Jørgensen (1993, 165))

Jørgensen shows that in spite of this the bilingual children do acquire manipulation skills. He also emphasizes the fact that co-operation is not the only principle that rules the conversations.

Cooperation is not everything, after all, conflicting interests are present in more than a few conversations. (Jørgensen 1993, 166)

Jørgensen finds that the manipulation strategies, which Kjøller has established, are useful in the study of bilingual conversations from the Køge Project. Inspired by this I describe some of the principles behind the manipulation strategies used by the children in my data. I focus on the conflicts in the conversations. My study consists of 1) a qualitative analysis of the manipulation strategies and the power-processes in the negotiations, and 2) a quantitative study of the outcome of the conflicts in the conversations. The study, which is described in Madsen (2001), concerns both linguistic and social parameters. I consider the relationships between

linguistic variation and social structures. As a starting point I see linguistic variation as a means of negotiating power relationships and identities. The linguistic choices bring about social relations in the conversation. My results, however, suggest that linguistic behavior in the conversation to some extent depends on brought-along social factors (Rampton 1995).

# 2. Language and Power

In the social sciences the concept of power is used to describe an aspect of human social behavior. Basically, power is the potential to carry out one's own will despite the opposing interests of others. Language is the primary means of power wielding in our society. Olson and Cromwell (1975) divide the concept of power into three dimensions: Power bases, power processes, and power outcomes. *Power bases* are the resources possessed by a person which improve his or her ability to influence or control other people or prevail in a conflict. These power bases can be institutionalized positions or personally acquired. The term *power processes* refer to the use of power bases, the power holder's self-assurance, and control in given situations. In a conversation the power processes concern e.g. the degree of interactive dominance. Control over a conversation can be achieved in different ways. Taking the floor, controlling the themes by keeping or changing the focus of the conversation, and taking or casting different conversational roles are all means of power wielding. Finally the term power outcomes concern the results of disputes and discussions in the conversation. To have one's way or to avoid losing face in a face-threatening situation (Goffman 1972) are power outcomes.

These three dimensions are useful in the study of language and power. First and foremost because the distinction between power processes and power outcomes is an important one in the study of linguistic power wielding and power relationships in a conversation. Many studies of language and power are stylistic in perspective (O'Barr 1982, Hosman 1989, Bradac & Mulac 1984). In a study of power relations among members of a Turkish family in the Netherlands, Huls (2000) studies competitive turn-taking patterns, and she asks the family members which individual makes the final decisions in the family. In that way she considers both power processes and power outcomes. In this work I focus on the pragmatic use of language. I study the power processes through an analysis of the manipulation strategies and I study the power outcomes by analyzing the occurring conflicts in the conversations in terms of who get their way.

#### 3. Data

My data is part of a longitudinal study of the linguistic development of bilingual Turkish-Danish children in a Danish school (the Køge Project, see Turan 1999). The project has collected a large amount of data from children from they started school until they finished nine years later in 1998. The data I use are the group conversations. These conversations involve 3-4 participants and are pure boys' conversations, girls' conversations or gender-mixed conversations. At the opening of each conversation the children are given an assignment. The conversations last around 45 minutes; they have been recorded and transcribed according to the Childes-conventions (MacWhinney 1995). I have selected 2-3 conversations from each of the eight youngest grades. This selection of data was made in connection with a larger project, which involved a quantitative study of initiatives and responses and focused on differences related to gender. One of the conclusions of the study was that linguistic dominance and competitive behavior was more typical of the girls than of the boys especially early in their school careers (see Jørgensen 2001, Madsen 2001).

#### 4. Power outcomes

To compare the linguistic power processes and the power outcomes I have carried out a quantitative analysis of the conflicts in the conversations. Identifying a conflict, however, involves a time-consuming qualitative analysis. As a consequence of this I have had selected 8 of the conversations for this analysis. I have chosen these so that each informant participates in at least two conversations, and furthermore so that I have conversations from different grade levels.

I define a conflict as a situation in the conversation where opposing interests or values are explicitly expressed (see also Gumperz 1982, 166). A conflict then is a speech event in which a participant by his or her utterances is in opposition to one or more of the other participants, to their utterances, or to their actions. In my definition a conflict always implies face-threatening acts (Goffman 1972). Following this definition I have identified all the conflicts in the conversations.

Every conflict in my data ends with some kind of solution unless the participants simply change the subject of talk. The conflicts are rarely solved equally acceptable to all participants. Most of the conflicts result in the loss of face for one or more of the participants. Therefore, I can calculate the won and lost conflicts for each informant.

I consider a conflict won if is evident in the conversation that the situation has changed in the direction preferred by one or more of the

participants, the winner(s). It is a victory if a participant succeeds in building up his or her own face. A conflict does not necessarily end with only a single winner or loser. Participants can ally against other participants and share a victory.

#### 5. Results

I have studied conversations from grades 2, 3, 5, and 7. One issue I wanted to look at, was the question whether power relationships change over time, or whether they are fixed at a certain age and then remain stable. Table 1 shows the conflict outcomes for three girls and three boys twice in their school career, namely grades 2 and 7.

| 2nd grade |       |     |      |        | 7th grade |     |      |        |
|-----------|-------|-----|------|--------|-----------|-----|------|--------|
|           | total | won | lost | agreed | total     | won | lost | agreed |
| Esen      | 11    | 10  | 1    | -      | 10        | 9   | 1    | -      |
| Selma     | 11    | 7   | 4    | -      | 6         | 3   | 3    | -      |
| Asiye     | 9     | 7   | 2    | -      | 8         | 0   | 8    | -      |
| Murat     | 9     | 7   | 1    | 1      | 19        | 13  | 4    | 2      |
| Bekir     | 15    | 7   | 6    | 2      | 20        | 9   | 7    | 4      |
| Erol      | 15    | 5   | 8    | 2      | 20        | 5   | 12   | 3      |

Table 1: Conflict outcome for the participants in girl- and boy-conversations in grade 2 & 7.

The power relationships seem to be fixed by grade 2 in the relative distribution of different power outcomes among both the boys and the girls does not change through their school years. The conversations furthermore seem more asymmetric in power distribution when the participants are girls than when they are boys. There is a greater difference between girls who often win the conflicts, and girls who do not, than there is among the boys. It is also characteristic that not one of conflicts in the girl conversations ends in a compromise.

### 6. Linguistic power wielding in the 2nd grade

In my analysis of power processes I found differences related to gender in the beginning of the school period. In table 1 we saw that the power relationships measured through power outcomes were more asymmetric in the girls' conversation than in the boys' conversation in the 2nd grade and that no conflict ended in agreement. In the following we shall look at excerpts from the 2nd grade conversations which show how the girls and the boys handle conversational conflicts.

In this first example the 4 participants in the conversation are the girls Esen, Selma, Asiye, and Eda. They are assigned to prepare a family to go on vacation in Turkey by cutting out pictures of suitable stuff from a catalogue. The assignment is the main subject of the conversation and also the main cause of conflict. Another recurrent conflict is rooted in the three other girls' bullying of Eda. This excerpt begins with a sound Eda makes. The other girls tease her and say that she farted.

Excerpt 1 from grade 2: **Eda farted** (Italic=Turkish)

**Selma**: oh Eda osur +...

Oh Eda fart +...

Asiye:oh osur osurmuş oh Eda osurdu # Eda osurdu.

Oh fart she has farted oh Eda farted Eda farted.(Eda laughs)

Esen: Eda osurdu.

Eda farted.

Eda: Esen osurdu oh.

Esen farted oh.(Eda laughs)

Selma:ssch terbiyesiz konuşmayın mikrofonda ben konuşmam.

Hush you should not speak naughty in the microphone I don't speak.

Eda: Esen osurdu Selma osurdu.

Esen farted Selma farted.(Eda laughs)

**Selma**:hiç de deşil asıl sen.

Not at all actually it was you.

Esen: bir daha seninle birşey olmaz.

Another time we don't want to be with you.

Selma:he.

Yes.

**Eda**: ben böyle dedim bak cart öyle ettim biliyor musun sizde söylediniz Eda osurdu dediniz buda cık cık seni xxx xxx.

I said like this look cart I did like this you know you said that you said Eda farted and this one here cik cik you xxx xxx (incomprehensible).

Esen: oh hiç birşey yok.

Oh there is nothing at all.

Asiye:benimkide de yok oh bu ne güzel mi Esen.

There is nothing in mine either oh how this is beautiful isn't it Esen.

Esen: evet bana başka birşey +...

Yes something else for me +...

In line 1 Selma comments on the sound Eda makes oh Eda osur, and the two other girls follow up in line 3 and 6. Eda laughs and responds in line 8 by saying exactly the same as Esen. Eda is still laughing which indicates now she finds that the situation is fun. In line 11 Selma tells the others to be quiet and reminds them that the conversation is recorded and therefore they should not "speak naughty" even though it was Selma herself who brought up the subject in the first place. Eda continues anyway and includes Selma in the teasing Esen osurdu Selma osurdu (line 13) while she still laughs. Selma defends herself and is supported by Esen (line 16 and 18). Eda stops laughing and this time she does not return the insult. Instead she tries to explain the sound she made ben böyle dedim.. She claims that it was the other girls who said that she farted söylediniz Eda osurdu dediniz.. (line 22). The others ignore her defense. In line 26 Esen changes the subject by commenting on her catalogue and Asiye follows up the new subject in line 28. The conversation is focused on the assignment for a short while, but Esen takes up the bullying of Eda again.

### Excerpt 2 grade 2: Eda farted 2

Eda:bende başka bir ev keseceşim çabuk ol.

I also have to cut another house hurry up.

Selma:tamam.

Okay.

Esen:şehirler neler.

Cities and so.

Esen: Eda osurdu.

Eda farted.(whispering)

**Selma**:nasıl da keseceşiz daha [/] oh Eda ben o zaman şu +...

How should we cut out more oh Eda so i'll take it.

Asive: oh nasıl kesiyor.

Oh how is she cuts.

Esen:Eda osurdu.

Eda farted.(Esen whispers Eda laughs)

Esen:# ne oldu ne oldu.

What happened what happened.

**Selma**:<*oh oh.*>[>]

Oh oh.

Eda: <bende bir kez>[<] sizi güldürmek için cart dedim <sizde lâfı büyütüyorsunuz,>[>]

And I just said cart one time to make you laugh and then you are making so much of it.

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**Selma**:<br/>
<br/>
birşeyler kokmaya başladı>[<] osurak gibi yumurta kokuları.

something has started to smell like eg like fart.

**Eda**: *he*.

Yes.

Esen: oh nasıl terbiyesiz konuşuyor.

Oh how she speaks naughty.

Asiye: evet terbiyesiz Eda.

Yes Eda is rude.

Eda: siz büyüttünüz işte lâfı.

It is you who's making it worse than it is.

Asiye: oh sen büyüttün terbiyesize bak.

Oh it's you listen to her the rude one.

Selma: doşrusu.

It's the truth.

Esen: ya hiç bir şehir bile yok. This isn't even a city.

Asiye: benimkide var Esen aha bak bunları buldum tek.

There are some in mine Esen look I only found these.

Eda, Selma and Esen speak about what to choose from the catalogue when Esen whispers *Eda osurdu* (line 7). The others do not respond to her remark. In line 12 Selma comments on the way Eda is cutting out the pictures. In this utterance she speaks about Eda without addressing her directly. She casts Eda in a conversational role as overhearer (Clark and Carlson 1982). A simular casting takes place in the utterance "Eda farted". Esen repeats her remark from line 7 in line 14, and this time Eda responds by laughing. But in line 21 Eda defends herself. She expresses that she thinks they make too much of her attempt to make fun. In the following part the three girls continue to make fun of Eda, and they continuously cast Eda as an overhearer. The casting functions as a means to establish an alliance between the three other girls, and so to exclude Eda from the group. The alliance of three against one is a strong strategy, and Eda does not have the power to defend herself. The conflict ends when Selma states *doşrusu* (line 37), and Esen changes the subject again.

The excerpts from the girl conversation show the asymmetric power relationships among the four girls. Eda is the one who loses the conflicts. The other three girls control the subjects of the conversation and ally against Eda. These examples also show how different manipulation strategies are used in the linguistic power wielding, allying being one of them. We see that Esen successfully changes the subject several times. To change the subject is another strategy, which directs the others' attention.

In the first example the other girls ignore Eda's defense. By ignoring Eda's utterance the other girls show that they do not recognize it as a threat. What you do not hear (or seem to hear), you do not have to consider. Another strategy, which is often used in the conversations of the students, is referring to an authority, often to the adults. Selma indirectly uses this strategy when she refers to the fact that they are being recorded and should not speak naughty into the microphone. Finally Eda tries to defend herself by the principle of "rather you than me", although without success, when she returns the insult with *Esen farted Selma farted* in the first example. The strategies found in the conversation follow the general principles of manipulation described by Kjøller (1991).

The following excerpt is taken from a boy conversation in the 2nd grade. The four participants are Murat, Bekir, Erol, and Ali. They have been given the same assignment as the girls.

# Excerpt 3 grade 2: You are both idiots

Bekir: nerde atalım ben alamıyorum şunları atalım bari.

Let's throw this one out I can't take these we better throw these out.

Erol: valla ben kesiyim.

By God I want to cut.

**Bekir**: *o zamanda ben ala*+/.

So I can't ta+/.

Murat: bize kısıncata biz yapıştıramıyoruz.

If you get angry with us we can't glue it on

Bekir: öbürünü ben de alamıyorum kafasız # ama.

I can't take the other one you idiot # but.

Murat: ama.

But.

Ali: herhalde ikinizde kafasız.

Clearly you're both idiots.

Bekir: oh.

Oh.

**Erol**: o zaman size ben veriyim size siz yapıştırın o zaman.

In that case to you I give to you so you can glue.

Murat: kendin yapıştırsana biz yapıştırmayız.

You can glue yourself we don't glue.

Erol: dövüşüyorsunuz valla benim için hiç farketmez keserim sussanız.

You're fighting by God it makes no difference to me at all I can cut if you'll be quiet.

Bekir: kes ama düzgün kes çünkü baksana bu ev ta bulutları bile almış.

Cut but cut straight because just look this house you even got clouds too.

From the conversation right before this excerpt it appears that Erol and Bekir are jointly occupied with finding suitable pictures in the catalogues. Ali and Murat are glueing, and Murat has just asked Bekir and Erol to move some catalogues from the table to give more space. In the beginning of the excerpt it appears that a conflict arises between Bekir and Erol. In line 1 Bekir suggests that they throw out something (probably the catalogues that they were asked to move). Erol responds in line 3 with the intensified expression valla that he wants to cut. Bekir starts objecting but is interrupted by Murat in line 8 bize kısıncata biz yapıştıramıyoruz. By saying you get angry with us he marks a distance between you and us. His utterance is directed to Erol. Bekir repeats and finishes his former objection and calls Erol an idiot (kafasız, line 10). In line 14 Ali joins the conversation. He claims that both Bekir and Erol are idiots. His remark seems to make an impression on the two boys. Bekir cries out oh but makes no futher response. Erol agrees to negotiate by suggesting a division of tasks. He will cut out the pictures for the others to glue (line 18). Murat does not accept his suggestion; in line 20 he claims that Erol can glue by himself and ends his utterance we don't glue pretending to speak for both Ali and himself. Erol closes the dispute in line 22. He expresses that there is no need to fight (dövüşüyorsunuz). He will cut if they will be quiet. Murat and Ali keep silent and Bekir continues the conversation about what to cut out. The four boys have come to an agreement, and they can take up the work again.

This excerpt does not leave us with any sense of uneven power relationships among the boys. In contrast to the girl conversation the power relations seem symmetric. The conflict in this example ends in agreement. Furthermore the boys' use of manipulation strategies seems less complex, and less competitive. Elsewhere they ally by casting other participants like the girls but in this excerpt we only see the argumentation strategy in the negotiation.

# 7. Manipulation strategies

In the excerpts from the 2nd grade I discovered six different manipulation strategies. I have carried out a similar qualitative analysis of every conflict in the eight conversations. With these analyses I can identify and describe twelve manipulation strategies. Every strategy mentioned in the following occurs several times in the eight conversations, and they are all used by several participants (except from the Winner strategy which is only used by Esen in the 7th grade). I do not want to exclude the possibility that more strategies could be found in other conversations. These strategies are, however, the ones I have been able to identify in my material.

The strategies can be characterized as follows. The Authority Strategy consists in referring to a higher authority. Selma does this when she comments that the conversation is being recorded. Bekir does it in a conversation from grade 3: adam dinliyor (the man is listening). The Alliance Strategy which the three girls use against Eda to establish a group of the three of them and to exclude Eda. The Ignoring Strategy consists in not accepting an utterance as part of the conversation by ignoring it as used by the three girls in the girl conversation when they avoid responding to Eda's defense. The Diversion Strategy is used to direct the other participant's attention to something different from the conflict. Esen uses this when she changed the subject in the 2nd grade conversation. This strategy can be used even more effectively when one change the subject of the conversation into something that makes the other participants laugh such as joke or a taboo word. Erol does that in grade 2 when his face is threatened by Ali: Erol'un annesi vampir vampir xxx (Erol's mother is a vampire vampire xxx) and Erol's answer is bakın pik (look dick). The Rather You Than Me Strategy has as its goal to make someone else look the target of an unpleasant accusation or a face-threat. This can be done in a simple way by sending a face-threat back, as Eda does in excerpt 1. Finally we saw *The Argumentation Strategy* in the boys' conversation when Murat says bize kısıncata biz yapıştıramıyoruz (if you get angry with us we can't glue it on). This utterance includes an explanation. Erol should not get angry because if he gets angry, they can not continue the work. The Argumentation Strategy is sometimes combined with The Authority Strategy if the participants support their statement with the argumentation that the adults say so. Another variant of this strategy is an argumentation without any real explanation I call this Because-argumentation when a participant supports his or her point of view simply by claiming because (I say so).

We shall now turn to the other six manipulation strategies that occurred in the eight group conversations.

# 8. The Command Strategy

The Command Strategy consists in placing orders like *shut up* or *hurry up*. For this strategy to be effective it is necessary that the user possess a sufficient power base. In this example the power relationships among the girls are clear. Asiye is able to use the command strategy against Eda but she obeys Esen.

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Esen: sus sus.

Shut up shut up.

Eda: bak dedimki # söyleyeyim mi.

Look I said do you want me to say it.

Esen: söyleme.

No.

Asiye: konuşma.

You are not allowed to speak.

**Eda**: *iyi sen* +/.

Okay you +/.

Asiye: konuşma aşzını kapat.

You are not allowed to speak shut up.

Esen: Asiye sende kes sesini.

Asiye you shut up too.

**Selma**: *bir* +...

One +...

(girl's conversation grade 2)

# 9. The Threat Strategy

Threats of physical violence or enmity are sometimes used as a verbal strategy in the children's conversations.

Bekir: eşek deme Hüseyin döverim bak.

If you say donkey Hüseyin i'm gonna hit you.

(boys' conversation grade 3)

Erol: Ali öyle deme döverim bak seni.

Ali If you say like this I will hit you.

(mixed conversation grade 5)

# 10. The Last Word Strategy

The final say in conversational conflicts can seem the most decisive. To get the final say a speaker can change the subject after having said what he or she means to be the final word in a conflict. In this excerpt Esen sticks to the current subject even though Selma tries to change the focus.

**Selma**: *oh hiç deşil <Esen sen>[>] sen kiminle evleneceksin.* 

Oh not at all Esen who are you going to marry.

**Asiye**:  $\langle eh \ sey \ xxx \ mi \ o \rangle [\langle] \ Selma \ kærestesini \ mi.$ 

eh is this xxx Selma is this her boyfriend.

Selma: fazla oldu.

This is too much.

**Esen**: nej jeg kan ikke lide ham mere.

No I don't like him anymore

(girls' conversation grade 7)

# 11. The I Don't Care Strategy

In the I Don't Care Strategy the speaker explicitly claims that he or she does not care and thereby does not feel face-threatened, e.g. I really don't care, so what or bana ne as in this excerpt.

Bekir: şunu sen Murat şunu al yapıştır.

And you this one Murat take this one and glu it on.

Hüseyin: ineklik yahu.

Man this is like a cow.

Murat: sen yapıştırsana bana ne.

You can glu it yourself i don't care.

(boys' conversation grade 3)

# 12. The Concession Strategy

In some situations the speakers get their way by admitting their inferior position. Through politeness or excuses they build up the power-face (Brown and Levinson 1987) of the addressee. In that way they seem reliable, and they obtain goodwill.

**Hüseyin**: ver ver Merva şunu ben keseyim ne olur şey eh Amerika øh Tyskland'a yapıştıracaşım.

Merva give it to me let me cut it out *please* eh America eh I have to glue it on Germany.

Merva: iyi kes.

okay cut.

(Mixed conversation grade 5)

# 13. The Winner Strategy

The last strategy I have been able to identify is the Winner Strategy, which makes what necessarily happens look like a personal victory for the speaker. Esen uses the Winner Strategy by making Asiye's suggestion look

like her own, she even combines it with the Alliance Strategy when she addresses Selma and casts Asiye as an overhearer.

Asiye: en stor kat kan vi ikke bare lave det.

A big cat couldn't we just make that.

Selma: ja men det er det er svært at lave sådan en kat.

Yes but it's difficult to make a cat like this.

Esen: ja det er det.

Yes it is.

Asiye: nej.

No.

Esen: det er det sgu da mand.

Man the hell it is.

Selma: åh xxx.

Oh xxx.

Esen: vi kan først lave benene Selma.

We can do the legs at first Selma.

Selma: ben på en kat.

Legs on a cat.

(girls' conversation grade 7)

#### 14. Conclusion

The qualitative analysis of the conflicts in eight of the conversations from the Køge Project has resulted in the description of twelve manipulation strategies used by the children in the power processes taking place in the social negotiation. These are not yet to be considered a full set of well-defined categories suitable for quantitative studies. The analysis of manipulation strategies is my attempt to describe the power negotiation in a new way, inspired by Kjøller (1991) and carry through the wiew suggested by Jørgensen (1993). In am convinced, though, that it is possible to develop a set of categories suitable for quantitative studies of manipulation in conversations.

In this study I have observed power-negotiations taking place in the conversations. Each of the conflicts that I have studied can be seen as a negotiation of power-relations between the participants. Nevertheless, in the light of my quantitative study of power-results, I have to conclude that the power-relations between the informants are unaltered in the 8 conversations. The children winning most of the conflicts in the 2nd grade also win in the 3rd, 5th, and 7th grades.

This result points to the fact that social structures play an important part in the outcome of linguistic negotiations of power. This is especially true when we see it in relation to the discussion of whether linguistic variation is a result of social structures, or language is a resource in negotiations and constructions of social reality. The micro-community of the bilingual children of two classes in a Danish school involves certain social structures, which predict the results of power-negotiations. The children use different strategies in the negotiations of their mutual powerrelations, but not everything can be negotiated or re-negotiated. Our study confirms that it is not possible to fully depict language as a social phenomenon without considering the social luggage of the language user. The negotiation itself and the language as a resource in the negotiation are both interesting. Nevertheless, the linguistic construction of gender or other identities taking place in social interaction does not count for the entire social reality. People engaged in a social interaction will - if they have met before - be influenced by brought-along experiences when placing themselves and others in mutual relations.

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