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Conversational Style: Analyzing Talk among Friends

(New Edition TANNEN, Deborah. Oxford University Press, Oxford 2005; ISBN: 0195221818; \$28.64)

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Conversational Style: Analyzing Talk among Friends is a book which deals with different conversational styles of a group of people written by Deborah Tannen who is mainly interested in how daily conversational styles affect our relationships to the others. It has a value of taking interests of scholars, students and anyone who is interested in how the microanalysis of a group of people whose daily conversation may have a role in comprehending and analyzing cross-cultural communication and discourse as Tannen explains in the preface of the new edited book. By referring to the feeling of one's having the need to be independent and not to be isolated from people and the society as well, in the first chapter, an introduction to the book, Tannen discusses the two types of need that make people to communicate with each other. She points out two different types of conversational styles, which she calls as *high-involvement* and *high considerateness* which are shared by members of the group consisting of six people. By making a compare and contrast between homogenous and heterogeneous societies, Tannen presents some questions and tries to answer them: *Why is it necessary to be aware of conversational style?*, *Who cares?* She expresses in what ways being aware of conversational styles of the people may help us. The chapter is well-constructed in terms of drawing attention of people by addressing to the shared needs of all of them to communicate with each other and revealing the questions addressing to the importance of being aware of the varying conversational styles that are discussed in the following chapters.

In Chapter two, Tannen gives a theoretical background of conversational styles and presents a kind of analysis in terms of conversation by referring to some well-known researchers by whom Tannen states being influenced. In this chapter, Tannen clarifies her preference of using the term of *style* and what she means by it and demonstrates what it is and is not as well. In a broader sense, she mentions about a theory which is called as *the logic of*

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politeness that is formed under three categories of strategies and Tannen presents a detailed explanation for each of those strategies by giving examples from different contexts and also states what kind of factors influence the people's preferences of using or choosing those ones. The paradox in a sense of cross-cultural communication is also discussed in terms of their need to be each other and need to be independent as well. Daggett (2007) suggests that the first and the second chapter raise the attention of both linguists and students who are interested in different conversational styles as a discipline or on a daily basis. In this regard, Tannen manages to achieve his purpose which suggests that the book is aimed to reach both scholars who are interested in analyzing the daily language and those who are not deal with the issue as a scholar but naturally.

In the third chapter, Tannen introduces us the participants in a detailed way giving information about their ages, jobs, interests, concerns related with their professional lives, backgrounds, their parents' backgrounds and their relation to each other which make them sharing similar or different characteristics on the topics discussed throughout the Thanksgiving dinner which she also demonstrates in details as where and when it occurred. By regarding it as a particular dinner, Tannen tries to answer the questions: *What bonds bring these people together on this afternoon?*, *And with what feelings and thoughts do they arrive?* She also gives voice to the participants' feelings after dinner, the point which is mostly related to the discussion on which person or which topic dominated the dinner. By giving a figure as a basis, Tannen gives a statistic that indicates how many words were spoken by the participants during the dinner emphasizing that there could be some deceptive points in the numbers as a result of some missing points. She expresses the participants' preferences of conversational devices that make them closer to or further from each other. The chapter is also a well-constructed one to make the readers conceptualize the Thanksgiving dinner participants and their characteristics that address to the varying conversational styles.

In Chapter four, Tannen demonstrates how the preference of personal or impersonal topics may have a role in one's degree of conversation by giving an example of a dialogue between a participant and herself. Before analyzing why the other one preferred to be silent when the subject turned to be a personal one, Tannen expresses how bad she felt herself when it happened which shows the differences in their conversational styles or strategies that lead the conversation got stuck at some points. The next point that makes the conversation hesitant between them is also discussed under the subheading of *the Enthusiasm Constraint* and Tannen tries to express the reason by answering the question how her using of conversational device, which is interruption, may prevent her aim to learn more about the topic. The other differences that are related with interrupting someone are the *machine-gun question* and the concepts of *overlap and pace* which are also discussed in this chapter. Dealing with most of the common topics such as personal and impersonal issues in interaction with other people and how the preference of one could be misinterpreted by the other side are also well-discussed in this chapter.

In the fifth chapter, Tannen states that the other point which makes the conversational styles differ from one another is one's preference of narrative strategy and she clarifies what she means by using the term *narrative* or *story* which she uses as alternatively. Different accounts are discussed in this chapter whether she could regard as narrative or not. She presents another figure to show the numbers of narratives told by the participants during the dinner which is also related with the previous discussion on finding an answer who dominated the conversation that night. To demonstrate how stories operate in conversations, she mentions about the story rounds and discusses the differences in using the term between ethnomethodologists and herself.

In Chapter six, the role of using *irony* and *joking* is discussed in terms of making one's conversational style is one of the most characteristic one. Tannen expresses how each of the participants' using or kind of humor shows differences and how it affects one's existence in conversation. A statistic showing the numbers of ironic and humorous turns of each of the participants is also revealed through which some surprising results for them are also suggested as some of the percentages of the turns are in contrast with their use of other conversational styles. Since drawing on the percentages of using joking and irony by the participants, Tannen reveals that one could show different performance on a style when compared to the others and it could make him/her the most talkative one although s/he seems to be the most silent on the others. The chapter is rather a short one but deals with one of the most crucial stylistic differences with the results that make the participants surprised and think again on the probable reasons.

In Chapter seven, Tannen emphasizes that the conversational styles which are discussed through the book do not consist of all kinds of conversational strategies but some of them that are performed during the interaction process. She states how three of the participants including herself, share same stylistic strategies which she calls as *high-involvement* style and on the other hand, how the other three share same stylistic strategies as well which she names as *high-considerateness* style. However, she emphasizes the idea that although some of them share same strategies, each one's style is composed of unique characteristics in itself and she explains it giving a reference to participants' different frequency levels in terms of their preferences of conversational devices. Giving an example of one's having the most different style among the other participants of the Thanksgiving dinner, Tannen stresses that as each one has a unique combination of conversational devices, if the preferred ones are met with the others, communication occurs properly, otherwise breakdowns may occur during the conversation among them. This chapter summarizes the varying conversational styles of each of the participants and Tannen emphasizes that much study needs to be done to reveal further features of the conversational styles.

In the eighth chapter, Tannen associates a well-tuned conversation with an artistic/aesthetic experience. She maintains that a well-tuned conversation makes a way of coherence as it refers to one's being ratified by other people and being successful in connection with them as well. Making a reference to the participants' conversations during the dinner, Tannen states that if one cannot develop a common rhythm with the other one or misinterpret one's intentions repetitively or s/he cannot see a kind of coherence in one's behaviors, s/he starts to feel a lack of coherence which refers to the idea of trauma in terms of cross-cultural communication. In this chapter, by revealing the situations that further lead people to be in a condition of trauma resulting from the lack of coherence, Tannen, as Vigo (2006) also suggest, manages to address to the importance of a coherent point of view for a successful communication between the participants of the conversation.

In the last chapter, which is titled as *Coda: Taking the Concepts into the Present*, Tannen explains what kind of developments in terms of used methods and shared ideas were revealed in this edited book compared to the previous one. She mentions about the three types of approaches that she held to analyze the conversation in her first and edited version which she calls as her *cornerstones* and these are; *the ambiguity and polysemy of conversational strategies* which is related with the concept of overlap, *the interplay of power and solidarity* which accounts for one's having the need to be connected with other people and not to be imposed on by the others as well and *the linguistic framing of meaning in interaction* in which she mentions about a theoretical method which she developed with Cynthia Waiet (1993). She explains their theory which is related with different kinds of frames and schemas, from different perspectives by giving an example of a doctor and the patient's mother in a setting of

an examination procedure. In another section of this chapter, Tannen also mentions about her other books and how and in what ways she benefited from them in writing this one.

Taking all these topics account, Tannen's *Conversational Style: Analyzing Talk among Friends* is a useful one to understand how different kinds of conversational styles may affect one's existence in a conversational context. Additionally, Tannen's preference of presenting her ideas through examining a group of friends and transcribing the recorded utterances during the dinner through which she reveals some crucial terms related to the conversational styles makes it easy to read and conceptualize the issues presented in the book. Vigo (2006) also points out that Tannen's using a simple way of revealing some key terms related to conversational style helps her aim to raise both researchers' and the people's awareness on the subject whether they are professionally interested in disciplines related to the topic or not. Daggett (2007) also suggests that the people who have colleagues or friends from different countries and cultures should benefit from this book in terms of comprehending the varying conversational styles.

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