

GOOD MANNERS AND GENDER ROLE AS TWO ASPECTS OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN *ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND*

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RESUMEN

El presente artículo defiende que la adquisición de la competencia comunicativa por los niños se ha traducido tradicionalmente en que éstos demuestren buenas maneras y su identidad en cuanto a pertenencia a uno u otro sexo. El análisis del discurso de un capítulo de *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Las Aventuras de Alicia en el País de las Maravillas) se presenta como un ejemplo de cómo una obra literaria del siglo XIX refleja esta idea. Además, el análisis encuentra un paralelismo entre la manera de hablar de niños y mujeres con respecto a la forma de expresión de respeto hacia la autoridad del adulto y del varón respectivamente.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Competencia comunicativa; análisis del discurso; identidad de género; lenguaje infantil.

ABSTRACT

This article supports the view that the acquisition of communicative competence by children has traditionally been associated to the verbal display of good manners and gender identity. The discourse analysis of a chapter of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* is shown as an example of the way in which a nineteenth century literary work encodes such concept. The analysis also finds a parallelism between children and female speech in the expression of respect for the adult and the male authority respectively.

KEY WORDS

Communicative competence; discourse analysis; gender identity; children's speech.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article soutient que l'acquisition de la compétence communicative par les enfants s'est traduite traditionnellement par leurs bonnes manières et leur identité pour ce qui est de leur appartenance à l'un des deux sexes. L'analyse du discours d'un chapitre d'Alice au Pays des Merveilles est présentée pour illustrer comment une oeuvre littéraire du XIX^{ème} siècle reflète cette idée. Cette analyse révèle, en outre, l'existence d'un parallélisme entre l'expression respectueuse de l'enfant envers l'autorité de l'adulte d'une part, et celle de la femme envers l'homme d'autre part.

MOTS-CLÉ

Compétence communicative, analyse du discours; identité de genre; langage d'enfant.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of communicative competence evolved as a result of a shift in emphasis among theorists in linguistics, a move away from the rules of language forms towards an emphasis on the ability to use the language¹. According to this theory, a child's acquisition of communicative competence involves not only learning to correctly use a formal system of phonology, lexis and syntax, but also learning how to use that system appropriately.

Teaching a child good manners can be seen as a large net thrown over children from a very young age, through which they acquire the

1. For general surveys of the history of communicative competence see Canale and Swain (1980), Canale (1983) and Munby (1981).

proper way to behave, verbally and non-verbally, particularly in contexts where adults play a significant role. Children learn soon that Adults wield Authority and that they should be properly respected.

A corollary to this principle of good manner acquisition, is the principle of gender role acquisition, or the process by which children develop a sense of their gender role by acquiring differentiated patterns of male or female speech as evident in the culture.

In the present article, the analysis of Chapter Five, 'Advice from a Caterpillar' from the book *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll, will serve to support both of these aspects of communicative competence: the acquisition of good manners by children, and their acquisition of gender roles.

TEXT INTRODUCTION

Alice's Adventures in Wonderland was written in 1865 as a book for children -Lewis Carroll created a fantasy world in which Alice, a child, is the central character- and at first, the impression is that there are no adult characters in the story, at least in recognisable form. What the reader comes to find is that actually, most of the characters are representative of adults; they have merely been distorted or transformed into wondrous creatures, usually animals. One would think that thus reducing the size and disguising the shape of these adult interlocutors, Alice would be much less socially bound in the net of 'proper manners', i.e. the correct verbal and non-verbal behaviour children acquire and practise with adults.

However, the reader finds that this is not generally so in the story. Even in the fantastic context of Wonderland, Alice remains constantly aware of the 'Adults' within the adventures, and throughout some rather confused, ambiguous, and even rude interactions with the creatures, Alice consistently acts very much the "good little girl", impeccably proper in her speech and manners.

In writing this book for children in the nineteenth century, Lewis Carroll has thus provided a wonderful example of the ways in which children of that time were expected to demonstrate their communicative competence in the realm of proper manners. Furthermore, he has also shown that children, in this case girls, could also demonstrate competence in gender role behaviour.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Chapter Five, 'Advice from a Caterpillar' from the book *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* consists of a conversation between Alice and a blue caterpillar in whose company Alice behaves throughout in her best ladylike manner.

Coalescence of the two competencies

The following analysis presents a discussion and examples of both communicative competencies which a child acquires. It is, however, very difficult to keep the two strands of development separate. The reason is that first, both boys and girls together learn the correct Adult/Child interaction patterns. These are patterns of verbal and non-verbal behaviour which equate the concepts of 'Adulthood' with 'Authority', which is a long-time tenet of child-rearing.

After children have understood this first differentiation however, the second strand of differentiated Male/Female gender-associated behaviour starts to develop. At this point the development of the boys will take a different path to that of the girls. The boys will generally progress towards the Male Adult Authority model, while the girls will only progress halfway; they will become Female Adults, but they will retain a non-authoritative style of speech.

As Alice is a female child participant in this conversation, she exhibits both strands of competence, but her responses cannot be labelled as exclusive evidence for one or the other. In the nineteenth century, much of what Alice would have learned in order to be a well-mannered child in the presence of adults, would have been retained throughout her life as a female adult in the presence of males.

In looking at this chapter then, most of the evidence will be presented as support for the Male/Female style of speech dichotomy, thereby subsuming the fact that Alice has already developed a competence for respecting adult authority within her competence for gender role behaviour.

Three traditional beliefs about female speech

In the following three categories of politeness, deference, and conversational goals, some traditionally-held beliefs about how women's speech differs from men's have been included.

Politeness: women are more polite than men

Politeness has always been a very important facet of communicative competence. It is inculcated early in childhood, but there may now be some evidence from a study done by Gleason in 1980 that children actually see only their mothers consistently modelling polite speech, and therefore they come to associate it with female adult behaviour (Coates 1986:130). If this is true, then politeness would be a behaviour retained by girls, but not so much by boys, into adulthood, thereby identifying it as a feature of 'female speech'. This is only a way of explaining a trend, however. It does not mean that politeness is exclusively a female behaviour. On the contrary, politeness is very much a feature of English-speaking culture.

G. N. Leech (1983) lists six maxims of the Politeness Principle in terms of polarity between the minimisation or maximisation of affective cost to both Speaker and Hearer. When applied to the conversation between Alice and the Caterpillar, it is seen that Alice, being a well-mannered child, consistently incorporates each of the six maxims into her speech. The Caterpillar, on the contrary, seems quite rude as he consistently violates the maxims.

Table 1 delineates three exchanges, showing how, in each case, the Caterpillar violates, and Alice upholds the stated maxims. Because the Caterpillar does disregard the principle of politeness so often, the consequence is that the conversation becomes very difficult to maintain. But, we can also notice that as a well-brought up 'young lady', Alice does manage to maintain her composure and tact, despite the somewhat difficult exchanges with the Caterpillar. The lesson that Carroll reinforces in this dialogue for his readers, is that polite responses are always the norm for children, and also for ladies.

Deference: women should be more deferential than men due to their lower position of status

The concept of deference is a social attitude reflected in linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour. Deference is usually an issue of status and the reason that any sort of deferential response would occur in conversation is that both participants would perceive one of themselves to have a higher status than the other.

In this chapter, the Caterpillar is clearly the character of higher status, but the reasons for this perception are not entirely clear; or rather,

Table 1 The Politeness Principle (G. N. Leech (1983))

the CATERPILLAR violates	Alice upholds
1. TACT Maxim:	Minimise the cost to the Hearer; Maximise the cost to the Hearer
2. GENEROSITY Maxim:	Minimise the benefit to the Speaker; Maximise the cost to the Speaker
C: "Are you content now?"	A: "Well, I should like to be a <i>little</i> larger, Sir, if you wouldn't mind. Three inches is such a wretched height to be."
C: "It is a very good height indeed!"	A: "But I'm not used to it!"
C: "You'll get used to it in time, ..."	
3. APPROBATION Maxim:	Minimise dispraise of Hearer; Maximise praise of Hearer
4. MODESTY Maxim:	Minimise praise of Self; Maximise dispraise of Self
	(Alice has just recited a poem as ordered by the Caterpillar)
C: "That is not said right, ..."	A: "Not <i>quite</i> right, I'm afraid. ... Some of the words have got altered."
C: "It is wrong from beginning to end, ..."	
5. AGREEMENT Maxim:	Minimise disagreement between Hearer and Speaker; Maximise agreement
6. SYMPATHY Maxim:	Minimise antipathy between Hearer and Speaker; Maximise sympathy
C: "It isn't, ..."	A: "...and being so may different sizes in a day is very confusing." A: "Well, perhaps you haven't found it so yet, ... but when you have to turn into a chrysalis - you will some day, you know - and then after that into a butterfly, I should think you'll feel it a little queer, won't you?"
C: "Not a bit, ..."	

there may be several overlapping reasons contributing to this perceptual judgement. What are the factors which could make a caterpillar a figure of higher authority and perceived status than a human being? First of all, even though Alice is a human, at the current phase of the story, she is only three inches tall, the same height as the caterpillar. This similarity in size should help to equalise the difference in status, but in fact it doesn't because the Caterpillar is sitting on top of a mushroom which is already Alice's height. This means that Alice can just peer over the top to see the Caterpillar. So the entire conversation setting takes on implications of an audience being granted by a personage from his throne, his "seat of authority".

This image is reinforced by the additional prop of a long hookah pipe which the Caterpillar is smoking apparently lost in contemplation when Alice first meets him. These props conjure an image of the 'Sage of the East', which implies a second status factor. The Caterpillar possess more knowledge and experience of the world than Alice does. Therefore, he is entitled to dispense advice as the chapter heading states.

Both of these factors are at the forefront of a child's perception of adults: they are taller, older, wiser and more experienced, therefore children pay them deferential respect. There is also a third factor at play in this conversation between Alice and the Caterpillar: Alice is female and the Caterpillar is male. Why does Alice perceive this to be the case? Carroll never explicitly assigns a gender to the Caterpillar; the referential pronoun used is always *it*. Neither the text nor the illustrations show any obvious sexual differences in the blue caterpillars of Wonderland, so why does Alice immediately identify the Caterpillar as male and assume a deferential role towards him? We could suggest that it is because she already has real-life and storybook schemata for gender roles and authority figures, and furthermore, that she has already acquired the appropriate competencies for interacting with such figures in accordance with her gender role.

Terms of Address

One of the most obvious examples from the dialogue to support this suggestion is the comparison of the terms of address used by both the Caterpillar and Alice. Only once does the Caterpillar "contemptuously" refer to Alice as "You!" Otherwise, he simply makes abrupt replies to her

with no nominal reference. Alice, on the other hand, politely refers to the Caterpillar four times as “Sir”.

Manner of Address

The manner of address used by the Caterpillar in this conversation is markedly different to that used by Alice. The following tables show the adverbs and verbs of speech used by Carroll to narratively reinforce the differences in status and gender of the two characters:

Table 2 Adverbs

CATERPILLAR	ALICE
said the Caterpillar <i>sternly</i>	Alice replied rather <i>shyly</i>
said the Caterpillar <i>contemptuously</i>	Alice replied very <i>politely</i>
said the Caterpillar <i>decidedly</i>	she said, rather <i>gravely</i>
said the Caterpillar <i>angrily</i>	said Alice <i>timidly</i>
<i>merely</i> remarking	Alice <i>hastily</i> replied

Table 3 Verbs of Speech

CATERPILLAR	ALICE
addressed	replied
called	began
asked	pleaded
said	said

The adverbs imply a distinctive deferential attitude in Alice’s manner of responding to the Caterpillar’s remarks. The choice of speech verbs reinforces the authority of the Caterpillar, as well as implying his prerogative in usually initiating the exchanges, while Alice predominately replies.

Hedging

Hedging is often considered to be a feature of women’s speech in the sense of not making direct statements. A deferential feature of Alice’s

speech in this conversation is that she never directly asserts statements or comments as the Caterpillar does. She tentatively phrases her replies, often with prefaces or lengthy qualifiers. In the two instances where she implies a question, she states them through the form of tag questions, hoping to elicit the Caterpillar's concurrence with her views, which incidentally, he never gives.

The following exchange shows the tentative indirectness of Alice's speech in contrast with the more aggressive directness of the Caterpillar:

C: Who are *you*?

A: I - I hardly know, Sir, just at present - at least I know who I *was* when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then.

C: What do you mean by that? Explain yourself!

In this exchange, Alice begins her reply by stuttering, which seems odd because she has not had the problem up to this point, and because elsewhere in her adventures she displays quite a lack of fear. So, why does she stutter with the Caterpillar? Also, she never gives him the expected answer which would be her name. Instead, she launches into a personal topic with this stranger, first saying that she doesn't really know; then qualifying that to mean that at the moment she doesn't know; then further qualifying that by saying that she did know this morning; and finally ends with a passive construction saying she must have been changed in size several times since then. All of this when an 'I don't know' or her name could have directly sufficed.

Another pertinent example of Alice's indirect hedging is her manner of requesting that the Caterpillar make her taller:

C: What size do you want to be?

A: Oh, I'm not particular as to size, only one doesn't like changing so often, you know.

C: I *don't* know

[Silence]

Are you content now?

A: Well, I should like to be a *little* larger, Sir, if you wouldn't mind.

This is very much an example of the Tact Maxim of the Politeness Principle, but it is applied in this situation to one asking a favour of one in power to grant it. Alice hedges in her answer, not wishing to sound

greedy, which would be both impolite and unladylike. The impersonal “one”, the modal “should like”, and the emphasised reduction of “a *little* larger” are further markers of her indirectness. In total during this conversation, there are seven instances where Alice gives an indirect answer to a question put forth by the Caterpillar, while his answers are painfully direct.

Respect of Silence

There are six periods of noticeable silence which occur during this piece of discourse. With the exception of the initial pre-conversation pause, each period of silence is initiated by a remark made by the Caterpillar. Additionally, all six silences are broken by a remark made by the Caterpillar. This could be seen as a very strong narrative technique used by Carroll to reinforce the dictum that “Children should be seen and not heard”, and the ideal that silence is the best ornament of a woman².

The evidence from the text does uphold the view that Alice is very conscious of both of her roles as the quiet “obedient” child and as the silent “obedient” woman which Carroll no doubt assumes she will become one day. Indeed, in the one exchange where Alice finally did make a tentative rebuttal to the Caterpillar’s rudeness, she first of all “drew herself up” (because height = status) and then replied to him “very gravely”, a choice of adverbs which implies that as a female, she must disagree in a quiet, serious manner.

Further support for the notion that children and females should remain quiet, are the three instances in which Alice “felt a little irritated”, was “swallowing down her anger”, and where “she felt that she was losing her temper”. Yet, although highly provoked, she does not let those feelings show in the presence of the Caterpillar, a very good lesson indeed for children.

In brief summary of this section, the notion that women should be more deferential than men is supported in this conversation through the four features used by Alice: the terms of address, the manner of address, hedging, and a respect of silence.

2. Jennifer Coates (1986:33) describes a woman’s silence as having been made synonymous with obedience.

Conversational Goals: women talk about different things differently than men do

Female speech is often lumped under the general comment "Women talk too much". Perhaps this notion has originated and been given its negative connotation because women's conversational style is simply different from men's conversational style³.

In her book *Women, Men and Language* (1986), Coates refers to seven aspects of conversation which according to Maltz and Borker (1982, in Coates 1986:152), are areas of potential miscommunication in mixed conversations between males and females. As these areas were only analysed and listed in the 1980's, it is interesting to note that of the seven features listed, six of them do indeed cause problems in the conversation between the Caterpillar and Alice. The one exception is the problem of Interruption, however, this is probably due to the fact that this is a textual conversation rather than an actual spoken conversation. Carroll's book, written over a century ago, seems to bear out the proposition that the conversational styles of males and females differ. It also shows that Alice, at her young age, has already acquired a gender-associated communicative competency as shown in her efforts to try and carry on a 'female-type' conversation with the Caterpillar who is simultaneously trying to carry on a 'male-type' conversation.

Following are the six remaining areas of miscommunication with a discussion of the problems caused in the conversation (paraphrasing from Coates 1986:152-155):

1. *The Meaning of Questions*: Women use questions and tag questions to maintain a conversation, while men see them simply as requests for information. Alice uses tag questions three times in her replies to the Caterpillar, inviting him to acknowledge, and hopefully to agree with what she has just stated. In each case however, he is obstinately uncooperative by abruptly disagreeing with her. This forces Alice to try and maintain the conversation by reintroducing the topics herself and elaborating on them. As we have seen earlier in her very indirect replies to the Caterpillar's questions, Alice does seem to answer indirectly in an effort to keep the conversation going.

3. By 'conversational style' we mean what is talked about (topics), and how it is talked about (conversational management).

2. *Links Between Speaker Turns*: The female pattern is to acknowledge the previous speaker's contribution first, before adding to that topic, or before introducing a new topic. Men do not necessarily follow this pattern. They may ignore the directly previous contribution and immediately present their own point. Except when the Caterpillar's remarks have silenced her in the conversation, Alice always acknowledges his contribution before making her own point:

A: ...I should think you'll feel it a little queer, wo'n't you?

C: Not a bit.

A: Well, perhaps *your* feelings may be different. All I know is, it would feel very queer to *me*.

3. *Topic Shifts*: Women shift topics gradually, preferring to organise conversations on elaboration and continuity, while men tend to shift topics abruptly. The following excerpt exemplifies the Caterpillar's dominant role in the conversation by directing which topics will be discussed. He abruptly shifts topics by ignoring Alice's last contribution and choosing instead to ask about the penultimate one:

A: I'm afraid I am, Sir. I ca'n't remember things as I used- and I don't keep the same size for ten minutes together!

C: Ca'n't remember *what* things?

The changing-of-size topic greatly concerns Alice. This occurrence is the third time in the conversation that she has tried to introduce it, yet the Caterpillar deliberately avoids it each time.

Table 4 shows the topics and topic shifts that occur in this chapter and the character who introduces them.

Table 4. Topic shifts

1st. Topic: Who are you?

1. C.: Question

2. A.: Reply

Elaboration

Elaboration

- 3. C.: Question
Demand
- 4. A.: Reply
Elaboration + Tag
- 5. C.: Reply (Negative)
- 6. A.: Reply
Elaboration

2nd. Topic: Changing sizes

- A.: Comment
- 7. C.: Reply (Disagreement)
- 8. A.: Reply
Statement
Comment + Tag
- 9. A. Reply (Disagreement)
- 10. A.: Reply
Comment

3rd. Topic: Who are you?

- 11. C.: Nominative
Question
- 12. A.: Demand/Request
- 13. C.: Question

4th. Topic: Temper

- 14. C.: Directive
Declarative
Directive
- 15. A.: Question
- 16. C.: Reply (Negative)

5th. Topic: Memory

- C.: Question
- 17. A.: Reply (Positive)
Declarative (Topic)
Declarative (Previous topic -2nd.)
- 18. C.: Question (Topic)
- 19. A.: Reply
- 20. C.: Command
- 21. A.: Compliance (Recitation)

- 22. C.: Evaluation (Negative)
- 23. A.: Reply (Agreement)
Elaboration (Excuse)
- 24. C.: Evaluation (Negative)

6th. Topic: Size

- Question
- 25. A.: Reply
Comment + Tag
- 26. C.: Reply (Negative)
Question
- 27. A.: Reply/Request
Comment
- 28. C.: Reply (Disagreement)
- 29. A.: Reply/Excuse
(Comment - silent)
- 30. C.: Reply/Declarative
Declarative

4. *Self-Disclosure*: Women tend to see conversation as an opportunity to discuss problems, share experience and offer reassurance and advice. On the other hand -Coates points out- men, when confronted with such topics, “take on the role of expert and offer advice, often lecturing the other speaker.” (p. 153). It seems as though Coates was listening in on the conversation between the Caterpillar and Alice!

5. *Verbal Aggressiveness*: Aggressive speech is a common feature of men’s talk, while women tend to avoid verbal aggressiveness. A quick review of the verbs and adverbs describe the Caterpillar’s speech does seem to support this. The Caterpillar speaks “sternly”, “decidedly”, and “angrily”, while Alice speaks “shyly”, “timidly”, and “gravely”.

6. *Listening*: Coates interprets this notion to mean that women greatly value the role of listening while men do not. Therefore, men think women do not participate well in conversations because they aren’t speaking, while women think men don’t allow them the chance to speak by dominating the conversation.

The amount-of-speaking rule does not hold true in this conversation, as Alice definitely speaks more than the Caterpillar does. However, there is some evidence to support the differing attitudes towards the role of

listening. In many of the examples already given, the Caterpillar does not seem to be actively listening, at least not in the sense that through listening, he will be able to add useful contributions to Alice's statements. Conversely, the following example shows that she thinks listening is important:

"Alice thought she might as well wait, as she had nothing else to do, and perhaps after all it might tell her something worth hearing."

To briefly summarise this section, we can conclude that there are considerable differences in the conversational goals and management styles of Alice and the Caterpillar. This part has tried to show how these differences match Coates' list of areas of potential miscommunication between males and females, but would also concede that much of the difference could also be explained by other factors discussed earlier, such as the question of high and low status, or the question of politeness and respect for adult authority. In any case, the three beliefs traditionally held about female speech do seem to be borne out in Carroll's story, which also seems to support the original proposition that Alice suitably demonstrates proper competency for both proper manners and for gender role.

CONCLUSION

The present article supports the argument that the acquisition of communicative competence by children has traditionally been associated to the verbal display of good manners and gender identity. The textual analysis of a chapter in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* shows the way in which a nineteenth century literary work encodes such notion. Besides, the fact that part of this analysis has been based on current views on male and female speech reveals its relevance to those interested in the acquisition and manifestation of communicative competence.

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