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GENDER DIFFERENCES IN PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN'S COMMUNICATION

Abstract

“Boys and girls grow up in different worlds, but we think we're in the same one, so we judge each other's behavior by the standards of our own.” (Tannen, 1990)

According to Tannen, the key difference between these two communities, i.e. male and female, is power on the male side and solidarity on the female side. The paper aims at relating Tannen's theory to the communication strategies of pre-school children (three to six years old) from several Mostar kindergartens. The research carried out for this purpose tries to explain language behavior of girls and boys during children's interaction in the same-sex groups as well as in the mixed-sex groups and to elaborate on the nature of two different gender cultures, their origins, and examples on how gender-related cultural norms affect language. Children of this age have just begun integration into their own subculture within a culture – men's or women's. They are, as far as their gender is concerned, still a, so called, *tabula rasa* which is yet to be filled with the rules of each subculture.

Key words: gender, communication, *genderlect*, cross-cultural, subculture, identity

Introduction

In its recent history, linguistics has been dealing with the analysis of male and female speech. The center of its attention is finding out whether men and women speak differently, and if they do, why and how. In order to detect differences, linguists have been analyzing speech behavior within gender differences, through the frames of phonology, lexical choice and usage as well as discourse. However, human language and communication are far more complex than to be simply stored down into drawers made out of random choice of words, utterances and sentences.

Many scientists from other fields have been exploring this issue too, because communication among humans exceeds the parameters of language and is greatly shaped by many factors such as context, ethnic background, education, socio-economic status, as well as gender. In this respect, linguists and any other scientists dealing with the same issue have been oriented to interdisciplinary approach in their research, examining thus gender speech through different disciplines such as anthropology, cultural studies, psychology, communication studies, linguistics, sociolinguistics etc.

Years of research on the matter have shown that the differences between male and female speech do exist and are, nonetheless, the cause of many conflicts and misunderstandings between men and women. Even in everyday communication we are aware of such discrepancies – women tend to blame men for being cold and inconsiderate when they show no compassion or sympathy for women's feelings, and men tend to blame women for being too sensitive and for nagging a lot about life and people around them. Many theories have scratched the surface of language differences trying to explain why is gender communication so complicated. Three of these theories have gone deeper into the issue and have tried to explain what might be the cause of the matter.

The first theory claims that men's and women's languages differ proportionally to the customs of the ethnic group they belong to, their age, level of education and socio-economic status. However, the speech of

two opposite sexes cannot be only anthropologically observed, because if such is the case, we still cannot explain why brothers and sisters of same ethnic background, or two colleagues of opposite sex but same education level, or husband and wife of the same age sometimes find it hard to communicate. In this case, the only obvious difference between them is their gender and not their background, age or economic status.

The second theory claims that the differences in language result from the male tendency to dominate women throughout history. At the expense of the feministic standpoint, this theory has seen female speech as a deviation from male speech norms, „man-made language“ as Spender (1980) puts it. In the 21st century this theory has put women in a disadvantaged position and deprived them of gender equality, and is hence, unacceptable because there is no strong evidence (even if we look far in the history) which proves men have invented language.

The third theory is based on the interdisciplinary approach to differences in language of opposite sexes and is the base of this paper. Professor of linguistics at Georgetown University, Deborah Tannen developed different model claiming that male-female communication is cross-cultural. According to her, men and women may grow up in the same family, same country, same society and culture, but their gender differences are significant as they belong to different subcultures. In an attempt to explain how come that women and men apply different speech norms and have different expectations of their interlocutors she published a book titled *You Just Don't Understand* (1990), in which she deals with why and how misunderstandings between sexes easily arise in discourse. This paper will lean on Tannen's theory of cross-cultural identities, or to put it more simply, on the female and male subcultures within one culture. Tannen calls these speech norms or features children learn from their early age a *genderlect*¹.

The results of Tannen's (1990) research show that in the world of boys life is a contest, i.e. the conversation is negotiation where one tries to be at the top (one man up), or at the bottom (one man down). In the world

1 A type or style of speech used by a particular gender; <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/genderlect>, (visited on Oct. 20, 2014).

of women, however, life is a community, i.e. conversations are built up as a network of conversations for preserving intimacy and closeness with others. Men value independence, hence their language creates distance, while women value intimacy and tend to often show similarity. Due to these differences it is natural to expect that same words can be interpreted differently by men and women, e.g. words such as status, power or intimacy carry various associations for the opposite sexes.

This paper deals with the language, i.e. the types of communication among pre-school children. The aim of the paper is to relate Tannen's theory to the language of children from three to six years of age and elaborate on the nature of the two different cultures of sexes through the examples on how gender-related cultural norms affect language. Children of this age are essential for this research because they have just begun integration into their own culture within a culture – men's or women's. They are, as far as their gender is concerned, still a, so called, *tabula rasa*² which is yet to be filled with the rules of each subculture.

The research conducted within this paper tries to explain or hint language behavior of each group through observing children's interaction in same-sex groups as well as in mixed-sex groups. As people in Bosnia and Herzegovina are of Slavic origin and nurture somewhat different speaking culture than those from the Western world, we expect that the research results will show some differences comparing to Tannen's, mostly due to different ethnic backgrounds of our target group and Anglo-American target group.

1. Method

The study is based on a fieldwork research carried out among pre-school children three to six years of age. During the observation period, seven different kindergartens were visited, and approximately 150 children included into research. Five out of seven kindergartens are situated in Mostar and the other two in Široki Brijeg. We were focused on pre-school children language behaviors in a natural environment where

2 Lat. *tabula rasa* – empty page.

children, although monitored by the adults, enjoyed their freedom in contrast to, e.g. task-oriented environments such as schools. Each observed group numbered 20 to 25 children, with approximately same number of boys and girls in each group. In gathering research data, the focus was not on any particular type of situations. Instead, we observed and noted down as much of children's language behavior as possible – their conversations, while they were playing, eating, drawing, fighting, and talking, were noted down and later analyzed according to Tannen's framework. The way the children conveyed information, their meta-messages, language style, topic selection, body language, etc. were taken into consideration. The methods used for gathering data were quite different from those characteristically used in sociological and sociolinguistic studies on children's behavior. In such studies efforts are typically made to systematically collect particular type of information deemed to be theoretically important in a carefully controlled fashion. Rather than being based on a laboratory model, the methodology used in this study was closer to ethnography of communication within the scope of linguistics and sociolinguistics. Such methodology allowed capturing the structures of *genderlects* in children's world as accurately as possible. It also helped avoiding any influence on children's behavior, since it allowed observation without interfering into children's world. The perspective of an objective observer helped in discovering one of the major assumptions of the paper, and that is the importance of ethnicity factor in cross-cultural communication, because it enabled noticing the traits of local mentality in pre-school children. However, the research did rely on theoretical background of Tannen's theory (1990) of difference displayed in six contrasting traits of male-female language, Spender's theories (1980) on man-made language and Goodwin's research (1990, 1998) on children's play.

2. Analysis and Discussion

2.1. Establishing Connections

The first and most apparent mode of language behavior that caught the eye was different methods of establishing connection with someone. In this respect, the girls were behaving similarly to the ones they were trying to connect with. The boys, on the other hand, did so by displaying their hierarchical status immediately. In one of the kindergartens a girl was celebrating her birthday. In this particular birthday-situation, the girls were eager to establish connection with the birthday girl as well as with the new girl who arrived that day. And they did so the way females do – they wanted to sit next to her, they showed her birthday was important by announcing it to the musician (who was invited to sing for the occasion), they asked if they could take a balloon, etc. For example, one of the girls, Tina gave a compliment to establish connection with another girl, Ivana, and Ivana accepted that connection by offering Tina to get the same hairstyle as she had.

TINA: „Who did your hair? It looks super-duper?“

IVANA: „My mum. And she will do yours when you visit me.“

The boys behaved in a completely different manner – by ignoring the birthday with getting up from the table whenever they wanted, turning on the TV and grabbing the balloons without permission. They completely ignored both the birthday girl and the new girl. After the teacher told the children to put their shoes on because they were going out to play – all the boys went out in the hallway, while the girls stayed to help the teacher clean up the table.

One of the typical things for the girls was that they often took the role of the teacher when she was not around. The boys did not display such behavior: one disobedient boy constantly stood up although the teacher warned him to sit down and be still. A couple of girls noticed the teacher warned the boy, so when they themselves saw him misbehave, they took over the teacher's role and told him to sit down or to sing, or some of them simply told the teacher what was going on. The rest of the boys

were unaware of this misbehavior because they were fully focused on the musician and the singing.

In another example, a girl took over a teacher's role again and took the girl that had been punished to the corner of the room, and told her: „Why did you leave the corner? You can't do that. The big teacher didn't tell you to do so.“ The girl then brought the third girl to watch over the punished one so she could not escape. Thus, the girls were acting as 'little' teachers, taking over the 'big' teacher's role whenever convenient or necessary.

2.2. *Grouping*

The boys' and the girls' ways of forming groups varied significantly. Three boys were playing with car toys, but one of the boys held all the cars and decided who was to play with what car:

KREŠIMIR: „Can I play with those cars, too?“

LUKA: „But only with one!“

TONI: „And I have a ship.“

KREŠIMIR: „Who took my dredge? Did you, Toni? Did you?“

TONI: „Na-uh! I'm a ship, gosh!“

Or, in another situation, three boys were playing the fortress game. The fourth boy came by and attacked their fortress because he wanted to play with them too:

MARKO: „This is my hiding place!“

JURE: „No, it's not! We were here first, go away! And those two cars are ours!“

MARKO: „And now I'm gonna kill you with my gun!“

JURE: „A gun! A gun? Ahahahah! Go away, Marko! You don't have a gun, and you can't count. You have fingers for nothing and you'll never play with us!“

MARKO: „You'll see! I'm gonna call the teacher.“

As the examples show, boys were creating their playing groups by showing who is in charge in that particular group. By deciding who

plays with what toy, Luka let Krešimir know who is on the top of the hierarchy. And Marko tried to enter the group of boys by showing off his strength – he first attacked their fortress, and then threatened he would hurt them and call the teacher. The boys never tried to mitigate the conflicts.

The girls, however, formed their groups peacefully. Three girls, Lea, Ines and Sanja, were playing the hairdresser game:

LEA: „Ines, let me do your hair!?”

INES: „Yeah, okay. But don't mess up my twists!”

LEA: „Sure, I won't.”

SANJA: „My mum brought this hairdryer. We'll use it to dry her hair.”

LEA: „Okay, but wait 'till I comb her hair first.”

Ines and Sanja accepted Lea into their group immediately, and then offered solidarity to see if Lea would give the same in return. After she did so, they continued playing together peacefully. The same happened in the following example: three girls also played the hairdresser game. To the question who was the main hairdresser, one of them, Tanja, first pointed at herself, then looked at her friend Mirta and said: „Both of us.” They started putting make up on the third girl, Ema, and they did so cooperatively – one girl taking care of the right eye, the other of the left one. And when they came to Ema's hair, they both agreed that Ema had to go to a wedding party so they were to make her look pretty.

2.3. *Proposing Orders and Ordering Proposals*

As far as orders and proposals are concerned, the boys indeed issued more demands than the girls. However, the girls were keen on using them too, e.g. they ordered a lot, probably a characteristic of girls' speaking culture. When they wanted something from somebody, or someone to do something for them, they used proposals only if orders did not work out. E.g. „We should wash her hair.” or „She can't see well. Let's put her eye glasses.” Proposals were actually the second option, but

it is significant that they used indirect imperatives expressed through modal verbs.

In the following example, the entire group of children in one kindergarten was playing the same game – trucks and roads. Two boys were dragging toy trucks over the play room. The third boy was in charge of filling the trucks with Lego blocks. He stood still in one spot and commented their play:

JOŠKO: „Guys, there’s not enough blocks, see?“ [he points at the pile of blocks on the ground]

MATEO: „Wait, let me see that! Where are all the blocks? We have to build something with them! How are we gonna do that now?“

JOŠKO: „I don’t know. I didn’t steal any, Mateo. I was standing here like you said.“

IVANO: „I’ll ask Franjo and his friends to help us out. See? They are not playing with their blocks. Common guys, let’s do it together.“

Firstly, the hierarchy had been clearly established – the boy of the higher status, Mateo, told the others what to do. Secondly, the unity of the group was of extreme importance, because it helped in displaying dominance to another group of boys (and girls). Franjo and couple of other boys belonged to another ‘clan’ of boys, with Franjo in charge. Mateo’s clan had to negotiate ‘business’ with them, but they decided to do it together because they felt safer in a group. In another corner of the room, three boys and one girl were making a labyrinth out of blocks that the above mentioned boy clan delivered them with their trucks. The labyrinth was a sort of a road their trucks had to pass through. As the game continued, boys and girls extended it and included other elements to their play next to simply loading trucks and building labyrinths:

IVANO: „You are making this road for us, ok?“

ANTE: „Okay! We are those people that build roads and bridges and stuff. What do you call them? Roaders? Roadmen? Oh, I don’t know! Gimme that block over there!“

BORIS: „Ante, stop building that part! That’s what I’m building, man!“

BOŽIDAR: [addresses a girl playing with them named Andrea] „Andrea, find and bring me this big block, and the smallest ones.“

In the example above, the pattern of giving orders to boys and girls is apparent – Božidar and Ante issued orders not just to strengthen their status, it was an inherent characteristic of their way of communication. Furthermore, Andrea did as Božidar told her without saying anything. They continued their play while talking to each other. While one of the boys was complaining about making the road wrong, a girl immediately started comforting him by sharing similar experience and expressing solidarity:

BOŽIDAR: „Oh, I did it all wrong! Look at this wall here, it's not straight! I don't think wall should be leaning like that. It's gonna fall on the truck.“
ANDREA: „Well it's ok, Božo. Look at mine! It's leaning too, but I don't mind. When I ride in the car with my dad we all go up and down in our seats. And my dad says it's the road, you know.“
BOŽIDAR: „No way, Andrea. We'll make it straight and we won't go up and down then, you'll see. We have to make it straight all the way to that big wall, but Igor took the rest of the blocks!“

Suddenly, a conflict aroused from Andrea and Božidar's need of blocks the other boys possessed. However, the boys did not mitigate the conflict. Andrea asked nicely for the blocks, and Igor categorically refused to give them. At first, Božidar tried to loosen the tension by inserting 'please' into his request, and when that did not help, he threatened:

ANDREA: „I'm gonna ask him to give them back to us!“ [addressing Igor]
„Hey you! Hey you! Will you give us those blocks so we could make the road for our trucks all the way to that big wall?“ [points at the big wall]
IGOR: „No, I loaded those blocks into my truck. They are my now!“
BOŽIDAR: „Common, please, give them to us! Give them or else I'm gonna call Ivano, and Boris, and Ante, and Franjo and his friends to kick you in the face!“

The girl was standing still and watched the boys argue. Unwillingly, Igor gave them the blocks. He now joined their play, and the game continued.

Although inside this group Mateo seemed to be a leader, some of the boys tried to belittle his dominance by questioning his demands:

MATEO: „Zvone and Marin, you two pick up the blocks on your side of the road so that the water flows in that direction.“

MARIN: „But why? There shouldn't be water here!“

ZVONE: „Yeah! It's a garage!“

MATEO: „No, it's not! Turn on the water, Zvone. The garage is there in my corner.“ [the boys turn off the water] „Okay! Now, turn it off because crocodiles are swimming towards us! Hurry! Okay! We don't need the traffic light anymore. I'll turn on the water. Andrea, what kind of water you like? Hot or cold?“

ANDREA: „Hot! Ouch, ouch, turn it off! Turn it off! It's too hot!“

ZVONE tried to take control over their play by yelling: „Run! Crocodiles are coming!“ [all run to another end of the room, and soon come back]

While they were running away from the crocodiles, somebody attacked their road and knocked down several blocks. The boy in charge, Mateo, ordered Andrea to turn off the water, and the boys to load the remains in their trucks and bring them to him so he could fix the road. But children found it interesting to turn the water on and off, so soon everybody started yelling „On/off!“ Mateo wanted to take control over the group again so he yelled:

MATEO: „From now on, I'm gonna turn the water on and off, and the rest of you will fix the road!“

ANDREA: „Right away?“

MATEO: „Uh-um! Right away!“

It is obvious from their conversational turns that a girl, if she wants to be a part of the boys' group, has to adjust her identity to the boys' needs and show obedience to the boy in charge. But, in 'decisive' moments she definitely expressed her female solidarity, showing her support.

2.4. *Avoiding and Provoking Conflict*

Another role that a girl usually takes over in a mixed group is that of a 'peacemaker'. Two boys, Niko and Slaven, and one girl, Matea, observed the poster of human body on the wall:

MATEA: „Look how much red color is inside of us! There's blue too.“
NIKO: „That over there is our heart, Matea. It's right over there.“ [Points a finger into her chest to show her where the heart is]
SLAVEN: „Na-uh, Niko, it's not! That's a bone. Do you see how big it is?!?“
NIKO: „No, it's a heart and it beats and you know when you're so scared it hurts you there...“
MATEA: „It's a red-colored bone!“

When Niko and Slaven started fighting over the poster, Matea tried to ease the tensions by offering a compromise – *a red-colored bone*.

When fighting, boys tended to brag and include the third person to win the fight. Three boys, Tomislav, Igor and Marino, were sitting at the table and talking:

TOMISLAV: „Did you know that I'm gonna fly to the space?!?“
IGOR: „Nah, you can't go there because you're just a little boy and you don't even have a ship!“
TOMISLAV: „Oh yes I can! Because me and Marino have robots that will take us to the Mars!“

Tomislav included the third boy, Marino, into their dispute, as if to show the need of additional back-up and to win this bragging situation.

2.5. Discussing Troubles

When mixed groups are concerned, establishing connection was somewhat different than in same-sex groups: two girls, Mia and Ana, and three boys, Ivan, Marko and Bruno were discussing what would happen if their parents forgot to pick them up from the kindergarten.

MIA: „I once asked my grandma to come pick me up so we can go to the park behind her house, because it was hot outside and my friends, Ena and Mario, were there too. I wanted to play with them. They had slides and swings and stuff, you know. But she didn't come, so I stayed home with my mum.“
ANA: „And my mum never left me anywhere in the whole world. And once I thought she did, and I got scared, and started crying and everything. But it was ok, because she just had to pee.“

IVAN: „If my dad ever leaves me anywhere, I'll... I'll... I'll just find another dad! But he never did, never ever. Once I made him so mad... I broke the remote control. I took it and threw it over the balcony. And we live so high up.“

Marko ignores the conversation and changes the topic that suited him:

MARKO: „Look at Matija! He's climbing over there, teacher! You said we can't do that, right?“

Bruno ignores Marko, and continues the conversation from earlier:

BRUNO: „And I, teacher, didn't even want to go to the kindergarten!“

In this trouble-talk situation, girls again tried to find similarities between themselves and their friends by sharing similar experiences. Ivan also offered a form of solidarity through similar experience but Marko tried to belittle Ivan by ignoring the entire conversation.

And again, girls nurtured their intimacy to preserve their friendship by announcing it aloud and by doing things together. Five girls were sitting at the table and drawing:

MAJA: „I drew my teddy a dress. He is a girl teddy now.“

LARA: „Me and Maša are drawing together two teddies, and Mia is drawing a bogeyman.“

MIA: „I'll draw my grandma and my dad, too. We'll paint this together, won't we? Because we are friends. Teacher, all the girls at this table are friends and we are all drawing together.“

In contrast, when someone new approached their circle of friends, the boys had to display their independence and make it clear about their hierarchical order. Three boys were sitting at the table and drawing. The fourth boy came by, asking for a pencil:

MARKO: „I need a pencil. Do you have any?“

IVAN: [looks at another boy, Mirko and asks]: „Do we?“

MIRKO: „Yeah, this one.“ [he turns to Marko, hands him a pencil without looking at him at all]

Boys and girls obviously use different strategies of group bonding, girls through solidarity and boys through showing dominance.

2.6. *Winners or Losers vs. Equals or 'Peacemakers'*

Boys always compete. Their games are full of demands, fights for dominance, and even if the game is not meant to have winners and losers, boys find the way to make it so. Two boys, Toma and Niko, were playing the market game:

TOMA: „You be the cashier, and I'll shop.“

NIKO: „Ok, c'mon! Good morning, sir! What do you need?“

TOMA: „Gimme that cocoa. I need it, I'm making a lunch.“

NIKO: „Okay, here you go. That's 50 KM.“

TOMA: [takes out his wallet] „I have lots of money here, you know.“

NIKO: „So, I have more in my cashbox!“

TOMA: „No, you don't!“

NIKO: „Yes, I do!“

Here the game instantly ended, the boys left the toys they were playing with, and each went his own way. On the other hand, the girls cooperated. Their play was all about harmony and equality. Three girls were playing in the kitchen:

SUNČICA: „Luca, Luca, let's tidy up together. We have to clean the house for the lunch. Irena is cooking, but I'll make a pizza.“

And when boys and girls played together, it looked like the following: two boys were playing the cave game and one showed the other how the cavemen behaved, so the other one imitated him. Then a boy and a girl, Petar and Maša, were playing the same game (an equivalent to mother and father game) – a girl was cooking them a lunch, and a boy was making them a cave:

PETAR: „Maša, you and me are, you know, going to get married, like husband and wife, you know?“

MAŠA: „No, I’m not gonna do that!“

PETAR: „But why not?“

MAŠA: „Well because, I’m not a mum!“

Then the third girl Ana joined them, and the boy instantly proposed marriage to the girl, but this time he was smarter, so instead of a demand, he formulated his wish into a question, and the girl accepted:

PETAR: „Ana, would you like, you know, that the two of us are like mum and dad? That we get married?“

ANA: „Yeah, let’s do it!“

At first, the boy acted the way boys usually act – he strongly demanded something from somebody else. However, he immediately changed his language style taking over the girls’ communication rules by formulating a demand into a question.

2.7. Interruptions

Interrupting patterns were not as frequent as it was assumed. The boys and the girls interrupted each other in terms of both positive and negative overlapping interruptions. For example, a group of boys was stacking a puzzle and they decided who would stack which part of the puzzle. The following presents a positive interruption, where two boys fasten the status by interrupting each other. However, if more than two are playing, there is always a boy who would like to be in charge:

VEDRAN: „Little boys can’t touch the puzzle pieces ‘cuz...“

KRISTIЈAN: „...because they don’t know how to stack them. They will just add some puzzles to us, big ones.“

VJEKO: „Yeah, but I’m better in puzzles than you are, Vedran. I’ll be in charge.“

Positive interruptions, however, were found between the girls, and they had the same purpose – to fasten a friendship. Two girls were playing with colored clay for children and started a conversation:

SANDRA: „How do you make that red [...] nose?“

ANITA: [“Well, I round it like this. I'll show you.“]

Negative interruption happened in an interesting situation which presented a voting system of boys and girls. Ivo was a new boy in his kindergarten group and he was also a bit younger than the rest of the children, so the teacher asked the children to take a special care of him. That day, the teacher awarded a gold medal to a child that helped little Ivo the most. The children voted for the best and most obedient child of the week. What seemed interesting to observe was the system boys and girls developed among themselves when it came to voting. All the children were sitting in a circle formation with the teacher as the head of the circle. The teacher was asking each child to come to her and whisper the name of the child he or she voted for. Both boys and girls were making deals of who they were going to vote for. The children were very friendly and protective towards little Ivo. When the teacher told a girl named Vita that little Ivo had voted for her, she turned towards him in a surprise, hugged and kissed him and thanked him. However, as the voting slowly came to an end, the children were more and more restless. They stood up, yelled at each other, fought over who was going to win, who was the best, etc.

JELENA: „But I don't like this stupid voting. I don't wanna Mislav to win, teacher!“

LUKA: „But he's gonna! He's the best all the time, you know?!“

JELENA: „Na-uh! He's stupid and fights all the time and doesn't wanna share his toys and...“

BOJAN: „And I don't like you, you shut up! I'm gonna call the teacher, you'll see!“

NINA: „I don't wanna him to win either, okay? Marsela should win! She's good!“

LUKA: „No way! She's not...“

NINA: „Oh, yes she will! I’m gonna call my dad and you can’t win him, he’s the biggest man ever!“

LUKA: [covers his ears with his hands] „Bla bla bla! I’m not listening to you! You’re just a girl! Hahahaha! ‘Nina-slina³, ‘Nina-sli...“

NINA: „... Shut up! I’ll never be you friend! Never! Teacheeeeer! Teacheeeeer!“

Luka and Nina kept interrupting each other, not in order to support each other, but the opposite – to win the fight. They kept on butting in one another’s words, insulting and threatening each other.

2.8. *Negotiation*

Negotiation strategies of boys and girls were interesting too. Two girls that were each other’s best friends were arguing who would sit at the head of the table – when a dominating girl sat at the head of the table, the other one started crying and said that she really wanted to sit there. As the first one replied that she sat there first, her friend continued to cry. The dominating girl then offered a solution by saying that they could swap their juices instead, and her crying friend accepted the offer.

It is interesting to see how girls deal with hierarchy inside their circles of friendship. In this particular case, the dominating girl accepted boys’ manners of establishing hierarchy – through negotiations. However, she displayed a female language trait to stop the argument, and that was a compromise offered through the proposal for swapping their juices.

2.9. *Topic Selection*

When together, boys mostly discussed their plans related to the games they were playing, activities they would do together and they commented on the activities or events that took place in the past. For example, they planned on building a road with blocks, or they planned on attacking each other’s hiding places, or they even planned how to play with cars, cashboxes, puzzles, etc. At one occasion, while Igor,

³ Slina – nasal mucus, phlegm (in Croatian it rhymes with female name Nina).

Branimir and Ante were playing together, they made plans on visiting each other after they got home from the kindergarten:

BRANIMIR: „My brother copied me a Ben Ten cartoon on the CD from the internet, and now I can watch it all the time!“ [He stood up, started singing the leading song from that cartoon and pretended to be Ben Ten]

ANTE: „Really? Even at night?“

BRANIMIR: „Yeah, I watched it last night too!“

IGOR: „But can we see it too? I mean, together?“

ANTE: „Yeaah! And we could put Ben's gadget on and afterwards we could be Ben Ten but no one has to be a bad guy!“

BRANIMIR: „You wanna come to my house, right? We have a big house and I have my own room.“

IGOR: „I wanna come this afternoon!“

ANTE: „Me too!!“

BRANIMIR: „Yaaaay! I'm gonna tell my mum, guys.“

Girls, on the other hand, talked about their hair, clothes, drawings, they commented each other, made plans, etc. They did discuss their emotions more openly and were focused on their friends more. The best example was already discussed example of boys and girls discussing their fear of being left in the kindergarten, since the boys tried to reject or ignore the topic and the girls expressed their emotions overtly. The girls tended to compare each other's drawings, hairs, clothes, nail polisher, etc. but they also compared the relations of their friends towards others and themselves. On many occasions girls tended to express their wishes, e.g. while drawing together, girls were sharing their mutual wishes and clearly show their bonding:

TINA: „I sometimes wish you were my sister so we could draw and play and sleep together all the time. And then you would go home with me every day.“

LORENA: „Me too! We would be like twins and we would do everything together. I wish that... that... A lot of things!“

TINA: „We are best friends in a whole, whole world, aren't we? And when we go to school will go together, and when we get married we'll live in the same house.“

LORENA: „Yeah! Can you give me the red pen, please? I've got to color the ribbon.“

2.10. Body Language

The first thing that caught our attention while observing children in almost all kindergartens was that boys found it hard to sit still. Not only did they protest to the authority in this manner, but they also displayed their dominance. For example, in the episode when a musician lady came to sing for a birthday party, the teacher told the children to sit still and listen to the musician. The girls obeyed cooperatively, and boys did the same in the beginning, but once one of the boys started squirming in his seat, the others followed. The boys avoided eye contact a great deal even when they talked about serious things. The only time they had eye contact was when they fought – to show the threat to each other. In their relation towards the girls, the entire body language was different. When a boy liked a girl he did not avoid eye contact that often, although he felt ashamed when their eyes would meet. Furthermore, they were gentle to the girls, they hugged and kissed them, and were protective of them. An interesting situation happened when a boy and a girl were putting away the toys from the floor and he leaned on and kissed a girl on her cheek, but the other boys saw it and started mocking him. When the boy realized it, he felt as if his male status was disrupted because the other boys saw his gentle side. He knocked the box with toys so that the girl had to clean up all over again, and he ran away.

The girls' body language was more free and overt than the boys'. They sat still when asked to and when they noticed a girl disobey, they did not follow her lead but reminded her to stay still. Eye contact was a sign of intimacy, closeness and support, and therefore, was not avoided. It was rather demanded. The girls looked each other in the eyes while talking and did so with the boys too. When it comes to showing affection whether to her girl-friend or boy-friend, a girl did it quite openly – she kissed them, hugged them, and sat very close to them. Moreover, girls tended to take each other's hand and walk around the room to show closeness, or they did so when they were afraid, or asked to do something they did not do before. Basically, girls held their hands whenever they felt insecure about something – whether themselves or the forthcoming situation.

Conclusion

By all means, childhood seems to pave the way into complicated world of human communication. What a child acquires in the early stages of his/her mental and physical development sets him/her off into the world. As a child learns simple actions such as walking, eating, playing, talking etc., he/she in the same manner learns how to communicate with others. But the worlds of boys and girls are not the same – the world is seen and treated differently through the eyes of girls and boys. Interaction with others teaches them how to balance those two worlds of words loaded with tones of different perspectives, approaches, techniques and methods of communicating. Any miscommunications men and women later have, may arise from their childhood. Thanks to Tannen's research, it was quite easy to notice clashes of different worlds within a communication, and to recognize them as such and not someone's poor character.

The research conducted among pre-school children in Bosnia and Herzegovina supported the above mentioned claims. For example, boys tended to either display or follow the hierarchy they created among themselves. Overall, the children formed their groups differently – boys had to show their strength and display their status in order to be accepted into certain group of boys, and girls asked for a level of closeness as a major reason for hanging out together. However, they expressed their wants and needs very similarly – by issuing direct orders. They both made proposals only as an alternative option if a demand failed. Although Tannen's research showed a different pattern (boys ordering, girls proposing), this particular research showed some divergence, and the reason for it may lie in different ethnic background these children come from. Furthermore, a part of boys' initiation ritual was provoking the conflict deliberately, where girls served as 'peacemakers' by offering a compromise. In discussing troubles, girls emphasized their feelings and boys proposed the solution of the problem, e.g. when talking about being left alone in the kindergarten. And as far as interruption patterns are concerned, boys and girls interrupted for two reasons – to

win a fight or to fasten a friendship. An interesting girls' behavior appeared when they negotiated to maintain their dominance (hierarchical structures obtained from boys) presented in a situation when two girls negotiated who would sit at the head of the table by finding a compromise in swapping juices. In topic selection, the boys often discussed their activities, plans or commented past events whereas the girls talked about things they could do together, they imitated each other's clothes, they discussed someone else's experiences, and emphasized their emotions. Finally, their non-verbal communication was completely different. The girls' body language was more open than the boys' in terms of not avoiding eye contact, expressing their affection by kissing and hugging each other, holding their hands when feeling insecure, etc. The boys' non-verbal communication spoke another language, since they displayed threat through direct eye contact with the boys and were very gentle to the girls.

Although Tannen was later criticized for stereotyping and generalizing about typically male or female behavior, we can recognize the existence of specific communication patterns which are not individual but can be considered an inherent characteristic of gender, i.e. male or female group. What seems not to be discussed enough is the fact that we, adults, were inevitably learnt as we were born not to understand each other completely. Encouraging a little girl to integrate into society of her peers by fully acquiring the traits of her gender (in terms of language, too), we fail to introduce her to be conscious about rules that govern the world she, as a female, 'turns her back from' – the world of boys. Our childhood should prepare us for both worlds – the one we belong to by our birth, and the one we will most certainly interact with in our future.

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