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Friendship, Sistership and Personal Identity in Early Adolescence: Conversation

Analysis Approach

The paper seeks to explore how relationships of friends and sisters are constructed, enacted and linguistically performed in conversational contexts. In philosophical accounts of friendship, several themes recur consistently, although various accounts differ in precisely how they spell these out. These themes are: mutual caring (or love), intimacy, and shared activity; these will be considered in turn and illustrated with conversational samples.

1. Mutual caring

When approaching the notion of friendship, the problem that researchers encounter is a lack of firmly agreed and socially acknowledged criteria for what makes a person a friend. Aristotle distinguished between a genuine friendship and two other forms: one based on mutual usefulness, the other on pleasure. Sistership, on the other hand, can involve co-operative behaviours and be based on either of the forms of friendship in terms of Aristotle's definition or else it can involve either competition or resentment where it can be based on animosity or hatred. Both the terms entail a reciprocal bond between two or more people who share knowledge, experiences and often come from similar socio-cultural backgrounds. Cases of friendships between people from diverse socio-cultural or ethnic environments are possible, yet less frequent. In interaction 3 'T' mentions a girl who does not want to make friends with her because she thinks she comes from a higher social class. 'T' does not accept the state of affairs and makes an indirect complaint to 'O' by criticising Martyna's behaviour and clothing. 'O' relays her strong support producing elliptical T. 11 whose meaning can be recovered when referring back to 'T's previous utterance. Interaction 3 shows that friendship is virtually impossible even if participants' status in socio-cultural contexts is equal yet construed as mismatched by the parties involved. 'T' and 'O' are friends and they both conceptualise their social positions as matching which is rendered in their common views on topics of appropriate behaviour, fashion or personal hygiene whereas friendship with Martyna is impossible because of differences in the construal of what is appropriate and what is not in diverse socio-cultural contexts, i.e. differences in moral judgements. In case of sistership there

cannot be socio-cultural variation involved; rather the reciprocity of the bond is affected by personality traits, cognitive abilities and social cognition. Sisters are doomed to live together in a relationship in early years of their lives, the bond, however, may cease to exist later in life when the projected images of one's identity are diametrically opposed. In the interaction 1 'A' introduces the parable of Jacob and Esau to achieve interactional goals. From analytic point of view, it is fairly revealing. She construes the relationship between the sisters as similar to the biblical bond between the two brothers. Jacob and Esau were complete opposites. The former was mature, responsible, conscientious and clever whereas the latter was infantile, reckless, slack and silly. Analysing the occurrence of this specific parable in the conversational context, one can predict that the two sisters are nothing like each other and their relationship is based on competition and contention rather than cooperation and mutual support. This is clearly visible in interaction 2 where 'O' provides interactional support to 'T' (e.g. explains what the mean score means) and challenges 'A's line of reasoning. Cicero (section 20) says that

[I]n friendship, those who possess any superiority must put themselves on an equal footing with those who are less fortunate, so these latter must not be annoyed at being surpassed in genius, fortune, or rank.

'T' does not appear to be annoyed by 'O' conduct though O's mental superiority is vivid for the participants and is indirectly acknowledged by 'T' in T. 7, interaction 2. 'T' does not consider 'O's contribution as a challenge to her identity, rather it is assumed to be a helping hand that allows 'T' to carry the conversation on. 'T' feels secure in the interaction and is sure of 'O's support that validates her identity and self-esteem. As Ray Pahl (2000: 148) has commented

It is not friendship *per se* that is important, but rather the trust, security, feelings of self-esteem and feelings of being loved for one's own sake that flow from it.

Knowing that 'significant others' like us, respect us and can provide practical support is likely to make for a positive construction of one's identity. Cicero (section 13) claims that

we should ask from friends, and do for friends, only what is good. But do not let us wait to be asked either: let there be ever an eager readiness, and an absence of hesitation. Let us have the courage to give advice with candour. In friendship, let the influence of friends who give good advice be paramount; and let this influence be used to enforce advice not only in plain-spoken terms, but sometimes, if the case demands it, with sharpness; and when so used, let it be obeyed.

Not only does 'T' readily use 'O's cue but also seeks for her advice believing that 'O' recognizes her identity as it is and her advice will contribute to a construction of an enhanced self image.

In contrast, 'A' struggles with 'O' for a superior interactional position, which results in invariable resentment of 'O's comments in interaction 2 and concurrent venture for a position of power in interaction 1. 'A' does not recognize 'O's good intentions, rather she looks upon her as stock and cares for 'O' in hope of making most profit. Accordingly the bond between 'A' and 'O' cannot be evaluated as spontaneous friendship which must be sought solely for itself.

'O' and 'T's relationship can be defined as a genuine friendship, to use Aristotle's definition. As Ray Pahl (2000: 22) states

'the friends are bound together, as they recognize each other's moral excellence. Each can be said to provide a mirror in which the other may see himself.'

Modern approaches to identity have been influenced by Cooley's notion of the looking-glass self (Cooley, 1902). Briefly, it means that our actions and behaviours are mirrored back to us through the responses of other people. If I project a particular image to other people, that image will be either reinforced or challenged by the ways in which people respond to me in their interactions. If we love the other person for their own sake not just for what they are or what they can offer then we put the interests of the other before our own. We can also see that we are separate and different from each other. We know ourselves and the other. The moral excellence of friendship, thus, 'involves a high level of development and expression of the altruistic emotions of sympathy, concern and care - a deep caring for and identification with the good of another from whom one clearly knows oneself to be clearly other' (Blum 1980: 71). David Hume (1740; cited in Hill and McCarthy 1999) has said

It is remarkable that nothing touches a man of humanity more than any instance of extraordinary delicacy in love or friendship, where a person is attentive to the smallest concerns of his friend, and is willing to sacrifice to them the most considerable interest of his own.

To sum up, it must be said that in the cases described, the bond between 'O' and 'T' is based on genuine friendship. They care for each other, have common insights, respect their identities and provide mutual interactional support. The relationship between 'A' and 'O', on the other hand is based on common origin and companionship, hence this a kind of mutually-useful friendship. Early adolescence carries a growing interest in the peer world. At this stage, the investment in time and, emotionally, in friends at the expense of siblings may take place (Updegraff et al., 2002). Adolescents live in the family and spend much of their time within the family arena, thus, disagreements, conflicts, and power assertions are probably inevitable,

whereas friends spend significant amounts of time away from the family. Therefore, causes of conflicts may be less common.

2. Intimacy

The relationship of friendship differs from other interpersonal relationships, even those characterized by mutual caring, such as relationships among siblings or colleagues in one major respect, namely friendships are deeper, more *intimate* relationships. Intimacy, though, can be characterized in a number of ways.

To begin, Thomas (1987; 1989; 1993) claims that the intimacy of friendship can be understood in terms of mutual self-disclosure. I tell my friends things about myself that I would not dream of telling others, and I expect them to make me privy to intimate details of their lives. Such mutual self-disclosure creates the bond of trust essential to friendship, for through such self-disclosure we simultaneously make ourselves vulnerable to each other and acknowledge the goodwill the other has for us. Such a bond of trust is what institutes the kind of intimacy characteristic of friendship. In the interactions at hand, 'T' openly admits not fully comprehending the content of the interaction 2 (T. 9) upon which 'O' provides conversational support, and this in turn encourages 'T' to ask 'O' about her plans for the future school achievement. In interaction 4, 'T' asks 'O' about her boyfriends, the reply, however comes from 'A' who appears to be fairly knowledgeable about 'O's 'love affairs'. 'O' is quite reticent, which is visible in the short utterances she responds with. This case shows that intimacy is also present in early adolescent sister relationship, which might be the result of what Aristotle (1170b: 11-12) calls 'sharing the pasture' like animals. Siblings spend a lot of time together and usually share not only family contexts but also school, playground and pastime activities. Hence the knowledge they possess about their sibling can be rich but implicit and may get surfaced in specific, local discourses. Friends, on the other hand live together by sharing in thoughts and emotions, hence the knowledge they possess about their friend is explicit as it has been either obtained directly from the friend or friend's behaviours and performances have been reflected upon turning what was implied into explicitly constructed content.

It appears that intimacy of friendship should be conceived of as a matter of discretion as well as a matter of trust a friend's good will. It means that friendship involves each person caring about the other's good for the other's sake and not just concerning secrets. In interaction 3, turns 10-12, 'T' asks for 'O's opinion, which turns out to be identical with hers.

They agree on the matters of everyday behaviours and interests. Both 'O' and 'T' feel secure in the interaction as they are convinced of their own righteousness and support they gain from the friend, which in turn strengthens their self-esteem and feeling of being a valuable individual.

According to Friedman (1989), the intimacy of friendship takes the form of a commitment friends have to each other as unique persons, a commitment in which the friend's successes become occasions for joy; her judgments may provoke reflection or even deference; her behaviour may encourage emulation; and the causes which she champions may inspire devotion. That is, such a commitment involves taking the friend seriously, where this means something like finding her values, interests, reasons, etc. provide me with reasons for me to value and think similarly. In this way, the dynamics of the friendship involves friends mutually influencing each other's sense of value, which thereby comes to be shared in a way that underwrites significant intimacy. The claim is not that friends share values only in that these values happen to coincide; if that were the case, the conception of friendship would be vulnerable to the charge that the friends really are not concerned for each other but merely for the intrinsically valuable properties that each exemplifies. Rather, a part of what makes my concern for my friend is my being committed to remind the friend of what's really valuable in life. Such a commitment is clearly a commitment to the friend, and a relationship characterized by such a commitment on both sides is one that consistently reinforces the sharing of these values. Such sharing of values, taken metonymically is presented in interaction 3 where the two girls make shared commitments concerning what is appropriate to wear in different social situations. In similar vein, interaction 4 displays that the girls are exposed to similar system of values and beliefs, i.e. they mustn't meet boys out of school. This parental imposition puts limits on girls' social experiences and familiarizes them with a specific code of behaviour. Interaction 2 explicates that school achievement as well as good education is of high concern for the two girls. Turn 9 of interaction 2 reveals that 'T' is determined to achieve high at school in future and asks for 'O's commitment, knowing that 'O' shares her view, which can be inferred from 'O' previous performance.

Such a view of the intimacy of the friendship as sharing evaluative framework can be found in Sherman's interpretation of Aristotle's account (Sherman, 1987). According to him an important component of friendship is that friends identify with each other in the sense that they exhibit a 'singleness of mind.' This includes, first, a kind of sympathy, whereby I feel on my friend's behalf the same emotions s/he does. Second, and more important, Sherman

understands the singleness of mind that friends have in terms of shared processes of deliberation. It is not that friends in a friendship are passively directed by the values of another friend, rather they actively transform each other's evaluative outlook as well as interpret and direct each other's behaviours and interests. In this sense friendship shapes and impacts individual identity. Cocking & Kennett (1998: 505) claim, 'the self my friend sees is, at least in part, a product of the friendship'. I project a particular self-image that may be either reinforced, challenged or amended by my friend. Looking at myself through the mirror of my friend's image of me, I come to know and accept myself. To be *interpreted* by my friend is to allow my understanding of myself, in particular of my strengths and weaknesses, to be shaped by my friend's interpretations of me. Thus, my friend may admire my tenacity (a trait I did not realize I had), or be amused by my excessive concern for fairness, and I may come as a result to develop a new understanding of myself, and potentially change myself, in direct response to their interpretation of me. As a result, a refined image of myself is constructed and projected. The same processes occur in my friend whose self, as a result, comes to be deconstructed and reconstructed. Turns 1 through 6 of interaction 3 display how 'O' changes her opinion of Martyna's clothing to be in accord with 'T' and avoid accusation of having bad taste. Sherman (1987: 600) claims that 'through the sense of belonging and attachment' we attain because of such sympathetic pride and shame, 'we identify with and share their [our friends'] good'. The intimacy of friendship and 'singleness of mind' in particular directly relate to the **creation of one's personal and social identities** both in local interactional contexts as well as larger socio-cultural discourses.

3. Shared activity

A final thread in philosophical accounts of friendship is shared activity. Friends engage in *joint* pursuits, in part motivated by the friendship itself. These joint pursuits can include not only such things as making something together, playing together, and talking together, but also pursuits that essentially involve shared experiences, such as going to the concert or a baseball match together. Yet for these pursuits to be properly *shared* in the relevant sense of "share," they cannot involve activities motivated simply by self interest: by, for example, the thought that I'll help you with your work today if you later help me with mine. Rather, the activity must be pursued in part for the purpose of doing it together with my friend, and this is the point of saying that the shared activity must be motivated, at least in part, by the friendship itself. Interactions 6 and 7 show that young adolescent friends share not only

activities, i.e. they are playmates as children but simultaneously they are engaged in discussing events and experiences that are beyond immediate context and variably available to each of them, yet they have the need to share them, which will enable them to develop joint attitudes and judgments. Both the activities the girls are engaged in as well as the content of their conversations are agreeably and enjoyably selected and practised by both the friends. They find pleasure in spending time together and sharing experiences that contribute to mutual understanding and deepen their love and intimacy.

Conclusion

The paper deals with the value of the relationships of friendship and sistership in early adolescence and their manifestation in language. Given the fact that we lack firmly agreed and socially acknowledged criteria for what makes a person a friend, Aristotle's definition was employed whose distinction between a genuine friendship and two other forms: one based on mutual usefulness, the other on pleasure serves as a basis of comparison and contrast of the quality of friendship and sistership bond between adolescent girls. Linguistic productions and communicative behaviours of the three girls engaged in sample interactions seem to indicate that sistership at that age of development is based on mutual usefulness and pleasure rather than genuine friendship that involves mutual caring intimacy and sincere interest. Despite the fact that sisters share larger portions of their lives, experiences and interpersonal relationships, which may lead to mutual self-disclosure, sibling rapport is based on competition and resentment rather than cooperation, characteristics which is overtly manifested in the conversational data. Peer friendship, on the other hand appears to satisfy the criteria of Aristotle's genuine friendship. The two girls who are close friends commit to each other as unique persons, they share values and care about the other's good. Such an intimate bond of trust and mutual authentic caring is characteristic of genuine friendship. This kind of relationship is performed in communicative situations and becomes easily observable in the linguistic analysis.

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Appendix

Interaction 1

- T1. A: ola! ty sprzątasz pokój i łazienkę na górze a ja swój pokój
ola! you'll clean your room and the bathroom upstairs and I'll do mine
- T2. O: to nie fer (.) łazienkę sprzątam razem!
that's not fair (.) we'll clean the bathroom together
- T3. A: ola ty mnie masz słuchać (.) pamiętasz chyba przypowieść o jakubie i ezawie?

ola you must listen to me (.) do you remember the parable of jacob and esau?

T4. O: no (.) i co z tego?

I do(.) so what?

Interaction 2

T.1 A: ja nie wychodziłam ani razu ale przez to że byłam chora

○ *I didn't step forward cause I was ill*

T.2 O: no raczej nie cały czas

○ *not all of the time*

T.3 A: no ale w tym roku tylko cztery setne brakowało mi do paska

○ *yea but this year I missed the red strip by four hundredth*

T.4 O: no raczej [nie

○ *not really [no*

T.5 A: [miałam cztery trzy pięć a musi być od cztery siedemdziesiąt pięć pasek [czyli

○ *[I had four point thirty five and one needs four seventy five [that is*

T.6 O: [ty miałaś cztery trzy trzy

○ *[you had four point three three*

T.7 T: ja się nie interesuję jeszcze tym. jeszcze tego

○ *I'm not interested in it yet (.) I don't*

T.8 O: od czwartej klasy musisz mieć od cztery siedemdziesiąt pięć żeby mieć pasek czerwony

○ *from the fourth grade you need to have four point seventy five to get the red strip*

T.9 T: ja będę miała na pewno będę miała a ty jak się będziesz uczyć?

○ *I will for sure I will and how about you?*

Interaction 3

T.1 T: no ale jest głupia strasznie i taka biedna

○ *yea but she's so stupid and so poor*

T.2 O: no:

○ *yea:*

T.3 T: ja ci powiem

○ *I tell you*

T.4 O: ja wiem ona w takich ciuchach ładnych chodzi

○ *I know she wears such lovely clothes*

T.5 T: w ogóle! [

○ *not at all!*

T.6 O: [to znaczy dziwnie się ubiera

○ *[I mean strange clothes*

T.7 T: ona nie myje włosów (.) wcale!

○ *she doesn't wash her hair (.) never!*

T.8 O: nie myje zębów (.) wiesz jakie ona ma żółte

○ *she doesn't brush her teeth (.) you know how yellow they are*

- T.9 T: no wiem! na podwórku o: jejku(.) takie straszne i mówi że się ze mną nie zadaje bo jest na wyższym poziomie i ja nie umiem się ubrać na luzie (naśladuje głos martyny) dlatego że ubrałam swoje najlepsze ciuchy na podwórko
- *I know! In the playground oh: gee (.) so horrible and she says she doesn't make friends with me 'cause she's high er level and I don't know how to dress casually (imitates martyna's movements) 'cause I wore my best clothes in the playground*
- T.10 T: przecież nie ubrałaby:m ta:k tak bym się nie ubrała na luzie o: tak na podwórko ale: nie ubrałabym się na przykład w śliczną kieckę i w ogóle(.)w tym to ja ja w tym właściwie chodzę na podwórko a martyna tak by się ubrała do szkoły (.) ja nigdy bym się tak nie ubrała do szkoły (.) a ty?
- *well I wouldn't wear I would dress like that loose clothes in the playground bu:t I wouldn't wear for instance a beautiful dress never (.) in these clothes I I frankly go to the playground and martyna would dress like that for school (.) and I would never dress like that for school (.) and you?*
- T.11 O: ja też nie. ja chodzę w lepszych ciuchach
- *me neither (.) I wear better clothes*
- T.12 T: ja też (.) w ogóle
- *me neither (.) never*

Interaction 4

- T.1 T: ej! a ty ilu masz chłopaków?
Hey! How many boyfriends have you got?
- T.2 A: ma chłopaka!
She's got one!
- T.3 O: ja: nie:
No I don't
- T.4 A: miała!
She used to have!
- T.5 T: nie masz?
Don't you?
- T.6 O: nie mam ale miałam
I don't but I used to have
- T.7 T: naprawdę miała?
Did she?
- T.8 A: miała na [pewno
Sure she[did
- T.9 T: [miała ale nie [ma?
[She did but she [doesn't?
- T.10 O: [nie::
[no::
- T.11 A: nie
no
- T.12 T: czemu? ja mam
Why? I've Got one
- T.13 A: nie? w drugiej klasie miałaś jeszcze Krzyśka
No? In the second grade you had chris
- T.14 T: miała?!

- Did she?!*
- T.15 T: nie masz teraz?
you haven't got any now?
- T.16 O: bo mi się żaden nie podoba (...)[ten co był
'cause I don't like any (...)[the one
- T.17 T: [a poza szkołą?
And out of school?
- T.18 O: poza szkołą też nie mam
Out of school either

Interaction 5

- T.1 T: ja codziennie robię brzuszki
I do sit ups every day
- T.2 O: ja też
me too
- T.3 T: naprawdę? ile?
do you? how many?
- T.4(.)
- T.5 T: ja trzy razy dziennie po dziesięć i jeszcze kilkanaście przysiadów
I do ten sit ups three times a day and some crouches and springs
- T.6 O: ja muszę robić na czas
I must do in time

Interaction 6

- T.1 O: ja też panią b...h będę miała
I'm gonna have miss b...h
- T.2 T: (podśpiewuje słowa piosenki z radia)
(singing)
- T.3 O: a od czego będzie twoja wychowawczyni?
What does your form mistress teach?
- T.4 T: słucham?
Pardon?
- T.5 O: od czego będzie twoja wychowawczyni. czego będzie uczyła
What does your form mistress teach?
- T.6 T: ona jest wspomagająca. ale teraz mi zrobiłaś fajne loki!
She's assistant what great curls!
- T.7 O: no!
Yeah!

T.8 T: taki: gładki!
So smooth!

Interaction 7

T.1 T: co?
What?

T.2 A: jak był dzień otwarty w waszej szkole to powiedziała witamy pana piotra
When there was an open day at your school she said please welcome mister peter

T.3 T: wiem na pikniku
I know at the picnic

T.4 A: a on tak o::(śmiech)
And he went something like o:: (laughter)

T.5 T: ten bardziej na twarz
That one (curl) onto the face

T.6 T: usłyszał głos mojej mamy? to moja mama taka głośna jest? (śmiech)
Did he hear my mum's voice? is my mum so loud? (laughter)

T.7 O: przez dyktafon czy coś [takiego
with a dictaphone or [something