DISAGREEMENTS IN TELEVISION DISCUSSIONS: HOW SMALL CAN SMALL SCREEN ARGUMENTS BE?

Alexandra Georgakopoulou and Marianna Patrona

Abstract

Based on a case study, this paper explores the interaction between the act of disagreeing and the contextual parameters of Greek television panel discussions. The analysis of the data reveals that, in contrast to previous literature on disagreements in TV interview situations, the disagreements at hand are both (host)-unmediated and rendered less dispreferred by being delayed, indirectly posed, and/or mitigated. The discussion sheds light on the systematic ways in which the above is sequentially achieved so as to suit the parameters of the given context. It is argued that the preference features that accompany disagreements attend to the specialized floor-holding and turn-taking rights as well as to the public occasion of the interactions. As such, they index the participants' management and negotiation of their roles and identities as interviewees, interlocutors, and public speakers.

Keywords: Disagreements, Mediated/institutional context, (Dis)preference, Face, Participant roles and identities

1. Introduction

The study of the act of disagreement in ordinary conversation has been associated on one hand with Pomerantz's (1984) conversation analytic work, based on the notion of preference, and, on the other hand, with Brown & Levinson's (1987) concept of face in their model of politeness. The two approaches are distinctly different, not least since the former captures the systematic ways in which adjacency pairs are organized in the sequence of talk-in-interaction, while the latter is intended to refer to psychological motives or intentions of individuals, shaped by the (postulated as) universal need to be polite. Nonetheless, there are certain notable points of convergence in their conceptualization of disagreement. Specifically, both see disagreements as socially disruptive, hence dispreferred (i.e. least expected and desired second pair parts within adjacency pairs, see Pomerantz, idem) or face-threatening acts (i.e. "acts that by their nature run contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or the speaker", Brown & Levinson 1987: 70). This means that their occurrence in interactions jeopardizes the participants' drive towards an interpersonal consensus. In terms of face wants, they are seen as being directed against the addressee's positive face, i.e. one's desire to be liked, appreciated, and ratified by others. In view of the above, both approaches stress that disagreements are likely to be mitigated...
and downplayed, or, in similar vein, delayed between, within, and across turns. As Pomerantz explicated it, they tend to be temporally delayed and structurally complex. They are thus commonly prefaced by partial agreements (cf. Levinson 1983; Mulkay 1985; Sheldon 1992), hesitations, requests for clarification, questioning repeats, etc.

Another common denominator between Pomerantz's and Brown & Levinson's view of disagreement lies in that they both more or less explicitly assume conversational exchanges that strive towards maintenance and enhancement of collusion between the participants involved. Such goals seem to fit data of ordinary talk between intimates, but they have been found to inadequately account for other interactional contexts. More generally speaking, it has by now become apparent, especially within post-Brown & Levinson research, that the degree and type of linguistic strategies employed to mitigate face-threatening, or, equally, dispreferred acts cannot be postulated a priori but needs to be grounded in contextually sensitive, empirical data analyses. By extension, even the actual degree of face-threat or dispreference involved in any act, rather than being intrinsically defined, is inextricably bound up with the contextual (i.e. situational and cultural) exigencies of the speech event in which the act occurs (Blum-Kulka 1997; Hutchby 1992; Sifianou 1997; see also Kotthoff 1993 for the role of the local interactional context).

In the case of disagreements, the above has been attested to in certain contexts of argumentation, where it is the absence of disagreement that is dispreferred, as it is perceived as the failure to defend one's position (Hayashi 1996: 230). Similarly, disagreements constitute preferred responses in adjacency pairs where the first part is a self-deprecation (Pomerantz 1984: 57-101). Furthermore, TV panel interviews have been shown to encourage an overt production of disagreement between interviewees (Greatbatch 1992); in other words, disagreements in them are not systematically delayed or mitigated by the occurrence of preferences features associated with ordinary conversation. They are rather produced in accordance with the specialized turn-taking provisions of news interviews, i.e. they are typically elicited by and addressed to a third party (the interviewer). In this way, they are automatically mitigated.

Finally, Schiffrin's study (1984) of American-Jewish conversations has seriously problematized the notion of social disruptiveness as being at the core of the functions of the act of disagreement. Specifically, her analysis of American-Jewish conversations suggested that the frequent construction of disagreement may serve as a culturally bound means of signalling and enhancing sociability between interlocutors. In Schiffrin's terms, a sociable disagreement, while having the surface characteristics of confrontation, is lacking in seriousness. Put it differently, "it is a speech activity in which a polarizing form has a ratificatory meaning" (: 33). (Incidentally, the same type of sociable disagreement seems to abound in Greek conversations; see Tannen & Kakava 1992).

Studies such as the above illustrate the benefits of, and, subsequently, further need for a contextualized, sequential approach to the study of disagreements. Likewise, our study of disagreements in Greek television panel discussions departs from the assumption that the production (i.e. initiation, mitigation, and termination, if and when applicable) of disagreements as sequentially organized activities cannot be linked with specific interactional purposes and functions (e.g. minimization of face-threat or, equally, (re-)affirmation of sociability) a priori of data analyses. It is rather shaped by and makes visible the specific parameters of the local as well as larger context of an interaction; in this case,
the institutional context of television and the participant identities, roles, and relations that it prescribes. Our framework of analysis is informed, on one hand, by research in institutional talk within conversation analysis (cf. Drew & Heritage 1992; Heritage & Greatbatch 1991), and on the other hand, by the recent turn to contextualized studies within social pragmatics (see Blum-Kulka 1997), as outlined above. Advances in both areas suggest that the participants' interactional management of activities and tasks systematically evokes and makes relevant specific aspects of their context of interaction. More specifically, forms of interaction in institutional contexts have been shown to present systematic variations and restrictions on activities and their design compared to ordinary conversation (Drew & Heritage 1992: 19).

In the case of our data, the institutional parameters that define the speech event of TV discussions and that, as will be shown, are inextricably linked with the act of disagreements in them, can be outlined as follows: To begin with, unlike everyday conversational contexts, the participant roles are demarcated a priori in that interactants are readily identified as host and expert. This distribution of roles is realized through a specialized turn-taking system where participants are clearly differentiated in terms of their conversational rights and obligations. The pre-allocation of questions (by the host) and answers (by the interviewees) is the most salient feature of this institutional turn-taking system (cf. Drew and Heritage 1992). According to a tacit agreement, the host is the institutional regulator of the encounter who manages and controls the allocation, order, duration, and content of participant turns, as well as the development of topic. The host's institutional role thus involves, at least in principle, the highest degree of communicative rights.

Moreover, the speech event of television interaction is staged and produced for mass viewer audiences who are the primary recipients of talk (see Clayman 1991; Heritage 1985; Hutchby 1991, 1995; Heritage and Greatbatch 1991). This public exposure maximizes opportunities for the participants involved to enhance their public self-image (face) while at the same time posing greater risks for "losing face". Speaker face concerns can thus be assumed to act as a crucial driving force for all participants in the event. In addition, TV discussions are instances of goal- or task-oriented interaction in as much as they require a high degree of co-operation on the interactants' part towards developing a pre-arranged topical agenda within the time constraints specified for each program, and along the lines set out by the host. As a result, participant contributions are informed by an urgency of task and an understanding that conversational rights will be distributed evenly among speakers.

Finally, the goals of communication of TV discussions frequently dictate the display of a public debate by two (or more) opponent sides that can take the form of a full exchange and presentation of views in response to a current affair (as in the program analyzed in the present paper). In such cases, as Greatbatch aptly put it, TV interviews "offer a framework which not only has a built-in potential for disagreement between news interviewees, but also facilitates its overt production, pursuit, and escalation, while simultaneously enabling interviewers to exercise a large measure of control over its focus and duration" (1992: 300). Tellingly, the host of the program at hand, in an interview conducted by Patrona, emphasized the importance of "contrasting angles for a lively and informative discussion". He also affirmed that the more tension (emotional, confrontational, narrative) is built up during the conversation, the more "watchable" the program is.
Accordingly, studio participants are selected so as to enact a difference between perspectives.

In view of the above, it seems fair to assume that disagreement is a salient act in the interpersonal dynamics of the speech event at hand (cf. Bennett 1981; Hutchby 1992). By extension, it can be expected that the drive towards collusion and consensus or, similarly, the aims of enhancing involvement and intimacy, normally prevalent in ordinary friendly talk, will not be relevant or salient in this context. Instead, it can be hypothesized that the production of disagreement will be shaped by and make visible the context of a pre-set formal agenda of talk involving pre-allocated roles for the participants and turn-taking constraints. As our analysis will show, the interactional management and negotiation of those roles and constraints account for the fact that disagreements in our data, although being unmarked acts in the context of a "healthy debate", are systematically delayed and mitigated by preference features. They are also largely host-unmediated, that is, not addressed to the host. In this way, they contrast the findings of previous studies (Greatbatch 1992; cf. Hutchby 1992, 1997 on radio phone-ins), according to which disagreements in "mediated" discussions are host-mediated, and, in turn, direct and unmitigated. This difference in findings will be discussed and accounted for in the light of the contextual parameters of our data. Specifically, we will argue that both the acts of delaying and mitigating disagreements and the preference features by which this is done in our data index the participants' orientation to and management of the rights and obligations associated with their roles as interviewees as well as interlocutors in a public speaking occasion.

2. "The moment of truth": A Greek discussion program in context

The data for this study come from a large corpus of video-recorded episodes from four discussion programs broadcast on Greek television between 1996 and 1998. Unlike certain popular talk shows on Greek T.V. that seem to encourage lively, at best, and aggressive, at worst, debate between studio participants (be they experts or lay persons), I ora tis aληθιας (The moment of truth) is a high-profile weekly round table discussion program that mostly draws on political current affairs. It is broadcast in the late evening zone of one of the two biggest, in terms of audience ratings, private outlets in Greece, ANTENNA channel. The program's target viewers are (upper)-middle class men aged 30-45 and women aged 40-55. The host, Jannis Pretenderis, a respected member of the new generation of political interviewers and talk show hosts, is also a press journalist. The panel of participants is mostly made up of professional politicians, but also includes journalists, academics, and/or other institutional spokespersons, whose participation is deemed appropriate to the show's theme. The participation framework is often extended to participants appearing on 'windows' for limited periods of time, through direct connection from their on-the-spot location, usually a distant studio. In terms of seriousness of content, style of presentation, and coverage of current affairs, the program is comparable with programs of the calibre of BBC's Newsnight. In contrast to Newsnight, in The moment of

---

1 This corpus was collected by Patrona for the purposes of a Ph.D. thesis which is currently under way.
truth, studio and ‘window’ participants can interact with one another directly, namely without being mediated by the host.

The data of this paper are based on a discussion of the uprising in Albania in 1997. The crisis plunged the country in a state of anarchy, and resulted in the resignation of the then prime-minister of Albania, S. Berisha. Studio participants include Greek businessmen with factory units in the area, Antenna journalists with first-hand knowledge of the events, a well-known criminal lawyer, an opposition MP, and two ministers, of Public Order and Foreign Affairs, who appear on ‘windows’(the in the first half and the latter in the second half of the program).

Points of disagreement mainly arise through the studio participants' contributions, and are, as a rule, directed at the two ministers. This confirms the observation in the literature that TV interviews are perceived as fora where representatives of established power are challenged and held accountable to the larger public, the result being that disagreements tend to be targeted at government politicians (Hutchby 1991, 1997; Livingstone & Lunt 1994). Disagreements in the data at hand mainly concern the following points of contention:

a) The nature of attacks against businesses as part of the crisis: Were they specifically directed against the Greek minority or were they instances of a generalized state of anarchy within the Albanian state?
b) The Greek government's involvement in the crisis: Has support to the Greek minority of Albania been adequate and well timed?
c) The solutions to the problem and how the Greek government can contribute towards them.

The following sections examine the sequential positioning and preference features relating to the production of disagreements.

3. Sequential positioning of disagreements

As the larger corpus suggests about this type of panel discussion on Greek television, the participants' discussion, including their disagreements, is by and large unmediated by the host. As mentioned above, this contrasts Greatbatch's finding according to which disagreements between participants in panel interviews, rather than being produced in adjacent turns at talk, are routinely elicited by and addressed to the host as the third party (1992: 277). In the data at hand, the main sequential positions of disagreement are as follows:

a) Participant X disagrees with participant Y in the midst of Y's response to a host's question. This disagreement inevitably involves interruption, as can be seen in extract 1 below. In addition, it normally signals the beginning of a series of overlapping turns of escalating disagreement between the participants involved. This is indeed the case after line 4 below, when both the interrupted Minister (R) and the opposition MP (F) compete for the floor while engaging in a disagreement sequence (see extract 10):
While in Greatbatch's data, such interruptive departures from the norms of sequencing disagreements tend to implicate only brief and tentative speaking rights for the participant who initiates them, in the data this is not always the case. In fact, such interruptions frequently succeed in securing long turns during which the participant develops his views. In the next example, the lawyer's interruption (line 2) secures him the floor for an extended turn:

Extract 2 (K: Vice-minister of Foreign Affairs; L: well-known lawyer)
1 K: afti itani fusi pu provalame // stin evropaici enosi
2 L: ipurje mu, me sinxorite, de *elo na pa - den ine eci to simio - to ego pistevo, kala den ine
tora n' analisme istorika ti ejine ...
1 K: that was our position //in the EU
2 L: ((My)) minister, if I may, I don't wish to - this is not the point - my view is, we shouldn't be analysing a posteriori what indeed happened …

b) Participant X, assuming an interviewer's role, poses a question to participant Y that indirectly initiates disagreement. These self-selected bids for questions are normally not regulated by the host, despite what might be expected, but they are directly addressed to a named participant. In extract 3, the MP directly addresses an elaborate three-part question to the Minister of Public Order. His first attempt at interruption metalinguistically frames the questions to follow: "I'd like to ask three questions". This failing to be taken up, he rephrases his bid as "I only want to put two issues", and the floor is granted to him by the Minister. Subsequently, the MP poses the three questions that he initially referred to. By casting points of contention in a questioning format, he effectively disguises (and, as will be shown below, downplays) the act of disagreement:
Disagreements in television discussions: How small can small screen arguments be?

Extract 3 (F: opposition MP)

F: eçete ti blëroforia cirie ipurje c' esis, oti' ne - i sçessis, fi:no berisa poli diskoles, ce isos na eçome ce - paretisi tu fino ce to leo afo ja na pareteta ta metra sas, ëfieron - ën anisicite oti afit i polieëtnici âñami, - astinomicis voïgas, pu eyo simfóno m' afitin kat' arçin, borî na òeriëtë oti enisçii to berisa, ce triton - ïëla na ksero præmati, - den anisicité? eyo anisizo para poli, oti telikos ta epïçirisi i Alvania na epïripsi - efënes, stîn elinici eòtnici mionotita ce ti kanete esis epaftu?

Are you aware too Minister, that the relations between Fino and Berisha are very tense, and Fino might even resign, and I'm saying that on a note of precaution, second - aren't you concerned that the so called multi-national force that will police the area, which in principle I am not opposed to, could be taken as strengthening the position of Berisha, and third, I would in fact like to know, aren't you concerned? I'm ever so concerned, that the Albanian state might end up attributing blame ((for the crisis)) to the Greek minority, and what are you doing to prevent this from happening?

Importantly, this type of disagreement is indirectly initiated, that is, disguised in the form of another speech act. As in the above example, participants metalinguistically label their contributions as questions, remarks, observations, etc. In the next examples, the speakers similarly preface their turns with metalinguistic statements ("allow me to pose certain questions, to make some observations", "I'd like us to discuss the following Minister - first, let me remark the following"). In extract 5, disagreement is not only indirectly prefaced but also delayed (line 3 is the beginning of a long and convoluted turn), while in extract 6, the point of contention (i.e. the speed with which the Greek government handled the situation) is put forth immediately after the prefacing of the turn:

Extract 4 (L: well-known lawyer; K: vice-minister of Foreign Affairs)

1 L: Cirie ipurje epîreposë mu na kano - kapjes erotïsis kapjes epïsîmansis =
2 K: = veveos
3 L: ipate kat' arçin, - ipate oti apo tin arçi, i elinici cîvernisi iksere ti prepî na jini
1 L: Minister, allow me to pose certain questions, to make some observations=
2 K: Certainly
3 L: You said at the beginning that the Greek government knew what had to be done

Extract 5 (F: opposition MP)

1 F: Ne ëkelo na pume ta ekis cirie ipurje, - proton na kano mga paratirisi (0.1) asfalos iпаçri
2 kaðksterisi - ce ënete oti iparxi kaðksterisi os pros tin parevmasi sas, gso boruqate na parevmete, apo to jejvnoo oti tin esënonde para poli e: eci i elines - ...
3 I'd like us to discuss the following, Minister - first let me remark the following (0.1) of course there's a delay - and it's obvious that there's a delay regarding your ((the Greek government's)) involvement, as much as that has been possible, from the mere fact that it is felt by the Greeks in Albania - ...

It is much less frequent for participants to seek the host's permission to pose questions to other participants as a strategy of expressing disagreement. In such cases, permission is routinely granted. In one particular instance, the host was about to ask the Minister a question when he was half-way interrupted by a participant as follows: "May I ask something?"; the host readily withheld his question and gave the participant floor-
holding rights. At another point, the host mildly reacted to a bid for question as follows: "You too Nikos? Do you want to pose a question?", to which the response was: "No, not a question as such, just a small remark, Minister, if you could kindly allow me, it's an observation that might help change the tempo of our discussion and maybe light the discussion up too" ((smilingly)). As can be seen, the participant not only assumed the host's permission, but even by-passed it half way by directly addressing the Minister. The above relatively free arrangements of conversational rights are part and parcel of an overall interaction that allows participants to engage in (host) unmediated discussion.

As will be shown below, in both sequential positions already discussed, the act of disagreement is routinely mitigated or delayed. While this immediately evokes the preference features of disagreement in ordinary conversation, in this case it is uniquely context-dependent, that is, bound up with the turn-taking rules and constraints of the speech event in question. Turn-taking in informal conversations is far from strictly regulated; in this context, however, both the floor-bidding and the floor-holding, when unmediated by the host, are highly competitive. As such, they need to be engineered in ways that do not pose an immediate threat to the participant who already holds the turn or to the agenda management of the discussion. In fact, the host intervenes to end extended sequences of direct disagreement between two (or more) interactants when these appear to develop endlessly in circles and to threaten the normal flow of the discussion. This is illustrated below where the host finally resists extended floor-holding by L, through which L has indirectly expressed his disagreement with the minister. The host achieves this by acknowledging (as adequate) the minister’s response to the lawyer’s prior challenges.

Extract 6 (L: well-known lawyer; H: host)

1 L: &e // beno safto - &e beno safto - alo Qelo na po =
2 H: mi bume, sas parakalo - sas parakalo poli - e&ose mja' pandisi o ipurgos, na minume stin apandisi afti
1 L: I am not going to enter that issue - not at all - what I want to say is=
2 H: Let's not get into this, please, the Minister has already given a reply, let's leave it at that

In other cases, the host explicitly refers to the requirements of a pre-planned topical agenda, in order to persuade participants to put an end to their sequences of disagreement. In this way, while the host generally holds a back seat in the initiation and deployment of disagreements, he is instrumental in signalling a termination or exit from them.

4. The production of disagreements

According to previous research (Greatbatch 1992), the redundancy of preference features is extended to unmediated disagreements as well. In contrast, the unmediated disagreements of our data are as a rule delayed, indirectly posed, or mitigated.

4.1. Delaying disagreement

The classic device of agreement prefaces (of the “yes…but” type) that has been found to
Disagreements in television discussions: How small can small screen arguments be? 331

accompany disagreements in ordinary talk (Pomerantz 1984) is as a rule missing. Instead, the following devices are mobilized for the delay of disagreement:

i) *Indirect posing of disagreement:* Disagreement is posed indirectly, namely it is renamed or labelled as a different speech act (see examples 4 and 5 above). Participants employ this strategy not only for the initiation of disagreement but also amidst a disagreement turn when their floor-holding rights are challenged. In the extract below for instance, the MP attempts to maintain the floor in the face of repeated interruptions by the vice-minister (escalating in line 2), by labelling the speech act of his contribution as a question (line 4):

Extract 7 (P: opposition MP; K: Vice-minister of Foreign Affairs)

1 P: Oen // enoo aifo, enoo uisastici voitka
2 K: ce sinandikka ce me tin mionotita, ce // ekalesa edo
3 P: 8elo 8io 8emata akoma, ce: - na roitis kati akomi, tris erotisis 8elo, proton =
1 P: That's not // what I mean, I'm talking about substantial help
2 K: And I met up with ((representatives of)) the minority, and I invited them here
3 P: There's two issues, let me ask three questions if I may, first=

ii) *Minimizing personal commitment to a view, conveying it as the view of others.* By attributing opinions and statements to others, i.e. by shifting footing so as to claim the identity of the animator (physical producer of talk) as opposed to the principal and author (aspects of self responsible for the content of talk) of views (Goffman 1981), participants indirectly claim neutrality for themselves. Interestingly, in the literature, this strategy has been found to typify the contributions of TV hosts rather than of participant-interviewees (Clayman 1992, 1998). In extract 8 below, the reporter frames an indirect challenge to the minister as the viewpoint of the Albanian themselves:

Extract 8 (J: Reporter)

1 J: ... ce:... malista epitrepte mu, cirie ipurje, na sas metafero - os reporter ... pu vreθikan eci
2 sti broti prami stin alvania, epitrepts mu na sas theso ton eksis provlimatizmo, pu mas
3 meteferan i antropi, ce apo to noto ce apo to vora, iθan tin estisi ot i elas staθke, ja poli
4 cero sto plevo tu berisa, e: // ce isos perisotero iper to theon . apo itan enas provlimatizmos
5 ton opion idikos i eksejerθandes mas eketan ... 
1 ... and: allow me Minister to convey to you - as a reporter ... who happened to be in the line
2 of fire in Albania, allow me to put to you the following concern, that was put to us by the
3 people there, both in the north and in the south of Albania, they had the feeling that Greece
4 had stood by Berisha all the way, supporting him more than it should have done. This was a
5 concern that in particular the rebels voiced to us ...

Conveying the view of others allows the reporter to delay assuming responsibility for the challenge to the Greek government's position that is encoded in the view expressed. He does so further down by saying "I am sure national interests should come first ((i.e. in the decisions of the Greek government)) but I also think that one major parameter of those interests is to be found in the ways in which tens of thousands of people feel in Albania ...".
In addition to their disagreement prefacing function, reports of third parties' views provide a broader basis of support for the speaker's own opinions (cf. Hill & Irvine 1992). Thus, they can be argued to increase the validity of the views expressed by a disagreement or, similarly, of the speaker's right to construct a disagreement.

iii) Elaborate phrasing. A common strategy for prefacing -and thus delaying-disagreement. Consider the following example:

Extract 9 (L: well-known lawyer)

L: Pandos ipurje mu, nomizo ine idjetera anisci\-titiko to jeyonas oti simera, me civernisi et\-nicis simfliosis, pu ipotiflete, jati pistevo kalopista ofilo, òeli na pai ... ce na odijisi ti òora siis ekojes ... ce stin apokatastas tis omalotitas, iparçi proton enas notos, o opios me\-zi simera timera tula\-ciston, enomenos .. ce lei den gata\-keti ta opla an dem baretifik o Berisa, iparçi mia civernisi i opia me\-zi st\-mris tulaxiston, den gataferni na perasi - na pernai ap ti vuli ta nomos\-cedja ecina, pu ine vasici proipofusi ja na fiimiurjifiun i simulcics omalis djeksayojis tnv ekloyon, ce triton erçe\-te simera o Kazindante, o opios se makra ayorefi tu sti vuli, kata\-yori sigekrimena prosopa, ce to amerikaniko lobi, oti oli af\-ti c\'-emis i elas ine piso apo tus ekserjemenus ... ta idate ti ipe ...

In any case, Minister, I think it is particularly disconcerting that nowadays a government of national coalition which presumably, and let's assume good intentions, wishes to lead the country to elections and to bring back order, on one hand there's the south which united claims that the arms won't be handed down unless Berisha resigns, there's the government which has so far been unable to pass new legislation, that would form the basis for a smooth conduct of the elections, and third we've got Kazindante, who in a long speech in the Parliament today accuses the Americans and us Greece of having instigated the uprising, you heard what he said ...

While the first line of the lawyer's contribution above creates the anticipation of an upcoming contrasting view to that of the Minister, what follows is a long-winded statement with no explicit focus of disagreement. This in fact proves to be the prefacing of a mitigated disagreement, which is only uttered when the Minister interrupts the lawyer and asks him "Where is this all leading to?". The point of contention, subsequently, turns out to be the lack of the Albanian government's popular appeal and, by extension, the Greek government's ill judgement in supporting it. According to Baym (1996), the initial expression of disagreements followed by a (more or less relevant) elaboration of the speaker's views proliferates in computer-mediated communication, more specifically in discussion groups. In Baym's view, elaboration serves as a device for shifting attention from the act of disagreement to the expression of the speaker's point of view for the sake of "mass" recipients, i.e. the whole readership of the list. Comparably, in the data at hand, it is conceivable that the elaborate phrasing that frequently accompanies disagreements is exploited by panel members as a means for engaging in extended acts of public speaking, i.e. developing (persuasive) arguments for the sake of the home audience.
4.2. Mitigating/downgrading disagreement

While various devices are used by speakers to mitigate the act of disagreement, the discussion here will isolate the two most salient strategies for doing so. The former is an act-prefacing device, while the latter can also be positioned within turns:

i) Politeness markers such as epitrepste mu/an mu epitrepete (allow me/if you allow me), sas parakalo (please, if I may), me sin xorite (if you will excuse me) commonly accompanied by social aligners (use of addressed participant's name and/or title) and hedges (e.g. ligo: A little, miso lepto: for half a minute) are used as prefaces to disagreement turns (see line 2, extract 2, line 1, extract 4, line 1, extract 8 above). Such politeness markers (for a discussion see Sifianou 1992) frequently frame cases of interruptive or overlapping disagreement turns where increased competition for floor-holding is involved, as can be seen in the example below (markers in bold):

Extract 10 (continuation of extract 1; R: Minister of Public Order; F: opposition MP)
1 F: /iparçi c'gli apopsi, iparçi c'ali apopsi, ine meros tu evriteru elinizmu
2 R: sas parakalo
2 F: /eyo sas parakalo, ine meros tu evriteru elinizmu ((further down)) cirje ipurje, sas parakalo poli, & boro nq po pjo pola, na nas fotografiso an òelete peste mu c'eksijiste mu, jati esònande simera i vorjoipirotes egatalelimeni ap' tin elaðkés=
4 R: =exis to lete
7 F: eyo to leo?
8 R: = & // lete - & lete, kanete lanòzmeni // politici
9 F: epitrepste mu sas parakalo
1 F: /there's another view on the matter, there's another view, the Greek-Albanians) form part of a broadly defined hellenism
   if I may ((lit. please))
3 R: If I may too, they are part of broader defined hellenism
4 F: ((further down))
   Minister, if I may, I can't say more to depict the situation, if you wish though, please tell me
   and explain to me why at this point the Greek minority feel totally abandoned by Greece
6 F: It's you who are saying that
7 F: Is it?
8 R: =you're not just saying, you're also adopting the wrong //political line
9 F: if I may, please
10 R: 
11 F:

While serving as cues of disagreement, in this use, politeness markers also seem to act as devices of turn-taking negotiation and are thus tied up with the floor-holding constraints of the speech event.

ii) Questions: The first type of questions in the data involves questioning repeats (partial or even paraphrases). These form part of quick, interruptive turns which normally repeat the interlocutor's final utterance (extract 11 below, line 7) or selectively repeat parts of the interlocutor's turn (extract 12, line 4):
Extract 11 (R: Minister of Public Order; F: opposition MP)

1 R: Citakte ... sas ipa .. esis ta lete, den ta lene ali, monopolite esis =
2 F: = &e monopolome // sas voithame
3 R: afiti tin anisia, ce tin barusiaze ot si ofilate, bioti den iparci anisia, an ipirce anisia,
4 R: ta izame ce megalro revma =
5 F: = (high pitch) den iparci // anisia? Pu den iparci anisia? Pu den iparci anisia cirie
6 R: ipurje?
7 R: Exume tin ganonici, oso izame ce ton broiyumen no, akoma ce vorjoipirotes. Sas
8 R: pliroforo oti i vizes tus perazmenus mines // itan jiro stis eptakosjes tin imera
9 F: Ama lete den iparci anisia =
10 R: Ce simera ine jiro stis pendakosjes, afiti simeni oti &e niothe tlin anisia opos esis tin
11 R: emfanizete
12 F: Lipame para poli ala &en iste kala enimeromenos
13 R: Listen ... as I've already told you, it's you who are saying all this, not anyone else, you're
14 R: monopolizing=
15 F: =We're not monopolizing, /we're helping you
16 R: the so called concern presenting it as you shouldn't have been doing, cause there is no
17 R: concern, if there were, we'd have a bigger wave ((of refugees going into Greece from
18 R: Albania))=
19 F: (high pitch) is there no concern? is there no concern? is there no concern Minister?
20 R: We've got the normal flow (i.e. number of refugees), as we did last month, in particular
21 R: amongst the Greek-Albanians, and if you must know, the number of visas ((requested by
22 R: refugees to enter Greece)) //in the last few months was up to seven hundred a day
23 F: Well if you're saying that there is no concern
24 R: And at this point it's down to five hundred, this means that they don't feel the concern that
25 R: you've been claiming
26 F: I'm sorry, but you are not well-informed

Extract 12 (J: Antenna reporter; F: opposition MP)

1 J: An mu epi - ne safos - to: to andilamvanome afito - paratiro episis omos, oti eno milame, ja
2 paroci voithias, cece milisi tora me - ja paroci voithias, den ecete kani kalo loyo, ja tin -
3 oti - I elinici mionotita, stin alvania ta prostatefi, c' apo tin anapikisi ton kalon sceson tis
4 eladas, - me afiti ti zora =
5 F: = jati i voitha apoklii tis kales scesis?
6 J: If I may - of course I realize that, but I also noticed, how while we have been talking about
7 aid supplies, you haven't mentioned that the Greek minority in Albania would also be
8 protected by the development of good relations with Albania=
9 F: =Why would aid supplies exclude good relations?

In Pomerantz (1984), questioning repeats are treated as delays of disagreement, since they
can be interpreted as repeats for clarification or signals that the original statement was
misheard. In the data, this does not seem to be the case, given that most such questions are
not followed by an explicit expression of disagreement: They themselves form a mitigated
means of posing disagreement and are perceived as such by the addressee. For instance, in
extract 11 above, the minister immediately treats the MP's questioning repeat as a challenge
and proceeds to provide grounds that refute it (lines 8-10, 12-13). The MP in turn, by
repeating his question (even as a statement in line 11), clearly signals his disagreement with
his interlocutor's view. In fact, in line 14, the MP, who is still not convinced by the
minister's answer, chooses to close the specific sequence of dispute. This is commonly the
case in the data: Interlocutors pose questioning repeats not as true questions that expect an
Disagreements in television discussions: How small can small screen arguments be? 335

answer, but as rhetorical questions that challenge the current speaker's view.

The second type of questions is, as already suggested, metalinguistically predicted at the beginning of a disagreeing turn (see extract 3 above). As mentioned previously, these are reminiscent of the host's question-embedded statements (Clayman 1992, 1998), and simulate a footing of neutrality (ibid). Following Levinson's view, we can claim that, through such questions, participants hope to elicit a response that will count as part of an implicit disagreement, and will enable them to further develop their argument (Levinson 1992).

5. Concluding discussion

Based on a case study, the aim of this paper was to present the sequencing and production devices of disagreements in a Greek TV panel discussion in order to shed light on the ways in which they are shaped by but also index the institutional (mediated) context at hand. Contrary to previous studies of TV news interviews (see Greatbatch 1992), our analysis suggested that the disagreements in the data at hand are host-unmediated, that is, not directed to co-interviewees through the host-interviewer as their primary addressee. In turn, they tend to be delayed and/or mitigated by preference features. To provide a conclusive interpretation of the difference between our findings and those of previous studies is by no means an easy and straightforward task. To begin with, previous findings are confined to a specific genre of TV interaction, namely news interviews, in a specific cultural community (Britain). As such, there is no direct generic comparability between news interviews and our data, which fall into the broad category of discussion programs. A further complicating factor is that discussion programs have gained increasing popularity in recent years, developing their own, distinctive set(s) of norms or "communicative ethos" (Brand & Scannell 1991). These, like all other mediated discourses and norms, are in fact still evolving dynamically and in markedly heterogeneous and shifting forms (Fairclough 1995). In that sense, the norms of our data might well apply to discussion programs of other communities. In other words, it could be the case that, even within the framework of British TV, the current norms of expressing disagreement in discussion programs are more dissimilar to those of news interviews (as e.g. attested to by Greatbatch 1992) than to our data. As we can only speculate on the above, what is more fruitful to do on the basis of our findings is to tease out the aspects of the intimate relationship between the production of disagreement and the institutional context that prove to be relevant in our data. Further studies could shed light on the extent to which those aspects are significant in other comparable, even if culturally diverse, contexts of mediated communication.

The first important insight that our findings provide into the interpersonal roles of disagreement in the given context is that the act seems to have a dispreferred status (i.e. it is perceived as face-threatening). In terms of local sequencing and production, this is evidenced in the fact that its expression is delayed or mitigated by means of preference features. At first glance, this finding suggests an affinity between mediated and ordinary talk and is thus congruent not so much with studies of TV interaction as with research in computer-mediated communication, in which agreement and disagreement have been found to be consistent with those of oral conversation (cf. Baym 1996; Georgakopoulou 1997a). Our contention, however, is that this affinity, rather than being a case of replication of
everyday conversation norms, is a case of (more or less strategic) adaptation and reworking of those norms so as to suit the mediated context. We base our argument on the fact that, while the expression of disagreement is delayed and mitigated, as one would expect in ordinary talk too, the ways in which this is achieved are distinctly different to those of conversations.

Specifically, as was shown above, delaying disagreement does not involve preturn initiation gaps, requests for clarification, or agreement prefaces (Pomerantz 1984); instead, it takes the form of disguising or couching the act of disagreement as another speech act (e.g. as questions that only the host is in principle allowed to ask). In our view, this device is shaped by the turn-taking constraints operating in this context, inasmuch as it is aimed at ensuring floor-holding rights in an environment where there is strong competition for the floor, particularly since this tends to be negotiated directly between interviewees and not mediated by the host. In similar vein, the devices of mitigation of disagreement seem to simultaneously preface and downplay bids for the floor within the etiquette of a formal discussion. This is evidenced in the occurrence of politeness markers in interruptive disagreeing turns. In similar vein, questioning repeats in interruptions appear to serve as a quick and interpersonally "safe" way in which current speakers can draw attention to where the previous speaker's posed argument, is, in their view, at fault. In addition, by posing questions in their turns, interlocutors seem to exploit the indirectness that questions afford. (Tellingly, questions in this context form the primary means of appearing neutral, and, as a result, they are mostly employed by the host). Finally, disagreements tend to be expressed in long and convoluted turns, which provide the speakers with the opportunity to fully present their views while engaging in rhetorical acts of public speaking.

The above suggests that the interactional strategies used for the production of disagreement in our data at hand mostly relate to the identity of participants as a) interviewees in a discussion with its own formal rules and turn-taking constraints, and b) speakers in a public forum. The former role dictates an etiquette of floor-bidding and turn-taking; that involves ways in which to manage instances of stepping out of the basic obligations of an interviewee, as, in our case, in host-unmediated, self-initiation of direct disagreement turns. In turn, the identity of a public speaker is oriented to when speakers use their construction of disagreement with their interlocutors as a point of departure for engaging in a lengthy development of their own point of view, while at the same time undermining alternative claims and/or representations of fact. This sort of essentially rhetorical act is arguably put on with the overhearing (home) audience in mind.

Following form the above, we can claim that the dispreference or threat involved in the act of disagreeing in the data at hand does not seem to be related to the needs of (re)affirming intimacy, involvement, and consensus, prevalent in ordinary conversation between friends or, more generally, in informal contexts (Georgakopoulou 1997b). Instead, it proves to be intimately linked with the mediated context of talk, in particular, the participants' management of their departure from prescribed roles as well as their self-presentation in a public occasion of speaking.

The above findings have potentially interesting implications for the conceptualization of dispreference and face-threat in disagreements and other acts. Our point of departure was that no act is inherently dispreferred or face-threatening, and that only contextual analyses can shed light on the local definitions of and interactional orientations to an act's dispreference as well as on the ways in which this is signalled or
mitigated. On the basis of our findings, it is worth investigating in various speech events
the concepts' intimate relation with interactional activities and constraints (e.g. rules of
turn-taking and floor-holding, prior specifications of topical agenda), on one hand, and, on
the other hand, with local enactments of larger (and, at times, pre-allocated) participant
roles, relations, and identities.

References


Questions and politeness: Strategies in social interaction. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 56-
289.

University Press.


Georgakopoulou, A. (1997a) Self-presentation and interactional alliances in e-mail discourse: The style-


