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## **Introduction**

People believe in sex differences and in fact, our lives are strongly marked by differences between men and women. Taken for granted, first names, forms of address, voices, clothing and behavioural norms ritualize gender identities. This leads to a certain way of presenting oneself not only as an individual, but also as a member of a group, of society. Language is one of the most important tools for creating one's identity, be it the gender or the professional one. Moreover, language has the power to reflect and construct social inequalities. At the same time, language forms our perceptions of femininity and masculinity as well as it conveys these images (Falger 2001: 39).

The connection between the use of language and the sex of its speakers has been examined in innumerable studies. With the rise of feminist studies of language, the notions of 'sex' and 'gender' as well as the dominance of the male language over the female one came up. Soon it was realized that women used a speech style considered to be less effective and powerless, as suggested by Robin Lakoff in 1975. Moreover, sex-related stereotypes, which were rooted in society, became more and more relevant for researchers.

Within language and gender studies, researchers only recently focus increasingly on the role that linguistic strategies play in the construction of gender identities in workplace settings. The professional workplace serves as an excellent example for studying linguistic inequalities between men and women since professionals are said to prefer a powerful, i.e. a male language.

The thesis is structured into three parts. The first chapter presents an overview of existing theories on the study of language and gender, with the ideological starting point being a merely linguistic one, without ranging into too feminist or too antifeminist perspectives. The first part on general differences in gendered language is divided into two chapters: first of all, the terms 'sex' and 'gender' are clarified, then sex-related stereotypes and

their importance for the research on gender and language examined, the three indispensable approaches of *difference*, *dominance* and *deficit* briefly introduced. Secondly, general characteristics of male and female language use are focused on, i.e. differences in phonological and grammatical choices will be discussed.

The second part of this thesis, “Women’s language” meets “Man-made language”, deals with Robin Lakoff’s understanding of a typical feminine language as distinct from a “man-made” one as suggested by Dale Spender. First of all, we will have a look at female talk and how femininity is created through discourse. Features which are supposedly feminine are presented and discussed. Secondly, male discourse is placed in the centre of attention. We will focus on characteristics of discourse produced by men and how masculinity is established through language. Lastly, a short section on how communication between men and women can fail will conclude the chapter.

The third part of the present thesis deals with gendered discourse in public life, i.e. in the workplace. Various speech acts performed in business contexts are analyzed in order to find out to what extent and how sex-related stereotypes function in workplace discourses.

## **PART I: GENERAL DIFFERENCES IN GENDERED LANGUAGE**

### **1. Interdisciplinary perspectives**

Language and gender studies have attracted the interest of many researchers in numerous different academic fields which explains the richness and diversity of existing information and data on this topic.

The field in question is a clearly interdisciplinary one, encompassing work from anthropologists, discourse analysts, feminist scholars, applied linguists, sociolinguists, psycholinguists and researchers from gender studies (Holmes & Meyerhoff 2005: 1-2).

Thus, all these academic areas contribute various diverse insights into the study of the relation between language and gender and shall, therefore, be discussed to clarify their scope and importance for language and gender research.

#### **1.1. Linguistic anthropology**

Interest in the connection between language and culture gave rise to the interdisciplinary research area of linguistic anthropology, sometimes also referred to as 'ethnolinguistics', combining notions of linguistics and anthropological research (Duranti 1997: 1-2). For many decades, linguistic anthropology enjoyed the reputation of being concerned with preserving endangered [North American] languages. Over time, it has grown to provide expertise on "a wide range of linguistic and other cultural phenomena", such as "[...] sign languages, literacy, socialization, gender, speechmaking, conflict, religion, identity [...]", to only name a few (Duranti 2004: xiii). In many respects, linguistic anthropology extends along sociolinguistics, but tries to discover the meaning behind the use, misuse or non-use of language, taking culture as a starting point (Foley 1997: 3).

Franz Boas, known as the founding father of American anthropology, claimed in the 1930s that anthropology consisted of four fields which were cultural anthropology, archaeology, physical anthropology and linguistic anthropology (Wasson 2009: 194). He defined linguistic anthropology as

“the study of culturally shaped communication patterns around the world”. Boas’ idea of anthropology was a holistic one which means that in order to be able to understand the various cultures’ point of view of the world, it was of great necessity for him to understand their languages (2009: 195). In fact, linguistic anthropologists continue to stress the importance of language “as a set of practices”, constituting a community’s way of living and interacting together (Duranti 1997: 4).

Within linguistic anthropology, language is treated as “a social tool and speaking as a cultural practice“. At the core of such studies are the users of language belonging to particular communities (1997: 1-3). Linguistic anthropologists focus their work on topics such as

the politics of representation, the constitution of authority, the legitimation of power, [...], the cultural construction of the person (or self), the politics of emotion [...], cultural contact and social change (1997: 3-4).

When it comes to linguistic anthropologists, the most well-known include Benjamin Lee Whorf and Edward Sapir who in the 1920s and 1930s were both concerned with the interrelationship among language, culture and reality. Later, in the 60s and 70s, Dell Hymes and John Gumperz focused their studies on “situated communication and language use”, meaning that in the centre of attention was the actual process of communication. Both, Hymes and Gumperz were interested in “linguistic *practices*” of which speakers of a language make use in communication (Wasson 2009: 195).

As opposed to sociolinguistics, linguistic anthropology is not only interested in finding out about how language is used, but also in how far a certain language is used to represent “actual or possible worlds” (Duranti 1997: 3). Seen from a linguistic anthropologist’s point of view, the perception of the world is represented by language and connections to the world are made through language. Hence, linguistic signs are never neutral because they are used to construct and shape cultural differentiations. These differentiations are made obvious through “concrete acts of speaking“ (1997: 5). It is these speech acts where the relevance of

language and gender research comes in since scholars from all branches look at possible differences between men and women in performing these acts. Linguistic anthropologists put emphasis on so-called speech communities which get reshaped through these concrete acts of speaking (1997: 6).

The term 'speech community' is used in linguistics to make generalizations about a group of people who share a language e.g. the English speech community (Mey 1998: 947). Gumperz denotes speech communities as

any human aggregate characterized by regular and frequent interaction over a significant span of time and set off from other such aggregates by differences in the frequency of interaction (Gumperz 1964: 137).

Special features of a speech community are that they exist across political borders, comprise various religious beliefs and cultures, and include dialects as well as idiolects, which also means that genderlects are part of the speech repertoire of such a community (Mey 1998: 948).

## **1.2. Sociolinguistics**

Sociolinguistics treats language as a social and cultural phenomenon, investigating the relationship between language and society and drawing on findings from other social sciences like sociology and psychology (Trudgill 2000: 21). To quote from Joan Swann (2004: 287), sociolinguistics is

[a]n orientation to the study of language that stresses the inter-relationship between language and social life, rather than focusing narrowly on language structure.

The importance of sociolinguistics in social interaction can be seen in the various studies that have been conducted on how, for example, "language can be used for manipulating relationships and achieving particular goals" (Trudgill 2000: 108). Moreover, in a sociolinguistic study, the interest lies on questions like why language is used differently in different social contexts and hence, what social functions language serves (Holmes 2001:1).

Social context has a strong impact on how people express themselves (2001: 1). This is called “stylistic variation”. People of different social backgrounds, age, race, sex, education or profession will also be likely to differ in their way of speaking which is then referred to as “social variation”. Researchers are trying to prove that such linguistic variation occurs systematically, following a certain structure (Coates 1986: 4).

Since many areas of study can be covered by the umbrella term ‘sociolinguistics’, Coupland and Jaworski (1997:1) state that in fact, the term sociolinguistics serves best to represent the research from linguistics and social sciences. It embodies “multilingualism, social dialects [genderlects, idiolects], conversational interaction, attitudes to language [prestige, status], language change [language shift or death], and much more” (Mey 1998: 892). Subbranches are theoretical and applied sociolinguistics: the former works with “formal models and methods”, whereas the latter studies language “in various areas of public life, for example, school, courts, [workplaces] etc.” (1998: 892).

Regarding the study of the link between gender and language, Swann maintains that since the early 1970s, there has been a turn from a general analysis of gender-related linguistic differences to a more modern investigation of ‘doing gender’ in social contexts (Swann & Maybin 2008: 21). From the 70s onwards, the main focus of studies lay on defining men and women as distinct social groups and identifying related

differences in the use of certain linguistic features [which became] associated with speakers’ lifestyle, social networks, and other factors indirectly related to gender [...] (2008: 22).

The increasing interest in women and their language stems from the publication of Lakoff’s “Language and Woman’s Place” in 1975 and the coinage of the term “women’s language”, a designation derived from analyses of spoken interaction (2008: 22). Today’s studies in sociolinguistics on language and gender centre around the question of how (gender) identities and social (power) relations are constructed linguistically (Cameron 2005: 482).

### 1.3. Pragmatics

The linguistic research area of pragmatics deals with language use and users. In its beginnings, philosophers rather than linguists were involved in pragmatic studies and faced linguistic problems they were unable to explain, for example, presuppositions, users and contexts (Mey 2001: 4). Traditional linguists treated pragmatics as a “waste- paper basket” for data coming from semantics. Over time, pragmatics came to be called the more practical approach in order to distinguish it from the “formal way of describing language”, the theoretical approach which was typical of linguistics (Mey 1998: 716).

The development of ‘pragmatics’ dates back to the 1960s and 1970s, when a wave of rejection of the Chomskian “syntax-only approach“ was triggered (Mey 2001: 4) and great enthusiasm about pragmatics came up worldwide. Linguists, Katz and Lakoff among others, claimed that it was not possible to separate the study of syntax from language use (Leech 1990: 1-2). This claim paved the way for pragmatics as an independent linguistic discipline.

Before that, pragmatics was considered a study field belonging to the semiotic trichotomy next to syntax and semantics, an organization of semiotics as proposed by Charles Morris as early as in 1938 (Levinson 1983: 1). Teun A. van Dijk comments that from the 1970s onwards, changes in the field of the study of language as well as the yet established subdisciplines sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics and discourse analysis brought about the need for discussing “the old semiotic label of ‘pragmatics‘“ (v. Dijk 1995 in Kasher 1998: 375). With the publication of John Searle’s Speech Act Theory in 1969,

[p]ragmatics soon came to be associated with [...] the analysis of [...] ‘speech acts’, being accomplished by expressing specific utterances in specific interpersonal or social contexts (v. Dijk 1995 in Kasher 1998: 375).

Later, pragmaticians began to concern themselves with politeness phenomena and strategic spoken interaction. Therefore, shifting the focus from correct use of syntax to the language user, pragmatics is a clear

contrast to traditional linguistics where the focus lies on “structures that the grammar (the language system) allows [...] to produce” (Mey 1993: 35).

### **1.3.1. Towards a definition of ‘Pragmatics’**

Since the breakthrough of pragmatics as linguistic discipline, there have been numerous attempts to delimit and define it. The term „pragmatics“ can be traced back to the Greek *pragma / pragmatikos*, with the English meaning of activity or affair (Brown 1993, 2: 2311 ‘*pragmatic*’).

The earliest definition, as given by Charles Morris in 1938, alludes to ‘pragmatics’ as “the science of the relation of signs to their interpreters [...]” (Morris 1938: 30). In the course of time, this delineation has been redefined and expanded. So, for instance, Jacob Mey intends to modernize Morris’ illustration by adding that “interpreter“ would be replaced by “language user“ and “sign“ by “message“ (Mey 1993: 35).

Still, the notion of the semiotic trichotomy syntax, semantics and pragmatics remains influential in the linguists’ work. Most of all, a clearcut division of semantics and pragmatics is not easy to postulate which leads Leech and Levinson to contribute various thoughts on these close linguistic neighbours (Mey 1998: 725). Leech agrees that semantics as well as pragmatics deal with meaning, only differing in the manner of ascribing it: while pragmatics links meaning with the user of a language, semantics disregards user and context of use (Leech 1990: 6). He further explains that there can be “pragmatics inside semantics“, referred to as semanticism, “semantics inside pragmatics“, called pragmaticism, and lastly complementarism, which means that “[pragmatics and semantics] both complement each other, but are otherwise independent areas of research“, of which Leech himself is a supporter (Mey 1998: 725).

Levinson, quite unsatisfied with attempts by colleagues to define the subject area, argues that pragmatics comprises language structure which is dependent on context and situation, as well as rules of how to use language and of understanding it. According to Levinson,

[p]ragmatics is the study of those relations between language and context that are *grammaticalized*, or encoded in the structure of a language,

restricting the field of study to linguistic structures and phenomena such as deixis, speech acts and presupposition, excluding many other topics (Levinson 1983: 9). Which ever approach is preferred, it was Morris already (1938: 30) who saw pragmatics as science

[...] with all the psychological, biological, and sociological phenomena which occur in the functioning of signs.

Van Dijk (1995 in Kasher 1998: 376) adds that pragmatics has no clearcut borders since it extends to other disciplines, especially to sociolinguistics. Hence, it is understood as an interdisciplinary research area. Pragmatics gives

*a general cognitive, social, and cultural perspective on linguistic phenomena in relation to their usage in forms of behaviour* (Verschueren 1999: 7; italics in original).

According to this, 'pragmatics' can be defined as dealing with the influence of situational context and interpersonal interaction on spoken language (v. Dijk in Kasher 1998: 376). As with many other disciplines, there is no one and only true definition of what pragmatics is since every pragmatician has their own interpretation and definitions are subject to change.

### **1.3.2. Sociopragmatics**

When one thinks of language in social contexts, sociolinguistics is the discipline that comes to one's mind. Sociolinguists, especially in the field of (socio)pragmatics, explore "aspects of the multitudinous relationship between language, society and culture" (Márquez-Reiter 2005: 191). Sociopragmatics is "the sociological interface of pragmatics", based on what interlocutors conceive to be valuable and socially as well as culturally relevant. Studies concentrate on rather locally occurring language phenomena and are, consequently, culture-specific (Leech 1983: 10- 11).

When examining language in its sociocultural surrounding, it is necessary to be aware that

sociocultural contexts can be as broad as a speech community or a community of practice or as narrow as interpersonal communication (Márquez-Reiter 2005: 191-192).

Sociolinguistics, in general, focuses on the interrelationship between spoken and written discourse and social variables like age, sex, race, class. Sociopragmatics, however, concerns the study of discourse in sociocultural contexts. Therefore, one of the main interest areas of sociopragmatics is “meaning in interaction“ and to find out how “cultural norms [...] underlie the interactional features of a given social group in a given social context“ (Márquez-Reiter 2005: 192).

#### **1.4. Feminist approaches/ Gender studies**

So far, various linguistic disciplines have been discussed because they shed light on issues concerning language and gender, drawing mostly on linguistic, social and context matters. However, research in language and gender is mostly associated just with women and their language use. This is a reason why the study of language and gender is very much related to feminism, which takes extralinguistic aspects into consideration.

Feminism deals with inequalities between men and women, often from a political viewpoint, and is, therefore, also interested in linguistic inequalities due to the fact that “language plays [part] [...] in reflecting, creating and sustaining gender divisions in society” (Talbot 1998: 15).

Feminist language and gender research focused in its beginnings on the role language acquired in the public spheres of work, education, and politics. This can be observed when connecting language use and the marginal position of women in these spheres (Cameron 2005: 496).

As Cameron (2005: 496) points out, feminist linguists dealt with silence, (male) dominance, stereotypes related to female speech styles and the undervaluation of the female “voice” in public spheres. Since organizations and institutions were, and still are, male-dominated, women tend to adapt their style of speaking to the male one in order to be accepted professionally (2005: 497).

Cameron (1992: 54) is convinced that

feminists must pay attention to beliefs about male and female speech, because prejudice is often more powerful than fact.

She provides a good overview of how feminist approaches to the study of language and gender have shifted: in the 'modern feminist approach', the sex and gender distinction has been taken to a new level. Gender is a social construct, whereas sex is biologically based. It is assumed that gender identities as well as gendered language use are something one acquires in the socialization process, i.e. in the process of growing up. Thus, gender is something one has. Modern feminists focus their researches on the differences between men and women, assuming that both sexes represent a homogeneous group, concentrating on mainstream features like being white, belonging to the middle-class, being monolingual as well as heterosexual. The differences which one is eager to find universally, are then explained as resulting from social structures, that is, men being the dominant, powerful group and women an inferior subgroup (Cameron 2005: 484).

The 'postmodern feminist approach', as Cameron puts it, changes the picture: again, the distinction of sex and gender is questioned, arguing that not only gender, but also sex itself is a social product. Moreover, gender identities and gendered behaviours are not features one has, but an act of performance which goes back to Judith Butler's idea of 'performativity'. What is new is that there is a shift from difference to diversity, which means that differences between the studied groups are as equally important as similarities. Explanations are given in terms of a community of practice (CofP), i.e. the fact that masculinity and femininity are created in specific social settings, depending on context. Such CofPs occur only locally, but not universally. Another shift is the one from mainstream focus to 'other' gender identities in relation to sexual identities (Cameron 2005: 484).

The most influential feminist approach to gender studies has been what is called "Third wave feminism", which is mostly based on Judith Butler's

concept of performativity and the understanding of gender as a performative act, following social constructionist perspectives. What has also become often utilized in feminist research is the notion of communities of practice which allow for an analysis of language behaviour in specific surroundings and contexts (Mullany 2009: 215). Here, feminist researchers adopt Eckert and McConnell-Ginet's (1992: 464) definition:

A community of practice [CofP] is an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in an endeavour. Ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, values, power relations – in short, practices – emerge in the course of this mutual endeavor.

Eckert and McConnell-Ginet stress “practices” because it is not language per se which is crucial to a CofP, but “the whole range of discursive competences” by which people create their identities, “including their gendered” ones (Walsh 2001: 3).

Since (gender) identities are created through discourse, feminist gender studies also examine discourse, applying critical discourse analysis (CDA). The Foucaultian delineation of “discourse” explains that discourses are “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault 1972: 49). There is a short description of critical discourse analysis (CDA) in the next section.

### **1.5. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is rooted in various linguistic disciplines, but is an established discipline in its own rights which, however, cannot be called holistic since it encompasses more than one methodology and no specific theory can be ascribed to it (Weiss & Wodak 2003: 11-12). CDA puts emphasis on

gender issues, issues of racism, media discourses, political discourses, organizational discourses or dimensions of identity

and relates these topics to the study of language and gender (2003: 12). CDA is nowadays a widespread type of analysis, understanding language as social interaction in specific situations. Language is not merely a system of signs, but rather a “mode of doing, being and becoming” since it

is through discourse that people shape their identities and roles (2003: 13). Consequently, CDA describes linguistic phenomena as a series of affective, cognitive and situational cultural acts. Discourses

are systematically organized sets of statements which give expression to the meaning and values of an institution. Beyond that, they define, describe and delimit what is possible to say and not possible to say. A discourse provides a set of possible statements about a given area, topic, object, process that is to be talked about. In that it provides description, rules, permissions and prohibitions of social and individual actions (Kress 1985: 6-7).

The overall aim of CDA is to encourage “progressive social change” (Sunderland 2008 in Harrington 2008: 9). Since gender and discourse have become inter-related by discourse analysts, CDA “has accordingly been seen as a flexible, incisive and valuable tool for the study of gender” since it has always been connected to problematic social issues (Wodak 2008 in Harrington 2008: 228).



## **PART I: GENERAL DIFFERENCES IN GENDERED LANGUAGE**

### **2. General preliminaries**

#### **2.1. 'Sex' and 'gender' – a definition**

The sex of a person is the first thing people notice when they meet each other. The distinction of male and female is so basic that it is taken for granted. Thus, it is hardly surprising that sex is also represented in every language. In English, for example, the two sexes 'male' and 'female' are represented linguistically in the grammatical terms 'he/she', 'boy/girl', 'man/woman' as in many other tongues. Sex is, however, not only articulated grammatically, but also lexically and, what is of greater interest here, in relation to 'gender' (Trudgill 2001: 61-63).

So, what is then the difference between 'sex' and 'gender'? Developed in feminist research, the terms 'sex' and 'gender' have caused heated debates. 'Sex' refers to the biological features of a man or a woman, i.e. the reproductive features. 'Sex' is regarded as a fixed category, whereas 'gender' is something socio-culturally constructed and therefore, changeable. The concept of 'gender' will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter since it is regarded as a controversial subject. Many researchers assume that "[gender] difference is part of the essence of every human being" (Holmes & Meyerhoff 2005: 8).

From an essentialist point of view, 'gender' is something we have or are, in other words, 'gender' is part of our self-concept and personality (Crawford 1995: 8). Within the frame of the social constructionist approach, 'gender' is a social construct which does not exist as a special trait in persons but in the actions they perform, giving access to power and resources (1995: 12). Supporters of this approach speak of "doing gender", which has been widely accepted by feminist scholars. In recent years, there has been a tendency in the gender discussion

away from essentialized notions of [a] gender to [...] people's participation in their immediate and most salient social groups (Holmes 2005a: 8).

In other words, in more modern gender theories, people are not classified by their 'gender', but by the way they interact and communicate within a community. Janet Holmes argues that the notion of gender is still relevant, especially in daily life, even though it might seem inadequate and dichotomous: "However, [...] gender as a social category *matters*" (Holmes 2005a: 9). Even more so,

most people intuitively agree on what gender categories mean, and share a common conception of gender (2005a: 11).

Linked to this is the fact that gender identity is socially constructed, i.e. every girl and every boy acquires their gender identities through what is being expected socially. Therefore, "gender is treated as the accomplishment and product of social interaction" (2005a: 11). Falger supports the idea that 'gender' is a product of socialization saying that as of their birth, male as well as female human beings are treated in different ways, having other expectations to fulfil and make, thus, distinct experiences. In other words, they grow up in two separate worlds. As a consequence, boys and girls develop specific ways of thinking, feeling and acting which result in the social product of 'gender' (Falger 2001: 27).

Analyses focus, then, on how people actually "do" gender (identity) when, for instance, talking to each other in a business meeting. This "doing gender" is shown through linguistic choices conversational participants make (Holmes 2005a: 11). Shari Kendall argues that

women and men do not generally choose linguistic options for the purpose of creating masculine or feminine identities; instead, they draw upon gendered linguistic strategies to perform pragmatic and interactional functions of language and, thus, constitute roles in a gendered way (Kendall quoted in Holmes & Meyerhoff 2005: 604).

Brown and Levinson (1983: 53) assumed that salience of gender is best given in either mixed-sex interaction in which participants are potentially sexually accessible or in same-sex conversations in gender-specific tasks.

They earn critique from feminists who fear that such a distinction of sex and gender is immediately linked to the assumption that 'gender' implies heterosexuality (Holmes & Meyerhoff 2005: 23).

From the discussion above, it is made clear that we are dealing with two very problematic terms. Earlier works on the study of language and gender by linguists used 'gender' in terms of its use as a grammatical description (Bergvall 1999: 274). Later, the definitions of gender as social construct and sex as biological feature were adopted. Still, researchers struggle with the question of where to start:

Should we and can we, as researchers, begin with the sex-based categories FEMALE and MALE, exploring their differences and similarities in the instantiation in WOMEN and MEN? Or do we begin with GENDER, examining the social construction of FEMINITY and MASCULINITY, and their effects on language? (Bergvall 1999: 275).

Moreover, even though theorists are tempted to use 'female' and 'male' for describing biological rather than social features of human beings, still, when it comes to popular descriptions, 'gender' is preferred over 'sex' in order to avoid relation to sexuality as such (Bergvall 1999: 276). What is more, Bergvall (1999: 276) claims that, if used publicly, 'gender' represents a way of covering the "old assumptions of basic sexual dichotomies of female and male". Judith Butler takes it a step further and says that

[i]f the immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called 'sex' is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all (Butler in Bergvall 1999: 276).

## **2.2. Sex-roles, self-concept and related stereotypes**

### **2.2.1. Sex-roles and self-concept**

It is a common belief that men and women speak differently. They speak about different subject matters and do so in different manners of speech. Moreover, we take the distinction of female and male speech for granted and are more or less content with the fact that “sex roles are our most salient social roles” (Kramer 1977: 151-152). Sex roles are developed during a long socialization process.

Boys and girls experience in various periods of life distinct socialization forms. Each sex has to live up to certain principles which are crucial to the development and manifestation of social order. What is more, as adults, women and men often become judged by their ability of adapting to these principles. As a matter of fact, these principles are based on clichés and stereotypes which, on the one hand, are shaped by social norms and beliefs, and, on the other hand, influence sex-role acting and thinking. Through these stereotypes, identity can be created since members of a certain society believe them to be true and valid. The more the individual can identify him- or herself with the stereotypical and ideal image of a woman or a man, the more likely it is that the gender identity will be established. This gender identity is so important for the self-concept of an individual, but still is something culturally learned since “man” or “woman” are culturally loaded terms (Falger 2001: 28).

The specific roles of a boy or a girl are learned from early childhood onwards. Girls tend to play in small groups, with their best friends at the core of social interaction outside their families. Friendship is a crucial concept in young girls’ lives since friends share everything with each other, even their secrets. Moreover, girls also like to play cooperative games in which they learn how to be loyal, close to somebody, equal and responsible for each other. Girls are praised for being nice and behaving in a considerate way, but are regarded as headstrong and conceited if they assert themselves (Falger 2001: 29-31). Boys, on the contrary, play

in bigger groups, assuring their status and power not only through physical strength, but also by using language in a powerful and effective way so that what often starts as a joke ends up in a heated discussion and verbal arguments (2001: 30). This is the result of a winner-loser- way of thinking which boys learn from a very early age onwards. They are “drilled” in thinking and acting competitively since strength is regarded a positive trait, giving in is equated with weakness (Oppermann 1995: 60).

Male behavioural patterns have been given prominence through socialization which makes it difficult for women to act in the same ways as men do. Consequently, culturally constructed paradigms of “male” and “female” behaviour arise and are perceived by society as the norm as well as stereotype.

### **2.2.2. Sex-role stereotypes in speech**

Sociolinguistic studies have investigated “sex-based differences in speech behaviour” since sex-role stereotypes have become an interesting area of research (Kramer 1977: 151). They do not only provide prejudicial assumptions about the speech behaviour of men and women, but also present stereotypes about the two sexes in general (1977: 152). Sex-role stereotypes result, according to Paul Rosenkrantz et al. (1968: 287), from “consensual beliefs about the differing characteristics of men and women in our society [...]”. Since rooted in society, sex-role stereotypes influence how men and women see themselves; they develop their self-concepts according to what is regarded as more prestigious. It is through these stereotypes that higher value is given to masculine than to feminine speech and speech behaviour (1968: 287).

Hence, stereotypical traits in speech have an impact on the actual behaviour in interactional conversation since both males and females act upon what is expected socially of them and upon what they themselves expect of others. Sex-role stereotypes come into play especially in situations in which the interlocutors meet for the first time or do not know each other well enough (Kramer 1977: 152). In order to start a

conversation, interlocutors stick to their stereotypical beliefs and assumptions. Broverman and her colleagues are convinced that through sex-role standards, pressure is put upon individuals to behave in traditional, prescribed ways (Broverman 1972 in Puka 1994: 192).

Still, these stereotypes prevail due to the fact that, regardless of sex, age, education and religion, both men and women perceive these notions as valid since they are common knowledge within society and across generations. Cheri Kramer points out traits which American men find essential in male speech: “adventurous, self-confident, assertive, restless, ambitious, self-centred, shrewd, and competitive”. American women as well rate self-assertion as socially desirable (Kramer 1977: 158-159). Furthermore, Kramer states that women’s speech, in contrast to male speech, is “open, self-revealing, gentle, polite, enthusiastic” – referring to positive qualities – and is characterized by containing gossip (1977: 159).

In general terms, men assume female speech to contain “more gibberish” and to be too trivial in the choice of topic. Even though males perceive women speech’s as “friendly, gentle, enthusiastic [and] grammatically correct”, it is not regarded as being as relevant and important as male speech (1977: 159). Robin Lakoff said

that a female is ‘damned if she does’ talk like a lady – and is thus seen as ineffective – and she is ‘damned if she doesn’t’ – and is thus seen as violating societal norms (Lakoff 1973 in Kramer 1977: 160).

Interestingly enough, men and women agree strongly on differences in speech behaviour in relation to the sexes, which, again, is necessary in order for stereotypes to exist (Rosenkrantz 1968: 288). Even though some men accept positively valued feminine characteristics in themselves, in general society, characteristics which are stereotypically known to be masculine ones are still understood as more preferable (1968: 291).

The following table represents American college students’ ranking of stereotypical male and female traits. The study was carried out by

Broverman (1972) who asked college students to name sex-related stereotypical traits in order to find out how stereotypes and self-concepts were related to each other. One of the findings was that there was a “very high degree of agreement between men and women as to what typical men and women are like” (Rosenkrantz 1968: 288).

**Table 1 Stereotypic Sex-role items (Responses from 74 college men and 80 college women)** Broverman et al. 1972 in Puka 1994: 195

Competency cluster: masculine pole is more desirable	
<b>Feminine</b>	<b>Masculine</b>
Not at all aggressive	very aggressive
Not at all independent	very independent
Very emotional	not at all emotional
does not hide emotions at all	almost always hides emotions
very subjective	very objective
very easily influenced	very dominant
very submissive	not at all easily influenced
[...]	[...]
Very passive	very active
Not at all competitive	very competitive
Very illogical	very logical
[...]	very worldly
Very sneaky	[...]
[...]	very direct
[...]	[...]
Has difficulty making decisions	[...]
Very home oriented	can make decisions easily
Warmth expressiveness cluster: feminine pole is more desirable	
<b>Feminine</b>	<b>Masculine</b>
Does not use harsh language at all	uses very harsh language
Very talkative	not at all talkative
Very tactful	very blunt
Very gentle	very rough
Very aware of feelings of others	not at all aware of feelings of others
Very religious	not at all religious
Very interested in own appearance	not at all interested in own appearance
Very neat in habits	very sloppy in habits
Very quiet	very loud
[...]	[...]

Oppermann (1995: 16-17) conducted a similar study, asking German-speaking women what they thought about the existence of “male” and “female” speech and what they regarded as distinct features of such speeches. The results coincided with Broverman’s findings: women

answered that men spoke in a loud, dominant and very aggressive way, using shorter sentences and numerous imperatives, making their talk less emotional, but demonstrating hierarchy and power (1995: 16). On the contrary, women said about their own sex that they spoke

[u]nüberlegter, unstrukturierter, integrativ, passiv, vorsichtiger, benutzen häufiger Wendungen wie „vielleicht“, „eigentlich“, „ich würde vorschlagen“ und nehmen sich dadurch die Überzeugungskraft; leiser, in höherer Stimmlage, offener, verbindlicher, andere Gesprächseröffnung, unterschiedliche inhaltliche Gewichtung, voller Konjunktive, mit Rückfragen, mit Bestätigung anderer, eher mit unterstützendem Sprachverhalten, mit mehr Fragen, tendenziell unpräzise, stärker affirmativ, ohne Verstecken hinter Sachlichkeit, mit weicherer, gemäßigerer, kindlicherer Ausdrucksweise, umfassender im positiven wie im negativen Bereich, ganzheitlicher, emotionaler; Frauen formulieren ihre Einschätzungen und Meinungen so, dass es anderen Personen eher möglich ist, Gegenpositionen zu vertreten, zurückhaltender, weniger dominant, kommunikationsfördernder, mit weniger Unterbrechungen von anderen, hören besser zu... (1995: 17).

The self-concepts of male and female participants seem to be similar to the respective stereotypes (Rosenkrantz 1968: 298). As a result, researchers argue that sex-role stereotypes continue to exist, even among younger generations. Furthermore, both men and women are convinced that masculine behaviour is more socially desirable (1968: 293). Crawford (1995: 16) states that society accepts “gender distinctions [...] as part of the self-concept” since every person behaves in the way “normative for people of their sex in their culture”. People tend to expect and accept sex differences, since even if a man and a woman do the same job or behave in the same ways, their actions tend to be interpreted differently. Only by putting masculine traits on the one side and feminine on the other, that is, by establishing categorical assumptions about each sex’ behaviour, differences are created and stereotypes maintained (1995: 14).

### **2.3. Gender in interaction: three approaches to gender and language**

This section deals with the three major notions of gender, language and interaction which have led to many investigations and build a frame around the theoretical backgrounds of many scholars. These frameworks are called 'deficit', 'dominance' and 'difference', all of which are rooted to some extent in feminist studies of the subject matter (Talbot 1998: 130).

Robin Lakoff published 'Language and Woman's Place' in 1975, an influential work for the *deficit* approach to women's languages use. According to Lakoff and other 'deficit' supporters, women are disadvantaged language users because through their style of speaking, they lack authority and power. Women's language is seen as "inferior and deficient" (1998: 131). By contrast, the language men use, constitutes the norm to which women's language is compared. In 'Language and Woman's Place', Lakoff describes a series of features characteristic of women's language, basing her assumptions on "informal observations" only (Mesthrie 2009: 226).

The *dominance* approach acts upon the assumption that "language patterns are interpreted as manifestations of a patriarchal social order" (Talbot 1998: 131). Thus, these patterns, i.e. male speech, and resulting linguistic asymmetries between men and women form an example of male power and dominance. Dale Spender's 'Man Made Language' seems to reinforce the concept of dominance which Talbot (1998: 131) questions:

It is as though all men were in a position to dominate all women, which is patently not the case.

Another defender of the dominance framework, Pamela Fishman, holds that linguistic differences in informal conversations between men and women are "manifestations of the larger social order in everyday interaction" (1998: 131).

Zimmermann and West analysed special asymmetries in mixed-sex conversations with regard to interruption and silence, viewing these

phenomena as a means of oppression and dominance of women in speech (Mesthrie 2009: 226).

As there is constant discussion about linguistic differences, it is only reasonable to question where they came from. In the *difference* framework, specialists account for differences to deviate from early socialization processes of children in which they belong to gender-specific cultures (Talbot 1998: 131). Maltz and Borker suggest that children acquire special linguistic patterns which are specific of their peer-groups, be it males or females only (Mesthrie 2009: 227). Therefore, they are convinced that men and women belong to two different sociolinguistic cultures and consequently any conversational feature is likely to be interpreted differently either by men or by women (Talbot 1998: 131-132).

The descriptions of all approaches given here are oversimplified and not at all complete, but they present the basic ideas of each. The most successful is the difference model, of which Deborah Tannen is another proponent. She bases her studies on a fundamental opposition between men and women, presenting two different attitudes towards conversation: while men are competitive when communicating, women are cooperative.

Women speak and hear a language of connection and intimacy, while men speak and hear a language of status and independence (Tannen 1990: 42).

### 3. General characteristics of male and female language use

As mentioned in the previous chapter, stereotypical assumptions about women and men also work with regard to language use. Until very recently, proverbs – a source of folklinguistics dealing with popular beliefs about language – gave an idea of what conversation styles of men and women were like. Empirical investigations on women, men and language resulted in the assumption that two separate varieties existed: a woman's language as opposed to a man's language. Jespersen (1922: 237) cites Rochefort (1665) who said that

[t]he men have a great many expressions peculiar to them, which the women understand but never pronounce themselves. On the other hand, the women have words and phrases which the men never use, or they would be laughed to scorn. Thus it happens that in their conversations it often seems as if the women had another language than the men.

This statement alludes to tribes who have distinct sets of vocabulary available for women and men due to their fixed social roles. It appears to non-native speakers that men and women of such tribes speak different languages since they do not use the same words or the same pronunciation to express the same things (Talbot 1996: 4-5). Before dealing with these two distinct varieties in more detail, general aspects need clarification.

In almost every human language, gender is enclosed. The English language, for example, expresses 'gender' through the use of third person singular pronouns 'she/her/hers', 'he/him/his' or 'it'. Moreover, by adding suffixes such as '-ess', a masculine noun is turned into a feminine one, as in 'actor – actress'. In other cases, lexis alludes directly to gender as in 'man and woman', 'boy and girl', 'husband and wife' etc. It is also possible that the socially constructed gender (not the grammatical one) is deduced secondarily. Consider the following example by Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003: 60):

And although it is positive to describe someone as *a handsome woman*, the description of *a pretty boy* is generally applied with a derisive sneer.

The reason for this is that both 'pretty' and 'handsome' denote good looks, but the former corresponds to good-looking women, the latter to good-looking men and hence, the terms are gendered (2003: 60). As the example shows, culture influences language and language is used by its speakers to create their identities within a certain culture. Therefore, linguistic resources also mirror gender in many ways.

Tone and pitch of voice, patterns of intonation [...], choice of vocabulary, even pronunciations and grammatical patterns can signal gendered aspects of the speaker's self-presentation (2003: 60).

In the following chapters, these gendered aspects will be subject to analysis. Especially, features of phonology and grammar will be outlined and discussed with emphasis on gender differences.

### **3.1. Phonology**

"It is an established fact that there are regular systematic patterns of sociolinguistic variation in English"(Cheshire 1982: 85). By examining language used by different social groups, such patterns can be identified and named. It is, then, possible to group specific linguistic features and ascribe them to speech communities.

#### **3.1.1. Pronunciation**

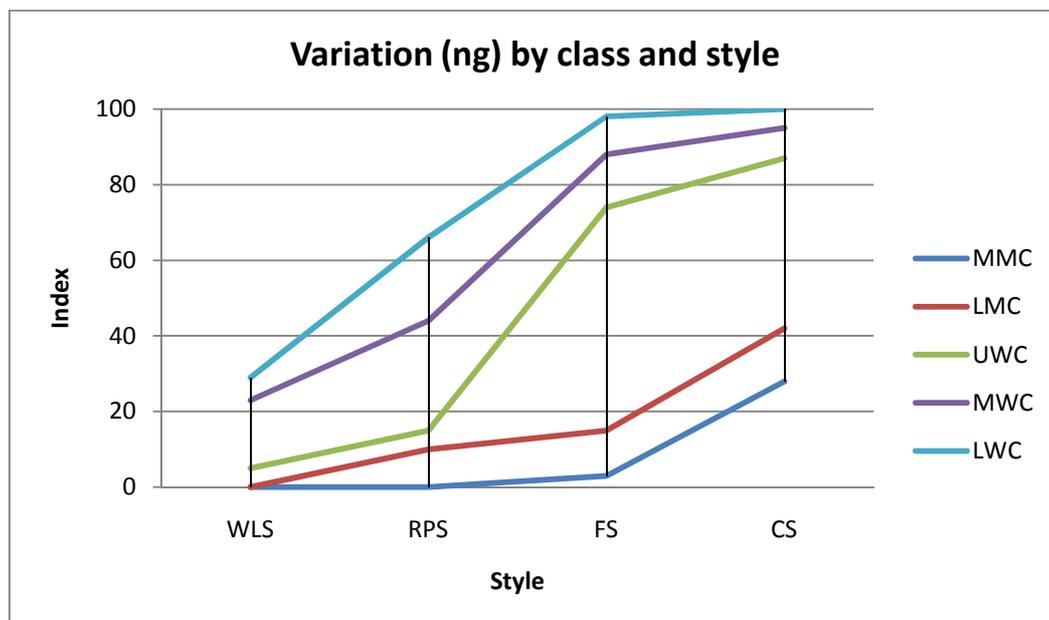
Variationists, studying regional variation of language, and dialectologists, concerned with the mapping of dialects, concentrated on the speech of men as subject of their analysis. It was generally understood as the "real and 'purest'" way of speaking. Hence, focus lay on men's lifestyle only. Sociolinguists, among others Labov and Trudgill, moved the research fields from rural areas to large cities, in order to investigate more modern language variation (Holmes & Meyerhoff 2005: 99).

The aim of quantitative sociolinguistic research was to identify the correlation between linguistic variation and social variables like sex, age and social class. What researchers found was social stratification, emphasizing the two concepts 'prestige' and 'stigma': the former is connected to linguistic forms usually used by the high social status speech

communities. The latter, on the contrary, is linked to the use of ‘vernacular’, a non-standard variety (Coates 1986: 57-58). A common stereotype is that female speakers prefer prestigious linguistic forms, i.e. the standard, over non-standard or stigmatized vernacular (1986: 64).

In his survey of Norwich English, Peter Trudgill tested inter alia the variation of the phonological variable (*ng*), as found in ‘reading’ and ‘sleeping’, linked to the sex of the speakers (Coates 1986: 60). According to him, (*ng*) served as a good item for analysis since it is pronounced differently in the various kinds of English (Trudgill 1974: 90). Trudgill only counted the two variants [ŋ] for standard RP (Received Pronunciation) and [n] for non-standard pronunciation. His informants of both sexes belonged to five social groups: middle-middle (MMC) and lower-middle class (LMC) as well as upper (UWC), middle (MWC) and lower working-class (LWC) (Coates 1986: 60). They were tested in four different speech style situations, i.e. data were elicited from “reading a word-list (WLS), reading a short text (RPS), [...] formal speech (FS), and [...] casual speech (CS)” (Holmes & Meyerhoff 2005: 101).

**Figure 1 Variation (ng) by class and style** (taken from Trudgill 1974: 92)



Trudgill found that the more formal the speech situation, the more the standard variant [ŋ] is used by all five social classes. Regarding sex differences, Norwich men use [ŋ] forms to a greater extent than women

who tend to use standard pronunciation [ŋ]. The ‘dropping of the g’, as it is also called, is a “marker of social status”: the lower in formality and the lower the class, a considerable increase in the use of non-standard forms can be noticed, especially among men (2005: 101). Lower-middle class women (LMC) show great affinity to the standard variant [ŋ], overusing it the more formal the speech event gets (Coates 1986: 64). Trudgill provides two explanations: first of all, women are more status-conscious than men which is due to their inferior position in society. Women stick to more prestigious linguistic variables because they want to assure their status linguistically (Trudgill 1974: 94). Moreover, working class speech is strongly related to masculinity, roughness and toughness. These characteristics may be desirable for men, but are not considered feminine. Feminine traits are refinement and sophistication which explains the tendency towards standard language use (1974: 94). Table 2 illustrates the usage of the non-standard [ŋ] (0 = never; 100 = always).

**Table 2 Usage of non-standard [ŋ]** (taken from Trudgill 1974: 94, table 7.2.)

	Word-list	Reading	Formal speech	Casual speech
<b>Middle-middle</b>				
m	0	0	4	31
f	0	0	0	0
<b>Lower-middle</b>				
m	0	20	27	17
f	0	0	3	67
<b>Upper-working</b>				
m	0	18	81	95
f	11	13	68	77
<b>Middle-working</b>				
m	24	43	91	97
f	20	46	81	88
<b>Lower-working</b>				
m	66	100	100	100
f	17	54	97	100

The table clearly demonstrates that lower-middle class women alter their pronunciation substantially in variant use: they assimilate to middle-middle class speech in formal conversations, making use of hypercorrection, a phenomenon studied by Labov in New York (Coates 1986: 65). Labov’s social stratification study on New York City English examined the absence or presence of the postvocalic /r/. He found that in less formal speech styles, only the upper-middle class pronounces the postvocalic (r), but the

more formal the style, the more the lower-middle class sticks to prestigious norms. A possible explanation for hypercorrection might be that the lower social classes are concerned “with correctness and speaking ‘properly’” (1986: 63). Moreover, across the social classes, women produce the socially desirable and prestigious linguistic forms comparably more often than men (Talbot 1998: 21).

It is widely accepted that women are more sensitive to linguistic norms and more conscious of status and prestige. As Trudgill has pointed out, this preference of prestige forms is linked to the inferior position of women in society, which he has also shown in the Norwich survey of lower-middle class women. In order to further prove the linguistic sensitivity, a self-evaluation test was conducted, focusing on the variants (*er*) as in *near* and (*a*) as in *fate* (Coates 1986: 72). First, informants listened to recordings of words, ranging from RP to non-standard Norwich pronunciation. Then they indicated which of the forms they would usually prefer.

**Table 3 Percentage scores for self-evaluation for (*er*) and (*a*) in Norwich** (based on Trudgill 1972, taken from Coates 1986: 73)

	<b>(er)</b>		<b>(a)</b>	
	<b>M</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>F</b>
<b>Over-report</b>	22	68	22	43
<b>Under-report</b>	50	14	28	0
<b>accurate</b>	28	18	50	57

Surprisingly, regarding the (*er*) variable, only 18 per cent of the female informants answered correctly. 68 per cent of them over-reported by saying that they used prestige forms where, in fact, they did not. By contrast, 14 per cent of the women under-reported which means that they indicated that they spoke in non-standard forms where they actually used standard ones (1986: 72). The investigation of the variable (*a*) led to similar results, with 43 per cent of the female speakers over-reporting. Over-reporting can, therefore, be regarded as a female characteristic, alluding to their preference of prestige language forms.

As the various studies have shown, women are more likely to use language norms, i.e. RP standard, since more prestige is associated to them than is to regional accents. “[...] RP speakers are perceived as being more ambitious, more intelligent and more self-confident” (Coates 1986: 76). So, women make up for their lower position in society by applying prestige forms and hence, are

[judged] as being more fluent, intelligent, self-confident, adventurous, independent and feminine than women with a regional accent [...] and rated as being more *masculine* (1986: 76).

This contradiction can be explained in terms of women taking on various social roles in which they have to behave differently and choose their speech style accordingly. It has to be taken into consideration that language functions as an ‘in-group device’ and creates group identity. Membership of a certain social group is marked by linguistic choices (1986: 76). Such social networks give insights into the way women and men establish their separate identities through language. Leslie Milroy’s study of Belfast’s social networks had “group membership [as] the key issue”, using the hypothesis of finding vernacular more consistently in local social networks as a starting point (Talbot 1998: 28). What is fascinating about this new approach to differences in speech is that it is the community’s closeness that counts and not status in society. If members of a community know each other very well, one speaks of a ‘closed’ network. In an ‘open’ network, people barely know each other (Coates 1986: 80).

Leslie Milroy conducted her study in three areas of Belfast, encompassing “differing patterns of employment and correspondingly different social networks”. In the area of Ballymacarrett, she found that men worked in close-knit groups, while women belonged to loose social networks. Milroy was able to demonstrate what she had anticipated: “men consistently used more local, vernacular forms than women did” (Talbot 1998: 29). In Clonard, an area where male unemployment rate is high, Milroy discovered that women used more non-standard forms, belonging to very dense social networks (1998: 29). She explained that the differences in

linguistic choices between men and women result from the fact that men are more usually members of denser and more multiplex networks in which vernacular norms are reinforced. Drawing on these findings, Milroy concluded that men socialize with their colleagues, sharing experiences, activities and employment and use vernacular forms to establish solidarity among each other. By contrast, women belong to less multiplex social networks and use vernacular less evidently (Coates 1986: 84-85). If, however, women did belong to close-knit social networks, they used more vernacular patterns as well.

### **3.1.2. Intonation**

Phonological aspects, as already shown in connection with pronunciation, reveal information about a speaker's sex. Intonation – the melody underlying speech- can be understood as the rhythmic variation of pitch and loudness while speaking. In technical terms, fundamental frequency, i.e. the vibration rate of the vocal cords in the larynx, determines pitch: the higher the vibration, the higher the pitch. Moreover, the larger the vocal cords, the lower the pitch due to slow vibration. It has often been claimed that due to their larger vocal cords, men produce lower pitch than women and young boys with smaller vocal cords (McConnell-Ginet 1978: 548). McConnell-Ginet is convinced that sex differences in intonation are not only due to anatomical differences, but also exist because of stereotypes (1983: 73).

Of course, adult males are able to produce high pitched voices, but do not make use of them due to cultural expectations because intonation is another means of projecting stereotypes: men who speak with a high pitched voice are made fun of and are often judged as homosexual because of sounding effeminate. What is considered to be the appropriate male pitch varies from country to country (Spender 1978: 19). Drawing on Spender, apart from anatomical differences, pitch range is culturally settled: while men learn to sound masculine and cool, women learn to sound sweet, polite and emotional. Stereotypes about male and female voice quality have become naturalized over time: a woman's voice is soft

and high-pitched, whereas a “real” man sounds deep, gravelly and loud (Talbot 1998: 31). As regards intonation patterns of women,

[c]entral to the stereotype of “feminine” speech is [the] use of a relatively wide pitch range with frequent and rapid long glides, although other features such as orality, tense articulation, and breathiness may also be involved (McConnell-Ginet 1978: 549).

McConnell-Ginet (1983: 71-75) argues that women’s tunes are devalued. ‘What’ women say is ignored or misinterpreted because ‘how’ they say it, is more important. Female intonation is characterized by its ‘dynamism’, referring to the broad pitch range and variation in volume. Dynamic female speech is, furthermore, connected to the overt expression of emotions since a great variation of pitch range alludes to greater emotionality and expression of feelings. When a female group is compared with a male one, it is probable that hearers perceive women as more emotional, judged only on the basis of their pitch patterns (ibid. 1983: 76-77). In contrast, male intonation patterns include narrower pitch range than the female and less shifting in pitch. Brend argues that

[m]en consistently avoid certain intonation levels or patterns. They very rarely, if ever, use the highest level of pitch that women use. [...] Men avoid final patterns which do not terminate at the lowest level of pitch, and use a final, short upstep only for special effects [...] (1983: 76).

In women’s speech, Brend describes a “surprise pattern” like *O<sub>h</sub>, th<sub>at</sub>’s aw<sub>ful</sub>!* and a “cheerful pattern” as in *Are you com<sub>ing</sub>?*, *Good<sub>bye</sub>!* (Sachs 1983: 154). Brend’s cheerful pattern coincides with Lakoff who has often argued that women use a question-like intonation in statements which accounts for their insecurity. Such an intonation has “a high-rising tone at the end of the sentence” (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2003: 173). McConnell-Ginet (1983: 79) takes up Lakoff’s often cited example (1975):

- (1) Husband: When will dinner be ready?  
Wife: Six o’clock?

Lakoff treated the wife’s response as a signal of “great uncertainty or lack of self-assertiveness” because she used a high-rise intonational pattern in a statement (1983: 79). McConnell-Ginet does not interpret the wife’s

answer as a display of insecurity, but rather as a counter question *Why do you want to know? or Didn't I tell you already?*. Leaving the questions aside, the utterance may simply be an attempt to continue the conversation. Instead of adding tentativeness to question intonational patterns, a high-rise rather conveys nonfinality of an utterance (1983: 79). Clearly, what is said is not only understood by mere utterances, but also by the modulation that carries these messages, like well-known comments such as "I don't like that tone" show (Edelsky 1979: 16).

A high-rise intonation pattern is not restricted to female speech, even though women are said to use it more frequently. Men also exploit the high rise in responses to questions, but without sounding effeminate. Edelsky studied university students' intonational pattern when answering questions about where they were born and what their favourite colour was. She tried to identify differences between male and female students in the employment of the following three patterns (McConnell-Ginet 1983: 79-80):

Fall: Hel  
lo

Fall-rise: Hel  
l<sup>o</sup>

High-rise (as in questions): Hel<sup>o</sup>

In contrast to what Lakoff suggested, both male and female informants used a falling intonation in replying as in

Wash  
ing  
ton (Example taken from Graddol 1989: 83)

Only when talking to a female interviewer, women used a 'rise-fall-rise' intonation more often than men as in

Kan<sup>sas</sup> city (Example taken from Graddol 1989: 84).

As regards speech in public settings like the workplace or politics, Sachs remarked the following about gender influence in pitch:

Adult men and women may modify their articulators lowering or raising their formant frequencies, to produce voices that aim toward male-female archetypes. [...] In other words, men may try to talk as if they are bigger than they actually are, and women may talk as if they are smaller than they actually are (Sachs 1975 in Talbot 1998: 34).

Indeed, pitch can allude to the speaker's sex, status and power. Many researchers argue that pitch is something learned and therefore, easily changeable. A striking example is Margaret Thatcher, former British prime minister, who sounded too feminine for a powerful politician. Her voice quality was regarded as lacking authority, so Thatcher was recommended to change her voice to a lower pitch (Graddol 1989: 38). Hence, voice can be a strategic display of oneself in some cases since lower pitch voices are interpreted as sounding more dominant and powerful, while higher pitched voices are socially heard as more submissive and less powerful. Then, an interesting question comes up: why do women vary pitch and volume so consistently when effeminate voices are said to lack power? It may be that on account of their powerlessness in society, female speakers try to "[attract] and [hold] the listener's attention" with pitch and volume as devices (McConnell-Ginet 1983: 83).

Altogether, pitch and intonation hint at the sex of a speaker which is a result of functioning sex-stereotypes: some intonation patterns are regarded as feminine stereotypically, others as masculine. Through the use of certain intonation patterns, we present ourselves to others and reinforce our femininity or masculinity. Interestingly enough, female intonation patterns are negatively marked, but those used by male speakers are perceived as neutral. This, again, is culture-specific, but stereotypical intonation applies, for the most part, to female (powerless) speech (1983: 83).

### 3.2. Grammar

Jenny Cheshire conducted a long-term study on gendered speech differences, working with boys and girls from Reading, Berkshire. In contrast to other studies which concentrated on phonological aspects, she focused on “non-standard morphological and syntactic features” (Coates 1986: 86) that are not to be found in Standard English. Some examples are given below:

1. Non-standard *-s*: the *-s* suffix occurs with non 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular subjects as in “You knows my sister, the one who’s small”
2. Non-standard *has* with non 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular subjects: “We has a muck around in there”
3. Non-standard *do* as in “That’s what I does, anyway, I just ignores them”
4. Non-standard *was* which occurs with plurals and the singular you: “You was with me, wasn’t you?”
5. *Ain’t* replaces the negative present tense forms of have and be: “How come that ain’t working?”  
“I ain’t got one single flea in my hair, they’re all married”
6. Double negation like “That’s where we go clubbing when there ain’t nothing to do”
7. *Never* is used like Standard English ‘didn’t’: “I never, I never, it was him!”
8. *What* is used for ‘who, whom, which, that’: “Are you the little bastards what hit my son over the head?” (Cheshire 1983: 31-72).

Most of these features stand for vernacular loyalty in the examined peer groups. Boys, especially, apply vernacular features in order to structure their groups. The informants formed a homogeneous group, coming from a similar social background and being of comparable ages as well. It is interesting to note that the groups act similarly to social networks: the boys’ peer groups were more closely-knit, showing also more adherence to the vernacular. The female peer groups, however, were only loosely

connected and hence, stuck to more standard language (Cheshire 1983: 87). Table 3 shows the frequency with which boys and girls use vernacular features (100 representing consistent usage):

**Table 4 Frequency indices for non-standard features in the speech of boys and girls** (taken from Cheshire 1983: 86)

Non-standard feature	Boys	Girls
<b>Present tense –s (regular verbs)</b>	53.16	52.04
<b>Present tense <i>has</i></b>	54.76	51.61
<b>Present tense <i>does</i> (full verb)</b>	71.43	50.00
<b>Present tense 3<sup>rd</sup> singular <i>do</i> (auxiliary)</b>	57.69	78.95
<b>Past tense <i>was</i></b>	88.15	73.58
[...]		
<b><i>ain't</i> = auxiliary HAVE</b>	92.00	64.58
<b><i>ain't</i> = copula BE</b>	85.83	61.18
<b><i>ain't</i> = auxiliary Be</b>	74.19	42.11
<b>Negative concord</b>	88.33	51.85
<b><i>Never</i></b>	46.84	40.00
<b>Relative pronoun</b>	36.36	14.58
[...]		

Since the male peer groups were so tightly structured, it was easy for Cheshire to define their vernacular culture, basing the “vernacular culture index” on six factors:

1. Carrying weapons
2. Skill at fighting
3. Participation in minor criminal activities
4. Sort of job preferred
5. Style (i.e. dress, hairstyle)
6. Swearing (Coates 1986: 88).

For the girl groups, it was rather difficult to analyze their vernacular culture, because the ‘vernacular culture index’ did not work for them as well: the girls did not go to the playgrounds as frequently as the boys, but stayed more at home or met at a friend’s place. Thus, the social network theory again is proven right: since the girls did not belong to a closely-knit group, the vernacular loyalty could not be measured (Cheshire 1983: 106-107). What Cheshire did was to divide the observed girls loosely into two groups: one of ‘good’ girls and one of ‘bad’ girls. She wanted to check whether there were striking differences in the adherence to vernacular

forms. In Table 5, the frequency results of vernacular forms for the two girl groups are listed:

**Table 5 Vernacular forms used by British girl groups** (taken from Coates 1986: 90)

	<b>'good' girls</b>	<b>'bad' girls</b>
<b>non-standard -s</b>	25.84	57.27
<b>non-standard <i>has</i></b>	36.36	35.85
<b>non-standard <i>was</i></b>	63.64	80.95
<b>negative concord</b>	12.50	58.70
<b>non-standard <i>never</i></b>	45.45	41.07
<b>non-standard <i>what</i></b>	33.33	5.56
<b>non-standard <i>come</i></b>	30.77	90.63
<b><i>ain't</i> = copula</b>	14.29	67.12

As Table 5 illustrates, 'bad' girls stick more closely to the vernacular than 'good' girls. Features like the non-standard -s, was and negative concord also mark boys' loyalty to the vernacular. For 'bad' girls, the non-standard *come* is the most sensitive indicator. Cheshire is convinced that different speakers operate the language system according to their needs, thus, some non-standard features are a hint towards the sex of a speaker insofar that they mark either girls' vernacular loyalty as the non-standard *come* and *ain't* as a copula or boys' preferences, such as the non-standard *never* and *what* (Coates 1986: 91).

Cheshire also observed some of the adolescents in their schools in order to find differences in their speech styles. While the recordings on the playgrounds show spontaneous interactions and hence, spontaneous speech, classroom interaction is more adapted to the speech situation, i.e. we find more appropriate language (Cheshire 1983: 112). Adolescents who in their leisure time adhere to vernacular features, are regarded rebellious if they use it in formal settings as well (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2003: 294).

**Table 6 stylistic variation in the frequency indices for non-standard features**  
(Cheshire 1983: 115)

Feature	Vernacular style	School style
<b>Class A</b>		
non-standard <b>-s</b>	57.03	31.49
non-standard <b>has</b>	46.43	35.71
non-standard <b>was</b>	91.67	88.57
negative concord	90.70	66.67
<b>Class B</b>		
non-standard <b>never</b>	49.21	15.38
non-standard <b>what</b>	50.00	54.55
<b>Class C</b>		
non-standard <b>come</b>	100.00	100.00
<b>ain't = auxiliary HAVE</b>	93.02	100.00
<b>ain't = copula BE</b>	74.47	77.78

Comparing vernacular style and school style, boys use less Class A features in school, which actually mark their vernacular loyalty, applying more prestige standard language. However, the features that do not correlate to the vernacular culture in leisure time, are increasingly exploited in the school style.

Eisikovitz (1987) conducted a similar study among Australian adolescents in which “a clear gender difference in the use of grammar in encounters with authority” was found. First, the boys and girls talked among themselves, later they were interviewed by Eisikovitz. When talking to her, girls stuck to the standard forms, whereas boys' speech became less standard which she understood as a “rejection of her institutional linguistic authority” (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2003: 295). Among others, Eisikovitz looked at non-standard past tense forms *He woke up and seen something*, multiple negation *they don't say nothing* and invariable don't *Mum don't have to do nothing* (Eisikovitz 1998: 43). Findings demonstrate that adolescent boys and girls differ in the use of these non-standard features, again, with male adolescents sticking more closely to the vernacular, even with increasing age.

## **PART II: “WOMEN’S LANGUAGE” MEETS “MAN-MADE LANGUAGE”**

### **4. Creating femininity through discourse: female talk**

Both, girls and boys learn certain speech patterns when growing up. They imitate their environment, speak like their mothers and fathers, are rewarded for sticking to their societal roles and punished if they do not. Lakoff points to the fact that girls acquire a language which they are expected to use within society: a “women’s language”. What Lakoff understands by this term, is explained further in the section “Women’s language: feminine traits in language use”.

As “women’s language” is said to be the main language use of females, “small talk” – also called “gossip” - is ascribed to women as their preferential type of conversation which is, again, linked to their social roles and their inferior status in society. Hence, the concept of such conversational genre is the central aspect of “Considered female: small talk and gossip”.

Finally, we shall look at features of discourse, typical traits which form part of “women’s language” and constitute the very feminine conversation style.

#### **4.1. Women’s language: feminine traits in language use**

Otto Jespersen was one of the first to discuss the notion of a distinct female mode of speaking, dedicating a special chapter to “The woman” in his book “Language: Its Nature, Development and Origin” (1922). Jespersen feeds the assumption of existing gendered languages by establishing a list of features, presumably typical of women’s speech. According to him, women differ from men in their use of grammar and vocabulary as well as in pronunciation and intonation patterns. Moreover, women do not switch language codes, but stick to their language patterns which is also the reason why they possess a less extensive vocabulary as men. He, however, admits that women are linguistically more competent than men (1922: 237-254). Jespersen’s beliefs repeat many of the

traditional stereotypes about women's language, but curiously they have remained very influential.

In the 1970s, an early feminist hypothesis about a 'women's language', put forward by Robin Lakoff and developing most of Jespersen's ideas, influenced both feminist studies and linguistics. Lakoff was convinced that "language used *by* women and language used *about* them" differed enormously from male language. Moreover, since language is an excellent means to exercise power, she argued that the inferior position women hold in society is reflected by the way women speak and are spoken about (Talbot 1998: 38).

Main attributes of such a 'women's language' were its "uncertainty, weakness and excessive politeness". Interestingly, Lakoff has not undertaken any scientific examination, but says:

The data on which I am basing my claims have been gathered mainly by introspection: I have examined my own speech and that of my acquaintances, and have used my own intuitions in analyzing it (Lakoff 1973: 46).

Nevertheless, Lakoff provided concrete examples of linguistic features considered as typical of female speech (Talbot 1998: 38).

#### **4.1.1. Lexical traits**

First of all, Lakoff addresses lexical peculiarities: women work in other areas than men and have, consequently, different sets of vocabulary at hand. For example, Lakoff states that women have "a stock of words relating to women's activities and interests", such as sewing and cooking. Moreover, women tend to distinguish colours more precisely: words such as "beige, ecru, aquamarine, lavender" belong to a woman's lexical repertoire (1998: 38).

(2)

W: "The wall is mauve" (example taken from Lakoff 1973: 49)

As with colour terms, women use more affective adjectives, expressing "affective meaning [...], not referential meaning" (1998: 38). Feelings and emotions are generally attributed to female speakers and many of the

existing adjectives for approval and admiration are typically feminine, such as “divine, adorable, charming”. Robin Lakoff calls these “empty adjectives” (1998: 39).

(3)

- a. What a terrific idea!
- b. What a divine idea!

(Examples taken from Lakoff 1973: 52)

Lakoff states that (a) is a neutral and therefore, could possibly be used by male as well as female speakers. (b), however, is more typically used by women.

Another striking feature is the use of ultra polite forms. According to Lakoff, women always attempt to be ‘ladylike’ and hence, avoid the use of expletives.

(4)

- a. *Oh dear*, you’ve put the peanut butter in the refrigerator again.
- b. *Shit*, you’ve put the peanut butter in the refrigerator again.

(Examples taken from Lakoff 1973: 50)

Clearly, (a) is considered to have been uttered by a woman, while (b) is most likely to have been said by a man. It could be argued that men use stronger expletives and women use weaker ones, if at all. Such weak swear words include “goodness” and “oh fudge” which turn utterances into something trivial (1973: 50). What is more, euphemisms are regarded as a part of female language because “women [...] know the right things to say [...]” (Lakoff 1975:?).

Apart from characteristics concerning lexical items, Lakoff suggests that women apply “discourse particles and patterns of intonation” that lack referential meaning but influence utterances (Talbot 1998: 39).

#### 4.1.2. Syntactic traits

Hedges, as Lakoff is convinced, add “tentativeness to statements” (1998: 39). They include discourse particles such as ‘you know’, ‘like’, ‘maybe’ etc. Like ‘very’, the intensifier ‘so’ belongs to the group of hedges as well, having an effect on the strength of statements.

Tag questions are a feature of syntax which female speakers overuse in conversation. A tag is problematic as it

[...] is midway between an outright statement and a yes-no question: it is less assertive than the former, but more confident than the latter (Lakoff 1973: 54).

By adding a tag question, the speaker shows that she is trying to make an observation, but lacks confidence in stating it.

(5)

- a. Is John here?
- b. John is here, isn't he?

(Examples taken from Lakoff 1973: 54)

In example (a), a traditional *yes-no* answer would typically be uttered after the question. In (b), the addresser is only “awaiting confirmation by the addressee”; since the addresser knows that John is there (1973: 54).

#### 4.1.3. Suprasegmental traits

In declarative statements, women tend to use rising intonation where it should actually be falling, which makes the statement a question and the speaker appear uncertain (Talbot 1998: 40).

(6)

Husband: “When will dinner be ready?”  
Wife: “Oh..., around six o'clock...?”

(Example taken from Lakoff 1973: 56)

As far as suprasegmental features are concerned, women possess a broader range of intonation patterns: Lakoff refers to female language as “speaking in italics”, it is as if women want to emphasize what they are saying by varying their intonation considerably. What is also striking is that research on pronunciation has shown that women use a “more advanced”

pronunciation, as Jespersen (1922: 243) called it. Lakoff adopts this point of view, but speaks of hypercorrect and more conservative pronunciation which is found in female speech.

Early discussions of a “women’s language” have been based on mere intuitions and have, therefore, been criticized many times. In innumerable empirical studies, researchers have tried to either verify or falsify the concepts of “women’s language” as forwarded by Jespersen and Lakoff. In most cases, the assumptions have been proved correct or at least, more likely to occur in female speech.



## **4.2. Considered female: small talk and gossip**

### **4.2.1. Small talk**

In daily life, we participate in small talk on the train, while waiting at the bus stop, in shops, at parties. It is an everyday activity both women and men engage in. Yet, it is always women who are – stereotypically, of course – associated with small talk. Schneider describes small talk as “a type of talk or conversation, specified as light, trifling [and] unimportant” (Schneider 1988: 4), as the name already suggests.

Women’s way of talking is regarded as trivial and is considered an act of communication in which no “real talk” – like talk done by men – is performed (Coates 1986: 115). Small talk is also referred to as ‘phatic communion’, a concept that was introduced by Malinowski. According to him, it is “a type of speech in which ties of union are created by a mere exchange of words”. The purpose of such talk is not communicating ideas, but to fulfill “basic communicative requirement[s]” (Coupland 2000: 2).

As trivial as small talk may be, it serves the “relational function of talk”: participants make statements about themselves, create solidarity, share personal experiences or behave simply in a polite manner. Consequently, women are experts in small talk since they “are indeed more socially engaged, cooperative [...]”, and are said to be polite and interested in others. This is also why small talk “becomes a source of female identity and power, and certainly enjoyment” (2000: 7).

Small talk is a conversational genre that has been degraded to triviality and depicted as a female communicative event. In fact, it is a friendly and informal means of interacting. The most important thing about small talk is that “talk is taking place at all” (Talbot 1998: 80). Restricted to private and informal settings in the past, it is now used in the workplace, on the street – everywhere – and not only by women. One type of small talk which is regarded malicious, i.e. gossip will be discussed in the next section.

#### **4.2.2. Gossip**

Gossip is an area of language use which has traditionally been associated with women. A common definition of 'gossip' is

a way of talking between women in their roles as women, intimate in style, personal and domestic in topic and setting (Jones 1980 in Cameron 1990: 243).

According to Deborah Jones, gossip can be divided into four categories: firstly, she defines 'house-talk' as "occupational talk" between housewives, stereotypically connected to female roles; secondly, 'scandal' which, in its essence, means observing other women and talking about their behaviour. It can be compared to talking behind their backs. Next, Jones speaks of 'bitching', a strategy of complaining, whining and discussing problems with other women. Most of the time, men are the core topic of bitching. The fourth type is called 'chatting', the intimate comforting of each other through talking (Jones 1980 in Cameron 1990: 246-248). The main function of all four gossip types is to exchange experiences: "women's gossip is 'a language of intimacy'" (1998: 81).

As regarding linguistic features, gossip includes the same patterns as described in Lakoff's 'Women's language':

gossip is said to be characterized by the use of questions and tag questions, rising intonation patterns, minimal responses [...], paralinguistic responses [...] and in general by a reciprocal pattern of interaction (Coates 1986: 115).

Gossip, certainly, belongs to the female oral culture, owing much to the characteristics described in 'women's language'. It is not, however, a malicious way of talking, but has the clear social function of sharing values, morals and establishing the feeling of being united.

### **4.3. Discourse strategies in female conversation**

So far, we have dealt with 'women's language', a language that is used by the female speech community. Moreover, the genre of 'small talk' – regarded as feminine – has been briefly explained. Let us now turn to discourse strategies which have been identified as belonging typically to female conversations. Numerous studies of spoken conversation between dyads of the same sex as well as mixed sex and also between couples, have led to acknowledge these discourse strategies to be actually more often applied by women than by men.

The following discourse strategies contribute to what Pamela Fishman called "conversational work" done by females in order to establish and maintain conversation.

#### **4.3.1. Questions**

Questions form part of any conversation and speakers ask questions all the time. In written form, questions are easy to identify by the conventional question mark. In spoken conversation, questions need to be deciphered as such since there is no sign indicating them (Coates 1996: 174). Extensive use of questions has been associated until recently with women and their rather powerless style of speaking. Hence, questions have been treated as powerless structures. This goes back to Robin Lakoff who said that tag questions displayed women's tentativeness and uncertainty.

In fact, questions fulfill various functions in conversation and can, consequently, be viewed as powerful linguistic resources. Jennifer Coates (1996: 174-203) pursues the matter in her work, trying to identify the most common questions women ask and what functions they perform.

Coates (1996: 176) is convinced that the classic question in any conversation tries to elicit information. This type occurs less often in women talk, since the prior aim is to keep the conversation going instead of merely exchanging information. However, Coates adds that information-seeking questions are more frequent in female adolescent talk, especially when talking about boys (1996: 176). The central role of questions is to

help start a conversation and to maintain it because questions have the potential to shape and structure talk. By asking a question, a new topic can be introduced and further developed; speakers can invite others to join in a chat by formulating the right question or by requesting clarification (1996: 182-185).

Rhetorical questions also belong to the question repertoire as well and women are especially good at formulating them since they help negotiate discourse without requiring an answer (1996: 188).

A crucial point to make in discussing questions is that those questions used by women in conversations with their female friends are mostly “other-oriented”, meaning that conversation is maintained by inviting others to join in. Most importantly, these questions “express solidarity and connection” in women friendships (1996: 201).

#### **4.3.2. Tag questions**

Tag questions, as already briefly mentioned, are syntactical structures, half statement, half question. Forms like ‘don’t you?’, ‘haven’t you?’, ‘isn’t it?’, ‘okay?’, ‘right?’ etc. are attached to a sentence. Lakoff suggested that women stereotypically use tag questions more often than men and make their utterances – voluntarily or not – less assertive and more uncertain, as example (7) shows:

(7)

- a. The crisis in the Middle East is terrible.
- b. The crisis in the Middle East is terrible, isn’t it?

(Examples taken from Coates 1986: 103)

Lakoff admits that there are cases in which a tag question is actually required, as in making small talk: “Sure is hot here, isn’t it?” and is, then, most likely to be uttered by men, too (Lakoff 1973: 55). Nevertheless, she insisted on her claim that tag questions were typically female.

Dubois and Crouch (1975) were first to examine empirically what Lakoff claimed about tags. They studied tape-recordings of an academic conference and, interestingly enough, discovered men using tag questions

more often than women in that academic setting (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2003: 168).

Janet Holmes (1972; 1995) studied the various functions of tag questions. She distinguished the epistemic modal function as well as facilitative, softening and challenging function (=affective tags) (2003: 168). The epistemic modal function means the tag “signals uncertainty about the information content of [the] utterance”, performed with a rising intonation and requiring confirmation. Lakoff clearly was in favour of the referential tag question.

(8)

He was behind the three point line, wasn't he?

(Example taken from Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2003: 168)

Affective tags, on the other hand, function in more ways: firstly, an affective tag can be *facilitative*, hence, “expressing solidarity and closeness”, performed with falling intonation; secondly, it can be *softening* which means that the force of a command is weakened (Talbot 1998: 41). Thirdly, it can be *challenging*, “[eliciting] defeated silence or reluctant admissions of guilt” (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2003: 168).

(9)

*Facilitative*: Great performance, wasn't it?

*Softening*: You were a bit noisy, weren't you?

*Challenging*: You won't do that again, will you?

(Examples taken from Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2003: 168)

Moreover, Holmes found in educational settings that women used the facilitative tag type more often than men (1998: 41). A reason for this finding is that the performance of a facilitative tag is linked to the relationships among interacting people, with “face work and social relations” (2003: 168). Moreover, facilitative tags involve positive politeness, another (stereotypical) feature connected to women's speech (Mesthrie 2009: 232). Positive politeness is connected to face work and means talking about problems, using terms of address like nicknames etc.

Jennifer Coates observes in conversations between women friends that tag questions also serve different functions. Most are invitations for others to speak, to join in the conversation. What is interesting is that performed tag questions tend to be followed by an answer by other participants.

(10) (talking about how talk changes when a man joins in)

Liz: but it does change doesn't it?

Anna: yeah/

(11) (talking about doctors and youthfulness)

Karen: I suppose if you're ill you don't care do you?

Pat: I suppose not/

(Examples taken from Coates 1996: 192)

It is also possible that there is no answer, but the tag question is uttered in order to assure "the taken-for-being-grantedness of what is being said", like rhetorical questions which do not require an answer either. Similarly, like full questions, tags questions structure talk and topics (Coates 1996: 194).

Tag questions have been treated as weakeners of statements and have contributed to the notion of a weak female language. In the discussion above, it has been proved that tag questions, in fact, fulfill varied functions in conversation and are, hence, an important feature of such.

### **4.3.3. Hedges**

Robin Lakoff claims that hedges are part of a stereotypically female speech repertoire, expressing uncertainty and doubt. Ever since the publication of "Language and woman's place" in 1975, hedges have been treated as "weak", 'tentative', 'unassertive'" (Coates 1996: 171).

Hedges, also called 'verbal fillers', are linguistic forms like 'maybe', 'sort of', 'I mean' etc., which make utterances less direct: "When we hedge linguistically, we avoid saying something definite [...]", as Jennifer Coates puts it (1996: 152). Hedges do not add new content to what is being said but serve different functions in a conversation.

First of all, they are used to express doubt and confidence:

(12)

Anna: Maybe he's right/ maybe I am a crap manager

(13)

Claire: but you know Julie right?

(Examples taken from Coates 1996: 154-155)

Secondly, hedging helps protect the face of speakers. Sometimes, it is the case that conversational participants want to express frustration and anger, but at the same time protect their partners' or their own faces. Hedging allows sensitive topics to be touched without offending others and even more so, bridges distances between interlocutors, bringing them closer together (1996: 185-187).

(14)

Karen: well I suppose it is I've never really had any worries like that

(Example taken from Coates 1996: 158)

Thirdly, hedges can signal that a speaker is looking for a word as example (15) shows:

(15)

Becky: it feels like your nose is just sort of. expanding/

(Example taken from Coates 1996: 158)

It is also likely that, by hedging, women try to avoid presenting themselves as experts in a special topic. Then, they insert a hedge right before a technical term, for example, to weaken its effect (1996: 160). Women do so because they want to "minimize social distance between [conversation] participants" (1996: 161). Lastly, hedges also work in maintaining the collaborative floor (1996: 170).

#### **4.3.4. Minimal responses (back channeling)**

Minimal responses, or back channeling, form part of simultaneous talk, but do not count as overlaps or interruptions as such. In the English-speaking society and in others as well, people are expected to prove that they are

following the conversation. Minimal responses like ‘mmh’, ‘yeah’, ‘aha’ – often paired with nodding and facial expressions - are sufficient to signal one is attentive. Not providing such a feedback, leaves the interlocutor wondering if the topic talked about is not of any interest to the listener or if the information given is wrong (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2003: 110).

Pamela Fishman found out in her analysis of intimate conversations between couples that women supported the speaker by using vocalisms like ‘uh-huh’, ‘really?’, ‘yeah’ (Talbot 1998: 82). Even more so, apart from showing interest in what a conversational participant is saying, “women [use minimal responses] supportively to develop the topic” (1998: 82). Without a doubt female speakers use these minimal responses more often and more appropriately than male speakers (Coates 1986: 102).

#### **4.3.5. Repetition and textual coherence**

As regards repetition in talk among female friends, structures are taken up and repeated in order to show that there are similar experiences or feelings which female interlocutors are willing to share. Through repeating, solidarity is established (Coates 1996: 203). Consider the following example, in which four female friends talk about their periods and make extensive use of repetitions:

(16) *Hot water bottles*

Turn 1: but hot water bottles help (Jessica)

Turn 2: hot water bottles help (Becky)

Turn 3: hot water bottles help me as well (Hannah)

Turn 4: help so much (Claire)

(Example taken from Coates 1996: 203)

Unplanned repetition happens in spontaneous discourse but functions as a “very strong form of agreement and of mutual affirmation”. Even more so, by repeating what has been said before, a coherent text is constructed and meaning can be jointly negotiated from this text (1996: 204).

Repetition can help to structure ideas and thoughts, but also emphasizes or develops them further. In women friends’ talk, repetition is seen as very supportive and often serves to establish the collaborative floor. As

demonstrated, repetitions fulfill many functions, but most importantly, “they signal solidarity between women friends [...]” (1996: 230).

#### **4.3.6. Politeness**

As we have seen so far, women and men differ in their use of speech acts and thus, also in the practice of politeness strategies. Women have the fame/reputation of being linguistically more polite because “they are more other-oriented, more collaborative, more affective” (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2003: 134). Again, the use of polite language leads to the assumption that women’s speech is inferior in status to male speech.

Politeness in language is attached to Brown and Levinson’s (1987) theory of ‘face work’ which is considered highly influential. They address general politeness aspects which tend to vary culturally but which every person possesses. Brown and Levinson distinguish between a ‘positive face’ and a ‘negative face’, the former catering for the need of “projecting a self that is affiliated with others, that is liked and identified with”; the latter means “projecting a self that is a separate individual”, looking merely for the fulfillment of own interests (2003: 134).

The so-called ‘positive politeness’ is connected to ‘face work’ is: it serves the positive face’s needs by admiring others, talking about problems, telling jokes and using “familiar terms of address”. ‘Negative politeness’ is clearly the opposite: “it is showing respect or deference, avoiding imposing or defending, acknowledging ‘rights’”. Speech acts, usually regarded as polite in everyday situations like apologies, greetings and other formulae, are often negative face work and hence, negatively polite (2003: 135).

Referring back to the claim that women are more polite language users, Holmes supports this by proving that women complement as well as apologize more than men. According to Holmes, complementing is an act of positive politeness, while apologies have a negative politeness connotation (2003: 136). The following example, presenting friendly small talk about a weekend in the sun signals what we are likely to conceive as ‘positively polite’ (Talbot 1998: 90).

(17)

Sarah: Hi Sallie (.) how's things? Ok?  
Sallie: Hi: Sarah (..) hhh oh not so bad.  
you look as if you had a good weekend!  
Sarah: Oh yeah, you bet! been out in the sun all weekend (..) my nose was all red yesterday(h)y though  
Sallie: Well it's not now (.) you look great  
Sarah: Mm thanks I needed a bit of colour all winter in this place (.) you're lo- you're looking good (.) can see you been in the sun  
Sallie: really? Go(h)d (.) was only in it for about an hour  
Sarah: Oh yeah can see it in your face (.) it suits you.  
(Example taken from Talbot 1998: 91)

In friendly and polite talk performed by women, like in the conversation above, we find (stereotypical) female linguistic traits such as “hedges, boosters, and compliments”, as Holmes states. Compliments establish a relationship of solidarity and rapport among interlocutors. Moreover, affective tag questions, which facilitate conversation, are also part of women's politeness strategies (1998: 90-91). Since compliments are regarded the most direct mode of expressing politeness, they are dealt with in more detail.

#### **4.3.7. Compliments**

Janet Holmes defines a compliment as a statement that positively values another person, as a kind of appraisal of the person being addressed (Holmes 1986 in Talbot 1998: 92). Compliments are dependent on power relationships between complimenter and recipient because we interpret compliments differently depending on who utters them.

(18)

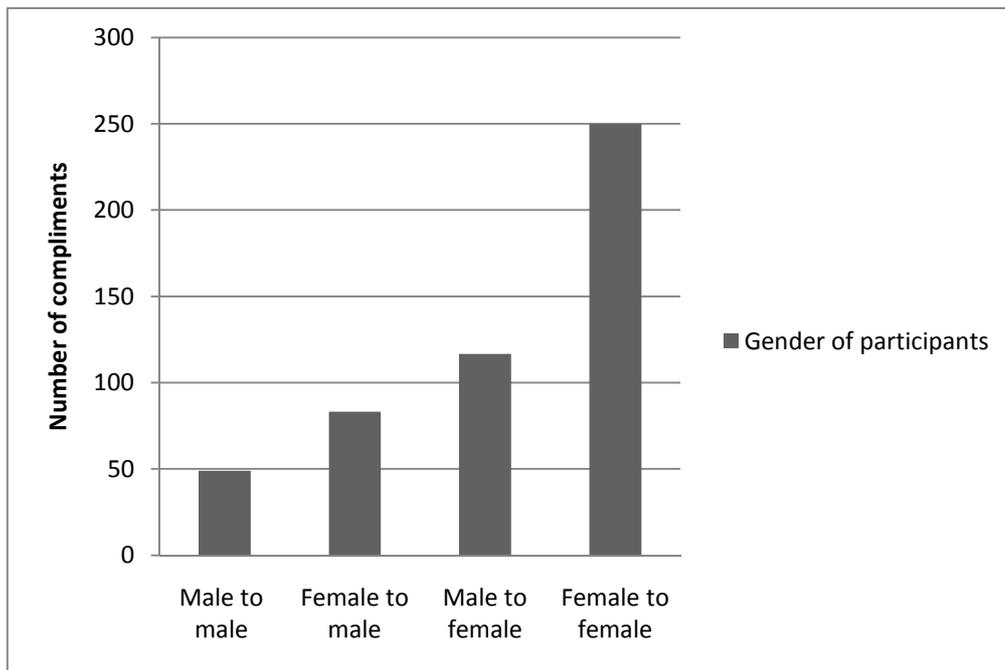
That's really good. (Example taken from Talbot 1998: 92)

If uttered by a teacher to a student, it will most likely be perceived as praise of work, but if said by a close friend it is interpreted as an expression of friendship (1998: 92). Compliments are highly ambivalent speech acts used to show hierarchy and therefore, can also be seen as “asserting power over the recipient”. Researchers draw the conclusion that

men use compliments less than women because they usually hold higher (job) positions (1998: 93).

Holmes' study on compliments between New Zealand men and women revealed that most compliments are made by women to women. Compliments are agreed on by using a token like "thanks" or an "agreeing utterance [I think so too]" (1998: 95).

**Figure 2 Compliments and gender of participants** (taken from Holmes 1995: 123)



Even though women compliment more, they also reject compliments more frequently by questioning them, by disagreeing or by checking on the complimenter's sincerity (1998: 95).

In examining compliments as most salient politeness strategy in conversation, it has been found that it is, in fact, women who compliment more and hence, are perceived more polite. Such signals of friendliness and politeness express solidarity, approval as well as credit and appeal, concludingly, to women's cooperative and affective language use.



## 5. Masculinity and language: male discourse

Men are known to be less talkative in comparison to women or for not talking much at all. On some occasions, for example, when meeting male friends, men do talk for hours about cars, sports, women and business. These, of course, are all stereotypical ideas as to what male conversational behaviour looks like. Until recently, men have not been subject to gender-oriented studies, but since the 1990s, men and masculinity have become a central topic in research (Coates 2003: 1-3).

### 5.1. Masculinity

Men talk is said to be competitive, hierarchically structured, full of humorous jokes, insults and impersonal topics (Cameron in Johnson & Meinhof 1997: 47). These stereotypical traits of male interaction have been the basis of research in order to distinguish men talk from women talk. Especially, the question of how masculinity is constructed through discourse is placed in the foreground of the studies. Men sustain their masculinities through talking because there are “approved ways of being male”, i.e. hegemonic masculinity, a concept that goes back to Connell. Such a hegemonic concept of masculinity faces other masculinities which go against the norm (2003: 4). Consider the following extract of a conversation among male friends:

(19)

- George: we was playing naked football the other night, like it was only about half eleven, er-
- Chaz: play that often, do you?
- George: well I was – in our pants like, we were only kicking it about back I live off
- Chaz: what, in your duds or wi’ fuck all?
- George: duds, and boots like [...] fucking next-door neighbor comes out like that fucking Gareth or whatever he’s called from-
- Dave: is that what he’s called?
- [...]
- George: and he comes out and says-
- Dave: fucking opening line
- George: ‘don’t you think you’re being a bit unreasonable playing football at this time a Monday night?’ I says ‘Fuck off <LAUGHTER> yer bunch of knobheads, go

on fuck off back inside <LAUGHTER> full of beer,  
funny.

(Extract taken from Coates 2003: 1-2)

This is supposed to be “authentic men’s talk”, as any native speaker of English would infer, including “boasting, swearing and topics such as football [...]” (2003: 2). The informal conversation between the men contains various clues about the relationship between men talk and masculinity. Mimicking or making fun of each other is a way of showing the “in-group” membership, of understanding each other, of claiming “who they are and who they are not” (2003: 2). It is interesting to look at how masculinity becomes established and maintained through male discourse (2003: 3).

Talking to friends plays an important role in gender work since participants feel accepted and acknowledged by each other and hence, the self-concept and identity of an individual as female or male becomes affirmed. The following example presents two male friends talking about mobile phones:

(20)

Chris: Kate’s just got a new one, got one of those tiny little Siemens ones with-

Geoff: oh that are- that are about that big=

Chris: =it’s tiny . with WAP services

Geoff: oh yeah

Chris: it is pretty cool [...] and we’ve been having these endless discussions because she wants me to have the same phone as her

Geoff: why?

Chris: um on the basis that she won’t read the manual and I will which means that-

**Geoff: you’re a man you don’t read manuals**

Chris: oh I do

Geoff: <LAUGHS>

Chris: only for the mobile phone I don’t read it for anything else

Geoff: ahhh

(Example taken from Coates 2003: 40)

This example shows clearly that both participants are explicitly doing gender work: Geoff comments that men do not have to read a manual in

order to figure out how something works. First of all, Chris contradicts this by saying “Oh I do”, but in the end gives in and adopts Geoff’s opinion. Most of the time, masculinity is not as overtly stated as in this example, but one of the major functions of men friends’ talk is to reassert the norms of the masculine identity by which men position themselves in relation to hegemonic masculinity.

According to Connell, masculinity does not signify possessing certain features, but to “produce masculinity by engaging in masculine practices” (Schippers 2007: 86). Hence, masculinity can be called a set of practices which are performed in certain social contexts (2007: 86). Creating hegemonic masculinity also implies the denial of femininity, since men see women and gays as “the despised other” (Coates 2003: 69). Hence, even the smallest feminine traits are avoided in male talk. Hegemonic masculinity denies homosexuality. In the following story sequence, a young male talks about a night out with a male friend:

(21)  
and er night before I left to come here right  
I um ((xx)) Bill ((xx)),  
I told you this.  
I was driving down the road  
**and I’ve just seen this long hair little fucking mini-skirt.**  
I’ve beeped the horn,  
this fucking bloke’s turned around,  
I’ve gone ‘aaaggghhh!’ <SCREAMS>  
<LAUGHTER>  
Bill’s gone ‘what what what?’,  
‘it was a bloke’,  
I’ve gone, ‘turn round, turn round’,  
and he’s turned round  
and you could just see these shoes hiding under this car  
and he must’ve thought we were just gonna literally beat the crap  
out of him.  
[...]  
I’ve driven past,  
opened the window,  
‘come out, come out, wherever you are,  
here queerie, queerie, queerie’.

(Example taken from Coates 2003: 69-70)

Clearly, the narrator positions himself as heterosexual, both through claiming interest in a girl (line 5) and through his reaction of shock when he figures out that this girl is actually a man (2003: 70).

## **5.2. A “male“language? Swearing and taboo language**

Male speech style is stereotypically perceived as powerful because of its dominant assertiveness, interruptions, challenging and directness. It is often equated with very intensive language, i.e. the usage of expletives and swearwords in order to contest their power (de Klerk 1997 in Johnson 1997: 145). Expletives function in the first instance as breaking the norm, shocking and disrespecting authority. Sometimes, they are uttered with the intention of sounding witty or funny, but most importantly, as other vernacular forms, swearing and cursing belong to a shared code of a certain group of people which shows group membership (1997: 147). As an in-group device, expletives have come to be associated with masculinity and power since taboo language powerfully disrupts linguistic norms.

In Western societies, the use of expletives has a covert attraction because of its connotations of strength, masculinity and confidence in defying linguistic or social convention (1997: 147).

The existing stereotype claims that it is men who do all the cursing and swearing, while women – ladylike as they are supposed to be – are tactfully reticent. Thus,

[...] most [...] slang is created and used by males. Many types of slang words, including the taboo and strongly derogatory ones, those referring to sex, women, work, money, whisky, politics, transportation, sports and the like – refer primarily to male endeavour and interest. The majority of [this slang] could be labelled ‘primarily masculine use’ (Flexner & Wentworth 1975: xii).

The reason why men prefer strong language has to be considered in relation to their socialization as boys in which they learn to assert themselves with verbal aggressive behaviour (1997: 148). So, it is likely that males conform to the expected masculine behaviour by trying out expletives.

Another common feature of male talk is the use of taboo language. Men tend to use words like 'fuck' quite often. Coates provides some examples:

- (22) we don't know what the fuck to do with the bastards
- (23) they just fucked me about completely
- (24) I was fairly pissed by the time we got to the fucking park if you remember

(Examples taken from Coates 2003: 45)

The use of swearing and taboo language fulfils various functions in male conversation: it adds verisimilitude to direct speech; it helps emphasize points and, perhaps most importantly, it is the performance of hegemonic masculinity. Men use taboo language in the company of other men in order to show their toughness and manhood. It is also used to maintain emotional restraint which is essential to the concept of hegemonic masculinity: by swearing, men keep the focus away from the personal and emotional. However, taboo language plays an important part within the context of male bonding (Coates 1996: 277; Coates 2003: 45-46).

Earlier, Lakoff found out similar things: she claims that there is a higher probability of finding words like *shit*, *hell* or *damn* in men's speech than in women's. She also relates the preferred use of taboo language by men to their position in society: "Allowing men stronger means of expression than are open to women reinforces men's position of strength in the real world" (Lakoff 1975: 11).

### **5. 3. Telling stories**

Story telling plays a significant role as it allows men to maintain their sense of themselves and explore alternative selves at the same time. When men talk, they always act a certain age as well as being part of a certain social class and in relation to this, create different masculinities (Coates 2003: 40-41).

There are four commonalities in men's stories Jennifer Coates (2003: 44) found out in her studies which are typically male: the topics of stories told, the protagonists' gender in these stories, the attention paid to details and

the use of swearing and boasting. All these features help create hegemonic masculinity. The topics the men recorded by Coates (2003: 44) talked about, were stereotypically masculine. Thus, the importance of sex-role stereotypes comes in once again: men talk about cars, modern technology, drinking, sports, sex and travel. They rarely speak about family or private life as opposed to women. Sometimes, however, women are present in the story worlds of men, but in most cases they are presented in sexual terms. It is a widely known phenomenon that men, when talking about women reduce them to body parts, so that they are presented stereotypically (Coates 2003: 123-124). Moreover, men's stories are full of details which allow them to avoid talking about personal topics:

(25) Car wouldn't start (narrator = Sam, Jack's words in italics)

1 can't believe my car  
 2 it's ((2 sylls)) [*really*]  
 3 mhm, speedo's fucked [*oh no*]  
 4 I was just about to-  
 5 wind [screen]wipers are fucked [*oh right*]  
 6 and now the fucker won't start [*oh no*]  
 7 [...]  
 8 I mean last time I just banged the bonnet [*yeah*]  
 9 and I mean it started up straight away [*yeah*]  
 10 and this time I was banging it and kicking it and shouting at it  
 ((xx)) [*oh my god*]  
 11 so then I- .hh I had a look at the fuses  
 12 and the fuses were all right  
 13 so I pulled the wires off  
 14 and cleaned them all up  
 15 and put them back again [% *fuck it%*]  
 16 did that three or four times  
 17 it still wouldn't start so-  
 18 *what a bastard*  
 19 ((xxx)) ((hope it)) starts first time tomorrow  
 20 [*Jack laughs quietly*]

(Example taken from Coates 2003: 41-42)

As men constantly focus on achievement in their stories, narrating a story can itself become a competitive act, which can be face-threatening in a certain way. Coates found out that men quite often use the 'strategy of

deflation', which is undermining another's story by adding a deflating comment at the end. With the help of this strategy, the heroism of the current narrator can be cut off in order to open the floor for the next speaker as males usually do not build up a collaborative floor like women do. Furthermore, when men are telling stories they perform hegemonic masculinity through presenting themselves or their male protagonists as successful heroes, like in the following example:

(26) *Amazing Left [Three 16-year-olds are talking in Julian's room at boarding school]*

1 in the June in the- in the final of the Cup  
2 I did the most amazing left with this half-volley you will ever see.  
3 ((it)) came down  
4 it was like quite- it was quite like- quite a- quite high but quite hard  
5 it came down ((here))  
6 I had someone running up  
7 it was on my left so I didn't have time to ((1 word)) change ((feet))  
8 so I took it on the half-volley  
9 and it just went flying <EMPHATIC>  
10 and Neil ran on from an on-side position  
11 and he was away  
12 and he ((was))-  
13 and it was just the most beautiful ball I've ever ever ever seen. <EMPHATIC>

(Example taken from Coates 2003: 48)

In this extract the narrator presents himself as the heroic protagonist. Men tend to place any pain or illness they have gone through in the foreground, but only to stress their heroic behaviour.

Besides constructing hegemonic masculinity, men's stories have another important function: having fun together. Male talk continuously switches between serious and less serious frames: male speakers often narrate incidents which they found to be funny, but they also want to entertain their friends as "having a laugh" is central to being accepted as masculine. Laughing together can also serve to touch more sensitive topics because it allows for indirectly admitting that there are times where certain things

go wrong and men are not always the heroes who can achieve everything (Coates 2003: 55-56). The overt discussion of a problem and self-disclosure are typical features of women's talk, but rarely found in all-male talk since men constantly focus on demonstrating achievement as well as triumph and thus, do not want to reveal their true feelings. Therefore, Coates argues that men prefer discussing several topics to telling stories. This has to do with peer group pressure because when only two male friends talk, they do often reveal their feelings and touch more sensitive and personal topics (2003: 77).

#### 5. 4. Report talk and male gossip

Report talk is typically associated with male talk. Cameron analysed a conversation among five male friends during a basketball game. She observed participants making references to the game, but also engaging in other topics, for example, classes at university, going shopping and wine, including longer narratives (Cameron 1997 in Johnson 1997: 50). What is striking is that, as Cameron discovers, men gossip about people who are not present and their appearance, clothing, sexual and social behaviours. Especially, homosexuality seems to be the topic of gossip.

(27)

Bryan: uh you know that really gay guy in our Age of Revolution class who sits in front of us?  
He wore shorts again, by the way, it's like 42 degrees out he wore shorts again [laughter] it's like a speedo, he wears a speedo to class (.) he's got incredibly skinny legs you know=

Ed: =you know  
Like those shorts women volleyball players wear? [...]

[...]

Bryan: he's either got some condition that he's got to like have his legs legs exposed at all times or else he's got really good legs=

Ed: he's probably he' [s like

Carl: [he really likes

Bryan: =he

Ed: =he's like at home combing his leg hairs=

Carl: his legs=

[...]

(Example taken from Cameron 1997: 53)

- (28) two male friends talking about a schoolmate (narrator= Henry, Julian's words in italics)
- 1 he was talking about . being raped by Ralph, yeah?[*yeah*]  
 2 and he was going on about how he didn't see it – think it was actually that disgusting  
 3 *he is gay!* <INDIGNANT TONE>  
 4 and then- and then we said [...] 'didn't you think it was absolutely disgusting?'.  
 5 He was sit- he was just sitting there like not answering.  
 (Example taken from Coates 2003: 71)

Men talk or male gossip is closer to the stereotype of feminine talk and, indeed, men talk about people and do so by establishing rapport rather than by reporting. Similar to women's gossip, men create and affirm solidarity among the group members by chatting about presumably female topics. The male friends observed in Cameron's example contradict themselves: first, they judge other male colleagues as being homosexual because they like to show off their bodies and dress more fashionably. Then, the informants themselves gossip about clothes and body styling, but do so in order to show that they are not sexually attracted to other men (Cameron 1997: 54). They create their heterosexuality and masculinity through discourse.

Other stereotypical assumptions are that men see talk as competition, their speech style is competitive as opposed to women's cooperative talk. Moreover, men do report talk in order to gain status while women establish connection between participants by performing rapport talk (1997: 55). Cameron found, based on Coates' ideas on cooperative informal talk, men in the observed conversation interact highly cooperatively.

- (29)
- Ed: he's **I mean** he's **like** a real artsy fartsy fag he's **like** (indeciph) he's so gay he's got this **like** really high voice and wire rim glasses and he sits next to the ugliest-ass bitch in the history of the world  
 Ed: [and  
 Bryan:[and they're all hitting on her too, **like** four  
 Ed: [I know it's **like** four homos hitting on her  
 Bryan:guys [hitting on her  
 (Example taken from Cameron 1997: 56)

Participants react to what has been said before, building their utterances on the contributions of others (Cameron 1997: 55). Extract (X) shows that many utterances start with “you know” and the marker “like” is used repeatedly. These function here as cooperative hedging, as Holmes suggests. If not identified as hedges, these markers presuppose that speakers share common knowledge. Interestingly, men often collaboratively construct talk through a variety of features such as repetition, questions and jointly completing utterances. Male collaborative talk functions to create group membership, but also to establish dominant masculinity (Coates 2003: 64). Extract (30) contains a lot of simultaneous speech which indicates that discourse is jointly constructed: parts are repeated with extra emphasis and backchannel support ‘that’s right’ being provided (Cameron 1997: 56).

(30)

Bryan: he doesn’t have any leg hair though= [yes and oh

Ed: =he real[ly likes

Ed: his legs=

Al: =very long very white and very skinny

Bryan: those ridiculous Reeboks that are always (indeciph) and  
goofy white socks always striped= [tube socks

Ed: [that’s right

Ed: he’s the antithesis of man

(Example taken from Cameron 1997: 54)

## 5.5. The (stereotypical) characteristics of male discourse

In comparison to studies on women's talk, little is known about informal talk performed by men, since male speakers and their speech practices are seen as the norm. The way talk is organized in male conversations has only recently gained importance in research.

### 5.5.1. Turn-taking in conversation

Conversation is structured by a set of conventions one of which is called turn-taking at talk. Turn-taking basically regulates when it is appropriate to speak, for how long and when to finish and end the turn – or leave the floor, as it is also called – between conversation partners. Speakers send out cues as to when they are coming to the end of their turns or when they want to take the floor. It is, therefore, necessary that speakers recognize these cues in order to avoid overlaps, interruptions or silence. Indeed, it seems that speakers do so without any problems (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2003: 109-110). Coates refers back to a stereotype by saying that “men disobey the normal turn-taking rules in order to control topics” (Coates 1986: 101).

What is known now is that while women establish collaborative floor in conversations with their female friends, men adopt a single floor when talking to male friends. As Edelsky points out (1981: Who's got the floor), the main feature of collaborative conversation is that speakers participate simultaneously, which is often found in women's talk. By contrast, single floor signifies that one speaker speaks at a time which is said to be characteristic of male friends' talk (Johnson 1997: 107-109).

(31) four friends talking in a pub

Bill: that-that's what I ((can see from x)) from my- my view/ is  
Bill: that-is that- . is that for instance they made a hell of a  
Alan: %mhm%  
Bill: lot of mistakes ((by me))/ you look at these massive concrete  
Bill: council estates they wouldn't dream of building now/ . but.  
Alan: mhm/ mhm/  
Brian: mhm/

(Example taken from Coates 1997: 109-110)

(32) male friends talking about a project

Tim: how long have you been thinking about it then?

Seb: well I k- I thought

Tim: ((just))- =yeah=

Seb: about it when I was living in Archway/ ((but it))= = you

Seb: know it's ready to be done/

Alex: what? the Fantin-Latour portrait?

(Example taken from Coates 1997: 110)

What is striking is that simultaneous speech, i.e. overlapping does not occur in all-male conversations since speakers stick to the turn-taking model: they either address the next speaker directly; self-select their turns or the current speaker continues their turn (1997: 112). Overlaps only occur where backchannel support is given, either by only one participant or by more:

(33) men talking about the 1960s

Bill: I mean I can remember a Labour Government/ but

Bill: the students can't/ . you know I'd- I'd just eligible to

John: no/ it's true/

Alan: mhm/

Brian: no/

(Example taken from Coates 1997: 109-110)

Moreover, overlapping speech happens where transition of turns is mistimed (34) or a result of misunderstanding (35):

(34)

Tim: it's really strange that you don't drink actually=

Alex: = why? =

Tim: well [yeah/

Alex: [[[do I?)]/ yeah but only like

Seb: =((he does drink a bit))/

Alex: [[(a sip of beer)]/

Seb: [I know – I know a few people who don't drink nowadays/

(Example taken from Coates 1997: 114-115)

(35)

Bill: do you think if we were French we'd be very different?

Alan: yes/

Bill: d'you think [because it's sixty-eight be different/

Alan: [we- we- we- we- talk about- well what we've

Alan: forgotten here...

(example taken from Coates 1997: 115)

Even though overlaps are less frequent in male than in female talk, when they occur, they are of clearly supportive nature (1997: 115).

Overlaps are usually regarded as a minor subtype of interruptions which are ascribed to men's talk. However, overlapping is part of simultaneous, collaborative and not one-at-a-time speech. Men avoid overlaps because they want to be equals in conversation and maintain friendship. Hence, overlaps or even interruptions are inappropriate in all-male interaction since they are considered dominant moves (1997: 117).

### 5.5.2. Interruptions

When it comes to interruptions, Zimmermann and West have discovered great differences in same-sex and mixed-sex conversations (Coates 1986: 99). What they have found is known as 'overlap' and 'interruption': the former happening when the second speaker overlaps the last word of the first speaker's turn; the latter "are violations of the turn-taking rules of conversation" (1986: 99). By interrupting, a speaker gains a turn but hinders another from finishing theirs.

Interestingly, it is men who interrupt more often in mixed-sex conversations, as the analysis by Zimmermann and West shows: out of the total 48 occurring interruptions, 46 have been caused by male speakers (1986: 99). Women, in contrast, "are concerned *not* to violate a man's turn but to wait until he's finished" (1986: 100, emphasis in original). In talk between either two women or two men, only 7 interruptions in sum occurred. Consequently, the speaker tends to remain silent, when their turn is interrupted (the speaker being a woman in most conversations).

Tannen (1994) thinks of 'overlap' as "supportive conversational strategy" because a turn may be enhanced through overlapping (Coates 2003: 111). She continues by referring to a style of speaking called 'high involvement' in which it is normal to have overlapping talk and argues that speakers who are not interrupted while speaking, "may feel frozen out rather than supported" (2003: 111). So, interruptions and overlaps can be seen as supportive strategies. However, the claim that interruptions are a means of showing power and dominance remains. Tannen refuses to accept this claim because "an interruption takes more than one participant". Only keeping silent and letting the interruptor violently take the floor, makes interruption possible (2003: 112).

### 5.5.3. Topics

Men discuss different topics in same-sex groups: often, male conversation deals with sports, business, travel, women and cars, i.e. impersonal topics in order to avoid self-disclosure (Coates 1997 in Johnson 1997: 119). When talk, if at all, becomes more personal, men chat about drinks and success, leaving emotions aside. Since men engage more in single floor conversations, topics are likely to be non-personal because they allow for monologues and "playing the expert" (1997: 120). In a monologue, one speaker holds the floor for a longer period of time which can often be observed in men's talk. The speaker in this conversation talks as if he were an expert in the current topic discussed (1997: 120).

(36)

John: I've got this tremendous ambivalence about the 60s/ ((cos I've got you know kind of)) on the one hand I see it as being this-. this potentially revolutionary era you know/ and on the other hand .hh a-a bunch of middle-class

John: creeps [((xx)) growing growing their hair long

Brian: [oh I agree with John ((xx))

John: and sort of- and really nothing particularly happened/.hh

Bill: well I wasn't middle class but I grew my hair long/<LAUGHS>

Brian: [so did I/ <LAUGHS>

John: [well I mean yes/ we di- I mean I did too/ but the-

and I wear the- wore the- you know the bell bottom pants  
were de rigueur and all the rest of it/ but um. I er I I I do-  
I do think that there was a kind of a- it was a change/  
A k- a-a change/ .not revolutionary necessarily/ but  
it was a change/. ((and)) [...]

(Example taken from Coates 1997: 121)

What is interesting is that even in monologues, men take turns to hold the floor, so that every participant is able to give a monologue of their own. While one man is talking, the others only provide supportive minimal responses (1997: 121).

#### **5.5.4. Questions**

Questions play an important role in turn-taking in such expert monologues. They seek information, handing the floor over to the addressee. The following sequence about speech synthesizers shows clearly that Peter asks Rob a question in order to offer him the floor:

(37)

Peter: what else do they use it for apart from the deaf? Or do they have other applications- I don't mean the deaf/ I mean the dumb/ do they have other applications?

Rob: well they didn't develop it for the dumb/ I can't remember why they did develop it/ um – I don't know/

(Example taken from Coates 1997: 123)

Furthermore, questions function as means of introducing a new topic about which the addressee then talks like an expert.

(38)

Rob: do you know of the Pennsylvania experiment?

Peter: no/ tell me about it/ [Rob proceeds to talk]

(Example taken from Coates 1997: 124)

#### **5.5.5. Directives**

Several studies have shown that men use more directives than women (Aries 1996: 107-108) which might be something acquired during childhood: Goodwin's examination of children's group dynamics and language strategies showed that boys negotiated status and hierarchy through the use of directives:

(39)

'Gimme the pliers'.

'Get off my steps.'

'Man, don't come down *in* where I *am*!'

(Examples taken from Talbot 1998: 89)

Young boys, who learn how to assert themselves, are rewarded for being direct, decisive and strong and acquire language that helps them appear powerful and in command. Without doubt, as grown-ups, men have more access to status and power in Western societies than women. They create and demonstrate power by using assertive language like directives (Kiesling 1997:65). Directives are a means of portraying power and are connected to the role of the leader. Such direct imperatives like "Close the door!" are a threat to the face of interlocutors since they constrain or restrict the other's actions.

#### **5.5.6. Emotions and self-disclosure**

When it comes to the expression of emotions, men are said to lack the ability of communicating emphatically: "they are inarticulate, emotionally illiterate, insensitive, and aggressive", says Deborah Cameron in "The Myth of Mars and Venus" (2007: 11). To express sentiments openly is not regarded manly, hence, self-disclosure and personal topics are scarcely found in male talk. Eckert proves that shared activity and exchange of information are more important to boys than talking about people, relationships and feelings (2007: 72). Moreover, society has become accustomed to a masculine image that portrays men as strong, powerful and unemotional. However, being less emotionally expressive does not mean that men do not have any feelings, but that they wear a mask to appear masculine and to reach up to societal expectations. In order to create hegemonic masculinity, men are constrained to avoid talking about emotions (Coates 2003: 197-198). As Seidler puts it,

[...] [men] refuse to experience parts of [themselves] that would bring [them] into contact with [their] hurt, pain and vulnerability since these threaten [their] inherited sense of masculinity (Seidler in Coates 2003: 198)

To be masculine is to avoid emotions, and instead use swearing, talking tough and boasting as a means to distract from sensitive and personal topics. Moments of emotional impact and self-disclosure are left untouched and even if feelings are revealed in all-male talk, they are introduced with tentativeness and cause uneasiness and embarrassment (Coates 2003: 73-75). Coates found only a single example of self-disclosure in her corpus on male friends' talk: a young man called Brian talks about a difficult moment in his life to his male friends:

(40)

1 Well at the moment ((**I mean**)) this is partly personal  
2 cos I mean I- my own life **sort of** has been [*ah*] up and down  
3 and I've . **you know sort of**-. If you'd t- if you'd had this  
 conversation with me about a term ago  
4 **I mean** I was **just** about as down as you could get  
5 because I'm er- really was quite seriously suicidal  
6 [...]  
12 **I mean** about . towards . about the middle of last term  
13 I **quite** seriously- . I went out and I bought a big bottle of pills  
14 they were codeine and aspirin mix  
15 and a bottle of whisky  
16 and I went and sat on Twickenham Green  
17 and I was going to kill myself [*mhm*]  
18 I was going to eat the pills and drink the whisky  
19 well it was only a little bottle of whisky <GREATER SPEED>  
20 sitting there **y'know** **TOTALLY just** about as depressed as  
21 you could possibly get  
22 and then I **just** thought 'you stupid sod'  
23 so I threw away the pills  
24 drank the whisky  
25 and went home  
 [...]

(Example taken from Coates 2003: 74-75)

Brian already introduces the delicate issue by uttering "partly personal" which serves to prepare his friends for his confession. Moreover, as the preceding conversation was about ups and downs in life, Brian carefully connects his own story to the current topic. By moving tentatively from a general topic to a very personal one, Brian shows his fear of revealing a personal experience. This is also emphasized by the excessive use of hedges which are uncommon in male talk, but can always be found in

female talk when discussing sensitive issues (Coates 2003: 73-75). Brian is afraid of appearing weak and vulnerable, but nevertheless, exposes himself emotionally to his friends. Surprisingly, even though he is talking about a very moving moment, Brian performs hegemonic masculinity at the same time by giving detailed information on what he wanted to use to commit suicide since details are necessary for men in their creation of masculinity (2003: 135).

## 6. You just don't understand – misunderstanding across the sexes

As has been shown in the previous chapters on distinctive features of female and male talk, communication across the sexes, i.e. between women and men is likely to fail because cross-sex participants interpret linguistic choices and practices differently. Research has uncovered that women and men try to interact as equal partners in mixed-sex conversation in which, however, women, in fact, do not play the same role. Striking differences in male and female contributions to mixed-sex interactions have been found to exist. Most researchers based their explanations for these different communicative strategies on power disparities in society or on personal characteristics of men and women (Maltz & Borker 1998: 417-419). Male speakers dominate conversation because men also dominate society and power relations. Another explanation comes from studies on sex-roles (for further discussion see chapter 2): Lakoff, for example, states that women produce talk the way they do because firstly, they have learned to sound ladylike and secondly, it “fits with the personalities they develop as a consequence of sex-role requirements” (1998: 419).

Maltz and Borker stress the notion of culture-dependent conversational differences between men and women and rules for interpreting conversation. Basing their ideas on the difference approach, they claim that through the socialization process, men and women have learned to communicate differently which leads to failure of communication across the sexes (Maltz & Borker 1998: 420).

For instance, even the smallest cues for interaction are misinterpreted: minimal responses like *mhm*, *aha* and *yes* are part of everyday conversational interaction, however, these particles mean different things for men and women, resulting in misunderstanding: a male speaker infers from a woman's 'mhm' that she agrees with what he is saying, while, in fact, she only shows that she is listening. A female speaker concludes that the man is not attentive because he only occasionally gives a minimal response, while he is actually indicating disagreement (1998: 422).

In addition to the problematic area of minimal responses, there are many other areas in which male and female speakers possess distinct rules of conversation. For example, in all-female groups, women engage in a conversation about one and the same topic for at least half an hour: they talk about experiences, feelings and relationships. Men, by contrast, like to tell anecdotes or stories and in doing so, they jump from one topic to the next, without spending much time on only one (Coates 1986: 151-152).

Whilst both men and women ask questions in conversations, their use seems to fulfill different intentions: women use questions in order to keep the conversation going, men understand questions as seeking information only. The indirect strategy of conversational maintenance performed by female speakers faces the direct strategy of requesting information, showing that males and females interpret the goals of questioning differently which leads to miscommunication (1986: 152).

When it comes to the organization of talk, women respect the rules of turn-taking so everyone has the chance to participate in the talk. A single floor conversation is regarded as too dominant and is, thus, disliked among female interlocutors. Men, on the contrary, see talk as a competition for power and dominance. To them, it is a means of establishing hierarchy (1986: 152). Moreover, when taking turns, women usually acknowledge what others have said, and connect their talk to the previous speaker's turn. Men do not link their contributions to previous ones: they rather ignore them since they want to get their own comments across. This implies that women feel left out of conversation between mixed-sex speakers because what they say seems to be unimportant in comparison to male statements (1986: 152).

Since women attach their contributions in talk to what others have said before, shifts in topics occur smoothly and gradually because each topic is jointly developed, yielding at "elaboration and continuity". Men shift their topics abruptly disregarding the need of women to establish continuity. However, this elaboration and continuity strategy is important for women to be able to discuss problems and experiences and give advice. Men

rarely talk about their personal problems or emotions. They do not react to another speaker's disclosure by sharing their own problems, but play the expert and give advice. Therefore, responses to stating problems differ because men and women possess other concepts of self-disclosure (1986: 153). The expression of troubles often causes frustration in mixed-sex conversations: while women dislike men's tendency to offer advice and solution to problems, men get annoyed by women's refusal to solve their problems which women complain about (Tannen 1990: 51).

Arguments are often loud and aggressive in all-male groups. "Shouting, name-calling, threats and insults" belong to the repertoire of men's verbal aggressiveness. Women, by contrast, avoid such behavior since they feel personally attacked and see it as disrupting the conversation. In men's speech, however, it is regarded as part of the organizational structure of talk (1986: 153).

What female speakers also consider as rude are interruptions. Women provide feedback by nodding, giving minimal responses like *mhm*, *yeah* and enthusiastic comments while another person is talking. The backchannel support is not regarded an interruption in all-female conversation, but is a way of proving attentiveness to the listener. Men, on the other hand, interrupt in order to procure the next turn and thus, deny other speakers to finish their current turns. This means for mixed-sex interactions that women remain silent after they have been interrupted by male participants (1986: 153).

All these areas contain potential for miscommunication to take place since the cooperative conversational style of females is confronted with the competitive organization of talk performed by males. This is due to the fact that women and men apply different conversational rules (1986: 154). Thus, participants have to carefully choose their rules for interpreting conversations since rules of conversational inference may not be the same for each participant (Maltz & Borker 1998: 431). One and the same situation might be viewed differently by men and women because women focus on intimacy and creating connection as well as consensus; men, on

the other hand, look for status and independence. For instance, women would never make any plans before consulting with their partners because they regard it a sign of courtesy and consideration. By contrast, men equal consulting with seeking permission which is why they often decide things without making sure that this is acceptable for their partners (Tannen 1990: 26-27).

Still, in order for the cross-sex misunderstanding to happen, men and women have to use the same language differently and at the same time, they have to be unaware of the use of the other sex. However, even if some linguistic forms are applied in a distinct manner, men and women belonging to one community share a lot of experience of communicating with each other, so that linguistic choices should be comprehensible in any case (Cameron 2007: 83).

### **PART III: GENDERED DISCOURSE IN THE WORKPLACE**

So far, stereotypical linguistic features of women and men have been focused on, as they present a very broad research area in language and gender studies. These stereotypes prevail in society and continue to function not only in everyday talk, but also in public domains and business communication. Thus, in recent years, research in the field of language and gender has focused on the interplay between gender and discourse in workplace contexts. The professional workplace is an excellent setting for investigating linguistic strategies and their connection to gender. The public sphere has become especially interesting since women entering professions which were traditionally male-dominated, face inequality which is also created and maintained through stereotypes connected to language use. Gender is an omnipresent factor in every conversation and therefore, an organizing principle in institutions, since widely-held stereotypes are reinforced in communicative encounters as interlocutors conform to societal norms and perform gender in stereotypic ways (Mullany 2007: 1-3).

Part III is divided into two chapters: the first one describes the importance of gender in the workplace as well as what actually constitutes workplace communication. Moreover, models that women employ in performing their professional identities are discussed in order to show what it means for women to communicate effectively in professional contexts. Finally, the notion of gendered workplaces is introduced, a term that has become widely known and implies many stereotypical assumptions for workplaces.

The second chapter is dedicated to the analysis of business discourse. First of all, research methods and data collection are described. Next, various speech acts that take place in workplace communication are briefly outlined, specified with examples and analysed with regard to stereotypically gendered performances.



## **7. Workplace discourse**

Workplace discourse is often referred to as “institutional discourse” in order to cover the broad range of interactions happening in workplaces. Since such discourses occur in special settings, they differ considerably from informal, everyday conversation. Drew and Heritage are convinced that three interactional dimensions reflect institutional discourse: first of all, interaction is always goal-oriented which means that participants interact in order to accomplish a goal, which is linked to their institution. Secondly, special and particular constraints connected to business determine the contributions of the interlocutors. And lastly, interactions are dependent on institutional contexts which becomes most obvious when technical or professional jargon is used (Koester 2006: 3-4).

Moreover, in contrast to ordinary conversation, institutional discourse is often asymmetrical: participants take on particular roles within the workplace setting which are unequal: e.g. an employer is talking to his employees. These roles are, however, not always relevant for interaction since “roles and identities are not predetermined and fixed, but actively negotiated through talk” (2006: 5-6).

Workplace discourse is essential in creating professional roles as well as gender identities at work. Since most workplaces are masculine domains, male interaction strategies are taken as the norm. So, how do men and women talk at work? Do they really draw on stereotypical ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ speech patterns (which have already been discussed in detail)? Is gender a determinant factor or is it instead that both men and women skilfully select linguistic strategies according to context? (Holmes 2006: 1)

### **7.1. The role of gender (stereotypes) in the workplace**

Gender does not necessarily determine the discursive strategies colleagues at work use, but it is a relevant and omnipresent factor in every communicative event. At some point, societal gender stereotypes creep into talk, since gender identities are negotiated through talk and both male

and female interlocutors conform to gendered norms, when performing their identities (Holmes 2006: 2).

In every conversation, participants identify immediately the sex of the other person and expect certain behavioural patterns which may be displayed in subtle or obvious ways. Gender is always there, even though not always consciously noticed. Consider the following example in which Jill, the Chair of the Board of an IT company, who needs help with her computer and after having consulted a male colleague, talks to her colleague Lucy about her experience:

(41)

Jill: [walks into room] he just laughed at me

Lucy: [laughs]: oh no:

Jill: he's definitely going to come to my aid  
but ( ) he just sort of laughed at me

Lucy: [laughs]

Jill: and then I've got this appalling reputation  
of being such a technical klutz

(Example taken from Holmes 2006: 3)

Even though Jill makes no explicit comment on gender in this extract, gender stereotypes form an essential part in the conversation: by stating *being such technical klutz*, she hints at the widely-known stereotype that women are completely incompetent when it comes to technology. Furthermore, she draws on a normatively feminine linguistic repertoire like the intensifiers *just*, *definitely*, *such a* show (Holmes 2006: 3). This short example already shows how gender and associated stereotypes enter conversations.

These gender stereotypes are used to maintain social order and because of this, women find themselves in a double-bind situation: in order to be powerful and respected in male-dominated domains, they adopt masculine linguistic behaviour which is regarded as an appropriate style for leaders and when performing professional identities. However, if in a business meeting, for example, a woman were to use a strong expletive to emphasize her point, colleagues would be shocked and embarrassed

since she has clearly challenged social norms. If a man, on the other hand, behaved in the same way, nobody would even raise an eyebrow since it is regarded the masculine way to talk and hence, connected to power. In fact, men and women choose their workplace discourse depending on context and considering communicative demands of their respective community of practice (CofP) (2006: 5).

## **7.2. Public talk**

Public domains, such as politics and economics, have been mainly male-dominated, but women are increasingly taking on male careers which forces them to try to break the norms by adapting various models of interaction. Walsh outlines three models “available to women who enter traditionally male-dominated communities of practice“(Walsh 2001: 5).

### **7.2.1. The accommodation model**

The accommodation model, as argued by Robin Lakoff in 1975, prescribes that women accommodate to the normative masculine discursive practices in order to be perceived as powerful as male colleagues. Various studies have given evidence to the fact that women change their ‘powerless’ language to the powerful (male) one, on the grounds that they would then be more accepted and given a higher status (2001: 5).

But women who successfully adapt to characteristically male linguistic norms run the risk of being perceived as aggressive and confrontational, as unfeminine – in other words, there is a clash between what is expected of a woman and what is expected of a person with high status in the public sphere (Coates 1998: 295).  
[language and gender: a reader. Oxford: Blackwell]

As a consequence, women in public roles who uncritically persist with male features of speech are negatively judged. Moreover, some feminists dismiss the idea of accommodation since it counters the gender equality (Walsh 2001: 5).

### **7.2.2. The critical “difference“ model**

Instead of adopting masculinist norms, women give more prominence to their own cooperative interaction style, to features of their own speech they regard as desirable. By doing so, female professionals may

cause/provoke further “creation of a gendered split *within* the public sphere“ (Walsh 2001: 5-6) since these female discourse strategies are not regarded as professional and therefore, they are judged powerless. Yet, “feminine speech styles coincide with those increasingly favoured in certain workplace contexts“ (Walsh 2001: 6).

What Walsh (2001: 6) calls “conversationalization“, i.e. interpersonal instead of merely transactional discourse, making use of more cooperative discourse strategies, has been identified by Cameron:

What is happening, at least in theory, is a shift in the culture of Anglo-American corporate capitalism away from traditional (aggressive, competitive and individualistic) interactional norms and towards a new management style stressing flexibility, team-work and collaborative problem-solving, which is thought to be better suited to changing global economic conditions (Cameron 1995: 199)

As to this shift in communication style, (in the most critical interpretation of the difference model) it has been demanded that it is not women but men who should modify their way of speaking and take on preferable feminine speech strategies (Holmes 1995, in Walsh 2001: 7). Opinions are manifold: feminists fear that through promoting female speech styles in professional contexts, it would all result in women belonging to private sectors and men belonging to public spheres (Walsh 2001: 6-7). Others think that this would be a chance for women to gain more prestige and status in the professional world. Cameron (1995: 43) sees the potential “to open up the possibility for challenge and change“instead of reinforcing gender distinction.

### **7.2.3. The performative model**

A third and more recent strategy has become accessible for women in the world of work. This is called the „performative model“ and means “the conscious shifting between masculine and feminine norms“ (Walsh 2001: 8). The first to mention a performative strategy was Judith Butler who was convinced that people do not possess, but perform gender (Butler 1990, in Walsh 2001: 26). Clare Walsh (2001: 8-9) found that the performative model, i.e. shifting between the two linguistic codes, is practiced especially

by women in professional contexts. These are traditionally male-dominated because certain situations require masculine norms, while the feminine norms fit other circumstances better.

Walsh fears this approach to be risky because women may be accused of being inconsistent and insincere (2001: 9). Furthermore, Cameron (1997: 32) is convinced that general gender stereotypes are at work and that „[p]laying with the codes only keeps the codes in play“, meaning that gender beliefs become reinforced.

### 7.3. Gendered workplaces

Management and leadership in organizations are areas which are typically masculine, including masculine norms of interaction, attitudes and values. Such ‘masculine’ organizations are classified by “emphasis on objectivity, competition and getting down to business” (Holmes 2006: 10). Characteristics which are always ascribed to men should also be the ones a manager exhibits: to be adversarial and assertive, competitive, logical, task- and goal oriented as well as powerful (2006: 6). All these characteristics are “culturally coded as gendered” (Holmes 2006: 6) and represent indices of gender. Drawing on Ochs’ indexing theory, Freed argues that communicative tasks within a specific setting become gendered if consistently associated with either men or women (Freed 1996 in Mullany 2007: 42). The following table (7) summarizes the most widely know stereotypical interaction styles which are associated with gender roles and gender behaviour:

**Table 7 Widely cited features of feminine and masculine interactional styles** (taken from Holmes 2006: 6)

Feminine	Masculine
✓ facilitative	✓ competitive
✓ supportive feedback	✓ aggressive interruptions
✓ conciliatory	✓ confrontational
✓ indirect	✓ direct
✓ collaborative	✓ autonomous
✓ minor contribution (in public)	✓ dominates (public) talking time
✓ person/ process-oriented	✓ task/ outcome-oriented
✓ affectively oriented	✓ referentially oriented

In a particular workplace, for example, every interaction concerned with business follows a masculine interactional style, whereas small talk conforms more to feminine styles. Workplace communication is clearly gendered and hence, the term 'gendered workplace' comes up. Labelling a workplace either 'masculine' or 'feminine' depends on how cultural values and attitudes are perceived as well as how people interact with each other, rather than concentrating on biological factors, i.e. the sex of colleagues (Holmes 2006: 10-11). Moreover, workplaces are gendered where one sex is more dominant than the other, representing extensively cultural and societal norms associated with this sex (Mullany 2007: 42).

Where feelings are expressed overtly, support is provided, social relationships are maintained and less hierarchical structures are found. One speaks of a more feminine workplace, where interpersonal dimensions and collaboration are highly valued, but at the same time display stereotypical feminine traits. By contrast, in more masculine workplaces, a more authoritarian style is preferred: the focus lies on achieving goals and acquiring power, which again represents stereotypical masculine attitudes. There are also workplaces in which a good balance of conventionally masculine and feminine styles can be found. Still, in most societies, in more formal and public contexts, the masculine interaction styles have higher prestige since they are connected to effective workplace communication (Holmes 2006: 10-11). Whether it is true that only stereotypically masculine communication styles are practiced at work will be discussed in the next chapter on business discourse.

## **8. Analysis of gendered business discourses**

### **8.1. Research methods: quantitative vs. qualitative approaches**

#### **8.1.1. Quantitative approach**

Corpus linguistic methods are used to investigate data collections of spoken and written texts. In the first place, corpora have been used to conduct lexicographical research which has led to the production of dictionaries. Today, more specialised corpora help examine texts of certain genres, for example, the Cambridge and Nottingham Business English Corpus (CANBEC) has been compiled to investigate spoken business interaction. However, most studies of institutional discourse are only possible on a small scale since only particular organizations or types of interactions are investigated (Koester 2006: 19).

#### **8.1.2. Qualitative approach**

Corpus-based methods may have an advantage considering the amount of data available, but tend to idealize results and hence, lose the dynamics talk contains: corpora cannot disclose anything about non-verbal or social context. Therefore, qualitative methods like ethnography and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) are also applied in workplace discourse examinations (Koester 2006: 20). Cameron is convinced that ethnographic descriptions of local contexts and belief systems are crucial in studying linguistic acts (Cameron in Mullany 2007: 50). CDA focuses on other details in interactions, taking a critical stance regarding power relations between interlocutors (Koester 2006: 20).

### **8.2. Description of the data collections**

#### **8.2.1. ABOT corpus**

The ABOT corpus contains British and American English data from three sectors: university, publishing and business. Both varieties of English were collected over a time period of one year in order to broaden the scope of the corpus. Data was obtained from various offices, using an ethnographic method: researchers observed, interviewed, and recorded talk to gain material. The ABOT corpus comprises 30 hours of audio-taped data, ranging from formal spoken texts (e.g. meetings) to chatting and informal

conversation. The most relevant data for the following analysis is the business data, i.e. spoken interaction which has been recorded in various white-collar workplace settings (Koester 2006: 28-32).

### **8.2.2. Language in the Workplace Project (LWP) corpus by Holmes**

The LWP corpus consists of authentic data that was recorded over a period of 7 years in white-collar professional workplaces. The corpus comprises 2,500 interactions and supplements like ethnographic notes and interviews. Recorded workplace interaction includes governmental material as well as data from business and commercial organizations of various sizes. Moreover, the spoken texts range from informal, more social conversations to highly structured and formal meetings (Holmes 2006: 20-21).

### **8.2.3. Data collected by Louise Mullany**

Louise Mullany, a British sociolinguist, conducted a short-term study on gendered discourses in professional workplaces. Over a period of six months, she collected relevant data from two internationally operating companies. Mullany did not compile a corpus due to small-scale data. However, she obtained enough material by shadowing, observing and recording. In total, Mullany conducted 23 interviews, making up for 19 hours of audio-taped spoken business interaction (Mullany 2007: 70-71).

### **8.3. Aim of analysis**

Linguistic and interactive strategies can be identified which work colleagues use to fulfil tasks as well as to create and maintain workplace relationships (Koester 2006: 3). These strategies are put in connection to gender and existing gender stereotypes. The aim of the analysis is to prove whether women really only draw on stereotypical 'feminine' and men only on 'masculine' speech patterns in workplace interaction.

## 8.4. Analysis of business discourse

### 8.4.1. Relational practice

The term 'relational practice' (henceforth RP) refers to a gendered concept that is primarily associated with a feminine interaction style. It can be defined as "the ability to work effectively with others, understanding the emotional context in which work gets done" (Holmes 2006: 74). The definition already suggests that relational practice is people-oriented, facilitating task-fulfilment and establishing workplace relationships. Doing RP at work involves being friendly and supportive, establishing rapport, appreciating the work done by others and being considerate. Since RP has nothing to do with the achievement of set goals, it is often regarded as marginal and irrelevant. However, RP furthers workplace objectives because people feel valued. It is due to this "background status" that RP is regarded feminine behaviour (2006: 75).

The *preserving* function of RP results in furthering workplace objectives, keeping projects going and making sure that misunderstandings and conflicts can be avoided. Facilitation and mitigation – stereotypically feminine – are the linguistic strategies used to preserve and manage the situation (2006: 76-77). In example (X), Smithy, the project leader, advises his team to continue working cautiously on the project after he has done some background work:

(42)

Smithy: um I've had a few discussions with people er in the corridor which [*quietly*]: is where I do my best work: um/+ people are\ saying that no  
Ben: /(if we can get your attention)\  
Smithy: they're er they're not confident that on day one they're gonna be able to go and and I think it's a little bit of-  
Clara: people are saying they're not confident  
Smithy: yeah and I had a discussion with someone who said you know that er it's taken two years to get up to speed...  
and I just wonder um hopefully that we can channel through the different  
having the team leaders here and stuff

(Example taken from Holmes 2006: 78)

Interestingly, it is a man preserving: Smithy is anticipating problems and informs his team in order to prevent failure from happening. On a relational dimension, he comforts the worrying team members and on a transactional level, Smithy warns them of possible problems, so that the team can take preventative action (2006: 78-79).

*Mutual empowering*, another RP function, intends, like preserving, to advance workplace goals. Effective networking is the key concept: making connections, providing feedback and support are, again, seen as feminine activities. Preceding the following example was a conversation about possible new directions for Zoe's career. In example (X), Leila, the manager, provides support and help in a very informal way using hesitations, hedges, colloquial expressions and mitigating hedges:

(43)

Leila: um I'm just trying to think + I'll have a wee think  
there's probably some decent things to read about that  
actually

Zoe: oh okay that would be useful

(Example taken from Holmes 2006: 81)

Leila's performance of RP is an official activity, even though it is expressed in informal language (2006: 81). There is also evidence of performing RP in a normatively masculine manner which leads to the conclusion that backstage RP is not only women's work: a male section manager, Jan, encourages the female senior manager, Kiwa, to make a decision which would help him improve his own performance:

(44)

Jan: well what are you going to do with this information?

Kiwa: well um I think we'll have to use the information now in our in  
our discussions with the Ministry of [name] about what  
policies what you know more/interventionist\

Jan: /right\

Kiwa: type /policies\

Jan: /you'll be\ bri- briefing the Minister of- the Ministry of [name]

Kiwa: yep

Jan: and what about our Minister...

(Example taken from Holmes 2006: 83)

Jan starts off with a challenging question to which Kiwa tentatively answers. By providing positive feedback (*right*), Jan pushes Kiwa to continue which, eventually, results in another challenging question (*what about our Minister?*), signalling Kiwa to rethink her steps and constituting guidance from Jan's part (2006: 83-84).

As can be drawn from the analysed examples, it is both, men and women who engage in relational practice in order to further relationships at work, to provide feedback and to anticipate and prevent possible problems. Relational practice is, thus, not a stereotypically feminine action but also a practice that male superiors use in leading their teams. The most important RP device, small-talk, is analysed next.

#### **8.4.1.1. Small talk**

People who work together do not only engage in transactional talk in order to fulfil their tasks, but also build workplace relationships through interacting in relational talk which is also called small talk, the stereotypically feminine discourse genre which is clearly dealing with topics outside the workplace, and often only consists of a phatic exchange of greetings and partings. Small talk either happens at the beginning of a meeting, while waiting for everybody to arrive or at the end of such transactional encounters (Koester 2006: 52-55).

Since having the reputation of being a trivial and stereotypical genre women love to engage in, the first example of small talk presents the classic situation: four women managers are involved in a conversation about the weekend:

(45)

Carol: ((smile voice)) you're going on the road you're [girls on tour]

Kate: [girls on tour]

((laughter from all women managers))

Kate: Thelma and Lou[ise ]

Carol: [do you] need any roadies?

((laughter from all women managers))

Sharon: Carry your bags miss?

Becky: I'm telling you (.) it's it's hard work you know

Sharon: ((laughs))  
[...]

(Example taken from Mullany 2007: 163)

The extract is so prototypical that there is not much to say: the women chat about the weekend, the plans of going abroad; make fun of men *do you need any roadies*. The interesting aspect about this example is that it takes place within a workplace setting and not in a café or a pub. Small talk at work serves to oil the wheels of good relationships among colleagues. Example (X) illustrates that men also engage in small talk with women, following the stereotypical patterns: a nice greeting, giving thanks and involving the other person in a conversation about family, a clearly off-work topic:

(46)

Gene: Hello Helga

Helga: Hi.

Gene: Thank you for your card.

Helga: Oh. Happy new year.

Gene: I'm thinking of... writing out something with... a – a family newsletter to bring to you, with uh- but most o' the news you already know. You know about out new grandson?

Helga: Yes. That's uh really wonderful. How old is he now?

Gene: Well uh about... three weeks old, hehehe

Helga: That's nice.

(Example taken from Koester 2006: 57-58)

Participants state overtly the status of the relationship: they are close enough to know more about their families, write cards etc. A positive relationship at work is maintained through this kind of talk and, obviously, not only pursued by female interlocutors. As the following extract will show, even in all-male conversations, small talk can be found, whereupon the direction of it differs slightly from the female topics. Matt and Bob, two colleagues of equal status, haven't seen each other for a long time and coincidentally meet in the lift:

(47)

Matt: hi how's things

Bob: hi good good + haven't seen you for ages how are you

Matt: fine busy though as always + must meet my performance objectives eh [laugh]  
 Bob: [laugh] yeah me too  
 ah well see you later  
 Matt: yeah bye  
 (Example taken from Holmes in Coupland 2000: 39)

Matt starts off with a phatic exchange, Bob joins in. However, Matt's response to Bob's *how are you* guides the small talk away from the private to "public" talk about work objectives. In this case, laughter only signals insecurity and it could be interpreted that the talk just takes place in order to avoid silence which is socially embarrassing (Holmes in Coupland 2000: 39-40).

What is then striking is that male speakers are not only doing small-talk in the lift or the corridors, but also at the beginning of official meetings. Steve initiates stereotypically feminine small talk after Sue has entered the meeting room:

(48)

Steve: Sue  
 Sue: Hi Steve  
 Steve: Back from hols [(smiles)] had a fantastic time  
 Sue: [laughs]  
 Steve: err just wanted to catch up and I've got a list of things here that I'll just (.) fly past you and just you know  
 Sue: [yeah]  
 Steve: sort them through (.) erm the batch runs  
 (Example taken from Mullany 2007: 96)

Again, this conversation follows the same pattern as the conversation in the lift: Steve welcomes Sue back, and then he talks about holidays, an off-work topic, invoking small talk. He reveals personal information, but then shifts the talk from personal to business matters. The small talk pattern is the same, as is the function of it: the power inequalities are mitigated as well as collegiality being established (Mullany 2007: 96-97). Like Steve, Peg shifts smoothly from small talk to business related matters: at the end of a business meeting, the following example took place between Peg and her manager, Clara.

(49)

Clara: how is the baby?

Peg: [drawls]: good: still just a baby though

Clara: right not a boy baby or a girl baby

Peg: no can't tell /it's legs crossed\

Clara: /haha you\ gonna have to wait... are you feeling tired?

Peg: yes but I just think it's summer too

because I didn't you know because been in summer  
cos I wasn't pregnant last time or AS pregnant in the  
summertime

so it was much easier cos I didn't know+

um I had help (until) December last time (so it was easier)

Clara: hey you you're hoping you're gonna work [drawls]:

though: /(what)\

Peg: /well + my\ plan is is to work full time up until the end of May

Clara: right

Peg: and then come back as we need as I'm needed after that  
just dependent on what happens with Daisy and Matt's  
group...

(Example taken from Holmes 2006: 88)

First of all, small talk circles around Peg's pregnancy, the baby's health and the baby's sex. Slowly, but constantly, the interaction moves from social talk to work related topics: Peg's plans as when to continue to work again etc. Both women clearly engage in RP, expressing interest, establishing a good workplace relationship and minimizing status inequalities (Holmes 2006: 88).

Even though relational practice and especially small talk is said to be clearly feminine behaviour, it is also possible to express some RP functions in a masculine way. So, for example, in more masculine workplaces, small-talk does take place, but the topics are far more work-related than in female small-talk. Personal topics or social talk are scarcely to be found. However, this type of small-talk still serves the functions of RP since it is not directly linked to the business agenda, but unofficial, off-record talk (2006: 94).

To sum up, the examples above illustrate that men and women often engage in small-talk equally, refuting the notion of small-talk as a stereotypically feminine discourse genre. For both sexes, small-talk

functions as a device of filling silence, of opening meetings, of being friendly and polite in encounters, but most importantly, small-talk oils the wheels of good relationships in the workplaces.

#### **8.4.1.2. Humour in the workplace**

Funny comments, jokes and the exchange of jocular abuse are all common types of humour that do not only occur when close friends meet, but also between business colleagues. Humour forms an integral part in social interaction and thus, also happens in the workplace. However, the amount and the type of humour that occurs, are influenced by the workplace culture: the relationship between those who interact and their respective personalities, the group size and the type of activity they are involved in when humour happens are all influential factors (Holmes 2006: 108).

Since humorous anecdotes and jokes often transmit gender stereotypes as well, gender is another important aspect in workplace humour. Jen Hay notes that the context in which humour takes place, is crucial: gender-stereotypically loaded humour appears in mixed-sex groups more likely than in single-sex groups (2006: 110). There are, certainly, more masculine as well as more feminine styles of joking, so it is possible to argue that humour is a source of gendered discourse since men and women negotiate their identities- gender and professional- through the use of humour. The often mentioned feminine and masculine interactional styles are covered again in relation to gender and humour:

‘women’s humour’ is cooperative, inclusive, supportive, integrated, spontaneous and self-healing while ‘men’s humour’ is exclusive, challenging, segmented, pre-formulated and self-aggrandizing (Holmes 2006: 109).

Feminine humour is either cooperative in content or in style: the former refers to the building humour on what has been said before, while the latter means that humour is jointly constructed. In example (X), during a meeting, participants jointly elaborate on a picture of living in a small town, causing tremendous laughter among them:

(50)

Penelope: the fact that we don't go to Malt [*name of a town in New Zealand*]  
Howie: mm  
Penelope: doesn't mean that people from Malt can't  
Scott: yeah  
Penelope: go somewhere to get help mm cos they were interested enough t-  
Ralph: if you live in Malt you need to go somewhere / (to get help)\  
/[general laughter]\  
Scott: there is actually quite a big consultancy in Malt  
Howie: is there?  
Scott: yeah  
Henry: I was told many years ago that Malt /was the\  
Mal: /Malt\  
Henry: /heart of the\  
wife swapping area for [name of province]  
Mal: /*(Malt)* [*pronounced with local pronunciation*]  
Scott: /isn't\  
it Malt that had the highest rate of um  
Penelope: /ex ex nuptial\  
birth- births /ex\  
[...]  
rates of ex ex nuptial births at one point...  
Mal: it's the alcohol that does it  
Howie: [laughs] it's the alcohol  
[general laughter and overlapping talk]  
Penelope: poor old Malt  
Kirsty: we should be there  
Scott: we should be there  
Penelope: we should be there  
[general laughter]

(Example taken from Holmes 2006: 112-113)

This humorous sequence exemplifies what people consider as gendered cooperative style of humour: participants take up each other's contributions and elaborate them. The topic is developed at length; each participant contributes absurd comments about how dreadful it is to live in a rural town; overlapping speech and laughter occur. The last comment *we should be there* is repeated three times in different pitches of voice and represents the climax of the humorous exchange since at first, the group makes fun of the place and then, they *should be there* to check out the discussed horrors of town life. Without doubt, the humorous event is collaboratively constructed regarding content as well as style. (2006: 111-113).

As opposed to feminine cooperative humour, there is a masculine contestive, challenging style to be found: contributions of others are contested or contradicted and hence, challenging. Example (X) is taken from a group meeting where such contestive humour happens frequently. Callum is the target of a jocular insult performed by Eric because he mixed up an important document:

(51)

Callum: I definitely sent you the right one  
Barry: [laughs]  
Eric: yep Callum did fail his office management [laughs]  
word processing lesson  
Callum: I find it really hard being perfect at everything  
(Example taken from Holmes 2006: 115)

Both, Eric and Callum perform challenging, uncooperative acts since Eric's joke is put down by Callum's assertion of being superior most of the time. Such humour is associated to some extent with masculine interaction styles since, like in the example, men engage in competitive talk (2006: 115). Interestingly, even when joking, men compete for the floor: interruptions and witty one-liners are part of masculine humour. Towards the end of a meeting, four men chat about where to have dinner and especially about the fact that Eric tends to check every restaurant kitchen:

(52)

Eric: I haven't I haven't done that kitchen so  
Callum: /(yeah)\  
Eric: /that'll\ be one for the collection  
Barry: [laughs] you /can't you can't\ remember it  
Eric: / ( ) [laughs]\  
Mark: lot of kitchens he doesn't remember  
Barry: /[laughs]\  
Eric: /[laughs]\  
(Example taken from Holmes 2006: 116)

There is disruptive overlapping since all the comments are independently uttered, being brief and witty in order to compete for the floor and to cause amusement among participants. Such a style of humour is stereotypically associated with men and less in female interaction (2006: 116). However,

also when men and women are interacting, contestive exchanges of humour can be found, like example (53) illustrates:

(53)

Sam: ke-keep going until there's only one person standing  
Jill: [laughs] oh you've been to our board meetings before  
[laughs]

(Example taken from Holmes 2006: 120)

The board meeting is almost over and most agenda points have been discussed. Sam, a board member, indirectly complains about the length of the meeting to the Chair, Jill, but does so in a humorous tone. Jill answers slightly contestively in style, but very supportively in content: she is teasing Sam a little, instead of challenging his supposedly contestive statement. Nonetheless, Jill acts according to her authoritative professional role and incorporates her feminine gender identity effectively at the same time (2006: 120).

Feminine humour is conventionally gentle rather than 'in-your-face' and represents an integrative discourse strategy. In workplace settings, women are forced to find a balance between their authority and their femininity. What women then do is to offset the more directive and decisive management style to a more acceptable feminine style of humour (2006: 122). The following sequence illustrates the switch from a directive to a more mitigated style: since Clara's leadership style is a rather directive one, her colleagues call her "Queen Clara": this nickname has become a running joke because Clara is put on the same level with a royal person who issues orders to her subordinates (Cameron 2007: 134). Clara is well aware of her name and takes part in the joking game:

(54)

Smithy: how's your mum?  
Clara: sorry?  
Smithy: she broke her hip didn't she?  
Clara: my mother? What are you talking about?  
XF: (laughing) the queen mother  
Clara: oh (putting on posh accent) my husband and I are confident  
she'll pull through

(Example taken from Cameron 2007: 135)

What happens here is that Clara is the person of authority in the first place, but the self-deprecating humour and the mimicking of the posh accent show that she tries to minimise the leader-subordinates asymmetry (2007: 135). In some cases, it is not only women, but also men who try to level out the inequalities between authorities and subordinates. Chris, the president of an advertising company, switches from a business-oriented talk to relational talk, establishing a joking frame for his company manager, Mike, to feel equal and comfortable:

(55)

Mike: so what if the request comes...uh... by e-mail at the end of a day, on Monday and I don't even see it until...

Chris: I don't know how were you- how were you gonna keep this before.

Mike: (uh that's a good point) Okay. So I'll... so I'll just- ignore time... between... me leaving and- hehehe an' me coming in. Okay.

Chris: Like- [so yeah.

Mike: so- so a request at five p.m. an' and an' I- complete it at nine the next day that's one hour

Chris: right. Hahahahahahahahahaha . hh. No I think heheheheh

Mike: [Right.

What? What?

Chris: yes correct. That's not a- that's not a: uh twenty-hour waiter. Yes heheh yes

Mike: [mock-whiny voice] I'm sorry but I had to sleep first and eat breakfast

Chris: [heheheh

Chris: [mock-whiny voice] I do- I do that almost every day!

Mike: [hehehehehehe

Chris: (heheheheheh)

Mike: Okay. An' we decided... [...]

(Example taken from Koester 2006: 156)

Mike asks his boss, Chris, what he should do if a request comes in late and he cannot deal with it until the next day. Instead of taking the question seriously, Chris starts laughing which disconcerts Mike. Chris shifts abruptly from business talk to a more informal talk with Mike joining in the joke only after Chris' remark *that's not a twenty-hour waiter*. With the imitation of Mike's voice and laughter, Chris attempts to establish solidarity with his subordinate, Mike, trying to minimize the power relationship (Koester 2006: 156-157).

In sum, workplace humour plays an important part not only in establishing a good working atmosphere, but also in getting things done. It is possible for humour to occur during any workplace speech act: be it directives, approval, small talk or criticism. Humour is a multifunctional discursive device, a powerful instrument because of its indirectness and ambiguity. It is also crucial in the creation of professional as well as gender identities, but at the same time has the potential to reinforce gender stereotypes: the stereotypically feminine style of humour serves to establish solidarity and collegiality, while the stereotypically masculine style is competitive and challenging (Mullany 2007: 86-90). Analysis has shown that there is a tendency for men and women to continue using the stereotypical humour styles in same-sex conversations; if, however, interacting in mixed-sex groups, both men and women draw on the other sex' manner of being humorous.

#### **8.4.1.3. Telling stories at work**

As narratives assist in the process of creating self- and social identity, they can be viewed as a way of accomplishing certain features of the gendered concept or the self of a person. Stereotypically, women focus in their stories on rapport, solidarity and establishing relationships. Men's narratives, on the other hand, are about adventures, achievement and activities. Workplace narratives serve to create professional identities and often manage to connect the gendered self and the professional role (Holmes 2006: 174-175).

Telling stories at work is crucial to the process of doing gender: male narrators depict managers as heroes who run successful businesses; they tell tales in which professionalism and competence are highly-valued qualities the narrator exhibits. So, male stories can be stereotypically classified as masculine narrative of contest: in order for the hero to be successful, he has to go through a lot and overcome obstacles. Victor, the Managing Director of an IT company, tells a story about when the business began, a "classic company myth story" (2006: 176). Moreover, he engages in important identity work:

(56) narrator=Victor (Vic); interviewer (Int)

Vic: we went away and in our discussions said  
actually there's an opportunity for someone else to  
go and do that  
and why shouldn't it be us?+  
so we spent a few months devoting most weekends  
to planning of whether it was feasible  
or how we should do it, what we could do  
and then decided it was worthwhile  
and in the meantime during that period of planning er  
we'd been saving frantically  
so that come the day when we stepped out  
er we didn't need to take anything out of the company  
for a period of time+...

Int: and so right at the beginning it was just the two of you?

Vic: mhm + sort of just the two of us  
er our wives had been involved in the planning +  
and er they were very very much instrumental in  
setting the thing up

Int: so um + so in a sense it was like a family business?  
/+++ as\ it grew in the initial stages

Vic: /yes very much a family business\ for several years

Int: yep

Vic: and um + it would have been about ++ probably five  
years in  
+ when we + realized that + we would either have to+ er  
get things organized to perpetuate a family firm

Int: mm

Vic: or we would have to consciously change to something new  
and we made the decision to change  
because we couldn't see the family firm side of things in  
consulting  
growing any big any further than we'd taken it  
and we were keen to carry on that growth path  
so that meant we needed to migrate to a a proper corporate  
structure

(Example taken from Holmes 2006: 176-177)

First of all, the construction of professional and gender identity is achieved through presenting himself together with his business partner as the anticipators of a chance of starting a business: *and why shouldn't it be us*. Then, Victor neatly describes the planning process that took place before taking the next steps. Repeatedly, he refers to a "we", alluding to a yet unknown business partner. Only later he confesses that their wives were also involved in the company foundation. However, Victor immediately

shifts the direction away from the women back to himself and his supposedly male partner, i.e. he “masculinises” the narrative: the success of the company has only been possible due to the hard work the men have put into it. Hence, Victor presents himself as the hero of the narrative who succeeded after overcoming the odds (2006: 177-178).

A similar masculine workplace story of another straight-talking and authoritative manager is told in the following, in which the gender identity of a strong and assertive manager is created. What is striking is that this manager is a woman: Ginette (2006: 178).

(57) narrator = Ginette (Gin), Helen = Hel

Gin: yesterday + afternoon Christian and I were standing  
at the end  
by the elevator over there talking  
and David was coming round with the vacuum by  
the two-kilo elevator +  
and just along the wall there on the ( )  
there's a trail of powder just went right along +  
we were standing away talking  
and David had the hose and had that long thing connected  
hosing um vacuuming by the two K-G elevator  
and then he went over to clean that trail of powder +  
along side the wall+  
what he did h-he disconnected the hose off+ off the end  
piece  
and then he walked over  
and he swept + the trail [laughs]: of powder up with that:

Hel: how stupid

Gin: [laughs]: with that metal bit:

Hel: yeah

Gin: when he finished that he connected the hose back on  
and then he vacuumed it up+  
the pile of powder that he'd swept up with just (the end)  
me and Christian were just cracking up laughing  
and (he turns to me) said + this is very [laughs]:  
embarrassing

Hel: [laughs]:

Gin: I thought what a dick + you know  
all he had to do was go along with this thing /and  
suck it all up\

Hel: and suck it up + it's actually easier + for that one  
[...]

Gin: dumb eh?

(Example taken from Holmes 2006: 179)

Ginette ridicules a team member, detailing how he is unable to do simple cleaning with the vacuum cleaner. The main goal of Ginette is to make the colleague look stupid and to amuse Helen. Moreover, she creates her professional identity of a tough manager in a masculine way: the story has a simple structure and theme, there is no embellishment whatsoever, and when it comes to linguistic features, Ginette does not draw on stereotypically female features. There is no use of hedges, mitigations or descriptive adjectives. Instead, she applies a very direct masculine style, making fun of the absent person: she explains how easy it is to do the vacuuming *all he had to do was go along with this thing*, uses insults *what a dick* and adds emphasis by saying *dumb eh*. She establishes a heroine who knows how to do things right, leaving aside the face needs of her team (2006: 180).

Naturally, workplace narratives are also employed to create feminine gender identity, but feminine stories differ considerably from masculine ones: while men display the successful hero, power and authority, women often downplay their skills even up to a point where they look completely naive and unqualified. It could be argued that these women take on the stereotypical role expected of society (2006: 183). The story of Marlene shows clearly how women struggle with asserting their professional as well as their gender identities:

(58) Narrator = Marlene (Mar); Cla= Clara, senior manager

Mar: I got a phone call from someone  
Who thought that I was Renee

Cla: [drawls]: oh:

Mar: and at first I didn't realize  
cos they just sort of asked kind of general questions  
and then by the time I realized  
sort of as I was just about to get off the phone  
that they thought I was Renee  
I thought this is going to be too embarrassing  
for this person now

Cla: [drawls]: oh yes yes

Mar: I quickly rushed off and told [laughs]: Renee

(Example taken from Holmes 2006: 184)

Using humour, Marlene tells her colleague Clara about her uncomfortable experience concerning her confounded identity: rather than telling the caller who she really is, she leaves him thinking that she was Renee. After ending the phone call, she informs Renee about the incident. Marlene's language use signals her insecurity and discomfort while telling the story: she employs hedges and mitigation *sort of, just, kind of* which are stereotypically feminine. Furthermore, the sentences *I thought this is going to be too embarrassing for this person now* and *I quickly rushed off and told Renee* refer to Marlene's self-identity of a considerate and sensitive person. So, the strategies she uses to tell her story and to construct her feminine identity are, in fact, stereotypically feminine: she is polite, caring and takes the face needs of others into consideration (2006: 185).

Like Marlene, the senior manager, Leila, uses a stereotypically feminine narrative to construct both the feminine and the professional identities:

(59)

Leila: once I had to go over and see the Prime Minister  
you were there I think  
about the suffrage stuff  
it was very last-minute one afternoon  
the Prime Minister called me over and all I had on  
was my cream linen  
trousers and like a white shirt or something it was re-  
I was really casually dressed on this particular day  
so Veronica found me I mean a really not-my-colour  
green jacket

[laughs]: /you should have seen me\

Lisa: /oh I know I've never seen you wear\

Leila: I went over to see the Prime Minister in it

Lisa: I know I've never /seen you wear green before\

Leila: [laughs]: and I sat there with sort of:\ this [laughs]

(Example taken from Holmes 2006: 188)

Leila, who is actually a very competent senior manager, narrates how she felt uncomfortable, being inappropriately dressed when meeting the Prime Minister. She personalizes the story *non-my-colour green jacket* and uses a number of normatively feminine linguistic features like hedges and intensifiers to construct her narrative. The story is very feminine in

structure, content and its point: Leila is concerned with her clothing which has the potential to let her appear incompetent and unskilled. Her self-deprecating presentation is typical of feminine narratives (2006: 188).

One would now expect that men do not tell feminine narratives since they are well-aware of their power and know how to assert their professional identities. De facto, men also use this self-deprecating strategy in their workplace stories. Gerry, a mentor for trainees of an IT commercial company, often uses a more feminine narrative to illustrate his points, to encourage and to establish personal relationships when working with his trainees. During a training session, one trainee overtly expresses dissatisfaction with his own work. Instead of playing the hero in the narrated story, Gerry admits his own errors and failures in order to animate the young man not to give up:

(60) narrator = Gerry (Ger); C-plus-plus is a computer programming language

Ger: /I\ can totally understand that  
I've worked on projects um I was at [*company name*]  
the er my project manager thought I was a C-plus-plus-guru  
she shipped me up to Auckland to work on this project  
with this guy  
doing um inventory reporting ... [*describes what he had to do*]  
he wanted me to use his C-plus-plus framework  
and er I had something like a week or two to finish  
this off  
it was quite a lot of work and I got to the end of the  
two weeks  
and the money ran out for them to pay for me  
and I just felt really bad cos I failed, I hadn't done a  
good job  
um it got to the last couple of days and I said to this guy  
look this is just crazy what you're doing you're  
doing this in C-plus-plus  
I said I could have (sorted) things out using X  
scripting  
and the database loader in half a day  
I mean he wanted sort of 20 different files to be loaded  
I could have done one in half a day um and I hadn't  
finished  
he had to get some other guy to come in and finish  
off my work  
so I felt stink

you know I'm under pressure I'm supposed to be  
this expert  
and I'm not I'm walking away I'm failing...  
so exactly what you've found  
you'll (all) hand in quality of work that you're not  
happy with  
so um be prepared for a little bit of failure and learn  
from it

(Example taken from Holmes 2006: 192)

Gerry emphasises his points in a number of feminine ways: intensifiers and hedges are used, but most importantly, the self-deprecating content presents himself in the light of an equally inexperienced trainee at some earlier point in his life (2006: 192). This example does important face-work and creates solidarity between the narrator and his addressee, however, it is rather rare in male-dominated workplaces since men usually play the hero and not the loser who admits being weak and fallible.

Altogether, workplace narratives comprise all the stereotypical features of masculine and feminine stories: there are superheroes overcoming great odds to then be successful which is normatively masculine and there are also those who admit failure, weakness and insecurity in order to establish a bond between narrator and listeners which is typically feminine. What is surprising is that, as the examples show, both men and women in workplace settings narrate stories which would be actually expected from the other sex. Hence, the stereotypical assumptions about telling stories cannot be held in connection to workplace interaction.

#### **8.4.1.4. Expressing approval**

Paying compliments and expressing approval are important speech acts in workplace settings: first of all, they address the face needs of the recipient(s) and secondly, superiors need to evaluate their subordinates from time to time. Since approval also serves to maintain good workplace relationships, it is stereotypically classified as feminine stylistic discourse. Approval is given either from superiors to subordinates or exchanged between status equals. Sometimes, however, subordinates express their

approval to their superiors, albeit less frequently. In any case, approval signifies complimenting the skills and performances of the addressee (Mullany 2007: 84-85).

The stereotypical notion of compliments implies that they are expressed more frequently by women to women. Thus, it is indexed a feminine interactional strategy. Women's compliments are elaborated in length and style, while men prefer short and precise expressions of approval (Holmes 2006: 96-97). A good self-explanatory instance of such an elaborated approval is the one given by Penelope, a CEO, to her project manager, Hettie:

(61) Penelope = Pen, Hettie = Het

Pen: actually I mean I've said this before  
but I'd like to just put it on record again h- +  
Mal: mm  
Pen: how extraordinarily impressed and proud we are  
of the work you've done on this project /and\  
Mal: /mm\  
Pen: how I can't actually imagine anybody else [inhales]  
certainly in my acquaintance /[laughs] who  
would've\  
actually been able to walk in and do this  
and I'm I have said many blessings /on the fact that  
we hired\  
Mal: /mm mm mm\  
Pen: Hettie /when we did\  
Het: /thank you\  
Pen: because I think we wouldn't be where we are  
in the [name] /act\  
project  
Mal: /mm\  
Pen: if we hadn't /[inhales] and\  
Het: /thank you\  
Pen: I'm terribly pleased for you that +  
some gaps are appearing / so that you can\ actually do  
Het: /[laughs]  
Pen: some other things cos /\ know that  
Het: /mm\  
Pen: /[inhales]\ while you've done it very willingly  
Het: /mm\  
Pen: /it's\ it has been absolutely massive  
Het: /mm\ mm so it feels yes it does feel wonderful  
to be at the end of it

(Example taken from Holmes 2006: 98)

Penelope appreciates Hettie's work in a typically feminine manner: not only is she giving a long talk on the performance and its effects for both the project and the organization, but also intensifies her statements *how extraordinarily impressed and proud we are; it has been absolutely massive; I'm terribly pleased* (2006: 98). On the contrary, a male Chair utters a stereotypically masculine compliment, short and precise, without any embellishment:

(62)

Chair: okay um well I support the paper the recommendations  
I think you've done an excellent job well done  
(Example taken from Holmes 2006: 99)

In the next utterance, Steve's performance of approval seems to be an exception since he already elaborates it a little. He is, however, repetitive and unable to find the right words to express his gratitude:

(63)

Steve: thank you very much for looking after the ship while I've been away especially to Sue (-) thank you very much errr (-) it was great coming back you know no issues or anything and that's all down to you and the team so thank you very much (-) okay?  
(Example taken from Mullany 2007: 104)

Most approvals, however, follow the masculine style: *good, great, fine, well done* and *nice job* are the most common minimal business compliments. As a matter of fact, men in the following examples stick to these minimal compliments, which also women pay:

(64)

Steve: fantastic I knew we'd come up with a solution (-) great  
Sue: if in between time anybody wants any sticky back (-)  
I can print some more  
Steve: good (.) great (.) fantastic (.) okay  
(Example taken from Mullany 2007: 102)

(65)

Amy: that would be good (-) okay?  
Sybil: mhm

Amy: Fab

(Example taken from Mullany 2007: 122)

It has been attempted to show that expressing approval and paying compliments is not only a stereotypically feminine strategy and indeed, both female and male superiors express their thanks and gratitude as well as appraisals to subordinates. Compliments are exchanged in single-sex as well as in mixed-sex encounters, from male superiors to female subordinates and vice versa. The only slight difference lies in the manner of giving approval: females draw on more elaborated compliments, while men stick to short one-liners. Hence, the style in which compliments are paid can be considered stereotypically either masculine or feminine, but the act of even uttering approval is not a stereotypically feminine speech act.

#### **8.4.2. Leadership at work: gendered talk?**

Effective leadership is said to be masculine in style since the role of the leader entails power and influence. This association is taken for granted and hard to challenge even though men and women choose styles of leadership either indexed as feminine or masculine according to context and depending on what effect should be created (Holmes 2006: 32-35). Still, women face a double-bind situation:

If she talks like a manager she is transgressing the boundaries of femininity: if she talks like a woman, she no longer represents herself as a manager (Holmes 2006: 35).

Cameron argues that in today's business management language, effective leaders listen to their subordinates, motivate their colleagues and provide support (Cameron 2007: 122). Such effeminate leadership style has been deemed powerless for a very long time, seeing it as weak and lacking authority in comparison to male leadership styles. These two conflictive styles comprise the stereotypical concepts which can also be found in informal communication styles:

A woman's leadership style is transformational and interpersonal, while a man's style is based on command and control. Women

managers promote positive interactions with subordinates; encourage participation and share power and information more than men do [...]. Women leaders use collaborative, participative communication that enables and empowers others, while men use more unilateral, directive communication (Cameron 2007: 124)

A woman's style of leading subordinates does not seem to fit the duties of leaders. These duties are, among others, issuing instructions, running meetings and planning goal-achievement.

#### 8.4.2.1. Directives

In leading a team, there is a great variety of performed speech acts which are regarded incompatible with the feminine style like, for example, giving directives. Directives are speech acts which try to get someone to do something. They can be blunt imperatives like *Shut the door* or mitigated like in *Could you please shut the door?* (Coates in Mills 1995: 18) The more blunt and direct, the more a face-threatening act is performed: clearly, the more powerful the person, the more direct commands are uttered. Directives can also occur covertly when a speaker subtly exercises power (1995: 19).

Masculine ways of giving directives are more direct, include imperatives and need statements: *check that out; go right through this; you finish doing it; get rid of them now; I need these by ten* (Holmes 2006: 36-37). These example statements show a stereotypically masculine behaviour of instructing subordinates. However, these generalizations do not reflect reality. Business reality proves that women are also capable of applying a directive, authoritative style in order to assert their professional roles (Cameron 2007: 125- 133):

(66)

Kate: okay here's the list  
**ring all the people** on the list and **tell them** the meeting is  
ten tomorrow

(Example taken from Holmes 2006: 39)

Carrie, the Director of a manufacturing company, is extremely blunt in issuing directives, very masculine in style, leaving aside feminine mitigation strategies:

(67)

Carrie: Anything to do with those sizing issues **give them to**  
Simon or Leah (.) **the next thing**  
(Example taken from Mullany 2007: 128)

(68)

Phil: Lyn came back and said that three (-) were interested  
In coming back for an interview but she'd get back to  
Me about whether they were serious in coming back fir  
An interview or not

Carrie: Oh **you're gonna have to follow that up**  
[...]

(Example taken from Mullany 2007: 132)

As opposed to direct instructions, the feminine strategy of giving directives is stereotypically seen as rather soft and less 'in-your-face': women use questions instead of imperatives, hedges and mitigation as well as longer pauses to minimize the force of the commands: *perhaps you could...; I wonder if you could...; we might need more help* (Holmes 2006: 39). Additionally, as the example lines illustrate, women leaders tend to use the inclusive 'we' which, of course, means 'you' but plays down the directive. These features help construct the image of a sensitive, considerate superior. In example (X), Sonia is talking to an administrative assistant:

(69)

Sonia: you'll be out here by yourself  
and **I wondered if you wouldn't mind** spending some  
of that time  
in contacting while no one else is around [...]  
(Example taken from Holmes 2006: 40)

As has already been shown before, males in high job positions also mitigate their directives to downplay status inequalities. A typical mitigating strategy – actually feminine in style – is employed by Rob, a Director of a middle-sized company: he uses the inclusive 'we', the modal 'can' and formulates his need statement subtly:

(70)

Rob: so **we just** need to think about how **we**  
[(-) how **we** can categorize] that [how] **we** look at it  
separately

David: [how we categorize on that] [yeah]  
(Example taken from Mullany 2007: 138)

Another case of a leader who mitigates the directives is Amy: her strategy is conventionally feminine and includes typical hedging devices as well as the inclusive pronoun 'we'. Moreover, modals, justifications and minimisers can be identified as well (2007: 118):

(71)

Amy: we've still got twenty percent left (-) erm I think we need  
now just to double check our (-) stock figures and make sure  
that everything that we have got is out (-) Billy  
(Example taken from Mullany 2007: 118)

As a matter of fact, the respective style of giving directives depends on the speaker-addressee relationship, i.e. who is talking to whom, as well as on context. Analysis of the given instances has proved that there are female as well as male superiors who assert their professional identities by issuing blunt and unmitigated directives, i.e. by sticking to the traditionally masculine code. However, it has also been illustrated that both sexes apply a feminine way of uttering directives when they want to attenuate power inequalities. Therefore, commanding is not stereotypically masculine in style as gendered norms suggest.

#### **8.4.2.2. Opening/closing meetings**

Another duty of leaders is to manage meetings, i.e. run them through from opening to closing them. Opening a meeting is actually a highly structured act that serves perfectly to enact and prove one's power. Again, it is a gendered act since there are many distinct forms of opening meetings. The more masculine ones are certainly expected to be direct, precise and immediately 'on-topic', while the more feminine openers may include small talk, greetings and approval (Holmes 2006: 43-44).

(72)

Carrie: Morning everyone (.) hope you all had a good weekend (.)  
okay we'll get going then with my report (.) sizing survey  
(Example taken from Mullany 2007: 126)

Indeed, Carrie opens the meeting in a feminine fashion: she welcomes the meeting members and after some small talk she introduces the official part of the meeting, stating inclusively *we'll get going* (Mullany 2007: 126).

(73)

Rob: right (.) let's get started good afternoon everybody erm (.)  
what I propose we do firstly is just address (.) the action points  
from the previous meeting (.) so the first one  
being to look at the (.) actual level of stock [...]  
(Example taken from Mullany 2007: 138)

Other than expected, Rob adopts the feminine style for opening meetings: the inclusive pronoun 'we' and 'let's' indicate this in the beginning line of his opening. The discourse marker 'right' and the hedge 'just' are stereotypically feminine as well. Moreover, Rob minimizes power inequalities between himself and the meeting members by changing his points into a proposal. So, a male meeting Chair acts upon strategies associated with femininity and exerts power only covertly (2007: 138). In fact, most chairmen and chairwomen use the feminine way of starting a meeting, as the following examples will further illustrate:

(74)

Penelope: okay well now we'll start properly+

(75)

Victor: thanks ++ so having got the documentation we need  
And er all the participants here  
Then we can make a start

(76)

Janet: okay + um shall we just start with our agenda ++

(77)

Barry: + okay that's great + so what do we want to talk about [...]  
(Examples taken from Holmes 2006: 45-46)

What is absolutely striking is that chairwomen behave in a more authoritarian way than chairmen: in example (X), Renee does not know Clara is going to chair the meeting in place of an absent colleague and asks a challenging, interruptive question which leads Clara to respond in a more authoritative way even though she opens the meeting in a feminine way using hedges:

(78)

Clara: okay well we might just start without Seth he can come in  
And can review the minutes from last week

Renee: are you taking the minutes this week

Clara: no I'm trying to chair the meeting

Who would like to take the minutes this week [...]

(Example taken from Holmes 2006: 47)

The most authoritative behaviour is enacted by a manager called Amy: all the meeting participants are already present and she comes in last.

(79)

Amy: right (.) there's a lot to get through today so (.)  
I'll start off with figures

(Example taken from Mullany 2007: 106)

Without any small talk, hedging or mitigating, she is straight 'on-topic', wanting to get through her agenda. Amy also overtly exerts power by saying *I'll start*. She is the only chair who draws on a stereotypically masculine style: Amy avoids other-oriented behaviour, but assertively leads into task-oriented talk (Mullany 2007: 106).

When it comes to finishing and closing meetings, a similar pattern as in openings can be identified: both, male and female managers use a non-authoritarian style, giving their subordinates the opportunity to discuss their concerns or yet untouched topics.

(80)

Amy: yeah (-) okay that's it (.) unless there's anything else  
anybody? (-) no (.) okay

(Example taken from Mullany 2007: 115)

(81)

Carrie: I think that's it unless you've got any other queries or things to raise? (-) alright (.) thanks

(Example taken from Mullany 2007: 135)

At the end of a meeting, Amy and Carrie enact their managerial identities by using a feminine informal speech style, indicated by hedges, pauses and interrogatives. Moreover, they ensure that their team members get their turns to talk, so Amy and Carrie are acting very considerately and focus on the needs of their teams which is typical of women. Before eventually closing the meeting, Carrie also thanks everybody who is present. Male managers do it alike:

(82)

Rob: Okay I apologize that's er (.) gone on a bit but I think erm (.) at the end of the day we're still very much in the sort of start-up phase in the sort of processes and procedures that we're talking about as we crack through some of the things and then going forward it will be a

(.) a bit more streamlined but thanks very much for your time

(Example taken from Mullany 2007: 151)

Rob closes the meeting in a very cooperative, inclusive manner and follows up by justifying this: he apologizes to his team because the meeting took longer than actually expected. He directly does so, followed by a justification. Apologies are considered feminine in style as is the whole sequence Rob performs, emphasized with hedges and the collective pronoun 'we', stressing the importance of team work (2007: 151-152).

Overall, opening and closing a meeting is accomplished in different gendered ways: managers who prefer the masculine style stick to their agenda, work through it without being distracted, assert their power explicitly and assign turns of talking. A more feminine strategy allows small talk to take place, and changes to be made to the agenda; mitigation is favoured and a nice and relaxed atmosphere is created (Holmes 2006: 53-

54). The sequences chosen for exemplification purposes document that chairpersons of both sexes prefer the stereotypical feminine features in managing their meetings which leads to the conclusion that opening and closing a meeting is stereotypically feminine in style.

#### **8.4.2.3. Politeness vs. impoliteness**

Politeness plays an incredibly significant role in interactions that occur in workplaces. Old, stereotypical conceptions hold that women are more polite than men and show their politeness through their choice of certain linguistic patterns. By contrast, men often ignore politeness conventions which lead to acknowledging that impoliteness is a stereotypically masculine style of interacting.

Linguistic politeness goes back to Brown and Levinson who defined politeness strategies either as a mitigating device which is a face-saving act or as an attack to the face needs, which is a face-threatening act. 'Face' in this context refers to the "public self-image" (Mullany 2007: 76-77). In order for this concept to be valuable in workplace contexts, it is adapted to the CofP perspective which then treats politeness as "a set of practices or strategies which communities of practice develop, affirm and contest" (Mills 2003 in Mullany 2007: 77). In fact, politeness norms are connected to power and authority: the most impolite discourse is directed from superiors to their subordinates which is considered clearly appropriate behaviour. Impoliteness displayed by subordinates to their superiors, however, is regarded as absolutely inappropriate and rude (Schnurr et al. 2008: 216). What is more, women who hold positions of authority often use politeness strategies to minimize this authority. If, by contrast, they demonstrate impolite behaviour, they break the stereotypical gendered norms since women are not expected to act in an impolite manner (Mullany 2007: 76).

Stephanie Schnurr (2008: 216) and her colleagues, among others Janet Holmes, identify two types of impoliteness taking place at work: the data of the LWP corpus suggests that first of all, interaction that is polite on the

surface level, is likely to deliver an impolite message on the deep level. Secondly, discourse which is impolite on-record can be classified as polite behaviour if analysed in the context of the respective CofP in which this behaviour takes place (2008: 216). The first example presents a supposedly impolite interaction between the team coordinator, Ginette and her team member, Peter. However, the interaction takes place within a blue-collar workplace in which behavioural norms differ considerably from white-collar workplaces: the talk takes place over the factory's intercom system.

(83)

Ginette: copy control copy control +

Peter: oh + good afternoon where have you been +

Ginette: who wants to know?

Peter: well we do +++

Ginette: um we're just gonna- run our fifth [product name]

And see how this packaging holds if it's okay

-and then wait and we'll get back to you

Peter: ( ) **thank you very much for your information**

(Example taken from Schnurr et al. 2008: 217)

Peter has been waiting all day for Ginette to call him, so when she finally does so, his *oh good afternoon where have you been* is not a criticism, but rather the expression of his own surprise. Ginette's reaction *who wants to know* is, in the context of the blue-collar workplace, an appropriate tone and not considered rude or impolite. Ginette's way of talking to Peter is more challenging over all: *wait and we'll get back to you*. Though superficially polite, Peter's *thank you very much for your information* is an instance of impolite behaviour because it is sarcastic and ironic. Being overly-polite is inappropriate and negatively marked and thus, Peter's utterance is impolite and challenging the authority of his superior (Schnurr et al. 2008: 217-219). Another instance of impolite exchanges comes from a white-collar organisation: some members always arrive late for IT meetings, which is annoying for those waiting. Tricia, the Chair of the meeting, ironically welcomes Serena, a manager, who enters the meeting room late:

(84)

Tricia: good afternoon

Serena: [in a light-hearted tone of voice]: sorry I'm late

Evelyn: it's been noted, chocolates expected next meeting  
[laughter]

Serena: (that's right) ***cos I was considering whether you'd notice if I didn't turn up***

Tricia: [in a friendly tone of voice]: we noticed:

(Example taken from Schnurr et al. 2008: 219-220)

Even though Serena apologizes for coming late, from her tone of voice, it can be inferred that she does not mean it seriously. Moreover, instead of accepting criticism and apologizing once more, she challenges her superior, Tricia, by saying *cos I was considering whether you'd notice if I didn't turn up*: regarding the form, the utterance seems to be intended to be polite, but the content is negatively marked and thus, the message is clearly impolite. Serena indirectly scrutinises Tricia's authority, but the invoked laughter mitigates the force of the utterance (2008: 220-221).

Humour is also very important in so-called 'mock impoliteness': superficially, the utterance is impolite, but conveys a politic message. Mock impoliteness is stereotypically associated with masculine behaviour. The following two examples verify this:

(85)

Russell: how was the meeting gee [...]

Ginette: [...] I didn't go

Trying to get the lines going brother

Russell: oh were you down there all the time ( )

Ivan: ***(that) you left the fucking packing lines going like hell***

Russell: [laughs]

Ginette: /I'm there all the time bro\\

Russell: [laughing]: yeah but ***I think you're the problem***: [laughs]

Ginette: [in mock anger]: you just keep your eyed on your screen:

Russell: ***//[chortles]: oo hoo hoo:\\***

Ivan: ***//[chortles]: oo hoo hoo:\\***

Ginette: if I get any shit powder from you

I'm coming up here to box your ears

(Example taken from Schnurr et al. 2008: 223-224)

While discussing progress on the packing line, Ginette is the target of impoliteness, issued by her subordinates Russell and Ivan: the extract

contains many moves which are considered impolite due to their directness. Russell's *I think you're the problem* is mitigated through laughter, but still does not lose its face-threatening nature since it displays very confrontational behaviour. Yet, the context of a blue-collar workplace is crucial to interpret the sequence correctly: teasing, mocking and superficial impoliteness are core elements of conversations in this setting. Thus, Russell is conforming to the norms of the CofP and not engaging in an impolite act (2008: 224). Whilst mock impoliteness seems to be normal in blue-collar workplaces, it is regarded disrespectful and rude in white-collar ones. Interruptions, for example, are instances of impoliteness: Matt accuses his superior, Smithy, of interrupting which leads him to being impolite as well:

(86)

Vita: Friday would be perfect

Smithy: hey Matt did you get all of your things completed by Friday

Matt: ***I was just about to say if Mr Smitherson wasn't so rude as to interrupt um***

[general laughter]

Matt: ditto for me all the contents are there (with me)

This week is fine

[...]

(Example taken from Schnurr et al. 2008: 226)

Matt considers Smithy's passing on the floor to him an unnecessary and interruptive action since he was going to talk next anyway: *I was just about to say if Mr Smitherson wasn't so rude as to interrupt um*. This accusation can be superficially identified as impolite: alongside with the overly-polite respectful *Mr Smitherson*, Matt performs an inappropriate act of mock impoliteness (2008: 227).

Altogether, it is male interlocutors who not only behave in an impolite way, but they also do this more frequently. Women, by comparison, engage in impolite acts as well. However, they only seldom disregard politeness norms and when doing so, they try to mitigate it with laughter. From the analysed examples, the conclusion that men are more impolite than women is gained.

#### 8.4.2.4. Criticism

The workplace is a setting where not just compliments are paid and approval is expressed. Negative evaluation of colleagues and subordinates is an extremely face-threatening act which can be realized in manifold ways: bald, unmitigated criticism – considered highly impolite – is stereotypically associated with male superiors negatively assessing their subordinates. Yet, mitigated criticism is also brought into connection with female leaders (Mullany 2007: 85-86).

Mitigated criticism implies that the speaker softens the force of the statement by hedging or using modals, minimisers and pauses: interestingly, a male conversation participant draws on this mitigating strategy:

(87)

Mike: you swipe that and that's got to be there for (-) check in  
And then you've got the top part on the top

Steve: that **might** be **a bit** too small

[...]

(Example taken from Mullany 2007: 101)

A very interesting way of negatively evaluating somebody or an event is to choose metaphors or idioms instead of more direct evaluative language: even though criticism is expressed, the speech act is softened and mitigated. What is more, it is a face-saving way of discussing emotionally charged subjects. In example (88), Mark, a subordinate, admits making a mistake while placing an order. His superior, Paul, is not at all pleased and criticises him using many metaphors and idioms:

(88)

Paul: [...] *That's a bit of a pain*, isn't it

Mark: yeah. So ... so-

Paul: [remember that next time

Mark: I said to him [uh... let us know next time you know... what [...]

Paul: *well you'll know it for next time*

Mark: mm

[...]

Paul: well I m- we won't – y' know *don't know do yous*

Mark: You don't know

Well it's annoying that he's got an order in if you think about it [...]

Paul: mm

Mark: it's not exactly like not getting an order at all though

Paul: [annoying, isn't it

[...]

Oh well, *it's a pain*, isn't it

Mark: mm

Paul: *can't win 'em all*

[...]

*Win some you lose some* [...]

*It's annoying though*, isn't it.

(Example taken from Koester 2006: 110-111)

All the idioms and metaphors used negatively evaluate the mistake Mark committed. Nonetheless, Paul mitigates his criticism which is atypical of men. Unmitigated, blunt criticism is considered stereotypically masculine in style and hence, only performed by males. This, however, cannot be proven to be true since women as well are capable of criticising directly: Julie, although being a CofP member with the lowest status, criticises Kate for discussing topics on behalf of Simon who is not attending the meeting:

(89)

Martin: alright

Julie: *has Simon got any other wish lists?*

Kate: ((smiling)) no that was it ((laughs))

Julie: okay

(Example taken from Mullany 2007: 156)

Julie's comment is very sarcastic, in tone as well as in content taking the context and her status in consideration. She is neither the chair of the meeting nor a manager, but asserts her role by self-selecting her turn and criticising on-record (2007: 156).

The most extreme example of criticism is performed by Sharon, even only paralinguistically:

(90)

David: so that's gone up from three something up

On the autumn side if

[(. ) side side ]

[((Sharon repeatedly whistles))]

((She waves a piece of paper at David and then throws it across the room at him))

David: I'm SOOO sorry (.) ((picks up a different sheet, but not the one Sharon has thrown)

David: on page five of the autumn winter one

(Example taken from Mullany 2007: 145)

Without stating a single word, Sharon makes clear that she is not content with David's performance since he has brought along the wrong figures. Her behaviour disregards David's face needs and is disrespectful. In order to get his attention, she whistles and throws a piece of paper at him. This sort of assertive, masculine strategy is rare in meetings and even more so if a woman as the Chair behaves this way.

All in all, roles are swapped in uttering criticism: male superiors stick to stereotypically feminine strategies, mitigating their displeasure by using metaphors, idioms and humour. By contrast, women are very assertive when performing criticism and hence, draw on stereotypically masculine discursive styles.

#### **8.4.2.5. Warnings**

Warnings are speech acts that are face-threatening, especially if uttered during a business meeting to one individual only. As with directives and criticism, mitigated forms of warnings are evidently feminine strategies, while bald, direct and impolite warnings invoke stereotypically masculine behaviour (Mullany 2007: 86). Carrie, the Chair of a meeting, informs her team that on Christmas Eve, the company will close early for the afternoon:

(91)

Carrie: one o'clock will be the time (.) and that way

((smile voice)) if you go to the pub

*Then you're not welcome back*

[laughter from many]

(Example taken from Mullany 2007: 127)

Her smile voice indicates that Carrie is warning her team members with humour, a strategy to mitigate the directive. Amy, another meeting chair,

enacts her authoritative role in a similar way: she tells her subordinates what is going to happen if they try to trick her:

(92)

Amy: when I got them in {departmental name} I gave them back  
to the managers (.) who'd let me down  
so they ended up doing the forfeits ((smile voice))  
**so be warned**  
((laughter from all subordinates))  
**don't do it [...]**

(Example taken from Mullany 2007: 107-108)

Even though Amy personalises the warning by saying *who'd let me down* and not being too impolite in formulating it, she is rather assertive and acts in a masculine way since the warning is explicitly stated: *so be warned, don't do it* (2007: 107-108). As the corpora do not include any warnings issued by men, it is only possible to say that women who are in high job positions draw on feminine as well as on masculine discursive features in warning their subordinates.

#### 8.4.2.6. Refusals

Making decisions sometimes also means saying *no*, refusing requests, and deciding against the will of others. Between close friends, refusals are often directly expressed, without mitigating the statements. In the workplace, refusals involve all the stereotypical strategies discussed up to now: they can be masculine and confrontational in style, but also well-formulated, softened and hence, of feminine character. Most refusals, however, are as directly stated as directives. The following example shows the directive style Clara, the team leader in a multinational company, applies when making decisions her team does not like:

(93)

Harriet: looks like there's actually been a request for screendumps I  
know it was outside of the scope but people will be pretty  
worried about it  
Clara: *no screendumps*  
Peg: (sarcastically) thank you Clara  
Clara: *no screendumps*  
Matt: we know we know you didn't want them and we um er we've-  
Clara: *that does not meet the criteria*

Smithy: so that's a clear well maybe no

Clara: *it's a no*

Smithy: it's a no a royal no

(Example taken from Cameron 2007: 134)

Clara ignores Peg's sarcastic comment and cuts off Matt's argument, interrupting him. Moreover, she overrules her team's doubts by directly and decisively refusing the team's idea: *no screendumps* (2007: 134). Similarly in the next conversation, Belinda refuses her manager's request to do an oral presentation on the evaluation of training programmes her company provides:

(94)

Len: um + and we would need to do a verbal for this one

Belinda: I'm not doing it

All: [laughter]

[...]

Belinda: /seriously\ /seriously\  
[...]

[...]

Belinda: /[[laughs] I don't think (it'd) be appropriate for me to do it\  
[...]

[...]

Belinda: use Clive [[laughs] ( ) no I've had enough

(Example taken from Holmes 2006: 160-161)

The first refusal is expressed very baldly and direct, threatening the face needs of Belinda's superior, Len: *I'm not doing it*. Second, Belinda switches from a confrontational to more mitigated way of refusing the request, laughing, drawing attention to her feeling uncomfortable and considering it inappropriate. Lastly, she utters a directive *use Clive*, followed by a clear statement of refusal: *I've had enough* (Holmes 2006: 161). Overall, Belinda reacts in a more masculine way but tries to soften her statement. As ascribed to stereotypical notions, men's competitive and assertive way of interacting also creeps into expressing refusals. As a matter of fact, the most face-threatening and confrontational refusals are uttered by males:

(95)

Alex: yeah Bert bro check our pallet downstairs for us please bro+

Bert: no I fucking won't

Do it yourself you tight bastard

(Example taken from Holmes 2006: 142)

Even though this refusal takes place between status equals, i.e. work mates, it is extremely impolite and direct. There is no attempt to mitigate it, instead, expletives are used: *I fucking won't, tight bastard*. Another instance of the use of expletives in refusals is illustrated in the next example. The team leader, Ginette, refuses a request of a subordinate who wants her to get some equipment he needs for his work:

(96)

Russell: can you get me one please [...]

Ginette: you get one

Russell: ah you're not doing anything

Ginette: you go and get one

Russell: fuck it +++ fuck you go get your fucking legs out here

Ginette: why didn't you get one before I talked to you about that  
yesterday

Russell: because we're busy + I got to get all that out of the way

(Example taken from Holmes 2006: 165)

Russell's reaction to Ginette's refusal is not only extremely face-threatening, but also issued from a subordinate to a superior which is rare in this format in business conversation. Ginette negates the request by using a sharp directive to Russell: *you get one* and stays unimpressed by his use of abusive language (Holmes 2006: 165).

Concluding, refusals cannot be stereotypically classified as either feminine or masculine discourse because both, men and women in leading positions dismiss requests, ideas and suggestions in a very harsh and decisive way. What can be said is that leaders of both sexes do indeed draw on the normatively masculine linguistic features to utter refusals.

### **8.4.3. Gendered speech acts**

#### **8.4.3.1. Floor-holding and turn-taking**

Sacks et al developed a turn-taking model which works perfectly in the professional workplace setting: usually, one speaker talks at a time and cues are sent out for the other to gain the floor, i.e. the chance to speak. Simultaneous speech or even interruptions lead to a malfunction of turn-

taking: of course, it is usually the more powerful who interrupts the subordinate's turn (Coates in Mills 1995: 20).

Meeting conversations are highly structured which is not only due to the set agenda, but also to the Chair's duty to control the conversation as to who receives the 'floor' for how long and when. The concept of 'floor' was defined by Edelsky who distinguishes between a single and a collaborative floor: the former is regarded conventionally masculine since men mostly speak just one at a time, playing the expert. The latter is judged stereotypically feminine because of its cooperative nature (Mullany 2007: 79-80). In meetings, the floor is often allocated directly by the Chair:

(97)

Carrie: Erm we ought to just see what the whereabouts is gonna be  
for everybody (.) Arthur do you want to start?

Arthur: yeah (.) on Tuesday

(Example taken from Mullany 2007: 134)

Although Carrie issues a directive to take the floor, she mitigates it by asking a team member, calling him by his first name: she gives the floor to him. Moreover, Carrie's starting line is of typically feminine character: the collective 'we', 'ought' and 'just' can be witnessed, which minimize her authority (2007: 134).

(98)

Amy: okay (-) so time to start (-) Gary

Gary: Yeah (-) erm we had a reasonably good week last week

(Example taken from Mullany 2007: 118)

Allocating the taking of turns directly to colleagues is a strategy to offer the floor to everybody in order to ensure all potential issues are covered. At the end of a meeting, Amy, the Chair, opens the floor to all meeting participants:

(99)

Amy: okay (-) anything from any of you? Tony?

Tony: yeah ermmm (-) talking about commercial  
 [...]  
 Amy: okay (-) is that it Tony?  
 Tony: yeah  
 Amy: Karen anything from you?  
 Karen: ermmm from the recruitment evening  
 [...]  
 Amy: was that it from you Karen?  
 Karen: yes yeah  
 Amy: Okay fab (-) anything Eddie?  
 Eddie: no not today  
 Amy: no  
 ((laughter from many))  
 Amy: How are you feeling?  
 Eddie: alright yeah  
 [...]  
 Amy: good (-) okay (-) Kirsty?  
 Kirsty: nothing  
 Amy: yeah your're feeling okay?  
 Kirsty: yeah  
 Amy: erm I was just gonna say what you just need to remember is  
 there's all of us (.) so if there's anything just shout up  
 You know (.) we all have a pretty good idea of what's going  
 on  
 So you know just just a- ask the question (-) Mary?  
 Mary: two things  
 [...]  
 Amy: is that everything Mary?  
 Mary: yeah

(Example taken from Mullany 2007: 114-115)

Every meeting participant is directly addressed by his/her first name: Amy checks whether they have any queries or problems to discuss. She also asks personal questions and mitigates a directive, drawing on a stereotypically feminine linguistic repertoire: collective 'we', conditionals, minimizers 'just' and hedges. In doing so, Amy creates an atmosphere where team members feel secure when expressing their concerns (Mullany 2007: 115). This normatively feminine interaction patterns are not only used by women, but also by male managers and chairpersons:

(100)

Steve: okay (-) errr is there anything else? (-) Mike? (.)  
 Mike: no  
 Steve: nothing  
 Mike: no everything's been covered  
 Steve: okay (-) Sue?

Sue: no  
Steve: no (-) Matt?  
Matt: no  
Steve: no (-) you're alright?  
Matt: yeah fine

(Example taken from Mullany 2007: 103)

Holding the floor and turn-taking are crucial elements in everyday as well as in business conversation. In meetings, turns are usually passed on from the Chair to the meeting participants to make sure that everyone receives the chance to speak. Indeed, the feminine, cooperative style is preferred by all the meeting Chairs analysed: both, male and female Chairs give the floor directly to their subordinates, addressing them by their names and ensuring that all their issues are covered within the meeting. Hence, turn-taking in workplace meetings can be identified as a stereotypically feminine strategy.

#### 8.4.3.2. Interruptions and simultaneous talk

Meeting members do not always conform to turn-taking rules. By definition, an interruption is a disruptive act which is considered stereotypically a masculine manner of gaining the floor and seen as an act of impoliteness. On the contrary, simultaneous talk is a feminine interaction strategy: conversation is jointly constructed which is a supportive strategy of politeness (Mullany 2007: 80). The focus here lies on interruptions only, in order to prove whether it is really only men who interrupt.

(101) Kelly = Chair of meeting

Kelly: next week we're going to be installing (.) the new lightning in the store we're going to go in the left side cos starting on the right side they'll be well up to deal with the job

Sybil: what's this changing?

Kelly: sorry?

Sybil: What's this changing?

Kelly: we've got a new one through

**[systems and ]**

Gary: **[go and have a look]** in the showroom you'll see in the showroom there's a new lightning system

[...]

(Example taken from Mullany 2007: 119)

Gary interrupts Kelly's response to Sybil's question, paraphrasing it into a blunt directive to Sybil. So, he is stereotypically performing an act of impoliteness – a masculine act – since he, first of all, is interrupting his superior Kelly in order to then utter a directive in an unmitigated manner to his status equal colleague, Sybil (2007: 119-120). The same strategy is applied by Keith who is very assertive:

(102)

Craig: Can we simplify the range?

Keith: Oh well I think the person to have involved on this issue should be Jason

Craig: mm

Jane: oh yeah but we did **[have ]**

Keith: **[I'm always ]** the man hard on this I

mean

it is not my baby really but I I seem to be getting the grief over it all

Jane: well **[we (.) ]** we have had a meeting with Jason

Keith: **[from customers]**

[...]

(Example taken from Mullany 2007: 140)

Keith interrupts Jane's attempt to take the floor twice, so, it could be interpreted that masculine interaction style and interruptions are interrelated. However, the following two examples illustrate two females interrupting the turns of colleagues in an impolite manner, disregarding the fact that the others have not yet finished their talk:

(103)

Kate: we've just got to hope that now Simon's on board that somebody's looking at stock and distribution that you can look at the two together cos before it was always well Carrie did

distribution **[didn't she]** is that the hold up **[side]?**

Carol: **[yeah but ] [you]**

Really have come as him ((smile voice)) haven't you?

Kate: Sorry?

[...]

(Example taken from Mullany 2007: 158)

(104)

Jackie: also they moved the **[(xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx)]**

Phyllis: **[subscription to magazines]**

[the magazines]

Jackie: [we could] take them over there and the new ones  
could go in to Sharon and ask  
Jane: *[(her to) ]*  
Phyllis: *[either they] are [lost or ]*  
Carrie: *[hold on a minute ]* wait until they're  
done  
[...]

(Example taken from Mullany 2007: 128)

In fact, all females engaged in this meeting conversation interrupt each other's turns. Phyllis interrupts Jackie to gain the floor, Jane continues, but Phyllis does not stop talking over her. So, Carrie finally interrupts Phyllis by issuing a directive to shut her up. All meeting participants draw on stereotypically masculine ways of interacting (2007: 128).

Interruptions are common in business communication, with one colleague trying to gain the floor violently over the other. Even though old conceptions hold that disruptively cutting off turns is stereotypically masculine behaviour of interacting, business reality illustrates nicely that women interrupt as frequently as men do and sometimes even more persistently. Hence, interrupting the other speaker's turn is not at all a masculine way of gaining a chance to speak.

#### 8.4.3.3. Questions

In many publications on gender and language differences, it has been argued that women ask far more questions in order to show interest and to elicit answers in order to continue the conversation. Men, by contrast, ask questions to hand over the floor to others and to receive information. In public sphere discourse, questions are information-seeking only. Moreover, workplace questions are a powerful means of forcing the addressee to produce a relevant answer (Coates in Mills 1995: 16-17).

(105)

Carrie: Okay (-) what about up here now? Everything okay up here?  
Jane: where did we get to with getting storage?

(Example taken from Mullany 2007: 135)

Both women engage in an informal, polite interrogative style which is certainly seeking information. Moreover, it is again both, men and women who ask questions in order to receive relevant information:

(106)

Belinda: what did [X] say to you when he talked about it?

Val: um that just a little about the () processes at that  
And what they're where they get to  
The um trainees who finish the course  
Or the trainees who who actually go through it  
Are full of praise for it and that kind of thing

[...]

(Example taken from Holmes 2006: 152)

(107)

David: when are we supposed to finish?

Sharon: two thirty

David: okay

(Example taken from Mullany 2007: 160)

As has been argued, interrogatives in workplace interactions are information-seeking only. Regardless of the sex of the person performing the question, stereotypically masculine reasons for asking a question are preferred: the exchange of information lies in the foreground of all interrogatives found in business discourse.



## **9. Conclusion**

Talk is a crucial component in social life in order for many things to be achieved. Through discourse, we position ourselves in society and perform our gender identity by conforming to gendered stereotypes. It is a fact that gendering happens in workplaces as well, be it a woman behaving in a more masculine way in order to be more respected or a man softening his directives to minimize power inequalities, which is stereotypically seen as a feminine strategy.

People draw on stereotypically masculine and feminine discourse strategies which are manifold and complex, but treated as valid universally. These stereotypes are problematic and constraining: in traditionally male-dominated workplaces, leadership is most effectively performed when using a very authoritarian, masculine style. More feminine leadership styles are negatively valued since they do not fit the traditional roles of a leader.

The data, however, presents a more multi-faceted picture of workplace interaction. As a matter of fact, female and male colleagues at work break stereotypically gendered expectations. The analyses of different speech acts performed at work by both men and women have demonstrated that it is not true that only women use stereotypically feminine ways of talking and only men use stereotypically masculine resources. The crucial aspects in choosing the right discourse strategies are the situational context, who is talking to whom and for what purpose, as well as the atmosphere typical of the workplaces, completely disregarding gender.

Men and women equally often use the other sex' discourse resources to achieve their aims. Thus, performing relational practice, doing small talk, using humour, telling stories and paying compliments are gender-neutral ways of interacting in workplace settings. These strategies are stereotypically classified as feminine, but are used, in fact, in both very feminine as well as very masculine styles.

Once more it was shown that impoliteness, criticism, warnings and refusals are expressed in a masculine manner; however, these speech acts are not exclusively performed by men only as stereotypically ascribed to them, but also by women. Furthermore, when it comes to turn-taking and opening or closing meetings, the reverse picture can be found: both female and male colleagues draw on more feminine styles in performing these strategies.

Thus, gendered stereotypes in workplace interaction can be challenged since there is no evidence whatsoever that the biological sex of a speaker determines their linguistic choices. There is not a single strategy which is only applied by men or only applied by women. Both draw on the existing resources and use them either in a feminine or a masculine style.

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## Transcription conventions

[laughs]: :	paralinguistic features and additional information in square brackets; colons indicate start and end
<LAUGHTER>	paralinguistic features
+	pause up to one second
...	Noticeable pause within a turn of less than one second
(.)	Indicates a pause of two seconds or less
(-)	indicates a pause over two seconds
-	Incomplete or cut-off sentence
...//...\\	simultaneous speech
[     ]	closed brackets also indicate simultaneous speech
(hello)	transcriber's best guess at an unclear utterance
[...]	section of transcript omitted
[voc]	untranscribable noise
(xxx)	indicates material that was impossible to make out
{xxx}	indicates material that has been edited out for purposes of confidentiality
((laughs))	additional information in double brackets
.hh	inhalation (intake of breath)
hhh	aspiration (releasing of breath)
'hehehe'	indicates laughter
<i>Italics, <u>yes</u></i>	emphatic stress
% %	indicates that material was uttered quietly
RIDICULOUS	capital letters indicate material was uttered loudly
=	equal signs indicate no discernible gap between speakers' utterances
XM/XF	unidentified male or female

All names used in the examples are pseudonyms!

(based on Koester 2006; Holmes 2006; Coates 2003; Mullany 2007)



## **Deutsche Zusammenfassung**

Geschlechtsspezifische Unterschiede zwischen Mann und Frau sind in unserer Gesellschaft so stark verankert, dass sie durch Verhalten, Wahl der Berufe und Zugang zu Macht nur weiter ritualisiert werden. Jeder Mensch entwickelt eine spezifische Art der Selbstdarstellung, die ihn als Individuum, aber auch als Mitglied einer Gesellschaft erkennbar macht und vor allem die eigene Geschlechtsidentität preisgibt. Das wichtigste Instrument zur Inszenierung der Geschlechtsidentität ist ohne Zweifel die Sprache. Sie gibt wieder, wie Gesellschaften das Rollenbild von Mann und Frau sehen, kann aber auch die soziale Ungleichheit aufzeigen und gleichzeitig konstruieren.

Die vorliegende Diplomarbeit beschäftigt sich mit geschlechtsbedingten bzw. geschlechtsspezifischen Unterschieden im Sprachgebrauch. Im Detail werden Stereotype, die in der (englischsprachigen) Gesellschaft als wahr und allgemeingültig angesehen werden, behandelt, die dann im Weiteren den Ausgangspunkt für die Analyse von verschiedensten Sprechakten liefern, die am Arbeitsplatz sowohl von Männern als auch von Frauen ausgeführt werden. Geprüft werden soll, ob diese Stereotype tatsächlich im täglichen Sprachgebrauch, d.h. in der täglichen Interaktion am Arbeitsplatz sichtbar werden.

Um zufriedenstellende Ergebnisse zu erhalten, werden zunächst Theorien und Fakten aus einschlägiger Fachliteratur präsentiert. Im Anschluss werden dann anhand dieser Informationen Beispiele aus mehreren bereits bestehenden Korpora (corpora) analysiert. Da diese Beispiele authentische Kommunikation am Arbeitsplatz widerspiegeln, können Aussagen darüber gemacht werden, wie Sprachgebrauch und Geschlechtsstereotype in der Berufswelt zusammenwirken.

Nach einem einleitenden Kapitel über die verschiedenen wissenschaftlichen Disziplinen, die sich mit Sprache und Geschlecht befassen, gliedert sich die Arbeit in drei Teile. Der erste behandelt allgemeine Aspekte der Sprach- und Geschlechterforschung. Die Beziehung zwischen Sprache und Geschlecht wurde in unzähligen

Studien untersucht, aber erst mit der feministischen Herangehensweise kam es zur Unterscheidung der wichtigen Begriffe „sex“ und „gender“. Bald darauf stellte Robin Lakoff (1975) fest, dass Frauen weniger effektiv kommunizierten und ihre Sprache der männlichen unterlegen war. Die Feststellung basierte unter anderem auch auf Geschlechtsstereotypen, die ab Mitte der 1970iger relevant für die Wissenschaft wurden. Der Einfluss der feministischen Sprachforschung führt zur Entwicklung dreier theoretischer Ansätze, die die sprachliche Ungleichheit und Unterlegenheit von Frauen weiter thematisieren: Dominanz, Differenz und Defizit. Natürlich zielen diese auf spezielle Charakteristika der Sprache, daher werden phonologische und grammatikalische Unterschiede genauer behandelt.

Rein linguistische, oberflächliche Unterschiede werden im zweiten Teil vertieft und speziell männliche sowie speziell weibliche Interaktionsstrategien aufgezeigt. Ausgehend von Lakoff's Verständnis einer „Frauensprache“, soll gezeigt werden, wie Frauen ihre Weiblichkeit mit der Wahl der Sprache kreieren und unterstreichen. Im Gegensatz dazu steht eine „von Männern gemachte Sprache“, die ebenfalls präsentiert wird und wichtiger Bestandteil in der Konstruktion von Männlichkeit ist. Da diese zwei Sprachen laut ihrer „Erfinder“ nicht kompatibel sind, kommt es folglich zwischengeschlechtlich zum Misslingen der Kommunikation.

Der empirische Teil behandelt Geschlechterdiskurs am Arbeitsplatz. Sprechakte, die in Form von transkribierten Beispielen analysiert werden, sollen bestätigen oder widerlegen, inwieweit Geschlechtsstereotype auch in der Berufswelt agieren. Die Ergebnisse, die die Untersuchung der Arbeitsplatzkommunikation liefern, sind eindeutig. Es zeigt sich, dass sowohl Männer als auch Frauen die geschlechtsspezifischen Interaktionsformen des jeweils anderen Geschlechts anwenden, d.h. Männer bedienen sich nicht nur ihrer autoritären, machtvollen Sprache, sondern auch der femininen, sozialeren. Frauen bleiben ihrer weiblichen Linie treu, können aber sehr wohl auch ihre Autorität mit Sprache unter Beweis stellen. Daher kann behauptet werden, dass

Geschlechtsstereotype bezüglich sprachlicher Strategien sicherlich auch am Arbeitsplatz zu finden sind, dass diese aber nicht relevant für die tägliche Kommunikation zwischen weiblichen und männlichen Arbeitskollegen sind.



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Seit 2004: Universität Wien  
Lehramtsstudium mit der Fächerkombination Englisch-Spanisch

1996 – 2004: Gymnasium BG/BRG/BORG Kurzwiese Eisenstadt

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## **Zusatzausbildung**

Certificate in Teaching English for Specific Purposes (CerTESP)