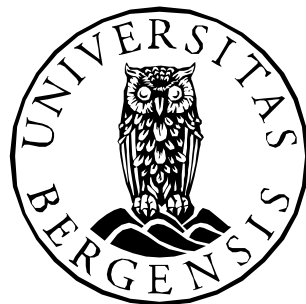


**“Language and Sex in Conflict Talk as Depicted
in American Films”**

By
Birte Myklebust



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Department of Foreign Languages
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Summary in Norwegian

Målet med denne masteroppgåva er å utforske kjønnskilnader i konfliktskapande språkbruk. Forskningsspørsmålet er: *er der ein skilnad på korleis menn og kvinner handterer konflikter språkleg sett?* Fem lingvistiske karakteristikkar som bidreg til konflikt vart valt for å utforske kjønnskilnader, nemleg bruken av identifikasjon, passiv stemme, generaliseringar, bipolaritet og bruken av slutningar versus skildringar. Analyse materialet vart henta frå amerikanske filmar med karakterar frå den same sosiale klassa, som kan beskrivast som mellomklasse. Hypotesane som forutsåg mannleg fleirtal når det gjeldt produksjonen av identifikasjon, passiv stemme og generaliseringar vart kvantitativt underbygga av resultatet. Både kategorien for identifikasjon og generaliseringar vart delt inn i to underkategoriar grunna gjentekne mønster som vart funne i analysen, høvesvis *initiert identifikasjon*, *identifikasjon som svar*, *absolutte generaliseringar* og *modifiserte generaliseringar*. Dei mannlege karakterane hadde fleirtalet av både initiert identifikasjon og absolutte generaliseringar, medan resultatata for identifikasjon som svar og modifiserte generaliseringar viste ei lik fordeling. Resultata viste ei nesten lik fordeling av bipolaritet, der påstanden var eit mannleg fleirtal. Hypotesen om bruken av slutningar og skildringar vart avkrefta, då dei kvinnelege karakterane produserte fleire slutningar enn dei mannlege, og dei mannlege karakterane produsert fleire skildringar enn dei kvinnelege. Undersøkinga av skildringar viste, på den andre sida, eit interessant resultat. Bruken av skildringar vert sett på som eit verktøy for å senke nivået av abstraksjon i språk, og gjer at det på denne måten reflekterer røynda på ein betre måte og er mindre konfliktsskapande. Resultata viste at sjølv om menn produserte fleire skildringar enn kvinnene til saman, var det kvinnene som initierte til sekvensar av skildringar etter bruk av ord med eit høgt nivå av abstraksjon nesten dobbelt så mange gongar som mennene. Dette viser ein tendens til at kvinner er meir opptekne av å halde språket nøyaktig og meir handgripeleg enn menn.

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“The division of the human race into male and female is so fundamental and obvious that we take it for granted. The fact that the difference is so basic means that it is hardly surprising that it is also reflected and indicated in all human languages” (Trudgill 2000: 61).

1 Introduction

1.1 Topic and aim

The topic of this thesis is sex variation in language conducive to conflict. After being introduced to the field of language and conflict at the University, I became very interested in this. The study of language and conflict is, among other things, about how specific linguistic characteristics can contribute to misunderstanding and conflict between individuals with the same background or from the same culture. It opened my eyes to how inadequate language can be when it comes to reflecting the complexity of people, situations and the world in general. It also gave useful solutions to how language can to a greater extent reflect the world in a more accurate way and thus be less conducive to conflict, if used in a different way.

Language and gender is something that I have found interesting since I first read about it. The factor of gender is pervasive throughout sociolinguistic research and has been investigated extensively. Trudgill (2000) presents the gender pattern, which is a tendency for female speakers to use a more standard variety than male speakers, and even over-report their usage of standard varieties. Fishman (1978) portrays an image of women as ‘victims’ in interaction where they have to do what she calls the ‘shitwork’ of keeping interaction going. Haas claims that “[p]erhaps the most widespread belief about men’s speech as compared with women’s is that it is coarser and more direct [...] [and that] the form of women’s language is reputed to be more polite than the form of men’s” (1979: 616-617). The research on sex differences in language, although present to a small degree before this, was sparked by Robin Lakoff’s book from 1975, *Language and Woman’s Place*. There she identifies and attributes several linguistic features to ‘women’s speech’, such as empty adjectives, hedging, avoiding strong expletives, etc. There is a recurring pattern of female speakers as supporting and non-competitive in conversation (Fishman 1978, Maltz and Borker 1982, Fasold 1990, Tannen 1992, Romaine 2000).

The aim of this thesis is to combine the fields of language and conflict and language and gender to investigate whether there is a difference as to which sex exhibits more language conducive to conflict than the other. Considering the established patterns found on sex differences, it is plausible that there is also a difference between the usage of the specific linguistic

characteristics found conducive to conflict. Do men use statements of a generalizing nature more than women? Are women more preoccupied than men with reflecting the complexity of the world through their language, such as using descriptions instead of inferences? Do men or women use more linking verbs to classify someone in a negative manner? These are interesting questions to me and they are the reason I chose the following research question: is there a difference between men and women as to how conflicts are handled linguistically?

1.2 Structure of thesis

The thesis is divided into five chapters. After the introductory chapter, follows the second chapter where a selection of theory regarding the various fields relevant for this investigation is presented. It is divided into three parts: language and gender, language and conflict, and language, conflict and gender. These are necessary for understanding and later problematizing the potential sex differences found in the data. The third chapter describes the selection process of material and the method used for the analysis of the data, in addition to the hypotheses of the research. The first part of the fourth chapter is a presentation of the results found. The second part is the discussion of the results, which will be discussed in light of the research question, the hypotheses and the theory presented in chapter two. The structure of chapter four follows the hypotheses, which will be addressed separately. The fifth and last chapter sums up the results and also suggests further relevant research within the same issue of sex differences.

2 Theory

2.1 Language and Gender

Section 2.1 presents a selection of the theoretical background on language and gender. The difference between sex and gender is presented, along with Coates' four approaches to the study of language and gender. Lakoff's *women's speech* introduces linguistic characteristics stereotypically associated with the way women speak, as does Trudgill's gender pattern. Maltz and Borker adopt a cultural approach to the study of language and gender and present specific linguistic characteristics associated with men and women.

2.1.1 Sex and Gender

When considering gender as a factor for linguistic variation, it is important to differentiate between what is usually referred to as sex and as gender. The two are often used without a clear distinction, which can be misleading in some cases. Initially, the main things said to separate the two were biology and construction; "Sex is to a very large extent biologically determined whereas gender is a social construct [but still one heavily grounded in sex] involving the whole gamut of genetics, psychological, social, and cultural differences between males and females" (Wardhaugh 2010: 333). This means that sex would be something inherent in a person, decided mainly and firstly by his/ her genitalia and chromosomes, while gender seems almost like an identity one can choose for oneself.

Since becoming more aware of the differentiation between sex and gender in the 1960s, one has seen that the relationship between these two, biology and culture, is actually intertwined, complex, and reflexive (West and Zimmerman 1987). West and Zimmerman propose gender to be something which is accomplished, methodically and recurring: "Gender depictions are less a consequence of our 'essential sexual natures' than interactional portrayals of what we would like to convey about sexual natures, using conventionalized gestures" (1987: 130). However, they do not seem to mean that these identities as either 'feminine' or 'masculine' are identities we can choose from freely. Doing gender is also seen as an activity creating and maintaining differences between males and females, and that these differences are not necessarily natural, essential or biological (West and Zimmerman 1987).

2.1.2 Coates' approaches to studying language and gender

Coates (2004) is one of the researchers currently studying language and gender, and she has identified four approaches to studying language and gender since language researchers first started investigating linguistic variation between genders. These are called the *deficit*

approach, the *dominance approach*, the *difference approach*, and the *dynamic approach*. The deficit approach was the one first used by researchers, followed later by the dominance approach and then the difference approach. The dynamic approach is, according to Coates (2004), the most recent and the most frequently adopted approach among researchers. Even though the introduction of a new approach has rendered the previous approach somewhat less applicable, it does not mean that the new one supersedes the previous one. As one will see later, the deficit approach is still used by some researchers.

The *deficit approach* was mostly used in the beginning of research on language and gender, and it is about taking the point of view of establishing a ‘women’s language’ and comparing it to that of males’, which is considered the norm. In this comparison, women’s language is usually found to be deficient to the language of men, and it implies that in order to be taken seriously women need to learn how to speak like men (Coates 2004: 5).

The second approach, the *dominance approach*, is somewhat similar to the *deficit approach* in that the researchers see women as subordinate to men, and that the difference in their language is a result of women’s subordination to and oppression by men. The linguistic difference is maintained by both men and women (Coates 2004: 5).

The third approach to language and gender is the *difference approach*. One of the major theorists in the area, Tannen (1992), adopts a *difference approach* to analyzing her data of cross-sex communication and potential miscommunications. Also Maltz and Borker (1982) analyze language adopting the same approach. This approach is about viewing women and men as members of different subcultures, and that the differences that can be found in their speech might be related to the membership of these subcultures. One of the good things about this approach is that one can look at women’s language without necessarily relating it to subordination or powerlessness. Coates (2004) notes, however, that critics (such as Troemel-Ploetz 1991, Cameron 1992, and Freed 1992) stress that one has to be careful when applying the difference approach to mixed-sex communication as Tannen does (1992). The reason for this is that “analysis of mixed talk cannot ignore the issue of power” (Coates 2004: 6).

The fourth approach is at the moment most frequently adopted, and it is called the *dynamic approach*. By using this approach, one emphasizes that gender is something that is constructed, again and again to different degrees, instead of being a fixed category. A gender identity is not seen as an opposition with two mutually exclusive elements, either masculine or feminine, but rather as a continuum, where something can have different degrees of one or the other, or both. The process of constructing gender is active and creative, and it has to be performed for every interaction. Gender identity can be seen as being a social construct, and

this construct can differ from culture to culture. In linguistics, gender identity is created through interaction with other people. “In any particular interaction we draw on its symbolic power to construct a particular identity or identities, and to express our conformity with or rejection of mainstream norms and values” (Holmes 1997: 195).

Holmes (1997) illustrates how one can construct gender. One of the examples she uses is a dialogue between two women where the speaker constructs the conventional gender identities of ‘good daughter’ and ‘good mother’ through a narrative of a family outing. In her qualitative analysis, Holmes bases her results on the speaker’s choice of words when describing her own actions, and also on the way the speaker constructs the identity of her own daughter into a conventional conservative identity by using diminutives and attenuators (e.g. *quite*, *just* and *little*), pragmatic particles (e.g. *sort of* and *you know*), etc. Holmes also emphasizes the speaker’s use of phonological variants, and her use of the standard variant of the variable (ING) and of a conservative variant of intervocalic /t/, produced with aspiration. These are features associated with femininity in the particular New Zealand society she studied (Holmes 1997).

Holmes’ second example is a conversation between two Maori men, and it shows that it is not only women who construct their gender identity through language: “In some contexts this will be a predominantly conservative or normative masculine identity; in others, men behave in ways more usually framed as ‘feminine’” (Holmes 1997: 209). A normal way for men to construct themselves is as someone “in control, knowledgeable, skilled and competent” (Holmes 1997: 209-210). Throughout the conversation between the two men who are discussing the performance of one of them in a game, Holmes notes at least three different identities constructed. Two of them are stereotypical conventional but contrasting masculine identities, and the third one is a more standard feminine identity where powerlessness and politeness are key. This is shown through a “lack of confidence and a need for re-assurance” (1997: 213). This example shows how the construction of gender is an on-going process, and how it can change even within the same conversation without a switch of interlocutors or topic of conversation.

By approaching gender as an identity that is constructed instead of an identity inherently present according to biological sex, one would think that it would be impossible to predict the behavior of men and women. Today more than ever, one can see both men and women challenging traditional gender identities with men exploring features traditionally associated with femininity and vice versa. However, “it is useful to recognize that the majority of interactions tend to re-create traditional gender identities and express the perva-

sive, though not universally accepted [...] values” (Holmes 1997: 215). This means that even though people are free to express whatever identity they like, one can still see patterns and similarities in the big picture.

One should note that gender alone is usually not the only determining factor when it comes to linguistic variation. Gender is a continuum which is combined with other factors in a complex way; it “interacts with other social dimensions such as social status, ethnicity, age and power” (Holmes 1997: 203). Holmes notes that in a study she did in Wellington, gender proved however to be the determining factor when it came to the realization of the (ING) variable, instead of normally salient factors such as ethnicity or class (Holmes 1997: 198).

Researchers are often influenced by variants of *deficit*, *dominance*, *difference* and/or the *dynamic approach*, even though the dynamic approach is the most current one. The deficit approach is seen as somewhat outdated by researchers using the *difference approach* or the *dynamic approach*. There are, however, still people studying language and gender adopting the *deficit approach*, especially if the study is done from a lay person’s point of view (Coates 2004).

When conducting a search on Google, I found several hits for courses in assertiveness in language for women, where they could learn to speak more like men because their own way of speaking is too unassertive. Karen on www.theprofessorisin.com, who has been employed as a professor at both the University of Oregon and the University of Illinois, offers the workshop “Yes You Can: Women and Success in Academia”, where she makes women aware of their language use and tries to help them become more assertive. “[...] in the professional world, where influence and power derive from individual authority, expertise, and confidence.... Women’s learned domestic behaviors of agreement, soothing, indirection, and non-confrontation fail them badly” (The Professor Is In, accessed 13 October 13). This was published in July in 2011, which is roughly three years ago. This indicates that the *deficit approach* is still used when investigating linguistic variation between men and women.

2.1.3 Robin Lakoff and Women’s Speech

One of the first researchers to bring theory to the field of variation in language when it comes to gender as a main factor was Robin Lakoff. There had been other linguistic researchers writing about gender differences in language before, but none in the same degree and as groundbreaking as Robin Lakoff. In *Language and Woman’s Place* (1975), Lakoff’s main focus was on how women are linguistically discriminated against by men, both by the language women are taught to use and by the way language is used about them.¹ Even though

both kinds of linguistic discrimination are intriguing and should be considered, I will limit my focus to linguistic discrimination in the language women are taught to use.

Lakoff (1975) bases her results on introspection, and is explicit about this. Though she is a highly accomplished linguist and many of her observations are probably indicative of real tendencies in language on a larger scale, one should take into consideration the fact that her theory is based on introspection. Nonetheless, Lakoff has identified and named several different features of language that she attributes to what she calls ‘women’s language’. These have since been the foundation of countless empirical studies done on language and gender differences, where their presence in ‘women’s language’ has either been refuted or corroborated. ‘Hedges’ in language is one of the features Lakoff ascribes to ‘women’s language’, and Crawford (1995) points to how many of the studies done on hedging after Lakoff’s claim often ignore surrounding circumstances: “Sex difference findings never enter the scientific discourse neutrally. Rather, they are interpreted within the context of deeply held beliefs about women’s natures. In accounting for their results, researchers cannot avoid being influenced by the sociocultural discourse of gender” (Crawford 1995: 32). A study done on the use of hedging in academic speech found no gender differences, thus refuting Lakoff’s claims of hedging (Poos and Simpson 2002). Either way, the features Lakoff has identified are representative of impressions of women’s speech that have been prevailing for a long time, and among some still are (The Professor Is In, accessed 13 October 13). One should note that her focus is mainly on how women’s speech differs from and is inferior to the speech of men, and her theory is an example of the deficit approach.

One of the types of features Lakoff identifies as to how women’s speech differs from men’s speech is lexical features. One example is fine discrimination of color terms. Few people would react to hearing the sentence “the wall is mauve” when uttered by a woman, while if a man said it, his sexual orientation or masculinity would surely be questioned. One of the reasons for this, according to Lakoff, is that “[...] since women are not expected to make decisions on important matters, such as what kind of job to hold, they are relegated the noncrucial decisions as a sop” (Lakoff 1975: 9). By having an extra set of vocabulary reserved for women, such as empty adjectives, it underlines what space is seen to be theirs, viz. the private space of the home where color is an important factor in, for instance, interior design.

Another lexical difference, with relation to ‘meaningless’ particles in men’s and women’s speech, has been identified by Lakoff. To exemplify this she compares the two sentences (a) “Oh dear, you’ve put the butter in the fridge again” and (b) “Shit, you’ve put the

butter in the fridge again”. One does not need to be a linguist to see that sentence (a) would, in the stereotypical view of language, be uttered by a woman, while sentence (b) would be uttered by a man. Many women can now be heard to formulate sentence (b) just as often, and maybe more often, than sentence (a). One would, on the other hand, rarely hear men constructing a stereotypical male identity formulate sentence (a). The underlined ‘particles’, as Lakoff (1975) calls them, signal what force the emotion is conveyed with. Shit is a much more forceful expression than Oh dear and Lakoff indicates that this difference in vocabulary is a result of men being allowed stronger ways of expressing themselves, and this again underlines their position of power and strength in the actual world. A result of this is that speakers who express themselves forcefully are more likely to be taken seriously by the listener, than those expressing themselves less forcefully. Here as well one can easily see how women become subordinated by the speech they are taught and expected to use (Lakoff 1975: 10-11).

Lakoff finds the use of adjectives to be a prominent difference in men’s and women’s speech and investigates adjectives such as *great*, *terrific*, *cool*, *neat* on the one hand and *charming*, *sweet*, *lovely*, *divine* on the other. The first set is normally viewed as ‘neutral’ adjectives, while the other set is mostly confined to women’s use. As with the grammatical and the lexical features, women are free to also use the variants connected to men’s speech, while you would very rarely hear a man utter the variants connected to women’s speech. The difference between the sets of adjectives is that while the former set can be used about practically anything, the latter set is usually confined to express something essentially frivolous, trivial, or unimportant. “[These adjectives], restricted to ‘women’s language’ suggest that concepts to which they are applied are not relevant to the real world of (male) influence and power” (Lakoff 1975: 13). Lakoff stresses that these adjectives do not necessarily imply ‘femininity’ as much as they imply someone ‘out of power’ or ‘uninvolved’ and that any group might use them. She does, however, connect them to ‘women’s language’ because “women are the ‘uninvolved’, ‘out of power’ group par excellence” (Lakoff 1975: 14).

Lakoff (1975) identifies a syntactic difference in men’s and women’s speech regarding the use of tag questions. The underlined part of the following example demonstrates a tag question: “you’re coming home at four o’clock, aren’t you?” and it is traditionally less assertive than a statement and more confident than a yes-no question. It is Lakoff’s impression, though she has no empirical evidence for it, that women are more apt than men to use tag questions. By using this structure they express uncertainty because it gives the impression that they are looking for confirmation and have no views of their own (Lakoff 1975). Later

empirical studies show that Lakoff's observations are often taken out of context, and that women do not actually use more tags than men, in the manner Lakoff claimed. Dubois and Crouch (1975) investigated this feature of language and found that in fact women did not use more tags than men, thereby refuting Lakoff's claims (Crouch and Dubois 1975).

A particular kind of intonation pattern is also a characteristic of the way women speak (Lakoff 1975). An example she provides is women answering questions with statements with a 'rising inflection'. Their statement takes the form of a declarative sentence, but has the "rising inflection typical of a yes-no question, as well as being especially hesitant" (Lakoff 1975: 17). As one can see from the example: "Question: When is dinner? Answer: Around six o'clock?" the rising inflection of the answer which has the form of a declarative sentence makes it sound like one is seeking confirmation to a tentative answer. Lakoff points to this structure as one of the reasons why women's language is perceived as more polite than men's language (Lakoff 1975: 17).

Lakoff concludes her section on language differences between genders by stressing the importance of studying linguistics as a means of discovering underlying inequalities of power in society in general. "Linguistic imbalances are worthy of study because they bring into sharper focus real-world imbalances and inequities. They are clues that some external situation needs changing, rather than items that one *should* seek to change directly" (Lakoff 1975: 43). The linguistic differences one can find between genders are like the symptoms of a disease; one can try and efface the differences by exchanging them with more neutral words, but as with a disease, one has to go to the root of the problem in order to get rid of the symptoms. It is not simply enough to cure the symptoms.

We should be attempting to single out those linguistic uses that, by implication and innuendo, demean the members of one group or another, and should be seeking to make speakers of English aware of psychological damage such forms do. The problem, of course, lies in deciding which forms are really damaging to the ego, and then in determining what to put in their stead (Lakoff 1975: 43).

Lakoff recognizes the difficulties and importance in singling out the linguistic forms which contribute to keeping social inequalities in society from the ones which do not have such consequences; she also recognizes the difficulties in replacing them with more neutral words (1975).

2.1.4 The Gender Pattern

The size of the gap between men's and women's language can vary to a large degree. One can have small differences, as in the way linguistic variables are realized, and one can have larger differences, as in having contrasting sets of vocabulary. Trudgill (2000) uses a tribe of the Indian Caribs where men and women speak different varieties of the same language as an example to illustrate how large the difference between men's and women's language can be. One of the reasons for this gender difference is that the Carib tribe exterminated the men of the Arawak tribe when they came to the island of Dominica, but let the women live and married them. In addition, the men used certain words when they were out hunting that the women were not allowed to utter, and in this way created a taboo on certain words. This has resulted in the two sexes speaking different varieties of the same language. Taboos in general may have a "powerful influence on the growth of separate sex vocabularies. [...] If taboos become associated with particular objects or activities such that, say, women are not permitted to use the original name, then new words or paraphrases are likely to be used instead, and sex differentiation of vocabulary items will occur" (Trudgill 2000: 66). This is one of the more extreme cases of gender differences within language.

In English, however, gender differences are usually "smaller, less obvious and more subconscious" (Trudgill 2000: 69). One of the most prominent findings when it comes to the difference between the language of men and women in English is that women "on average use forms which more closely approach those of the standard variety or the prestige accent than those used by men" (Trudgill 2000: 70). This phenomenon is called the *gender pattern*, and it is, according to Trudgill, the most consistent fact derived from sociolinguistic research performed in the last thirty years. He performed an empirical study in a local community in Norwich in 1974 where he investigated realizations of the variable (ng). The results showed that women actually over-reported their usage of the standard prestige form, while men over-reported their usage of the non-standard forms. This means that women perceived themselves as using more of a variety considered to be prestigious and standard than they really did, and this may indicate that they think they are expected to use prestigious standard forms. The *gender pattern* shows that women tend to use more of the standard variants than men in the same age, social class, and circumstances do. Standard variants are usually concurrent with the variants that are considered prestigious and thus socially accepted, and the *gender pattern* is what Trudgill calls a *social-class-linked gender accent differentiation* (Trudgill 2000).

Trudgill mentions two possible reasons for the differences in the use of standard variants between men's and women's language. One of them can be that the speech of the

working class, which is usually associated with non-standard local forms, has traditionally been linked to the notion of masculinity. This would naturally lead to women being more inclined towards using more standard prestigious forms than men, regardless of social class (Trudgill 2000: 78).

The other reason can be that many societies actually expect a higher degree of social adherence from women than from men. Trudgill claims this because many studies have shown that women over-report their usage of high-status variants (Trudgill 2000, Romaine 2000). According to Trudgill, the differences one can see in language are closely linked to society: “Gender differences in language, then, arises because [...] language as social phenomenon, is closely related to social attitudes. Men and women are socially different in that society lays down different social roles for them and expects different behavior patterns from them” (Trudgill 2000: 79).

Social significance in language is important when it comes to explaining linguistic differences between genders. Biology, for instance, is not the reason for the different languages of the Arawak tribe Trudgill mentioned. The differences are seen as results of the social position men and women have been in for quite a long time, and the differences can be found in both phonological and morphological variables, and in pragmatic and interactional linguistic features. This has to do with what kind of social significance a word or a way of speaking acquires. “Social significance is acquired by the pattern of an item’s use, its association with a particular social group. So a particular phonological variant may have the social significance of ‘female’ or ‘youthful’ because it tends to be used most often by these social groups” (Holmes 1997: 215). So a linguistic characteristic becomes either ‘feminine’ or ‘masculine’ because of its traditional use throughout the years, which has again been used in a particular way because of the position the group of speakers has been in, for example unassertive linguistic characteristics, such as the pragmatic particle *sort of*, that have traditionally been associated with a feminine way of speaking because women have not been in positions of power (Holmes 1997: 215). Unassertive linguistic devices are normally not associated with the language of people in power.

2.1.5 A cultural approach to gender differences

Maltz and Borker (2012) investigate previous studies done on cross-ethnic communication, and draw comparisons between the results from this research and the results of studies done on male-female communication:

[Their] major argument is that the general approach recently developed for the study of difficulties in cross-ethnic communication can be applied to cross-sex communication as well. [They] prefer to think of the difficulties in both cross-sex and cross-ethnic communication as two examples of the same larger phenomenon: cultural difference and miscommunication (Maltz and Borker 2012:169).

They study how men and women assume different roles when they interact with each other. In cross-sex communication, women are more likely to ask questions to keep the conversation going.ⁱⁱ Fishman (1978) directs attention to what she calls the ‘shitwork’ of keeping social interaction going, and asking questions is one of the linguistic structures she investigates. According to her, women are “more actively engaged in insuring interaction than men” (1978: 404). This means that women more often than men “[...] make utterances that demand or encourage responses from their fellow speakers” (Maltz and Borker 2012: 170). Positive minimal responses, such as ‘mm hmm’ are a characteristic feature of the way many women speak; many women also use ‘silent protests’ after being interrupted or receiving a delayed minimal response. Another tendency is that women often use the pronouns ‘you’ and ‘we’ more often than men do, which is a strategy to include the other speaker in the conversation (Maltz and Borker 2012: 170).

There are also features that characterize the way many men speak, as opposed to women. Interruptions in speech are one phenomenon that has been studied, and results of many studies show that men are more likely to interrupt women in conversation than the other way around, and that men are also “more likely to challenge or dispute their partners’ utterances” (Maltz and Borker 2012: 170). Men are also more likely to respond unenthusiastically or with a delay, or sometimes offer no response or acknowledgement at all. Maltz and Borker have found a tendency for men trying to control the topic of conversation more than women do, and also to be more assertive and direct in declaring facts or opinions (2012:170).

In describing these differences between men’s and women’s language when it comes to the use of pronouns, interruptions, topic control, etc., Maltz and Borker (2012) disregard previous approaches often used to describe gender differences in language, viz. the *deficit approach* and the *dominance approach* previously mentioned. Their study adopted the *difference approach*, where they placed gender differences in the same category as cultural differences:

[Maltz and Borker] argue that men and women come from different sociolinguistic subcultures, having learned to do different things with words in a conversation, so that when they attempt to carry on conversations with one another, even if both parties are

attempting to treat one another as equals, cultural miscommunication results (2012: 171).

Maltz and Borker point to the fact that most of our patterns of interaction, both when it comes to personal and impersonal relationships, are acquired in the age between five and fifteen years old. This is incidentally a period where most people interact more with people of the same sex.

The different ways in which men and women speak are often called *genderlects*. Maltz and Borker (2012) refer to the acquisition of these *genderlects* as the “learning of gender-specific *cultures*” (174). They compare the difference between the speech of men and women to “accent divergence in which members of two groups that wish to become clearly distinguished from one another socially acquire increasingly divergent ways of speaking” (2012:174). Maltz and Borker investigate what patterns in social organization can be found when young boys and girls play together, and how this can relate to the differences found in male-female communication. “[...] it is these patterns, learned in childhood and carried over into adulthood as the bases for patterns of single-sex friendship relations, we contend, that are potential sources of miscommunication in cross-sex interaction” (2012:175).

Girls develop three main linguistic functions. The first one is to create and maintain close and equal relationships. The second one is to criticize someone in as non-confrontational a way as possible. The third one is to interpret accurately what is being said by other girls.

To a large extent friendships among girls are formed through talk. Girls need to learn to give support, to recognize the speech rights of others, to let others speak, and to acknowledge what they say in order to establish and maintain relationships of equality and closeness. In activities they need to learn to create cooperation through speech (Maltz and Borker 2012:176).

In most relationships between girls, being considered as ‘bossy’ is a negative thing because it implicates inequality in the non-hierarchical relationship. This does not mean that girls do not argue. It only means that they handle arguments and the possible domination of another person in different ways than boys do. Their arguments are often angled to focus on the group’s needs and situational requirements instead of personal gain or interest (Maltz and Borker 2012:176). A lot of the power dynamic within girls’ relationships is governed by how much and to whom they distribute information; by sharing your secret with someone you make yourself vulnerable at the same time as you connect with that person. “Given the

indirect expression of conflict, girls must learn to read relationships and situations sensitively. Learning to get things right is a fundamental skill for social success, if not just social survival” (Maltz and Borker 2012: 177).

Most boys, on the other hand, use language as a tool in a social hierarchy and obtaining and maintaining a position within that hierarchy. One should think that a natural consequence of this is that dominance is a major factor in men’s pattern of communication. Three uses of language have also been found in the way men communicate. The first one is using language to declare a position of dominance in a hierarchy. The second has to do with gathering and keeping an audience, while the third use is to “assert oneself when other speakers have the floor” (Maltz and Borker 2012: 177). Many of the ways in which these three uses of language are done were observed, among other researchers, by Savin-Williams (1976). He did a study on these patterns of dominance and investigated interaction among children in a summer camp. The most common features he found used in interaction to assert dominance were to command people verbally, e.g. ‘Get up,’ ‘Give it to me,’ or ‘You go over there’. He also found several instances of name calling and ridiculing, as e.g. ‘You’re a dolt’ and verbal threats or boasts of authority, as e.g. ‘if you don’t shut up, I’m gonna come over there and bust your teeth in’. Refusals to obey such boasts and also winning verbal arguments, such as ‘I was here first’ and ‘tough’ were also common. It is, however, simply not enough to have the dominance to use these features, but one must also know under what circumstances to use and not to use them (Maltz and Borker 2012:177).

Boys also use “[...] words to gain and maintain an audience. Storytelling, joke telling, and other narrative performance events are common features of the social interaction of boys” (Maltz and Borker 2012: 178). Another feature prominent in boys’ interaction is the response to the narrative performances, which often takes the form “mockery, challenges and side comments” (Maltz and Borker 2012:178) of the story told by the narrator. It is also important for the boy telling the story to learn to ride out these challenges and get to the end of his story.

Considering these different ways of communicating, one cannot avoid miscommunication. Maltz and Borker (2012) identify five linguistic characteristics men and women often use differently and which can contribute to miscommunication. The first characteristic is asking questions, which occurs frequently in a conversation. A woman might, however, mean something different by asking a question than a man might. For women, asking questions is an important part of keeping the conversations going, as a form of maintenance, while most men first and foremost ask questions to request information. The second characteristic concerns how utterances are linked to preceding utterances. A difference between most men

and women here is that men have no rule for making a connection between the two. They might in fact ignore the preceding comments altogether, while most women seem to feel a “call for an explicit acknowledgement of what has been said and making a connection to it” (Maltz and Borker 2012:183). The third characteristic of how miscommunication may occur between men and women is how verbal aggressiveness is interpreted. Women have a tendency to interpret this as something directed at them personally, and as being both negative and disruptive. Men, on the other hand, use it as a tool to organize and structure the flow of the conversation. The fourth characteristic, where the room for interpretation and miscommunication between the genders can be potentially great, is topic flow and topic shift. For most women, the development of topics usually happens progressively and the shift from one topic to another happens gradually. For most men, on the other hand, topics are usually narrowly defined and stuck to until they abruptly shift to another one. Problem sharing and advice giving is the fifth characteristic of language that Maltz and Borker (2012) highlight as a factor for potential miscommunication. For most women, sharing a problem is an encouragement to share similar experiences and offer reassurance. For most men, on the other hand, sharing a problem is seen as a request for a solution and they will offer advice, act as experts and in some cases lecture their listener (Maltz and Borker 2012:181).

2.1.6 Summary of 2.1

In section 2.1 the different ways in which gender variation can manifest itself in language have been presented. Coates (2004) shows how gender differences can be studied by adopting four different kinds of approaches, viz. the *deficit*, the *dominance*, the *difference* or the *dynamic approach*, and Holmes (1997) portrays how gender can be constructed to different degrees. Lakoff’s (1975) various features that characterize women’s speech and Trudgill’s (2000) gender pattern are presented, followed by Maltz and Borker (2012) who study gender-lects adopting a *difference approach*.

2.2 Language and Conflict

2.2.1 Understanding conflict

This section presents the three main foci in the study of disputes to give insight into what the study of conflict focuses on. The experiential basis of meaning is presented to give an understanding of how words and meaning are connected, and how this can lead to misunderstanding and conflict. The difference between having an intensional and an exten-

sional orientation is presented to show how people's orientations are towards giving and receiving information. It shows the importance of lowering the abstraction of what one is trying to convey to make it as close to non-verbal reality as possible and less conducive to conflict.

2.2.1.1 Foci in the study of disputes

When it comes to studying disputes, there are three elements of focus. The first element of focus is the content of the interaction. Conflicts often center around objects or rights, such as parking spaces, money, etc. Disputes of people's beliefs, such as ideologies, values, opinions, etc., are also often the content of a conflict. Factual claims can also be a source of conflicts in interaction, such as what was promised to someone, historical facts, who said what to whom, etc. A combination of the three mentioned elements is also common in a situation of conflict (Grimshaw 1990). The question of identity is another important element when regarding the content of conflict talk. This means that claims about and negotiations of the nature of people's identities are made about speakers participating in the conversation and/or about people outside the conversation. Also the character of the social relations between these people can be disputed in conflict talk. "It appears that *all* conflict talk involves *some* negotiation of identities and of the appropriate nature of interpersonal (i.e., structural, organizational) arrangements" (Grimshaw 1990: 284).

The second element of focus in the study of conflict is the occurrence and visibility of disputes. The stakes involved in a conflict vary to a large extent. For many people it would be easier 'picking a fight' with someone one is not close to, because one did not risk compromising a close friendship with someone because of the dispute. The nature of the relationship between the speakers is important here, and also the attributes and the orientations of the individual speakers. Lastly, the context around the potential conflict is an important factor. However 'inevitable' a dispute may seem because of all of the above, it may be delayed or 'tabled' by "situational constraints such as emergencies or the appearance of certain audiences" (Grimshaw 1990: 285). This also works the other way, where conflicts may be sparked by e.g. unintended insults, in a situation where the speakers were trying to avoid conflict (Grimshaw 1990). The visibility of conflict is also a factor in the second element of focus. Conflict may be occurring, even though the direct signs are not present: "conflict may be obscured by indirections or overt politeness or spurious playfulness or even by apparent solicitude" (Grimshaw 1990: 287).

The orientation of the participants is the third element of focus of conflict talk. This element is hard to pinpoint, because of its varied nature:

Participants' orientations are even less accessible than is 'content' to direct observation; and contenders, audiences and analysts may make different assessments of orientations – indeed, the nature of orientations may itself become a focus of conflict. This fact makes specification of the boundaries and internal organization of the sectors of orientation very difficult (Grimshaw 1990: 287).

The nature of involvement for the participants of the conversation is a key factor in the orientation of the participants. In conflict talk, the participants always either speak 'for' themselves or on behalf of someone else. It is also common for participants in conflict talk to deny the roles the opposite parties of the conversation assign to them and to again assign roles for themselves which are the reverse of what the opposite parties assigned them (Grimshaw 1990). This would then constitute a dispute about true and alleged nature of orientation, both when it comes to oneself and the other speaker.

Whether or not the participants reflect around the content of the conflict talk, they are most likely aware of the probable outcomes of the conflict. The participants' perceptions of the stakes in the conversation rule to a degree the way in which they handle a conflict. To different participants disputes will be regarded as varying in degrees of importance. Some disputes will be regarded as more important than others, and some are seen as 'all-or-nothing' while others might be subject to compromise. Sometimes the contending parties will differ in these views of the conflict and its stakes, and they will disagree in willingness to negotiate. The outcome of a dispute and its potential for conflict can also change, e.g. as one becomes more mature in the course of life and gains more perspective and knowledge or as new information comes out during the dispute (Grimshaw 1990).

The emotional orientation of the participants can also influence how a dispute plays out. Put simply, this means that one's emotions towards individuals or events can be positive, negative or indifferent. These emotions can change throughout a dispute, but "participants are likely to have at all times some sense that interpersonal relations and the talk *itself* are hostile, friendly or neutral" (Grimshaw 1990: 290). These emotions are, however, difficult to assess. One speaker might perceive the interlocutor's apparent negative comment to be something directed personally at the speaker, while the interlocutor might not mean it as a personal attack on the speaker. In this way they might assess one of the party's emotions differently (Grimshaw 1990).

The 'instrumental-expressive' dimension is also a factor of participants' orientation one has to consider when investigating conflict talk. Displays of emotion are not always as legitimate as they may seem: "[...] appearances *can* deceive and [...] the presence or absence of emotions can be simulated. [...] Some of us learn to employ emotion *tactically*" (Grimshaw 1990: 291-292). A normal part of most peoples' upbringing is learning when and how to simulate the right emotions when offering e.g. an apology, thanks or other niceties so that the other party thinks that one means it. In these cases there is always a risk of situations being misinterpreted, that orientations and emotions can change throughout a dispute and simulation turn to reality, and also that there can be idiosyncratic and cultural differences in ways of ventilating emotions (Grimshaw 1990).

2.2.1.2 The experiential basis of meaning

Bringing the study of language down to a micro-level, it is important to understand how meaning and language are connected. The meaning people assign to words is built up by the personal experience one associates with a word. The first step to developing a meaning of a word is to attach one's own experiences to it: "You will develop no sense of what a word means to you if you have no experience to connect with it" (Janicki 2010: 33). In this process you have the *symbol*, which in this case is the word assigned to a non-verbal object; the non-verbal object is the unique, ever-changing thing, activity, state, etc. in real life, which is called the *referent*. The more experiences you have with the *referent*, the more experiences you attach to the *symbol*, and this adds to the formation of a *concept*. A *concept* is the image that comes to mind when hearing or seeing a *symbol*, and it is made up of all your past experiences with the *symbol*. Another way of describing the process of assigning meaning to *symbols* is that the more experiences one connects to a word, the more your meaning of a word is shaped by this experience. All people's meaning of words is colored by their experiences of it, which can differentiate from each other as much as people do. This is one reason why total understanding is difficult. For instance, a child is told by its parents that the yellow Ford they have is a 'car'. Up until this point, the yellow Ford is the only object the child associates with the word 'car'. The child will, however, connect more and more experiences to the word 'car' as it grows older and has more experiences, and a *concept* of the non-verbal object 'car' will develop. This *concept* will be based on the child's individual experiences with the word, and even though the child's notion of 'car' will be similar to others' notion of it, it will never be exactly the same (Janicki 2010).

Learning *symbols*, its *referents* and building *concepts* is a process that starts when you are an infant, and which continues in varying degrees for the rest of your life. Because the meaning of words is grounded in individual experience and this experience will always differ at least to a small degree, total understanding between two people cannot happen. This is connected to the fact that language is arbitrary, which means that “there is no necessary connection between the symbol and that which is symbolized” (Hayakawa 1990: 16). If language was not arbitrary each referent would have one symbol, which would be the same for every person and in every language. Every person, however, has individual and unique thoughts and experiences, and this makes the process of mapping experience onto words, to some extent, unique as well. Understanding how meaning is connected to words is important in order to alleviate misunderstanding and miscommunication. “[People] need to be systematically aware of the powers and limitations of symbols, especially words, if they are to guard against being driven into complete bewilderment by the complexity of their semantic environment” (Hayakawa, 1990: 18-19). One important thing to keep in mind when it comes to symbols and what they refer to is to always separate the two and not mix them up. “The first of the principles governing symbols is this: The symbol is *not* the thing symbolized; the word is *not* the thing; the map is *not* the territory it stands for” (Hayakawa, 1990: 19).

The information about the experiential basis of meaning might give one a pessimistic view on language and the possibility of understanding other people. Social agreement, however, makes it possible for successful communication to occur most of the time. Social agreement, which means that there is some agreement as to what kinds of *symbols* to use for specific *referents*, makes sure that the experiences one connects to a word are somewhat similar to the experiences other people connect to the same word: “In spite of whatever differences as to details there may be, our experiences may be seen as similar to some degree. [...] we understand each other to the extent that we share the experience that is behind the concepts and words that we use” (Janicki 2010: 47). In this way, meaning is inexorably linked to experience (Janicki 2010).

Common ground is important when it comes to both being understood and understanding other people. *Common ground* is considered to be the beliefs, suppositions, and experiences people have in common in order to make understanding possible. “[It] is based on two people’s mutual belief that one or both are members of a particular community – women, English speakers, New Zealanders, ophthalmologists – and personal common ground, on joint perceptual experiences and joint actions” (Clark 1996: 116). In conversation with other people you frequently make assumptions about the views and beliefs of the other person, which

might prove to be right or wrong, as does the other person about you: “this is a dynamic network of relationships which comes to life as a small network when we start communicating as children and gradually develops (and gets more and more complicated) as we grow older and as new experiences enter our lives” (Janicki 2010: 48). *Common ground* needs to be established every time one interacts with a new person, and the greater coherence there is between the *common ground* you assume your conversational partner has and the actual *common ground*, the better understanding you will have (Clark 1996).

Our understanding of how words are learned, how experience counts in the learning process, how *common ground* contributes to interaction, how we categorize the things around us, and how meanings are imputed *to* words rather than found *in* them seems to me to be fundamental for our understanding of confusing discourse and for our understanding of misunderstanding (Janicki 2010: 51).

It is important to have knowledge of the experiential basis of meaning because misunderstanding is connected to the fact that meaning of symbols is to some extent individual. Symbols, which imply stability, often fail to represent the ever-changing, dynamic reality and this might lead to misunderstanding and conflict.

2.2.1.3 Intensional and Extensional Orientation

There are several ways of relating to information you receive or give. A distinction is made between having an intensional and an extensional orientation. “The more intension, that is, the less connection between words and tangible territory, the less understanding. Extension enhances understanding but, importantly, never leads to reaching it in full” (Janicki 2010: 102). People who are intensionally oriented have “the habit of guiding [themselves] by *words alone*, rather than by the facts to which words should guide us” (Hayakawa 1990: 145). This means that they usually do not consider the non-verbal reality that their words refer to, and will use a lot of words of a high abstraction. “To be oriented *intensionally* is to order behavior in terms of definitions, arguments, verbal proofs, and theorizings, essentially disregarding the existence of verifiable life facts” (Lee 1941: 148). People who are intensionally oriented, when asked what something means they will usually explain high-abstract words using other words of an equally high level of abstraction. They will not use lower-level abstraction words, referring to more tangible things in order to make the meaning more understandable. People put too much store on words and what they supposedly mean, instead of the reality they refer to. “On verbal, ‘definitional’, or doctrinal semantic grounds, we expect something else than

what the experiences of life give us. The non-fulfillment of expectation produces a serious affective and semantic shock” (Korzybski 1994: 415). The more you connect words to tangible reality, the less potential for misunderstanding and conflict there is.

Another example of intensionally oriented people is people who buy cars based on brand names instead of the complex non-verbal reality they actually refer to. In this case they react to the *symbols* instead of the *referent*, which is the actual tangible object and might be quite different than what the *symbol* implies. In poetry, on the other hand, being intensionally oriented does not necessarily have to be a bad thing (Janicki 2010). The use of alliteration and assonance might call for paying more attention to the sounds of the words than of their actual meaning.

People standing at the other end of the continuum are what we would call extensionally oriented people. ”To be oriented *extensionally* is to realize the primary importance of life facts, to emphasize the roles of observation and investigation, to go to the facts first and abide by them” (Lee 1941: 148). This is not to say that extensionally oriented people will not use high-level abstraction words, make generalizations, and draw conclusions. They do this, while at the same are more likely to draw generalizations and conclusions based on experiences they have had in real life instead of long chains of generalizations and inferences that no longer have anything to do with non-verbal reality. They will always tend to connect the abstract *symbol* to a more tangible *referent*, and thus avoid statements where they generalize without including concrete examples of own experiences (Janicki 2010).

To practice an extensional orientation it is an advantage to be aware of how the process of abstracting happens. Korzybski defines “‘consciousness of abstracting’ as ‘*awareness* that in our process of abstracting we have *left out* characteristics’. Or, consciousness of abstracting can be defined as ‘*remembering* the “*is not*”, and that some characteristics have been *left out*’” (1994: 416). Focusing on maintaining an extensional orientation will make your discourse clearer and less likely to be misleading and potentially causing conflict.

There are many aids you can utilize to make your language more extensional rather than intensional. To give concrete examples after making a high-abstract generalization is an extensional device that helps connect language to a more tangible, non-verbal reality. The use of *indexes* is another device, and it involves individualizing the object spoken of, instead of generalizing it: “The use of the index would provide in our speech what is to be found on investigation in the world, a sense of the individuals and the uniformities abstracted therefrom” (Lee 1941: 93). Using this device helps language reflect the complexity of the

ever-changing non-verbal reality. *Dating*, which can be adding the relevant year to a country when talking about its state at the time, also serves the same purpose of showing that the state of the country is not constant but rather a specific situation at a specific time. ‘Et cetera’ is another device one can use to show that whatever one is listing is not the finite number of possibilities discussed. *Hyphens* is still another device that can be used to show that the non-verbal reality is in fact not divided into clean-cut classifications, such as language indicates, but that it is more complex. *Quoting* specific words is a device that draws our attention to the fact that language is arbitrary. This is especially good for words where there is a lower level of social agreement as to what the word refers to, such as with words concerning emotions and the likes (Korzybski 1994).

Using *plural forms* instead of singular forms when talking about general cases, such as ‘eatings out’ instead of ‘eating out’, would make the actual meaning of the sentence clearer. By using the singular form, one implies that all meals one eats at a restaurant are exactly the same, instead of the unique experiences they really are. Using *quantifying terms* where it is possible is another device. Instead of e.g. using words such as ‘a lot’, and ‘many’ it is better to specify the exact amount (if possible) since the amount of these quantifiers is relative. Also when making statements where one assigns characteristics to objects, states, people, etc., such as in ‘Peter is stupid’, there are devices one can use to make it clear that the characteristic ‘stupid’ assigned to ‘Peter’ is something that is projected onto him by the speaker. One can do this by adding e.g. ‘to me’, ‘in my view’ or ‘as far as I can tell’ to the statement. Doing this makes it clear that the characteristic is not inherent in the person, which is what the example implies. The use of *visualizations* is also important in making understanding more clear, as is the use of *extensional definitions*. Extensional definitions lower the level of abstractions of what is being explained and bring us closer to ‘tangible reality’ (Janicki 2010). “Definitions are most helpful [...] when they are *operational*, that is when they point to tangible behavior, to what people can do rather than what they can think, feel, surmise, and so on” (Janicki 2010: 113).

Practicing an intensional or an extensional orientation is, however, not an ‘either – or’ state of being. It is a way of relating to your surroundings, and a person can hold both of these orientations, parts of them, a mix of them, etc. “Most people tend to move along the intensional-extensional continuum, being sometimes very intensional, sometimes very extensional, and sometimes locating themselves somewhere in between” (Janicki 2010: 97).

The section on intensional and extensional orientation shows the importance of lowering the level of abstraction of language to make it more representative of non-verbal

reality and less conducive to misunderstanding. This can be done by using the extensional devices.

2.2.2 Linguistic characteristics conducive to conflict

Five different linguistic characteristics conducive to conflict are presented in the sections below, viz. bipolarity, identification, generalizations, passive voice and the use of inferences versus the use of descriptions. These all contribute to simplifying and in some instances misrepresenting the complexity of non-verbal reality, and can be conducive to misunderstanding and conflict.

2.2.2.1 Bipolarity

The English language is full of words that express bipolarity and “[w]e tend to think in opposites, to feel that what is not good must be bad and that what is not bad must be good” (Hayakawa, 1990: 113). In many cases one can express oneself in a suitable manner that reflects the continuum that exists between the two oppositions in non-verbal reality, but this is mostly done by implying different degrees of the two oppositions. The opposites *good* and *bad* express a binary opposition. There is no word that describes a state that is neither one of these, but rather somewhere between them. One can grade the two words as to what degree of a certain quality they are, such as *better* or *worse*. This is somewhat helpful when it comes to giving a realistic image of the more complex reality than the simple reality implied by the binary opposition. But expressing the degree does not change the fact that forms of the words *good* and *bad* are still mentioned. “[...] the use of these words [*beautiful* and *ugly*] in trying to express continuity does matter. What we have words for we tend to take as more important than that which we have no words for” (Janicki 2010:126). The problem with bipolarity, both in thinking and as manifested in language use, is that the middle ground of situations is easily over-looked.

Bipolarity can be seen as practicing a *two-valued orientation*, which is to view the world in bi-polar terms: “Another species of the non-indexing habit is to be found in our temptation to talk in terms of but two values, even though many may be found. Involved in this process is a neglect of the differing facts of experience and an assignment to them of few rather than many distinctions” (Lee 1941: 100). This way of thinking goes all the way back to Aristotle, who practiced a *two-valued logic*, and it is still prevalent today through the practice of *two-valued orientation* in language.ⁱⁱⁱ It is also prevailing in many areas of life, as one can see in not only language but also in how soap operas are structured through counterpoints (e.g. good guys vs. villains, the beautiful vs. the ugly, etc...), in statements we hear on the

radio or the television, in sayings and proverbs, and in political discourse (Janicki 2010). Politicians often foster bi-polar views in their speeches, such as using phrases like *pro-America* or *anti-America*, which allows no space for a middle-ground. This is, however, very misleading, since most American people are politically positioned at the center, meaning they are neither entirely *pro-America* or *anti-America* (Tannen 1998). Two-valued orientation in decision making is more highly valued than practicing a multi-valued orientation which involves consideration of the complexity of the situation before making a decision (Janicki 2010).

The opposite of practicing a two-valued orientation, and important in order to move away from a bipolar way of thinking, is adopting a *multi-valued orientation*. A multi-valued orientation is a tool used to try to reflect the complexity of non-verbal reality and “[...] is necessary to democratic discussion and to human cooperation” (Hayakawa 1990: 131). To practice a multi-valued orientation in language, especially the English language which has a lot of word pairs consisting of binary oppositions, is not very easy. One of the things one can do is to try to contextualize the words used, meaning that you specify the circumstances around a statement. For example, to specify what kind of education someone has instead of just saying that they are ‘educated’ contextualizes and more accurately reflects the complexity of the non-verbal world to a higher degree. “We are free to liberate ourselves from these binary pairs of words, coin new words that may better reflect the complexity and say things in ways which clearly show that the world is much more complex than the binary pairs might suggest (Janicki 2010:139).

It is important to be aware of how language’s inherent bipolarity can force us into thinking in terms of opposites. This leaves out the middle ground and is in most cases not representative of the complex reality, which can lead to misunderstanding and conflict.

2.2.2.2 Identification

Language gives you the ability to compare people, objects, activities, states, etc., to other people, objects, activities, states, etc. To verbalize this comparison one normally uses the verb ‘to be’, which can be used in three different ways. ‘To be’ can be an auxiliary, the main verb in existential sentences, or a linking verb to subject complements. The subject complements can be realized by noun phrases, nominal clauses, adjectives or adjectival phrases. The structures containing linking verbs and subject complements are structures of *identification* and will be introduced in the following paragraph. They are divided into two groups, viz. the ‘*is of identity*’ and the ‘*is of predication*’ (Korzybski 1994).

When the subject complement is a noun phrase or a nominal clause, the structure is called the ‘is of identity’. “[...] the ‘is’ leads to *identification* of different levels of abstraction, implying in the utterance that one ‘thing’ can exist as another. [...] [It obscures] the differences between silent and verbal levels. This ‘is’ serves as a synonym for ‘may be classified as’” (Lee 1941: 229). In the sentence ‘Susan is a student’ one implies identity between the person ‘Susan’ and the noun phrase ‘a student’. This can be misleading because “from the physical point of view we and everything around us are constantly changing. If we take this simple statement seriously, one of the conclusions that follow may be that there are no two things or states, or activities, which we could see as identical” (Janicki 2010: 143). If one considers the two territories, ‘Susan’ and ‘student’ and thinks about all the things these might refer to, one can see that implying that one territory is the other is a gross oversimplification of reality. Even if ‘Susan’ does inherit some of the features one would normally associate with a student, she will most definitely have other characteristics as well. The same goes for the territory ‘student’, which can refer to a huge amount of things and activities (Janicki 2010). If another example is considered, such as ‘John is an idiot’, the structure’s potential to induce conflict becomes more apparent. This is a negative categorization and a negative evaluation of John, where he as a person is simplified to a great extent. With this kind of negative evaluation the chances are higher that your interlocutor will disagree with you and feel that you are misrepresenting non-verbal reality, which could lead to conflict.

When the subject complement is an adjective or an adjectival phrase, the structure is referred to as the ‘is of predication’. The danger of using this kind of structure is that “[...] the ‘is’ leads to the predication of qualities [and] we make the assumption that characteristics exist in ‘things,’ whereas they are to be found only in the relation of an observer to what is observed” (Lee 1941: 229). In this kind of structure the adjectives can be used attributively in a subject group, e.g. the adjective ‘crazy’ in ‘Peter is crazy’ can easily be turned into ‘Crazy Peter’. The structure implies permanence, stability or static existence of the subject ‘Peter’. It also implies that ‘crazy’ is an inherent characteristic of Peter and not just a state that is projected onto him by the speaker. This is most definitely a simplification of the territory ‘Peter’, and is therefore contrary to fact (Janicki 2010). The ‘is of predication’ belongs to the category of identification because it involves an identification of a characteristic of someone or something. It is misleading because the structure implies that the characteristic is inherent in the person or object, i.e. a part of their identity. As in the case of the ‘is of identity’, the potential for conflict is great when the ‘is of predication’ is used to express negative

evaluations, such as with ‘Maria is annoying’. While this is an evaluation from the speaker, it is formulated like a universal statement instead of a personal opinion, and other people might object strongly to identifying this characteristic in Maria. The ‘is of predication’ can in this way be conducive to conflict.

2.2.2.3 Generalization

The use of *generalizations* as a linguistic characteristic happens frequently in language use, and a general statement can be defined as “a statement about a group of people or things that is based on only a few people or things in that group” (Merriam Webster Dictionary, accessed 18 March 14). The statement ‘Californians are not a judgmental lot’ (Los Angeles Daily News, accessed 27 April 14) is a generalization where the quality of not being ‘judgmental’ is connected to all people living in California. It is a generalization because the statement is based on the speaker’s encounters with a limited number of Californians, not all Californians, which is what the generalization implies. Even though generalizations usually used to refer to something tangible in non-verbal reality, like actual encounters with several Californians who were perceived to not be judgmental, generalizations lose more and more meaning the more they come to entail. “[...] [T]he abstract ‘the American people’ map refers to so much, that is, to so big a territory, that it may be taken to refer to nothing” (Janicki 2010: 83). The terms *map* and *territory* is here used as an analogy of the relation between language and non-verbal reality (viz. the referent).

Korzybski (1994) compares the production of generalizations to interpolation in mathematics and science, where curves are made in spite of not having all the points or data:

The nervous processes which are involved in interpolations and building up equations are also involved in producing *ordinary generalizations* in daily life; that is, we interpolate from the data we have and then generalize in words instead of equations. It is well known that sometimes when a new datum is discovered it transforms the curve entirely, with a corresponding change in the equation (generalization) (Korzybski 1994: lv).

This means that any new information about the person or thing that is being generalized can alter the general statement. Generalizations are thus fragile and are a simplification of non-verbal reality, whose usage might lead to misunderstanding and potentially conflict.

2.2.2.4 Passive voice

Passive voice constructions are syntactic structures where the agent of an action is either put in the syntactic position as the object of a sentence or not included at all.^{iv} “Passive sentences

crawl and drag along, lacking directness and liveliness” (Ralph 1991: 9). One of the more potentially confusing uses of passive voice constructions is *subjection*. This is when the verb of the sentence is made into a noun by adding the suffixes ‘tion’ or ‘ment’ and put in subject position of the sentence. In this structure the subject is neither an object nor a person but it becomes “[...] an abstraction coined from what would normally have been the verb of the sentence with a suffix such as ‘tion’ or ‘ment’. Verbs [preempt] the subject position and [leave] the verb position blank” (Ralph 1991: 9). Because of this one gets sentences such as ‘Revisions of the school rules were proposed’ where there is no agent and no object, and it is impossible to know exactly who and what actions it refers to. The connection between the agents and actions of this sentence and its referents in the real world is very blurry (Ralph 1991). Concealing the agent of an action can make the meaning of a sentence or an utterance less clear, and more likely to be the source of confusion and misunderstanding.

2.2.2.5 Descriptions and inferences

The main difference between a description and an inference is that a description is directly based on non-verbal reality, meaning that it describes first hand knowledge of the speaker, which is something that they themselves can see, hear or touch. An inference, on the other hand, is more indirect in the sense that conclusions are drawn based on what you can infer from descriptions; “*inferential* words [...] involve generalizations, judgments, conclusions, which enter when statements are made about descriptions of non-verbal fact” (Lee 1941: 187). An example of this difference is the description “it is raining outside” based on the fact that you can see the actual rain coming down from the sky, versus the inference “it must be raining outside”, which can be based on the fact that a person entering your house has rain drops on them. This is a relatively harmless inference, but the more one infers the farther one gets from non-verbal facts and the more potential the inference has for misunderstandings and miscommunication: “[...] in so far as we can make an unending number of inferences from any observation or description, it follows that any one inference may have only remote connection with the particular life facts” (Lee 1941: 192).

The fact that inferences are inexorably connected to judgments and conclusions drawn from descriptions makes them more conducive to conflict than descriptions of non-verbal fact. Inferences are in many cases subjective, and from one set of descriptions there will probably be as many different inferences as there are different people, which can cause disagreement and conflict.

2.2.3 Conflict on a macro-level

So far, the theory presented on conflict has been on a micro-level, viz. how language can lead to conflict between individuals belonging to the same culture. Bringing the issue of conflict to a macro-level, the US will be presented in this section. The US is perceived to be a high-conflict culture.

Tannen (1998) discusses the argument culture that characterizes discourse in the American society, and how the use of binary opposition and practice of a two-valued orientation in language is a particularly salient feature. Different societies and cultures can be placed on different points on the continuum between cultures that are high-prone or low-prone to argument and conflict. The transition from being a high-conflict prone culture to a low-conflict prone culture can take several generations. Cultures also differ in how they view conflict. Scandinavia and Japan in general view conflicts as a negative thing (Tannen 1998). People in the US, on the other hand, have a higher tolerance for framing issues as dichotomies and talking about affairs using war metaphors, which inflicts a more conflict-laden image of a situation. This is a display of two-valued orientation, which is conducive to conflict. The tendency to present issues as if they only have two opposing sides makes one forget about the middle ground which is almost always there. This tendency can even go as far as making up an opposing side which does not exist (Tannen 1998).

One can see the tendency of thinking in terms of binary oppositions in practice when it comes to using confrontational tactics. Only introducing the two opposing sides of a case in debates instead of also introducing representatives of the middle stance is one way in which thinking in terms of binary oppositions is apparent. One of the reasons for structuring debates in this way in American culture is that the press often gives more coverage to situations where conflicts and oppositions are displayed. Peaceful debates where several aspects of a case are carefully considered and more than just the two opposing views of an issue are introduced do not receive the same amount of publicity. The structure of opposition again fosters a two-valued orientation among people, because the ability to make quick decisions based on dichotomies is valued. Adopting a multi-valued orientation where one tries to consider the middle stance and view an issue from several angles will often be seen as two-faced and unreliable (Tannen 1998). This result is, of course, the opposite of the desired goal of adopting a multi-valued orientation. Considering several options surrounding an issue is meant as an aid in the attempt to reflect the complexity of the non-verbal world through language to the best of one's ability.

The structure of the American political system promotes their adversarial culture. The existing system, which mainly consists of two opposing sides, makes people who are politically in the middle stance choose one of the sides, since these opposing sides have the largest power to perform change in politics. The law system is also adversarial, and research has been done within law and language. This field is called forensic linguistics and within it one investigates how the use of language in courts can have an influence on whether someone is sentenced or acquitted unjustly. When one answers a question in court one can usually only respond with either 'yes' or 'no', which illustrates binary opposition. Reality mostly contains more complex situations, where context is required to understand the whole meaning of an incident. The world is rarely black and white for 'yes' and 'no' to suffice to answer questions of an often complex nature (Tannen 1998).

If one studies cultures in other countries, confrontation and argument can actually be a way of establishing intimacy to your conversational partner. Many European countries, for instance, view disputes as a good way of getting connected to other people. "In France, [...] agreement is deemed boring; to keep things interesting, you have to disagree – preferably with great animation" (Tannen 1998: 209-210). Because of this, someone from an American culture might mistake a European's attempt at starting a friendly debate by showing interest and involvement through opposition for an unfriendly attack. At the other end of the scale, there are Asian cultures that "place great value on avoiding open expression of disagreement and conflict because they emphasize harmony" (Tannen 1998: 212-213). For instance, in Japanese, praising someone is nearly always meant as a way of criticizing someone. This is because the 'minimal human unit' is the group, and not an individual person, which means that if you praise one of your friends or colleagues you indirectly praise yourself. This is thought of as boasting and has negative connotations. The Americans' way of praising each other both publicly and privately is regarded as inappropriate and embarrassing to most Japanese (Tannen 1998). This shows how conflict can easily occur between members of different cultures, based on what metamesages they put in different linguistic functions, such as praising.

2.2.4 Summary of 2.2

The first subsection of 2.2 presents the different foci in the study of conflict in general. In addition, it brings the study of conflict down to a micro-level, explaining how meaning in words develops based on individual experience in order to give an understanding of how language use can lead to conflict. It explains how confusion and misunderstanding can happen

between people who speak the same language and come from the same culture. The section also elucidates the difference between having an intensional and an extensional orientation, and how one can enhance an extensional orientation by using a number of extensional devices. This lowers the level of abstraction in language and makes it less likely for misunderstanding and conflict to occur

The second subsection presents and explains five different linguistic characteristics conducive to conflict. It shows how binary opposition permeates the English language, and how it is connected to essentialism and being two-valued oriented. Identification, generalization, the passive voice and descriptions versus inferences are also presented and exemplified. It is important to be aware of these characteristics of language, among others, when trying to understand why language use can sometimes lead to confusion, misunderstanding and conflict. They all contribute to simplifying the complex non-verbal reality through language.

The third and last subsection brings the study of conflict back to a macro-level. Tannen (1998) illustrates how the American culture is featured by opposition and that it is high conflict-prone compared to other cultures.

2.3 Language, Gender and Conflict

Section 2.3 presents the different communication patterns of *rapport-talk* and *report-talk*, patterns characterizing the language of women and men, respectively. The issue of interruption and overlap is also presented, to give an impression of how conflict can occur as a result of differing styles. 2.3.3 and 2.3.4 show how conflict can occur between interlocutors of both the same sex and of different sexes.

2.3.1 Rapport-talk and Report-talk in American English

Men's and women's language has traditionally been connected to different spheres, that is the public and the private sphere respectively. The use of language in different spheres has led to differences in language patterns, and may be a cause of conflict talk between men and women. One can differentiate between *public* and *private speaking*, and in these two speaking areas "men feel more comfortable doing *public speaking* while more women feel comfortable doing *private speaking*. Another way of capturing these differences is by using the terms *report-talk* and *rapport-talk*" (Tannen 1992: 76-77).

Women's tendency for *rapport-talk* means that their primary reason for communicating is often to establish a sense of connection and to negotiate relationships with other people. "Emphasis is placed on displaying similarities and matching experiences. From childhood, girls criticize peers who try to stand out or appear better than others" (Tannen 1992: 77). Women's communication has throughout history been connected to the home sphere, which is a private arena. This is where people usually have the closest connections to other people, such as family members and friends.

Men's tendency for *report-talk*, on the other hand, means that their primary reason for communicating is concentrated more around status in the public arena. "For most men, talk is primarily a means to preserve independence and negotiate and maintain status in a hierarchical social order" (Tannen 1992: 77). This can be done in several ways. One way which often is learned from a young age is the act of storytelling and joking. Displays of knowledge and skills, and conveyance of information are verbal performances that are often present in men's communicative patterns. Many men are more comfortable than women when it comes to speaking in public spaces with unknown people because men have been used to employing language as of childhood to get and keep attention from other people (Tannen 1992). These patterns of communication are reflected in casual conversation between same-sex friends. For men, this means that their way of interacting with each other is often characterized by exchange of information. The choice of impersonal topics and topics in which they can display expertise naturally follow these characteristics. Fun for men can be exchanging and arguing about ideas. For women, the talk in itself can be seen as the main activity: "*Doing friendship*, then, is a very different enterprise for women and men, or at least for those women and men whose friendship patterns have been researched" (Coates 1997: 125).

A result of the differing patterns of communication in mixed-sex conversations can be that women often end up listening while men often do a lot of the talking. Women's pattern of communication is based more on being supportive, while men's patterns are more characterized by giving information and opinions. The female pattern, which typically deals with establishing rapport, is more likely to downplay own expertise instead of flaunting it in a conversation. Flaunting it would in many situations come across as trying to establish yourself as better or more knowledgeable than the other person, which would not be a good foundation for building a relationship between equals. "[...] [W]omen are more attuned to metamessages[,] because they are more focused on involvement, that is, on relationships among people, and it is through metamessages that relationships among people are established

and maintained” (Tannen 1987: 111). A metamessage is the meaning that can lie behind the literal words spoken, e.g. the consideration one can interpret from an invitation to a meal.

The male pattern of communication, which usually deals with report and establishing or maintaining a place in a social hierarchy through language, is more likely to “seek opportunities to gather and disseminate factual information” (Tannen 1992: 125). This is a reason why all-male conversation is often characterized by monologues, which are “stretches of conversation where one speaker holds the floor for a considerable time” (Coates 1997: 120). These stretches are referred to as ‘playing the expert’, and in this structure speakers take turns in talking about subjects they have a great knowledge about. This ‘game’ is most often found in conversations between male speakers, whereas women, as mentioned, often try to avoid the role of an ‘expert’ in a conversation (Coates 1997).

The home is a place where many couples often have troubles having to do with communication. Many women feel that their male partners do not share with them as many of their thoughts as the women would like. This has to do with the amount of talk, not necessarily the content of what men say. Many women might misinterpret this as lack of interest or general tiredness. An explanation of it can be, however, that men see the home as a place where they are free to be silent and where they do not have to fight for a position in the social hierarchy through language (Tannen 1992). Women, on the other hand, often see the home as a place where they are free to express themselves without their talk being judged by other people, and also “a place where they are free to talk, and where they feel the greatest need for talk, with those they are closest to” (Tannen 1992: 86). This difference can be a source of conflict because people have a tendency to interpret others’ style of interaction in light of their own style. “Communication is always a matter of balancing conflicting needs for involvement and independence, but although everyone has both these needs, women often have a relatively greater need for involvement, and men a relatively greater need for independence” (Tannen 1987: 110).

The reverse might be seen in situations in the public arena. Here one sees a tendency for men to be more comfortable stepping up to speak and ask questions, whereas women tend to use more time to do the same. An example of this is a radio show where the radio hosts discussed different topics and the listeners could call in with their comments. When they were discussing abortion, 90 percent of the callers were men, even though the listeners were evenly distributed between men and women. Speaking on the radio is a highly public and attention-seeking activity, where your comment might be judged and commented upon by a large number of people. A reason for the contrasting ratio of male and female callers could be that

“many men are more comfortable than most women in using talk to acclaim attention. And this difference lies at the heart of the distinction between report-talk and rapport-talk” (Tannen 1992: 88).

With the communication pattern of women based on connection and affiliation, one might assume that conflict would be a tool that works against the goals a female style of communication wants to achieve. This is not to say that women do not engage in conflicts, but rather that they may be played out in different ways. “The appearance of community among women may mask power struggles, and the appearance of sameness may mask profound differences in point of view” (Tannen 1992: 151). One example of how the differing styles may lead to confrontation is the ways in which males and females try to get other people to do things. Boys and men, communicating from a pattern of social hierarchy, might phrase such requests as direct orders and also respond to them by resisting to do what is asked of them. Girls and women tend to make requests by using e.g. *let's*, which implies doing something together and appeals to women's focus on community and connection in communication. “Girls and women find or feel themselves in a community that is threatened by conflict, so they formulate requests as proposals rather than orders to make it easy for others to express other preferences without provoking a confrontation” (Tannen 1992: 154). One can see here how the two different ways can result in conflict between men and women. Women resent being told directly what to do because they appreciate that decisions and activities should be taken together, and they make moves in conversation to try to avoid confrontation. Women's way may, on the other hand, make men react in a negative fashion because women's way of formulating something as a joint decision may be perceived as a manipulation and threat “by an enemy who is all the more sinister for refusing to come out in the open” (Tannen 1992: 155).

A result of these differing styles is that women's way of avoiding confrontation and direct complaints can be viewed in a negative way. It is by many people seen as going behind someone's back. According to Tannen (1992), American men have a greater tendency to voice complaints directly to the person in question, and if one views the women's way in comparison to men's, it might seem insincere. The outcome becomes, however, slightly different if one tries to see it from both perspectives:

Sparking direct confrontation by expressing criticism may seem ‘sincere’ to those who believe that confrontation reinforces camaraderie. But in a system where confrontation causes rifts, it would not be ‘sincere’ at all, since directly expressing criticism and

sparking a fight would send a metamessage that one wants to weaken the bonds of friendship (Tannen 1992: 158)

In the female pattern of communication, with its focus on connection and a sense of community, direct confrontation is seen as an act that threatens connection and community. It would then be better to voice one's criticism indirectly instead of conveying the *metamessage* of weakening the 'bonds of friendship'. Conflict in general carries different meanings to the different genders. "Boys are far more likely to express and create affiliation by opposition" (Tannen 1992: 162). Boys often use conflict as an opening for interaction and the creation of involvement with other people (Tannen 1992). One should note that this comment is about young boys in particular, and might not be applicable to grown men. Tannen (1995), however, claims about adults that "[...] males are more likely than females to use 'agonism' – a warlike, oppositional format – to accomplish a range of interactional goals that have nothing literally to do with fighting" (1995: 57), and points to how political debates are typically structured as an opposition of two sides, where the opponents argue their side while trying to assault the opponents arguments.

Once again, the American female fashion of communication in conflictful situations forms a contrast to the male fashion. "The role of the female as peacemaker crops up again and again" (Tannen 1992: 165). Disagreement in conversation conveys a metamessage of peril to intimacy in a relationship, and brings an element of aggressiveness into the dialogue. This does not, however, mean that women never express contest or criticism in conversation: "girls and women can use apparent cooperation and affiliation to be competitive and critical" (Tannen 1992: 171). In this way, women accomplish their means in a more indirect way than men, who are often more direct in expressing criticism. An example of this is when a woman repeats a critical remark to a friend made by somebody else, under the guise of 'I thought you should know'. The use and interpretation of metamessages are common in females' patterns of communication and "[...] metamessages are a form of indirectness. Women are more likely to be indirect, and to try to reach agreement by negotiation" (Tannen 1987: 110).

Not being afraid of confrontation can be an advantage when it comes to wielding power in several situations. If someone causes a scene in public, they are likely to get their way in many cases because it is often easier to give in than to take up the fight. Women's tendency to avoid confrontation not to threaten the sense of community can be positive and negative. Women are often thought of as successful managers because they to a greater extent often try to make decisions in cooperation with their employees. Employees are more likely to

work hard for something where they have been a part of the decision-making process. But women's avoidance of conflict can also be negative in that they are not able to wield power in situations where it is necessary. "Women who are incapable of angry outbursts are incapable of wielding power in this way. Far worse, their avoidance of confrontation opens them up to exploitation. In a word, they don't stand up for themselves" (Tannen 1992: 182-183). It is much simpler to 'rip off' someone who avoids confrontation in order to get along than someone who takes an oppositional stance (Tannen 1992). Even though there does not have to be anything negative about either females' and males' styles of communication in the workplace, the difference is bound to grant one of them an advantage and the other a disadvantage: "[...] styles common among women, often put them at a disadvantage in the workplace as it is currently run, according to styles more common among men" (Tannen 1995: 314).

As one can see, women's and men's way of dealing with conflict and the degree to which they judge conflict as a useful means to achieve goals are thoroughly different. This means that if men and women first land in a situation of opposition, more conflict is likely to be spiked by their differing communication patterns (Tannen 1992).

2.3.2 Interruption and overlap in conversation

When it comes to interruption in conversation, which can be a source of conflict, a common impression is that women in general talk more than men and that they interrupt men. This has led to a lot of studies on the issue, and "one of the most widely cited findings to emerge from research on gender and language is that men interrupt women" (Tannen 1992: 188).^v

An interruption is in itself seen as a negative linguistic phenomenon because it indicates a form of 'conversational bullying' by attempting to dominate the conversation or usurping someone's right to speak. Interruption is to a large degree a case of control and domination in conversation. The problem when investigating interruption in conversation is to decide what actually constitutes interruption. "Interruption is inescapably a matter of interpretation regarding individuals' rights and obligations. To determine whether a speaker is violating another speaker's rights, you have to know a lot about both speakers and the situation" (Tannen 1992: 190). There are many factors to consider in deciding what is interruption and what is merely an addition to the conversation expressing support and agreement to what is being said. First you have to consider what the other person is trying to do with her/his comment, viz. whether it is a reinforcement, contradiction or a change in topic. This has to be understood from what is being said and the context around it. Different

conversation styles also have to be taken into consideration because there might be times when speaker 1 *feels* interrupted by speaker two, although speaker 2 did not *intend* to interrupt (Tannen 1992). Considering all these factors, it is not always easy to know when an interruption takes place.

To know whether an overlap is an interruption, you must consider the context (for example, cooperative overlapping is more likely to occur in casual conversation among friends than in a job interview), speakers' habitual styles (overlaps are more likely not to be interruptions among those with a style I call 'high-involvement'), and the interaction of their styles (an interruption is more likely to result between speakers whose styles differ with regard to pausing and overlap) (Tannen 1995: 233).

An interruption in conversation is when one of the parties has his/her speaking rights violated (Tannen 1992).

The different kinds of speaking styles may lead to one speaker feeling interrupted when the other speaker did not intend to interrupt, e.g. when a *high considerateness* speaker meets a *high involvement* speaker in interaction. A speaker with a *high considerateness* style usually gives "priority to being considerate of others by not imposing", while a speaker with a *high involvement* style gives "priority to showing enthusiastic involvement" (Tannen 1992: 196). A speaker with a *high considerateness* style would in most cases appreciate there being only one speaker at a time. If someone chimed in to add things to the story as a comment on the content the *high considerateness* speaker would most likely view this as an interruption and an attempt to take over the floor and the right to speak, and would probably back down. If the other speaker exhibits a *high involvement* type of style, the addition to the conversation would most likely not be meant as an interruption, but rather as a way to show backing and participation of the other person's comment. In conversations between *high involvement* speakers, overlaps are usually positive features, and not something that disrupts the conversation (Tannen 1992).

Overlaps that happen between two *high involvement* speakers are often called a cooperative overlap. "These speakers yield to an intrusion if they feel like it, but if they don't feel like it, they put off responding, or ignore the intrusion completely" (Tannen 1992: 198). Another important feature for an overlap to be cooperative is that it usually elaborates on the topic discussed, instead of changing the topic. Overlaps changing the topic can be cooperative in some cases, depending on the topic and the situation, such as aiding someone to get away from a topic they know is sensitive to the speaker (Tannen 1992).

The amount of overlap in same-sex conversations has been observed to be greater with women than with men. As mentioned, overlaps in conversation are often connected to a *high involvement* style of speaking, and this way of constructing a conversation can be seen as a *collaborative floor* structure of speaking, which is the opposite of a *single floor* structure of a conversation: “The main characteristic of the single floor is that one speaker speaks at a time, while the defining characteristics of the collaborative floor is that the floor is potentially open to all participants simultaneously” (Coates 1997: 109). A conversation structured as a *collaborative floor* is often referred to as *polyphonic* because utterances are often co-constructed and speech can overlap. Minimal responses and laughter often occur as well, in addition to the single voice that can be made up of several peoples’ utterances. This way several voices can contribute to a conversation at the same time. *Polyphonic* talk is most prominent in all-female conversation, but has also been found to be present in mixed-sex conversation (Coates 1997).

A study done at faculty committee meetings investigated the amount of talk done by females and males, and found that men talked more in situations where the speakers held the floor one and one at a time. In situations where several voices were heard, on the other hand, women were more likely to contribute to the conversation. This shows that women felt more comfortable speaking when the conversation had the form more like rapport-talk than in conversations that bore resemblance to report-talk. Cooperative overlaps were characteristic of the situations similar to rapport-talk (Tannen 1992).

In American English, all-male conversation is often characterized by lack of overlaps. Where overlaps do occur, however, it usually has the form of supportive minimal responses (such as ‘mhm’), or they arise because of misunderstanding, mistiming, or as a way of agreeing with the speakers. Overlaps that are more extensive than the ones mentioned here are regarded as interruptions in a *single floor* conversation. Studies done on casual all-male conversations show a lack of overlap and interruption (Coates 1997). The tendencies for men and women to construct friendly conversation in different ways often result in interruption being perceived where it is not intended: “It seems that the conversational strategies which accomplish friendship among women may be construed as moves to seize the floor by speakers assuming a one-at-a-time floor” (Coates 1997: 117).

An explanation for the difference in the construction of *single floor* talk and *collaborative* talk might be the topics typically characterizing men’s and women’s same-sex conversations. In same-sex conversation, men often talk about more impersonal topics than women do. Even when males’ talk becomes more personal between close friends, it often

centers around topics such as drinking habits or personal achievements, instead of feelings (Coates 1997). The topics are reflected in structure in the way that “non-personal topics encourage one-at-a-time floor-holding because these topics lend themselves to what [Coates calls] *expertism*” (Coates 1997: 120). This tendency of taking the role as ‘expert’ in interaction is, as previously mentioned, a male feature of language.

When two differing conversation styles like the *single floor* and the *collaborative floor* meet it is natural that one of the parts feels interrupted by the other. When women respond to men’s speech with cooperative overlaps, where they utter words of agreement, support and “anticipations of how their sentences and thoughts would end” (Tannen 1992: 210), many men feel that the woman is interrupting them and trying to take control over the conversation. Many women, on the other hand, most likely appreciate this kind of overlap. They see it as a sign of involvement in the conversation and a sign of connection to the other speaker, when you do not have to spell everything out. This means that women and men often feel interrupted by the other sex because they have different goals they want to accomplish with the interaction (Tannen 1992).

Since ‘public speaking’ has until recently been the domain of men, it is therefore structured by men’s patterns of communication. This means that the *single floor* structure is prevailing when it comes to how one should express oneself and interact with others in ‘public speaking’. In this lies the assumption that “conversation is an enterprise in which only one voice should be heard at a time” (Tannen 1992: 208). It is then natural to assume that women have a disadvantage in ‘public speaking’ situations where report-talk is emphasized, since they are used to *collaborative floor* structure, where the focus is on rapport-talk.

As previously mentioned, changing the topic of a conversation is viewed as an interruption most of the time: “[...] it is not overlap that creates interruption but conversational moves that wrench a topic away from another speaker’s course” (Tannen 1992: 214). While the person doing the topic-switch might see this as a favor to the speaker, if they are e.g. moving into a sensitive topic of conversation, the speaker might view this as a lack of interest in his/her topic, and is thus highly misleading. These differences between high considerateness, high involvement and single- and collaborative floor speakers are not clear-cut between the male and female genders. Gender is a construction which people realize, again and again, through their actions every day. “We as actors actively engaged in the construction of our social worlds inevitably perform gender in our daily interactions as either ‘being a woman’ or ‘being a man’” (Coates 1997: 127). So even though people are free to choose whatever actions at any time, there are still tendencies of different patterns for the two

genders. It is natural to assume that misunderstanding and potential conflict can arise from this.

2.3.3 Interaction differences in mixed-sex couples

The differing styles of communication can become apparent when members of different sexes interact. “Much of what has been written about women’s and men’s styles claims that males are competitive and prone to conflict whereas females are cooperative and given to affiliation” (Tannen 1992: 149). Considering the fact that males’ patterns of communication are based on competition within a social hierarchy, one might assume that conflict would be an important part in the negotiation of status within said hierarchy. Fighting for a position implies the use of linguistic strategies for both attack and defense. “[...] male behavior typically entails contest, which includes combat, struggle, conflict, competition and contention” (Tannen 1992: 150). This pattern has colored the way many men interact with each other in general giving it a nature of combat and opposition. This is important when it comes to how men and women may view a seemingly adversarial situation in different ways. Many women are not used to ritualized combat being a part of interaction and may misinterpret many men’s adversativeness in communication style and may miss the ritual aspect of ‘friendly aggression’ (Tannen 1992).

One might expect and be prepared for differences in ways of interaction when meeting someone from a different culture. The fact that one is aware of it makes it less likely that one will mistake the other person’s linguistic traits for rude interruption or carelessness when something else was intended. When it comes to interaction between male and female partners, misunderstandings usually come unexpected:

[...] in a way, male-female miscommunication is more dangerous, because it is more pervasive in our lives, and we are less prepared for it. [...] we don’t expect family, friends, co-workers, and romantic partners who grew up in ‘the same culture’ and speak ‘the same language’ to understand words differently and have different views of the world. But they often do (Tannen 1992: 281-282).

An outcome one can see coming from this is called *complementary schismogenesis* (Bateson 1972), and has to do with how other people’s behavior affect your own behavior. *Complementary schismogenesis* in language occurs e.g. when speaker 1 becomes aware of what is to her/him divergent behavior in speaker 2 compared to speaker 1’s own behavior. Speaker 1’s subconscious response to this is often that their own behavior, which also might be thought of as divergent by speaker two, is exaggerated. This becomes an aggravating

spiral, and results in that the differences, which were not that great to begin with, effectuate a larger and larger distance between the two speakers. The differences “contain dynamic elements, such that when certain restraining factors are removed the differentiation or split between the groups increases progressively toward either breakdown or a new equilibrium” (Bateson 1972: 68). For example, the sensitivities and hypersensitivities of men and women: “[...] a man who fears losing freedom pulls away at the first sign he interprets as an attempt to ‘control’ him, but pulling away is just the signal that sets off alarms for the woman who fears losing intimacy” (Tannen 1992: 282). This continues to escalate because the man pulling away will make the woman afraid of losing intimacy, which will make her work harder to try to maintain intimacy. In language one can see this with women asking men questions to establish a sense of connection and rapport. Men, interpreting this behavior using their pattern of report-talk as a reference frame, will most likely see the questions as a means of controlling them. This will make them more likely to pull away, which is the opposite of what the woman wanted to achieve with her questions.

Keeping information from your partner can also display power relations at play. Tannen (1992) tells of a wife finding out that her husband’s arm has been hurting for a couple of weeks and feels insulted because he has not told her. This is a classic case of wives receiving information from their husbands a lot later than they themselves would prefer, and thus feel they are being treated as strangers. When hearing the story from the husband’s point of view, he stresses that he refrained from telling her because he did not want her to worry and felt he was protecting her this way. This reflects how men and women often assume roles of protector/protectee in relationships. But taking on the role as the protector, although a subconscious action in most cases, “also grows out of and reinforces the alignment by which he is in a superior position. He is stronger than she, and he has power to cause her worry by the information he imparts” (Tannen 1992: 288). The woman in this example felt that her husband increased the distance of intimacy between them by refraining from telling her, making her feel like he treated her like a stranger. It is important to be aware of these differences between men and women’s language use and behavior to understand how misinterpretation may occur and lead to conflict.

2.3.4 Interaction in same-sex pairs

Interaction between most women is characterized by features operating to maintain a sense of community and connection, but this does not mean that there are not any misinterpretations between the speakers. For example, the tendency to respond to stories of negative incidents

with a matching incident of your own can become a liability if one does not have or has not had the same problem as the speaker; the incentive to produce rapport-talk puts pressure on the listener to contribute matching experiences instead of just listening to the speakers' problem and simply providing suggestions for a solution. Exclusively providing solutions would imply that the listener does not have the problem they are discussing, and is therefore one-up in relation to the speaker who is having a negative experience. An example of a conversation between two women can show what outcome this kind of pattern can have; one woman always includes the other using 'we' when talking about her own problems. The woman sharing her problems expects the other to contribute to the conversation with matching her troubles, but instead ends up feeling put down by her when she says that she does not have this problem. The second woman, on the other hand, feels that she is not allowed individuality because the first woman expects her to show support by sharing similar problems she does not necessarily have (Tannen 1992: 293). This is frustrating to both parts of the conversation, when one of them feels forced to contribute experiences they are not having, and the other part expects support and is not getting it.

Conflict can also be found in all-male interaction. Many men actually prefer female friends when it comes to talking about personal and emotional topics. A reason for the lack of that kind of talk between male friends is the pattern of communication based on competition within a social hierarchy. "Men's need to be strong and independent all the time can be felt as a stringent requirement not to have troubles" (Tannen 1992: 293). For example, a man spent two years to find male friends when moving to a new city, because most men he encountered were not eager to talk about their feelings, share troubles and were competitive in general in interaction. American culture has also been found to be more competitive than other cultures when it comes to all-male interaction, by making "friendly conversation into a contest" (Tannen 1992: 293).

2.3.5 Summary of 2.3

In this section same-sex and mixed-sex communication patterns have been reviewed. Researchers have found that many men and women use language according to different patterns. Women's pattern is characterized by using language to build connections to other people and negotiate relationships. Men, on the other hand, use language to obtain and maintain status in a social hierarchy. In mixed-sex talk, misunderstanding and conflict is likely to occur because of the differences in patterns of communication. Complementary schismogenesis is also likely to make a situation of already divergent patterns worse.

Researchers have found that men often feel interrupted by women. Men, who are most comfortable in a single-floor talking situation, may feel interrupted by women, for whom a collaborative-floor talking situation is more natural. Women, on the other hand, may often feel offended by men's agonism in communication style.^{vi}

ⁱ 'Taught' is the verb Lakoff uses in her theory in *Language and Woman's Place*.

ⁱⁱ Maltz and Borker's "A Cultural Approach to Male-Female Miscommunication" was first published in 1982.

ⁱⁱⁱ Thinking in terms of bipolarity is related to an essentialist philosophical view of the world. *Essentialism* has been a part of Western thought for a long time, and it has had a great influence on the way we think. It goes all the way back to Socrates, Plato and Aristotle and is still with us today. Many people consider it a way of viewing the world that has negative consequences:

Essences in the traditional sense are core properties or clusters of properties present, in all and only those things which bear the common name. knowledge is one thing; language is one thing; beauty, meaning, humanity, life, law, justice – each is a single, invariant reality, present in the most varied instances, or in a separate realm of forms (Hallett 1991: 2).

Essentialists believe that objects, activities, states (the non-verbal reality) have an essence, which is to say that it is possible to assign one true meaning to a word. Essentialist thinking is related to having a two-valued orientation. "Thinking in terms of opposites [...] appears to be deeply ingrained in many people's minds" (Janicki 2010: 125). As is the case with English, it is often the words that make up the language that push us in the direction of a two-valued orientation and bipolarity. Bipolarity is only a small part of essentialism, which is a whole philosophical position of concepts containing more than just language use.

^{iv} Avoiding passive voice constructions is important in E-Prime, which is a version of English where one avoids using the verb 'to be'. E-Prime is a linguistic tool used to make language more clear and less likely to be the source of confusion and misunderstanding. "[...] E-Prime can give us a shortcut to understanding the passive voice and the 'ises of identity and predication,' all of which interfere with lively description, clear writing, clear thinking, and honest expression" (Ralph 1991: 12). To practice E-Prime is to express oneself without using the verb 'to be'.

^v Tannen uses material from American culture when speaking about interruption, and is the culture to which this theory is applicable. Different patterns might apply for other cultures.

^{vi} The studies presented in 2.3 are applicable to American culture, and are not to be viewed as universal.

3 Method and material

3.1 Material

For this thesis, 23 scenes from American movies containing conflict talk in mixed-sex interaction have been chosen.^{vii} It was initially planned to compare same-sex and mixed-sex interactions. Mixed-sex interactions, however, turned out to be more available and dominant to quite a large degree when searching for conflict talk in movies, as opposed to same-sex interactions containing conflict talk. This is perhaps natural considering that the plot of many movies centres around matters of love and relationships. I decided early on to exclude same-sex dialogues between homosexual partners because it would then be necessary to bring in queer linguistics, which would be too large a scope for a thesis this size.

The following movies have been included in the analysis: *Hope Springs* (2012), where five scenes are analyzed, which adds up to approximately ten minutes in length. Two of the scenes take place in the home of the two characters and three of the scenes at their counselor's office. The two characters are Kay and Arnold, a couple in their sixties. He works in a bank and they met at college where Kay was taking classes, indicating that they are educated people. Their use of Standard American English also indicates this.

The second movie is *The Other Woman* (2009), where four scenes are analyzed, which add up to approximately five minutes in length. Three of the scenes take place in the home of the two main characters, Jack and Emilia, while one of them takes place at school where Jack is having a conversation with his ex-wife. The characters examined are Emilia, who is in her mid-thirties, her boyfriend Jack and his ex-wife Carolyn, who are both in their mid-forties. Jack and Emilia are both lawyers, while Carolyn is a gynecologist. This indicates that they are all educated, as does their use of Standard American English.

The third movie is *When Harry Met Sally* (1989), where five scenes are analyzed, containing approximately nine minutes of data. All of the scenes take place at various locations, such as in a car, at a wedding, on the street, in a diner and on a plane. The characters are Harry and Sally, and in the beginning of the movie they meet each other when they both graduate from college, indicating that they are probably in their mid-twenties. This, in addition to their use of Standard American English, implies that they are educated.

The fourth movie is *28 Days* (2000), where two scenes are analyzed, containing approximately five minutes of data. The first scene takes place on a boat in a lake, while the second one is in the stables of a rehab center where one of the main characters is a patient. The characters are Gwen, who is a patient at the center, her boyfriend Jasper, and Eddie, who

is also a patient there. They are both in their mid-thirties. Jasper and Gwen are both writers and educated people, and Eddie is a baseball player. Their usage of Standard American English implies that they are in the same social class as the other characters investigated.

The fifth movie is *American Beauty* (1999), where the seven analyzed scenes contain approximately seven minutes of data. All of the scenes take place in either the home or the car of the two characters investigated. The characters are the married couple Lester and Carolyn. Lester has been working at a big corporation but has just been laid off at the beginning of the movie, while Carolyn is a real estate agent. They are both in their forties or fifties. In addition to their usage of Standard American English, their occupation implies that they are educated people belonging roughly to the same social class as the other characters included in the study.

In total, the 23 analyzed scenes add up to 37 minutes of data, and there are six female characters and six male characters investigated. Even though one cannot say with certainty that they belong to the same social class, one can, based on their language use and their occupation, say that they are not too far from each other in education and social standing.

3.2 Method

The method used in this investigation is a mixture of qualitative and quantitative research. In qualitative analysis one attempts to answer *how* and *why* miscellaneous features of language occur (Johnstone 2000). Qualitative analysis is often the precursor of quantitative analysis because it aims to describe the linguistic characteristics occurring in the data rather than quantifying it, and allows one to consider several perspectives: “The fact that qualitative analysis is not primarily classificatory also means that the ambiguity which is inherent in human language – not only by accident but also through the deliberate intent of language users – can be fully recognized in the analysis” (McEnery and Wilson 2001: 76). Quantitative research on the other hand is about classifying linguistic phenomena and counting their occurrence in order to recognize patterns in people’s language use. An advantage of quantitative analysis is that the findings can be used as grounds for making generalizations about language use and “[...] it enables one to discover which phenomena are likely to be genuine reflections of the behavior of a language or variety and which are merely chance occurrences” (McEnery and Wilson 2001: 76).

My analysis is quantitative in that the five characteristics of language known to be conducive to conflict will be investigated and compared to see whether one of the sexes has a greater occurrence of these than the other. Considering the amount of data analyzed in this

thesis, however, it will be difficult to draw generalizations from the quantitative analysis. Secondly, the analysis is qualitative in that the circumstances around the relevant examples will be investigated when interpreting the results. These “descriptions that help answer qualitative questions about how and why things happen” (Johnstone 2000: 37) are essential to qualitative analysis, and is a natural choice of analysis considering the focus of the thesis and the data.

To collect data, movies playing out social conflicts of some kind between mixed-sex individuals were chosen. It seemed natural to choose movies within the drama genre, because I believe it is most likely that the language used by the characters in this genre is meant to reflect non-scripted language, both in content and word choice. I stayed away from genres such as comedies, thrillers, action movies etc. The selection of scenes for the analysis was based on my working definition of conflict situations, which is as follows:

Talk involving disputes of some sort, disagreement and talk where there are arguments of the nature of someone or something, often performed with raised voices in an aggressive manner.

This is a wide definition of a conflict situation, with few clear points one can look for when choosing the scenes to analyze. The selection of scenes, viz. what constitutes conflict situations according to the definition will undoubtedly be influenced by the subjectivity of the researcher.

In addition, a working definition of conflict talk based on five linguistic characteristics, as defined in 2.2.2, was used in the analysis of the material to find the relevant occurrences:

Conflict talk is language containing identification of a negative evaluation and the use of the passive voice, generalizations, bipolarity and inferences rather than descriptions.

Conversations containing more than two speakers have been eliminated in order to make the analysis easier.^{viii} Finding long enough dialogues was a challenge, as scenes in movies often contain short interactions before the scene changes, but most of the scenes selected contain approximately one to two minutes of dialogue.

A limitation of the data is that the discourse is taken from movies and not real life. This implies that the dialogue is scripted, most of the time by one or more writers, either male or female and will be colored by their perceptions of how gender is performed through

language, which might not be reflective of actual usage. This is, however, the reason for which I have chosen movies within the drama genre and have selected, to the best of my ability, scenes that reflect realistic language use. The movies have been produced in recent times (1989 - 2012), which means that they should reflect current use of English. The reason for investigating dialogues from movies instead of conducting sociolinguistic interviews or questionnaires is that I believe the kind of data needed for the analysis is difficult to elicit from speakers in an artificial situation.

An advantage of the data used in the analysis, on the other hand, is that the observer's paradox will not be a potentially altering factor of the data. The observer's paradox is a phenomenon often encountered when conducting sociolinguistic research, and it means that "our goal is to observe the way people use language when they are not being observed" (Labov 1972: 61). This poses a challenge to the researcher, since it is not ethical to record and analyze people's language use without informing them of this and giving them the option to refuse to be used as informants. Because of the observer's paradox, one normally has to take into account that informants can, and often do, adapt their language to accommodate either the researcher's language use or what the informants think are positive or negative features of their own language. However, since I am analyzing dialogues from movies where the characters are not aware previous to performing the dialogue that they are subject of sociolinguistic research, their language is not likely to be influenced.

The hypotheses to be tested in the investigation are based on the research question, as posed in 1.1 and the five linguistic characteristics conducive to conflict (see 2.2.2), and are as follows:

Hypothesis a) *Male characters use the 'is of identity' and 'is of predication' structures in the form of potential insults more frequently than female characters.*

Hypothesis b) *Male characters produce passive voice constructions more frequently than female characters.*

Hypothesis c) *Male characters produce statements in the form of generalizations more frequently than female characters.*

Hypothesis d) *Male characters show bipolarity in their formulations more frequently than female characters.*

Hypothesis e) *Male characters use inferences more frequently than female characters, while female characters use descriptive statements more frequently.*

The hypotheses are based on a selection of linguistic characteristics conducive to conflict. They were selected, from a larger number of linguistic characteristics, because they were thought to be possible to analyze in the kind of data used. Practicing an extensional versus an intentional orientation for instance, even though central to language conducive to conflict, has been left out of the hypotheses and investigation because it is more complicated to investigate. It would most likely prove hard to draw a distinctive line between the two.

The formulation of the hypotheses is, even though prejudiced in that men use more language conducive to conflict, based on pervasive stereotypes of female and male language established in the 1970s:

Women's speech is said to contain more euphemisms, politeness forms, apology, laughter, crying, and unfinished sentences. They are reputed to talk more about home and family and to be more emotional and positively evaluative. Further, women's speech is stereotyped as nonassertive, tentative, and supportive. Women are also said to talk more than men. Men, on the other hand, are reputed to use more slang, profanity, and obscenity and to talk more about sports, money, and business. They are reputed to make more hostile judgments and to use language to lecture, argue, debate, assert, and command (Haas 1979: 623).

Women's tendency to use polite forms, apologies, and being more positively evaluative, nonassertive and supportive in conversation makes it plausible to hypothesize that they will use less of the five linguistic characteristics chosen. Men's tendency to make hostile judgments and argue, debate, assert and command other people through language makes it plausible to hypothesize that they will produce more of the five linguistic characteristics conducive to conflict.

In the analysis language and sex will be investigated, instead of language and gender. The reason for this is that there is not enough material in the data to say anything about gender.

^{vii} In the analysis it will be differentiated between sex and not gender, even though research shows that gender can be performed differently from time to time, and femininity and masculinity to different degrees (see 2.1.1 and 2.1.2).

^{viii} In *Hope Springs* the couples' counselor is present in most of the relevant scenes, but his lines are short and few and not part of any of the examples used. The daughter is also present in one of the scenes of *American Beauty*, but she only has a couple of short lines and they are not included in the analysis.

4 Results and Discussion

The results' section will be structured after the order of the five linguistic characteristics I chose to investigate in the analysis. This means that I will first present the results found for the linguistic characteristic **identification**, after which follows the results of the use of the **passive voice**, **generalizations**, **bipolarity** and lastly the use of **descriptions versus inferences**.

4.1 Presentation of results

The tables depict the distribution of data according to sex. The examples included and described are extracts from the analyzed data, containing the relevant linguistic characteristics. Underlined phrases exemplify the linguistic characteristic in question.

4.1.1 Identification as a negative evaluation

Title of movies	Hope Springs	The Other Woman	When Harry Met Sally	28 Days	American Beauty	Total
Female initiation	2	2	3	0	4	11
Female responses	2	0	1	1	1	5
Male initiation	10	0	3	2	5	20
Male responses	0	1	1	0	0	2

Table 4.1.1: Identification as a negative evaluation

Table 4.1.1 shows the occurrences of **identification as a negative evaluation** (which will be referred to as **identification** from now on) and the results are separated into **identification as initiation** and **identification as response**. Identification was divided into initiation and response because the analysis of the data showed that if speaker 1 produced the linguistic characteristic identification, it sometimes sparked a counter-response in the form of an identification by speaker 2; this use of identification bears influence of speaker 1's choice of words and might be seen in part as a reflection of the first speaker's structure choice, which is why I chose to separate the two. For example, where Harry calls Sally a dog, when referring to how people perceive time in different ways. He initiates the topic by stating that one year to a person is like seven years to a dog, and Sally asks for clarification:

- [1] Sally: Who is the dog?
Harry: You are[...]

Sally: I don't see that Harry, if anyone is the dog, you are the dog, you wanna act like what happened didn't mean anything.

(*When Harry Met Sally*, scene 5)

In [1] we can see that Sally uses the 'is of identity' and calls Harry a dog, but in the dialogue this use of identification is initiated by Harry, who brings up the equation between Sally and a dog; Sally's identification is mainly a retort reflecting Harry's usage of words. She had, on the other hand, a choice of changing her words, making her response more nuanced and less offensive, but did not.

[2] Arnold: Where are you going? This is insane

Kay: (sobs) No, it's not (runs away)

(*Hope Springs*, scene 3)

In [2] the male character uses the 'is of predication' to express what he thinks of his wife's behavior after they started arguing during the couple's counseling. 'Insane' is meant in a derogatory sense in this context, and is conducive to conflict because it implies an objective evaluation of the situation, while in fact it is his subjective view of it. It is not coherent with how the female character sees the situation, as one can see from her contradiction to his statement in the next line.

[3] Lester: Well, don't you think it's weird or kind of fascist?

Carolyn: Possibly, but you don't wanna be unemployed

Lester: Oh, well, all right, let's just all sell our souls and work for satan cause it's more convenient that way

Carolyn: Oh, could you be a little bit more dramatic please, huh? [...]

(*American Beauty*, scene 1)

The female character, Carolyn, produces two occurrences of the 'is of predication' in [3]. The first one connects the negatively evaluated adjective 'unemployed' to the male character, and the structure makes it sound like a permanent, unwanted state, instead of something temporary. It is conducive to conflict because it implies a permanent state, and the male character infers that she wants him to go back to his old job he was unhappy with. The second occurrence is Carolyn's reaction to her husband's inference about her wanting him to keep his old job. She calls him dramatic because of his inference. The adjective 'dramatic' is meant in a negative way, as in that he is exaggerating, and is conducive to conflict because it undermines the male's reaction to be upset in a situation like this.

[4] Gwen: Why, because I don't feel like talking about it

Eddie: What's the matter, are you too good for me?

Gwen: What, are you dense, did your mother drop you on your head, what, I said no, I don't wanna talk about it. just drop it.

(28 Days, scene 2)

Eddie initiates identification in [4] by using the 'is of predication' about Gwen when she does not want to tell him about the things she has done under the influence. Gwen retorts with an 'is of predication', calling Eddie 'dense'. It is phrased as a question, but in the scene it is clear that it is a rhetorical one, meaning that she is not expecting a reply.

Overall the results in table 4.1.1 show that the male characters produced twice as many occurrences of identification as initiation as the female characters; the males produced 22 tokens of it, while women produced 16 tokens of it. They usually occurred when conversations were dealing with personal issues of the speakers. In example [5] both Arnold and Kay produce the 'is of identity' when Arnold opposes the exercise their couples' counselor gives them, which is to practice holding each other:

[5] Arnold: [...] I don't like the idea of anybody telling me, I mean, the whole idea of this 'exercise' thing is totally ridiculous to me,

I'm not a trained monkey

Kay: You're a bully!

(Hope Springs, scene 3)

Here we see both the male and the female character using the 'is of identity'. The use of identification is initiated by Arnold claiming he is not a 'trained monkey', implying that this is what the counselor's exercise is making him feel like. Kay replies using the 'is of identity' by classifying him as a bully, which is a negative, emotional evaluation. Here she could have chosen to use different words which would not be offensive (as could he). Considering the rest of the conversation, however, one gets the impression that she is getting more and more aggravated by Arnold's reaction, and that her word choice might reflect his.

The results further show that the female characters produced five tokens of the identification as response while the male characters produced 2. In this case, the response was brought on by an identification as initiation produced by the other conversation partner.

[6] Sally: You're wrong

Harry: I'm not wrong, he

Sally: You're wrong

Harry: He wants her to leave, that's why he puts her on the plane

(When Harry Met Sally, scene 1)

In [6] Sally and Harry are disputing the meaning of a scene in a movie they are discussing. Sally initiates the identification with her use of the ‘is of predication’, where she discards his opinion by saying that he is ‘wrong’. This is a subjective evaluation of Harry’s opinion by Sally. Harry objects to it by using the same structure, denying her ‘is of predication’. She does not, however, ask for clarification. Instead, she sticks to her opinion and the dispute continues throughout the scene.

[7] Carolyn: What the hell do you think you’re doing?
 Lester: Uh oh, mom’s mad... Bench presses, I’m going to wale on my pecks, then I’m going to do my back
 Carolyn: I see you’re smoking pot now, I’m, I’m so glad. I think using illegal psychotropic substances is a positive example to set for our daughter
 Lester: You’re one to talk, you bloodless moneygrabbing freak
 (*American Beauty*, scene 5)

Carolyn sees her husband working out while smoking pot in the garage and asks him what he is doing, to which he replies with an ‘is of predication’. His choice of words, ‘mom’ and ‘mad’, uttered in a sarcastic manner shows that he implies that he is being treated like a child by her. She responds with an ‘is of identity’ where she categorizes his actions as a positive example for their daughter. This is meant sarcastically, and is a negative evaluation of his behavior. That her ‘is of predication’ is conducive to conflict can be seen from the male character’s response. He uses the ‘is of identity’ where he derogatorily categorizes her as a ‘bloodless, moneygrabbing freak’.

4.1.2 Passive voice

Title of movies	Hope Springs	The Other Woman	When Harry Met Sally	28 Days	American Beauty	Sum
Female	0	0	0	0	0	0
Male	2	0	0	0	1	3

Table 4.1.2 Passive voice

Table 4.1.2 shows the results from the investigation of the linguistic characteristic **passive voice**. There were only three tokens of the passive voice found in total, of which all were produced by the male speakers.

In [8] Kay tells Arnold that they can get half of their payment back from the counselor if they choose to quit the sessions. Arnold talks about how he didn't think the counseling would work anyway:

[8] Arnold: It's ridiculous, you come up here and you spend one week and you're supposed to, what, have a new marriage? It's a set up. You're set up for failure. Then you feel bad about failing, you see that right? ... can't win... Why the hell did you bring us here?
 Kay: You know how you think you're always headed towards something? [...]
 (*Hope Springs*, scene 4)

Kay goes on to explain that she didn't want to give up on their marriage, explaining how she has always thought that things would get better. She is trying to justify her act of bringing Arnold to the counselor, whom he frames as an unknown agent setting them up for failure; this phrasing is an elaboration of Arnold's statement in scene 2 generalizing all counselors as being like lawyers, only out to get money from their clients instead of helping them.

[9] Arnold: Well, uhm, maybe that's what, uh mean, forced intimacy, is that really
 Counselor: Well, it's not forced intimacy
 Arnold: Well, that's what it sounds like (agitated)
 Kay: Oooooohh (exasperated)
 (*Hope Springs*, scene 3)

In [9] Arnold is reluctant towards the exercise the counselor wants them to do, which is to hold each other. Arnold formulates it as 'forced intimacy', an action of which the agent is unknown. From the context one cannot know whether the agent is himself, the counselor, or Kay, his wife. Kay's reaction shows that she opposes his use of 'forced', which frames the exercise as something negative to him.

4.1.3 Generalizations

Title of movie	Hope Springs	The Other Woman	When Harry Met Sally	28 Days	American Beauty	Sum
Female	8	0	5	4	2	19
Male	5	2	18	4	4	33

Table 4.1.3 Generalizations

Table 4.1.3 shows the results from the investigation of **generalizations**. Generalizations were one of the most frequent linguistic characteristics found in the data, and most of them

occurred in *Hope Springs* and *When Harry Met Sally*. The results pertaining to the two movies differ, however. In *Hope Springs* the female character produced eight of the 13 tokens, while in *When Harry Met Sally* the male character was responsible for 18 of the 23 tokens.'

[10] Emilia: Jack! I didn't tell him on purpose, he overheard both of us. This isn't my fault
Jack: Oh, I know, nothing's your fault, right?
Emilia: What's that supposed to mean?
Jack: Nothing. Everything just happens, right?... Everything just fucking happens!
(*The Other Woman*, scene 4)

[10] shows Jack and Emilia discussing Jack's ex-wife who is pregnant, and Jack's son accidentally overhears them talking about it. Jack is angry that his son finds out because it was too early for him to know. There are two occurrences of generalizations, the first one containing the indefinite pronoun *nothing* and the second one the indefinite pronoun *everything*.

[11] Counselor: Alright, this is good
Arnold: Good? Yeah, good for you. The more we tear each other apart, the more money we have to pay you to put it back together, hehe.. Jesus, god..
You people are worse than lawyers
(*Hope Springs*, scene 2)

[11] shows Arnold using a generalization in that he claims that all counselors inherit the same characteristics. The underlined clause also belongs to the category of **identification** in that Arnold characterizes counselors to be worse than lawyers, which is here most probably meant as an insult.

[12] Arnold: Well, then I don't know what to you, that in all our years together never have I
Kay: Have you heard me ask for anything?
Arnold: Excuse me, did we not just get a new refrigerator because you wanted
Kay: Oh, that's not what I mean
(*Hope Springs*, scene 1)

Kay uses the generalization that she has never asked Arnold for anything in [12], which Arnold interprets literally. His response shows indignation by his use of the phrase 'excuse me' and one can see that she gets frustrated when he does not pick up on what she means. Kay uses a generalization to get her point across, which is most likely that she has not asked

him to go to couples' counseling before or to engage in other activities meant to save their marriage.

- [13] Jasper: [...] Trust me, you're just in a RUT, it happens to EVERYONE
Gwen: No, Jas, there's an entire world of people out there who do everything right, they live right, they don't drink, they don't do drugs
Jasper: That's a crock of shit
Gwen: and they are HAPPY
(28 Days, scene 1)

[13] shows Jasper and Gwen discussing the fact that she is in rehab. He refuses to see that she has a problem with drinking, while she has realized that she does and wants to get better. Jasper tries to downplay Gwen's problems with the generalization that the situation she is in happens to everyone, to which she responds with another generalization. Her generalization, on the other hand, is slightly more nuanced and more reflective of non-verbal reality than his, and works as a modification of his generalization. It is still very simplistic and gives the impression of a whole group of people who do everything right and are successful, and is in this way not an accurate depiction of non-verbal facts but a generalization.

- [14] Counselor: Allright... What else Kay?
Kay: Well, it feels like we live in the house together like.. eh.. like two workers who bunk in the same room. You know, except we don't.. eh, we're not in the same room.. it just feels like there's nothing holding us together. Except the house.
Arnold: Nothing holding us together, like 31 years of [...] marriage!
(Hope Springs, scene 2)

[14] shows Kay making the general statement that there is nothing holding them together anymore, after which she specifies that they own the house together. This addition makes the meaning of the generalization less absolute.

- [15] Counselor: Why? What are you afraid will happen?
Arnold: You wanna what, uh uh. Fine! What I'm afraid will happen here is probably what happens at every god damn therapist's office and poor couple that goes in there, you say whatever thing because somebody like you is dragging it out of them, and then you can't take it back [...]
Kay: Tell me. I wanna know, I wanna know... It's worse not knowing when there are things you're holding back, that you don't wanna say because you think I'm too fragile [...].
(Hope Springs, scene 5)

Arnold generalizes what goes on in all couples' therapy sessions in [15]. The generalization illustrated by the example is also a less typical case of a generalization, in that the word 'probably' makes it less absolute.

4.1.4 Bipolarity

Table 4.1.4	Hope Springs	The Other Woman	When Harry Met Sally	28 Days	American Beauty	Sum
Female	4	5	9	2	2	22
Male	6	1	12	3	3	25

Table 4.1.4 Bipolarity

Table 4.1.4 presents the results from the investigation of the use of **bipolarity**, and it shows that bipolarity occurred many times in the data. The distribution was almost equal between the genders, with the male characters producing 25 of the tokens and the female characters producing 22 of them overall. *The Other Woman* was the only movie where there was a big difference between the male and female speakers, where the female character had five occurrences and the male only had one. In the other three movies the distribution was almost equal, with the male characters producing one, two or three more occurrences of bipolarity than the female characters in each of them.

In [16] the counselor is trying to make Kay explain what she is missing in her and Arnold's relationship. She talks about their lack of communication:

- [16] Kay: Uhm... we don't talk about anything
 Arnold: Talk (*snorts) what is there I don't know about you?
 About Eileen and the skirts she bought, or if she took back the little necklace with the tiki-gods, hehe.. jeez
 Kay: (laughs a bit simultaneously)
 No, I don't mean. I just mean, I don't (*sigh) I don't tell Arnold how I feel, about anything. And I don't know how he feels about anything either.
 (*Hope Springs*, scene 2)

Both the female and the male character exhibit an attitude of bipolarity in the example. Kay saying that they do not talk about anything is an exaggerated statement from her, most likely made to get her point across, which she specifies in her second line in the example. The use of the word *anything* in this context conjures this image of a nothing – everything bipolarity. This interpretation is supported by Arnold's derogatory response to her comment where he indirectly claims to know everything about her, and is in this way also portraying a bipolar

view of the situation. Both Kay and Arnold are ignoring the middle ground of the situation, which would most likely be that they do talk to each other, but maybe not about the things that Kay would like them to in order to feel connected to him. By framing her view in this bipolar manner, Arnold misunderstands her and there is disagreement.

- [17] Jack: [...] Carolyn's pregnant
Emilia: Carolyn's (drops hot pan) uuh, shit, fuck!
Jack: You OK?
Emilia: Carolyn's pregnant? How can she be pregnant? She's 43
Jack: Well, she's 42, and she's been seeing someone since summer.
(*The Other Woman*, scene 3)

In [17] Emilia reacts badly to Jack's news about his ex-wife being pregnant, and shows this by simplifying the situation to a great extent. Her question followed by a statement shows that because of Carolyn's age, Emilia finds it difficult to believe that Carolyn can be pregnant. In Emilia's eyes one is no longer fertile as a woman when one is 43 years old, and this is a view that does not take into account that every person and every situation are unique.

- [18] Harry: Great, friends, it's the best thing... you realize of course we can never be friends.
Sally: Why not?
Harry: What I am saying is, and this is not a 'come on' in any way shape or form, is that men and women can't be friends because the sex part always gets in the way
Sally: That's not true, I have a number of men friends and there is no sex involved.
Harry: No, you don't
(*When Harry Met Sally*, scene 2)

Harry's underlined statement about the nature of male-female relationships in [18] is a bipolar statement in that it portrays that there are only two opposing outcomes of a relationship between a man and a woman. Either they become lovers or they do not interact at all. Sally disagrees with him, and they start disputing whether or not this is possible.

- [19] Gwen: What are you, proposing or?
Jasper: Yeah, I am
Gwen: At rehab
Jasper: No, I'm proposing to you now, you happen to be here
Gwen: Yeah, but... I don't know, I mean... "well, how did he ask?", "well, he came down to visit me in rehab, and..."
Jasper: Huh, well ok so it's not moon light Maui
Gwen: Where did you think we were gonna get married? McSorley's pub?

(28 Days, scene 1)

In [19] Jasper responds in a bipolar way to Gwen's negative reaction to the time and place of his proposal. He does not consider the middle ground of the situation, which might have been to wait until she was out of rehab to propose to her. Instead, he is sarcastic and indicates that she was expecting an idyllic proposal on Maui. His bipolar statement seems like an aggressive defense to her negative reaction.

[20] Lester: Well, I'll bet money that she's gonna recent it, and I'm missing the James Bond marathon on TNT
Carolyn: Lester, this is important. Now, I'm sensing a real distance growing between you and Jane
Lester: Growing? She hates me
Carolyn: She's just willful
Lester: She hates you too

(American Beauty, scene 3)

[20] shows Lester and Carolyn going to their daughter's recital while they are discussing their relationship to their daughter. In this scene one can see the female character taking the role as the mediator of the situation, and trying to make the male character focus on the middle ground of the situation. She is uttering a concern for the relationship between the father and the daughter.

4.1.5 The use of descriptions versus the use of inferences

4.1.5.1 Inferences

Table 4.1.5.1	Hope Springs	The Other Woman	When Harry met Sally	28 Days	American Beauty	Total
Female	4	8	4	4	5	25
Male	3	1	5	3	9	21

Table 4.1.5.1 Inferences

Table 4.1.5.1 shows the occurrence of **inferences** in the data. There was not a great difference between the female and male production of inferences. The female characters had a slight majority of the occurrences, with 25 tokens to the 21 male occurrences. Three of the movies showed almost an equal distribution between the sexes, while there was a difference in *The Other Woman* and *American Beauty*. The results from these two movies are, however, divergent. In *The Other Woman* the female distribution was eight tokens, while the male was

only one. In *American Beauty*, on the other hand, the use of bipolarity was almost twice as high for the male characters and the female ones, with nine to five tokens respectively.

[21] Kay: I wanna go
Arnold: Have you been to see Dr. Lesser, maybe this has something to do with that hormonal thing
Kay: I am not crazy, Arnold
(*Hope Springs*, scene 1)

[21] shows Arnold inferring that Kay is having hormonal changes because of her wish for them to go to couples' counseling. This is an inference because it is his interpretation of her behavior, and not a description of non-verbal reality. Kay's response is also an inference of what she thinks Arnold is implying with his question.

[22] Lester: Well, you don't think it's weird or kind of fascist?
Carolyn: Possibly, but you don't wanna be unemployed
Lester: Oh, well, alright, let's just all sell our souls and work for satan cause it's more convenient that way
Carolyn: Oh, could you be a little bit more dramatic please, huh? [...]
(*American Beauty*, scene 1)

Lester makes a negative and exaggerated inference in [22] which is meant to be sarcastic. From Carolyn's statement that he should not want to be unemployed, he infers that she thinks he should keep the old job he was not happy in. This is not what she is saying, which one can see from her request for him to stop being 'dramatic'.

[23] Harry: I don't think it's a matter of opinion, empirically you are attractive
Sally: Amanda is my friend
Harry: So?
Sally: So you're going with her
Harry: So?
Sally: So you're coming on to me
(*When Harry Met Sally*, scene 2)

Harry continues to deny the inference Sally makes in [23] and they start disputing whether it is possible for a person to call another person attractive without it being a come on. Sally infers that Harry is coming on to her because of his comment about her looks. That the goal of Harry's statement was to make a move on her, however, is only one of many possibilities. Sally misunderstands and her inference is not reflective of non-verbal reality.

[24] Carolyn: Is she expecting you at home at any particular time? Will dinner be waiting?
Jack: (sighs) I'm gonna pick up William early on Friday, at three, here, instead of five at your place.

(*The Other Woman*, scene 2)

In *The Other Woman* the female-male distribution was eight to one tokens respectively, i.e. a strong female majority in the occurrence of inferences. In [24], Carolyn, Jack's ex-wife, is talking about Emilia, his current girlfriend whom he left Carolyn for. The inference is a judgment by Carolyn of Emilia, based on her past experience. In Carolyn's eyes, Emilia had an affair with her husband and is the reason why he is no longer with Carolyn and their son. From this she infers that Emilia is not a good partner for Jack. Most of the other inferences in the movie are made by Emilia and are, in return, about Carolyn.

[25] Emilia: Guess you've heard.
Jack: Yeah, I heard
Emilia: She's gonna go to court
Jack: No, she's not gonna go to court, you're gonna pick him up every Wednesday, same as before, and take a cab here

(*The Other Woman*, scene 4)

In [25] Emilia infers, on the basis of her impression of Carolyn, that she will go to court to stop Emilia seeing William, Jack and Carolyn's son. This is also a judgment made of another person, only partly based non-verbal reality.

[26] Jack: I don't know, seven eight weeks, something like that... She told me, when we lost Isabel... Made her realize that she wanted another child, but... She got pregnant right away.
Emilia: She got pregnant because of Isabel? Your ex-wife got pregnant because my baby died?
Jack: Not because she died (sighs) because... She saw how much we loved her. Emilia... This is a good thing. Like something good came out of Isabel's death, she didn't die in vain
Emilia: (sobs) That is not why she died! So that Carolyn could have another baby.

(*The Other Woman*, scene 3)

Emilia produces two inferences in [26]. Both of them are instances of her inferring information, wrongly as one can see from Jack's responses, from the situation. Jack tells her that Carolyn got pregnant when Jack and Emilia lost their baby, and Emilia infers from this that their baby's death is the reason for Carolyn choosing to have another baby. Even though these two things were related, Emilia's inference is wrong, as one can see from Jack's reply.

4.1.5.2 Descriptions

Table	Hope Springs	The Other Woman	When Harry Met Sally	28 Days	American Beauty	Total
4.1.5.2						
Female	8	2	5	3	5	23
Male	9	4	7	4	7	31

Table 4.1.5.2 Descriptions

Table 4.1.5.2 shows the occurrence of **descriptions** in the data. Overall, the male characters produced more descriptions than the female characters, with 31 to 23 tokens respectively. The male characters also had the majority in all of the movies, even though only with a slight margin. The amount of descriptions in total was almost the same as inferences, only the males producing 31 descriptions to 21 inferences.

[27] Sally: I don't want anything from you
 Harry: Fine! Fine, but let's just get one thing straight, I did not go over there that night to make love to you, that is not why I went there. But you looked up at me with these big weepy eyes. 'don't go home tonight, Harry, hold me a little longer, Harry,' what was I supposed to do?
 Sally: What are you saying, you took pity on me?
(When Harry Met Sally, scene 5)

[27] shows Harry describing how Sally looked at him in the situation they are discussing. The description then turns into an inference, where he infers that she wanted him to stay with her. Even though his description is colored by the content he inferred, it is also his representation of non-verbal reality as he saw it. Sally follows up with an inference to his description, where she infers that he only made love to her out of pity. The scene ends with Sally slapping Harry across the face, making it safe to assume that both the description and the inference in this case caused conflict.

[28] Kay: Well, I hate it when you'd rub up against me like you expect me to just, you know, do it, come on (snaps her fingers), let's go
 Arnold: Well, hell, I got to the point where I was afraid to make any kind of move, if I even tried as much as to kiss you
 Kay: Oh well, you never kiss me, you don't wanna kiss me, you just want it. Not me. Huh, you know he always keeps his eyes squeezed tight shut... It's not me, you just want it.
(Hope Springs, scene 5)

Kay describes her feelings when Arnold would approach her in [28], to which Arnold replies with a defense of his actions. Kay continues with an inference where she says that Arnold only wanted sex and not her, which is inferred by his actions and not something he has said. The inference is followed up with a description to support her inference.

- [29] Arnold: You have a way of saying that something is up to me, and then, uh when I I make a decision and it's something that you don't like you don't actually say anything but you sure do get your point across
Kay: Well, can I just say, I don't like the, uh is it my turn [to the counselor]?
I don't like the way that we always do something for Christmas or an anniversary that's a joint gift for the house, like a water heater
Arnold: You needed that water heater.
(*Hope Springs*, scene 5)

Arnold and Kay mention specific incidents from their marriage in [29], when asked to talk about their problems, and both are based on situations they have experienced themselves, viz. non-verbal reality.

- [30] Carolyn: Lester, you're gonna spill beer on the couch
Lester: So what, it's just a couch
Carolyn: This is a 4000 dollar sofa, upholstered in Italian silk. This is not just a couch!
Lester: It's! Just! A! Couch!... This isn't life, this is just stuff. And it's become more important to you than living. Well honey, that's just nuts..
(*American Beauty*, scene 7)

Lester and Carolyn have differing views in [30] of the importance of the couch, which is reflected in their descriptions of it. Carolyn emphasizes the material and the price of the couch, while Lester emphasizes its existence as a piece of furniture and nothing of importance.

4.2 Discussion

In this section the results presented above will be discussed in light of the hypotheses formulated in the introduction and the theory presented in chapter two. The hypotheses are linked to the research question of the investigation, which is:

Is there a difference between men and women as to how conflicts are handled linguistically?

Other issues will also be discussed where relevant.

4.2.1 Hypothesis a)

Hypothesis a) concerns the occurrence of **identification as a negative evaluation** in language:

Male characters use the ‘is of identity’ and ‘is of predication’ structures in the form of potential insults more frequently than female characters.

Identification (see 2.2.2.2 and 4.1.1) was overall used as an insult more by the male characters than the female ones, with 22 to 16 tokens respectively. Many factors other than gender may have influenced this outcome, such as what kind of role the various characters were assigned, the amount of screen time they have, etc. The pattern of males producing more occurrences than the females is not consistent in each of the movies.

In *Hope Springs*, for example, the female character, Kay, had five tokens and the male, Arnold, twelve, which shows a clear sex difference. The plot of the movie, however, is the married couple, Kay and Arnold, who are going to couples’ counseling. Kay is the one who wants to go, while Arnold resents going there and does so unwillingly throughout the whole movie. This might influence the outcome of the use of identification as an insult, as many of Arnold’s occurrences of identification were related to showing his opposition towards going to counseling. The ‘is of identity’ “you’re a grown woman” (*Hope Springs*, scene 1) is used derogatorily by Arnold in the beginning when he says that Kay can go wherever she wants, but he is staying at home. The ‘is of predication’ “I thought she was nuts” (*Hope Springs*, scene 2) is when Arnold recounts his reaction to the counselor when being told by Kay that she wanted to go to counseling. Arnold’s comment to the counselor, “you people are worse than lawyers” (*Hope Springs*, scene 2) also shows his reluctance towards being there. In these cases, identification is used to map negative qualities onto the person spoken of, and with this Arnold shows his resentment towards being brought to couples’ counseling by his wife. In all three examples, identification is used as an insult.

Two out of four of Kay’s occurrences of identification are **identification as response**, meaning that it comes as an immediate response to an **identification as initiation** in the form of an insult by the other speaker. It was my impression during the analysis that identification sometimes occurred as a response to the other speaker’s use of identification, especially when the first one was used as an insult.

[31] Arnold: Kay, this is infantile
Kay: I think you’re infantile!

(*Hope Springs*, scene 3)

Arnold sparks the conflict in [31] by referring to her behavior as ‘infantile’, which is meant in a derogatory manner. Kay responds with the ‘is of identity’ saying that Arnold is ‘infantile’, which extends the area to which ‘infantile’ is mapped, viz. from a person’s behavior to a whole person. This is an example of *complementary schismogenesis* (see 2.3.3), because one can see that one person’s use of a linguistic characteristic conducive to conflict makes the other person respond using similar characteristics. This becomes an aggravating spiral.

The Other Woman had very few occurrences of identification, with the female character producing two tokens of identification and the male one producing one token. The male character’s token was in addition an identification as response. This is not a difference revealing of any pattern, but taking into account two of the other linguistic characteristics conducive to conflict, the female characters in *The Other Woman* used bipolarity and inferences more frequently than the male characters as well (see tables 4.1.4 on bipolarity and 4.1.5.1 on inferences). Once again, when one of the sexes produce more linguistic characteristics conducive to conflict than the other, it might be explained by the different roles the characters are assigned in the plot, rather than by sex differences. Emilia is the mistress of Jack who later becomes his girlfriend when he leaves his wife, Carolyn, and there is animosity between the two female characters throughout the movie. Jack inhabits the role as peace keeper in many of the cases.

- [32] Emilia: Carolyn’s insane, she needs a valium drip or patch, or four
Jack: Well, I guess it’s the hormones or something. I mean, first there were the shots and now that she’s... oh. Carolyn’s pregnant.
(*The Other Woman*, scene 3)

Emilia uses the ‘is of predication’ in [32] to characterize Carolyn, saying that she is ‘insane’, and Jack tries to defend Carolyn’s action by explaining the situation she is in. Here as well the initiated identification is used as an insult to another person, potentially triggering conflict. Jack’s peacekeeper role, on the other hand, tries to deflect the situation. He is adopting a *multi-valued orientation* (see 2.2.2.1) by trying to contextualize Carolyn’s situation, most likely hoping to avoid conflict. His measures do not work, however, as conflict escalates throughout the scene because Emilia exhibits bipolarity in her further statements regarding the situation. The subject of pregnancy is a highly sensitive subject to Emilia, because Jack’s and Emilia’s baby died of SIDS, and this can be the reason for her adopting a *two-valued*

orientation (see 2.2.2.1) and using identification to show animosity towards Carolyn, who is now pregnant and expecting a baby.

With males producing 22 tokens of identification as an insult and females 16 tokens, the results show a tendency for male characters to use it more frequently. This use leads to conflict because it does not reflect non-verbal reality accurately and because it involves negative categorization of someone or a situation.

The females' 16 tokens, however, mean that they also use identification to insult their interlocutor. As previously mentioned, five of these occurrences were identification as response. One possible reason for these results is that when one person insulted another by the use of identification, the reply was usually a retort using the same structure. This is natural, as many people would feel a need to reciprocate when they are insulted.

When it comes to which type of identification was used most, 20 tokens were the 'is of predication' while 18 were the 'is of identity', which means that there was no significant distinction between which structure was preferred when identification was used as an insult. The 'is of predication' implies characteristics to be inherent in the person spoken to/of, instead of something projected onto the person by the speaker. This will cause the insulted person to take it personally, and is likely to spark a conflict between the two.

[33] Harry: I mean nothing bothers you, you never get upset about anything!
Sally: Don't be ridiculous!
Harry: What! You never get upset about Joe, I never see that back up you, how is that possible? Don't you experience any feeling of loss?
(*When Harry Met Sally*, scene 4)

In [33] Sally uses the 'is of predication' by calling Harry 'ridiculous', to which Harry's reply 'what' can indicate that he thinks her comment is unjustified. He reacts by trying to convince her that he as a person and his views are reflective of non-verbal reality and not ridiculous.

18 of the tokens were structured as 'is of identity', and was also an effective tool to insult the interlocutor.

[34] Lester: Oh what, you're mother of the year?
Carolyn: What?... what?
(*American Beauty*, scene 2)

[34] shows Lester's comment to his wife, Carolyn, when their daughter walks out of dinner because of an argument she had with Lester. He asks the rhetorical question to imply that she is no better than him, thus using the 'is of identity' to insult her.

In view of the results obtained one can say that hypothesis a) is weakly corroborated, with the male characters producing identification as a negative evaluation more frequently than the female characters.

4.2.2 Hypothesis b)

Hypothesis b) concerns the use of the **passive voice**:

Male characters produce passive voice constructions more frequently than female characters.

The overall occurrence of the **passive voice** (see 2.2.2.4) was low (see 4.1.2). All of the passive voice constructions were, however, produced by the male characters.

[35] Lester: Sit down! [...] I'm sick and tired of being treated like I don't exist.
You two do whatever you wanna do, whenever you wanna do it, and I don't complain. All I want is the
Carolyn: Oh, you don't complain! Oh please, excuse me, excuse me, I must be psychotic then, if you don't complain, what is this? [...]
(*American Beauty*, scene 6)

Lester's use of the passive voice in [35] makes his statement sound very general. Judging by Carolyn's heated response, she sees through his attempt to hide the agent of his statement and takes it personally. She tries to contradict him on his statement that he does not complain in general. In this example, the use of the passive voice may have contributed to the conflict sparked in the conversation.

It can be a coincidence that all occurrences of the passive voice were produced by the male characters. Three occurrences are not enough to say anything definite about whether one sex produces more of this linguistic characteristic conducive to conflict than the other sex. One could, however, speculate as to whether women are more preoccupied with conveying content clearly in their speech, which would include avoiding passive voice constructions, since the female characters did not have any occurrences at all. This could be a feature of rapport-talk (see 2.3.1), where producing linguistic characteristics that can potentially spark conflict is an act that threatens and potentially weakens the bonds of a community. Avoiding passive voice constructions are a part of practicing E-Prime, which is seen to present non-verbal reality in a more accurate and concise way than the standard use of English (see note ii, p. 42).

One reason for the low frequency of the passive voice constructions in general might be that this is scripted, and most importantly, supposed to simulate spoken language. This means that there might be a tendency to avoid passive voice constructions to hide the agent of an action, since your interlocutor can easily ask for clarification. This sort of dialogue, which might often take place in real life, would probably be seen as excessive in the scripted dialogue of a movie that is plot driven, meaning that the action in the movie needs to move forward quickly. The fact that three of the movies did not have any tokens of the passive voice at all further shows that this might be the case.

A last note about example [35] is something unrelated to the passive voice. Lester starts his line with ‘sit down’, a command aimed at his daughter who is about to leave the table. Even though only a one-time incident, it reflects and affirms the pattern Maltz and Borker (see 2.1.5) discuss of how boys are more likely to assert their dominance in a conversation by verbally commanding people.

In view of the results obtained, hypothesis b) is weakly corroborated. Looking at it qualitatively, the occurrences show no pattern that would suggest that this structure is preferred by the male speakers.

4.2.3 Hypothesis c)

Hypothesis c) concerns the use of generalizations (see 2.2.7):

Male characters produce statements in the form of generalizations more frequently than female characters.

Generalizations (see 4.1.3), along with descriptions (see 2.2.2.5 and 4.1.5.2), had the most occurrences of the linguistic characteristics. The male characters had roughly twice as many tokens as the female characters, with 33 tokens to 19 respectively.

When Harry Met Sally, however, skewed the results with 18 male tokens to five female tokens. If the result from this movie is removed from the total, the female and male characters produce an almost equal amount of generalizations, with 14 and 15 tokens respectively. A reason for the high occurrence in *When Harry Met Sally* can be the role that the male character, Harry, plays. He is the antagonist in the plot, which means “one that contends with or opposes another” (Merriam Webster Dictionary, accessed 16 April 14). Most of the disputes between Harry and Sally are sparked by generalizations made by Harry, and this is probably an instrument to raise the various issues they debate throughout the movie.

[36] Harry: What! You never get upset about Joe, I never see that back up on you, how is that possible? Don't you experience any feeling of loss?
Sally: I don't have to take this crap from you
Harry: If you're so over Joe, why aren't you seeing anyone?
Sally: I see people

(*When Harry Met Sally*, scene 4)

In this example one can see that Sally gets provoked by Harry's generalizing statement about her feelings. Harry's linguistic behavior is in tune with the patterns Tannen (1992) describes, where men often use opposition in conversation to create affiliation with the interlocutor and how men often focus on giving information and opinions instead of support, like women do (see 2.1.5, 2.3.1 and 2.3.3). Harry's statement might be an attempt to connect with Sally, but it is not interpreted as that by her. This is an example of how differing styles between the two sexes can create conflict between the sexes, because they do not understand what the other person is trying to accomplish with what they say.

In the other movies, the results pertaining to the sexes show a more equal distribution. In *Hope Springs*, however, the female character, Kay, had nearly twice as many tokens as the male, with eight to five respectively. In [12] (see 4.1.3), Kay's generalization causes misunderstanding and frustration on Arnold's behalf because he thinks she means that she has never asked for anything. This pattern is consistent with women's use of metamesages in rapport-talk and men's focus on giving and receiving information as a goal of communication, viz. report-talk (see 2.3.1). Kay is using this generalization to exaggerate her case and to convey a metamessage, which is that this is the first time she has demanded anything specific of Arnold when it comes to improving their marriage. Arnold, who focuses on the literal information conveyed in her statement, misunderstands and disagrees with her statement.

Overall, both men and women produced a lot of generalizations. There did, however, seem to be different patterns to their use. Generalizations were often used by men as a device to show opposition towards the person they were speaking to, as one can see in examples [7], [10], [11], [13], [15] and [36]. Women often used it as a means to convey metamesages, as seen in examples [12] and [14]. This means that the data shows a tendency for men and women to have different goals with their use of generalizations.

Example [10] also portrays how generalizations can cause conflict. Jack says "nothing's your fault, right?" when Emilia claims that she did not intend for his son to overhear their conversation. This is conducive to conflict because Jack simplifies reality to a great extent, and takes a one-time incident where Emilia was an accomplice in spreading the news to his son and transfers it to all areas of life. Most people would object to this kind of

phrasing, and conflict would often be sparked. Generalizations in the data often appeared in situations where conflict had already escalated. This could mean that, in addition to being conducive to conflict in itself, the use of generalizations can be triggered by already existing conflict. This means that conflict induces generalizations.

There are many ways of forming a generalization, which was also reflected in the data. There are typical cases of generalizations that express an absoluteness and often contain adverbs such as ‘never’, ‘always’, etc, as seen in [10], [12], [13] and [14]. There are also less typical cases where statements of a generalizing nature contain elements that somehow modify the content. In this way the generalization takes into account that the generalization might not apply for absolutely all incidents, as seen in [15]. Arnold says: “What I’m afraid will happen here is probably what happens in every god damn therapist’s office and every poor couple that goes in there, [...]”. The use of ‘probably’ modifies the generalization in that it reflects some uncertainty around the generalizing statement. Despite the modification, it is still a variety of a generalization.

The number of modified generalizations was low in the overall occurrence of generalizations, and the distribution between the sexes was equal with three tokens each. This is, however, natural, considering that generalizations expressing absoluteness were often followed by either another generalization expressed in the same manner or by a modified generalization.

Example [14] shows Kay describing to the counselor what is wrong with their marriage, and she says “[...] there’s nothing holding us together. Except the house”. Her use of this modified generalization might be a product of Arnold’s reaction to her use of the absolute generalization, as seen in example [12]. The succeeding reply by Arnold, however, implies that he is still interpreting her statements literally, instead of her nuanced meaning conveyed through the metamessage of the generalization: “nothing holding us together, like 31 years of [...] marriage!”. Her generalization is used to convey the message that there is a lack of emotional connection between them, while he implies that their being married for 31 years should be enough. Kay’s generalization, even though modified, is still misinterpreted by her husband, and this causes a dispute between them.

The following example containing an interaction between the married couple, Lester and Carolyn, shows two occurrences of a generalization that is modified.

[37] Lester: Well, excuse me, but some of us still have blood pumping through our veins
Carolyn: So do I

Lester: Really? Well I'm the only one who seems to be doing anything about it

Carolyn: Uh, Lester I refuse to live like this, this is not a marriage

Lester: This hasn't been a marriage for years, but you were happy as long as I kept my mouth shut. [...]

Carolyn: Oh, I see, you think you're the only one who's sexually frustrated.

(*American Beauty*, scene 4)

Lester's use of 'seems' shows that he is aware of the fact that even though he cannot see his wife, Carolyn, doing something with her sexual frustration (the topic they are talking about), he cannot be sure that she is not. The use of the modified generalization makes his statement less possible to respond to, and might be the reason for Carolyn changing the topic in the next line. She brings the topic over to the more general topic of marital issues they are having. Once again, Lester answers with a modified generalization to her statement about their situation not being a marriage. He specifies that their marriage did not use to be as bad as it is now. The use of modified generalizations did not make the conflict escalate further than it already was, but helped to keep the status quo of the situation

One interesting observation pertaining to examples [14] and [37] is how the modified generalizations are received by the other speaker. The male character in [11] does not pick up on the nuance conveyed by the female character's modified generalization, which is that they are lacking an emotional connection. His response, where he interprets her comment literally, discards her statement and directs attention to the length of their marriage as if this should say anything about the nature of it and ensure an emotional connection in itself. He is here practicing an intensional orientation (see 2.2.1.3), where he puts too much store on '31 years of marriage', instead of examining the non-verbal reality this refers to. The two other occurrences where a female character made a generalization with a modified content, the male receiver either answered with a generalization contradicting the female's generalization or discarded her modified generalization completely (see [13]).

The female character in [37] changes the topic as a response to her husband's modified generalization, indicating that she picks up on what he means and changes the topic instead of contradicting him. Her change of topic most likely means that she realizes that the generalization is modified, thus making it more difficult to contradict. His statement, even though generalizing, is taking into account that the situation might not be like this even though he perceives it this way. In [10] the female character responds by asking for descriptions of the male character's high-abstract language use.

The occurrences of these modified generalizations found in the data are few and are not enough to draw any conclusions as to whether men and women respond to generalizations

differently. Despite this, the examples investigated do affirm the pattern of women as being more attuned to metamesages of language, which is a feature of rapport-talk, and men being more focused on the actual information conveyed, a feature of report-talk (see 2.3.1).

In view of the results obtained, hypothesis c) is weakly corroborated. The distribution was equal between the sexes if one excludes one of the movies where the male character produced a high amount of tokens, determining for the overall results. The phenomenon of generalizations with a modified content was observed during the analysis, but the use of these showed inconclusive results.

4.2.4 Hypothesis d)

Hypothesis d) concerns the use of bipolarity:

Male characters show bipolarity in their formulations more frequently than female characters.

The results for **bipolarity** (see 2.2.2.1 and 4.1.4) show an almost equal distribution between the female and the male characters, with 22 to 25 tokens respectively. The slight majority of the male characters is most likely not indicative of a tendency, but more likely a coincidence considering the low number of characters' speech analyzed.

Bipolarity was used in different settings, such as to polarize someone else's statement, as a defense, to make general statements, etc., by both men and women. One can see examples of this in [16] and [19], where the male characters respond using bipolarity as a form of defense to the female character's statement. Being put down by your interlocutor in conversation is something that threatens the social hierarchy. The male characters' bipolarity might be a result of engagement in ritual combat as part of interaction (see 2.3.3), thus affirming male patterns of communication.

In [19], the woman in turn responds sarcastically to the man's bipolar statement. Once again, one can see that one instance of language conducive to conflict initiates further use of language conducive to conflict by the other speaker, and this is also an example of complementary schismogenesis (see 2.3.3). This might be a reason for the almost equal distribution of bipolarity in the results. In the interaction ([19]), there does not seem to be a great difference as to how the genders are constructed regarding the female and male characters in question. Their linguistic behavior is quite similar. This might, however, be a result of complementary schismogenesis. This is the same tendency found regarding generalizations, where it seemed like conflict situations induced conflict talk.

In two of the examples containing bipolarity ([18] and [20]), the female characters tried to mediate the male characters' bipolar statements. This can be related to women's tendency for rapport-talk, where the primary goal of communication is negotiation and maintenance of relationship (see 2.3.1). [18] shows Sally responding to Harry's bipolarity, by providing concrete examples to why his statement is not true to non-verbal reality. In [20], Carolyn tries to advocate for the middle ground of the situation, that their daughter is just 'willful', thus adopting a multi-valued orientation (see 2.2.2.1). The male character, Lester, refutes his wife's comment about their daughter with his bipolar statements about her hating both him and his wife. He displays a two-valued orientation (see 2.2.2.1), with no regard for the potential nuances of the situation. The scene ended with his comment, so one did not get to see what reaction this comment would have sparked with his wife. It is, however, likely that being subjected to this bipolarity would lead to a dispute, if one feels that it is unjustified. In this way his language would be conducive to conflict.

Women did, however, also produce statements in the form of bipolarity (see [16], [17] and [38]).

[38] Jack: Well, she's 42, and she's been seeing someone since summer
 Emilia: No, she hasn't, Will would've told us
 Jack: Well, he told me. He doesn't know about the baby, she wanted to wait
 until she passed the three month mark to tell him
 (*The Other Woman*, scene 3)

Emilia rejects the possibility of Jack's ex-wife having found someone new, because Jack's son, Will, has not told her. She ignores the middle ground, that his ex-wife could have found someone new even though she did not know about it, and her bipolar statement bluntly counteracts Jack's statement. Jack responds by describing the situation, thus making the content of their conversation closer to non-verbal reality. In this case, he is the mediator and conflict is avoided. This shows a pattern the opposite of what observed in [18] and [20], which could mean that the role a character plays in a plot is more important in deciding their linguistic behavior, than the sex of the character.

In view of the results obtained, hypothesis d) has been refuted. Bipolarity reflects a two-valued orientation, and the data indicates that there were no clear sex differences regarding two-valued orientation. Despite this, the examples did confirm some of the patterns characteristic for women's and men's speech.

4.2.5 Hypothesis e)

Hypothesis e) concerns the use of inferences versus the use of descriptions:

Male characters use inferences more frequently, while female characters use descriptive statements more frequently.

As in the case with the other linguistic characteristics, there was not a great difference between the genders when it came to the occurrence of descriptions and inferences (see 2.2.2.5) in the data (see 4.1.5.1 and 4.1.5.2). Males produced 31 tokens of descriptions and females 23 tokens, while with inferences the occurrence was 21 to 25 tokens, respectively. These results are not conclusive as to which sex produces more of one or the other linguistic characteristic, but the tendency shows a pattern opposite to the one hypothesized.

4.2.5.1 Inferences

Once again, two of the movies analyzed skew the results for the total numbers of inferences in one direction, meaning there was one character, either male or female, that was responsible for many of the occurrences.

The results are inconsistent in the different movies, however. A reason for the high female occurrence of **inferences** in *The Other Woman* might be explained by the plot of the movie, and not necessarily by the sex of the characters. All through the movie, there is rivalry and animosity between the two female characters, and most of the time they are trying to put the other person in a bad light (see [24] and [25]). The use of inferences to make evaluations in the form of judgments and generalizations about people who are not there to defend themselves is here used as a tool to portray someone in a negative way.

The way many of the inferences are used in *The Other Woman* is as an indirect way to insult the person they are speaking of. The female characters, Emilia and Carolyn, both feel threatened by each other, at the same time as they are trying to maintain a close relationship to a person they love, viz. Jack. Their use of inferences in this case might be their way of expressing dislike, at the same time that they do not want to be too explicit, by using e.g. identification. In this way, they are avoiding openly constructing a male gender identity, which can be characterized by direct criticism and agonism (see 2.1.5 and 2.3.1), at the same time as they state their negative opinions about the other person. A reason for this indirectness can be that both Emilia and Carolyn do not want to weaken the bonds of connection to Jack, whom they both know will be defensive of the other woman. This is in compliance with

female patterns of communication, where maintaining a sense of connection with the other speaker can be as important as what is being said (see 2.3.1).

In *American Beauty* the results were the opposite, with the male character producing almost twice as many inferences as the female character.

- [39] Carolyn: Your father and I was just discussing his day at work, why don't you tell our daughter about it honey
Lester: Janie, today I quit my job, and then I told my boss to go fuck himself and then I blackmailed him for almost 60 000 dollars, pass the asparagus
Carolyn: Your father seems to think this kind of behavior is something to be proud of
Lester: And your mother seems to prefer that I go through life like a fucking prisoner while she keeps my dick in a mason jar under the sink
Carolyn: How dare you speak to me in that way in front of her! [...]
(*American Beauty*, scene 6)

Both inferences here are used to insult the other speaker, the same as in *The Other Woman*. In this case, the female character initiates the inference and it is based on the descriptive statement Lester gives their daughter of how he quit his job. He has not said that he is proud of the way he did it, but she infers that from the manner in which he describes it. The male character, Lester, follows up with another inference expressing his negative view of his wife. Whether or not this is instigated by the female character's initial use of inference is hard to say, but the pattern resembles that of identification as initiation (see 4.1.1), where the use of identification often resulted in a response of the same form by the other speaker. Lester's use of inference (see [39]) is metaphorical in the sense that it paints a brutal picture of the way he feels their marriage is sexually unfulfilling to him, and it is consistent with the patterns of male communication (see 2.3.1 and 2.3.3). Lester responds with a statement similar in form and even more insulting than the initial inference by the female character and it can be seen as a form of ritual combat in the interaction. Carolyn's reply to his inference shows that she takes it personally and is offended by his inference. Example [22] shows the same pattern as example [39]. These are examples of how differing styles of communication can lead to further conflict.

In general there was a pattern of inferences made often being the reason for the conflict sparked, once again establishing that inferences are indeed conducive to conflict. Many inferences found in the data were statements from which debates were started and the scenes analyzed usually only contained two characters. The fact that this often sparked arguments and disagreement shows how little ground an inference can have in real life.

Inferences also often occurred in scenes where conflict was already sparked to make accusations about the nature of the other speaker or about life in general (see example [39], [21], [22], [23] and [26]).

4.2.5.2 Descriptions

The distribution of **descriptions** (see 4.1.5.2) was almost equal between the sexes in all five movies analyzed, with only a slight male majority in all of them. Overall, the male characters produced 31 tokens and the female characters 23.

Hope Springs had the highest number of occurrences of descriptions. There were, however, no significant sex differences. A reason for *Hope Springs*'s high number of descriptions is most likely that most of the scenes investigated also include their counselor. In many incidents, he forces their interaction from an abstract level with inferences to a more descriptive, tangible level (see [29]).

The overall high occurrence of descriptions in the data can be explained by that descriptions often followed linguistic characteristics conducive to conflict, such as inferences, generalizations, bipolarity, etc. This is to be expected considering that descriptions of non-verbal reality lower the level of abstraction (see 2.2.2.5), thus making language more likely to reflect the complexity of situations. The use of descriptions in comparison to e.g. inferences and generalizations can prevent conflict from escalating, and this was observed in multiple parts of the data. Scene 5 in *Hope Springs* is an example of a situation where conflict is generated by generalizations made by the male character: “[...] you say whatever thing because somebody like you is dragging it out of them, and then you can't take it back, there are things in life that you don't say for a reason”. His generalizations are followed up by an inference by the female character: “[...] I wanna know... It's worse not knowing when there are things you're holding back, that you don't wanna say because you think I'm too fragile or whatever you...”. The conflict, however, does not escalate in the course of the scene, because the counselor directs their conversation from an abstract level to a more descriptive one. When the characters are forced to contribute specific examples instead of providing generalizations, they are moving towards an extensional orientation (see 2.2.1.3).

Providing examples is related to extensional definitions, which are operational definitions where the level of abstraction is low in that it refers to tangible things, states, activities, etc. The general pattern of the data was that sequences of descriptions normally followed linguistic characteristics conducive to conflict, such as generalizations, bipolarity and inferences. Both the female and male characters usually contributed to the descriptive

sections that followed, and this is most likely the reason for the almost equal distribution of descriptions between the two sexes.

One interesting thing about the occurrences of descriptions, however, is who initiates the sequences of descriptions after an occurrence of a linguistic characteristic conducive to conflict. To investigate this further, only the first token of description, viz. the person initiating the descriptive sequence, per new scene or per new conversational topic was counted. Whereas the female characters had 23 tokens of descriptions in total, they were responsible for twelve initiated descriptions. The male characters, with a majority of 31 tokens, however, only initiated descriptive sequences in seven instances. This shows a majority of almost twice as many female occurrences as male occurrences of initiated descriptive sequences. From this one can see a pattern of the female characters practicing an extensional orientation when it comes to bringing down the level of abstraction to a larger degree than the male characters, thus contributing to use language in a manner less conducive to conflict. The initiation of descriptive sequences might be initiated by the female characters more frequently than the male characters because descriptions make language more accurately reflective of non-verbal reality than e.g. the use of inferences. For women, opposition in interaction is something that can potentially weaken the bonds of connection to the person (see 2.3.1). This might explain why the female characters to a larger degree than the male characters initiated the use of descriptions.

In view of the results obtained one can say that hypothesis e) has been refuted. All in all, the female characters produced slightly more inferences than the male characters, while the male characters had more descriptions than the female ones, viz. a tendency opposite to what had been hypothesized.

5 Conclusion

5.1 Conclusions drawn from investigation

All five hypotheses stated that the male characters produce more of the linguistic characteristics conducive to conflict than the female characters. Adding up the results, excluding the occurrences of descriptions, the total number of occurrences for all five characteristics for the female and the male characters was 82 and 104 respectively. This shows that the male characters overall produced linguistic characteristics conducive to conflict more frequently than the female characters.

The hypotheses about the use of identification, the passive voice and generalizations were corroborated in that the male characters produced more tokens than the female ones. Despite this, one has to take into account that one person's role could be the reason for the many occurrences of one linguistic characteristic because of e.g. the part he/she was playing, and thus be a determining factor in the results (cf. Harry's use of generalizations in *When Harry Met Sally*). Also the results from the use of the passive voice are subject to doubt. The three occurrences were all produced by the male characters. They were, however, spread out through the movies, so there was only one occurrence per movie. This means that it can be a coincidence as well as it can be indicative of a pattern.

The hypothesis of bipolarity was refuted, with the male characters producing only three more occurrences than the females. Both males and females displayed bipolarity in their language and it was often used to counteract someone's statement. There was a tendency of bipolarities used in different ways by the female and the male characters. Females often used it to polarize situations, to make statements and to convey metamessages. Males often used it as a tool in ritual combat in interaction.

Hypothesis e) regarding the use of inferences and descriptions was refuted in light of the data analyzed. The numbers show a pattern opposite to what was hypothesized, viz. that female characters inferred more often than the males, and the male characters used more descriptions than the females. There was, however, an interesting pattern of female characters initiating descriptive sequences almost twice as often as the male characters.

All in all, the conclusion is that the male characters showed a tendency to use more linguistic characteristics conducive to conflict than the female ones. Considering the small amount of data, however, these tendencies are not necessarily indicative of a pattern of sex differences, but might be explained by other factors, such as the role of the character and complementary schismogenesis.

5.2 General observations

There were several interesting patterns noticed throughout the analysis apart from the quantitative sex differences.

Complementary schismogenesis, in this case meaning that one person's initiated use of a linguistic characteristic conducive to conflict induced use of the same characteristic by the other person, kept recurring throughout the data. If e.g. the male character used either the 'is of identity' or the 'is of predication' about the female character in the scene, this would usually lead to the same linguistic characteristic being used by the female character in return. This is also the reason why I chose to distinguish between identification as initiation and identification as response. Complementary schismogenesis was particularly frequent with the use of identification, inferences and descriptions.

When it came to the use of generalizations, men and women seemed to have different goals with using generalizations. Men often used them as a linguistic tool to create opposition in interaction, which is a known component of the male pattern of communication. Women often used it as an exaggeration to convey metamesages to the person they were speaking with, which was usually their partner. This is also a known feature of female communication patterns. Their differences in speaking and also receiving information often ended in misunderstanding and arguments.

There also seemed to be a difference as to how men and women perceived the nuanced information given through modified generalizations. Males seemed to focus on the information given in the modified generalization and interpret it as an absolute generalization. Women, on the other hand, seemed to pick up on the modification in the generalization and would either change the topic and perpetuate the conflict or the conflict would subside. There were, however, few occurrences of modified generalizations, so the validity of this tendency might be questioned.

It might be added that even though there were few clear sex differences when it came to whether linguistic characteristics were used or not, one could see conventional gender patterns constructed in the way these characteristics were used and received. The female pattern of rapport-talk and using language to convey metamesages was often reflected in their use of bipolarity, absolute generalizations and initiating descriptive sequences. The male pattern of report-talk and viewing interaction as an arena potential of climbing a social hierarchy was reflected in their use of bipolarity and absolute generalizations as a means of showing opposition to the other speaker.

A last note is that, even though there was not found as many linguistic characteristics conducive to conflict as expected, conflict was often perpetuated by other factors than linguistic ones. Expressing opinions in raised voices, in a derogatory manner or certain looks were also ways of which conflict could arise or be perpetuated. Example [9] in 4.1.2 shows the male and female character disputing the exercise they have been given by their couples' counselor. The male character does not use any of the five linguistic characteristics conducive to conflict, but he voices his opinion with a raised voice, clearly showing that he is not satisfied with the situation. The female character's response is 'ooooohh', said in a manner indicating exasperation towards something she perceives to be an exaggeration. The man's use of a raised voice shows, in this case, opposition towards the situation and resulted in the perpetuation of the conflict.

5.3 Self-critique and further research

Firstly, the theory chapter scratches only the surface of the large fields of language and gender, language and conflict and studies done on language, gender and conflict. A selection of what I thought to be most relevant was done, but I am aware that central works and theorists may have been left out. The time scope, however, made it necessary to limit the theory to central and available sources. This could result in something essential being left out. There might also be research investigating the same topic as this thesis, but I have not been able to find any.

Secondly, the data amount, with roughly 37 minutes of mixed-sex interaction analyzed, was initially supposed to be larger. It was, however, reduced throughout the process because of trouble finding relevant data. Many scenes initially included in the preliminary selection process were excluded in the course of the analysis because of lack of relevant linguistic characteristics. A larger data amount would most likely have resulted in a higher number of occurrences of linguistic characteristics conducive to conflict and would hopefully show a clearer pattern than the numbers found in this thesis. Even though many of the results had a close to equal distribution between the female and male characters, one could see tendencies to one of the sexes producing more occurrence of characteristics conducive to conflict than the other. A larger amount of data would perhaps show more generalizable results as to whether one of the sexes used more characteristics conducive to conflict than the other.

Thirdly, the selection of data is influenced by myself, the researcher. The scenes constituting conflict talk are selected on the basis of the definition of conflict situations, which

is talk involving disputes of some sort, disagreement and talk where there are arguments of the nature of someone or something, often performed with raised voices in an aggressive manner. This is a very wide definition without concrete indications of when to include or exclude relevant scenes. It follows that, even though all the scenes analyzed contain clear cases of conflict talk, this is still in the eyes of the researcher. Intuition often plays a role in selecting data and not least in the qualitative interpretation of the data itself, and also has in this case.

Deciding which cases were actually occurrences of linguistic characteristics was a challenge at times as well, and the ones included and excluded are dependent on the researcher's interpretation. The following example shows an occurrence not included in the analysis because of uncertainty of whether it is valid or not:

Lester: Don't interrupt me, honey... And another thing, from now on we are to alternate our dinner music, cause frankly, and I don't think I'm alone here, I am really tired of this Laurence Welch shit.

(American Beauty, scene 6)

Lester's comment could be an occurrence of identification. It is a negative evaluation of his wife's music, which he refers to as 'this Laurence Welch shit'. It is not clear, however, whether this can be interpreted as an indirect insult of his wife. Because I wished to be consequent about the nature of the occurrences included in the analysis, this example is not included as an occurrence of identification. Decisions like these can have resulted in occurrences being excluded when they should have been included in the analysis.

One issue that sparked my interest during the process of analyzing was that the female characters initiated descriptive sequences after a linguistic characteristic conducive to conflict was produced by the other speaker. This appears central to me because this prevented conflict from escalating in many incidents, and reflects an awareness of women when it comes to what kind of language use is more accurate and more likely to reflect non-verbal reality. This merits further study, perhaps with a larger amount and a different kind of data.

Lastly, I would like to mention my initial plan of analysis which proved to be difficult to conduct considering the size and time scope of the thesis. The goal was to investigate and compare both same-sex and mixed-sex conversation to find out whether any of the sexes adapted their pattern of communication when it came to linguistic characteristics conducive to conflict in same-sex or mixed-sex conversation. This would, however, be a more extensive study and it would require larger amounts of data.

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Movies

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