Boy and Girl Talk
A sociolinguistic study of international high school students’ turn-taking patterns from a gender perspective

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Abstract

The aspect of gender and language has been thoroughly studied by sociolinguists. Research has however mainly focused on adults. This study investigates whether the concepts of male competitiveness and female cooperation are valid among Swedish high school students and if boys and girls use different turn-taking strategies when engaging in a conversation.

Eight high school students participated in a conversation which was recorded. The topic, the justification for the existence of Systembolaget, which is a government run off-license, was chosen as it is a controversial subject on which young people have diversified opinions.

Hedges, minimal responses, tag questions, interruptions and overlaps were categories used as parameters to quantify how cooperative or competitive the participants were. Categories were chosen as other sociolinguists have found that these are areas where men and women use language differently.

The behaviours of the participants were also connected to Grice’s conversational maxims. The maxims serve as an explanation as to how turn-taking and turn-taking order took place in the recorded interaction.

The concept of female cooperation and male competitiveness proved to be ambiguous, as the girls adopted cooperative strategies, such as hedges and minimal responses, as well as a more competitive strategy by using far more overlaps and interruptions than the participating boys did.
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1. Introduction

Men and women are said to talk differently and this has engaged several linguists who have studied how men and women use language. Several studies have been carried out on the topic. Trudgill (2000) refers to a case from the West Indies where arriving Europeans discovered that the male and female population used different vocabulary even though they spoke the same language. This phenomenon which can be explained as a result of two language groups melting together, still evoked some interesting thoughts regarding if there are separate male and female languages (Trudgill 2000: 65f).

Lakoff’s (1975) publication *Language and Woman’s Place* became the starting point of a whole new sub-discipline within linguistics where women’s and men’s use of language and the connection to the societal hierarchy is studied (Coates 2004: 5).

Over the course of time, many generalizations about men, women and language have been made. Women are said to talk more and to engage in what is referred to as ‘empty talk’, implying it lacks substance. Men are said to speak less than women, but on the other hand only talk when having something important to say (Coates 2004: 3). Women are believed to use less swear words and in general to use the standard or ‘prestigious’ forms of language, whereas men use more swear words and aim for the less ‘prestigious’ varieties of language as a way of reproducing masculinity (Coates 2004: 52).

1.1 Aim

Most of the research carried out on conversational behaviour connected to gender theories, focuses on adults. This paper will use the theories of conversation analysis and gender, and apply them to high school students. The aim is to investigate whether patterns of male dominance and female cooperation are as evident among young adults as researchers have proved them to be among adults. The findings will be related to existing gender-based conversation theories and Grice’s (1975) conversational maxims.

1.2 Research questions

This essay aims to consider whether the ideas of female cooperation and male competitiveness in conversations are valid among high school students. It also aims to investigate whether male and female high school students use different conversational strategies when participating in a conversation.
1.3 Discourse analysis / Conversation analysis

Discourse analysis can be described as the study of interaction and has been influenced by several different academic disciplines, including philosophy, sociology, sociolinguistics, conversation analysis, traditional linguistics, ethnography and anthropology (Coulthard 1985: 1ff). Discourse analysis as a sub-discipline of linguistics developed as a method of studying spoken language and texts that were longer than one single sentence or a clause (Pomeranz et al in Van Dijk et al 1998: 66).

As feminism and other critical theories grew more and more popular, the interest in the power of words emerged as an important field within discourse and conversation analysis. Researchers interested in these areas started to study how power is distributed and how language is used to maintain and reproduce societal power structures and hierarchies (ibid 1998: 66). An example of this is the branch of conversation analysis which focuses on how men and women use language in conversational interaction.

In the 1950s Firth (1957), inspired by social anthropological approaches to language encouraged linguists to study human conversation as he thought it gave a true picture of language and how language works in reality. The study of conversations makes us more aware of the actual use of language in communicative situations (Firth in Coulthard 1985: 1).

There have been early problems defining ‘discourse’ regarding whether it should refer to spoken texts only or if written texts also should be considered discourse material. This paper will focus solely on spoken texts and adopts Coulthard’s (1985) position in making a clear distinction between spoken discourse and written texts. Not all researchers share this view however and claim that written texts also can be considered discourse material (Coulthard 1985: 3).

Conversation analysis, considered to be one of the major fields within discourse analysis, has its roots in sociology, which is natural considering the sociological background of its early pioneers. It started out as a way of studying spoken conversation by Sacks (1972) and his followers (Pomeranz et al in Van Dijk et al 1998: 64).

1.3.1 Sacks and conversation analysis

Sacks developed a model of conversation analysis which was based on his observations obtained from a suicide prevention centre where he worked. What fascinated Sacks was the organization of the phone conversations to the centre, and how the people who called the centre referred to themselves and to the people around them. He found that even though the callers could choose from various labels, such as ‘socialist’, ‘Latino’ or ‘wife’ they just referred to the people around them as friends and relatives. These references were reproduced by the staff at the centre who asked callers about friends and family. Sacks saw this as proof of the way we use language and how we use words and expressions from different categories to create order in our lives. He also found that conversations are structured in different sequences to make the conversation flow smoothly and in order to make the participants feel at ease (Pomeranz et al in Van Dijk et al 1998: 68). One method of assuring that participants felt at ease in an interaction was to respect the turn-taking norms which will be explained in detail in the coming chapters.

Conversation analysis has been questioned since we use different conversational styles depending on the situation and context. In classrooms, courts and other more formal contexts the
conversational style we use there cannot be compared to the style we use when among friends and in other relaxed contexts. An example of this is brought up by Holmes (2001) in which she compares how the same message is presented in three different ways depending on the relationship between the participants, with respect to power and social status and also depending on the context (Holmes 2001: 223). In a courtroom, for example, the style is more strict than among friends and this also influences the conversational patterns. In a formal context rule-breaking behaviours, such as interruptions and overlaps, are less likely to occur. (Holmes 2001: 234f).

However, the majority of conversation analysts study formal, as well as informal language, and Pomeranz and Fehr (1998) claim that there is no reason for making distinctions between these two, since they both are integral parts of human language. The difference is that we use different varieties in different contexts (Pomeranz et al in Van Dijk et al 1998: 64).

Conversation analysis has been misinterpreted because some researchers have maintained that the only way to analyse natural language is to study unscripted, spoken interactions. Equally important are conversational strategies such as pauses, interruptions and gaps between conversational turns (Pomeranz et al in Van Dijk et al 1998: 65). This essay will show how these conversational strategies are used by international high school students in Sweden. It will focus on the turn-taking strategies and analyse how these strategies are connected to theories of language and gender.
1.4 Conversational norms

When engaged in a conversation the participants do not, in general, keep quiet and wait for their
turn to speak. In an ideal world, participants in an interaction would always let the current speaker
finish his or her turn before taking their own turn. Much of spoken communication is however full
of interruptions and overlaps; speakers are in other words not likely to stick to conversational norms.

Sacks, Schlegoff and Jefferson have adopted a sociological perspective on language in laying the
foundation for conversation analysis. According to Coulthard there is one rule in conversations, at
least in the western part of the world, which says that “at least and not more than one party talks at
a time” (Coulthard 1985: 59).

1.4.1 Turn-taking

Conversations are not random interactions, but are organized on the basis of a system of norms.
These norms govern when a participant has the right to talk and for how long a participant has the
right to retain the conversational floor (Richards et al 2001: 141). These norms are subconsciously
picked up by children and are considered part of the social codes that help speakers to function
properly in conversations. These norms prevent conversations from turning into chaos (Coates 2004:
111).

All cultures have different turn-taking norms which govern when it is appropriate to talk, how long
a speaker is allowed to keep the conversational floor and how often the same speaker is able to take
a new turn (Coulthard 1985: 55).

1.4.2 Different turn-taking cultures

Coulthard gives an example of how Russian children are encouraged to talk when their families
have guests, whereas French children are expected to be silent and only talk when being spoken to.
These conversational norms and expectations are also evident when it comes to the two different
genders. In some cultures men are expected to talk all the time and women should remain silent.
The situation can also be the opposite (Coulthard 1985: 55).

Turn-taking norms are different in different cultures concerning interruptions, simultaneous speech,
pauses between turns and the use of minimal responses. In intercultural meetings, where people
from different conversational cultures interact, this can become strange as participants might break
their fellow interactants’ conversational rules without being aware of it. Trompenaars (1993) has
identified three different turn-taking patterns or norm systems acknowledged by linguists:

*The **Anglo** style; which is used in the western part of the world. It demands the speaker to take
turns, to wait for his or her turn without interrupting or pausing for too long. Silence should be
avoided as it makes the participants feel uncomfortable (Trompenaars cited in FitzGerald 2003:
111f).

*The **Oriental** style also expects its participants to take turns, but participants take long pauses
between the turns as a way of showing respect to the previous speaker. The longer pauses indicate
that what the previous talker said is being considered and thought about (ibid 2003: 111f).

*The **Latin** style is different from the Oriental and Anglo styles as this style pays no attention to
rules when it comes to turn-taking. Instead overlaps and interruptions are frequent phenomena.
These are seen as proof of the participants’ engagement in the conversation and that they pay
attention to and are interested in what other participants say (ibid 2003: 111f).
Similarly, Tannen (1984) has identified a model where she measures what she refers to as ‘high involvement style’ and ‘high considerateness style’. The first style looks at speed of speech, interruptions, overlaps and simultaneous talk as a way of showing support to the current speaker. Overlapping does not interrupt the current speaker, who continues for as long as he or she wants. However, the speaker has to be prepared to have several people talking simultaneously. Simultaneous speech, to overlap or to interrupt another speaker is not considered rude or as norm-breaking. Instead it is seen as a way of showing interest in what speaker has to say, and the current speaker has no obligation to let other participants into the conversation (Tannen cited in FitzGerald 2003: 111f).

As a contrast to the ‘high involvement style’ Tannen has identified ‘the high considerateness style’ which focuses on slower talk and a very clear turn-taking system. Overlapping is not seen as proof of engaged participants; instead all kinds of interruptions are considered rude and rule-breaking (ibid 2003: 111f). An example from Coulthard (1985) provides an explanation to how overlaps can work in a conversation:

AGNES: That’s about all,
GUY: What else.
GUY: The hat,
(0,5)
AGNES: En the hat

(Coulthard 1985: 63).

When someone starts to talk, the other participants are silent and wait for the turn (ibid 1985: 63). This corresponds very well to Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson’s (1974) description of how people in the western world are governed by a strict turn-taking system, where the main rule is one speaker at a time (Sacks et al cited in Richards et al 2001: 141). This model which has strong connections to Trompenaars’ Anglo style is sometimes referred to as ‘no gap and no overlap theory’ as it expects the participants to stick to the conversational rules. As a result, overlaps and interruptions are somewhat rare and when they occur, they are seen as violations of the norms (Coates 2004: 112). Pauses and overlaps will occur naturally in any spoken interaction, but the norm is to keep these as short and non-frequent as possible. According to Coulthard this is a norm which is maintained by the speakers themselves and previous research has shown that participants are very careful to avoid pauses and overlaps. When these occur, speakers are very eager to repair the conversational damage (Coulthard 1985: 59f).

1.4.3 How to take conversational turns

Taking conversational turns is not something that happens just randomly; instead researchers have shown that speakers stick to different tactics and strategies in order to be able to take the turn in a conversation. Sacks (MS) has identified three different ways for the current speaker to control the coming turn:

1. The current speaker can select the next speaker by naming him or her.
2. The current speaker can constrain the next utterance without selecting the next speaker.
3. The current speaker can decide to leave the floor open by not selecting the next speaker and to let the other participants continue the conversation by selecting themselves.
The system with these three options is strictly hierarchic. Option one is always chosen before going on to the second option. The second option is chosen before moving on to alternative three. When a speaker has not been selected for the turn and regardless of this takes the floor, Sacks identified that the right of the speaker originally selected, in most cases was preserved and that the selected person would take the next turn (Sacks cited in Coulthard 1985: 60).

Sacks’ theories provide an explanation as to how a speaker takes the floor by being appointed by the current speaker or by taking the floor when there is a pause in the interaction. However, Sacks gives no explanation as to how a speaker actually knows when to take a conversational turn. According to Sacks, speakers are not really interested in whether the current speaker has finished with what he or she wanted to say. The reason for this is that it is virtually impossible to know (Fairclough 1995: 47). Instead the next speaker is interested in when the current speaker is most likely to finish his or her turn (Coulthard 1985: 61). Speaker changes are most common at the end of sentences and when these occur there are clear norms on how these should take place.

If the next speaker has been appointed by the current speaker, he or she will take the floor at the end of the current speaker’s utterance. If no speaker has been appointed, any speaker is free to take the floor. This means that a speaker is vulnerable, so to speak, at the end of each sentence even if he or she has chosen the next speaker or not. Coulthard implies that each turn in a conversation is valued and that most turns in a conversation only consist of single sentences, which means that the participants have to be on their guard throughout the conversation. In order to have the possibility to self-appoint, the participants need to take the turn as soon as the current speaker reaches his or her completion. That means that the next speaker can take the floor as soon as the next speaker is believed to have finished, even if that was not the case (Sacks cited in Coulthard 1985: 61f).

Jefferson (1973) writes that participants in a conversation are capable of selecting the precise moment when to start talking and “no later than the exact appropriate moment” (Jefferson cited in Coulthard 1985: 62). Regardless of situations like these, overlaps occur in conversations, especially when there are self-selection processes occurring in the conversation (see the three different alternatives Sacks suggested). This scenario is most likely to occur when the current speaker has not selected the next speaker and a participant who has self-selected him- or herself as the next speaker identifies a possible completion and overlaps with the current speaker, who had intended to keep the conversational floor. Another scenario is that the speaker takes the floor from somebody who had appointed him- or herself the next speaker. When this occurs the unspoken rule says that the person who started to speak first has the right to continue (Coulthard 1985: 62f).

Sometimes silence occurs after a conversational turn; in general in western societies, there is low tolerance of silence between turns. Schegloff and Sacks (1973) found that when silence occurs, the previous speaker is likely to use a post completor. These can be questions, but also a repetition of what was just said. Participants who do not want to take the next turn can then use minimal responses such as ‘mmm’ or ‘erm’ and thereby incorporate the silence into their turn (Schegloff et al cited in Coulthard 1985: 63).

A person, who has the current turn and wishes to keep it has several strategies in order to prolong his or her turn. The incompletion marker is one way; by starting utterances with subordinators such as ‘if’ or ‘since’ the other participants engaged in the interaction, are aware that there will be at least two clauses before there is a possible finish and an opportunity to take the floor (ibid 1985: 63).

The current speaker can also use the strategy of starting an utterance with a clause connector such as ‘but’ or ‘however’. These turn potentially completed turns into incomplete turns. This strategy is
called an *utterance incompletor.* This strategy is not considered fair as it prevents self-appointed speakers from taking the floor and interruptions and overlaps are likely to occur at this stage. Ferguson (1975) found that 28 per cent of interruptions occurred after conjunctions in recorded material he studied (Ferguson cited in Coulthard 1985: 64). As Coulthard claims, none of these strategies are guarantees that the speaker is actually able to keep the floor, but it forces the other participants to decide if they want to interrupt and break the turn-taking norms or not. A speaker who wants to take a turn but cannot find the right time, has the possibility of simply breaking in. This might be considered rude by the fellow participants (Coulthard 1985: 65).

Not all participants in a conversation are willing to take the floor. A person who wants to remain silent, but is offered the turn can use the strategy of simply keeping silent until someone else takes the turn. There is also the possibility of using a minimal response to show engagement in the conversation (Coulthard 1985: 65).

### 1.5 Conversational maxims

The conversational maxims aim to explain the connection between what is said and how other participants in a conversation understand what has been said. When engaged in a spoken interaction what is said sometimes has to be analysed in hindsight. Grice (1975) gives an example of this in Coulthard (1985), where A and B are talking about C in their conversation. In the conversation B says *Oh quite well, I think; he likes his colleagues, and he hasn’t been to prison yet* (Grice cited in Coulthard 1985: 30f). What B does is that he or she assumes that A knows something about C which A might know something about. There are two possibilities here: that A knows what B is talking about, or that A does not know what B is talking about. Both alternatives influence how the conversation is understood by the two participants.

*Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.*

(Grice cited in Coulthard 1985: 31).

The conversational maxims are tied to Grice’s cooperative principle which states that participants in a conversation expect the other participants to only contribute with what is required at that stage and to stick to the topic or the direction of the talk exchange.

Grice’s cooperative principle covers four different maxims:

1. **Relation:** be relevant
2. **Quality:**
   a) do not say what you believe to be false
   b) do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence
3. **Quantity:**
   a) make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange)
4. **Manner:**
   a) avoid obscurity of expression
   b) avoid ambiguity

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1Electronic source, *LinguaLinks*
c) be brief
    d) be orderly (Coulthard 1985: 31).

These maxims are not to be seen as descriptive rules on exactly what a conversational utterance should be like. Violations of the maxims can occur if a participant for example decides to lie or to keep information from the other participants. There is also a possibility of being stuck between two or more maxims and where one has to violate them. Coulthard gives an example of someone who has to be as specific as possible and still faces the maxim where one is expected to only say things when having solid proof. When the maxims are violated they provide a foundation for the other participants to infer. This can be done by the participants saying ‘Be relevant’ or by asking the current speaker to not change the topic. This requires a two-stage process; first someone needs to react to the violation of the conversational maxim and then infer (Coulthard 1985: 31f).
1.6 Gender and conversational behaviour

1.6.1 Definition of gender

The term ‘gender’ is central to this study as the aim is to investigate the conversational behaviours of high school students from a gender perspective. Coates’ (2004) definition of ‘gender’ will be adopted in this study. The term ‘sex’ will be referred to as the biological distinction between boys and girls. ‘Gender’ refers to the socially constructed categories connected to the two sexes (Coates 2004: 4). ‘Feminine’ and ‘masculine’ are tied to the concept of the two genders and how we expect men and women to behave when it comes to actions as, well as in conversations.

1.6.2 Theories on language and gender

Several different linguistic perspectives and approaches have been applied to the study of language and gender. The social constructionist approach which Zimmerman and West (1987) adopted claims that participants are not specifically a gender. However, they way participants behave in spoken interaction contribute to reproducing gender roles. In the way participants use language, they “are doing gender” (Zimmerman et al cited in Coates 2004: 6).

The difference approach claims that women and men belong to different cultural subcultures and that should serve as an explanation to why men and women use language in such different ways. Critics of this approach point out that most people are likely to interact with members of the opposite sex on a regular basis, and that women are not always victims of linguistic oppression (Coates 2004: 6).

The deficit approach was one the first attempts to study language from a gender perspective. This approach was and still is, even though less and less linguists confess to this approach, heavily influenced by Lakoff (1975). Lakoff introduced the idea of ‘Women’s language’, characterized by hedges and tag question, which Lakoff regarded as weak and deficient as it lacks ‘power’ (Lakoff cited in Coates 2004: 6).

The dominance approach is also one of the earlier perspectives on linguistic research from a gender perspective. It sees women’s way of using language and conversational behaviour as a natural result of the societal oppression against women. Men’s power and women’s subordination are reproduced in language according to researchers who support this approach (Coates 2004: 6).

According to Coates the different approaches, with the exception of the deficit perspective, are still thriving and contributing to the gender-based research on language (Coates 2004: 7).

In the early 1970s, discourse and conversation analysts became more and more interested in how societal power structures and hierarchies influenced language, and how language reproduced structures and hierarchies in society. This interest in gender and language awoke at the same time as feminism and other critical theories grew stronger in other academic disciplines. Research on male and female language thereby became a primary focus for many linguists (West et al in Van Dijk et al 1998: 127).

Lakoff (1973, 1975) who introduced the concept of ‘Women’s language’, was one of the pioneers on the field. Women’s language was considered different from men’s language in that it was less direct, less confrontational and more hesitant (Lakoff cited in West et al in Van Dijk et al 1998: 127). Lakoff’s theory was that women use a language which helps to reproduce their status as
subordinate to men. The choice of language used, as well as how men speak about women, contribute to women’s status in society. Among the linguistic features Lakoff (1975) identified as specific to women’s language were hedges and fillers such as you see, well, you know, kind of, like. The avoidance of taboo words was also a trait Lakoff claimed was typical of the way women use language. Instead of using swear words women, according to Lakoff, tend to use expressions like my goodness, which are considered more gentle. Intensifiers such as so much and just, and descriptions of precise colours, for example magenta or aquamarine were also much more likely to be used by women. Tag questions which are used to express uncertainty as well as hypercorrect and superpolite forms were also characteristic of how women use language (Lakoff cited in Holmes 2001: 284ff). According to Lakoff (1975) women use hedges and other linguistic features, that can express uncertainty or lack of confidence, and sometimes intensifiers such as so much to make sure that other people take them seriously. If they don’t use these intensifiers, Lakoff claims, women fear that they will not be taken seriously (Lakoff cited in Holmes 2001: 287).

Lakoff’s theories were heavily criticized by other linguists for making sweeping generalisations about women and their way of using language as she had only studied white middle-class women. Although this is a serious criticism, Lakoff’s findings have been very influential all the same, mainly because fellow researchers only studied male language as it was considered the norm (West et al in Van Dijk et al 1998: 127f). This work on women’s language was influential in that it was the first time male language was not the norm and Lakoff’s work influenced other linguists to look deeper into male and female language as two different categories.

1.6.3 Early research on male and female linguistic behaviour

The initial research on male and female language focused on differences in grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary. Early on, researchers such as Key (1975) among others, found that women were more likely to use intensifiers such as such, quite, sort of and so than men (Key cited in Van Dijk et al 1998: 128). Hirschman (1973) and Eble (1972) claimed that women were thought to use more fillers, for example sweetie, darling and honey (Hirschman, Eble cited in Van Dijk et al 1998: 128). The choice of which words and expressions to use was not to the only aspect of language that differentiated women from men. Labov (1972) and Trudgill (1975) found that women tended to use standard and ‘prestige’ pronunciation more often (Labov, Trudgill cited in Van Dijk et al 1998: 128).

The ambition of using prestige pronunciation and standard varieties is connected to the concepts of overt and covert prestige, which researchers have found are essential concepts of gender-based linguistic research. Covert prestige can be described as strategy for a speaker who is aware of their speech in that they will move towards less prestigious linguistic codes and varieties (Trudgill 2000: 74). Trudgill (1972, 1974) carried out a study in the city of Norwich in Eastern England where he investigated how men and women talked. He asked his participants to indicate if their everyday talk was to be considered Received Pronunciation (RP) or if it was closer to the Norwich pronunciation, considered a non-standard variety (Trudgill cited in Coates 2004: 62f). One of the words Trudgill made his participants say and read was the word tune which in a standard form is pronounced with a [j] as in [tjuːn] whereas the local non-standard pronunciation is [tuːn]. Trudgill divided his participants into two different groups; those who in more than 50 per cent of the times used standard pronunciation and the other group consisted of those who in less than 50 per cent of the times used the non-standard pronunciation. Trudgill’s result showed that a majority of the participants in his study were able to decide whether they used a standard pronunciation or not. In the group consisting of those who, in more than 50 per cent of the case used the standard pronunciation, 40 per cent of the participants in this group claimed that they used the non-standard pronunciation, even though the index scores showed this was not the case. 16 per cent of the
participants in this group claimed to use more standard pronunciation than was the case (Trudgill 2000: 76f).

What Trudgill (1972, 1974) found was that 68 per cent of the women were over-reporting, which indicates that they claimed to use the more ‘prestigious’ variety, closer to RP, whereas the index scores Trudgill used to measure their speech clearly showed that this was not the case. Only 22 per cent of the men were according to Trudgill over-reporters (Trudgill cited in Coates 2004: 62f). Trudgill also discovered that under-reporting was a much more common phenomenon among the men in his study. 50 per cent of the men in his study claimed to use more non-standard forms when Trudgill’s index scores revealed that they in fact were much closer to the standard form. In Trudgill’s study only 14 per cent of the women under-reported and thought that they used a less ‘prestigious’ form than they really did. Trudgill’s conclusion was that the women in his study and women in general, are more sensitive to linguistically ‘prestigious’ norms and are more aware of how standard forms are expected of women. Men under-report because it is connected to masculinity (Trudgill cited in Coates 2004: 63). Trudgill’s explanation as to why women in his study were over-reporters, whereas the men in general under-reported, was that society expects different things from men and women. ‘Better’ behaviour is expected from women. Men do not experience the same expectations to behave in a polite and ‘proper’ way, neither in their behaviour nor in conversations (Trudgill 2000:73). The men in Trudgill’s study were more concerned with being associated with the covert prestige and the women with the overt prestige (Trudgill 2000: 77).

Cheshire (1982) studied teenagers in Reading, England and their use of grammatical phenomena such as double negation and the use of expressions like ain’t. These phenomena and expressions are considered non-standard and Cheshire found that the vernacular, non-standard forms, were used much more frequently by the boys in her study. Their use of language was heavily connected to the concept of toughness and criminal behaviour such as fighting and stealing. Even though there were girls in Cheshire’s study who were just as tough and behaving ‘badly’ they tended to use grammatically correct language. Cheshire’s conclusion was that the aspect of gender was more important in this case than the aspect of class in how these girls used language (Cheshire cited in Holmes 2001: 164).

Different expectations on how women and men are to use language also influence the way men and women behave in conversations. This goes for same-sex groups, as well as for mixed-sex groups. The overt and covert prestiges are not isolated linguistic phenomena, but aspects of how gender roles are reproduced in human language.

1.6.4 Gender and conversations

When researchers have studied turn-taking strategies and other conversational behaviours among men and women, results have shown that women and men behave differently and use different strategies. Zimmerman and West (1975, 1983) studied conversational patterns in mixed-sex groups and they found that phenomena such as interruptions and overlaps were used very differently in conversations depending on the composition of the groups. Zimmerman and West studied spoken interactions which took place in same-sex as well as in mixed-sex groups. The mixed-sex groups consisted of one man and one woman, whereas the same-sex groups consisted of two men or two women (Zimmerman et al cited in Coates 2004: 113ff).

In the twenty-six same-sex groups that Zimmerman and West studied, they identified twenty-two overlaps and seven interruptions. However, in the eleven mixed groups, consisting of one man and one woman, they identified forty-eight interruptions and nine overlaps. What struck West and
Zimmerman was that the vast majority of interruptions in the mixed-sex groups, forty-six out of forty-eight interruptions, were made by men interrupting women. All nine overlaps were also identified as men overlapping their female partner. As these findings were unexpected, the results were further verified. However, the interruptions occurred in all conversations but one (ibid 2004: 113ff). Zimmerman and West’s results showed that in conversational groups consisting of men and women, men were more likely to violate women’s conversational rights and especially women’s rights to finish their turns. Zimmerman and West were not able to find a single case in their study where a woman violated a man’s conversational right. In the same-sex groups, however, there were incidents of overlaps and interruptions and where women were responsible for them (Zimmerman et al in Coates 2004: 115). These findings indicated that women, at least in Zimmerman and West’s study, were careful and aware not to violate men’s conversational rights, whereas the men did not care about women’s rights in conversations. Men were more likely to interrupt other men, but also women. Women, on the other hand, were not very likely to interrupt a man (Coates 2004: 115).

West and Zimmerman’s findings on interruptions were not coincidental as other researchers such as Leet-Pellegrini (1980) cited in Coates (2004: 115) and Gunnarsson (1997) cited in Coates (2004: 115) came to the same conclusions and thereby confirmed West and Zimmerman’s results.

1.6.5 Gender and conversational dominance

The gender hierarchy, in which women and also children are restricted to speak and are submissive in relation to men, is reflected in the way men and women behave in conversations (West, Zimmerman (1998) cited in Coates (2004: 115). This is evident in cases where women are considered to be of higher educational status for example. Coates (2004) illustrates this by giving an example of the female doctor who is much more likely to be interrupted by a male patient, even though she is supposed to ‘dominate’ the conversation by asking the patient questions. Woods (1989) saw the same pattern when investigating how women with high-status positions at their workplaces were more likely to be interrupted and violated conversationally by a male subordinate than to violate his conversational rights, even if that would be regarded more normal considering the hierarchy situation (Woods cited in Coates 2004: 115).

According to Coates, the use of interruptions works as a method for men to control topics in conversations. In a conversation which is held according to turn-taking norms, the participants decide on the topics discussed together. However, in mixed-sex groups men are more likely to choose the topic by using interruptions and overlaps as a way of controlling the conversation (Coates 2004: 116). Eakins and Eakins (1978, 1979) cited in Coates (2004: 117f) and Swacker (1979) cited in Coates (2004: 117f) found that in the public sphere men talk a great deal more and tend to dominate conversations. The public sphere includes television debates, seminars and panel discussions. In these cases, the strategy of interrupting works a way to control the discussion (Eakins et al, Swacker in cited Coates 2004: 117f).

In a study by Swacker (1975) men and women were asked to describe three pictures and Swacker found that men in average spent 13 minutes to describe one picture. The female subjects spent 3 minutes and 17 seconds respectively. Swacker’s findings which show that men are likely to talk more than women, found support among other researchers who had come to the same conclusion (Swacker cited in Coates 2004: 117f). Linguists have also studied television interviews and found that even in cases where the interviewers were two women and one man interviewing men, the male journalist managed to dominate the conversation and the women spoke less (Coates 2004: 117f).

Conversational dominance is not retained by taking the conversational floor and thereby breaking turn-taking norms only. Equally important are the non-cooperative strategies; these strategies are
mainly used in everyday, informal talk in the private sphere. Fishman (1980) recorded three American couples in order to study their everyday talk and saw patterns of different conversational behaviours. In Fishman’s study, women had the strategy of using the expression *you know* before and after pauses when they were waiting for some sort of response from their husbands. According to Fishman, this was seen as evidence that the turn-taking mechanism did not function properly and also that the men were not willing to participate in the interaction. *You know* was then used as a way to keep the conversation going and by using *you (know)* the women in the study showed that some sort of response from their husbands was expected as he had been addressed (Fishman cited in Coates 2004: 120).

DeFrancisco (1998) cited in Coates (2004: 121) studied seven married couples who were asked to record their everyday conversation for at least one week. Afterwards they were expected to comment on the recorded material. DeFrancisco’s results were similar to those of Fishman in that the male subjects in the study were the ones who broke the turn-taking norms and rules and thereby violated their wives’ conversational rights. This was the case in all of the recorded spoken interactions. The two categories where this was the most evident were those of ‘no response at all’ and delayed responses. Both of these show a lack of interest in the ongoing conversation and this is the same conclusion Sattel (1983) cited in Coates (2004: 121) came to. Sattel explained that silence or non-participation are methods for men to dominate and control conversations. These strategies are used by men in order to control spoken interaction not just in mixed-sex groups, but also in conversations with other men (DeFrancisco, Sattel cited in Coates 2004: 121). Silence is just as effective a method in violating somebody’s conversational right as interruptions, because it leaves the other participant in a powerless state conversationally. Silence is according to Coates frequently the result of a violation of turn-taking norms as silences tend to occur after interruptions, or when the same speakers has held the floor for too long. Zimmerman and West (1975) found that in single-sex conversations average silences lasted 1, 35 seconds, whereas silence in mixed-sex groups lasted longer; 3, 21 seconds (Zimmerman *et al* in Coates 2004: 122 f).

Minimal responses can also function as a strategy of controlling conversations and putting other conversational participants in an exposed position. Zimmerman and West (1975) found that delayed minimal responses were used by men in their recordings and that they were used as a way of dominating topics and conversations. In contrast to how women tend to use minimal responses, as a way of showing interest and engagement in spoken interaction, men’s use of delayed minimal responses means that the men take on a passive role. In the conversations West and Zimmerman recorded and analysed, the male subjects were the ones who used delayed minimal responses as a conversational strategy. That means that, unlike women who use minimal responses while the other part is talking, or when the current speaker just finished his or her turn, men used minimal responses after a pause. This indicated lack of engagement and interest (Zimmerman *et al* in Coates 2004: 123).

### 1.6.6 Single-sex groups and conversational strategies

As researchers have studied male and female conversational behaviour they have, as mentioned previously, identified different strategies to keep the spoken interaction going. In order to be able to compare how men and women behave in mixed-sex groups, knowledge about their behaviour in same-sex groups is essential.

In single-sex groups women use language as a way to show support and acknowledge each other; their conversational strategy is built on the concept of cooperation (Coates 1996: 133). Men tend to be far more competitive and are likely to ignore or disagree with other male speakers (Coates 2003: 133).
1.6.7 Men and competitive strategies

Men’s conversational style is characterised by the image of gladiatorial combat, battles and contests, where men use language as a way of competing with other men. In conversations Coates has looked at, men rarely talked about personal things; instead they discussed more ‘shallow’ subjects, such as Bob Dylan or the behaviour of today’s students. When men meet and talk to other men, the conversations tend to end up as monologues where one single speaker holds the turn for a long time. Unlike women who use language to support each other and share experiences, men tend to favour talking about things they know a great deal about. This is what Coates has identified as ‘playing the expert talk’. It seems that men accept that one speaker holds the floor for a very long time. Coates has also seen that minimal responses are used the same way women use them in mixed conversations; they function as a way of showing support to the current speaker. This is to be compared to the delayed minimal responses that men use in spoken interaction with women; then the minimal responses are used as a way of showing dominance and control (Coates 2004: 133f).

Holmes (2001) claims that the competitive style of men is also evident in that verbal abuse and insults are an integral part of men’s language in same-sex groups. The verbal sparring that she and other researchers have examined, seems to be an established part of men’s conversational style (Holmes 2001: 300).

Not all conversations where only men are involved end up as monologues, and Coates (2004) have identified something referred to as ‘rapid-fire turns’. These are characterised by short turns which are passed back and forth between the participants in the conversation (Coates 2004: 135). As an example of a rapid-fire turn, Coates gives the following example of a situation where two men try to outnumber one another:

Ray: crate!
Sam: case!
Ray: what?
Sam: they come in cases Ray not crates
Ray: oh same thing if you must be picky over every one thing
Sam: just shut your fucking head Ray!
Ray: don’t tell me to fuck off fuck (…)
Sam: I’ll come over and shut yo-
Jim: yeah I’ll have a crate of apples thanks (laughingly using a thick sounding voice)
Ray: no fuck off Jim
Jim: a dozen...
Dan: shitpicker! (amused)


The same conversation can be found in Holmes (2001: 300) but the participants in the conversation have different names. The extract shows how men use insults as a way of expressing solidarity and in order to maintain social relationships, even though some of the words may come across as harsh (Holmes 2001: 300). The ‘playing the expert’ feature is evident in the interaction as the whole conversation is about Sam playing the expert over Ray.
Conversational phenomena, such as interruptions and overlaps, that are common in interaction between men and women, are not common in all-male conversation as men tend to prefer a one-at-a-time model. Overlaps are seen as rule-breaking and the wrong way to ‘grab’ the conversational turn. Talbot (1992) reported that men can experience women’s more cooperative style as way of trying to take the floor even though women’s use of overlaps or minimal responses are used to confirm what the man just said (Talbot cited in Coates 2004: 137). Pilkington (1998) who studied four single-sex groups, consisting of two groups with women only and two groups with men only, came to the conclusion that male speech in all-male groups was confrontational in that men do not avoid disagreements, silence, long monologues and absence of verbal feedback (Pilkington cited in Coates 2004: 138).

1.6.8 Women and collaborative strategies

In conversations with other women, women are said to behave in a more collaborative way than men do. Conversations are used as a way of showing solidarity and support to their fellow female friends (Coates 2004: 126f). Aries (1976) and Nelson (1998) studied how women work in groups with other women and also in groups consisting of women and men and all-male groups. Aries found that in groups which consisted of men, power hierarchies were important and there was a clear leader and the rest of the people in the group remained rather passive. In groups consisting of women only, there was no struggle over leading the groups and Aries identified that there were less passive participants in all-female groups. She also saw how women used language as a way to create solidarity within the group, whereas she saw the opposite in groups consisting of men only (Aries cited in Coates 2004: 127). Nelson studied male graduate assistants who worked in jobs where most of their colleagues were women. Some of these men expressed the view that there was a very “warm and supportive” feeling in their workplace (Nelson cited in Coates 2004: 127).

Women use several strategies in order to express and create a feeling of solidarity and collaboration in spoken interaction with other women. The use of minimal responses is one; women use minimal responses to show that they pay attention and interest to / in what other speakers have to say. They also function as a way for women to accept the change of topic or to show that they have accepted the closure of a specific topic. Coates (2004) and Holmes (1995) identified how women placed their minimal responses perfectly to show that attention has been paid to what was just said (Holmes cited in Coates 2004: 128f). Men also do this in conversations with other men, but in spoken interaction with women, men use the strategy of delayed minimal responses instead (Coates 2004: 123f).

Women are not bothered with the power hierarchy in groups in the same way researchers have shown that men are. This is also reflected in women’s use of language. Hedges, which according to Lakoff express uncertainty, Coates identified as way for women to embed sensitive topics into the conversation (Coates 2004: 129). It is a way to save one’s face, in other words to be liked and admired by the other participants in the chat (Coates 2004: 105). Men do not have this problem as they have the right to be more upfront in their conversation, and do not need to think about face the same way women have to (Holmes 2001: 300).

In conversations with other men, all-male talk tends to end up as monologues and competitions where men try to be the expert on the topics discussed (Coates 2004: 134). All-women talk can be described as more ‘conversational’ in that more than one participant is allowed to speak at the same time. Edelsky (1993) studied women’s talk and named the simultaneous speech in women-only groups collaborative floor as the women not really competed to take the conversational floor, but rather talked simultaneously as a way of showing engagement (Edelsky cited in Coates 2004: 131).
Coates refers to the same phenomenon as *jam session conversations* because there are similarities to the way jazz musicians meet to improvise. When collaborative floors or jam session talks occur, the women involved in the interaction construct utterances and sentences together. What is characteristic of this type of talk is that it is open to all participants at the same time (Coates 2004: 131).

To summarize, women are said to use language to build and maintain relationships with the other participants regardless of their sex. Minimal responses and other linguistic features are used as a way of showing solidarity within the group. Groups consisting of women only, also proved to be more open for all participants and participants were rarely completely passive because everyone is invited to participate.
2. Methodology

The main material for this essay is a recorded conversation which took place in a classroom in a Swedish town. A recorded conversation was preferred as natural language is important in order to be able to analyse how boys and girls actually behave in conversations. The major disadvantage with recorded material is what Labov (1972) referred to as the observer's paradox. This is an important factor when recording spoken interaction. As the purpose of this essay is to find out how people talk when they are not being observed, it is important to think about the fact that the participants in the study are well aware that what they say is being recorded (Labov cited in Holmes 2001: 236). The observer’s paradox deals with the matter that participants in a study know that they are part of a scientific study and being recorded; this means that there is a risk of participants consciously or subconsciously changing their behaviour and / or language. The fact that the participant sees him- or herself as a scientific subject may lead to the results ending up ‘manipulated’ in that it does not really represent ‘real’ language. In a situation where somebody is interviewed and recorded by a stranger, it is very easy to use a more formal style and ‘proper’ pronunciation than if not recorded (Holmes 2001: 236). What Labov did to avoid the observer’s paradox from being too influential in his results, was that he constructed a model where he minimised the risk of participants being too conscious of the fact that he or she was a subject in a study. The most effective way to carry this through, was to ask subjects to tell him about life-threatening events in his or her life. That works as a way of trying to make sure that the person being recorded forgets about the recording for a while. Another part of this model was to let close friends and family of the person being recorded interrupt. This made the participant ‘forget’ the research situation and speak ‘naturally’ (Chambers 2001: 19).

Coates (2003) has in her studies of male and female language, been very much aware of the importance of established relationships among the participants in her recording sessions. This is a method to make sure that participants do not hold back, but act as normally as possible (Coates 2003: 7). This is something which was considered before conducting this study. The participants in this study have known each other for at least three years and they have seen one another in school every day. It is safe to say that the participants in this study have a well-established relationship.

2.1 Detailed procedure

In March 2009 an email was sent to the head teachers of three high schools in a Swedish town. These three schools were chosen because of the high percentage of international students, who study at these schools. The head teachers were asked to forward the email to the English teachers of the students in third grade. These students were attending their last term before leaving school. The reason for this initial email contact was to be approved to come and record students, which without permission from the head teacher, could be seen as unethical. Two of the head teachers responded and sent contact information to the teachers concerned. The teachers were sent an email and two teachers responded. One of the teachers did not reply to the following email in which a date for recording was suggested. The other teacher invited the researcher to come and introduce himself. It was important that the gender aspect to the study was not disclosed. There was a risk that it would make the participants think too much about how they behaved in the recording session later on. Instead, the students were told that the topic of the study was teenage language, which is partly true. The researcher received all the students’ email addresses and some of the students responded very quickly to the emails sent; the students who responded were all girls. A date was arranged and at the time for the recording session, four girls and three boys showed up. As it was very important with an equal number of girls and boys in the study, the students found one more boy who agreed to participate.
Beforehand the students were emailed with some suggestions on topics for the conversation. The reason for this was to make sure that the students had an interest in what they were to discuss and as a way of minimising the risk of observer’s paradox.

2.2 Participants

The participants in the study are students at the International Baccalaureate programme at an international school in a Swedish town. This means that the participants come from different cultural background. However, they all come from western countries so on paper they should conform to Trompneaars’ Anglo style.

Eight students participated in the study and the group consisted of four boys and four girls. Two of the boys were 17 years old and two were 18. The four girls were all 18. They had various backgrounds and had all moved to Sweden. Some of them had lived in many different countries. This is something which could reflect the results of this essay; the participants are used to interacting with people from different cultures and could be less likely to regard other cultures’ turn-taking norms. The conversation was in English, which was the mother-tongue of five of the participants. This might have lead to them feeling more at ease in the conversation, and there was a risk that the three students who did not have English as mother-tongue, would be passive and silent in the conversation. This worry was unjustified as these three students were just as active and talkative as the rest.

In the analysis part, the participants have been given numbers: B1, B2, B3, B4, G1, G2, G3 and G4. The B stands for Boy and G stands for Girl.

2.2.1 Discussion

The composition of the group was important. The results might have come out differently if other participants took part in the study. These students actively decided to participate which means that there is a possibility that the most talkative and opinionated students volunteered as subjects. This could explain the absence of longer silences in the recorded discussion. The researcher made the decision to participate in the discussion, asking questions and responding to what the students say. This was to break the ice initially, and to prevent the participants from being all silent to start with.

A dictaphone was placed on the table, which the eight students sat around. The participants were told that the recording would take 20 minutes, which gave them a time frame to relate to. They decided that the question “Should alcohol be sold in ICA and Coop, which are both Swedish supermarkets, or is the concept of Systembolaget, which is a state-run off license, a good idea?” should be the topic of the conversation. The researcher had given them several topics to choose from, all concerning alcohol.

The choice to let them talk about alcohol was strategic as it is something which is of interest to young people. It is also something which could be considered controversial and could help the students to ‘forget’ that they were recorded for a while.
2.3 Categories

In order to analyse if, and in that case how, boys and girls behave differently in conversations, categories of analysis were chosen. These were the parameters from which the different strategies of conversational behaviour were analysed.

There are many different linguistic features to study and the selection is always problematic. The categories chosen to focus on in this study are the categories which Lakoff (1975) and Coates (2004) distinguish as either part of Lakoff’s ‘Women’s language’ or Coates’ features, which are typical of how women use language. These theories provide a model in which the differences between boys and girls can be distinguished and discussed.

* Minimal responses
* Overlaps
* Tag questions
* Hedges
* Interruptions

2.3.1 Minimal responses

Minimal responses are small utterances which interrupt ongoing conversations. Examples of minimal responses are *right, yeah* or *mhm*. The purpose of minimal responses is to show support and show interest in what other participants say. They can also be used in order to just show that you have listened to what was just said (Coates 2004: 128f).

The following example is an extract from Coates (2004) to illustrate how minimal responses can function in a spoken interaction:

Tina: she provided the appropriate sayings for
Lyn:
Tina particular times and so on
Lyn: right
Tina: she didn’t actually TEACH them but
Lyn:
Tina: she just provided a model
Lyn: provided a model (Coates 2004: 87).

Another example of how minimal responses work in spoken interaction is from Holmes (2001).

Mary: I worked in that hotel for- ah eleven years and I found the patrons were really really good you know.
Jill: Mm.
Mary: You had the odd one or two ruffian ’d come in and cause a fight but they were soon dealt with.
Jill: Really, really just takes one eh? To start trouble.
Mary: Yeah, and and it was mostly the younger ones
Jill: Mm.
Mary: that would start you know.
Jill: Yeah.
Mary: The younger- younger couldn’t handle their booze.
Minimal responses do not just function as a way of showing an interest in what has been said, but they also function as a way to approve of a new topic or the closure of one (Coates 2004: 129). Men use minimal responses similarly in men-only groups, but when engaged in conversation with women, men change strategies and instead use delayed minimal responses, which creates a feeling of not being interested or paying attention to what was just said. Minimal responses can, in that way, be one of the strategies for men to dominate and control conversations. What Coates has found is that this type of behaviour from men typically leaves women silent as they feel that they are have not been listened to. However, Coates stresses that silence does not always indicate powerlessness, but that silence has to be analysed from the perspective of who is involved in the conversation, and in which context the conversation takes place. Women who are silent after having been interrupted, or after delayed minimal responses can be seen as powerless. A man who is silent in a conversation can be seen as showing his power to decide whether he wants to participate in the interaction or not (Coates 2004: 123f). The idea of silent women is something researchers have studied and Ardener (1975, 1978) found that people from the ‘muted groups’, individuals who are not part of the dominant groups, have to express themselves in a very aggressive and dominant way if they want to be heard. According to Ardener, the silence of ‘muted groups’ is something which is decided by the dominant group, and something which can be seen in many different contexts. They provide a number of examples of Greek weddings and various religious contexts (Ardener cited in Coates 2004: 26). Silence conveys different things in different cultures and it can indicate anger, boredom, respect or consent, depending on the culture and on the context. Holmes (2001) states that in some cultures silence is considered an appropriate response, whereas in other cultures silence as a response is taboo and a spoken response is the appropriate alternative (Holmes 2001: 278f).

2.3.2 Overlaps

Overlaps are a common phenomenon in conversations, in mixed-sex groups as well as in same-sex interaction. Overlaps are described by Coates as “Instances of slight over-anticipation by the next speaker” (Coates 2004; 113). They occur when speakers do not wait for their turn to talk and instead they take the conversational floor at the end of the current speaker’s turn (ibid). Some researchers for example FitzGerald (2003) refer to overlaps as ‘simultaneous speech” (FitzGerald 2003: 112).

An example of how overlaps take place in spoken interaction is taken from Coates (2004).

[Jo complains to her friend Ruth that she is feeling very tired]

Jo: when you say early
Ruth: so you’d better go to bed early
Jo: tell me what you mean /
Ruth: (Coates 2004: 113)

This second example again illustrates how overlaps can work in discussions:

Nicky: he can’t understand it when girlfriends leave him because
Nicky: he says it’s in his genes hh. he says it’s
Jane: yeah he’ll say you know obviously by everyone
Nicky: natural for him to be unfaithful
Jane: wants to do that. (Coates 2004: 132).
What distinguishes overlaps from interruptions, is that overlaps do not prevent the current speaker from finishing his or her turn (FitzGerald 2003: 112). It can be seen as interruption, but can also be recognised as a way of showing that participants are engaged in the interaction.

2.3.3 Tag questions

Tag questions are small conversational features associated with uncertainty and concern about other participants’ feelings. According to Lakoff (1975) tag questions were an essential part of what she coined ‘Women's language’ (Lakoff cited in Holmes 2001: 288). However, tag questions do not only express uncertainty, but they can also indicate positive politeness or as a way to make criticism come across as milder (Holmes 2001: 288f). Holmes (1984) distinguishes between modal and affective tag questions. The first ones indicate the speaker’s certainty about what has been said. These tag questions are speaker-oriented, as they expect the other participant(s) in the spoken interaction to respond. The affective tag questions are addressee-oriented, as they express the speaker’s attitude or thoughts to the addressee. This is done by either supporting the addressee or by mitigating the criticism (Holmes cited in Coates 2004: 91). There are also occasions where tag questions are used as a confrontational device. This shows in how many various ways tag questions are used and not all of them express uncertainty (Holmes 2001: 290).

The following examples of how tag questions can function in spoken interaction are taken from Holmes (2001) and Coates (2004)

Modal tag question which expresses uncertainty:
Susan; I did my exams in sixty-three was it? (Holmes 2001: 288).

Affective tag questions which functions as a way of softening criticism:
Older child to younger friend: That was pretty silly wasn’t it? (Coates 2004: 91).
Claire: That was a bit of a daft thing to do, wasn’t it? (Holmes 2001: 289).

Affective tag question which functions as a way of supporting the addressee:
Teacher to pupil: The hen’s brown isn’t she? (Coates 2004: 91).
Tag question which expresses confrontation:
B: Yes, Sir, yes, understood.
A: Now you er fully understand, don’t you? (Holmes 2001: 290).

2.3.4 Hedges

Hedges are small expressions, for example perhaps, you know, I’m sure and like (Coates 2004: 88). Their primary function is to express certainty or uncertainty about what has been said during the conversation. Lakoff (1975) was the first researcher who claimed that hedges were a prominent feature in the way women use language. Lakoff’s theory was that women use hedges, because they are taught that expressing oneself clearly is not considered ladylike or feminine (Lakoff cited in Coates 2004: 88). Preisler (1986) cited in Coates (2004: 88) and Holmes (1984, 1987) cited in Coates 2004: 88) investigated hedges and women’s supposed over-usage of these, and came to the conclusion that women used more hedges and more often than men (Preisler, Holmes cited in Coates 2004: 88). However, Holmes distinguished between hedges that expressed certainty and those which expressed uncertainty. She claimed that you know for example could express both certainty and uncertainty depending on the intonation (Holmes cited in Coates 2004: 88f). Coates’ claim is that hedges are generally used when discussing sensitive topics and that men in general
avoid sensitive topics. Instead, women who are more likely to discuss sensitive and personal topics, use hedges to save the participants’ faces, as well soften the force of what is said (Coates 2004: 90).

Irwin (2002) studied young people’s use of the hedges like and kind of. Irwin claimed that adolescents use these hedging devices as a strategy of distancing themselves from the impact of what they say, as it can be considered “either positively evaluative of self or negatively evaluative of others” (Irwin cited in Coates 2004: 89f). That means that the use of like or kind of can be used as a way to tone down positive utterances about themselves, and to make sure that criticism of others, does not come across as too harsh.

The following example of how hedges works in spoken interaction is taken from Holmes (1987).

(3) and that way we’d get rid of exploitation of man by man all that stuff/you know/ you’ve heard it before [radio interviewee describing past experience] (Holmes cited in Coates 2004: 88).

This is an example from Coates (1996):

HELEN: she really loves it/ and she’s somebody that was really being, sort of labelled as somebody that wasn’t really- was anti-school almost at Riverside Road [primary school]/ (Coates 1996: 159).

Hedges can also be used in the following way. Another example from Coates (1996):

EMILY: you know what? my Mum thinks I’m much more sensible than SHE was at our age […]
GWEN: what did she do at your age? […] was she all- all sort of a bit of a raver?
EMILY: I think she was/ (Coates 1996: 159).

2.3.5 Interruptions

Interruptions are regarded the most evident violations of turn-taking norms (Coates 2004: 113). When a speaker decides to take the turn while somebody else is already talking, without indicating that he or she was about to finish his turn, the whole symmetry of the conversation is broken (Coates 2004: 113f). Zimmerman and West (1975) found that the distribution of interruptions in same-sex conversation was not much different in groups of men or women, but in mixed-sex groups the situation was different. In studies they conducted, almost all interruptions were made by men in mixed-sex groups. When participants were later recorded in a sound-proof booth in a laboratory, men were responsible for 75 per cent of the interruptions (Zimmerman et al cited in Holmes 2001: 294f).

When the interrupter takes the floor in the middle of somebody else’s turn, he or she prevents the current speaker from completing his or her turn (Coates 2004: 114). This can also be the case with overlaps, but what distinguishes an overlap from an interruption is that in case of overlapping, this does not prevent the current speaker from finishing the turn. Interruptions leave the current speaker silent (Coates 2004: 113f). Silence can, as described earlier, be seen as a sign of helplessness (Coates 2004: 118). Holmes (2001) even claims that girls are socialised to be interrupted and to give up the conversational floor more easily than boys. Holmes supports her claims by referring to studies showing that in parent-children relationships, fathers were responsible for the most interruptions and daughters were interrupted the most. They were interrupted by their mothers as well. Holmes therefore claims that the strategy of male dominance in conversations is something young boys learn from an early age and that girls learn to be interrupted by the men as well as by
other women (Holmes 2001: 295).

The following is an example is from Holmes (2001) and it shows several interruptions:

Woman: How’s your paper coming?
Man: Alright I guess. I haven’t done much in the past two weeks.
Woman: Yeah. Know how that [can]
Man: [Hey] ya’ got an extra cigarette?
Woman: Oh sure (hands him the pack)
    like my [pa-]
Man: [How] ’bout a match
Woman: ’Ere ya go uh like my [pa-]
Man: [Thanks]
Woman: Sure. I was gonna tell you [my-]
Man: [Hey] I’d really like ta’ talk but I gotta run- see ya

This second example of how interruptions can affect a conversation is from Coulthard (1985):

ATHA: they have at their disposal enormous assets and their policy
PITMAN: look can I just
    come in on that last year
ATHEA: YES IN A MOMENT IF YOU MAY AND WHEN I’VE
    FINISHED then you’ll know what the point is

This third example, which is rather funny, is taken from Holmes (2001):

Wanda: Did you see here that two sociologists have just proved that men interrupt women all the time? They-
Ralph: Who says?
Wanda: Candace West of Florida State and Don Zimmerman of the University of California at Santa Barbara. They taped a bunch of private conversations, and guess what they found. When two or three women are talking, interruptions are about equal. But when a man talks to a woman, he makes 96 per cent of the interruptions. They think it’s a dominance trick men aren’t aware of. But-
Ralph: These people have got nothing better to do than eavesdrop on interruptions?....
            (Holmes 2001: 293)
3. Results

This analysis will be divided into six sub-sections; one general, and five for each of the chosen categories of analysis. The findings in the recorded conversation will be transcribed and related to the theories of male and female use of language and conversational behaviour. The spoken interaction will also be related to Grice’s conversational maxims and cooperative principle.

Not all of the spoken interaction will be transcribed. However, the whole recording is available as an MP3 file.

3.1 General analysis of results

The recorded material is a 20 minute long discussion on the Swedish alcohol monopoly and whether alcohol should be sold in supermarkets. The quality of the recording is good, but sometimes it is hard to determine who speaks, especially when there are overlaps or interruptions. However, it is easy to determine if it is a boy or girl who is responsible for the violation of the turn-taking rules.

All in all, the recorded conversation consists of 120 turns. Minimal responses are not included in these 120 turns, as most of them cannot be considered complete turns. Instead they are regarded more as support for somebody who has the current turn. In the 120 turns, finished turns, interrupted turns and overlapped turns are included. The distribution of turns from a gender perspective is rather equal: the participating boys were responsible for 53 of the 120 turns and the girls were responsible for 67 of them. Therefore girls were counted for 55.8 per cent of the turns. The distribution of turns does not in any way reveal how gender and power structures are being reproduced in the conversation. It is therefore necessary to study how the chosen categories and Grice’s conversational maxims correspond to the recorded interaction.

This table shows how the different categories were distributed throughout the discussion. It also enables one to see the distribution between boys and girls.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minimal responses</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overlaps</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tag questions</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hedges</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interruptions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.2 Minimal responses

In the recorded material 55 minimal responses occur. Sometimes in the recording the researcher is heard, but these occasions have for obvious reasons not been counted as part of the study. Unlike the distribution of turns in the recorded interaction, the distribution of minimal responses is anything but equal. All in all, 55 minimal responses were identified in the recording. 49 of these minimal responses were uttered by the girls in the conversation. That means that the girls were responsible for 89 per cent of the minimal responses. This result is very interesting considering how evenly the turns were distributed between the girls and boys. There were no delayed minimal
responses identified. Instead, all the minimal responses in the recording were used as a way of showing support for the current speaker. One explanation as to why there is such a heavy majority of minimal responses among the girls, can be explained by the fact that the four girls in the conversation were all much more active than the boys. Only three of the boys in the discussion were really active. One of them was fairly quiet and very polite in that he raised his hand before taking his turn. However, that does not give a full explanation as to why the girls used so many minimal responses. To illustrate how minimal responses were used in the discussion, examples will now be given. These examples will be connected to the theories of female and male conversational behaviour. The extracts do not intend to give a complete picture of the whole discussion on alcohol, but only to illustrate how the minimal responses worked in the interaction.

[25 seconds into the conversation]
G1: I think it has the opposite effect from what they want because...uhm...obviously these people just go to Denmark and get their alcohol.
G2, G3: mmm.

Discussion: This is a typical example of how girls are believed use the minimal response to show support to what G1 just said. Both G2 and G3 use the same minimal response simultaneously and they place it so that it does not interrupt or prevent G1 from finishing her turn. This supports Coates’ (2004) theories that women use language to show solidarity and support (Coates 2004: 126).

[50 seconds into the conversation]
G2: Well, it also shows that if they don’t offer us alcohol as, you know, as a regular thing that you can buy the government doesn’t even trust us to control our own drinking. I understand if there should be age restrictions, but restrictions on someone who is already 45 years old...
G1: mmm

Discussion: Just like in the example above, a minimal response is used as a way of showing support to what the current speaker has said. Yet again it is a girl supporting another girl.

[1 minute into the conversation]
G1: And they have the time restriction where you can buy until a certain time on a Saturday, which G4: yeah
G1 is the time when people want to buy alcohol so...
G3: yeah
B2: I think it’s, kind of, exporting people in a way because for the first it is a monopoly, they charge the prices, they do whatever they
B3: yeah
G1: yeah
B2: want as there is no competition between the...eh...no competition between the companies. The prices are sky-high ............ they decide when they close............... it’s not really meant for the people.
G1: mmm
B1: mmm
B2: It’s just something the government said.
G4: yeah.

Discussion: In this example both girls and boys are involved in the interaction. The boys, as well as the girls, use minimal responses as a way of cooperating in the conversation. However, what is interesting to see is that the girls support the girls, but also the boys. The boys, on the other hand,
only use minimal responses as a way to show support for another boy. The boys show cooperative behaviour with boys only, at this stage of the interaction.

[2 minutes and 20 seconds into the conversation]
G3: ...be allowed in ICA [Swedish supermarket chain; author] because there would still be an age restriction so there would still be the same availability so really there would not be not...eh...impact and actually better because people would stay in the country instead of going to Denmark.
B1: yeah
G2: …go to Denmark...people who go there, like, to get alcohol because it’s so expensive here to do that...they get really, really drunk, not just a little drunk...they get smashed...
G1, G3: yeah

Discussion: At this stage of the conversation, there is an occasion where a boy is supportive of what a girl says. This minimal response is placed ‘perfectly’ as it shows that B1 is paying attention to what G3 says. When G2 takes the turn, G1 and G3 once again show how the girls in the conversation simultaneously use minimal responses to give support to another girl. This enhances the feeling of solidarity.

[3 minutes and 55 seconds into conversation]
B4: Well I personally think that like the stronger alcohol which are kept in Systembolaget shouldn’t be (indecipherable) by the regular population because I think the people sitting around me, they’re...
G4: mmm
B4: only...I know they are saying it because it will be easy...much more easy to access for them and this is one of the huge changes I saw when I came to Sweden. Uhm..parents didn’t care if their children came home stumbling drunk when they’re 16 or 17 and in America you just...you ...you cannot get away with that...(continues to talk)
G1: yeah (and then continues to talk).

Discussion: G4’s minimal response when B4 talks is carrying the cooperative function. What is interesting is how G1 uses her minimal response as a strategy to take the turn herself, even though B4 continues to talk. According to the theories on male and female conversational behaviour, this type of strategy is less likely to take place, as women interrupting are not very common (see Holmes 2001: 294f).

[5 minutes and 45 seconds into the conversation]
B3: I agree with that because it’s so limited, it’s like OK I need to get hold and try it but it’s like everywhere
G1: yeah.

Discussion: This is yet again a traditional use of a minimal response, in that it functions as a cooperative device. It can, however, also function as a means of showing that G1 acknowledges the end of the topic, as it is placed, just when it is likely that B3 is about to finish his turn (see Coates 2004: 128f).

[6 minutes and 20 seconds into the conversation]
B1: A little bit of alcohol (indecipherable)...more available I think teenagers would start drinking
'cos it wouldn’t be more of a...you know...how do you say like...it wouldn’t be as big of a thing
G1: yeah
B1: if it’s available and not and yeah...and also what H said earlier about being a taboo...I’ve lived
G3: yeah
B1: in Sweden, used to...been here over Christmas and New Year’s and every time, I mean, we’ve
had a little bit of champagne or something to celebrate the occasion.

Discussion: The girls use the minimal response as a way of showing support. However, what is
important and interesting to see, is the absence of support from the other boys. The girls are clearly
the ones who use the minimal responses to do the ‘conversational shitwork’ as Fishman (1980) calls
it (Fishman cited in Coates 2004: 87f).

[7 minutes and 10 seconds into the conversation]
G1: For a party then I could tell my parents, because I have been brought up quite, not to treat
alcohol like something that should be treated like to be ashamed of drinking. I can go to my
parents and say someone’s having a party and (in decipherable) and they’ll trust me to...uhm
know when I’ve had enough and to be responsible so I can go to my parents and ask them if I
can
G4: yeah
G1: have some alcohol to take with me.
B3: See, I don’t sneak behind my parents’ back.
G1: yeah.

Discussion: There is a clear pattern of girls supporting girls, but also of girls placing minimal
responses when the boys speak. In this passage, there are no signs of the opposite. The girls are the
ones who work hard to create a feeling of cooperativeness in the interaction.

[9 minutes and 10 seconds into the conversation]
B1: Know I lived in the States before this and I read stories in the newspapers about past high
school students, ‘cos they were completely cut off alcohol, drinking parties most of it, so when
you do turn 21 you go over the top. You try everything, you party, you go gambling and
G4: yeah
B1: eventually you die of alcohol poisoning or overdose.
G2: Yeah. Every 21-year-old...

Discussion: G2 uses her minimal response as a way of taking the floor; it is clear that she identified
that B1 was about to finish his turn. G4, on the other hand, placed her minimal response without
any ambition to interrupt or attempt to take the floor.

[10 minutes and 11 seconds into the conversation]
B1: But that is Swedish stores in general, I mean...I mean, close, when do you, when don’t you
G1: yeah
B1: work? You don’t work on Saturdays and you don’t work on Sundays. Those are the days when
they close the earliest. When I lived in the States it was open until like ten, eleven, malls on
G1: yeah
B1: Sundays. Here they close at three, four, five, somewhere between there. Some are not
G1: Five
G4: Yeah
B1: even open on Saturdays and Sundays. It’s crazy.
Discussion: The same pattern is repeated; when the boys speak, the girls support them.

[11 minutes and 4 seconds into the conversation]
G2: It can, I mean, it can help to loosen up. To get to know people better and stuff. Other times
G1: Yeah
G2: you just end up acting just stupid. In general it’s just like a little bit. Look, if you take just a
little drink it does help to loosen up. I mean (indecipherable) to get completely...but yeah.

Discussion: Girls support girls as a way to keep the interaction cooperative.

[14 minutes into the conversation]
G4: I have never heard of that.
B3: No.

Discussion: This is one of the few occasions where something, which could be identified as a
minimal response is uttered by one of the boys in the group. This one is a bit ambiguous as it can be
interpreted as an attempt to take the floor, rather than a minimal response.

[14 minutes and 40 seconds]
G3: And then I when came here, when I first came here I was 15 and I was really shocked at the
way people were behaving I think in general. So, ehm...I was like...I think it’s called a culture
shock when you but yeah I got used to it obviously.
G1: yeah

Discussion: Girl supports girl by using a minimal response.

[17 minutes and 30 seconds into the conversation]
B3: ...generalizing too much; it sounds like if you drink, you get drunk. It’s not like that.
G1: yeah
B4: no

Discussion: G1 uses her minimal response to support, whereas B4 chooses to use his minimal
response in a way that can be interpreted in two different ways. It can be seen as support of what B3
just said, but it can also be seen as a way to distance himself from B3’s statement. Depending on
how you interpret it, it can be seen as either competitive or collaborative.

[18 minutes and 30 seconds into the conversation]
G1: With me, I have only been drunk twice. Like, so I mean, it’s not like I go to parties and get
drunk every time.
B2: No.

Discussion: This is again one of the few occasions where a boy uses a minimal response to support
a girl.

[18 minutes and 40 seconds into the conversation]
B1: ...just to have fun
G3: yeah

Discussion: Girl supports boy by placing a minimal response, when he’s likely to finish his turn.
[19 minutes and 46 seconds into the conversation]
B3: It’s like socialising, ’cos I mean, like cheering with a stranger or something.....to meet...
G1: yeah
G2: yeah
B3: people. It makes it a bit easier and so on.
G3: yeah
G4: mmm

Discussion: This is very much the stereotypical example of how the use of minimal responses can be connected to the theories of gender behaviour. The boy holds the floor and the girls use minimal responses as a way to support him.

3.2.1 Overlaps

In the recorded material there are 16 identified cases of overlapping turns. The participating girls are responsible for 13 of these, whereas the boys are responsible for the remaining three. In the cases where boys overlap one of the other participants, they overlap another boy in two cases and they overlap a girl once. The girls on the other hand, are responsible for overlapping other girls on seven occasions, and they overlap boys the remaining 9 times.

[1 minute and 14 seconds into the conversation]
G2: They shouldn’t be allowed to...to, you know, go wherever they want in order to get alcohol it’s just (indecipherable)...
G1: and they have the time restrictions where you can buy until, I don’t know, a certain time on a Saturday.

Discussion: This is a case which could be considered an overlap, as well as an interruption. However because G2, who is the participant being overlapped, continues to speak for a while before giving up; the researcher regards this an overlap. The explanation to why G1 decides to start her turn where she does, could be explained by the fact that it was likely that G2 was about to finish her turn after “get alcohol”. Despite the fact that G1 took the turn by selecting herself, at a point where there was a possible closure on G2’s behalf, G2 continues to talk and there is a situation of simultaneous speech. This is something which correlates very well to Edelsky’s (1993) and Coates’ (2004) observations on the collaborative or jam session floor. They found that women were in favour of simultaneous speech, something which is supposed to be specific to women’s way of conversing (Edelsky, Coates cited in Coates 2004: 131).

[1 minute and 50 seconds into the conversation]
B3: ... it’s not really meant for the people. It’s just something the government has said just because they don’t want people to buy alcohol.
B1: That’s probably what I think is the main reason why people go over to...

Discussion: This is a clearer violation of the turn-taking norms than the previous example, since it is obvious that B3 was not about to finish his turn. Despite the fact that B1 decides to start talking, it does not prevent B3 from finishing his turn. B1 was in no way selected by B3 to take the next turn, neither did B3 really indicate that he was about to finish his turn. Instead B1 selects himself and takes the turn. B3 does not stop, but finishes his turn rather quickly. Unlike the previous example with the girls, this is not an occasion of jam session talk as B3 after he finishes his turn, lets B1 have the conversational floor to himself.
[1 minute and 55 seconds into the conversation]
B1: mean at least here where we live, where it’s, we have the luxury of getting over there, but...
B3: easy...
G1: well, yeah...sorry

Discussion: In this part, B3 tries to take the turn by overlapping B1, who continues to speak and keeps the floor and B3 gives up. G1 also gets involved in the conversation, but apologises when she realises that she has broken the turn-taking norms. Both B3 and G1 select themselves despite the fact that B1 holds the conversational floor. When they realise that B1 is not willing to give them the floor, they immediately allow B1 to finish. This is actually an example where the turn-taking mechanism functions rather well, in that violators realise their mistakes and set out to repair them.

[2 minutes and 10 seconds into the conversation]
G4:... you know allow it in ICA. I don’t see why, it should be allowed. If you show ID...
G3: yeah, I think...

Discussion: G3 tries to take the turn by overlapping G4. It is a sophisticated strategy to try taking the turn by using a minimal response. When G4 continues to talk, G3 stops talking and leaves G4 to finish her turn. This is once again an example of how the turn-taking norm prevents speakers from breaking them. There is an attempt to violate the turn-taking mechanism, but as soon as the self-selected G3 realises that G4 is not willing to let the floor go, G3 tries to repair the damage by stopping.

[2 minutes and 19 seconds into the conversation]
G4:...I mean, I don’t see why...
G3: I mean, it should, might as well be allowed in ICA because...

Discussion: Just like in the previous example, G3 tries to take the turn by overlapping G4. This time she is more successful. G4 keeps the floor, finishes her turn and lets G3 continue and take the floor. This could be seen as the women’s aim to keep conversations cooperative. G4 does not seem to be disturbed by letting G3 take the turn, even though she still talks. This is a behaviour which can be connected to the theory of jam session talk (see Coates 2004: 131).

[3 minutes and 25 seconds into the conversation]
G4: ...they’re not really like obsessing about it...
G1: It is kind of like a taboo here ’cos in countries like France....

Discussion: This is a clear overlap and G4 does not stop talk immediately when G1 takes the turn. Instead, she finishes her turn and G1 continues to talk about something which had a connection to what G4 had said. G1 selected herself as the next speaker, and carefully started her turn when she sensed that there was a possible closure on G4’s behalf.

[5 minutes and 50 seconds into the conversation]
B3: It’s everywhere and everyone’s doing it. Almost, I also think it’s the kind of wrong view from...
G4: More common.
B1: I think it’s....

Discussion: In this example, B1 tries to take the floor by selecting himself the next speaker when B3 is likely to finish his turn. G4 also tries to take the floor by agreeing with what B3 has said, and by the strategy of self-selection. This strategy does not succeed as B3 keeps talking and G4 as well
when B1 stops. Once again the turn-taking mechanism is strong and both G4 and B1 seem aware that they violated the conversational symmetry, and try to repair the damage by not continuing to talk.

[6 minutes and 5 seconds into the conversation]
B3: ...like drinking almost so, so it’s worse than drinking
G2: and smoking and yeah that is available in all supermarkets and...

Discussion: In this case, G2 self-selects herself as she identifies that B3 is about to finish his turn. As soon as he reaches the point of a potential closure, G2 takes the floor. What then happens is interesting, as B3 decides to take the turn again or is maybe more likely to continue his turn. When he identifies a possible closure in G2’s turn, after “smoking”, he regains the turn again, even though G2 continues to talk. This leads to simultaneous speech for a while, before B3 quits and lets G2 hold the floor.

[7 minutes and 3 seconds into the conversation]
B3: They do have beer there. It’s just you know, you know. Order!
G4: like....
G1: but, but...

Discussion: This part of the conversation is interesting. For the first time in the conversation one of the participants actually reacts to the violation of the turn-taking norms. B3 clearly does not appreciate the fact that G4 and G1 try to take the floor from him. His reaction follows Grice’s model. First he reacts to the violation and then he infers by saying “Order!” (see Coulthard 1985: 31f). This also gives support to the theory that men are in favour of a turn-taking norm where one speaks at a time and women accept simultaneous speech, something which Edelsky (1993) confirms in her research (Edelsky cited in Coates 2004: 131).

[9 minutes into the conversation]
G4:... gonna, you know, be completely irresponsible, ’cos you already did that
B3: know one thing...good
G1: the way...what
B1: I know, I lived..

Discussion: This is again a good example of when self-selections ends up violating the turn-taking symmetry. The participants realise it and attempt to repair the damage by stopping. B3 selects himself the next speaker as he identifies the potential closure in G4’s turn. As mentioned earlier, speakers are not concerned with the completed turn, as it is impossible to know when a turn is about to end. Instead, what a speaker is interested in is the possible completion (see Coulthard 1985: 61). The moment B3 overlaps G4, G1 selects herself as the next speaker and starts to talk when she identified a completion in B3’s turn. When she realises that B3 wants to keep the floor, she stops and tries to repair the conversational symmetry. The moment she does that, B1 takes the floor, using the strategy of self-selection and keeps the floor.

[10 minutes and 43 seconds into the conversation]
G2: It depends kind of, you can, I mean if you’re mature about it...
G1: Nah, you don’t need alcohol to have fun.

Discussion: This is again a clear example of how overlaps turn into what Coates refers to as jam session talk. G1 overlaps G2 when there is a possible closure, but when G2 does not stop talking,
G1 continues and there is a moment of simultaneous speech.

[18 minutes and 31 seconds into the conversation]
B3:...outside in a bush. It’s just stupid. You might as well...
G1: Well, with me, I’ve only been drunk...

Discussion: This example is rather difficult to classify. It could also be classified as an interruption, but as G1 is likely to have identified a possible closure in B3’s turn, this is most probably an overlap. As G1 selects herself the next speaker when she believes that B3 will finish, she also takes the turn. B3 then lets his turn go.

[18 minutes and 50 seconds into the conversation]
G4:...it’s just a social thing on New Year’s Eve, it’s not you know.
G1: dinner, you have a glass of wine with dinner yeah

Discussion: This overlap sequence once again displays what Coates (2004) referred to as a jam session (see Coates 2004: 131). G1 self-selects herself when she identifies a possible completion in G4’s turn. Despite this, G4 continues to talk and there is simultaneous speech which supports Edelsky’s (1993) conclusion that women do not have a problem with more than one speaker at the same time (Edelsky cited in Coates 2004: 131).

[19 minutes and 38 seconds into the conversation]
G4:...glass of dinner or champagne yeah it’s not like we don’t yeah
G1: like we’re like we’re having fun. It’s just...

Discussion: Just like with the example above, this once again shows how girls incorporate simultaneous speech in the way they talk and how the self-select themselves and then have no problem with talking more than one at a time.

3.2.2 Tag questions

No tag questions occurred in the recorded conversation. It is hard to explain the absence of tag questions, but one explanation could be that tag questions might be associated with more formal speech. It is also likely that tag questions are hedging devices which are about to disappear from everyday language.

3.2.3 Hedges

In the recorded interaction a total of 81 hedges were identified. The hedges that have been counted and analysed are you know, I mean, I think, kind of and like. Out of the 81 hedges in the material, 55 of these were uttered by the participating girls. The remaining 26 were uttered by the boys. This means that the girls were responsible for 69 per cent of the hedges in the conversation. This result supports what other researchers have found when they have studied the use of hedges in boys’ and girls’ language use (see Coates 2004: 88f). In this analysis there will be a distinction between when hedges are used as a way of showing certainty, and when used as a way of expressing uncertainty. This will be done in the case of you know and Holmes’ (1987) model of a rising intonation (’), which indicates uncertainty and a falling intonation (‘) which indicates certainty, will be adopted in the analysis. (Holmes cited in Coates 2004: 88f).
An explanation to the uneven distribution of hedges in the recorded interaction is that the girls held the conversational floor for a longer period of time when they had the turn. The boys kept their turns shorter, which the examples below will show. The fact that one of the girls used many hedges also contributed to the result. The boys in the discussion only tended to use one or two hedges in each turn, whereas the girls used multiple.

In this section, minimal responses that were uttered as support from the other participants, have not been transcribed as the researcher wants to focus on each category separately.

[55 seconds into the conversation]
G2: Well, it also shows that if they don’t offer us alcohol as, you know, as a regular thing that you can buy, the government doesn’t even trust us to control our drinking. I understand if there should be age restrictions, but to have restrictions on someone who’s already 45 years old. They shouldn’t be allowed to...I mean to, you know, go wherever they want to get alcohol...

Discussion: In both cases, this participant used you know with a rising intonation which can be interpreted as uncertainty. This is something which would correspond very well to the theories that women use conversations as a way to cooperate. These hedges can be seen as a way to ask for support from the other participants.

[1 minute and 25 seconds into the conversation]
B2: I think it’s kind of exporting the people in a way because for the first, it is a monopoly. They charge the prices, they do whatever they want as there’s not competition between the...eh...no competition between the companies, so the prices are sky-high, they decide when they close. It’s not really...uhm...meant for the people. It’s just something the government said because...

Discussion: This example should be compared to the previous one as they are almost of the same length. Where G1 used three hedges, B2 only uses one hedge; kind of. This is one of the hedges that can be seen as an expression of uncertainty according to Irwin (2002) (Irwin cited in Coates 2004: 89f).

[1 minute and 50 seconds into the conversation]
B1: The main reason why people go over to Denmark and buy, I mean, it’s I mean at least where we live where it’s easy...

Discussion: The use of I mean can be interpreted as B1 looking for support from his friends who could confirm what he says.

2 minutes and 3 seconds into the conversation]
G4: I think, I think it should be available in like ICA, ’cos I mean there’s so many, you can go to like bars. You can go to Denmark and I mean you might as well, you know, allow it ICA. I don’t why...It should be allowed ’cos I mean if you show ID...I mean, I don’t see...

Discussion: In this example G4 uses many hedges. They make her come across as uncertain and she hides her message in all the hedges. This can of course also be explained by the fact that English is not her mother tongue. The rising intonation on the you know enhances the impression of insecurity.

[2 minutes and 37 seconds into the conversation]
G2: I mean, like, when they go to Denmark a lot of times people who go there like to get alcohol,
because it’s so expensive here, they go there and they get really, really, drunk. Not just.....they just get smashed.

Discussion: The tag like can be used as a way to boast what a participants is about to say and by repeating it several times in one turn, Irwin (2002) claims that this a distancing strategy (Irwin cited in Coates 2004: 89f). By repeating like, G2 clearly wants to distance herself from the people who go to Denmark to get drunk.

[2 minutes and 50 seconds into the conversation]

G4: But I think that also has to do with like drink driving ’cos I know in some countries like France and Germany, there’s like basically no drink dri...like drinking and driving ’cos I mean it’s just like more normal also. It’s not like here I mean people are so obsessed ’cos it’s...they just, you know, don’t drink during the week and in the weekend they get completely drunk and they overdo it completely. And then in other countries where it’s, you know, allowed it’s more normal and it’s like you drink a bit everyday and that’s it...they’re not really obsessing.

Discussion: The use of like as a hedge in this context could indicate that G4 aims to distance herself from drinking and driving as a phenomenon. The rising intonation on you know shows that it is likely G4 wants support from her fellow participants as she is feeling a bit uncertain.

[3 minutes and 55 seconds into the conversation]

B4: What, I personally think that a control instance as like the stronger alcohol which are kept in Systembolaget shouldn’t be purchased (indecipherable) by the regular population because I think all the people sitting around, they’re only...I know they are saying it because it will be easy...much more easy to access for them and this is one of the changes I saw when I came to Sweden...uhm... parents didn’t care if their children came home stumbling drunk and when they’re 16 or 17 and in America you just...you...you cannot get away with that (overlapping conversation) trust for the rest of your life. But here it’s just like as long as you clean yourself up it’s OK.

Discussion: In this extract it is interesting to see how like is used in a more certain way and not as a way for B4 distance himself from what is said. It is very clear that the hedges are used to give strength to B4’s personal opinion and not to gain support from the other participants.

[4 minutes and 40 seconds into the conversation]

G1: What I find the biggest, is like kids like drinking at 14, 15 and a lot of the time it was OK, ’cos in England I know it’s not like that. So that is what I find weird is that...eh like young teenagers drinking like that and it wasn’t...like a big deal for their parents.

Discussion: The third and fifth like are not really considered hedges in this context and they have not been included in the total amount of hedges. However, they still show how the same word can mean different things depending on the surrounding words. The remaining hedges support Irwin’s (2002) theory on how like is used. G1 uses them to make sure that she is not associated with the behaviour she describes (Irwin cited in Coates 2004: 89f).

[5 minutes and 24 seconds into the conversation]

G3: Selling it in like ICA stores would make it less of a taboo and therefore when you’re really young like 14 and drinking, it wouldn’t be like showing off for your friends and it would be more accepted, so therefore it wouldn’t be as attractive to do it just because it’s crazy or something like different.
Discussion: When G3 uses the *like* hedge before mentioning 14-year-old people, this could be regarded as a strategy of distancing herself from these people she obviously regards as immature. It could also be a way to make sure that the other participants are not offended by her talking ‘badly’ about 14-years-olds.

[5 minutes and 42 seconds into the conversation]
B3: I agree with that because it’s so limited so it that is *kind of* “OK, I got to get hold of that thing and *like* try it”. But it’s everywhere...

Discussion: Just like with the example above, it could be regarded that B3 uses *like* as a strategy to distance himself from the people who think they need to get alcohol because it is limited and restricted by the government.

[5 minutes and 55 seconds into the conversation]
B3: Almost I also think it’s a *kind of* wrong view from the government. They *like* focus on drinking like it’s the worst thing in the world. What about drugs? There’s more drugs coming in to Sweden than there is drinking almost.

Discussion: Once again B3 uses *like* to distance himself from the people he talks about, in this case the Swedish government. This supports Irwin’s (2002) theory about young people using *like* when they talk about topics which can be considered controversial and where they could be judged by the other participants (see Irwin cited in Coates 2004: 89).

[7 minutes and 12 seconds into the conversation]
G1: Well for a party then, I could go tell my parents *like*, I’ve been brought up *like* to not treat alcohol something to that should be treated *like* to be ashamed of drinking. So I could go to my parents and say someone’s having a party (indecipherable) alcohol and they trust me to...ehm...know when I’ve had enough and if I’m likely to be responsible. So I can go go to my parents and ask them if I can have some alcohol to take with me.

Discussion: Irwin (2002) found that the use of the hedging device was far more widespread among girls than boys and among middle-class girls, rather than working-class girls (Irwin cited in Coates 2004: 89). In this turn G1 uses *like* three times in a short while and it could serve as a way to not portray herself as ‘better’ because she was brought up to treat alcohol responsibly and to be able to consume it despite her age. Just like Irwin shows, *like* can also be used to avoid ‘boasting’ about the fact that she is allowed to drink. In this case the hedge can be interpreted as a way to avoid positive self-evaluation.

[8 minutes and 20 seconds into the conversation]
G1: Most of the times at parties it’s not *like* that you drink, but you don’t get wasted *like* that. It’s *like*...it’s not, I don’t drink *like* to get drunk.

Discussion: Unlike the example above, where *like* was used as a way to avoid portraying herself positively, *like* is now used as a way for G1 to distance herself from the people who drink to get drunk.

[8 minutes and 43 seconds into the conversation]
G4: And that’s *like*, *I mean*, when you’re having other experiences when you’re younger, *like* when it’s you’re served, *I mean* what you just said, you don’t probably don’t want to, *like* if you, I don’t know, how (indecipherable) alcohol you’re probably not going to drink much after this.
And...ehm...then also when you get older, when you’re actually allowed to drive, you’re not going to, *you know*, be completely irresponsible, ’cos you already know...

**Discussion:** G4 uses three different hedges on six different occasions in this example. The *like* hedges could be seen as a strategy to distance herself from what she is talking about, and the *you know* with the rising intonation indicates uncertainty and that she could be looking for support from the other participants in the conversation.

[10 minutes into the conversation]
G1: ...and *like* the times that they have are inconvenient, *like* my parents will finish working later and then it closes at 18. And so *like* getting there it in the hours is inconvenient. So it’s not that easy to..
B1: But that is Swedish stores in general. *I mean...I mean*, close, when do you, when don’t you work? You don’t work on Saturdays and you don’t work on Sundays. Those are the days when they close the earliest. When I lived in the States it was open until *like* ten, eleven malls on Sundays. It is crazy.

**Discussion:** The girl uses *like*, which, once again, Irwin (2002) found was more common in girls’ speech (Irwin cited in Coates 2004: 89f). The boy only uses one *like*. He then uses two *I mean*-s, which are hard to determine whether they should be classified as hedges expressing uncertainty or certainty.

[10 minutes and 50 seconds into the conversation]
G1: ...’cos at Molly’s party. Mo, *like* one of our friends, she’s had a party and there was no alcohol at that and that can be just as fun.

**Discussion:** In this example, G1 uses *like* as a way to really boast that Molly is one of their friends. Coates (2004) has identified a pattern which is used by girls and where *like* is used to strengthen boastful claims (Coates 2004: 89).

[11 minutes and 40 seconds into the conversation]
G2: Well, yeah my Swedish friends they get drunk at home a lot. Yeah! Well, they’re the *kind of* people who live in Skånes Fagerhult. But *like* they do, but they’re *like*, that’s where they drink. They don’t *like* yeah at parties when they get drunk at home...

**Discussion:** This is a clear case of *like* being used as a way of distancing oneself from the people being talked about. When G2 talks about the people from Skånes Fagerhult she uses *like* and *kind of* to ensure the other people in the conversation that she should not get associated with their behaviour or that culture.

[12 minutes and 12 seconds into the conversation]
B4: ...They share some interest in alcohol....that I haven’t seen anywhere else. *Like* when I was in the store I saw a little girl walking with her mother, she was picking up bottles and was *like* “Are you really gonna drink that again?” and it’s awful when you hear that.

**Discussion:** The use of hedges in this example could be interpreted as a distancing strategy on B4’s behalf.
[12 minutes and 43 seconds into the conversation]
G3: Well, what I’ve noticed is...uhm...one of our friends, she goes out and drinks and then she comes home and her mum asks her about it and then her mum finds out about it and she’s like “You shouldn’t do it” and then my friend still does it all the time and her mum doesn’t really do anything about it. She’s like “OK, well you shouldn’t do it, but”...

Discussion: In this case, the hedges do not aim at neither distancing G3 from the mother she is talking about, nor avoiding the self-evaluation of G3 in a positive way. Instead in this case, like should be regarded as a neutral expression which, in this context, carries neither uncertainty nor certainty.

[14 minutes and 14 seconds into the conversation]
G2: Well, you...like in Israel it’s very...it’s I wouldn’t say relaxed ’cos people don’t get drunk quite often there. I grew up in a pretty religious background, so drinking, alcohol is what you have on a, you know, Friday, you know the whole sacred wine thing and that’s why people don’t get drunk. Like adults would get drunk sometimes, but like they wouldn’t act stupid.

Discussion: In this section the tag you know is pronounced in the more certain way with a falling intonation. This could be explained by the fact that G2 talks about her own background which is something the other participants cannot question.

[14 minutes and 58 seconds into the conversation]
G1: For me it’s like...eh, I think it’s the way you’ve been brought up like in England. The majority of my friends don’t go and get drunk like that, but I know people...uhm...that do and I think it’s their background, because...ehm...often their parents are not really as involved and they’re not family-ish in that way so I think it depends on...uhm... your background in the UK, whereas here...I don’t know, I don’t see as being like that.

Discussion: Just like with like and kind of, the hedge I think can also be regarded as a way to address a sensitive topic in a less direct way. By using I think G1 does not claim to know that people who come from less “family-ish” backgrounds necessarily drink more, but it is what she has observed. The I think also saves G1 from breaking the quality maxim which says that one should not say something without evidence (see Coulthard 1985: 31) since I think does not need evidence like I know would do.

[15 minutes and 31 seconds into the conversation]
B1: I think it’s more of a cultural thing also. I mean, I’ve lived in UK. I mean I was very young at the time, but I know people who went out to the pubs every night and like compared to the States (indecipherable) completely opposite almost. Everyone stayed in and there wasn’t...everyone swapped out beer with a cola. Here in Sweden there’s a little more of a mix in between these two. They have, I mean, they have drinking, but they also don’t so I think I’ve seen all three different types.

Discussion: The hedges in this example do not really display any uncertainty as they deal with B1’s own opinions or views on things.

[16 minutes and 37 seconds into the conversation]
G4: I think for me, I don’t know...eh, well...eh. It’s not like, usually like...I’m from Germany, like usually people drink, like start drinking like very early. So like when I came here I was like 13 and at that age like my friends in Germany like we would all be drinking, but here like people
wouldn’t have done that, ’cos usually...I don’t know still, I think, I mean, it’s a teenage thing to get drunk. I guess at parties, but then usually like now when I go back it’s not that common any more like to get drunk. It’s just like a drink to have a good time, but it’s not like crazy, you know and you have to get drunk to be cool and...but, we did that when we were younger, but now like I mean...you learned from that and...when you are, I mean, older, it’s not like you’re obsessing about it any more...but, I don’t know.

Discussion: This is the example in the recorded material which contains the highest amount of hedges; twenty-two hedges in total. Like is the most commonly used hedge in this example, but what is really interesting is that the you know hedge is pronounced with a falling intonation, which according to Holmes (1987) indicates confidence in what has been said. As G4 talks about her own background, the falling intonation is natural (Holmes cited in Coates 2004: 88f). However, the excessive use of hedges in this conversational turn supports Lakoff’s (1975) claim that women use many hedges (Lakoff cited in Coates 2004: 88). Even though it would be hard to prove that G4 uses hedges as a strategy to come across as feminine, the vast amount of hedges could be used to indicate that they are indeed used to larger extent by women than by men. This example could show that girls, at a rather young age, have adopted the use of hedges as part of their language.

[17 minutes and 40 seconds into the conversation]
B4: Well, I think it’s rather hypocritical because uh...almost everyone in this circle, with the exception of a few people...uhm...do intend to get and do...they get shit-faced. And that’s what they think is fun and immediately afterwards they’re like “Oh, when’s the next party?” and I see grimaces and I...I...you know, it’s...

Discussion: B4 could use the like hedge as a strategy to distance himself from the people who drink too much. Regarding the you know hedge, he pronounces it with a rising intonation, which could be interpreted as a request for support from the other participants in the conversation. The I think hedge right at the beginning of his turn also serves as a way of softening the accusation of the other participants being hypocrites.

[18 minutes and 31 seconds into the conversation]
G1: Like with me, I’ve only been drunk twice, like...so I mean, it’s not like I go to parties and get drunk every time.

Discussion: By using the hedge like, G1 seems to distance herself from people who go to parties to get drunk and this could support Lakoff’s (1975) theory of hedges serving as a way for women to keep their femininity intact (see Lakoff cited in Coates 2004: 88f). To get drunk every time would probably not be regarded as very feminine and by using a hedge, G1 ensures that people do not associate her with that type of behaviour.

[18 minutes and 42 seconds into the conversation]
G4: Yeah, I mean...like you said, drinking doesn’t mean you have to get drunk. It’s just like...it’s also like a little social thing. It’s just a social thing....(simultaneous speech)...New Year’s Eve, it’s not, you know...

Discussion: In this example G4 uses four different hedges and the like hedges are hard to determine as she cannot be said to use them in order to distance herself from other people. Instead in this case, the likes can be seen more as fillers. The you know hedging device is said with a rising intonation and can be analysed as a way for G4 to ask for support from the other participants.
[19 minutes and 23 seconds into the conversation]

G4: Yeah and I know, like when...I know some people like here if we hang out, I mean we just, you know, have dinner, have a glass of wine and because I mean...here you can’t really...go clubbing, like...you can’t go to all clubs, ’cos we’re too young. So we just you know, we just hang out at home, have dinner, have a glass of wine or champagne...(simultaneous speech)...it’s not like...

Discussion: The two you know hedges in this turn are both pronounced with falling intonation. This could be interpreted as confidence and is natural as G4 talks about her own life and her own social actions.

[19 minutes and 48 seconds into the conversation]

B3: It’s more like socialising ’cos I mean...just like cheering with a stranger or something, opening up to meet people. It makes it a bit easier...

Discussion: Here, B3 uses the hedges in a rather neutral way, and the like hedges used in his turn do neither carry any attempts to distance himself from what he talks about, nor do they attempt to turn down a positive self-evaluation.

3.2.4 Interruptions

There are six occasions when participants in the recorded interaction break the turn-taking norms and interrupt one of the other speakers. As discussed earlier, there is a fine line between overlaps and interruptions. This makes it difficult to sometimes categorise what is considered an interruption and what is considered an overlap. The approach in this essay is that overlaps allow the current speaker to finish his or her turn, whereas an interruption prevents the speaker from finishing and instead it makes the current speaker silent. In overlaps, the speaker who takes the turn does so because of a possible completion in the current speaker’s turn. When interrupting, the speaker takes the turn regardless (see Coates 2004: 113f.)

In the 20 minutes of recorded spoken interaction, which is the raw material used for this study, an interesting pattern emerges. In a majority of the interruptions occurring, the participating girls are responsible for breaking the turn-taking rules. A very interesting observation is that the girls interrupt the boys.

[5 minutes and 20 seconds into the conversation]

B1: Oh, I beg to differ. (indecipherable)
G4: Selling it in like ICA stores would make it less a taboo...

Discussion: Just like with overlaps, this is hard to classify as a clear-cut interruption. However, the decision to regard this as an interruption is based on the fact that B1 had continued to talk when G4 self-selects herself and starts talking. B1 continues to talk for a very short while but then turns silent and allows G3 to take the floor alone.

From the perspective of turn-taking norms, G3 definitely violates the conversational symmetry when she takes the floor the way she does. It is likely that she assumed B1 was about to finish. However, when she realised he had more to say, she should have repaired the damage by being silent and by letting him finish. This situation is special in that it does not correspond to what other researchers have found when they have studied women’s behaviour in conversations. G3 breaks the gender stereotype, which claims that girls are the ones who are interrupted and boys are the ones...
who interrupt (see Holmes 2001: 293fff).

[5 minutes and 50 seconds into the conversation]
B3: But it’s everywhere, it’s (indecipherable)
G1: Getting (indecipherable)

Discussion: Just like with the previous example, this could also qualify as an overlap as it is possible that G1 assumes that B3 is about to finish his turn. When G1 takes the floor, using the strategy of self-selection, B3 has not finished his turn. The moment G1 understands that he will not, in order not to break the turn-taking norms, she should have gone quiet. This, however, shows that the girls in this study actually participate in the conversation with the same right to speak as the boys do. The girls dare to take charge over the conversation and they do not feel restricted to remain quiet. This can be seen as a change in how girls perceive their roles in conversations. Instead of accepting to be interrupted and silenced, they participate and have the same conversational rights as boys do.

[10 minutes and 50 seconds into the conversation]
This example is unfortunately impossible to transcribe as there are too many participants talking at the same time. A girl takes the turn when a boy reaches a possible closure; she is then interrupted by another girl who takes the floor by not letting the current speaker finish.

[12 minutes and 38 seconds into the conversation]
G1: ...but it is in a way, like the way they regulate it and stuff.
G2: Well, I don’t know...
B1: Yeah (indecipherable) how the population treats it.

Discussion: When G1 finishes her turn, there is silence for a very short while, which indicates that the floor is open to any participant who wishes to self-select him- or herself the next speaker. Both G2 and B1 see the opportunity to do so and B1 is somewhat quicker and has started on his turn when G2 starts talking. When G2 understands that B1 is not willing to give her the floor, she stops talking in order to repair the damage and lets B1 finish his turn. In this example, the girl was the one who violated the turn-taking norm, but she was also aware of it and repaired it.

[13 minutes and 45 seconds into the conversation]
G2: I’ve never (indecipherable)
G1: I have never (indecipherable)

Discussion: This is again an example of how women, and in this case girls, do not have a problem with simultaneous speech and the collaborative floor, which means that the floor is open to several people at the same time (see Coates 2004: 131). G1 breaks the turn-taking pattern when she decides to take floor even though G2 had already started. G2 does not seem to be disturbed by this instead they hold the floor together and talk simultaneously.

[18 minutes and 11 seconds into the conversation]
B4: ...I see grimaces...and I...you know, it’s...it might as well....(indecipherable)...
G1: ...go to these parties where people aren’t drinking

Discussion: This example shows how girls have adopted the role that has traditionally been associated with men; the interrupter. In this case, G1 clearly interrupts B4, even though he has not
indicated that he was about to finish his turn. Even though B4 continues to speak, which should have resulted in G1 trying to recreate the conversational symmetry by turning silent, both parts continue to speak until B4 eventually finishes his turn. Once again a girl behaves in a way that according to previous research is associated with men’s conversational behaviour. G1 is the one who interrupts and B4 is the one who is interrupted. The research that Holmes refers to by Zimmerman and West (1975) which stated that men are much more likely to interrupt women is in other words not exclusively valid in this study (see Zimmerman et al cited in Holmes 2001: 294f).
4. Discussion

The recorded conversation, which was the raw material used in the analysis, is in no way a perfect spoken interaction. Several times the turn-taking norms are violated and when Grice’s conversational maxims are applied to the conversation, it is obvious that the cooperative principle is not a principle the participants necessarily stick to. As shown in the examples given from the recorded conversation, both girls and boys violate the turn-taking rules as well as the cooperative principle on several occasions.

Minimal responses was the first category to be analysed. The analysis showed that a vast majority of the minimal responses were uttered by the participating girls. From a traditional gender perspective, which focuses on the difference between men’s and women’s language, the minimal responses function as a way, for women mainly, to create a feeling of solidarity (Coates 2004: 128f). The recording clearly shows how the participating girls use minimal responses as a way to support the other participants, regardless of sex or gender. The boys who participated in the discussion did not use as many minimal responses as the girls did, and this is something which other researchers have distinguished as a difference between men and women. Men use language in a more competitive way and use the strategy of delayed minimal responses, which can be interpreted as lack of interest in the topic or what the other participant says (Coates 2004: 123). There were no delayed minimal responses identified in the recorded material and on the few occasions where the participating boys chose to use minimal responses as a part of their conversational strategies, the minimal responses were used the same way as the girls did. In other words the boys also used the minimal responses to show solidarity and to support the current speaker.

Minimal responses can function as a part of the cooperative principle since the use of these can give a feeling of cooperation in the conversation. However, when investigating how well minimal responses correlate to Grice’s conversational maxims, they can be considered to be relevant in that the current speaker obviously wants some sort of response from the other participants and still wants to keep the floor. Minimal responses can, in this case, have a significant purpose, but they can also be considered to break several of the other maxims that Grice established. From the perspectives of the quantity and the manner maxims, minimal responses are to be considered violations. The quantity maxim which states that participants should keep their conversational contributions as informative as possible transform minimal responses into violations of this maxim. Minimal responses are hardly seen as quantitative as their main purpose is to provide another participant with support or as a way of taking the floor.

The minimal responses can also be considered a violation of the manner maxim which says that all contributions should be as clear as possible. Minimal responses can easily be interpreted as ambiguous as it is the current speaker him- or herself who has to decide how minimal responses should be interpreted.

Researchers who have studied language from a gender perspective, have found that men are more likely to break the conversational rules, in particular when it comes to the norms of turn-taking. However, minimal responses which have been heavily associated with women’s language are not in any way less ‘correct’ when it comes to Grice’s conversational maxims. This means that the participating girls in this study are violating the conversational maxims, since they are responsible for the majority of the violations in the minimal responses category.

The participating girls in this study reproduced the image of girls’ conversational behaviour as collaborative and supportive of the other participants. They were supportive and used minimal
responses when the other participants talked. On the few occasions where boys used minimal responses, they mainly used them in order to support the other boys. The gender roles are reproduced in that the girls do what Fishman (1980) refers to as ‘conversational shitwork’ (see Fishman cited in Coates 2004: 87f); the participating girls support the others by adding minimal responses to show that they pay attention to what the other participants say. The boys, on the other hand, use them to show an interest in other boys’ contributions to the conversation.

Even though minimal responses are to be considered violations regarding some of Grice’s maxims, the absence of minimal responses can also be seen as breaking conversational rules, as silence can be seen as a strategy of non-cooperation which many sociolinguists associate with male strategies (see Coates 2004: 120fff). The use of minimal responses was so established among the participating girls that it is safe to say that young girls learn that conversations function as a platform for collaboration and for establishing relationships. This is a conclusion which correlates well with what other researchers have found.

Boys are expected and raised to be competitive, whereas girls are raised to be compassionate and supportive. This of course results in the way boys and girls use language. However, the lack of absence of minimal responses by the boys does not really give strength regarding male competitiveness as two of the boys in the study were rather passive. One of the boys hardly said anything at all in the conversation. This passiveness is an interesting observation. He did not use the conversational floor to compete with the other participants. The other boy, who used a more polite strategy, raised his hand before taking the floor also did not come across as very competitive. This type of behaviour is not expected from a boy according to the theories of men’s and women’s ways to take turns. It is important to keep in mind that the participants are individuals and not representatives of their sex. The field of gender and language is in danger of paying more attention to gender as categories and forgetting the individuals. In this study, however, the girls behave according to earlier research in that they embrace the cooperative and collaborative style. They use minimal responses as a strategy to create conversational relationships with both boys and girls.

The category of hedges stood out, when it came to reproducing the existing research findings related to gender. The result in this section supports the theory of hedges as an integral part of what Lakoff (1975) referred to as ‘women’s language’ (Lakoff cited in Holmes 2001: 286). In relation to the results of hedges, it is important to discuss the fact that the participating girls did not use an equal amount of hedges. Just like with the minimal responses, individual behaviour can influence the result a great deal. The large amount of hedges used by the girls was the consequence of one of the participants who used more hedges than the other girls. This is certainly something which has to be taken to consideration when looking at the results. Despite this, the girls still used more hedges than the boys and they also preferred to use the non-certain version of you know with the falling intonation. This is something which supports the results of other sociolinguists.

The four different explanations that Holmes (2001) gives as to why women’s use of language is different from men’s, can all explain the girls in the study’s usage of hedges (see Holmes 2001: 157). Women’s roles in society are expressed in the way they use language. Because women still are regarded as a subordinate group, even in somewhat equal countries like Sweden, they must use language in a careful and polite way, in order not to offend the dominating group, the men. By using a language considered less offensive and less direct, women reproduce their subordinate status as it helps them to protect their own face. The explanation is that society expects boys and girls to behave differently linguistically and that implies that girls are expected to use more ‘proper’ language. Holmes claims that the fact that “Women are designated the role of modelling correct behaviour in the community” is a contributing factor to gender differences in language use (Holmes 2001: 158f). These expectations on girls and women demand that they use a language which is not offensive and not too dominating. In order to make language less confrontational the
Use of hedges is convenient because they wrap the message up (Coates 2004: 88). Even though the girls in this study are fairly young and have grown up in a society which embraces gender equality, the distribution of hedges in the recorded spoken interaction implies that girls still confirm to the societal expectations that they should embed their language in hedges in order to protect their faces. This is of course something which happens without girls being conscious about it; girls do not have a strategy to use language which reproduces gender stereotypes.

Regarding the results of the hedges category, it is important to discuss the composition of the group. The results could have come out differently if other participants had taken part in the study. It is the people in the group that create the result together. In this study one girl in particular, used a great deal of hedges. If another girl had taken her place in the study, the result might have been different, but that is always the case in research.

Lakoff (1975) claims women use hedges to express uncertainty (Lakoff cited in Holmes 2001: 286f), a theory which is supported by Coates (2004). It is a strategy of portraying oneself as ladylike or to make sure utterances come across less confrontationally (see Coates 2004: 88f). Hedges can, in other words, be called a strategy of politeness as the purpose is to save faces. However, the use of hedges can be problematic. Despite its purpose of politeness, hedges are violations of Grice’s conversational maxims. When looking closer at the four areas, relation, quality, quantity and manner (see Coulthard 1985: 31), which make up Grice’s conversational maxims, hedges can be considered violation of all four areas.

The manner maxim, which implies that a speaker should be relevant in his or her contributions in the conversation, is clearly violated when somebody uses hedges. As mentioned earlier, hedges are used to sound less confrontational or to express uncertainty, which is something that cannot be considered relevant in a conversation. Instead, hedges are a way of avoiding being relevant. By adding hedges to one’s language, the message is covered in a sophisticated way. The quality maxims, which claim that one should not say things one believes to be false, and that one should not to say things that one cannot prove, are also violated when somebody uses hedges. Since hedges are used to express uncertainty, they clash with the quality manners because they show that the speaker does not have solid proof for what he or she says.

The same can be said for the quantity manner, as it expects participants to make sure that the contributions are as informative as possible. Hedges are not informative; instead they are to be seen as fillers that really do not provide the language with anything substantial. This is also something which violates the manner maxim. As two of the sub-categories of the manner maxim require that participants in conversations should be brief and avoid ambiguity, hedges also violate this maxim. When using hedges to soften the message, this is of course a strategy to not be brief; even though the purpose could be to save face, it is still a violation of a maxim. The same thing goes for the ambiguity part; since hedges are used to avoid directness, there is also a risk that the message is open to misinterpretation. This clearly shows how, even though the girls in the study are likely to use hedges, to not portray themselves as too confident and to offend the boys, they still break conversational rules, in this case Grice’s conversational maxims. Girls and women are exposed to a very difficult situation. As Holmes (2001) puts it: a woman is damned if she uses language which is expected from a woman. If so, she is ridiculed and made fun of. She is also at risk of being accused of not being able to think clearly. If a woman refuses to use the language expected from a woman she will be accused of not being a woman. According to Holmes, these are the two alternatives a woman has to choose from; she can choose to be less of a woman or less of a person (Holmes 2001: 284). This serves as an explanation to why women save face by using a language which is full of hedges. It is expected from them.
The results regarding overlaps, showed that Edelsky’s (1993) and Coates’ (2004) observations of women’s supposed collaborative floor and tolerance with more than one speaker at the time holding the floor, were accurate (Edelsky cited in Coates 2004: 131). In the recorded material the participating girls were the ones who showed the most anticipation when it came to starting to talk before the current speaker had finished his or her turn. The girls identified a potential closure and started to talk. What is interesting about how the boys and girls overlapped each other is that the boys tended to interrupt boys, this happened twice and only once did a boy overlap a girl. The girls on the other hand, overlapped the boys nine times and other girls seven times. The girls, when breaking the turn-taking norms, did so to take the floor from a boy. This is something which has to be discussed as these findings do not correspond very well to what other researchers have found when they have studied the same phenomenon. An explanation as to why the girls in this study behave this way can be explained by the development society has undergone when it comes to how gender roles are being discussed and how girls have been encouraged to take place. The girls in this study are 17 or 18 years old. They have grown up in an environment that has tried to be equal and has been very outspoken on discrimination because of gender. As language is not isolated from the rest of society it is natural that this will influence the way people behave in conversations. What this study has shown is that the change may have started by the way girls take turns in conversations. The simultaneous speech and the collaborative floor were no new findings. Other researchers have shown that this is often case in all-women conversations. The change is seen in that they dare to take the floor from the boys. In the study, the girls did not behave like a group which has less conversational rights compared to boys.

The most interesting results were the ones regarding interruptions. The results were very unexpected as they showed that the girls in the conversations were the participants who used interruptions as a conversational strategy. This is something which is not associated with girls’ or women’s conversational behaviour. Other researchers have found that men are more likely to interrupt women. Zimmerman and West (1975) (Zimmerman et al cited in Holmes 2001: 293f) as well as other researchers, for example Holmes (1995) have discovered the same pattern; that men are less likely to interrupt other men. However, when they are engaged in conversations with women, they use interruptions as a way to restrict women’s rights to talk. This is something which is particularly the case when a woman is about to finish a turn (Holmes cited in Coates 2004: 115).

Interruptions are of course considered severe violations of conversational. They disrupt the organisation and structure of the conversation (Coates 2004: 113f). The fact that girls were mainly responsible for conversational violations when it came to interruptions is an interesting observation. In the other categories analysed, the girls reproduced the behaviour that is expected from girls, in the use of minimal responses and hedges. As these two categories are considered politeness markers it is interesting that the girls then adopt a mode of behaviour which is heavily associated with men’s use of turn-taking. This could be seen as evidence that the gender roles of language are slowly beginning to change. When linguistic changes occur, they usually start within one group and this group is most likely to consist of the younger population (Holmes 2001: 171f). In linguistic changes women are associated with changes that are prestigious as well as vernacular, less prestigious. Men, on the other hand, are more often responsible for vernacular changes only (Holmes 2001: 210).

Even though this is the case with linguistic features such as pronunciation and adopting new words, it is likely that changes in turn-taking patterns develop the same way, starting with the young speakers. Just like with all changes, they take often take place gradually. The change might start with the girls breaking turn-taking systems by using interruptions, in order to take the floor, and then gradually the change will move over to overlaps and to how girls use minimal responses and hedges as well.
Once again it is important to discuss how the group composition can affect the result. Of course there is a chance or risk that the result regarding interruptions is the result of the girls in this study being more ‘aggressive’ than the average girl. This is something which always has to be discussed in linguistic research. However, in this study the girls behaved somewhat more aggressively when it came to interruptions, which could also be explained by the fact that researchers have found that women are more likely to accept a conversational environment where more than one person at a time speaks. Both Edelsky (1993) and Coates (2004) have studied this phenomenon and come up with the same conclusion; that collaborative talk or jam session talk is an integral part of the way women organise conversations. In women-only conversational groups Coates, described the floor as open to all participants simultaneously (Edelsky cited in Coates 2004: 131). This could serve as an explanation to why the participating girls were more likely to interrupt than the boys were. If one is used to collaborative or jam session talk when engaged in interaction with your female friends, it is also more likely that this type of conversational behaviour is used in mixed-sex conversations as well.

Interruptions are, as mentioned earlier, violations of the turn-taking norms and there is also a violation of Grice’s manner maxim which says that participants have to conform to rules when engaged in a conversation. Interrupting somebody else when he or she has the conversational turn is violation of this maxim. In the recorded conversation which was used for this analysis, there are two occasions where one participant actually infers when he has identified a violation of a conversational maxim. In these two cases, it is the same boy who infers in order to repair the situation. The fact that it is a boy who infers is not a surprise, considering that girls seem to be more tolerant of simultaneous speech than boys.

The absence of tag questions was somewhat surprising considering the high frequency of minimal responses and hedges. Since these two are so heavily associated with the way women are believed to use language, the lack of tag questions was interesting. Tag questions, however, are also a violation of Grice’s conversational maxims as they violate the quality as well the quantity maxims. Tag questions are a way to show insecurity and therefore they violate the maxim that says that participants in a conversation should not say anything for which they lack adequate evidence. They can also be said to violate the quantity maxim which says that one should be as informative as possible when contributing to a conversation. Just like hedges, tag questions serve a function as fillers and cannot be seen as contributing with information to the conversation. Instead, their purpose is to create a feeling of solidarity and togetherness among the participants in the conversation. This is good from the social aspect, but does not really provide the conversation with substantial contributions from the perspectives of conversational maxims.
5. Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to provide answers to the two research questions stated in section 1.2.

This essay aims to consider whether the ideas of female cooperation and male competitiveness in conversations are valid among high school students. It also aims to investigate whether male and female high school students use different conversational strategies when participating in a conversation.

Regarding the theories of female cooperation and male competitiveness, the study shows that the participating girls and boys were flexible when it come to acting according to the gender stereotypes. The results show that the boys did not use language in a competitive way only and that the girls did not behave in a collaborative or cooperative way exclusively. Instead the study shows that the existing theories and expectations on conversational behaviour from a gender perspective are not watertight and that they depend on which categories you use in your linguistic analysis.

What this study shows is that the linguistic features that Lakoff (1975) claimed were significant of how women use language are rather accurate. Lakoff was criticized for making those claims without any proper research, more based on her own intuition and observations (Holmes 2001: 286). Even so, this study supports Lakoff’s findings. When analysing the features of the so called ‘women’s language’ in this study, the girls were actually over-represented in the use of minimal responses and hedges. Girls do, in other words learn at an early age to use language as a way to maintain relationships with their friends and other people. This pattern was very clear in the minimal responses section, where the girls really adopted the collaborative or cooperative strategy by supporting the other participants in the conversation. The boys also used some minimal responses in the conversation, but there were no delayed minimal responses identified in the conversation, which is seen as an evidence of men’s competitive style and male dominance over women (Coates 2004: 123f). They also used minimal responses in order to acknowledge the other participants, mainly other boys. The boys adopted a cooperative strategy more associated with how girls are expected to behave.

Just like with minimal responses, the girls used hedges the way Lakoff (1975) claimed that they were used by women. Direct language is something which is associated with male language and a woman who uses direct language is at risk of not being perceived as proper woman (Lakoff cited in Coates 2004: 88).

The girls used many more hedges than the boys, which indicates that the concept of ‘women’s language’ is adopted by girls at a young age. The study shows that Lakoff’s observation was correct when she claimed that hedges were an important part of how women use language. However, not only girls use hedges as a way to show insecurity or to express uncertainty. As this study shows boys also use hedges, however not to the same extent. However when they used the hedge you know they used it in the same way as the girls do, as part of a strategy to gather support from the other participants. When looking closer at the purpose of the you know hedge, the girls in fact used this hedge with the falling intonation, which indicates certainty, more often than the boys did. In that sense the girls tended to use language to ‘play experts’ on more occasions than the boys.

The girls in the study were very collaborative and cooperative in that they used minimal responses as a way to maintain the relationship with the other girls. This is something which is confirmed when looking at how the minimal responses are placed as a way to show solidarity. However, the boys’ competitiveness has not been confirmed the same way. In fact, the boys did not behave in a competitive way, but rather cooperatively as well. The traits that other researchers have identified as
characterising of male competitiveness, such as using language to show expertise or to compete verbally with other participants in the interaction is not seen in this study (Coates 2004: 133ff). This study shows that not all boys have adopted the more competitive strategy when engaged in conversations. The result has to be discussed in the context where the ideas of cooperation and social intelligence have been discussed and embraced over the last years.

When it comes to turn-taking norms, the girls were clearly the ones who acted in a more competitive way by overlapping and interrupting the other participants, girls as well as the boys who took part in the conversation. The boys were also responsible for some of the violations of the turn-taking rules, but not to the same extent as the girls. This is perhaps the most interesting finding in this study.

The conclusion reached in this study is therefore that the ideas of female cooperation and male competitiveness were not exclusively relevant. The girls behaved in a cooperative way by using minimal responses and hedges, but they also behaved very competitively when taking turns, so the thought that girls always behave cooperatively proved to be incorrect. However, the idea of boys’ competitiveness and aggressiveness in conversations, especially when engaged in interaction with girls did not prove to be valid, at least not when it came to the boys participating in this study. Instead they were much more ‘gentle’ in turn-taking situations, compared to the girls, and the boys were also the ones who tended to infer when they believed that turn-taking norms had been violated according to Grice’s maxims.
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