"Boys are from Mars, Girls are from Venus"

A Study of the Linguistic Role of Gender in Swedish Classrooms

En studie av könets språkliga roll i den svenska skolans undervisning
Acknowledgements

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Abstract
This research aimed to find out whether or not linguistic theories on how men and women use language can be applied to boys and girls, and their language use, in two selected schools in Southern Sweden. The data was accumulated throughout field investigation. Five questions were created and six teachers from two selected schools were asked to read the questions and keep them in mind while observing them in their class for one week. They were asked to write the answers and hand them in within one week. When the data was accumulated I started to draw connections to already existing theories on how men and women use language and, I started to compare it with how boys and girls use language from these two schools. The answers from the six teachers that participated in this research were not diverse, and they corresponded with the theories cited in this essay’s literature review on how men and women use language. For instance, boys tend to use humor as a tool when they communicate in order to occupy the centre of attention just like men, while girls tend to be emotionally involved while communicating just like women. This is one example of many similarities that this research has found.

Key words: boys, gender, girls, language use, linguistic differences, men, women
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1. Introduction

The reason for writing this essay is because I am interested in how boys and girls use their language comprehension. As a prospective teacher in English, I believe that this is useful knowledge and information for my own career choice. To begin with, I will give explanations for all of the chapters: an overview of what this essay contains followed by the essay’s purpose and the thesis question.

1.1 An Overview of the Essay

Chapter One is the introduction chapter and, in this chapter, I have briefly explained why I have chosen to write about the linguistic differences between boys and girls. In subchapter 1.1, as already mentioned above, each chapter of this essay will be presented separately in order to give an overview of this essay. It will involve explanations of what each chapter and subchapter of this essay represents. Subchapter 1.2 will introduce the thesis question and the purpose of this essay. Chapter Two will relate earlier studies that are relevant for this essay. Studies that will be mentioned are those that have been accomplished over recent years that have arrived at different conclusions regarding language and gender. Subchapter 2.1 maintains studies that are gender related studies on second language acquisition, and subchapter 2.2 presents different studies that have been done on gender and language in general. Chapter Three will illustrate background information for this essay. This chapter describes the difference between the usage of the term “sex” and the term “gender”, mainly because this study is based on students’ socially defined gender as opposed to their biological gender. Subchapter 3.1 explains the definition of the term “sex”, while subchapter 3.2 explicates the definition of the term “gender” both in general and in linguistic terms.

Chapter Four will outline two different approaches on the subject, and their theories on gender and language. Subchapter 4.1 introduces Edlund’s theory on language and gender. Subchapter 4.2 describes Locke’s theory on why men and women speak differently. Chapter Five, which is the methodology chapter, will contain a demonstration of the method that was used for this study. Subchapter 5.1 presents the process for performing and accomplishing this study. This subchapter also introduces the six respondents that have contributed to this research. Chapter Six will include the results of this study. Six teachers from two selected high schools in Southern Sweden were asked to keep five questions in mind and observe them for one week. With this they contributed to the results of this study. In this chapter, their contribution to this essay will be presented. Chapter Seven will be my conclusion. It will
analyze the results of my research and make general conclusions from them. These will then be compared and contrasted to the theories proposed by Edlund and Locke concerning how men and women use language. It will then be possible to draw conclusions as to the extent to which these theories are applicable to children undergoing education, and wider implications of this within the field of education will be considered.

1.2 The Purpose of the Essay and the Thesis Question

The bestselling\(^1\) book *Men are from Mars and Women are from Venus* was written by a relationship counselor named John Gray. The title of the book suggests that men differ from women and vice versa to a far greater extent than might previously have been appreciated. More recently, it has been said that men and women differ in their language use. The implication of the title is that, metaphorically speaking, men and women use language as though they originate from two different planets.

The purpose with this essay is to discover the extent to which the linguistic differences between men and women relate to boys and girls in Swedish high schools where English is being taught as a second language. Therefore, I have formulated the following thesis question: how can the linguistic differences between men and women be applied to boys and girls in two selected Swedish high schools?

\(^1\) It is acclaimed as such by the publisher here:

2. Earlier Studies

During recent years, much research has been carried out concerning the linguistic differences between men and women. In this chapter, I have collated and described some of the studies that have been carried out over recent years.

2.1 Gender Related Studies in Second Language Acquisition

Since the aim of my essay is to find out how the linguistic differences between men and women can be applied on boys and girls in selected Swedish high schools where English as a second language is being taught, I decided to find out what earlier studies have to say about gender differences regarding second language acquisition. What I found was that earlier studies came to the conclusion that women have a more positive attitude towards learning a second language than men. For example, Ellis writes about two studies that came to the same conclusion. The first study that Ellis mentions was conducted by Clare Burstall in England in a primary school where students learned French (Ellis, 1994:489). This study revealed that female students were more successful than the male students in the exams they sat. The study was conducted in 1975. The other study that Ellis mentions, which came to the same conclusion as Burstall, was performed by Dan Boyle in 1987. He conducted his research in Hong Kong on a group of university students learning English (Ellis, 1994:200). Ellis (1994) wrote that female students are more positive toward second language acquisition and more motivated, while male students are more instrumentally motivated (Ellis, 1994:203), which means that men are motivated for practical reasons and not for personal reasons.

More recent studies have shown that it does not necessarily have to be true that women are more successful than men in second language acquisition. Block (2002) cites a study by Gardner and Lambert which showed that female learners of French as a second language in Canada were more motivated and more positive towards the speakers of the target language than the male learners.

2.2 Language and Gender Related Studies

Since the early 1990s, studies have mainly focused on the differences between men’s and women’s language use. Earlier studies have shown how differently men and women use language when communicating with people throughout conversations in a larger group or a two-way dialog. According to Gray, women love to talk while men prefer action instead of words. Women also view talking as a way of connecting with others emotionally, while men
treat conversation either as a practical tool or a competitive sport. According to Gray (1992),
women are good at listening, building rapport with others and avoiding conflict. Men, on the
other hand, confront each other more directly, and they are less attuned to either their own or
others’ feelings when having a conversation (Gray, 1992:21).

Crawford came to the conclusion that men and women talk differently, but that it is not
simply because of the sex differences. It is rather due to differences between the two sexes in
power, status and other characteristics related to social context. Crawford (1995) believes that
the language difference between men and women is learned, situational and reinforced by
social institutions and situational factors.

A more recent study was conducted by Edlund, and she concludes that there is no obvious
connection between language and gender, but that there are stereotypes that show a difference
between men and women regarding language use Edlund (2007). One stereotype is that
women love to talk while men prefer to be brief, these types of stereotypes are usually applied
on men and women in society.
3. Background

In this study, I chose to use the term “gender” to categorize the students of my research according to my perception their socially defined gender as opposed to their biological gender; I will next explain the difference between “sex” and “gender”.

3.1 The Definition of Sex

In earlier times, men and women were believed to have different inherent characteristics, but these were then linked to the notion that the male sex was physically and mentally superior, while the female counterpart was, in these respects, an inferior version (Edlund, 2007:36). During the 1700's, a new perception was established of women's and men's bodies: they became even more of each other's opposites; every detail of a woman's body was described as being more radically different than of a man (Ibid). Some examples are that women menstruate while men do not; men have testicles while women do not, and men generally have more massive bones than women.

In the 1950s and 1960s, British and American psychiatrists, and other medical professionals working with intersex and transsexual patients, developed a distinction between the term “sex” and the term “gender”. Since then, the term “sex” has been increasingly used to describe sex as something biological and something that basically assumes a sex categorization from biological factors. With the external biological factors genitals (vagina and penis), and the internal factors such as chromosomes, (XX, XY) and hormones (estrogens, androgens), we can, in most cases, categorize people as either male or female (Edlund, 2007:29). In other words, “sex” refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that define men and women.

Studies have also shown that the term “sex” is more complex and that the word itself started to lose meaning when talking about the differences in linguistic orientations, considering that the term “sex” is used to describe the biological gender (Edlund, 2007:179).

3.2 The Definition of Gender

The term “gender” originates from the Latin word “genus”, meaning kind, sort or class (Shaw, Ardener, 2005:3). The term “gender” is used to explain masculinity and femininity (Grauer, Macadam, 1998:1), rather than if the person is a female or male. When talking about gender in linguistic terms, the definition of gender can be divided into three categories: 1) social gender, 2) grammatical gender, and 3) natural gender (Yule, 2010:84). The definition
of gender, where the social constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women are being applied to men and women is defined as the “social” gender (Yule, 2010:274). An example of this is that women do more housework than men, in most parts of the world, mainly because, in society’s view, it is defined as “women’s work”. The second definition of gender, in linguistic terms, is the grammatical gender and it is used when defining a noun as masculine, feminine or neuter. The noun “girl” is feminine, and is referred to by the feminine pronoun “she”. The noun “boy” is masculine, and is referred to by the masculine pronoun “he”, and the noun table is neuter, and is referred to by the neuter pronoun “it” (Yule, 2010:84). The third linguistic definition of gender is the natural gender. This definition of gender is based on the biological distinction between male, female or neither (Ibid). From these three mentioned linguistic terms, this study is based on the social gender. This is because the theories regarding language and gender are stereotypes of how men and women use language: stereotypes that society indirectly applies on men and women.
4. Theories

This essay aims to establish whether the linguistic differences between men and women, as identified by specified theorists, can be applied to boys and girls in Swedish classrooms. In this chapter, I will outline the principles which are central to the two theories I have chosen to use in this essay in order to ascertain their applicability to children’s communication.

4.1 Ann Catrine Edlund

Edlund (2007) mainly writes about different stereotypes regarding men’s and women’s language use. She proposes that men and women use language in different ways and for different purposes, and she believes that one of the differences is that women talk more than men. In this case, Edlund (2007) discusses the stereotype that claims that women are ambiguous and like to gibber. “In its most patronizing interpretation women are ambiguous and they chatter, but despite their speech flow and their chatter, their speech is without real substance – it is meaningless and therefore irrelevant”\(^2\) (Edlund, 2007:58). Edlund (2007) refers this theory to a study that was made by two Swedish linguists, Cederschiöld and Lindqvist, who concluded that women “dominate”\(^3\) feel feelings or emotions while men “dominate” sense. In women’s speech, there is greater use of subjectivity whereas men’s speech tends towards greater objectivity. Because a woman dominates the emotional dimension, she is more impulsive in her speech and, therefore, talks with greater rapidity and with strong emotions more evident. In the same utterance, a woman can express conflicting views, which means that her speech is perceived as aimless and difficult to interpret (Edlund, 2007:61).

Edlund (2007) also proposes that women have a tendency to experience or create closeness to the topic that they are talking about and empathy with the people with whom they are talking. She also believes that women like to feel a belonging in the conversation; women like to open themselves up and reveal their inner thoughts in order to be appreciated and feel a belonging. Men are the opposite: they generate a distance between both themselves and their topic, and also between themselves and their interlocutors. Edlund (2007) believes that men have a tendency to aim for control in a conversation while women prefer to listen and be friendly.

\(^2\) It is my own translation from Swedish.

\(^3\) Edlund uses the Swedish word actually used and it is a cognate (cognate are words that can easily be transformed from English, and in this case, to Swedish).
These are traditionally typical male and female sociolinguistic related factors, which result in different conversations. “The men’s conversations are said to be reported and actively problem solving. This means that men are looking for a solution for the problem in a conversation and that they are looking for a closure in the discussion, in order for them to move on” (Edlund, 2007:63). It is also said that men tend to expound in conversation, while women are said to be more focused on their listening skills. Women’s conversation is also said to be relationship building and empathetic. Edlund (2007) concludes that men and women communicate in different ways and therefore they behave differently regarding language use. Edlund (2007) also points to a study that was made by Lakoff. This study claims that women leave the way open for comments or modifications when using question intonation. Instead of stating that dinner is at six o’clock, women have a tendency to say: “six o’clock?” in order to get a modification or a comment on the time (Edlund, 2007:66). Men, on the other hand, use questions in order to extract information and not modification or comments. Women also tend to overuse words such as “isn’t it?”, “well”, and “kind off”. These kinds of expressions are used to express women’s insecurity or cautiousness. The main difference between men’s and women’s language use, according to Lakoff, is that women are more polite than men when conversing. This means that women in conversations avoid oppositions and conflict with the person with whom they are speaking.

4.2 John L. Locke

Locke (2011) discusses why men and women talk differently: he writes that men are more likely to interrupt each other, resist each other’s demands, tell jokes and try to top another’s story when having a conversation in a group of the same sex. He also writes that women are more likely to agree with one another, acknowledge points made by other speakers, cooperate and be polite when they are having a conversation in a group with other women (Locke, 2011:6). Locke (2011) has mainly focused on his beliefs that men “duel” when they are talking with each other, while women “duet”. Throughout history, he claims, men have dueled. They dueled to protect the honor of their country or the honor of their loved ones (Locke, 2011:31). Even if this is another kind of dueling, men have a tendency to duel, metaphorically speaking, with words as well. This means that men have a tendency to struggle with another skillful opponent when speaking to each other; they fight for the honor in a conversation. Dueling has a call-response structure and usually insults elicit an in-kind

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4 It is my own translation from Swedish.
response. The call and response structure is a form by spontaneous verbal and non-verbal interaction between a speaker and a listener in which all of the statements, which are defined as calls, are punctuated by expressions, which are responses from the listener. Locke (2011) mentions examples that he identifies as dueling signs. For example, in many societies, when a man encounters a long-term male friend, he utters a lighthearted insult: “How are you, you old son of a bitch?” “Well, look at what the cat dragged in.” (Locke, 2011:37) Locke (2011) sees these “greetings” as a way for men to play-fight with words.

Another example of dueling comes from the inner city areas of Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia and New York, in which black adolescents and young adults play a verbal game called “Sounding”. In this game, two opponents duel verbally, making derogatory remarks about each other’s family members, usually the opponent’s mother. It is a humiliating situation for the one receiving the derogatory remarks about his mother. Each player is appreciated and judged by the group, whose responsibility is also to urge the players on. The winner is the player who hurls the most linguistically derogatory comments and still maintains his composure (Locke, 2011:43). Examples of derogatory comments related to one’s mother is: “Yo mama’s so stupid she stole a free sample.”, “Yo mama’s so fat, when she backs up she beeps.” (Locke, 2011:44).

These kinds of performances are examples of how men try to get others to like or admire them. The most known strategy is men’s use of humor (Locke, 2011:71). Many men, like circus hawkers, like to draw a crowd and to be up on their feet in front of it laughing, boasting, swaggering, showing off, clowning around and doing what they can to make themselves the center of attention, therefore they duel (Locke, 2011:62). On the other hand, Locke argues, women have never dueled. Locke (2011) mentions that there are no indications of it in the history records, but that there are a few cases where women dueled with swords, although this was rare. Women had virtue, but they clearly did not have honor in anything approaching the masculine sense. According to Locke (2011), there is no evidence that women have ever engaged in verbal dueling as performed by men, or that they do so now (Locke, 2011:48-49).

Locke (2011) says that women have a tendency to duet when they have a conversation. This means that they indirectly complete each other’s sentences because the listener already knows what the speaker has to say without her finishing the sentence. For example:

Adele: because they’ve only got to win four seats
Beth: four … yes, I know
Just as Beth is saying “four”, she hears Adele say “only got to win four seats”. This means that Beth does not have to add the word seats as she would have if she was the sole speaker. This is connected to the fact that women have a tendency to agree with one another during a conversation; therefore, they duet in a way that singers do when they perform together (Locke, 2011:122). To duet is a way of relating while talking. When words are used, there is a tendency for linguists to get involved, but duetting is less about language than it is about action – human interaction that is expressed in movement of the body, face and voice. Timing is also important and eye movements matter. Duetting reflects women’s reactions to external events, but it responds to internal forces – emotions and memories and ongoing life events. Duetting expresses evolved dispositions for one woman to coordinate, perhaps even to coalesce, with another (Locke, 2011:117).

As with duels, the evolution of duets is a story about the emergence of an adaptive way to deal with competition, but duets involve a collective approach to competition. In a collective approach, two or more persons collaborate to reach a common goal, or to help one of them achieve a personal objective (Locke, 2011:138).

Meanwhile, men have a tendency to maintain some distance from others if they are to remain free to act as they wish; therefore, they do not duet in order to maintain distance from others (Locke, 2011:159). Duets involve an honest exchange of emotion and intimate experience. If a duetting relationship turns sour, this “material” can be used to threaten or weaken the person that supplied it. This is not something that Locke believes would naturally appeal to men.
5. Methodology

Here, I will explain the method that was used during the study. In this chapter, I will also explain the process of the study and how it was performed.

5.1 Inductive Method

This essay's research is based on qualitative field investigation, and the results that were made in the qualitative field work will be analyzed by employing different theories in the field of how men and women use language differently. This will be done through the inductive method. Jacobsen (2002) illustrates that this method aims to observe a phenomenon and collects data on it. In my case, the phenomenon is the linguistic differences between boys and girls at the age of 12-14 in two selected Swedish high schools. When the data has been collated, existing theories will be applied to interpret that data and conclusions drawn accordingly. In my case, the existing theories come from Edlund and Locke.

5.2 Procedure

In this study, I have chosen to investigate the extent to which current linguistic theories, which attempt to explain how men and women use language differently, can be applied to boys and girls between the ages of 12 and 14 in two high schools in Sweden. My respondents are six teachers from two high schools in Southern of Sweden. The teachers’ background career information is the following:

Respondent A is a female teacher in English and Art. She has worked as a teacher for about 20 years.
Respondent B is a female teacher in English and Social Science. She has worked as a teacher for one year.
Respondent C is a female teacher in Social Science and English. She has worked as a teacher for about 30 years.
Respondent D is a male teacher in Swedish, English and Physical Education. He has worked as a teacher for 8 years.
Respondent E is a male teacher in Swedish and English. He has worked as a teacher for 12 years.
Respondent F is a female teacher in English and Social Science. She has worked as a teacher for 14 years.
I identified these six teachers from two high schools, because they all teach pupils from similar backgrounds, and they all live in the same part of Sweden. I decided to rely on teachers working in the field and seek first hand data from their perspectives. When I found six teachers that were willing to proceed with the field work I handed out a paper to each teacher. Each paper contained five questions and the teachers were asked to read these, but not answer them at this stage. Instead, they were asked to keep these in mind while observing their students in order to establish the linguistic differences between boys and girls in their class for one week. I did not want to have unstructured interviews, because I could not rely on the fact that the linguistic differences between boys and girls is something that teachers think about while working. I wanted to gather as much information as possible and I felt that, if the teachers observed the linguistic differences between boys and girls for one week and wrote the answers to me, I would obtain the amount of information I needed for this study. After one week had passed, I returned to the high schools and gathered the papers from the teachers. The five narrative questions I asked the respondents to keep in mind are as follows:

1) What can you notice regarding input and output?
2) What do you observe in students interruptions?
3) What can you notice regarding vocabulary being used by girls and boys?
4) What can you observe regarding linguistic interactions when having conversations (girls with girls, boys with boys, and intersex conversations)?
5) What can you tell about the difference in speech patterns, involvement and interaction in the classroom, and how do you as a teacher respond to it? (See Appendix 1)

These five questions were created with the help of the two theories that this study represents in the chapter above, Chapter Four. The theories are not mentioned in the questions, but the questions involve speech patterns, involvement and other linguistic activities that the theories represent.

The answers to these questions from the respondents will comprise the results for the primary data analysis for this study. They will be presented in the following chapter, Chapter Six.
6. Results

In this chapter, I will present the results of my study. I will present the respondents’ answers, and their observations. I have divided the chapter into five sub-chapters. In each sub-chapter I will present the results from each one of the five questions in order to put the answer from each respondent together.

6.1 Input and Output

The first question that the respondents observed was: what can you notice regarding input and output? Yule (2011) defines input as the language that a student is being exposed to, and output as the language that the student produces. Regarding input, all of the six teachers wrote that they adapt their language-level toward the students. They do not use difficult words unless it is necessary and, if they do so, they explain them in order to teach their students’ a new word or words. All of the six respondents try to adapt their language toward the students in order to be correctly understood by the students; therefore they use an adaptive language to prevent barriers in the transfer. All of the respondents try to speak as clearly as possible in order for the students to understand, and avoid complications in language transfer. Respondent D wrote that he speaks to girls with a lower pitch and with a higher pitch when he is speaking to boys. He believes that boys need to be told, in a harsh way, in order to understand that it is not a joke and that they need to stop with whatever they are doing.

Respondent E wrote:

“I try to speak as professionally as possible with them, but sometimes
I can lower myself to their level and use phrases such as “brother from
another mother” and “what’s up man”. This is just for fun”. (see
Appendix 6)

According to the respondents the output, on the other hand, is a different story. They wrote that students have a tendency to use an “awful” language or, as respondent B defined it, “awfully mean and harmful words” (see Appendix 3). Regarding output respondent A wrote:

"They use words that they do not understand, in this case they do not
understand the deeper meaning of the words being used, and this is
definitely not the language that neither my colleagues nor I use when
we are speaking to them” (see Appendix 2).
Examples of words considered inappropriate or profane being used are those such as “motherfucker”, “bitch” and “gay”. A few of the respondents agree on the fact that these kinds of words are being used in an even earlier age than was the case before. A few years ago, the use of inappropriate language started in the higher grade, around the eighth grade of high school. Today, they all hear even the younger children in junior high school use these types of inappropriate epithets. Respondents A and C believe that this is due to the fact that they hear the older children use these terms, and they look up to them so they repeat them. Respondent C even wrote that these words have been accepted by the parents, and some even use them around children, and this makes it acceptable, and therefore it transfers to the children automatically:

I am under the impression that this inappropriate language use that the students use is something that they hear at home or out in the courtyard outside of their apartment building. I believe that they hear it from older children to whom they look up to. I also believe that some parents use inappropriate words in front of their children. This shows children that it is acceptable for them to use inappropriate language as well. (see Appendix 4).

Respondent F wrote:

“The mean words being used by the students is not gender related, because both boys and girls use them, and because of my experience I believe that it is rather related to the students’ personality”. (see Appendix 7)

Respondent B wrote:

“In my class some students are very honest; usually girls and they can say the meanest things to each other just because they believe that they are being honest. They forget to think about the other persons feelings. I want to emphasize that this is not related to all girls in my class and not to words such as motherfucker, bitch etc. This is related to honesty such as you’re ugly, you’re fat, and you’re stupid”. (see Appendix 3).

6.2 Interruptions

The second question that the teachers observed was the following: “what do you observe in students interruptions?” Interruptions are very common among all of the six respondents’ classes, whether it is whispering, yelling or tossing notes around to other students. In today’s
classes, an interruption can occur when a student looks down under the table to send a text message to someone. This is a silent interruption but, just because they do not use their voice, it does not mean that they do not interrupt the lesson when performing this action. This type of action can confuse and interrupt a teacher when he or she is trying to explain, teach or just say something to the class. Respondent D emphasizes this, and he believes that students are too attached to their social lives that they interrupt themselves, as well as him, during class when trying to send a text message. Respondent F also emphasized the fact that cellphones have become a common interruption. Beside this, she also wrote:

Girls have a tendency to interrupt when they are whispering; boys on the other hand like to interrupt no matter what. When they are interrupting it is usually to make a joke or just to be in the center of attention. Sometimes they can ask a question like: what are we supposed to do? Just to be heard by the other students (see Appendix 7).

Respondent E wrote that the girls in his class are rarely to interrupt; usually the boys are the ones that interrupt. He wrote:

“They enjoy standing in the center of attention and having everybody’s eyes on them. Usually they interrupt by making a comment or a joke about the lesson or topic. I can’t say that they are not charming when they do so. They interrupt with a glint in the eye” (see Appendix 6).

Respondent A wrote that students have a tendency to get bored during class, and that this leads to small talk and interruptions. The girls usually talk in an indoor voice while boys tend to be loud, and look for attention. Generally, boys try to be funny when they are interrupting in class, and they try to make themselves the center of attention, according to respondent D. Respondent A emphasizes that she does not like it when students interrupt each other, especially when another student is talking or answering a question in class. She has experienced that this can leave the student with the feeling that he or she is answering the question incorrectly or that they are making fun of her/him. This can, in the worst scenario, lead to the student not wanting to answer any more questions in class, which shows the lack of self-confidence that exists regarding language use, and the strong need to feel and create a
sense of belonging. She, on the other hand, has got used to the fact that interruptions do occur, and that it is hard to eliminate all interruptions.

6.3 The Vocabulary Differences Between Boys and Girls

The third question for this study was: what can you notice regarding vocabulary being used by girls and boys? Five of the respondents noticed vocabulary differences between boys and girls. Respondent D emphasized the fact that girls have, over the years, developed an inappropriate language, but they have not reached the boys’ level, yet. He refers to the example that girls have a tendency to say “you cow” or “you bitch” to each other, while boys use sexually related words, usually related to one’s mother. He also wrote that boys are more likely to use slang rather than girls; he mentioned examples such as “yo bro”⁵ and “yo man”⁶. Respondent F wrote something similar to respondent D:

“The girls in my class can also use bad words, but not in the same amount as the boys. I believe that boys are aiming for control and possession with their language use, while girls are just looking to connect” (see Appendix 7).

Respondent B wrote that she does not see a gender related difference in vocabulary use between boys and girls. According to respondent B, both boys and girls use slang, and unpleasant words. She also points out that there also are boys and girls that are the opposite of the above-mentioned, those who are pleasant in their language use. Respondent C wrote that she cannot see an obvious difference between the boys and girls in her class, but she wrote about one difference regarding the use of inappropriate language:

The only difference I can spot is that the girls in my class do not use inappropriate language while I am nearby; they use it when they think I cannot hear them. Boys use it all the time, no matter if I am there or not. (see Appendix 4).

Respondent E wrote about the vocabulary differences due to the language level they use:

⁵ The respondent refers to the Swedish term ”bror”.
⁶ The respondent refers to the Swedish term ”mannen”.
“The girls use a higher level of vocabulary when they speak while the boys prefer slang and skipping the g in the -ing form. They can say: “are you commin? rather than “are you coming?” (see Appendix 6).

In this case the boys in respondent E’s class tend to pronounce the verb “coming” with the /n/ sound rather than with the /ŋ/ sound.

6.4 Linguistic Interactions when Having a Conversation

The fourth question of this research was based on linguistic interactions: what can you observe regarding linguistic interactions when having conversations (girls with girls, boys with boys, and inter-sex conversations)? Respondent D mentioned that boys are trying to top one another’s story when having a conversation, and that “the seed in their conversations”\(^7\) is to solve the problem and move on with the conversation. He sees the boys’ conversations as problem-solving discussions where they are getting to the point and moving on, while girls tend to be emotionally involved in conversations and associate the topic with something that has happened in their lives. Respondent A also wrote that girls are emotionally involved in conversations; that they start to talk about one topic and in a few minutes their conversation has degenerated, and they have started a whole new topic to talk about. Sometimes it is not even closely related to the topic with which they started. Respondent B wrote that she noticed that girls are relaxed when they are interacting in a conversation; they adapt their language use and level to each other. Boys are just the same, but they compete for who gets to say the last word in the conversation. Respondent E wrote:

When girls are speaking with each other they speak with in-door voices. They usually agree with each other and they do not interrupt someone when they are speaking. When boys are speaking with each other they are yelling. It’s all about who has the best story to tell and it is common that they interrupt each other (see Appendix 6).

Respondent F wrote something similar to respondent E:

“Girls have a tendency to agree with each other during a conversation. They share the same thoughts, and they usually develop on each other’s stories. Girls can speak with each other without interruptions.

\(^7\) This is a Swedish metaphor that means getting to the bottom of the problem.
Boys are louder when they are speaking to one another. They aim for control in a conversation, and they are trying to top one another’s story. Their conversation is kind of like a competition, who has the best story to tell is the winner of the conversation” (see Appendix 7).

6.5 The difference Between Boys and Girls in Speech Patterns, Involvement and Interactions in the Classroom

The fifth and final question was a rather wide question: what can you tell about the difference in speech patterns, involvement and interaction in the classroom, and how do you as a teacher respond to it? Respondent D wrote that his students are equally involved when he is teaching English, but that the girls are more active in social science lessons. He believes that the amount of involvement is due to the choice of topic, for example, if they speak about football boys are more likely to raise their hands and be linguistically active. On the other hand, girls are more active when they are speaking about Twilight\(^8\) or Justin Bieber\(^9\); in this case, the boys in his class make fun of the girls for liking Twilight and Justin Bieber. Respondent F wrote something similar to respondent D about the choice of topic, she wrote:

Boys are involved when it suits their interest. They do not like to talk about feelings and girl-stuff; they like to talk about football and cars.

Girls like to talk no matter the topic; they can talk about cars and football as well. Many of the girls have football players they like so it is not a problem for them to talk about football (see Appendix 7).

Respondent E wrote the opposite: he wrote that the boys in his class are usually the ones to speak while the girls prefer to be told to speak:

/…/ the boys in my class are the ones that make fun of things and use language as a tool for humor, while the girls prefer to be as polite as possible. The girls are more involved when they are given a topic; the boys speak and joke no matter what. The girls in my class prefer to be told to speak, while the boys are more likely to be told to be quite [sic] (see Appendix 6).

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\(^8\) Twilight is a series of four vampire-themed fantasy romance novels by American author Stephenie Meyer.

\(^9\) Justin Bieber is a Canadian Pop/R&B singer-songwriter, musician, and actor.
Respondent A wrote that her students are equally involved in her class. When she asks the class questions, it is not just boys or just girls that raise their hands; it is of equal frequency for both boys and girls. Respondent C wrote about a difference in her class even if her students are equally involved:

The girls in my class are more freely active because I do not need to ask them to speak or answer a question in class. They do it voluntarily; the boys on the other hand need to be asked to speak. Otherwise they just joke around. (see Appendix 4).

Both respondents D and F believe that the linguistic differences are not an obstacle, rather the opposite. They see it as a personal challenge. Respondent D tries to get to know each student in order to encourage them to be linguistically active in class. Respondent B wrote that both boys and girls are linguistically active and involved in her class, sometimes the girls are a step ahead of the boys. The boys become distracted by other things that occur around them, and they lose focus on what they actually should be doing.

Respondent E wrote that he likes the fact that his students have different opinions and that they use language differently in order to express their opinions and thoughts. He enjoys listening to them when they communicate and interact.
7 Analyses
This essay’s thesis question was the following: how can the linguistic differences between men and women be applied to boys and girls in two selected Swedish high schools? In this chapter, I will analyze the results of this research and discuss the results by comparing them to Edlund’s and Locke’s theories.

7.1 Analysis of Data
The answers from the respondents have shown that boys have a tendency to aim to be the centre of attention by using humor and being loud with their language use. When they are involved in a discussion, they try to find the solution for the problem of their discussion in order to move on with another problem or topic. They do not become too involved in the topic of their discussion, neither personally nor emotionally. In their conversations, boys try to top one another’s stories. Who gets to say the last sentence or the best story is a central concern in their discussion, together with an orientation towards solving problems. Boys use humor to get attention in discussions; they also use humor when interrupting in class and when they are making fun of girls and their interests. When boys are greeting one another, they informal interjections such as “yo bro” and “yo man”. They also use sexually related words when speaking with other boys.

The answers from the respondents have shown that girls have a tendency to aim for belonging, and being emotionally involved in conversations. Their conversations usually develop from one topic to another and this is because they have a tendency to be emotionally involved. One respondent emphasized that the girls in his class have developed an inappropriate language use over recent years. He also mentioned that they have not reached the boys’ level of bad words, which are sexually related, but they are heading for that direction. When girls are having a conversation, they adapt their language to one another. When girls participate in a conversation, they use quieter voices, and they have a tendency to connect with each other throughout the conversation, mainly because they share experiences from their lives with each other. They associate the topic of their discussion with events from their lives.

Both boys and girls are linguistically involved in class if the topic of the discussion suits their desires and interests. When girls know the answer to a question, they raise their hands; when no one else wants to answer the question, boys raise their hands in order to proceed with the lesson. Generally, the results have shown that both boys and girls are linguistically
involved in class and when having a conversation. The main difference is in their language use. Just as Edlund (2007) mentioned that men and women communicate in different ways and, therefore, they behave differently regarding language use, so the results of this study have shown that boys and girls communicate in different ways and therefore they use language differently. However, not all respondents’ experiences are the same. In some areas, they disagree, for instance respondent D wrote that the boys in his class use slang and girls do not. On the other hand, respondent B wrote that both the boys and girls in her class use slang. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that all teachers have different experiences.

### 7.2 Discussion

The results of this study, regarding boys, have shown a similarity to how men use language according to the theories. This research has shown that boys are coarse in their language use and when they are communicating with each other. These patterns are rather similar to the theories that were introduced in the theory chapter of this essay. Locke’s main theory on men’s language use is that they “duel” when they communicate. His theory on dueling involves the use of insults and greetings such as “Well look at what the cat dragged in”. This is something that can be correlated to the results of this study.

Locke (2011) presents dueling as a way for men to deal with competition. Men try to top one another’s story when they are communicating (Locke, 2011:6). They compete for the prize of who tells the best story. This study has also shown that boys are capable of doing this as well as men. A few of the respondents wrote that boys compete to tell the best story, or to have the last word in a conversation. Locke (2011) describes this kind of performance as a way for men to achieve admiration from others. The most known strategy is men’s use of humor. Locke (2011) wrote that many men like to draw an audience: to be on their feet in front of it laughing, boasting, swaggering, showing off, clowning around and doing what they can to make themselves the center of attention (Locke, 2011:62). Some of the respondents emphasized the fact that boys, too, use humor as a means of directing attention to themselves and enhancing their popularity.

Locke (2011) also mentions “sounding” as another way of dueling. Sounding involves insults directed to one’s mother (Locke, 2011:43). This is something that the results of this study also have shown. Four of the respondents’ wrote that boys use sexually related words, usually associated to one’s mother. This is similar to Locke’s description of sounding where men joke about one another’s mother in order to insult their interlocutor (Ibid).
A further tendency of boys is to generate some emotional distance between themselves and their topic preferring, instead, to focus on finding a practical solution. This is something that Edlund (2007) mentions that men have a tendency to do when they are involved in a discussion. One common characteristic of boys is that they use sexually related words when they are trying to be funny, and insult each other; these sexually related words are usually related to each other’s respective mothers. Locke (2011) has also observed this phenomenon in men.

The results have also shown that there is a similarity between the theories on how women use language and how girls use language. According to Edlund (2007), women have a tendency to become emotionally involved in a conversation, and this is something that the results have also shown. Girls also have a tendency to be emotionally involved, mainly because they share events from their life which are related to the topic of the discussion. Locke (2011) mentioned that women usually agree with each other during a conversation (Locke, 2011:6), the results from this study have shown that girls also have a tendency to agree with one another. They tend to develop on each other’s stories and this is something that Locke (2011) demonstrates when he writes about the fact that women duet. Locke (2011) explained that duetting means that they indirectly complete each other’s sentences because the listener already knows what the speaker has to say without her finishing the sentence (Locke, 2011:122). This is another way of explaining how girls communicate co-operatively to complete each other’s stories.

Edlund (2007) mentioned a theory advanced by Lakoff. His theory demonstrated that the main difference between men’s and women’s language use is that women are more polite when having a conversation. This means that women in conversations avoid oppositions and conflicts with their interlocutors (Edlund, 2007:66). One of the respondents mentioned that girls are more polite when they are having a conversation. They also like to be told to speak rather than speaking without permission. Another respondent wrote the opposite. She wrote that girls love to speak no matter what. Her response is similar to Edlund’s stereotype that women love to speak (Edlund, 2007:58). One other respondent wrote that girls’ conversations have a tendency to degenerate and that their conversation usually ends up with a different topic than the one with which the conversation started. This is something that Edlund (2007) mentions as stereotypical of women and their language use. This stereotype describes women’s language as ambiguous and that they like to gibber (Ibid).
As mentioned in this subchapter, Edlund’s and Locke’s theories on how men and women use language can be applied to boys and girls in these two selected high schools in Southern Sweden.
8. Conclusion

In this chapter, I will summarize the essay and discuss its successes and shortcomings. I will also present an idea for further research.

Having reviewed the relevant literature concerning the differences between men and women in their speech habits, I conducted a survey to establish the extent to which the claims of that literature were valid for children within an educational environment. To facilitate this, I conducted a survey involving six teachers who were asked to observe their class interactions while they kept five specific questions in mind over a set period and to report their observations which I have used as primary qualitative data. What I found was that boys and girls, from these six respondents’ classes, have a similar way of using language.

The answers from the respondents were not diverse, and they corresponded with the theories cited in my literature review on how men and women use language. For instance, boys tend to use humor as a tool when they communicate in order to occupy the centre of attention, while girls tend to be emotionally involved when communicating. Boys are also competitive when they communicate: their aim is to tell the best story and to top each other’s story. The girls tend to develop on each other’s stories when they communicate. They can begin their talk about one topic and during five minutes they have covered five more.

I began this research by composing five questions regarding speech patterns, involvement and the differences between boys and girls in their utterances in class. I then asked my respondents to read these questions, but not answer them at this stage. Instead, I asked them to keep these in mind while observing their students in order to establish the linguistic differences between boys and girls in their class for one week. My opinion on this method is that it worked very well. I received the information I needed for this study and the respondents had time to think their answers over. I saved a lot of time by avoiding unstructured interviews because, had I used such interviews, I would have had to listen to six tapes and transcribe them which, in this case, was not an issue because the respondents wrote the answers for me. The use of unstructured interviews would have been impractical, owing to the time constraints on completing this research, but they might be considered in the event of a larger research undertaking.

One aspect I was worried about was that the respondents would forget to answer the questions or not understand them. I took a risk by choosing this method because, with unstructured interviews, the answers are recorded and, in case a teacher forgets that he or she has an interview appointment, they would be able to reschedule. In my case, I was concerned
that they might forget to write down the answers and give them to me, and then I would have had to wait another week or two. In the end, it worked out very well and none of the teachers forgot to answer the questions.

As already mentioned, this research involved six teachers. Four of them were female teachers and two male. One of my findings was that the female teachers wrote that the girls in their respective classes are usually the ones who are linguistically involved, while one male teacher wrote that the boys in his class are the ones who are linguistically active. I find it interesting that the boys are more linguistically active in respondent E’s class while the girls in his class are asked to speak. Respondent D, who also is a male teacher, wrote that the boys in his class are louder than the girls. The girls in his class speak with quieter voices, while the boys are noisy and loud. I assume that the boys are more comfortable to be linguistically active when the teacher is a man. It could be related to the fact that boys are more likely to identify with their male teachers or, debatably, due to the fact that boys and men use language in similar ways. In spite of my research and the snapshot it provides, I am not yet able to answer this with full confidence, but I would like to know the answer and consider the matter worthy of further investigation.

I cannot make definitive and universally applicable conclusions based on a study of such a small sample group and from just two high schools in Southern Sweden. More research has to be done on the topic, in more communities and cities in Sweden, in order to draw a more reliable result, but based on only the results from this research there are similarities in how boys and girls use language compared to how men and women use language. The results of this research on how boys and girls use language could have been different if a greater number of teachers from different high schools in Sweden had participated. In order for that to be possible, more time would have been necessary. I believe that more research with more teachers would have to be carried out on this topic in order to achieve a result with greater validity and applicability. To confirm or disprove teacher perceptions one can, in larger studies, place cameras within classrooms whereby a researcher could record actual interactions for analysis.
9. List of Sources

Block, David. Language and Gender and SLA. [Electronic version], 2002


Grauer, Anne L & MacAdam, Patricia Stuart. Sex and Gender in Paleopathological Perspective. Cambridge University Press, 2005


9.1 Webpage’s


[Information collected on the 6th of June, 2012]
10 Apendices

10.1 Questions
The purpose of this interview is to find out how boys and girls interact in classroom situations, with focus on the linguistic interaction. I would appreciate it if you read these questions and observed the linguistic differences between boys and girls for one week in your class, in order to give me as much information as you can.

The questions are the following:
1. What can you notice regarding input and output? Input being the language that the pupils are exposed to and output being the language that the pupils are producing.
2. What do you observe in students interruptions (jokes, gossip, whispering, changing the topic etc)?
3. What do you notice regarding vocabulary being used by girls and boys?
4. What do you observe regarding linguistic interactions when your students are in dialogue with each other (girls with girls, boys with boys, and inter-sex conversations)?
5. What do you perceive to be the differences in speech patterns, involvement and interaction in the classroom? How do you, as a teacher, respond to it?

10.2 Respondent A
Female teacher in English and Art, I have worked as a teacher for about 20 years.

1. The students are treated with a clear and appropriate language, appropriate to their age. The students, themselves, are using all kinds of inappropriate language. They use words like "fuck your mother" (knorra din mamma), "fucking fagot" [sic] (jävla bögl) and so on. They use words that they do not understand, in this case they do not understand the deeper meaning of the words being used, and this is definitely not the language that neither my colleagues nor I use when we are speaking to them. The only time I have used those kind of words has been when I have asked them: "Do you know what you are actually saying when you say “fuck your mother” or "Do you know what it is you say when you express yourself with a “fucking fagot” [sic].
2. Students have a tendency to interfere during class; they have a tendency to become restless. This is a problem for the person who is speaking. It may be that the teacher tries to go through the plans for the lesson or a student who answers a question the teacher asked. Teachers may lose the thread and the student who answers a question can get the feeling that they are whisper about him / her or laugh at him / her.

3. The language of inappropriate terms being used is related to both boys and girls- The boys tend to use a coarser language. The use of inappropriate language has started at an earlier stage than it has been before. Previously, the students in the latter part of high school used inappropriate language, today the students in first grade at primary school uses them. This is something I believe comes from students' social interaction with other children in the playground or in the yard of their home. In addition, girls use a softer language. There is more order in the girls' language. The boys tend to use language as a tool to joke and to try to be funny, while girls do not see or understand the fun in their attempt to be funny. I think this is because the boys want to be in the center of attention.

4. The boys talk and come to a solution, or reach the goal of the discussion, while the girls’ conversation degenerates. They talk about this and that and in the end, the discussion ended up somewhere else. I think that this is because they are emotionally involved in their conversations. This is something that I read a lot about at Lund University, and I think that this is why girls tend to degenerate.

5. The linguistic activity in my class is equal between the sexes, but at the same time, girls are those who try to pull out of the discussion while the boys come to the point and willingly go to the next item. They are active in different ways, but they are equally active. When you ask an open question and the students raise their hands, it's not one or the other sex who is willing to answer the question but it's 50-50.

**10.3 Respondent B**

Female teacher in English and Social Science, I have worked as a teacher for one year.

1. I try to adapt my language toward the student's level but I avoid using curses such as "darn" and "damn it", but I cannot say that they do not slip my tongue sometimes. The
language that the children use varies depending on the situation. I have students who are very mean in their language and who can say awfully mean and harmful words, and then I have those students who don’t say mean and harmful words at all. I also have those girls that use language as a tool to say exactly what they think and feel. In my class some students are very honest; usually girls and they can say the meanest things to each other just because they believe that they are being honest. They forget to think about the other persons feelings. I want to emphasize that this is not related to all girls in my class and not to words such as motherfucker, bitch etc. This is related to honesty such as you’re ugly, you’re fat, and you’re stupid.

2. It is common for my students to joke, gossip, whisper and etc. during class. It is something that circulates them every day and everywhere. It is not only in class, it is during breaks and lunch as well. Gossiping is very common and it can involve nice things that are being said but also mean things. Some students take this badly and they can start to argue or even fight because of it.

3. In my class I do not see a big difference between boys and girls and the language they use. They both use slang and unpleasant words. Then there are boys and girls who are the opposite of this assumption. Those who are pleasant in their language use.

4-5 I have noticed that girls are relaxed when they are interacting in a conversation; they adapt their language toward one another, and they adapt their language level toward each other. Boys are just the same, but they compete for who gets to say the last word in the conversation. The boys compete in who has the best story to tell. I see the differences as something that is related to the students’ individuality and not their gender. The boys in my class can be withdrawn when having a conversation in class, depending on the topic. It is the same with girls. They can also be withdrawn depending on the topic. I believe that each student differs from the other and this is something I like. This is mainly because each student has their own opinion and their own way in how they use language.

10.4 Respondent C
Female teacher in Social Science and English, she has worked as a teacher for about 30 years.
1. The students use an inappropriate language when speaking to each other and sometimes even when they are speaking with adults. I try to stop them from doing this but sometimes I can let it slip and I know that this is bad, this happens mainly when I am in a hurry or I have a lot to do. By inappropriate language I am referring to words such as “gay”, “bitch” and etc. This kind of inappropriate language has earlier been used by the older children, students in the 9\textsuperscript{th} grade. Today I can hear students in the 4\textsuperscript{th} grade use them. They use these terms when speaking with each other. Sometimes they can even call a teacher “bitch” when they are told to leave the classroom. When I am speaking to my students I try to lower my language comprehension toward their level. This is mainly to avoid misunderstandings. Just because I am lowering myself toward their level it does not mean that I use inappropriate language. On some occasions I have used terms such as “darn it” or the Swedish term “fan”, which means the same as “darn it”. I know that this is wrong, but it has slipped my lounge once or twice by mistake. I am under the impression that this inappropriate language use that the students use is something that they hear at home or out in the courtyard outside of their apartment building. I believe that they hear it from older children to whom they look up to. I also believe that some parents use inappropriate words in front of their children. This shows children that it is acceptable for them to use inappropriate language as well.

2. The students in my class love to interrupt. Whether it is by yelling something out without raising their hand or just tossing papers around, they love it. I have talked to them a lot of times about this but their answer is usually that they are bored. The girls in my class are not that common to interrupt while the boys are. They are the ones usually yelling things out and tossing papers on each other.

3. The vocabulary differences between the boys and girls in my class are not that obvious. Both the boys and girls use inappropriate language and they both use Swedish terms such as “mannen” or “brushan”, which means “man” and “brother” in English. The only difference I can spot is that the girls in my class do not use inappropriate language while I am nearby; they use it when they think I cannot hear them. Boys use it all the time, no matter if I am there or not.
4. When the girls in my class are communicating with each other they are emotionally involved in the conversation. They use their feelings to express their inner thoughts. When the boys are communicating with each other they talk about the topic until they have reached a solution and then move on to football or something more interesting. When both boys and girls are communicating with each other girls tend to withdraw their feelings and be less emotionally involved while the boys aim for the center of attention and they joke around while doing so.

5. Both boys and girls are linguistically involved in my class. The only difference is the use of inappropriate language during class. Boys tend to say “shit” and other inappropriate words while being asked to speak or answer a question. The girls do not do this, at least not in class. The girls in my class are more freely active because I do not need to ask them to speak or answer a question in class. They do it voluntarily; the boys on the other hand need to be asked to speak. Otherwise they just joke around. I try to get the boys more actively involved by asking them to speak their mind and express their thoughts on the topic. Of course I would prefer if they spoke their mind freely.

10.5 Respondent D
Male teacher in Swedish, English and Physical Education, he has worked as a teacher for 8 years.

1. I try to adapt my language toward my pupils and their level of knowledge. This is mainly to avoid barriers in the transfer. I don’t mind if they didn’t understand the assignment and need to ask me once again just to clear things up, but I do mind when they ask me: “what are we supposed to do?” I know that they haven’t been listening if they ask me something like that. I avoid using difficult words. I speak with a lower pitch in my voice with the girls, while I use a higher pitch with the boys. This is because the boys in my class tend to lose focus and they need to be told at once. Just because I adapt my language it doesn’t mean that I use the curses they use. I don’t even use slang in the same amount as the pupils do.

2. The girls in my class tend to whisper and send notes to one another. During recent years the girls in my class have developed an inappropriate language. They have not
reached the boys level of inappropriate language use but they are heading for that direction. They are not that far away. The boys tend to say inappropriate things about each other’s mothers and the girls tend to say “cow” or “bitch” to one another. The boys in my class think that they are whispering while speaking but they are not. They like to stand in the center of attention and have everybody’s eyes on them. This makes me lose focus and it irritates me. When the girls in my class interrupt all I have to do is look at them and they stop, when the boys interrupt I have to tell them at once to stop with what they are doing, otherwise they won’t stop.

3. As I have mentioned the girls use words such as “you cow” and “bitch” while the boys use sexually related words, usually related to someone’s mother. The boys use more slang than the girls. The boys also use terms such as “yo man” and “yo bro” (usually the Swedish terms: bror, mannen).

4. When boys have a conversation they are loud and they want to top one another’s story. They use humor and they try to be funny. They come up with solutions for the problem, when they feel like they have solved the problem they move on with another topic, usually football. When girls have a conversation they develop on each other’s stories. They don’t speak as loud as the boys but they are emotionally involved. They talk around the topic and not just about the topic. Their conversations degenerate. When the boys in my class communicate with the girls they try to be funny, they want to impress on the girls by using humor. The girls in my class keep focus on the topic while the boys joke around.

5. The boys in my class tend to answer a question when no one else is willing to do so. Usually the girls are the first ones to raise their hands in social science classes, but in English both boys and girls are equally involved. I try to get each student involved. When we are talking about football usually the boys are active, but when we speak about Justin Bieber or Twilight the girls are more active. When we speak about twilight or Justin Bieber the boys tend to make fun of the girls for liking Justin Bieber and Twilight. I do not see the linguistic differences as an obstacle. I see it as a challenge and it wouldn’t be fun to be a teacher if all the pupils are the same.

10.6 Respondent E
Male teacher in Swedish and English, I have worked as a teacher for 12 years.
1. When I am speaking to my students in class and outside I adapt my language toward their level. I want to avoid complications and misunderstandings. Something I have noticed is that some words that students use is not something I have learned them. For example they use “bitch”, “asshole” and many other bad words. I believe that this has something to do with their social life, who they are hanging out with when they leave the school area. I try to speak as professionally as possible with them, but sometimes I can lower myself to their level and use phrases such as “brother from another mother” and “what’s up man”. This is just for fun.

2. The girls in my class aren’t that much into interruptions, but the boys sure are. They enjoy standing in the center of attention and having everybody’s eyes on them. Usually they interrupt by making a comment or a joke about the lesson or topic. I can’t say that they are not charming when they do so. They interrupt with a glint in the eye.

3. I noticed one thing and that is that the girls in my class differ from the boys in vocabulary use. The girls use a higher level of vocabulary when they speak while the boys prefer slang and skipping the g in the –ing form. They can say: “are you commin’? rather than “are you coming”? This is the main difference, it may not be a big difference but this is what I noticed.

4. When girls are speaking with each other they speak with in-door voices. They usually agree with each other and they do not interrupt someone when they are speaking. When boys are speaking with each other they are yelling. It’s all about who has the best story to tell and it is common that they interrupt each other. When boys and girls are communicating with each other the boys are trying to be funny and get the girls attention, while the girls stay the same.

5. As I have mentioned the boys in my class are the ones that make fun of things and use language as a tool for humor, while the girls prefer to be as polite as possible. The girls are more involved when they are given a topic; the boys speak and joke no matter what. The girls in my class prefer to be told to speak, while the boys are more likely to be told to be quite. I enjoy listening to my students and when they interact
linguistically. They all have different opinions on things and therefore their
discussions can get rather steamy. I like the fact that they use language differently to
express their opinions and thoughts. I don’t mind if they use slang when they are
speaking as long as they do not use it when they are writing reports and assignments.
Each student has their own individual speech pattern and it is hard to divide it into
gender.

10.7 Respondent F
Female teacher, for 14 years, in English and Social Science

1. I usually adapt my language to the students and their level of knowledge, mainly
because I want to avoid confusions and misunderstandings. Students on the other hand
have a tendency to use awfully mean words. The mean words being used by the
students is not gender related, because both boys and girls use them, and because of
my experience I believe that it is rather related to the students’ personality. Some
students are looking for attention so they use their language skills in order to stand in
the center of attention, usually they use mean words such as “motherfucker”, “bitch”,
“gay” etc. This kind of language is not something that I use when speaking to them. I
even try to avoid the use of curses, but sometimes they slip out. Curses such as “damn
it” or “darn it” are the most common during my worst days.

2. Girls have a tendency to interrupt when they are whispering; boys on the other hand
like to interrupt no matter what. When they are interrupting it is usually to make a joke
or just to be in the center of attention. Sometimes they can ask a question like: what
are we supposed to do? Just to be heard by the other students. In today’s society one
common interruption is students’ use of cell phones. I have told my students that it is
okay for them to bring their cell phones as long as they do not interrupt in class and
disrupt them from their assignment. The most common interruption with cellphones is
when they are looking down under the table and not on the board. When I notice that
they cannot handle to have their cellphone with them in class I ask them to put the
phone on my table and I return it to them at the end of the day.
3. Both boys and girls have a wide vocabulary in my class. The main difference is that boys are more likely to say sexual related words while girls are not. The girls in my class can also use bad words, but not in the same amount as the boys. I believe that boys are aiming for control and possession with their language use, while girls are just looking to connect.

4. Girls have a tendency to agree with each other during a conversation. They share the same thoughts, and they usually develop on each other’s stories. Girls can speak with each other without interruptions. Boys are louder when they are speaking to one another. They aim for control in a conversation, and they are trying to top one another’s story. Their conversation is kind of like a competition, who has the best story to tell is the winner of the conversation. When they are involved in an intersex conversation girls become more shy while boys are trying to be funny.

5. Usually girls are more involved in class, but it all depends on the topic. Boys are involved when it suits their interest. They do not like to talk about feelings and girl-stuff; they like to talk about football and cars. Girls like to talk no matter the topic; they can talk about cars and football as well. Many of the girls have football players they like so it is not a problem for them to talk about football. The main difference in speech patterns is that boys have a tendency to use slang while girls do not. The girls in my class are always challenging themselves; they are always trying to use difficult words in order to receive a higher grade. The boys in my class are more natural in their speech; they do not challenge themselves as much as girls do. They speak their mind without the difficult words and pronunciations. I like the fact that both boys and girls differ in their language use. I see it as a challenge, a good challenge.