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Writing in School

A study of how students in upper secondary school use adjectives and adverbs
in school writing

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to see how often, and to what extent, students in upper secondary school use adjectives and adverbs in their school writing. Additionally, a comparison was made between girls and boys. 40 texts were used in total, and 20 of them were written by girls and 20 written by boys. I counted the adjectives and adverbs in the texts and took notes of what kind of adjectives and adverbs were used as well as how often each of them were used. In this study, I found that girls outperform boys in both total number, of both adjectives and adverbs, as well as in variety. Furthermore, I found that students use far more adjectives than they do adverbs in their school writing.

Keywords: Upper secondary school student writing, Adjectives, Adverbs, Gendered writing

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1 Introduction

Most students seem to think English is important and they are eager to learn. Many students learn English outside of school and start learning at early age, so the majority of students have basic knowledge already entering the upper secondary school classroom. What is lacking though, is knowledge of more academic and formal English, not used in everyday lives as students already have knowledge of (Olsson 2016). That means teachers need to work on giving students vocabulary and other tools to be able to comprehend and produce more academic language and to function in more formal forums.

Writing is a part of the course English 5 and students should be able to communicate in writing, i.e. writing letters, giving peer response etc., as well as produce texts in different genres, such as research essays and argumentative texts. In any kind of writing, students should be able to use a language that gives the text variation and flow.

Language variation is, among other things, graded in students' written assignments in English 5, and for higher grades (C-A) students need to have quite good vocabulary and use a great deal of variation in their work. Already for the grade E (lowest passing grade in English 5) students need to be able to use a somewhat varied vocabulary in their writing.

“In oral and written communications of various genres, students can express themselves in relatively varied ways, relatively clearly and relatively coherently. Students can express themselves with some fluency and to some extent adapted to purpose, recipient and situation. Students work on and make improvements to their own communications.” (Skolverket 2011)

In English as a second language, students have better receptive skills than productive skills (Skolverket 2012). This is something I have noticed as well when teaching English. I found that students in general had trouble expressing themselves both when speaking and writing. However, when speaking students seem to have quite efficient strategies of explaining and moving forward in conversation. In writing, though, students seem to fall short in arguments and statements. Many times, I have to ask students to explain further and argue for their statements.

Additionally, I noticed that girls had better flow in their language and had better skills putting together longer texts that were adjusted to the situation, recipient and purpose, to larger extent than boys did. In my comments on the students work I noticed that I often commented more on grammar and spelling when commenting on girl's texts, and when commenting on boy's texts I often gave comments on content and lack of information. In a quick overview on some of my student's school work I noticed that girls often used a more explanatory language than the boys; i.e. when the girls stated something they, more often than not, gave an explanation in addition to their statement or argument. The boy's texts had not as many explanations following a statement or argument and were also shorter in general.

This led me to thinking about this study and I wanted to see to what extent students used adjectives and adverbs, which I believe are important word classes that helps oneself express meaning, interact and put together more complicated texts. In addition to that, I also wanted to see if there was a difference in how girls and boys use adjectives and adverbs since my general understanding was that girls tend to use more adjectives and adverbs than boys.

1.1 Aim and research questions

The aim of this study is to do a comparative study of the usage of adjectives and adverbs in students' texts to see if there is a difference in texts that boys and girls produce, and also investigate if there is a difference in what type of adjectives and/or adverbs used between the genders. According to earlier research regarding the accomplishment differences between girls and boys, the result of this study would show that girls use adjectives and adverbs more frequently than boys tend to do, as well as they would use different type of adjectives and adverbs (Lakoff 2004).

Therefore, my research questions are:

- How do students use adjectives and adverbs, regarding variety and frequency, in their school writing?
- Is there a difference in the use of adjectives and adverbs, in both variety and frequency, between girls and boys?

2 Background

According to Joan Swann (2003), girls and boys are believed to have different opportunities of succeeding in school, and although research shows that girls in general outperform boys, girls are often hindered in gaining social status or a high-status career. Due to boy's much more competitive speaking style, they often dominate the classroom leaving the girls "limited opportunities to contribute" (Swann 2003).

Although earlier research often show that boys do contribute more and take a lot of place in the classroom, more so than girls, statistics still show that boys in general get lower grades and girls outperform boys with approximately a ten percent difference in English (Skolverket 2006). In different stages of students' lives research has shown that girls are almost always ahead of boys when it comes to language acquisition and language competence (Coates 2004). There are both biologically based theories and socially based theories that claim there are differences between girls' and boys' achievements in school.

Adverbs and adjectives are two different word classes and they are used to describe other words. Adjectives describes nouns and pronouns such as people, things or places. Adverbs describes verbs, such as actions or events (Vannestål 2007). One could simply state that "The dog stole the candy from the living room table.", and that would be a sufficient explanation of the event of a dog stealing candy without permission. However, if one have access to adverbs and adjectives in their vocabulary, one could further explain the event with the dog. For example, "The drooling dog unwillingly stole the way too deliciously smelling, newly homemade Christmas candy from the white, nose-high living room table.". The descriptions in sentence number two of the dog and the event, gives the reader a clearer view of what has happened. The candy was simply too easy to access for the dog, the dog could not handle the temptation. In sentence number one, the dog could easily be painted out as the bad doggie that stole the candy. The drooling, in sentence number two, points out that the dog tried to be good and just could not fight the urge any longer. It also gives the reader a background story and setting, otherwise not presented in sentence number one. The owner of the dog has just made candy in time for Christmas and put it on the living room table, in sentence one, none of this was made known to the reader.

3 Method & Material

This investigation is focusing on students' school writing and the analysis will be done on a writing task designed as a personal letter to a fictive person. The reason being for doing so is because the material students have produced was under normal settings, i.e. during their accustomed settings with their regular English teacher, instead of them having to have an uncomfortable, and somewhat artificial, meeting with an interviewer. Also, doing an analysis on texts that are aiming towards school writing that was less of a formal text, the students had greater opportunity of using their full vocabulary, i.e. the students were free to use vocabulary they normally do not use in typical school texts.

The students were participants of the same course (English 5) although they attended the course at different times, which means the texts that are collected are written over a time period between 2014 and 2015. This assignment was constructed and introduced to the groups by the same teacher and the instructions have always been the same. The preparation beforehand has always consisted of the same material; an article about what is typically Swedish, a TV-series episode¹ and classroom discussions with the starting point "*What is Sweden to you?*". Therefore, all students had an equivalent starting point. Even so, the girls outperformed the boys, in both total number and variety of both adjectives and adverbs.

Furthermore, this assignment may have urged the students to somewhat use some of the same kind of adjectives and/or adverbs, such as *cold*, *warm*, *typically*, *Swedish* and so on, due to the questions stated in the assignment instructions.

3.1 Data collection

The data, i.e. the adjectives and adverbs, will be collected from 40 different student texts. Adjectives and adverbs will be analyzed in 20 texts written by girls and 20 texts written by boys. The texts are collected from Fronter² where the students have handed in the assignments and gotten feedback on them. The texts were collected from different groups

¹ *Welcome to Sweden*, Season one, episode one.

² Fronter is a platform where students have access to all course material as well as handing in their assignments.

at Fronter, which means the analyzed texts are quite evenly spread out over different programs.

3.2 Reliability & validity

Adverbs and adjectives that are used wrongly in students' texts are not represented in this study. For example, one student used the adverb *exactly* when instead he should have used the adjective *exact*. The sentence was "It is the highest mounting in Sweden, 1420 meters to be exactly." The reason for this is that it would not contribute to the result and including it would make this whole study unreliable and lack validity. Since this study is to see how frequently and in what variation students are able to use adjectives and adverbs, including grammatical mistakes in this study along with the rest of the result, the analysis, and overall result, would lack validity. Wrongly used adjectives and adverbs would rather prove the opposite, that they in fact are not able to use these word classes correctly.

Even though I have let my own students' do this assignment, I have chosen to use texts written by students whom I have never taught. The reason being I did not want my influence in the students' texts what so ever. In my feedback to the students I tend to focus on giving them comments concerning language use, and more often than not, I am asking them to develop their statements, argue their case and so on, which often leads to students using a broader vocabulary. In that sense, using my own student's text may risk this investigations' objectivity.

3.3 Students' texts

An assignment was given to the students in which they were asked to write a letter as an answer to a received letter from a fictive person called Chris³. In the letter the students were asked to give Chris suggestions on places to go and advice on clothing and spending budget etc. The students had a lot of freedom in constructing the content in the letter, as well as language use. My thought was that it would have given the students lots of opportunities to use their vocabulary and increase risk-taking in language use.

³ See assignment instructions in appendix.

Students need to feel comfortable in school in general, but also in the classroom where L2 learning takes place, to be able to take risks in their second language, i.e. using vocabulary they are uncertain of, and in many cases speaking and participating at all. The teacher must create that setting in the classroom as well as in constructing the assignments, giving the students the confidence to take risks (Zafar & Meenakshi 2012). This assignment would, in my opinion, create that comfort zone for the students, mainly because of the fact that the interaction was with a fictional person and they got to write about something they already had knowledge of; their home country. The students had also a great opportunity to include a lot of their own opinions and even stories and memories if they had wanted to.

4 Theory & earlier research

A lot of research has been done focusing on differences between girls and boys and their language use, as well as their accomplishments in school. Research show that girls do better in school than boys do and that the majority of those who later on attend university are girls (Ingvar 2010). English has never been easier to learn and access than it is today and a lot of teenagers learn English outside of school. Even so, there are more girls receiving passing grades in English than boys (Skolverket 2006).

4.1 Sex and gender

Girls hit puberty approximately two years before boys do, this might be evidence for the big difference in school accomplishments (Ingvar 2010). Just as well as school accomplishments might be an effect of the socially constructed gender roles girls and boys are raised into and “[...] differences between male and female children might be diminishing as a reflection of less polarized gender roles and sexist modes of child care [...]” (Coates 2004 p. 148). Language has long been linked to gender stereotypes and it is believed that there is such a thing as men’s and women’s language. For instance, Lakoff mentions the difference in describing adjectives such as colors and that such matters are more important to women than to men. She says that if men were to discuss whether a color was mauve or lavender they would be ridiculed and not upholding their male language status (Lakoff 2004).

“Women, then, make far more precise discriminations in naming colors than do men; words like beige, ecru, aquamarine, lavender, and so on are unremarkable in a woman’s active vocabulary, but absent from that of most men.” (Lakoff 2004 p.43)

Adjectives then, according to Lakoff (2004), are female coded language and for men to use too many adjectives would be quite unfavorable to them regarding their social status.

Already as children, when girls and boys start to learn language, they start identifying themselves as girls and/or boys through behavior and start using gender coded language; i.e. they start embracing a linguistic behavior to identify themselves, or being identified by others, as one or the other sex. Even though there are no anatomical differences between boy’s and girl’s speech organs before puberty, girls and boys start to sound differently due to this linguistic behavior. Children’s vocal cords differ before puberty only because of the child’s size. Even so, girls tend to have a higher pitch voice than boys before puberty and before the anatomical differences occur (Coates 2004).

A study was made in 2011 in Europe to measure students’ knowledge in English as well as in Spanish (GERS). The study was made in the 9th grade, however, the result of this study is of interest because the gap between 9th grade and first year at upper secondary school, when studying English 5, is very small. English 5 is the next step from 9th grade English.

This study showed that Swedish boys and girls reached very good results and both boys and girls reached almost the same level of reading and listening comprehension. Boys outperformed the girls in reading comprehension and girls outperformed boys in listening comprehension, yet not so much as it would make any noteworthy statistical difference. However, in the writing test, girls outperformed boys in reading and listening comprehension (Skolverket 2012). The result in this study is a bit contradicting to other research one finds, which shows that girls almost always outperform boys in all aspects of L2 learning.

Furthermore, boys might suffer more from writing apprehension than girls and as a result, the boys hand in shorter texts with a lower word count and thinner vocabulary (Faigley & Daly 1981).

4.2 Vocabulary

Students in upper secondary school should be able to write, as well as read and understand, different texts; formal, informal and within different genres. It goes without saying that students need an efficient set of vocabulary to do so. At this level of English, language learned at home is often not sufficient for being able to handle all writing assignments in school. Mainly because an academic vocabulary is not something learned at home while chatting on the internet or watching movies. Academic vocabulary used for analyzing and reasoning is to greater extent learned in school than outside of school (Olsson 2016).

As mentioned earlier, Lakoff states that women tend to use a broader vocabulary explaining colors. Also, women have access to a set of adjectives not socially accepted for men to use. These adjectives express admiration for something or someone. For instance, *adorable*, *charming*, *sweet*, *lovely* and *divine* are adjectives socially accepted for women to use, while *great*, *terrific*, *cool* and *neat* are neutral and can be used by both men and women. These adjectives Lakoff calls empty and their function is that they are signaling a weak feminine stereotype (Lakoff 2004). Due to these gender norms in language, boys and men may possess adjectives, however are not socially able to use them without risk of losing social status.

Although men might have a broad vocabulary, such as female coded adjectives, some are not able to use it without losing social status and on the other hand some men are in such positions that they are able to use it without losing social status. The men that are able to use more female coded language are men in power positions in society. The reason why it is so that these men are free to use their full vocabulary is that this group of people already possess such high social status in society that others wish to have, and they need not worry about their social status or risk of losing power (Lakoff 2004).

Men in the academic world for instance have much greater opportunity to use more of women's language than lower social classes. A man in the academic world could without risk of losing status use female coded language "But to a truck driver, a professor saying, "What a lovely hat!" is undoubtedly laughable," (Lakoff, 2004, p 24).

5 Results and analysis

In this chapter the results of the analysis of adjectives and adverbs will be presented. The result of how adjectives and adverbs were used between the two genders will also be presented in this chapter.

40 texts were analyzed in total; 20 letters written by girls and 20 letters written by boys in upper secondary school. Both adjectives and adverbs were studied in all 40 texts.

The result show that students are more accustomed in using adjectives than adverbs. The students used 1185 adjectives in 40 texts, meanwhile 368 adverbs were used in all 40 texts. There were no texts without adjectives and/or adverbs. Although, in one of the boys' texts only two adverbs were included. Noteworthy is that the text in itself was very short.

The following overview show the total number and average of adjectives and adverbs used in student's texts.

	Total number of adjectives used	Total number of adverbs used	Average of adjectives used in texts	Average of adverbs used in texts
Boys	446	153	22,3	7,7
Girls	739	215	37	10,8

5.1 Adjectives

There is a notable difference in the usage of adjectives in the student's texts. Not only in total number but also in variety of adjectives, the girls outperform the boys. In this case the boys used 39 percent less adjectives than the girls did. In total the students used 1185 in the 40 texts. Girls used a total of 739 adjectives in total and boys used 446 adjectives in total.

Fig 1. Total use of adjectives

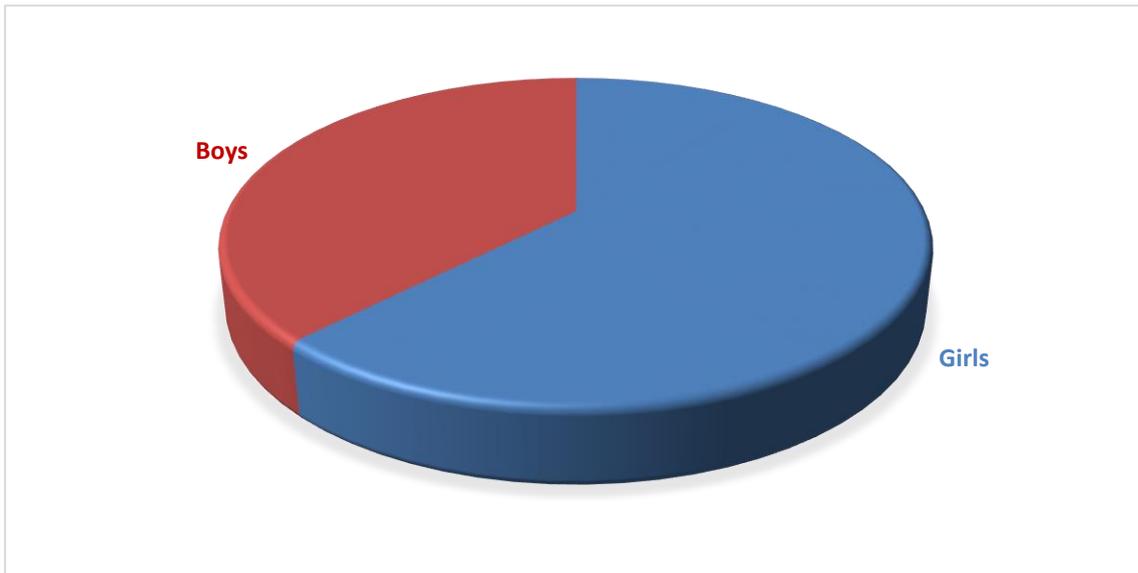
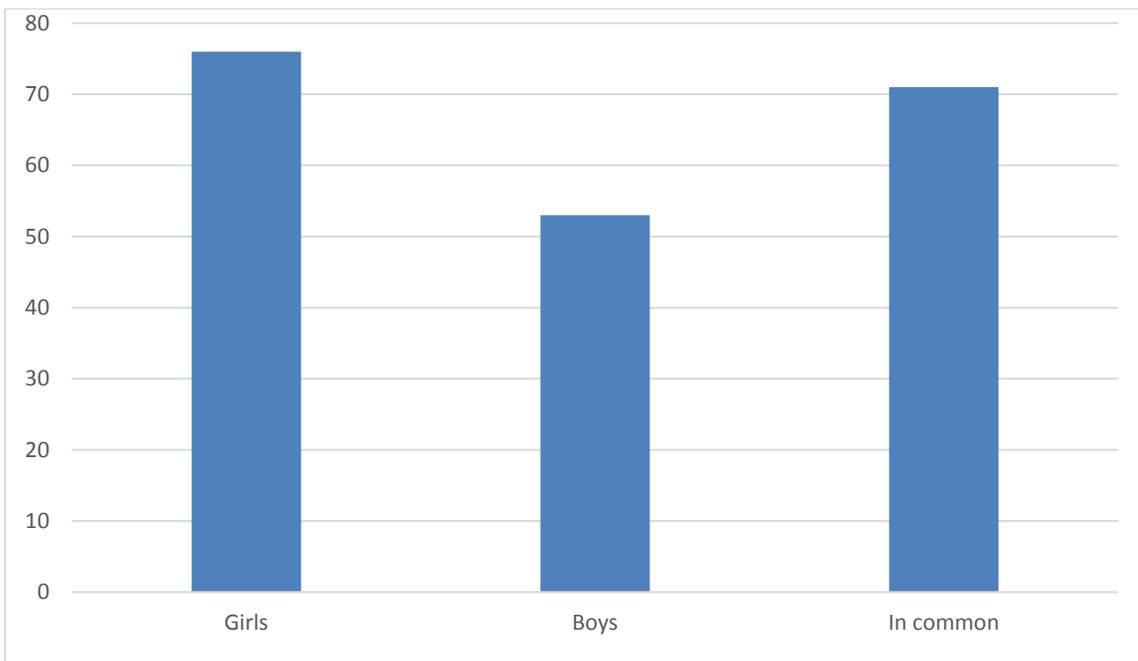


Fig 2. Varieties of Adjectives



Girls and boys had 71 different adjectives in common that both genders used in the texts. The girls used 76 other different adjectives that none of the boys used. Further, the boys used 52 different adjectives that the girls did not, see Fig 2. This result shows that boys do not only use less adjectives than girls do, but girls and boys tend to use a high number of different adjectives. That shows that girls and boys to some extent use the same

vocabulary, yet a large part of their vocabulary are of that sort that the other gender did not use. 42 percent of the adjectives boys used were used by boys alone, whereas 51 percent of the adjectives the girls used were used by girls alone. The difference between girls and boys use of adjectives, that none of the other gender used, is 9 percent units.

Many of the adjectives that are used in the texts, by both boys and girls, are such adjectives that are present in the instructions of the assignment. For example, the adjective *Swedish* was used in the texts by girls 56 times and by boys 46 times, that is an average of 2,55 in all of the 40 texts. Undoubtedly, this word occurs often in the students texts due to the question in the assignment which states “*What should I bring back with me that is typically Swedish?*”.

Instead of describing the nature students, more often than not, simply state that the nature is *beautiful* or the weather is *cold*, without further explanation or development of their arguments. One student simply changed the format and spelling of the word to enhance the picture of how *big* or *huge* the mountain was, instead of changing his adjectives or adding more explanation to his statement. He wrote the word *big* in capital letters and added the letter *I* two times and the letter *G* one time (BIIIGG). The student added two of the letter *U* in *Huge* (huuuge) later in his text.

The main difference in the kind of adjectives that girls and boys tended to use in their texts was that boys tended to use adjectives that mainly described clothing, weather and the nature. For example, boys often described the weather and clothing as *warm* and *cold*. Although adjectives like *clear blue skies* and *sweaty* were also used to describe nature in a couple of the boy’s texts. The nature were almost exclusively described as *beautiful*, however *snow-covered mountains*, *snowy* and *perfect* were also used to describe the nature in some texts.

Whereas the girls tended to use adjectives that mainly described personal attributes and use more varieties. For example, when girls used adjectives that described personal attributes they used adjectives such as *cute*, *famous* and *inspiring*. When describing that something taste good, girls used adjectives such as *good*, *tasty*, *delicious* and *yummie*, meanwhile the boys only tended to use the adjective *good* when describing food. Overall, the girls were able to use more synonyms, whereas the boys more often than not used the same word, such as *good*, several times.

However, the adjective *lovely*, which is more of a women's vocabulary than men's, according to Lakoff (2004 p. 45), was used 2 times in the girl's texts and 3 times in the boy's texts. The adjective *lovely* was used by boys who in general wrote longer texts and overall used a broader vocabulary.

5.2 Adverbs

Adverbs occur in the students' text far less frequently than adjectives do, in both girl's and boy's texts. In total the students used 368 adverbs in the 40 texts. Girls used in total 49 different adverbs that the boys did not use and the boys used 43 different adverbs in their texts that the girls did not use. 23 different adverbs were used in both boy's and girl's texts.

Fig 3. Total use of adverbs

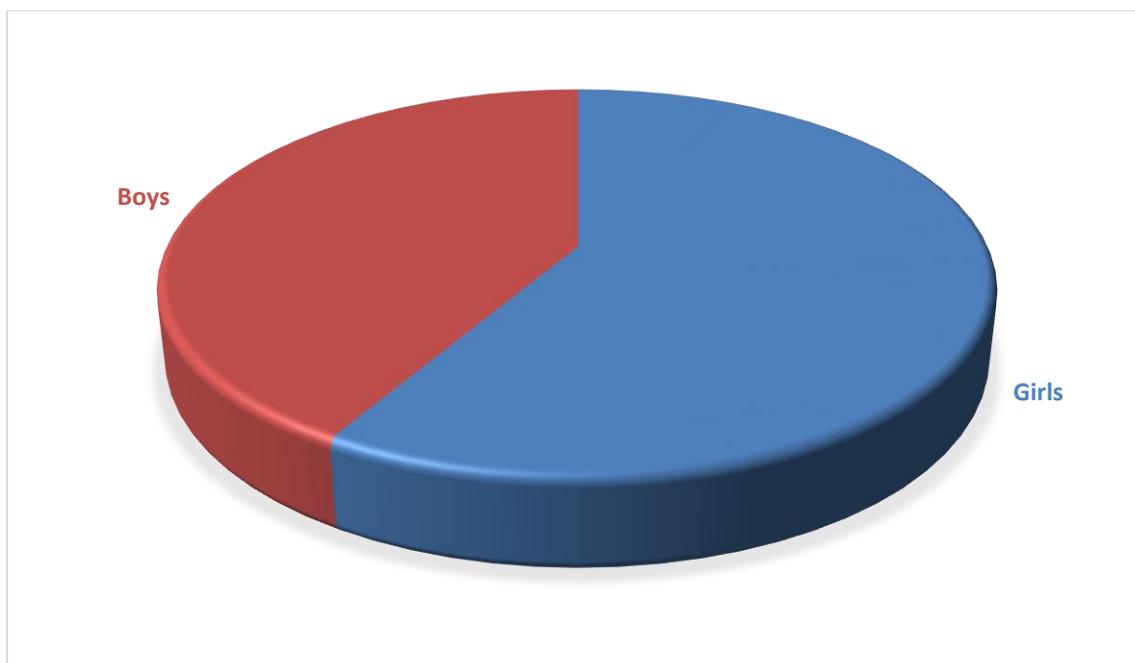
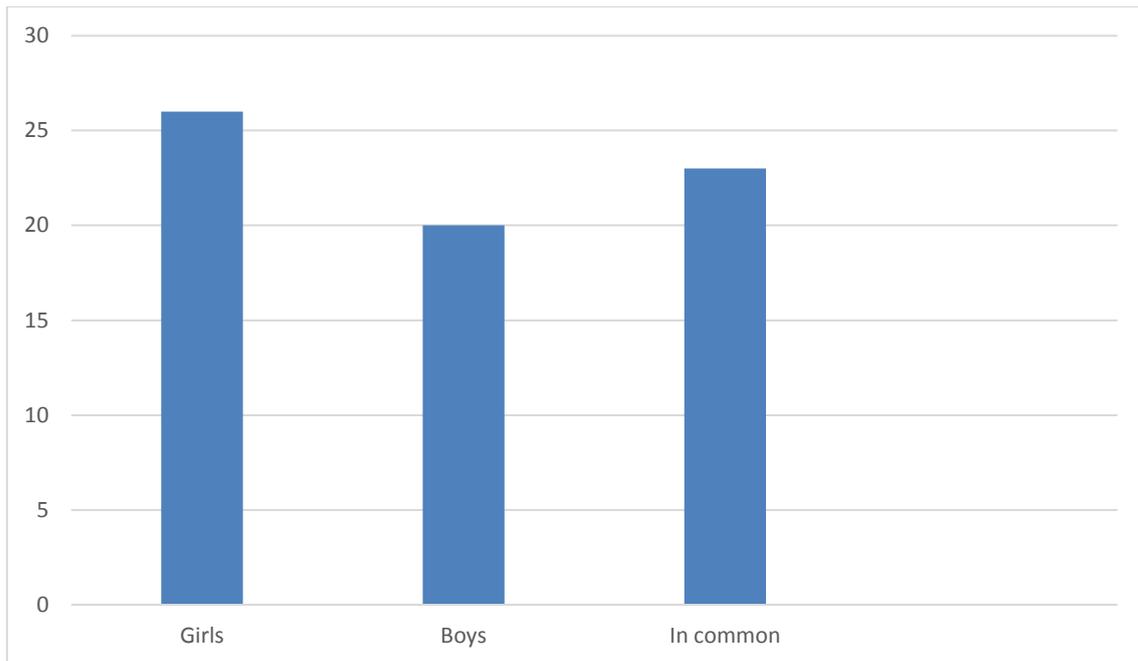


Fig 4. Varieties of adverbs



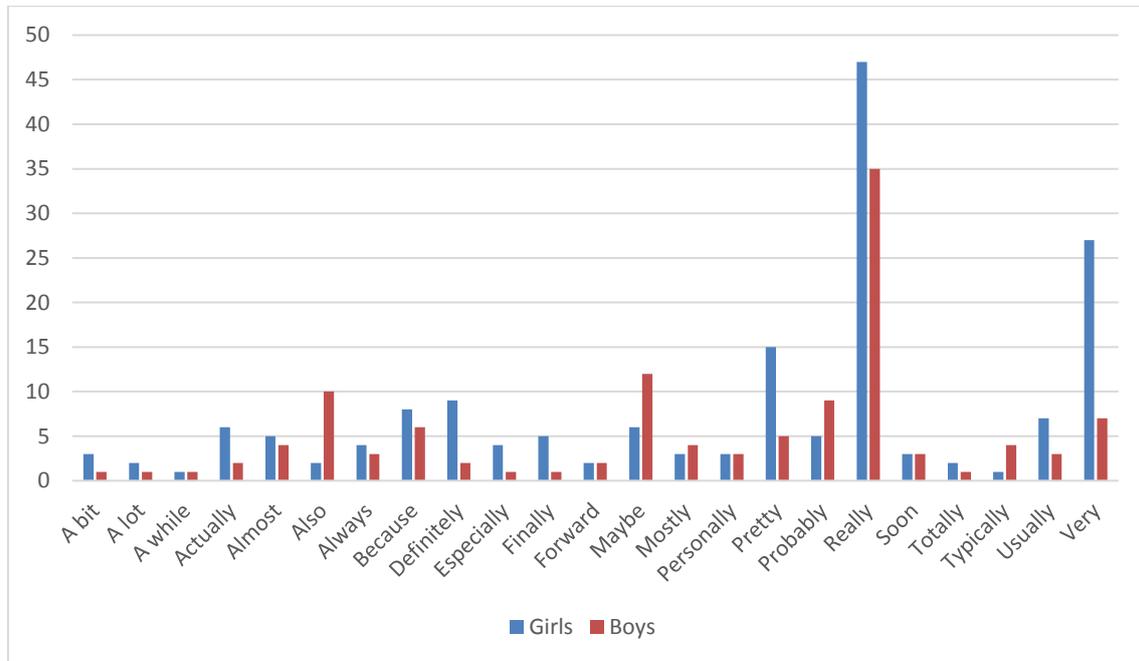
The adverbs girls used most in their texts were *really* and *very*. *Really* was represented 47 times in the girl's texts and *very* was represented 27 times. That is an average of 2,4 per text for *really* and 1,4 times for *very*. Boys also used the adverb *really* the most and in the 20 texts written by boys, *really* occurred 35 times, which is an average of 1,8. Boys also used the adverb *very*, although it only occurred 7 times in all 20 texts. That is an average of 0,4.

Girls have an average of adverbs used in their texts of 10,8. Whilst the boys have an average of used adverbs in their texts of 7,7.

Other than that, girls used adverbs such as *extremely*, *strongly* and *excessively* whereas the boys used adverbs such as *hopefully*, *perhaps* and *honestly*. These adverbs indicate that girls tend to use a language that is more certain and direct and does not leave as much interpretation and decision-making up to Chris, meanwhile the boys used such language not as certain and direct and left more of the decision-making up to Chris. For example, one girl wrote "... and that is a place I strongly recommend!" meanwhile boys more often used expressions like "...perhaps you could go to Gothenburg."

The adverbs they did have in common show that girls and boys to some extent have the same vocabulary, even though some of the words varied in frequency between girls' and boys' texts. Only five of the adverbs were used more frequently in boys' texts than in those of girls. These were *also*, *maybe*, *mostly*, *probably* and *typically*.

Fig 5. Adverbs used in common between girls and boys



Girls used adverbs such as *absolutely*, *definitely*, *most likely* and *strongly* more frequently than boys did. In comparison to the adverbs that appeared frequently in the boy's texts that express uncertainty, these words express determination and are coded as male language, according to Lakoff (2004) and Coates (2004). Words such as *hopefully* and *perhaps* were not used at all by girls. *Might* was only used one time in a text written by a girl and never the boys' texts.

Fig 7. Use of adverbs that express determination

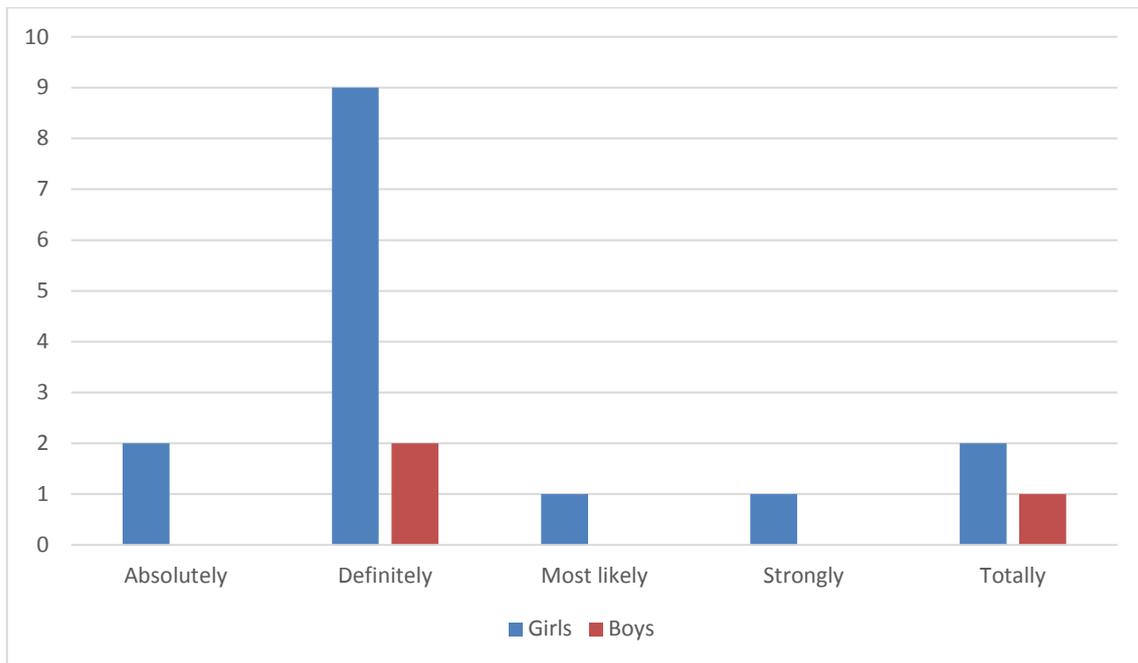
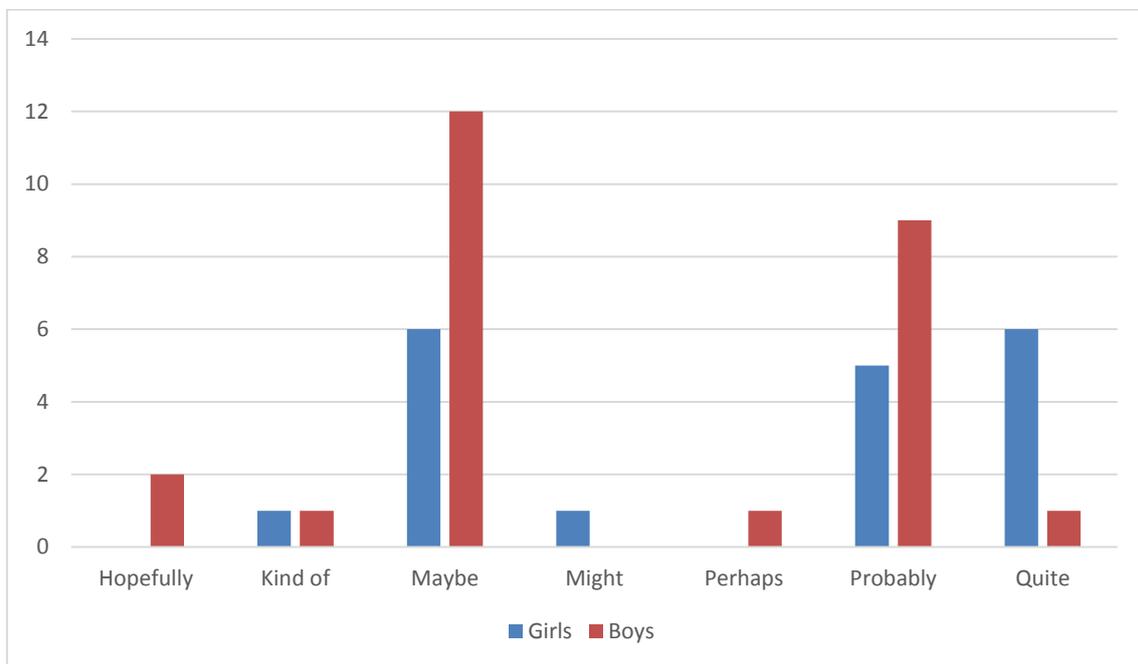


Fig 8. Use of adverbs that express uncertainty



6 Discussion

Since the study showed that the girls and boys as well tended to use not only different number of adjectives and adverbs in their text, but also different adjectives and adverbs in general, one could assume that this is due to gender based differences. Swann (2003) states that “Girls and boys [...] have different speaking styles, they made different reading choices, they wrote in different ways and about different topics” (Swann 2003). Even though Swann’s research was focusing mainly on classroom interaction, the result in this study shows differences between girls and boys language occurs in writing as well.

In this analysis of the student’s texts boys generally tended not to use the same extent of vocabulary as the girls, and in addition to that, the boy’s texts were shorter overall, compared to the girl’s texts. This might be explained by the general notion that girls succeed to greater extent in English as a second language, and language studies in general, than boys do (Ingvar 2010).

Just as Faigley and Daly presented in their paper (1981), it seems like boys might be suffering from writing apprehension more so than girls, and that they generally hand in shorter texts. This was confirmed in this research where boys generally handed in shorter texts overall and did not use the same extent of vocabulary as the girls. A more extended vocabulary, where adverbs were more frequently used and a larger variety of adjectives were used, were in the boy’s texts that were longer and upheld a better quality. In general, the texts with the best quality that the boys produced matched the average of the girl’s texts.

Even though the use of adjectives and adverbs may have helped the students express themselves, the usage of some adjectives and/or adverbs may similarly indicate a lack of an extensive vocabulary and functioned as just the opposite of giving an extensive explanation. However, the student that chose to change his format to ‘BIIIGG’ ‘huuuge’ rather than using other words to describe, for instance *massive*, had another strategy of explaining the nature. This type of language use could be looked upon as appropriate in this type of assignment where the aim was communicating with a friend. Had the assignment been, for example, to write an informational pamphlet about Sweden,

language use like this would however not be as suitable and instead other adjectives would be preferred. One might say that this student adapted his texts to recipient.

When using adverbs both girls and boys used the adverb *really* frequently in their texts. Girls also used *very* often in their texts and instead of using other, perhaps more, descriptive language, the students tend to use these adverbs to enhance their meaning. This might, in some cases, indicate a lack of being able to express oneself, and instead of explaining further why, or how, the students have just said *really like it*, *really promising* or *really recommend going there*. If students simply explain that Chris would *really like it* or that he or she could *really recommend going there*, without further explanation or examples, the questions has not completely been answered and using the adverb *really* has not added any meaning to the statement the student was aiming for. Thus, adverbs and adjectives could be seen as a developed language while at the same time as an escape route from a lengthy description.

An interesting result is that boys more frequently than girls used the adverbs *maybe* and *probably*, *perhaps* and *hopefully* which are words that express uncertainty and according to both Lakoff (2004) and Coates (2004) those are words most typically used by women, such as hedges and tag questions that also express uncertainty or might be demanding confirmation. Since earlier research show that boys in general suffer from writing apprehension to larger extent than girls, and hand in shorter texts (Faigly & Daly 1981), it might be so that in writing boys are quite uncertain of themselves regarding texts production and use language that express uncertainty because of that.

Since this assignment was only supposed to be sent to the teacher and not actually to be sent to Chris, the boys could use their full vocabulary without having to risk losing reputation or their male status by using female adjectives, such as *divine*, *lovely* or *adorable* (Lakoff 2004). In this case, using as many different adjectives as possible, would on the other hand be in favor to the boys in a final grade on the assignment.

In adjectives girls used 63 percent of the total number, whereas the boys stood for the remaining 37 percent. In adverb usage girls used 58.4 percent of the adverbs, whereas the boys used 41.5 percent. Even though, in percentage, the difference is similar between adjectives and adverbs something worth shining some light on is that adverbs were far less used in both the girls and boy's texts compared to adjectives.

There were 1185 adjectives used in the total 40 texts and only 368 adverbs used. Seemingly, adverb is a word class still difficult to use in the level of English these students are at, for both girls and boys. It seems to be easier for the students to describe things and places more so than actions and events. It might be so that in general, when describing your home country, it is easier to write about things to see and places to visit rather than actions and events.

Even though it seems like the students possess a great deal of vocabulary, mainly a set of adjectives rather than adverbs, they still have some issues expressing themselves. For example, when describing nature as *beautiful* without further explanation. Olsson (2016), mentions in her paper that students first and foremost need English education in school to learn academic English; i.e. formal English. This particular assignment (Letter to Chris) was testing the students' interaction in school writing, however, their vocabulary was at times limited. Perhaps students learn and acquire a larger vocabulary outside of school that they are not able to use in school or typical school assignments. On the one hand this assignment gave the students the opportunity to express themselves freely and use their full set of vocabulary. On the other hand, had the assignment been adapted somewhat more to the student's interests and hobbies maybe the result would have been different and the study would have presented a whole other set of vocabulary.

The result in this study is somewhat limited and the study could be further developed in many areas. One could look at other linguistic features that indicate competence and are signs of learning, and also other participants could be included in that study. According to the National Agency for Education in Sweden, students from cities where traditionally education is emphasized, tend to choose programs which prepares you for university and other onwards studying. Whereas in other cities where education is not traditionally emphasized, students tend to choose programs that prepare you for work, and subjects such as English, is not considered as necessary as other subjects for the students (Skolverket 2006). If the study would have been comparative between two different cities with different studying cultures and educational tradition, the result might have told something else.

7 Conclusion & further research

The overall result in this study show that girls outperform boys in usage of both adjectives and adverbs. Not only in total number do the girls exceed boys' performance but also in variation of adjectives and adverbs. Both girls and boys use far more adjectives than adverbs in their produced texts.

Furthermore, compared to earlier research (Lakoff 2004 & Coates 2004) that show that certain words are female coded and express uncertainty, this study shows that girls tended to use rather deterministic adverbs and boys used adverbs that express uncertainty.

Further, a deeper study could be made looking at other word classes to see if there is a difference, or not, regarding those as well. It would also be interesting doing a comparative study over time with the same students to see whether the students have developed their vocabulary over time. Or, further research could be done on wrongly used adjectives and adverbs as well, to see if there is a difference in how often students try to use a more descriptive language but are not successful. That might say something about students taking risks.

Additionally, further research could also be done in looking at in what way students use their vocabulary to communicate their advice for Chris. This research is quite limited in that way and is solely looking at if and how students use certain word classes, i.e. adjectives and adverbs.

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Appendix

Students' assignment – Letter to Chris

E-mail to a friend

Your task in this written assignment is to write a reply to an e-mail sent to you by a friend.

*Chris Rawlings
1300 Columbus Avenue
Fisherman's Wharf
San Francisco, California
USA 94133*

October 13, 2013

Dear friend,

At last I've made up my mind to come to Sweden. I've already talked to a travel agent and received some information, but it's all a bit confusing. I've made a list of questions and I hope that you'll be able to answer some of them so that I can make definite plans.

First of all I need to know when I should come. I can take a month's holiday whenever I want, so what do you think would be the best time of the year for me to visit and why? Could you also tell me what the weather will be like, so that I know what kind of clothes to bring? I suppose it's pretty cold most of the year.

Since I'm going to have a lot of time, I'd like to travel around the country instead of spending all my time in the big Swedish cities like Stockholm, Oslo, Brussels and whatever their names are. I've heard so much about the beautiful Swedish countryside; snow-covered mountains, fjords and lakes. Could you recommend two places of interest that I just shouldn't miss, perhaps one in a city and the other in the country? Please explain why you think I should go there.

I also don't know if I should visit any of the other Scandinavian countries. "If you've seen one, you've seen them all", as they say. Is this true? Can you tell me of some differences?

Finally, I'm ashamed to say I don't know much about Sweden. Is it expensive? What should I bring back with me that is typically Swedish?

I'm really looking forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes

Chris