ATTITUDES TO SWEARWORDS

Gender Differences among Native and Non-native speakers of English

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Abstract

In this essay I have investigated differences and similarities between women’s and men’s language, native speakers of English, with regard to their use of swearwords. I have also looked at if Swedish men and women differ in how they would use different English swearwords. I carried out a corpus based study in the BNC (British National Corpus), and I used an informant test in the investigation about the attitude to swearwords among Swedish learners of English. The questionnaire they answered contains four questions and it was answered by fifty people. Previous research has shown that men and women speak differently in social interactions. One major different is that women speak in a more indirect manner whereas men speak in a more direct manner. Women also use Standard English to a higher extent than men in most situations. The results from the present study showed that women use substantially fewer swearwords than men in general. However, the differences in the use of aggressive swearwords are quite small. Finally, men use swearwords that are more offensive than women do.

Keywords: Swearwords, gender differences, conversations, men and women, taboo words.
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References
1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Men and women differ in many ways. Some of the differences which have been found have to do with how we communicate. It has been suggested that such differences can make it difficult for men and women to understand each other at times when they have discussions. Swearwords tend to be used in two main ways, when one is angry, or socially, which means that one uses swearwords all the time without being angry. People tend to connect swearing with lower working class men, because people tend to believe that these men lack the proper upbringing. The overarching goal of the present study is to investigate how men’s and women’s language differ with regard to swearwords.

1.2 Aims

The primary aim of this essay is to investigate differences and similarities between women’s and men’s speech, native speakers of English, with regard to their use of swearwords. A second aim is to investigate how sensitive we are to using swearwords in a foreign language. Do Swedish men and women also differ in how they would use different English swearwords?

With regard to the first aim, the study is both quantitative and qualitative. I am interested in finding out which group swears the most, i.e. men or women, but also if there are any differences in the functions of the swearwords. Do swearwords tend to be used mostly in heated discussions or not? For the second aim, I will look at whether the reaction to the use of English swearwords is different between the sexes for Swedish learners of English. Finally, I will try to explain the differences and similarities found. I have chosen to investigate two words that are less offensive and two words that are more insulting, the words are bollocks, crap, fuck and cunt.

1.3 Method and Material

To investigate the differences between women’s and men’s speech for native English speakers, I will carry out a corpus-based study. For the corpus based, I will use the British National Corpus (the BNC). I will search the database to see how often the swearwords that I have picked out are used and which gender that uses them mostly.
To investigate the attitude to swearwords among Swedish learners of English, an informant test was used. The questionnaire contains four questions. I asked fifty people, twenty-five women and twenty-five men, all between twenty and fifty years old. The answers from this questionnaire will hopefully give me the overview of how sensitive Swedish learners, men and women, are to different English swearwords. I will not take social class into consideration when I am doing this investigation.
2. Gender differences

2.1 Chapter overview
In this section, I will discuss what previous research on differences between men and women regarding to how they communicate in terms of the use of swearwords. First, in section 2.2, I will discuss differences in overall performance. Second, in 2.3 there will be a discussion of cultural clashes, in section 2.4, I will look at different functions. Further on, in section 2.5, I will discuss swearwords and in section 2.6, I will show a categorization of swearwords.

2.2 Difference overall performance
According to Morris (1998:35), a medical science team who recently worked in Belfast discovered that girls in the 8th to 20th week old in their mother’s womb, showed more frequent and longer periods of mouth movement than boys. After the birth, the pattern was still the same. Girls of the age 1 to 5 years old are more advanced in their speech than boys in the same age. Girls speak earlier than boys and they also use longer phrases when they speak. Girls also vary their language more and have a more extensive vocabulary than boys (Morris 1998:36). Furthermore, Morris (1998:37) claims that recent scientific research from John-Hopkins University in Baltimore has given more evidence to the theory that women are more advanced linguistically than men. Researchers have discovered that the specific area in the brain which controls this ability has a larger concentration of cells in the woman’s brain than in the man’s brain (Morris.1998:37).

2.3 Cultural clashes
According to Gray (1993), men often feel frustrated when women speak, because women are generally perceived by men as speaking for a long time without getting to the point, while men often say what they want immediately. However, often when a man speaks, he has already planned what he is going to say, whereas women may speak about a lot of things before they finally reach the goal (Gray 1993:74). According to Gray (2002), men often make the mistake of believing that women will think, communicate and react in the same way as they do. Women make the mistake of believing that men will feel, communicate and give response in the same way as they do (Gray 2002:24). Another thing that Gray (2002) mentions is, that one thing women often complain about is that men do not listen to them. The man completely ignores that a woman speaks or he will only listen for a minute or so, and will then come up with a conclusion to the problem he thinks is bothering her. When the woman
does not appreciate this, he gets confused. It does not matter how many times she says that he is not listening to her, he still does not understand anything and he will then do the same thing again. She wants compassion and he thinks that she wants solutions according to Gray (2002:25).

2.4 Different functions

Men often complain that women try to change them. When a woman loves a man, she feels obliged to make sure that he develops in life. It does not matter how much he tries to resist, she believes that she is nursing him. Men want women to accept them as they are (Gray 2002:25). Women talk about problems to get intimacy and not necessarily to find a solution (Gray 2002:31). One major difference between men and women are how they communicate when they are stressed. Men want to be left in peace, in front of the television or with reading a newspaper. While women want to talk about the things that make her stressed (Gray 2002:39). A man does not know that a woman appreciates that he just listens to her (Gray 2002:47).

When we are upset, disappointed or angry it is difficult to communicate with tenderness and warmth. We temporarily lose our love feelings, trust, tenderness, understanding, ability to accept, appreciation and respect. When these moments come, the conversations turn to arguments. During such moments, Gray (2002) claims that women tend to blame the men and give them feelings of guilt for their actions. When women are upset they find it difficult to speak in an accepting appreciative tone. She may not realize how negative and painful her attitude is to her partner. When men are upset, they have a tendency to say harsh things about women and their feelings. Instead of remembering that his partner is vulnerable and sensitive, he can sound mean and insensitive. He may not realize how painful his negative attitude is for her (Gray 2002: 221).

Coates (2004), states in her book that it is obvious that women think more about how they speak then men do. “Everyone knows that as far as language is concerned women are more conservative than men; they conserve the speech of our forebears more carefully”. Coates (2004) continues by saying that, in England men speaks the vernacular more frequently, more consistently, and more genuinely than women (Coates 2004:35).

Surveys have shown that women on average use forms, which more closely approach those of the standard variety or the prestige accent than those used by men. In other words, female speakers of English, tend to use linguistic forms which are considered to be better than non-standard forms (Trudgill 2000:70). This means that men are much more likely than
women to use non-standard local pronunciations (Trudgill 2000:72). Male informants, we can see, are strikingly more accurate than their female counterparts. The women, we can say, report themselves, in very many cases, as using higher-class variants than they actually do – presumably because they wish that they do belong to another class (Trudgill 2000:76).

Research findings suggest that women use interrogative forms more than men and that this may reflect women’s relative weakness in interactive situations. They exploit questions and tag questions in order to keep the conversation going, because they feel that they get more attention from men if they show interest in the man and talk about things that interest him or about his job. If men do not show any interest in what women talk about they feel insecure and unloved (Coates 2004:93). Male speakers prefer a one-at-a-time model of turn-taking, in contrast with women, who often adopt the jam session model, which means overlapping talk. For men, conversations involve long monologues which give individual speakers privileged access to an uninterrupted floor, while the more gladiatorial style talk, where males spar with each other, also depends on the well-timed exchange of speaker turns. This means that, in mixed conversations, women and men may come into conflict over overlapping talk, which is a normal component of jam session talk (Coates 2004:136).

Tannen (1998) shows that men and women often fail to understand one another properly, and that such misunderstandings can lead to friction and tension in relationships. One aspect of communication that may cause problems of this type is the relationship between directness and indirectness (Trudgill 2000:115). Men use indirectness significantly less often in stating their goals, beliefs and intentions than women do, and therefore run the risk of being perceived by women as being tactless, dominating and impolite. Because they use indirectness less, they are also not sufficiently sensitive to its use by women, and may well not realize when women have indirectly made a request or given an opinion. Women may therefore interpret men as being insensitive and self-absorbed. Women, on the other hand, because of their lack of directness, may be perceived by men as being evasive and indecisive. Because they are not sufficiently direct in what they say. Moreover, they may be perceived by men as being uncommunicative (Trudgill 2000:117-118).

According to Finegan (2004:375), speech differs a lot between men and women. Not only how they speak but also how they pronounce words and which words they choose to use when they talk. Finegan continues by saying that certain words are associated more with women than men and may ‘sound’ feminine as a result. Adjectives such as lovely, darling and cute may carry feminine’s associations. Women delete sounds less frequently than men and women also tend to behave like the higher socioeconomic groups to a greater extent than men
do (Finegan 2004:377). Edlund (2007) writes that in Robin Lakoff’s seminal book “Language and women’s place”, it says that women’s language is weaker than men’s and this is one of the causes to men being superior against women (Edlund 2007:48).

Edlund (2007) writes in his book about another linguistic, Pamela Fishman, who did an investigation during the 90s were she placed a tape recorder in several couples’s homes. She found that the women spend much time and energy to keep the conversation alive and they also supported the men all the time with humming answers. However, the men did not support the women back at all (Edlund 2007:48). The same study showed that women and men start conversations in different ways. It was very common that women began their conversations with a question, while the men began their conversations with a statement. Fishman says that women ask questions because it is more likely for them to get an answer. A statement do not always have to be answered, however, the men almost got answered all the time anyway. The men showed an uninterested attitude toward the women’s questions in general. When introductions to new conversations took place, the women did most of the job. Despite the fact that women introduced more subjects than the men, less than half of these led to a conversation. Meanwhile, the men were much more successful in their introductions of subjects. Every time the women answered their opening statements. Thus, it seems that the men control the conversations and the women just answered the men’s statements. In addition, they supported their statements and they followed up their introduction of subjects. However, the men did not show the same support against the women (Edlund 2007:85).

Research has also shown that there are differences between the genders in politics. Women speak less than men in the Swedish Parliament. However, during elections women tend to speak more than the men, because they want to inform the people about everything that they intend to change during the next years to come. Women speak more about sociopolitical questions, while the men speak about production and companies. Only women speak about questions like prostitution, pornography, and women’s health. Women in politics get harsh competition: they get fewer questions in TV debates than the men and also less support from the people. Women tend to speak directly to the audience, while men seem to speak out in the air (Edlund 2007:86).

Edlund (2007) claims that, another difference between men and women’s speech concern apologies. Women apologize to show consideration to other people experiences. However, men do not like to apologize because they think that it will put them in a lower status (Edlund 2007:57). Another thing that Edlund (2007) mentions, is women’s emotions imply that they are more impulsive in their speech and they speak very fast, with strong
emotion and with a large variation in her speech. Women can give expressions for opposite opinions, and this tends to be perceived as uninteresting to men, and they may find it difficult to understand. Women talk and think faster than men do (Edlund 2007:61). Edlund (2007:63) furthermore states that women´s speech is marked by an intimacy to both the subject which is being discussed and to the people who take part in the discussion. Meanwhile, men´s conversations are marked by a distance toward the subject and the people in the discussion. Women seem to strive to create a connection in the conversation, meanwhile the man assumes to strive to control the situation in the discussion. One can also say that men are seen as being reparative and active trying to solve problems, while women are seen as compassionate and with focus on building relationships. The male speech style is more lecturing and in monologue form, while women´s style seems to be more focused on the listening (Edlund 2007:63).

Male conversations tend to revolve around topics of public concern and are focused on establishing status, which means that if any tensions arise in the conversation; this will lead to a marking of independence. Female conversations are often about the private area and are focused on belonging, support and on expressing confidence towards their partner (Edlund 2007:64).

Edlund (2007) writes that, according to Lakoff, there are several things which are typical in women´s language. Some of these things are:

- A rich vocabulary, specifically in certain female areas connected to female doings.
- Women answer with questions instead of concrete facts.
- A wide register of intonation patterns.
- Very correct pronunciation. Men tend to take away the ´g´ in singing and going.
- Women tend to overuse words like, isn´t it?, well and kind of as in tag questions. Lakoff argues that these expressions show women´s uncertainty or caution.
- Women´s language does not contain any humor. Lakoff says that women cannot tell jokes because they ruin the point and they do not understand others jokes either.
- Women swear very little, because women do not want to upset or hurt anyone. (Edlund 2007:66)

Women have also been found to be more polite than men (Edlund 2007:67). To be polite in a conversation means that one avoids tensions and do not take any conflicts with the
conversation partner. Women’s speech style is relations, listening, connections, compassion and fidelity (Edlund 2007:67).
3. Swearwords

3.1 Historical overview

According to a legend, powerful expressions or swearwords come from ancient Egypt from the time when Farao was king. The legend tells that there was a hunger strike which unleashed fury amongst a group of workers, and they became so angry that they cursed Farao. This is how it all began, according to Ljung (2007:11).

Ljung (2007:15) states that, in the beginning people used God and the Devil the most to curse on or swear upon. There are several examples of this from the Bible, one example of this is, “one who swears an oath for the country shall swear by the God”.

However, it is against ethic and moral to curse God or to use his name wrongfully. The Greeks and the Romans also swore much at things and persons like Hercules and Apollo (Ljung 2007:17).

Ljung (2007:23) claims that, around year 1500, swearing was forbidden and to curse God and one was punished if one got caught swearing. In France and England people had to pay a fine, if they cursed. The swearing increased in the late 1600, early 1700 and words like shit, ass, piss, cunt, cock and fuck became much more commonly used than before (Ljung 2007:32).

However, in the late 1800s and early 1900s, swearing was prohibited again and was taboo to use in social occasions. Meanwhile, the farmers and low class workers continued to use them. During the next 150 years, swearwords were associated with criminals, rawness, and lack of raising and poor education (Ljung 2007:35). Later on the swearwords became regular in every man’s speech, no matter what social class one belonged to.

The main reason why people curse is because they want to let out some steam; they need to get their angry feelings out. Another reason for swearing is social swearing, for example, “shit what fun this was” (Ljung 2007:84). Ljung (2007) also says that to swear has always been connected to the lower working class. According to Ljung (2007:91), the degree to which we swear depend on age, gender and social class. Cunt is the word which is most taboo in England. According to Coates (2004:15), a general study which has been made with people between 13 and 23 years old shows that, they often use swearwords. This finding is supported by linguistics studies which have been made. Swearwords are something which is generally connected to men. It is clear that people have thought for a long time that women and men differ in relation to the use of swearwords and other taboo expressions (Coates 2004:15).
Ljung (2007:93) writes that, a recent study about youths using swearwords showed that for words like *cunt, cock* and *gay* there was very little difference between the genders. However, *whore* was much more frequently used by men. Another result showed that men used *fuck* more often than women. Generally, boys use a wider variety of swearwords than girls (Ljung 2007:93). Women seem to strive toward using the standard variety. This implies that women have better understanding of the social dimensions of language, and therefore, women tend to use milder and fewer swearwords than men (Ljung 2007:93).

“Women don’t use off-color or indelicate expressions; women are the experts at euphemism” (Coates 2004:15). “There can be no doubt that women apply a great and universal influence on linguistic development through their instinctive shrinking from coarse and gross expressions, and their preference for refined and (in certain spheres) veiled and indirect expressions” (Coates 2004:15). There are great differences with regard to swearing between different nations; but in those countries and in those circles in which swearing is common it is generally found much more extensively among men than among women (Coates 2004:15).

According to Wajnryb (2005:15), there are two potential points of confusion when it comes to understanding and talking about foul language. One has to do with the words used that commonly constitute “swearing”. The other has to do with how we refer to “swearing”. The first point of confusion arises from the form-function relationship of swearing terms. Wajnryb (2005:15) also says that there are more swearing functions to perform than there are swearwords to use; to put it differently, lots of targets but a scarcity of ammunition. This means that people who swear have to use the same old words over and over again though in different circumstances and for different purposes. They dip into the swear bank and use words that may be similar semantically but different pragmatically. The second potential point of confusion concerns the meta-language of swearing. “Meta-language” is a term used for language that describes languages in this case, the language conventionally used to talk about swearing. We talk about swearing, cursing and using bad language, and the meanings differ even while, confusingly, the words we use are the same or similar (Wajnryb 2005:15).

One thing that is not acceptable today is the use of swearwords which is used about people. This means the people who call other people for example *motherfucker, cocksucker, whore* or *cunt*. This kind of behavior is not acceptable in society today, because it shows that people have little respect for other people. This bad behavior has increased very much in the schools today amongst the youths. Teenagers use these words and they do not seem to think about whether they hurt someone or not. The use of bad language can be both a “good” thing
and a “bad” thing. The good thing is the use of it when one is angry and has to get the feelings out of the mind. The bad thing is when the words are used in a way that hurts other people.

3.2 Categorization of swearwords
Swearwords can be categorized into different subgroups. The following groups and definitions are borrowed from Wajnryb (2005:17-22)

*Abusive swearing:* Swearwords that are directed toward others, for example *you fucker.* Derogatory in tone, for example, *this is a shitty piece of work.* Involve metaphoric curses, like *go to hell* or denigrate through name-calling, example *you bastard.*

*Blasphemy:* A form of swearing that deliberately vilifies or anything associated with religious meaning. What’s important here is the swearer’s intention. “*Jeez*”, for instance, is a common and, indeed, conventional word today and would not be regarded as blasphemous unless its use were intended to give offense to a Christian.

*Curse, Cursing:* In a curse, the curser usually involves a higher being and calls down some evil upon a specifically defined target. “*May you be damned for all eternity*”, is a curse, or “*Eat shit and die*”, is considering powerful, threatening behavior.

*Cuss, Cussing:* A term from American English that means “swearing” in the general sense of using foul language, for example *bloody hell.*

*Dysphemism:* This is the substitution of an offensive or disparaging term for an inoffensive one. Most deliberately abusive swearing involves the use of dysphemisms, for example *ass* instead of *fanny.*

*Epithet:* Often used interchangeably with expletive, this is a defamatory or abusive word or phrase.

*Euphemistic swearing:* This involves the substitution of an inoffensive term, or one that is seen as acceptable, “*Goodness gracious*” for one that is considered indecent or taboo breaking “*Good God Almighty*”.
Epletive: This is the exclamatory swear word or phrase said in emotional circumstances, it betrays a letting off, of built-up steam. For example, “Mother of God”, “Fucking Hell”, and “Blown me down”

Insult: Loosely speaking, in an abusive context, when you swear at someone, you intend to insult them. In more precise terms, “insult” is reserved for an abusive term that is meant literally “you ugly, fat, pimply idiot”.

Invective: Allows the user to insult his or her victim without using taboo words or breaking social protocol, for example “you shining wit”.

Oath: The word “oath” has two meanings that parallel the two broad contexts of use of “swear”. One is the formal promise you make when you swear by the bible or by Jove, or by whatever you fancy. Here the oath is the actual text that you recite in the swearing act. Oaths are no longer a common feature of daily life.

Obscenity: Swearing through the explicit use of indecent or taboo words to refer to intimate parts of the body and the body’s functions and products, like for example shit and fuck.

Profanity: Swearing through the use of words that abuse anything sacred, profanity is a wider term than blasphemy and distinct in that there may be no intention to vilify. Profanity may simply involve the use of religious terminology such as, “God” or “Jesus”.

Swear: To swear can be- to tell the truth, swear to do my best, to honor my school or to fight for my country. It can also mean to swear by or on someone/something, like I swear on the bible or I swear by my mother’s grave. Or swear at or to, like “he was swearing wildly at his wife”. This kind of swearing is characterized by reference to taboo or stigmatized material and by its strong non literal force. It is usually associated with strong attitude or emotion.

Taboo words: They may be words that disrespect religion, or include stigmatized topics such as mental illness, birth defects.
Vulgarity: A form of swearing that makes use of foul language by breaking taboo words related to intimate language. It is broader than obscenity, but is loosely used interchangeably, for example “wow, look at those tits!”.  

Wajnryb (2005:41) also claims that, the use and overuse of “Fuck” in the everyday speech of many people has led, to some extent, to a lessening of its impact as an expletive. However, the word still retains its shock value, although it is less now than it was when the critic Kenneth Tynen caused controversy by saying it on British TV in 1965 (Wajnryb 2005:41).

The groups of swearwords which will be investigated in the present study are abusive swearing and obscenity.
4. Result

4.1 Chapter overview
In this chapter, I will present the results of my queries of the BNC and the results from the questionnaire with non-native speakers. I will discuss the results of the investigation of one swearword at a time. In section 4.2, I will discuss the BNC results of the four swearwords that I have chosen. In section 4.3, I will show the results from the questionnaire about the use of swearwords amongst men and women. I will give the results from the speech survey in section 4.4.

4.2 BNC result
Table 4.2a shows the results for cunt in men’s and women’s speech. The table shows that men use this word more frequently than women.

Table 4.2a CUNT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>No. of words</th>
<th>No. of hits</th>
<th>Frequency per million words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1,427,850</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>34.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2,240,685</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3,668,535</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>17.99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2b shows the results for fuck in men’s and women’s speech. The table shows that men use the word to a higher extent than women.

Table 4.2b FUCK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>No. of words</th>
<th>No. of hits</th>
<th>Frequency per million words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1,427,850</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>232.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2,240,685</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>46.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3,668,535</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>119.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.2c shows the results for *bollocks* in men’s and women’s speech. The table shows that men use the word more than twice as much as women.

**Table 4.2c BOLLOCKS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>No. of words</th>
<th>No. of hits</th>
<th>Frequency per million words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1,427,850</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>44.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2,240,685</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>17.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3,668,535</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>28.35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2d shows the results for *crap* in men’s and women’s speech. The table shows that men use the word at a higher level than women.

**Table 4.2d CRAP**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>No. of words</th>
<th>No. of hits</th>
<th>Frequency per million words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1,427,850</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>95.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2,240,685</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>43.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3,668,535</td>
<td>235</td>
<td>64.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Diagram 4.2e shows a summary of the results about the four words that I have looked at in the BNC investigation.

Diagram 4.2e

Results from the BNC investigation

The result from diagram 4.2e shows that men use swearwords more than women in this case with the four words I have chosen. This result supports the results from previous research.
4.3 Result from the swearword questionnaire with Swedish non-native speakers

In this section I will discuss the results from the questionnaire. The questions are about their habits in how Swedish learners of English use swearwords.

Diagram 4.3a shows the results for question 1 about whether or not you use swearwords when upset. The first four questions do not make reference to their use of swearwords in English but may apply to Swedish too.

Diagram 4.3a

Do you use swearwords when you are upset?

The result from diagram 4.3a show that the differences are not that significant when it comes to using swearwords when one is angry. The differences are greater in the no section. There are very few men who do not use swearwords when they are angry, while there are more women who do not use swearwords when they are angry.
Diagram 4.3b shows the results for question 2 about whether or not you use swearwords socially.

**Diagram 4.3b**

Do you use swearwords socially?

The result from diagram 4.3b show that men use swearwords much more in social settings than women do. Perhaps this support previous research, the women usually think more about what they say than men do. Women do not want to insult or hurt anyone.

Diagram 4.3c shows the results from question 3 about whether or not you swear often.
Diagram 4.3c

Do you swear often?

The results from diagram 4.3c show that men use swearwords to a much higher extent than women do in general. Men use swearwords very often in both aggressive and social ways, whereas women do not.

Diagram 4.3d shows the results from question 4 about which swearword you use most when you swear.
The result show that the word *fuck* is used the most by men whereas women use a less offensive word, *crap*. The word *bollocks* is used almost equally between men and women. The word *cunt* is not used at all by the informants, and it was also used very little in the BNC report. This supports the results from the BNC investigation.
5. Summary and Conclusion

The aim with this essay was to investigate differences and similarities between women’s and men’s speech, with regard to how they use swearwords. The British National Corpus was used to investigate how often the words *fuck, bollocks, crap* and *cunt* are used divided by gender, and which gender use swearwords most frequently. A questionnaire was used with the aim to show how sensitive Swedish learners of English, men and women, are to different English swearwords.

As could be seen from the result of the BNC investigation and the survey, men use swearwords most under all circumstances. Even though women use swearwords, they do not use them in the same range as men do and nearly not at all if they are not upset. How we express ourselves depends on many things, our family, the society and our friends. When it comes to the use of swearing, men use far more swearwords. Women do not want to swear because they do not want to offend others or hurt them. Women think much more about what they do say than men. Men use swearwords that are more insulting than women do.

Furthermore, as we could see from the result of the survey, both men and women swear when they are upset. My conclusion from this investigation is that the literature on this subject shows exactly the same thing as my results when it comes to the differences between women and men’s use of swearwords and their way of communicating with each other. The results from the BNC and the survey gave me the expected answer, i.e. that men use swearwords more than women, and that men also use more offensive words when they swear.

Swearing used to be connected primarily with men, criminals, low-class workers and people who seem to have been poorly raised. Once upon a time that might have been true, but nowadays both men and women swear and they belong to all the social classes. However, men use swearwords much more than women, as shown in the results of the present study. Men use swearwords equally in social situations and in aggressive situations. Meanwhile, most women only use swearwords in aggressive situations. This difference may be connected to how women have been found to think much more about what they say and they may often want to be seen as a person from a higher social class then they actually belong to. Men also use more offensive swearwords than women do, women often use words like *crap*, while men use words like *fuck and cunt*. Today swearwords are a part of our vocabulary and people are not surprised at all when they hear them, perhaps because there are more people who swear than there are people who do not swear. Nor are we surprised when a woman swear socially.
nowadays. This is what Wajnryb (2005) means when she says that the word *fuck* does not have the same impact any longer like it has had before.

To conclude, there is clearly a difference in the use of swearwords among men and women. Previous research seems to add up with the result from my survey. Women speak *indirect*, men speak *direct*. Men speak non-standard English and women speak Standard English to a higher degree.
References