Gender Difference in Role-Play
Male and Female Character Language in *World of Warcraft*

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ABSTRACT
In this essay, I have investigated whether players of World of Warcraft change their language to suit the gender of the character they play. I have researched if there are gender differences that correspond to what is defined as male and female language in mixed-sex conversations. Chat-logs, collected during four participant observations, were used for making an analysis based primarily on research by Coates (1993) and Yale (2007). Seven features were selected for analysis: amount of participation, hedges, questions, directives and commands, taboo language, compliments and grammar. It was possible to discover gender differences, but these were not consistent in all areas of research. For example, female characters had a higher contribution than males, as well as a higher use of hedges and tag-questions among males, which contradicts previous research. The lack of consistency might be due to the fact that the participants do not specifically consider all areas as typically female or male, or their unawareness of these tendencies. We also need to consider disagreement in previous gender studies as well as folklinguistic belief. The explanation of the lack of consistent differences may be a more equal relationship between males and females in this context, or due to the possibility that the participants, who are usually male, make use of their normal male language.

Key words: World of Warcraft, gender, gender differences, chat-logs, mixed-sex conversations, folklinguistic belief, amount of participation, hedges, questions, directives, commands, taboo language, compliments, grammar.
WORD LIST

CMC: Computer Mediated Communication.
Gameplay: when a player focus on advancing within the game.
IC: In Character; a player imitates the language of his or her character.
MMORPG: Massive Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game; a specific kind of genre among computer games.
NPC: Non-Personal Character; a character which is controlled by the computer or server, i.e. there isn’t a real player controlling it.
OOC: Out Of Character: a player does not imitate the language of his or her character.
PVE: Player Versus Environment; “players will not be attacked by opponents unless consenting to fight” (Corneliussen & Walker-Rettberg 2007: 5).
PVP: Player Versus Player; “players will be flagged as legal targets for opposing faction when moving into contested or hostile territory” (Corneliussen & Walker-Rettberg 2007: 5).
RP: Role-Play; when a player takes on a created role.
WoW: World of Warcraft; the game released by Blizzard Entertainment.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1. Aim</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2. Method and Material</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3. Outline of Study</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1. Introduction</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2. <em>World of Warcraft</em></td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3. Construction of Gender in WoW.</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4. Gender Research</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.1. Women’s Language</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.2 Men’s Language</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5. CMC, WoW and Gender</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1. Introduction</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2. Overview</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3. Hedges</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4. Questions</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.1. Yes/no-questions and <em>Wh</em>-questions</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4.2. Tag-questions</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5. Directives and Commands</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6. Interruptions</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7. Taboo Language</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8. Compliments</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.9. Grammar</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. SUMMARY</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1. Corresponding Gender Differences</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2. Contradictions of Gender Differences</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. CONCLUSION</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Sources</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary Sources</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX 1: The In-game Mail</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX 2: The Follow-up In-game Mail</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. INTRODUCTION

The Massive Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game (MMORPG) World of Warcraft was released on the 23rd of November 2004. After this date, there have been two large expansions of the game: one in 2007 (the Burning Crusade: tBC) and one in 2008 (Wrath of the Lich King: WLK). According to a recent press-release the game now has more than eleven million subscribers and it is considered a success (Blizzard Entertainment 2008a).

The game takes place in the fantasy world of Azeroth, which has a highly developed background history. Inside the game, the player gets to create a character, male or female from two different factions: Horde or Alliance. After that, the adventure begins in a world based on role-playing.

Role-play is a way of taking on the role of the character you play and acting out his or her actions. To do this in World of Warcraft (WoW) you write what you want your character to say e.g. Elf says: What do you mean by that? and use written actions to describe what you do e.g. Elf pulled of her helmet. The communication taking place is an important part of the game.

Such a large game as World of Warcraft can give many interesting objects of study; gender related language is one of them. Research has shown that there are known differences in language use depending on the gender of the speaker. For example, tag-questions and hedges have been shown to be more frequent in women’s language than in men’s language. Are we sensitive enough to such differences that we would incorporate them in role-play? The present study will investigate whether the players in WoW, role-play to the extent that differences between men’s and women’s language are evident.

For a long time, discourse analysis has been used to analyze language: spoken, signed and written. The body of written language is constantly growing and today it also includes computer mediated communication (CMC). This is an area with several different fields and with possibilities to examine how language is used online, in contrast to ordinary written texts. There are areas like newspapers, blogs, communities and more, as well as the field of online games, which is the topic of this essay.

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1 This is an invented character name and an example of how it could look in a chat.
1.1. Aim

The aim of the present study is to investigate whether players of World of Warcraft change their language to suit the gender of the character they play. It is often said that there are differences between women and men with regard to language use. I will study if male and female characters’ language corresponds to what is defined as male and female language in mixed-sex conversations.

I have based my analysis foremost on Coates’ (1993) account of differences in male and female language, which discusses both research and folklinguistic believes. I will also take Yale’s (2007) similar findings into consideration. I will investigate the following features: interaction based on solidarity and support; interaction based on dominance and power relations; tag questions; hedges; grammar; interruptions; taboo language and compliments.

1.2. Method and Material

The subject will be studied by analyzing chat-logs recorded during participant observations made in World of Warcraft on an English RPPVP (Role-Playing Player Versus Player) server. On this kind of server there is a focus on role-play, as well as combat. It is therefore likely that players try to imitate the language of their characters more frequently than on other servers, where there is no role-play involved. With the help of the collected chat-logs and an in-game mail sent to 50 of the participants (see Appendix 1), I will research if the players change their conversational style.

I will analyse the conversations that take place in the in character (IC) channels and disregard the chat from the out of character (OOC) channels; game information which is not a part of the role-play; my own comments; as well as emoticons and things performed or said by non-player characters (NPC). The logs were collected during four evenings of two weeks; two before the new expansion: WLK, and two after. I do not think there is any difference due to the expansion, but I decided to not collect logs during the immediate release as the players are too busy with the new functions to focus on role-play.

The participants of this study are 119 players: 83 male characters and 36 female characters, of World of Warcraft with different origins, ages and experiences, who participated in role-playing events during my collection of observations. I will not take ethnicity or social class of the players or characters into consideration in the present study. Since this is a comparison between differences between male and female characters’ use of language, there will be an average sum calculated which show number of use per character.
The participants have given their consent to being recorded but were not told about the subject of the essay. This is to ensure that they will not change their language due to the study.

As it is difficult to know the real life gender of a player, as none of this information is public, I will disregard that and focus on the gender of the character, although I will ask this question to the 50 players who receive the in-game mail. According to Yee (2006) there are approximately 84 percent male players, so there is a greater possibility that the player of a female character is male than female.

To protect the integrity of the players, the name of the server will not be stated: guild names will be exchanged to guild 1; guild 2 (G001, G002) and the players will be anonymous and referred to as male 1; male 2 (M01, M02) and female 1; female 2 (F01, F02) etc, with regard to the gender of the character.

1.3. Outline of Study

Chapter 1 contains an introduction to the subject, aim of the study and what kind of method and material that was used for the research. In Chapter 2 the theoretical background of the study is presented. In Chapter 3, the results of my analysis of the chat-logs is presented and discussed. Chapter 4 contains a summary of the received results, followed by the conclusion in Chapter 5.
2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will first give an overview of the World of Warcraft and discuss how gender is constructed in the game. Secondly, I will present gender research and state some typical features of women’s language and men’s language. Thirdly, I will discuss some research on Computed Mediated Communication (CMC) which was based on gender, as well as consider a previous linguistic study made on WoW chat-logs.

2.2. World of Warcraft

World of Warcraft is a game based on a war between different forces, primarily the two factions: Horde and Alliance. It therefore has a structure based on a hierarchy of power similar to that of an army.

Players have four options on what kind of server to join: Normal server; also called Player versus Environment (PVE) server, where other players “can’t attack you unless you allow them to” (Blizzard Entertainment 2008b). There is also the choice to join a PVP server (Player Versus Player), described as “you are in a constant state of war against the other faction” (Blizzard Entertainment 2008b). There is also the choice to join an RPNormal server or a RPPVP server, which is a combination of the two versions mentioned above, but with the addition RP (role-playing). Role-playing is when the player acts his or her character to perform what is said or done. MacCallum-Stewart & Parsler (2008:243) discusses the difficulties of this, as the environment in WoW is somewhat static and working against you, since a player cannot move any NPCs to take his or her position. There are also no rewards for role-playing, like there is for performing other sections of the game, like quests.

After choosing a server, players can create characters. They get to choose faction, race, gender and appearance from a set form of choices before entering the game. The only actual free choice is the name of the characters. A game like WoW does not have a defined ending (Corneliussen & Walker-Rettberg 2008:8), but is in constant development. The main purpose of the game is to gain higher levels and earn/receive better gear, by performing quests and defeating bosses. To do this, a player has the possibility to join a Guild, a group of players with something in common, to help with these achievements. Cooperation is a requirement to complete certain quests and areas of the game, which make “the social aspect of this world” (Corneliussen & Walker-Rettberg 2008:6) vital.
On an RP-server, there is a possibility of joining a guild that focuses on role-play, instead of gameplay; where your main focus is to advance further in the game. You design your character’s personality and try to find a guild that suits the character’s goals or loyalty, e.g. defend a certain capital or have a certain belief. In some ways, role-playing can be seen as diminishing the progress of WoW (MacCallum-Stewart & Parsler 2008:227), as there is nothing to achieve by role-playing, as there is by gameplay.

In a role-playing guild, there are different channels for role-playing. There is the out of character (OOC) chat and the in character (IC) chat. I have only collected the IC-chat, which can look like this:

883. 11/16 19:04:46.187  F01 stares you down.
884. 11/16 19:04:49.578  F01 says: You're late...

All lines in the created corpus are numbered. Information about what line the above examples are from is visual in the first numbers; 883 and 884. After these, there is the date when the chat was collected; 16th of November, and the time with hours, minutes, seconds and milliseconds; 19:04:46.187. F01 is the anonymity number for this particular player, followed by what she does; “stares you down” and what she says; “You’re late...”

As WoW is based on a hierarchical system, most of the chat will probably be of an asymmetrical kind (terminology from Coates 1996:201) and concentrated on the fact that the characters are not equal in skill and/or status. There is a possibility that also symmetrical talk, similar to that among friends, does exist depending on what is role-played. Also note that players from the two factions cannot communicate with each other, apart from certain emotes (Corneliussen & Walker-Rettberg 2008:5)

2.3. Construction of Gender in WoW

According to Corneliussen the history of Azeroth, where WoW takes place, is mainly a “history” (2008:69), with foremost male heroes and approximately 60-70 percent male NPCs. On the other hand, she notes that there are several strong women represented, foremost as war-heroines. The female characters take on both traditional and untraditional female roles in World of Warcraft.

The dwarf female Modgud’s actions could as well been performed by a male, but most other females have a “special female role” (Corneliussen 2008:70). The human female Aegwynn is one of them, who is pictured as a brave warrior and leader. She also performs the untraditional role of seducer, when she needs to give birth to an heir. Aegwynn leaves the
child with his father, who takes care of the child, which traditionally would have been a female role. The night elves are another race which brake the traditional gender roles in WoW, as most of their warriors are female and since their race has more female NPCs; 58 percent, than male (Corneliussen 2008:76). They also have female leaders: Queen Azshara and priestess Tyrande.

Corneliussen concludes that:

“[W]e find females contributing with special female abilities, thus acting as complementary to males (romance and childbirth). We also find males and females as equals, with females entering traditional male positions (leaders and seducers), and we find parité version of ignoring gender, making males and females interchangeable (Modgud).

(Corneliussen 2008:71)

Corneliussen also questions what it is that defines males and females in World of Warcraft. In games in general, there has been a large amount of “hypersexualization” (2008:72), where breasts and a thin waistline defines femininity. In WoW there is a choice as most female clothes also defines cleavage and more visual skin than male clothes, but with accessories; as shirts, there is a possibility to also cover these parts.

The male characters are significantly larger than the female characters, which concludes that body mass is an important part to define gender. Also note that Blizzard increased the body mass of the blood-elf males, as they were considered too feminine (Corneliussen 2008:73). The males of the more demonic species have more “monster” attributes than the females, for example the males of the Draenai race has tentacles and a large tail, while the females of the same race do not have tentacles and a significantly smaller tail (Corneliussen 2008:74).

Corneliussen concludes that World of Warcraft is not equal, but it is more equal than many other games and “an interesting playground for challenging cultural perceptions of gender” (2008:82).

2.4. Gender Research

Research has shown that there are differences between how males and females use language with regard to certain features, e.g. questions (Coates 1993:122) and hedges (Coates 1993:116). There are also folklinguistic believes about gender differences. For example, males are thought to use taboo language to a larger extent than females, who are supposed to use what is generally considered a more polite language (Coates 1993:23). Also, females are thought to talk much more than men do, which is visible in the traditional proverb: “A
woman’s tongue wags like a lamb’s tail” (Coates 1993:33, 115), even though there is no evidence of this. According to Trudgill (2000), it is difficult to explain why these kinds of gender differences exist (2000:64); he comes to the conclusion that it is “closely related to social attitudes” (Trudgill 2000:79).

Western society used to be based more firmly than today on hierarchy where what men said was norm and what women said was considered based on that norm (Coates 1993:19). There is a status difference between men and women which originates from men traditionally having a higher position in society than women. These differences still apply to a certain degree, like in the following example about leaving a parking lot:

The woman gets to proceed not because it is her right but because he has granted her permission, so she is being framed as subordinate. /.../ The [male] driver is deciding on his own course of action [which is waiting to let the woman drive], rather than being told what to do by someone else.

(Tannen 1990: 34)

Men and women have traditionally acquired different social roles, which creates a certain way of talking and behaving. There is proof, however, that these roles are in a state of change, maybe due to a more equal society (Trudgill 2000:80).

Interaction for women has been found to be based on solidarity and support, where women acknowledge and build on other’s utterances (Coates 1993:136). This kind of indirectness is a strategy used to “avoid intimidating people” (Trudgill 2000:117), which might be used because women traditionally have had less power than men.

Men tend to see conversations and actions from a “hierarchical social order” (Tannen 1990:24) based on power, where they are focused on a goal and on problem solving. Women tend to see conversations and actions “as an individual in a network of connections” (Tannen 1990:24f) based on solidarity, where they want understanding. They, like the men, also wish to pursue their goals, but they do not focus on them to the same extent as men.

These gender differences start early, as a child is spoken to differently depending on if it is a girl or a boy. Research made by studying children, show that girls often play in small groups, where their games seldom have winners or losers (Tannen 1990:43). They often use suggestions and do not try to gain a higher status by their actions. Boys, on the other hand, often play in larger groups, that have a more structured hierarchy with leaders. Their games focus on winning or loosing and they challenge each other for different positions inside the group. This pattern is very similar to the differences between adults.
2.4.1. Women’s Language

Women are perceived as more expressive and concerned with others. Women are more cooperative in their conversations, work harder to establish equality between people, and are often tentative, using more hedges and qualifiers than men.”

(Yale 2007:29)

The quote above suggests that women make use of a more cooperative language, with certain types of questions and hedges. Many studies have also shown that women use a type of language and grammar which is closer to that of the standard variety than men do. These forms are culturally considered more prestigious, formal and hypercorrect (Coates 1993:65, 133). However, it has also been shown that women often overestimate their use of correct grammar, while men underestimate their use of it, as it is prestigious in itself to use, or not use these varieties depending on gender.

It has been shown, furthermore, that women use a higher number of hedges, e.g. *I think, I’m sure, you know, sort of* and *perhaps*, in their conversations (Coates 1993:116). In comparison, Herring (1998:205) discovered that men used hedges more than women in electronic discourse when females were empowered. The reason for this may be to show uncertainty, to “signal that the speaker is not committed to what she is saying” (Coates 1996:154) or the opposite, to show confidence in what she says.

Furthermore, women use questions, e.g. *tag-, yes/no- and wh-questions*, to a higher degree than men (Coates 1993:119, 122). There is a wide variety of reasons why questions are so frequently used, e.g. to seek information, to hedge and to encourage another speaker to continue (Coates 1996:176). Women are expected to use tag-questions, following the stereotype and according to Tannen (1990:228), some may see this as a sign of lower intelligence. It has therefore been said that tag-questions are relatively powerless, but studies have shown that many powerful speakers of high education use them in asymmetrical talk, similar to those of teachers to students (Coates 1996:123). According to Coates (1993:120), there are two different meanings of tag-questions: *modal*, which “signal the speaker’s degree of certainty” (Coates 1993:120) or *affective*, which “express the speaker’s attitude to the addressee” (Coates 1993:120), where the last category can be either *facilitative*, i.e. show support to the addressee, or *softening* the negative aspects of what is said.

Compliments are another way in which men’s and women’s language differ. Compliments made by a woman to a woman often comment on appearance and are usually appreciated by the receiver. On the other hand, compliments made by a woman to a man, often make the man uncomfortable and act as face-threatening towards him (Coates
Men can also perceive women as ‘mothering’ when they ask questions similar to “Where is your coat?” In comparison, compliments made by a man to a man often focus on possessions or skills, while compliments made by a man to a woman often have a sexual base and acts as face-threatening towards her (Coates 1993:128).

2.4.2 Men’s Language

Men are perceived as more dominant, controlling, and concerned with establishing and maintaining status. Men also tend to use more absolutes and abstraction, and more often demonstrate a lack of sympathy. (Yale 2007:29)

As the quote suggests, men tend to have a conversational style where interaction is based on power. Men disagree or ignore other’s utterances and use more aggravated commands and directives than women (Coates 1993:113, 124, 136). Traditionally, it is believed that women talk much more than men and the literature is full of characters that build upon this stereotype (Coates 1993:33). A reason for this belief is that silent and obedient women were in Western society seen as an ideal, as with children (Coates 1993:34). Research has shown that it is in fact men who talk more and who often dominate conversations (Coates 1993:115).

In addition, men interrupt women more. Tannen (1996:55) discuss the research carried out by Zimmerman and West (1975) which acknowledges that 96 percent of all interruptions are made by men. Zimmerman and West also found that silence can have a similar power based effect, often used by men in e.g. the relationship with a spouse.

Men make use of overlaps and interruptions to a greater degree, where the next speaker is too eager to continue and start before the current speaker is finished (Coates 1993:109). A folklinguistic belief is that men also use more swearing and taboo language than women, of which there is no actual proof (Coates 1993:126). However, men’s use of swearwords are significantly lower in mixed-sex conversations (Coates 1993:128).

2.5. CMC, WoW and Gender

Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) was first thought to be a base of equality between genders, but gender differences have turned out to persist (Yale 2007:7). This can be visible in the degree of participation among male and female users, where males had approximately 80 percent of the contribution in a study carried out on an electronic discussion list (Herring 1998:198). Compared to the research made by Yee (2006), MMORPG have an average of 4 percent more male players than an electronic discussion list. The amount of
participation by users can show status, power and influence of its members (Herring 1998:198). On the other hand, users of CMCs tend to believe that there is more equality online, as it is often difficult for users to be sure of gender, occupation, race etc. of other participants.

Collister (2006) carried out a conversation analysis from chatlogs in World of Warcraft. She did not focus on gender, but on other linguistic findings. She observed, for example that players “use the Enter key as a marker of Turn Construction Unit (TCU)” (Collister 2006:80). A TCU is used to extend a turn of talk for a more cohesive discussion. She also gives examples of other discourse features and notes the limitation of performing a study on a role-playing server, as it is PVE-servers that contain a majority of all WoW-players. In addition, Collister (2006:82) makes an important note that players also may use different chat styles depending on their previous use of other online activities. These findings have been taken into consideration during the analysis in the present study.
3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will start with a short overview of the amount of contribution based on gender of the characters and a discussion about the possible number of male and female participants. Secondly, I will present and discuss the results of hedges, as well as yes/no questions, *wh*-questions and tag-questions; directives and commands; interruptions; taboo language; compliments and grammar.

3.2. Overview

There were a total of 119 participants: 83 male characters and 36 female characters. The material consisted of 2,298 lines, where 1,430 lines were written by males and 868 lines were written by females. That creates an average number of 19.3 lines per character. The female characters posted more: 24.11 lines, which is above the average, than the male characters; that were below the average with 2.07 lines. This information is shown in Table 3.2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lines</td>
<td>2298</td>
<td>1430</td>
<td>868</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of lines per character</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>17.23</td>
<td>24.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The higher number of lines from the female characters contradict the research that male have a higher degree of participation than females in CMC. However, as stated previously, it is likely that that a majority of these characters are played by males (Yee 2006).
Graph 3.2: The probable number of players and their choice of gender, calculated from the statistics by Yee 2006.

Graph 3.2 gives us a break-down of the participants into gender. The 27 replies I received, to the in-game mail sent after the collection of the material, supports the findings by Yee (2006). There were 2 females, who both played female characters and there were 25 males, where 17 of them played male characters; 5 switched between male and female characters and 3 usually played female characters.

Most of the questioned participants did not think about whether they changed their language when they played in regards to gender, but a few gave their character some sort of dialect to suit the personality they wanted to portray. They did in general not provide any details of what they changed, but when followed up by another mail where I asked for more specifics without suggesting particular gender differences (see Appendix 2), the replies gave suggestions of using giggles and minding their appearance more. The men, who played a female character, said that they changed their language in 7 out of 8 cases to be more formal and feminine.

3.3. Hedges

Coates (1993:116) discuss five examples of hedges, e.g. I think, I'm sure, you know, sort of and perhaps. In the chat-logs these were used eight times, apart from you know, which was used once, but in a doubtful context which makes it questionable whether it actually is a hedge and this example was therefore disregarded. The male characters used more hedges: a total of 6, than the female characters, who used 2 hedges. Table 3.3 shows the distribution of hedges between the two genders.
Table 3.3: Number of hedges used per character.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I think</td>
<td>4 (0.05)</td>
<td>1 (0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’m sure</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 (0.02)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sort of</td>
<td>1 (0.01)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perhaps</td>
<td>1 (0.01)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6 (0.07)</td>
<td>2 (0.05)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is clear that these types of hedges were used more by males: 0.08 use per character, than by females: 0.05 use per character. This contradicts the finding that women use more hedges in their conversations.

The function of a hedge is to express confidence or uncertainty (Coates 1993:117), but it might be difficult to define a hedge as one or the other as it in itself express a doubt. The following two examples show the use of I think, which was the most frequently used hedge:

1421. 11/20 21:28:58.718  M70 says: [Low] Alot showed up... I think we can take them though.
2287. 11/20 22:25:35.906  M57 says: Mhmm, I think they were fighting. She looked like a guard

In the example above, M70 and M57 express a doubt to what they are talking about in two different conversations. M70 is unsure, but positive to the fact that he and his friends probably can defeat their enemy. M57 was uncertain if the people he saw was fighting or not, but it was possible they did. I think can also express confidence, like in the following examples where M52 and F03 are sure about what they say:

1378. 11/20 21:15:50.109  |Hchannel:Guild|h M52: mhm.. I'm pretty dead alright.. as in.. I think one of me limbs is over yonder..
2277. 11/20 22:24:12.250  F03 says: I think you [M57] were a bit late to the actual meeting...

This is a more humorous version of I think as M52 knows that he is dead and express “I think one of me limbs is over yonder..” as irony about his body being divided into several parts, that can be put back together again. F03 knows that M57 was too late for the meeting, as it had already taken place, but makes a sarcastic note about it by the use of a hedge.

Another example of a hedge is the following:

193. 11/11 20:26:23.201  M04 says: let's just kill this guy..
194. 11/11 20:26:26.869  M04 says: clearly he betrayed us..
197. 11/11 20:26:32.321  F01 says: He's an agent [M16] of me, M04..
198. 11/11 20:26:36. 548  M04 says: As he is sort off used to..
Line 198 is incomplete, which makes it difficult to understand. My interpretation is that M04 is implying that M16 once was a member of G001 and therefore a betrayer, as he is not longer a member of that guild but of a rival guild, G005. This makes the hedge sort of, an expression of confidence for M16’s true loyalty.

The presentation below, of the hedge perhaps is, like the previous utterance, also incomplete, which creates a doubt for what M05 means. Perhaps expresses a possibility that they might win against their opponents:

52. 11/11 20:02:43.721 M05 yells: You heard the mistress! Let them die! Stab them in the back, perhaps the ye!

The following representations of I’m sure clearly express confidence in what is said: F01 is sure of the Death Knights’ actions:

1202. 11/20 20:22:30.562 F01 says: I’m sure all you G001s are eager to scream and laugh, and perform your most wicked desires on unsuspecting citizens and soldiers...

None of the two hedges that were made by female characters specifically expressed uncertainty. On the contrary, they expressed confidence, which does not equal what is considered female language and therefore opposes the suggestion that the players change their language to suit the gender of the character. On the other hand, the male characters used hedges much more which might prove that females have a more empowered situation in WoW.

3.4. Questions

There were a total of 280 question-marks in the chat-logs, but there were 305 actual questions asked. 181 were made by males and 124 by females, which mean that there were 2.18 questions asked per male character and 3.43 questions asked per female character, which is displayed in Table 3.4. The fact that the females asked more questions suggests that gender differences may be displayed in role-play, since women have been shown as more frequent users of questions according to some studies (Coates 1993:119, 122).
Table 3.4: Number of specific type of questions per character.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Question</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>1.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tag</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wh-</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2.18</td>
<td>3.43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.4.1. Yes/no-questions and Wh-questions

Table 3.4 illustrates that yes/no-questions were the most frequently used type of question of the three categories, especially by female characters. The male characters asked only 8 percent fewer yes/no questions: 0.45 uses per character, than the females, which is significantly less than the number of questions asked by men in the research in Coates (1993:122). In that study, the men asked 107 out of 370 questions, which is 21 percent less yes/no questions than the women asked.

The wh-questions were used more frequently by the female characters, with 83 percent more uses per character, than the males. In comparison, there was seldom a clear reply to the yes/no- or the wh-questions, which contradicts the finding that “questions demand a response” (Coates 1993:122). 71 percent of the yes/no-questions and 56 percent of the wh-questions received no reply in the chat-logs. The tag-questions had a higher number of replies: only 6 percent of the tag-questions were not answered.

The male characters received no reply to 1.45 questions per character, which is 67 percent of all questions asked by all males. The female characters received no reply to 1.89 questions per character, which is 55 percent of all questions asked by all females. The females received a reply more often, with regards to the number of questions they asked, but as they asked more questions than the male characters, they actually received fewer replies in total.

Many of the unanswered questions were rhetorical and similar to these:

543. 11/12 21:10:44.218 M01 says: Run fool.
544: 11/12 21:10:50.421 M39 says: Fool?

These kinds of questions do not necessarily require a reply, but are more of a response to what has been previously said. M39 already knows that M01 called him a “fool”, but he questions that statement.
In CMC in WoW, it is difficult to know whom a question is directed to. This might be one reason why many questions remain unanswered; there is no explicit mention of a recipient. All the same, when a question was asked to a specific character, they were in most cases answered.

Questions were used to show sarcasm, like in the example below, which shows how M81 mocks what F03 says:

1063. 11/16 19:58:57.281  F03 says: We live to serve...
1064. 11/16 19:59:03.609  M81 says: Oh really?

This could be seen as a sort of verbal abuse, but I do not think that it is based on sexism as there was a similar question asked by a female.

536. 11/12 21:10:24.796  M23 says: You..
537. 11/12 21:10:26.671  F13 says: Seems your friend has died.
538. 11/12 21:10:29.984  M23 says: Will die for this..
540. 11/12 21:10:33.328  F13 says: Oh really?

Here F13 questions M23’s possibility to kill her with: “Oh really?” which is similar to M81’s question of F03’s statement in the previous example.

3.4.2. Tag-questions

There were, as shown in Table 3.4, more males who used tag-questions than females, which contradicts the research that women use more tag-questions than men (Coates 1993:119). The number of tag-questions in the chat-log was low: only used five times in the traditional way of “She likes driving, doesn’t she?”:

215. 11/11 20:27:42.342 M04 says: Time didn't change your betraying and arrogant attitude is it?
565. 11/12 21:11:45.750 F13 says: Dam, never stay dead does he.
1421. 11/20 21:30:03.453 F12 says: Fleeing now are we..?
2128. 11/20 22:16:55.937 M56 says: you guys aint the best lookin, are you?
2159. 11/20 22:18:39.625 M51 says: You really are a bastard aren't ye?

Three of these were asked by males and two by females, which is a fairly equal number. A slightly different version of a tag-question that was used is:

338. 11/12 20:55:46.265 F02 says: There is two of you, right!

Here the usual “isn’t it” is replaced by the adverb “right”. This was only used twice and only by females, with a modal meaning.
The most frequent version of tag-question was used to show thought, or as a form of dialectal use, as in the following examples:

384. 11/12 20:58:53.562 M19 says: Not worth dirtying yourself yet, *eh*?
953. 11/16 19:18:54.828 M46 says: Three lines, *hm*?
1239. 11/20 20:28:14.125 M52 says: I say.. If I can speak milady, let us unleash tha chaos.. *aye*?
1522. 11/20 21:37:13.203 M50 says: So whens we gonna stick 'em like pigs *ey*?
1893. 11/20 22:05:27.078 M51 says: You feel funny *heh*?

These versions were only used by males, which support finding in previous research that males use a more informal style of language while females use a version of language more similar to the standard variety.

Table 3.4.2.: Distribution of tag-questions according to meaning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Modal meaning</td>
<td>5 (41%)</td>
<td>1 (25%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective (facilitative) meaning</td>
<td>2 (17%)</td>
<td>3 (75%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affective (softening) meaning</td>
<td>5 (41%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Coates (1993:120) females made use of more tag-questions with facilitative meaning, while males used more tag-questions with modal and softening meaning. This equals the results I have received, as seen in Table 3.4.2, but as there were so few tag-questions in my material, these results may be misleading.

3.5. Directives and Commands

There were a total of 317 directions and commands given: 179 by females and 138 by males. The females made 4.97 commands per character and the males made 1.66 commands per character. That is a considerable difference and contradicts the research finding that males have a conversational style based on power with more commands and directives (Coates 1993:124).

The actual number of participants who made a directive or a command is few: 13 females and 30 males. There is also one character that has a significantly higher number of uses than the others, which points to the importance of taking individual preferences into consideration.
F01, who was the guild-leader of the guild where the chat-logs were recorded, had a total of 136 directives and commands, which is 76 percent of all those made by the female participants. She was also the leader of the organized events, which equals the highest amount of power in the group, as does her position of guild-leader. Therefore, she made most commands and directives of all participants. It is interesting that this position was held by a female character, which shows that the power relations in WoW probably are not based on gender, but on skill. None of the guild-members questioned her position and it was apparent that what she said should be followed. Her amount of participation clearly shows her status, power and influence (cf. the results of Herring’s 1998:198 study).

Table 3.5: Number of characters that used directives and commands.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of directives and commands</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&gt;100</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4&lt;</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 3.5 shows, there is a wide difference between the number of directives and commands used by each character. If I disregard the directives and commands from F01, as they are significantly higher than the others, there are 181 directions and commands given: 43 by females and 138 by males. When the guild-leader is disregarded, there are more directives and commands made by males; 1.6, than by females; 1.19. This result agrees with the studies that show that males make more use of directions and commands (Coates 1993:124). We may ask whether those who play a female character consciously or subconsciously choose a less authoritarian style. This apparently does not apply on power positions, which can be hold by both male and female characters.

3.6. Interruptions

Interruptions are, according to Tannen (1996:55), more often used by men towards women than by women towards men. In the chat-logs there was only one character that actually interrupted someone else:
F01 questions F18’s right to speak, as she does not consider herself finished with her turn. She seems to be the only one with the power to interrupt someone. This contradicts the studies that it is males who interrupt females more in conversation. In WoW it may be based more on the amount of power you hold.

It is difficult to find interruptions since any participant can say anything and no one can actually interrupt them in a CMC. On the other hand, which I discussed earlier, it is not certain that everyone receive a reply, which could also be considered as an interruption. When a participant does not receive a reply, he or she will face a difficulty to continue the initiated conversation, since the other players do not respond, or perhaps do not include him or her, which could equal an interruption for that player’s conversation.

3.7. Taboo Language

There were a total of 84 occasions of different versions of taboo language and insults, which is shown in Table 3.7. The male characters used 0.51 swear-words per character and the female characters used 1.14 swear-words per character, which contradicts the folklinguistic belief that men swear more than women. In the chat-logs, females make use of more swear-words than the males, with respect to the number of participants of that gender.
Table 3.7: Number of swear-words used per character.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rude behavior</strong></td>
<td>2 (0.02)</td>
<td>2 (0.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Omitted word</strong></td>
<td>5 (0.06)</td>
<td>2 (0.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Idiot</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>4 (0.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Whore</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 (0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fuck</strong></td>
<td>1 (0.01)</td>
<td>1 (0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hell</strong></td>
<td>4 (0.05)</td>
<td>6 (0.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dumb</strong></td>
<td>1 (0.01)</td>
<td>1 (0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cur</strong></td>
<td>2 (0.02)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ass</strong></td>
<td>1 (0.01)</td>
<td>3 (0.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bugger</strong></td>
<td>1 (0.01)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moron</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 (0.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shit</strong></td>
<td>2 (0.02)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bloody</strong></td>
<td>2 (0.02)</td>
<td>1 (0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shut up</strong></td>
<td>2 (0.02)</td>
<td>3 (0.08)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Maggot</strong></td>
<td>3 (0.04)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Damn</strong></td>
<td>6 (0.07)</td>
<td>4 (0.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Darn</strong></td>
<td>2 (0.02)</td>
<td>1 (0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Heck</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 (0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wench</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 (0.03)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Oh… (dear/god etc.)</strong></td>
<td>9 (0.11)</td>
<td>9 (0.25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>43 (0.51 per character)</strong></td>
<td><strong>41 (1.14 per character)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most used word is the blasphemy similar to *Oh God*, with some alternations. This was used to the same extant by both males and females. My suspicion was that this would be considered more feminine, as Lakoff (1975) “claims that men use stronger expletives (*damn*, *shit*) than women (*oh dear, goodness*)” (Coates 1993:127). My result contradicts this, as *oh*... was used 9 times by each gender. Although, in regards to the number of expletives per person of each gender, expletives were used more by the female characters: 0.25 times per female character, but only 0.11 times per male character.

The taboo-word *damn* was used more times per character by the females: 0.11, than by the males: 0.07. This is a stronger expletive, which therefore contradicts Lakoff’s suggestions.

The word *whore* was used by one female character, in a very insulting phrase:
F02 here insults the recipient of the line, F27, and use several taboo-words apart from whore; fucking and hell. These are three words that have strong expletives, used by one female character in the same line. I would consider this sentence the most insulting one among the chat-logs.

3.8. Compliments

There were a total of 27 compliments in the text, 10 made by males and 17 by females: each male character made 0.12 compliments and each female character made 0.47 compliments, which is shown in Table 3.8.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appearance</td>
<td>3 (0.08)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skill</td>
<td>7 (0.08)</td>
<td>14 (0.39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarcastic</td>
<td>1 (0.01)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possession</td>
<td>1 (0.01)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual</td>
<td>1 (0.01)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>10 (0.12)</strong></td>
<td><strong>17 (0.47)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All compliments made by a female were made by F01, where she commented on the skill, or more rarely on the appearance, of her guild:

871. 11/12 21:34:33.531  F01 says: Good battle, G001s.

She did that because of her position as guild-leader, as well as organizer of the events which took place. I did not note that these compliments were received as face-threatening when they were made towards a male, but as these compliments were made by a female in a power-position this may be misleading. It is interesting that it is the most powerful participant that uses most compliments, perhaps due to her position of power.

There might be a connection between compliments and directives and commands given. As stated above, F01 also made most directives and commands. When I disregarded the input from her, most directives and commands were given by male characters, which also concord
with a larger number of compliments. There might be a relation between giving a directive and awarding the recipients with a compliment.

The compliments that were given by males were seldom made by the same characters. The larger number of compliments was on skill, which equals the belief of the male stereotype that focus on skills as well as possessions.

There was one sarcastic compliment made:

207. 11/11 20:27:15.264 M04 says: How wonderful.. *likewise.*

M04 here compliments on his meeting with M16, whom he dislikes. Therefore this isn’t a positive compliment and probably face-threatening towards his opponent.

The only sexual compliment was:

1793. 11/20 22:00:07.718 F18 crawls on the table.
1794. 11/20 22:00:07.718 M52 says: That’s really nice missy..

M52 compliments F18 when she crawls on the table, which has a more sexual base and acts as a face-threatening act towards her.

### 3.9. Grammar

The grammar of the participants suggests that gender differences are visible in role-play, as is shown in Table 3.9. The male characters had approximately 4.24 grammar and spelling mistakes per character, while the female characters made only 2.58 grammar and spelling mistakes per character. This demonstrates that the female characters pay attention to correctness to a higher degree than the male characters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of mistakes</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of mistakes</td>
<td>352</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of mistakes per character</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>2.58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The role-players who answered the in-game mail also suggested that females make use of a more correct and formal language. On the other hand, it is difficult to change your language to be more correct, since I think most grammatical mistakes are made due to limited knowledge in grammar and spelling. Still, it is true that some of the males on purpose changed their language to show a dialectal version, which might be the reason for the significantly larger
amount of grammatical errors by males; or the males who played female character had a
greater knowledge of grammar and formal correctness.
4. SUMMARY

In this essay, I have investigated whether players of *World of Warcraft* change their language to suit the gender of the character they play, as well as if there are gender differences that corresponds to what is defined as male and female language in mixed-sex conversations.

According to the short interviews with some of the participants, 7 out of 8 of them think about their language when they play a character of the opposite sex (see p.13). They were vague about what they considered female language, but regardless of gender, they tried to change their language to suit the character they wished to portray.

4.1. Corresponding Gender Differences

There are differences in the language-use in the chat-logs, which confirms the results from previous gender studies:

- women’s use of a language closer to the standard variety and men’s use of dialect;
- men’s conversational style based on power;
- females’ more frequent use of questions and their use of tags with affective (facilitative) meaning as their most frequent type of tag-question;
- the male characters’ use of compliments about skill and possession.

The language used by the female characters was closer to the standard variety than the language used by the male characters. Seen from a folklinguistic perspective, women are seen as more talkative than males. These findings agree with how the participation by the female characters was higher in relation to number of participants. The males’ language contained a higher number of hedges as a stylistic play with dialect, which agrees with males’ use of a language diverging from the standard variety. If the contribution made by the event and guild-leader, F01, is disregarded, the male characters used more directives and commands than the female characters, which agree with how males’ conversational style has been claimed to be based on power. They also used more grammar and spelling mistakes, where some appeared to have been made on purpose.

The males’ compliments focus on skill, which is in agreement with the belief of male stereotypes. They also made use of one sexual compliment which acted as face-threatening towards a female, as well as one sarcastic compliment and one compliment on possession, which also agrees with previous studies. The female characters’ more frequent use of questions concurs with Coates (1993:122) studies. The fact that they also received fewer
replies to the questions, agrees with previous research on mixed-sex conversations. One other reason for the lack of replies may be uncertainty about a specific receiver. Finally, the females fewer numbers of tag-questions were to a high degree facilitative, which is in agreement with previous research.

4.2. Contradictions of Gender Differences

The following features did not correspond to previous gender research:

- men’s participation in this CMC, was lower than the female characters’;
- the stereotype of the silent, obedient woman and the more powerful male was not confirmed by the chat-logs, as the female characters made a larger contribution than the male characters;
- the more frequent use of tag-questions and hedges among women, was contradicted since these features were more frequently used among the male characters;
- men’s larger uses of directives and commands, as well as larger number of interruptions, were lower than the female characters;
- the folklinguistic belief that males use more taboo language than females was incorrect, as the female characters used more swear-words than the male characters;
- and female characters did not give more compliments and the compliments from a male to a female were generally not face-threatening.

Among the female characters, there was only one person who used compliments: F01, who commented on the result and appearance of her group. This result contradicts the folklinguistic belief that females use more compliments than male. The female character F01 was the most authoritative character of all. She was not questioned for her position and no one, visually, fought to achieve it, which is a contradiction to men’s greater focus on power. F01 was the only one who clearly interrupted someone, in a dispute to hold the floor. In contrast to previous research, F01 used significantly more directives and commands. In addition, the use of taboo language was more frequent among the female characters than the male characters, regardless of the strength of the expletives, which contradicts the folklinguistic belief.

The male characters produced less text than the female characters, which contradicts the observation that men have a higher participation degree in CMC as well as in conversation.
Hedges were more used by male characters, where they showed both confidence and uncertainty. The two hedges used by females did not express uncertainty, but confidence, which is a contradiction against females’ use of hedges in previous research. Lastly, there was also a higher participation among the male characters for tag-questions, which contradict previous research, where women traditionally have been found to use a higher degree of tag-questions.
5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there are gender differences in role-play in the game *World of Warcraft*, but they are not consistent throughout the analysis. This might be due to the fact that the participants do not specifically consider all areas as typically female or male, or they are unaware of these areas. The two genders operate in the same social spheres and carry out the same tasks. The fact that the players still alter their language to a certain degree when they role-play a character of the opposite gender suggests that the players do not see gender as only a social construct.

Another reason for the contradictory results may be the high degree of equality in the environment of *World of Warcraft*. Third, the lack of gender differences in some regards may be due to the participants, who are usually male, using their normal male language in this traditionally male environment. The male characters know that the female characters are probably played by males. It would be interesting to find out if gender differences would be more apparent, or if the same results would be obtained, if we had studied a role-play server with predominantly female users in a traditionally female environment.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources


Secondary Sources


APPENDIX 1: The In-game Mail

The following text was sent to 50 participants by using the mail system inside World of Warcraft:

Dear XX²,

I’m currently doing […] research for a school-essay and I would really appreciate if you could reply to the following questions:

1. Are you male or female in real life?
2. Do you usually play a female character or a male character?
3. Do you change your language in any way to suit the gender of the character you play?

Best regards,

YY³

² XX was changed to the name of the character.
³ YY was changed to the name of my character.
APPENDIX 2: The Follow-up In-game Mail

The following text was sent to those who replied to the previous mail:

Hi XX,

And thank you so much for your reply. Could you please be more specific of what kind of things you change when you play your male/female character?

Thank you once again,

YY