Gender Specific Features of Language  
Their Representation in a Popular TV Show  

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Abstract
The aim of this study was to find out how features that have been found to be typical of women’s language, such as hedges, tag questions and a high level of talkativeness etc., are represented in a popular TV series. Five cross-sex conversations from one episode of the sitcom *The New Adventures of Old Christine* were analyzed, and the results show that many of the features of interest, as for instance tag questions, minimal responses and indirect style, are unexpectedly used more frequently by men in this small investigation. In fact, the only feature that was used more frequently by the female main character was hedges. Several factors affect the results of the study, as for instance the fact that the conversations are fictional. The special characteristics of the speakers also affect the results, as well as the tone and the topic of the chosen conversations. Many of the features of interest were used to a very small extent, which is probably a result of the fact that the language in a sitcom is to be entertaining and rather quick, which leaves little or no room for the features studied.

Key words: women’s language, feminine style, sitcom, tag-questions, hedges, negative concord, talkativeness, interruptions, indirect style, compliments, minimal responses
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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The interest in the way that women and men talk has grown a lot since the middle of the 1970s and we have increased our knowledge about the different interaction patterns between women and men since then (Coates 1998:2). We also know that when studying gender specific features in language it is important to keep in mind that gender is not the only thing that shapes our way of talking or writing. As Eckert states “[w]e clearly cannot talk about gender independently of other aspects of social identity, as no variable correlates simply with gender or social category” (Eckert 1989 in Coates 1998: 65). Other factors have to be taken into consideration, such as context, the speaker’s/writer’s age, level of education, geographical culture etc. Furthermore you must keep in mind that gender is not the same thing as sex.

Gender is “an individual's self-conception as being male or female, as distinguished from actual biological sex [...]. Gender identity is not fixed at birth; both physiologic and social factors contribute to the early establishment of a core identity, which is modified and expanded by social factors as the child matures[...] Like an individual's concept of his or her sex role, gender identity develops by means of parental example, social reinforcement, and language”. (encyclopedia Britannica, 2008)

The quote suggests that even though women have been studied in most studies of feminine style, gender styles are open to all people (DeFrancisco & Palczewski 2007:77) and that researchers on gender/sex and discourse now seem to agree that universal male/female differences in communication are not prominent (DeFrancisco & Palczewski 2007:79). Crosby & Nyquist (1977) measured how women and men used what they call the “female register” (which includes hedges, tag questions, intensifiers (e.g. so) and politeness formulas (e.g. please, thank you)), based on Lakoff’s (1975) characterization of women’s speech. Their study shows that the female register can be used by both women and men, but tends to be used more by women among people that are familiar with each other. In relations with people of different status, “subordinate men and women were likely to use the female register” (Bonvillan 2007:336).

Though you cannot see them as universal, some special features of feminine style language have been proved by some studies to be used more frequently by women than men.
These features can be divided into features of “grammatical variants” (Bonvillan 2007: 333) and “conversational style” (Bonvillan 2007: 335).

1.2 Aim

The purpose of this essay is to see how features that are (by some researchers) considered to be typical for women’s language are represented in popular culture TV series. I want to investigate whether these features (see below) are used primarily by women, or if men tend to use them too. I will look specifically at the popular TV series *The New Adventures of Old Christine*, which is an American sitcom created by Kari Lizer. I will focus on features of “grammatical variants” (Bonvillan 2007: 333) and “conversational style” (Bonvillan 2007: 335). The grammatical variants which I will investigate are the following:

- According to Lakoff (1975) women use tag-questions more frequently than men do (Bonvillan 2007:334).
- Women tend to use more hedges than men do (Bonvillan 2007: 335).
- In the use of negative concord: women’s use is more standard, or conservative, than men’s (Coates 1998:66)

The features of conversational style which I will investigate are:

- According to Sattel (1983) women are more talkative than men in regard to discussion of emotions (Bonvillan 2007:337).
- According to West and Zimmerman (1975&1983) women are often interrupted by men in cross-sex conversations and when that occurs men are usually successful in gaining the floor, whereas women interrupters are not likely to succeed (Bonvillan 2007:338).
- According to Lakoff (1975) the feminine style speaker is perceived to use an indirect style of communicating, such as stating “the coffeepot is empty”, rather than directly requesting, “please make some coffee” (DeFransisco & Palewski 2007:70).

• Women use more minimal responses than men do (Maltz and Borker 1982 in Coates 1998: 421).

Intonation and pronunciation will not be brought up in this essay, since this work will be based on the transcription of conversations from the TV series. As the focus is on women’s language in mixed-sex conversations, the special features of men’s language will be brought up only as a comparison.

1.3 Material and method

In order to analyze the presentation of the features of woman’s language I have chosen to focus on one episode in the TV series The New Adventures of Old Christine. The reason why I have chosen this particular TV series is that the main character, Christine Champbell, who is a divorced average American mother (Wikipedia), is interacting a lot with different men with whom she has a close relationship, as for example her ex husband Richard and her live-in brother Matthew.

Christine’s conversations with her ex husband, her brother and other men around her (men that she is dating) are of interest in this investigation, since they represent every day conversations in the lives of “common middle-class people”. They have a similar background and know each other very well, which makes their conversations informal. I have transcribed five mixed-sex conversations from the chosen episode and thereafter analyzed the transcriptions according to the results of some previous research (see e.g. Bonvillan: 2007; DeFrancisco & Palczewski: 2007; Coates: 1998; Tannen: 1994).

The analysis will be organized in the same order as the theories or statements in the theoretical background, and the features will be discussed in turn. At the end of the paper, the transcriptions of the conversations are attached, in Appendix 1-5. Each appendix starts with a small description of the context in which the conversation takes place, followed by a transcription of the conversation. The main character, Christine, is present in all conversations, where she talks to different people. In conversation I, which consists of 614 words, she talks to her new boyfriend Patrick and her ex-husband, Richard. In conversation II, which consists of 314 words, Christine talks to her brother Mathew. Furthermore, in
conversation III, which consists of 269 words, she talks to her ex husband Richard again, and finally, she discusses emotional matters with Patrick in conversation IV, which consists of 318 words, and conversation V, which consists of 190 words.
2 Theoretical Background

2.1 Introduction
This Chapter will introduce the reader to the gender specific sociolinguistic topic of this essay and theoretical background of the special features of women’s language or language of feminine style that will be used in the analysis of this paper. First, in Section 2.2, I will discuss differences in the use of grammatical variants. In Section 2.3, different features of conversational style will be brought up.

2.2 Grammatical variants
In this section, I will discuss grammatical variants, such as tag-questions, hedges and negative concord.

2.2.1 Tag-questions
According to Lakoff (1975) women have been shown to use tag-questions more frequently than men do (Bonvillan 2007:334). Tag-questions are sentences in which a speaker makes a declarative statement and adds on a “tag” in the form of a question about their assertion, as in “Jane came home, didn’t she?” (Bonvillan 2007:334).

Lakoff (1975) has pointed out that women use more tag-questions than men as a signal of their reluctance to make direct assertions and to avoid coming into conflict with the addressee (Bonvillan 2007:334), but there is no reliable evidence behind this statement. Other studies (e.g. Dubois & Crouch, 1975) show that there is no clear gender difference in the use of tag-questions (Bonvillan 2007:334). Furthermore, Holmes (1984), who divided the tag-questions into different categories, stated that “men more often use tags for “speaker oriented” goals, to obtain or confirm information about themselves, whereas women more often use tags for “addressee-oriented” goals, particularly as strategies to engage addressees in talk” (Bonvillan 2007:335).

However, the research by Bonvillan (2007) shows that though women and men do not differ greatly in total usage, women tend to use more tags (Coates 1993:120). Other researchers claim that the use of tag-questions varies depending on the “powerless” or “powerful” roles of the speakers and although they do not discuss gender differences, the results from their study show that powerful men are more likely than powerful women to use
modal tags, and powerful women are more likely than powerful men to use affective tags (Bonvillan 2007:335). Moreover, some research on the use of tag-questions show that people tend to believe that women use more of them than men do (Coates 1993:119).

2.2.2 Hedges

Women have been found to use more hedges than men do. (Hedges are words or expressions that covertly comment on assertions in one’s statements: “Perhaps we could try fixing it”) (Bonvillan 2007: 335). Other examples of hedges are “I think, I’m sure, you know, sort of and perhaps” (Coates 1993:116). Because females are socialized to defer to others and avoid conflict, they use hedges to minimize confrontation with an addressee who may hold a different view” (Bonvillan 2007:335). Preisler (1986) also came to the conclusion that women use significantly more hedges than men do when he recorded groups of four people discussing controversial subjects. In his study, he listened to women and men in two different age groups and in both mixed-sex and single-sex conversations.

Holmes (1984&1987) makes a distinction between different kinds of hedges and divides them into different categories, where she brings up the example of “you know” which can express either “confidence” or “uncertainty”, as she puts it. The total result of her study shows that, though female speakers used the hedge expression “you know” more often than the male speakers, there is only a small difference in the frequency of use and men tended to use the expression “you know” more often than women when they expressed uncertainty, while women used it more frequently when expressing confidence (Coates 1993:117). On the other hand, data collected by Fishman (1980), who recorded three young American couples show that women use “you know” five times more than men. One reason for this could be that women expect to get more minimal response (see under “conversational style”) when they talk and use “you know” because men are not participating in the discussion and because they want to keep the conversation going (Coates 1993:112).
2.2.3 Negative concord

Eckert (1989) points out that in the use of negative concord (e.g. *I didn’t do anything* vs. *I didn’t do nothing*), women’s use is more standard, or conservative, than men’s. She also states that conservativeness in language is not an all-or-nothing phenomenon, since phonological variables and grammatical variables are two separate things that can be used more frequently by either men or women. She also states that the fact that women use standard language to a higher degree than men in many cultures can be a result of the way that women are for example excluded from the work place, or in other ways subordinate to men. This makes women want to establish a place in the world (Coates 1998:66-67). Coates claims that “[i]n the case of gender, it was established that in many speech communities female speakers will use a higher proportion of prestige forms than male speakers” (Coates 1993:67). She brings up results from a study made in Sydney, Australia, in which the low prestige form “multiple negation” e.g. “they don’t say nothing” is shown to be used by 44 percent of the male speakers, but by only 21.7 percent of the female speakers (Coates 1993:76-77). Another explanation of women’s greater use of standard forms is proposed by Deuchar (1989), who suggests that the use of standard forms allows women to pay attention to other people’s face and avoid threatening it and protect their own face at the same time (drawing on Brown and Levinson’s model of politeness (1978:1987) (Coates 1993:85).

2.3 Features of conversational style

In this section, I will discuss some features of conversational style: degree of talkativeness and the occurrence of interruptions.

2.3.1 Level of talkativeness

Women have been said to be more talkative than men with regard to the discussion of emotions (Bonvillan 2007:337).

According to Sattel (1983) “in some encounters, men are more silent than women, particularly in regard to discussion of emotions” (Bonvillan 2007:337). However many studies contradict these results (Bonvillan 2007:337). The suggestion may originate in a stereotype: “The stereotype is that women are more emotional than men, suggesting that women both experience and express more emotion. The truth is that women and men experience emotions relatively equally, but women are expected to experience and express
them more” (Defrancisco & Palczewski 2007:95, with reference to LaFrance & Hecht, 2000; Madden et al., 2000).

2.3.2 Interruptions
We need to distinguish between overlaps and interruptions: “Overlaps are instances of slight over-anticipation by the next speaker: instead of beginning to speak immediately following current speaker’s turn, overlapping the last word. Interruptions, on the other hand, are violations of the turn taking rules of conversation. Next speaker begins to speak while current speaker is still speaking, at a point in current speaker’s turn, which could not be defined as the last word. Interruptions break the symmetry of the conversational model.” (Coates 1993:109).

Two important studies by Candace West and Don Zimmerman (1975:1983) show that there is a significant difference in patterns of overlaps and interruptions (see explanation below) in same-sex and cross-sex conversations. In cross-sex conversations, women are often interrupted by men, and when that occurs, men are usually successful in gaining the floor, whereas women interrupters are not likely to succeed (Bonvillan 2007:338). In the West and Zimmerman studies, overlaps and interruptions were evenly distributed in same-sex conversations, where each speaker contributed with approximately the same number, but in cross-sex conversations, almost all errors and intrusions were made by men (Bonvillan 2007:338). West and Zimmerman also point out that even though the men were subordinates to the women, they tended to interrupt them, so “women are the most likely targets of successful interruptions even when they are in higher-status positions. When double factors of low status co-occur, women are especially likely to be interrupted” (Bonvillan 2007:338-339).

Coates claims that the fact that men tend to interrupt women is a way of infringing their right to speak, and that the fact that women use no overlaps in conversation with men (which was also shown in the Zimmerman and West study) suggests that “women are concerned not to violate the man’s turn but to wait until he’s finished” (Coates 1993:110).

Another study, on the other hand (James and Clarke 1993), shows that there is no clear pattern of males interrupting women (Tannen 1994:34). A reason for these different results could be that different people look at overlaps and interruptions in different ways. Some people might see an overlap as a way of showing enthusiastic participation in the conversation, while others might see the same overlap as an interruption, an attempt to wrest the floor (Tannen 1994:35). It has also been shown that women use overlaps to agree with the speaker, to create a so-called collaborative floor (Edelsky 1993) whereas men use overlaps (which turn into interruptions) to disagree with the speaker (e.g. Coates 2004:131-132, 138).
2.3.3 Indirect vs. direct style of communication

The feminine style speaker has been claimed to be more indirect (Lakoff 1975), e.g. stating that “[t]he coffeepot is empty”, rather than directly requesting, “[p]lease make some coffee” (DeFransisco & Palczewski 2007:70). Here the term “feminine style” indicates that not only do female speakers use indirect speech, but men may do so too. According to DeFrancisco & Palczewski, people who have lower social status may be more likely to use indirectness and politeness to gain compliance from others. People with higher status can afford to be more direct, making stronger public statements. On the other hand, in a study by Holmes (1995) it was shown that men actually did not value or exhibit politeness as much as the women did (DeFrancisco & Palczewski 2007:70). The view that indirectness is a sign of powerlessness, and is used by people with lower status has been discussed by Tannen (1994), who points out that indirectness can actually be seen as a sign of power instead, and as something that is being used by people with higher status. She brings up an example where a Greek father answers his daughter who wants to go to a party “[i]f you want to, you can go”. Because of the lack of enthusiasm in his voice, the daughter understands that he really does not want her to go. Therefore she “chooses” not to go. Tannen argues that this father did not feel powerless, but that he in fact felt so powerful that he did not need to give his daughter orders; he simply needed to let her know his preference, and she would accommodate to it (Tannen 1994:33).

2.3.4 Compliments

According to Holmes (1995) women tend to give and receive more compliments than men (DeFransisco & Palczewski 2007:70). Women and men also use different forms of compliments (Holmes 1986 in Coates 1998: 110). A certain study by Holmes (1986), in which she analyzed the distribution of compliments between New Zealand women and men, shows that women gave and received considerably more compliments than men did. Other researchers report similar patterns. Compliments between women are most frequent in all studies and men compliment women more often than they compliment other men. One reason that people give more compliments to women could be that women value them as something positive, whereas men perhaps see them as face threatening acts more than women do. Another reason could be that compliments express social power and are usually addressed “downwards” and as a result of their subordinate social position women get more compliments (Holmes in Coates 1998:104-107). On the other hand, women do not only
receive more compliments, but also give more compliments than men do, which, I would argue, is a sign that compliments are addressed “upwards” as well. However another study by Holmes (1988) shows that “higher-status females were almost twice as likely to be complimented as higher-status males. In other words, such women, because they are women, end up on the compliment-accepting rather than the compliment-giving side of the equation. Their apparent ‘high status’ is worth less than their male peers” (Coates 1994:101).

There are also patterns that indicate that men and women prefer to use different types of comments. In the New Zealand (by Holmes 1986) study just mentioned, women used the rhetorical pattern What (a) (ADJ) NP! (e.g. What lovely children) much more often than men. Men, on the other hand, used the minimal pattern (INT) ADJ (NP) (e.g. Great shoes). Furthermore, Herbert (1990) reported from an investigation among over one thousand American compliments, that only women use the stronger form I love X compared with I like X and they used it most often to other women. Johnson & Roen (1992) noted that women use more intensifiers than men do (such as really, very, particularly). In general, Holmes states, with reference to studies by Herbert (1990) and Johnson & Roen (1992), it is also true that women use more personalized compliment forms than men (compliments with you or I), while men prefer impersonal forms (Holmes in Coates 1998:108-110).

2.3.5 Minimal responses
Women have been said to use more minimal responses than men do. Minimal responses can be comments like “yes” and “mm hmm” (Maltz and Borker 1982 in Coates 1998: 421).

Maltz & Borker (1982) suggest that minimal responses such as “yes” and “mm hmm” have different meanings to men and women; that women use them to say that “I’m listening to you; please continue”, while men use them to express a stronger meaning such as “I agree with you” or at least “I follow your argument so far”. “The fact that women use these responses more often than men is in part simply that women are listening more often than men” (Maltz & Borker 1982 in Coates 1998:421). Maltz & Borker continue by saying that the different meanings that men and women put into these responses often lead to misunderstandings which make men think that women are always agreeing with them and make women think that men never seem to be listening (Maltz & Borker 1982 in Coates 1998:422).

To get back to the Pamela Fishman study (1980) that I mentioned above: the fact that women use “you know” much more frequently than men do seem to be a result of women’s expectation of receiving more minimal responses than they do (Coates 1993:112).
3 Results

1.1 Chapter overview
In this part, I will analyze the five cross-sex conversations that I have transcribed (see Appendixes 1 to 5). I will discuss how the features mentioned above are represented in these excerpts. In 3.1, I discuss Grammatical variants and, in 3.2., features of conversational style.

3.1 Grammatical variants
In this section, I will discuss grammatical variants, such as tag-questions, hedges and negative concord.

3.1.1 Tag questions
Among the analyzed conversations, only one tag question was found.

![Diagram 3.1.1: The presence of tag questions in the conversations](image)

This tag question is uttered by Christine’s boyfriend, Patrick, in the first conversation, where he says “…you two are very close ha?”. The stereotypical statement that women use more tag questions than men is hence not supported in this small investigation. At least, these findings are not reflected in this fictional account. Furthermore, the tag question that is used is “addressee-oriented” (Bonvillan 2007:335), which should make it even more “suitable” for women. However, in this single example, that is obviously not the case. The limited use of tag questions is probably a result of the intention of being entertaining and funny, which perhaps contributes to a more direct language with no room for tag questions. This could be due to the fact that tag questions do not bring anything new to the conversation, but rather “put it on hold” for a while. In a sitcom like this the conversation needs to be developed rapidly in order to entertain the audience. Perhaps typical features of women’s and men’s language vary according to genre; features that are represented in for instance a comedy, could be totally
absent in a drama series for example. Exactly as in real life, the characters’ statuses and backgrounds, as well as the context in which the conversations take place, affect how language is used.

3.1.2 Hedges
Many hedges are uttered in the conversations and especially in the first conversation, where Christine uses “you know” and “okay” seven times altogether, while Patrick uses the hedge “I mean” only once.

Diagram 3.1.2: The presence of hedges in the conversations

If you consider all the conversations, Christine uses significantly more hedges than her male friends. She uses 15 hedges in total, while Patrick and Richard use only one each (“I mean” and “kinda’’”). Matthew does not use any hedges at all. Christine’s most frequently used hedge is “you know” which she uses as much as 10 times. This confirms the results from the Fishman study (Coates 1993:112) that showed that women use “you know” five times more than men. Moreover, the fact that women use more hedges to express confidence rather than uncertainty, which is shown by Holmes (1984 & 1987) (Coates 1993:117), is also supported here. In my opinion, Christine uses “you know” six times to express confidence, as in conversation I, where she says “But seriously you know, it’s important that you’re onboard for the Richard thing…”, or in conversation II, where she says “…you know, I laid it all out there for Patrick”. In comparison, she uses “you know” four times to express uncertainty, as in conversation IV, where she says “I-I really don’t wanna mess this up, you know ah…”, or in conversation V, where she says “I’m confused you know…”. However, all the “you know” hedges that express uncertainty are being uttered in conversation IV and V, in which Christine and Patrick discuss whether to continue their relationship or not. In the rest of the conversations (I, II and III) I would say that all the “you know” hedges express confidence.
This makes it clear that the topic and the tone of the conversation are crucial factors for which type of hedges that are used.

3.1.4 Negative concord
I could not find any expressions of negative forms similar to “I didn’t do anything” or multiple negations resembling “I didn’t do nothing”. This is probably due to the limited material used in this investigation, which means that the results most likely would be different if a larger corpus of data were used. The absence of multiple negations could also be a result of the fact that the characters are from the middle class, and these forms are probably mostly used by people with lower social status.

3.2 Features of conversational style
In this section, I will discuss the use of different features of conversational style, such as level of talkativeness, interruptions, indirect vs. direct style of communication, compliments and minimal responses.

3.2.1 Level of talkativeness
When counting the words in the fourth and fifth conversation that both deal with emotions, you find out that Christine talks a bit less than Patrick in the fifth conversation: Christine uses 93 words and Patrick uses 97 words. However, she speaks more than twice as much as Patrick in the fourth conversation: Christine uses 215 words and Patrick uses 103 words. In the first conversation Patrick is the one who brings up emotional matters. He starts by saying “Can I tell you something that might freak you out?” trying to point out that he will bring up something important, but Christine replies “You don’t really own a winery?”, which shows that she wants to avoid emotional subjects. Later during the same conversation, Patrick brings up a sensitive subject once again by saying “Should we talk about what just happened?” and again, as you can see from her answer, Christine assumes that he is talking about something that is not so serious, (which is clearly a way of avoiding an emotional topic). A third example where Patrick wants to start an emotional discussion, but Christine tries to avoid it, is in the fifth conversation, where Patrick says “I don’t care that you’re trying to scare me off” referring to their last conversation, and Christine answers “Oh I’m not ah, this is just what I look like without make up”. In the second conversation, on the other hand, Christine tells her brother how wonderful her date with Patrick has been, bringing up an emotional topic herself.

As the results show, this investigation cannot confirm the statement that women are more talkative than men in emotional discussions, that is, in this particular episode of the
chosen sitcom. Even though Christine talks twice as much as Patrick in the fourth conversation, Patrick is the one who brings up emotional subjects most often if you consider the three conversations in which he participates. On the other hand, Christine sometimes has difficulties being serious about emotional things. Nevertheless, I would say that this is a result of the special settings in which the conversations take place, since the intention of being entertaining and funny affects the language and makes it very direct and funny rather than seriously emotional. Finally, I would say that this analysis supports the fact that “feminine style” of language is free to be used by both men and women (Bonvillan 2007: 333).

3.2.2 Interruptions
During the five conversations of interest there are only two interruptions.

![Diagram 3.2.2: The presence of interruptions in the conversations]

In the first conversation, Christine is interrupted by Patrick when she says “…Oh yeah I remember, I was going to kiss you right about…”, here Patrick interrupts her and says “Should we talk about what just happened?”. In the fourth conversation Christine is interrupted by Patrick again when she says “Ah well, I’m in my thirties…”, here she gets interrupted when Patrick says “And you’re afraid I’m gonna find out you’re not in your thirties?”. These two examples support the Zimmerman and West study (Bonvillan 2007:338), which shows that men interrupt women more often than women interrupt men. Still, the fact that there are only two interruptions in total indicates that the material is a bit too small to work as a base for such statements. Furthermore, the interruption in the fourth conversation could also be seen as supportive to Christine and a way of Patrick trying to put words into her mouth to help her continue with what she wants to say. As mentioned earlier the results of interruption studies can vary a lot depending on how they are valued and therefore the result of this analysis could be either one or two interruptions depending on how you see them.
One possible reason for the small number of interruptions in this case, (except for the limited material used in this essay), could be that frequent interruptions are quite disturbing for the viewer. Many interruptions in a conversation can be annoying since they make it difficult to follow the discussion.

3.2.3 Indirect vs. direct style of communication
The only example of indirect style that is being used in these conversations is uttered in the first conversation, where Patrick says “I brought my toothbrush”, by which he actually means “I want to spend the night”.

Diagram 3.2.3: Presence of indirect style in the conversations

The fact that this single example of indirectness is used by a man supports the statement that the “feminine style” (Bonvillan 2007: 333) of speech can be used by both men and women. At the same time it contradicts the statement that women tend to use a more indirect style than men when they speak. Moreover, in this particular show (which is fiction and not reality). I believe that Christine’s characteristics of being self-confident, and her thoughts about herself of being a person with high status (being proud of the middle class woman she is), makes her language more direct rather than indirect. This confirms the theory of DeFrancisco & Palczewski, who state that “[p]eople with higher status can afford to be more direct” (DeFrancisco & Palczewski 2007:70). It also confirms that many factors other than sex impact the way we speak. For instance, Christine would probably not be that self-confident i.e. use such a direct style of language if she were much younger, or if she did not feel comfortable in her social position as a single middle class mother.
3.2.4 Compliments

There were some difficulties identifying the compliments during the analysis (utterances like “Your brother sounds interesting” (Patrick, conversation I) or “Oh, wow you own a winery and you brush your teeth, hm I think I could love you” (Christine, conversation I), could be seen as compliments as well).

Nevertheless I decided to focus on obvious compliments and found two, one that is uttered by a woman and one that is uttered by a man (i.e. Christine and Richard). They are also directed at both sexes; Christine compliments her brother in the second conversation when she says “…how are you, you handsome man?” and Richard compliments on Christine’s bed spread in the first conversation, by saying “…hey did you have a new bed spread?” This indicates that compliments are uttered by/directed at both sexes equally, which contradicts the statement that women use and receive more compliments than men (not reflected in this show). On the other hand this too supports the fact that the “feminine style” can be used by both men and women (Bonvillan 2007: 333).
3.2.5 Minimal responses

There are rather few minimal responses in the conversations.

Diagram 3.2.5: The presence of minimal responses in the conversations

This is probably also an effect of the special settings in which the conversations take place. Minimal responses do not bring the conversations forward as much as longer responses do, which is possibly a reason why they are not used that much in this sitcom. Another reason for the small number of minimal responses in this case, could be that they are disruptive to the viewer if they are used too frequently. Three of the minimal responses that are used are uttered by Patrick in the first conversation, where he answers Christine with “hmhm”, “hu” and “oh”. The other three minimal responses that are used are uttered by Mathew in conversation II, where he answers Christine by making sounds, such as “youck”, “eh” and “uh”, that clearly show that he does not like what he hears. Hence, judging from this sitcom men use more minimal responses than women do, which contradicts Maltz and Borker’s suggestion of the opposite (Coates 1998: 421). However, as many other results in this study, this also shows that the “feminine style” could be used by both women and men (Bonvillan 2007: 333).

3.3 Reflections

The fact that fictional data is used, most certainly affects the results of this investigation. The results would probably be different if real life conversations were used instead. I believe that real people usually have more varied characteristics than fictional people. They also speak in order to communicate, as compared to entertaining an audience, which is the case in these conversations. Accordingly, the way in which real people express themselves naturally differs
from the way the people in this sitcom speak. Another important factor worth mentioning is
the fact that this study is based on a small amount of data, which also affects the results to a
great extent. The larger amount of data you use the more reliable results you get. I also think
that when it comes to studying language use, you need to analyze a very broad material in
order to get an adequate result. Moreover the genre is a determining factor for the results of
this study, since language use in fiction, as in reality, differs depending on the context. This
means that the language use in a drama series, such as *ER*, where most of the characters are
doctors and nurses, is logically very different from the language use in a sitcom. On the other
hand, I would like to point out that if I had chosen to analyze more than just one episode of
this particular sitcom, the results could differ greatly too. This is due to the way that the theme
of a particular episode and the topics of the conversations in it, affect the language use.

Finally, to extend this investigation, it would be interesting to compare language use in
different genres, or to compare language use of real people with the similar background as
those in the TV series. For example you could compare the language in conversations
between real middle class women and their boyfriends, with the language used in this sitcom.
Another interesting study would be to compare the language used in conversations between
doctors and patients in the above mentioned TV series *ER*, with the language used in
conversations between real doctors and patients.
4 Conclusion

In this essay, I have brought up different theories of how features of women’s language or feminine style of language are used. Some examples of these features are hedges, indirect style, minimal responses, compliments etc. Thereafter, I have analyzed one episode from the sitcom *The New Adventures of Old Christine*, and discussed how the features of interest were represented in five cross-sex conversations from that episode. The aim was to confirm or disconfirm the theories in the theoretical background. I wanted to investigate whether the main character Christine uses the features of feminine style to a greater extent than the men with who she speaks. The results show that some of the features are actually used more frequently by the men in this small investigation. Those features are: tag questions, interruptions, indirect style and minimal responses. The only feature that is used more frequently by Christine is hedges, and in this case the difference in usage is significant. Compliments are used by men and women to the same extent and are also directed equally between them. Finally, when it comes to emotionally loaded discussions, men seem to talk at least as much as women, or even more in this particular episode.

The results showed that the language used in the sitcom “*The New Adventures of Old Christine*” is not representative of what is called “women’s language” or “feminine style/register”, if you think about it as something that is mainly used by women. This probably depends on the fact that the language in this kind of show has to be rather direct, quick and also entertaining. Furthermore, the main character Christine, who is the only woman represented in this analysis, is a person who avoids emotional subjects. These characteristics impact on the results of the study, and so does the limitation of people used in it, which is due to the importance of using characters that know each other well and that are on a similar social level.
References

Primary sources


Secondary sources

Printed material


Online material


Appendix 1

Context, conversation I

The main character Christine and her new boyfriend Patrick enter Christine’s house. They end up in her bedroom, where they continue talking and start kissing. After a while Christine’s ex husband Richard also enters the house and calls her name. Christine replies and lets him know that she is upstairs so he goes up there to talk to her. Christine and Richard start talking and seem to forget that Patrick is still in the room.

Conversation I

Christine: So you didn’t hear it from me, but that’s why my brother can’t date Asian women

Patrick: Your brother sounds interesting

Christine: Oh, you can say crazy, I’m not protective

Christine: So Ritchie is at his grandparents for a few days, which means we have the house all to our selves

Patrick: Huh

Christine: I don’t think I’ve given you a tour

Patrick: Hmhm

Christine: Okay, so this here is down stairs… do you wanna see the bedroom?

Patrick: Yes I do

Christine: Ok

Kissing on the bed

Patrick: Can I tell you something that might freak you out?

Christine: You don’t really own a winery?

Patrick: No, I do

Christine: Oh, nothing else matters

Patrick: Mmm, I brought my toothbrush

Christine: Oh, wow you own a winery and you brush your teeth, hm I think I could love you

Both laughing
Christine: Give me a hand get out of these tummy flattenin’ undies, there’s a jaws of life under the pillow

Richard: Christine!

Christine: Yeah, I’m up here

Patrick: Oh, ah, sh-should I leave?

Christine: Oh no it’s fine it’s just my ex

Patrick: Oh i-is he gonna kill me?

Christine: No

Patrick: Should I hide?

Christine: No

Patrick: Shouldn’t you at least take your hands out of my pants?

Christine: Oh, yeah, probably

Richard: Oh, hey sorry I thought you were alone, she’s normally alone

Christine: Ah aaa Patrick, this is my ex husband Richard

Patrick: Oh, nice to meet you

Richard: Likewise

Christine: Richard what are you starring at?

Richard: Sorry it’s just, seeing a guy in your bed, it’s like seeing a yeti

Christine: Ha the act’s comin’ along

Christine: What else do you want?

Richard: Oh my mom called, Richie needs his I-pod do you know where it is?

Christine: Oh yeah it’s in the top drawer of my buro, sorry ‘bout that Richie can’t sleep without his I-pod, we’re trying to wee him off of it

Richard: Good luck it took him two and a half years to get off the boob

Christine: They still look great though, I mean you know, it’ll be dark soon

Richard: Can’t find it

Christine: No no no no NO not that drawer, God, wrong drawer it’s not a big deal, it’s just that it’s a p-p-private drawer
Richard: That’s why I can never find batteries in this house

Christine: Here is the I-pod

Richard: Thanks, hey did you have a new bed spread?

Christine: No you’ve seen this

Richard: Is it cotton? We have a silk one in our bed and it’s nice but it’s so hot

Christine: Nonono you gotta get cotton

Patrick: I’m still here

Christine: Oh, I’m sorry, you know Richard you need to go

Richard: It was nice meetin’ ya

Patrick: Ah good luck with the comforter

Christine: So where were we? Oh ya I remember I was going to kiss you right about…

Patrick: Should we talk about what just happened?

Christine: Oh yeah, you know what.. that’s not such a big deal. You know most single women have a drawer like that, you should see my friend Barbs, ’s a trunk

Patrick: I was talking about you and Richard, you two are very close ha?

Christine: Oh, okay ah I knew this was gonna come up sooner rather than later, ahm okay yes, I have an unusually close relationship with my ex-husband and it’s been a problem for other guys I’ve dated. The drawer kind of grew out of that. But seriously you know it’s important that you’re onboard for the Richard thing, cause you’re gonna have to either take it or leave it

Patrick: I’ll take it

Christine: You will?

Patrick: Of course. Christine I really like you

Christine: Oh hahah hh wow. The take it or leave it thing has never really worked my favor before

Patrick: I think what you and Richard have is, is nice, I mean I wish I had that kind of relationship with my ex

Christine: Oh no, no I would not be okay with that

Patrick: Oh
Appendix 2

Context, conversation II

Christine’s brother Matthew is having breakfast in Christine’s kitchen. Christine comes out from the bedroom wearing a robe and they start talking about her date with Patrick while Christine is making herself some coffee.

Conversation II

Christine: Good morning Mathew, how are you you handsome man?

Mathew: Mornin’ mom

Christine: So I had another great date with Patrick last night, there’s nothing wrong with this guy. I told him everything he didn’t flinch, not about the underwear

Mathew: youuck

Christine: Not about the drawer

Mathew: eh

Christine: He’s even cool about my relationship with Richard

Mathew: Uuh

Christine: Why’s that a Uuh?

Mathew: You and Richard are annoying

Christine: We are not annoying

Mathew: No really, wait till Patrick finds out about all those stupid games you make up

Christine: What stupid games?

Mathew: Ah there’s “guess what I’m eating”, am “what does this smell like” ah, an’ than there’s this super irritating “wig or real hair”

Christine: Let me tell you something, “wig or real hair” is the best game ever

Mathew: Ah Richard showing you a picture he took of someone’s head and you saying it’s a wig is not a game

Christine: You’re just mad ‘cause we don’t like you play

Mathew: I don’t wanna play, it’s not a game

Christine: If it’s not a game, then how do I have over ten thousand points?
Mathew: It’s because when the game was invented you were sleeping with a judge

Christine: You know what’s different about this relationship Mathew

Mathew: You’re not sending yourself roses to make you seem more desirable?

Christine: No I did that, but, what’s different is me. Yeah, I’ve decided that I’m just too old to waste my time pretending to be something that I’m not, you know I laid it all out there for Patrick

Mathew: Gross

Christine: Yeah I did I mean he could either have this relationship on my terms or not at all. I’m like ah ah. Who’s the woman who finally gets what she wants by standing up for herself?

Mathew: Mrs Doubtfire?

Christine: Yeah, I’m like mrs Doubtfire, I’m like the mrs Doubtfire of relationships, yeah I should write a book about dating in my thirties

Mathew: Only if you wrote it ten years ago
Appendix 3

Context, conversation III

In the third conversation Christine’s ex husband Richard comes to visit Christine, who is getting ready to go on a date with Patrick. They discuss whether Richard should follow her on the date or not.

Conversation III

Richard: Hey

Christine: Hey

Richard: Can I hang out here for a little while?

Christine: Sure, why?

Richard: New Christine’s sister and mom are over at the house talking about the wedding so I had to clear out. It started out nice but then it kinda’ seemed like they were trying to talk her out of it so, I decided to leave before I gave them any more ammunition

Christine: Yeah my mom tried to warn me

Richard: You should’a listened. You goin’ out?

Christine: Yeah, I’m meetin’ Patrick he’s taking me to that new French place down the street

Richard: Kiddin’ I was trying to get a reservation there for over a month, how’d he get in?

Christine: He owns a winery, it’s how he got in there, it’s how he’s gettin’ in here

Richard: A winery man! The only business person new Christine knows is some guy who makes his own dog food

Christine: I guess you can come with us

Richard: On your date

Christine: Aha

Richard: I’m not gonna do that, I’ll eat at home, got some lamb and rice Christine left in the fridge

Christine: Na it’ll be fine, Patrick’s totally cool about us

Richard: Okay if you’re sure he won’t be mad
Christine: Na he won’t I told him you were gonna be around a lot and he’s gonna have to either take it or leave it, so he took it

Richard: Really?

Christine: Yeah, I mean Richard, who’s gonna leave this?

*Christine is pointing at herself*

Richard: I left it

Christine: No, I left it

*Christine is pointing at Richard*

Richard: Well the important thing is one of us left it before we killed it

Christine: So come on, Patrick knows the deal

Richard: I feel like it could be awkward

Christine: How could it be awkward?
Appendix 4

Context, conversation IV

Christine and Patrick are having dinner at a restaurant. They discuss whether to continue their relationship or not.

Conversation IV

Christine: Thank you so much for going out with me again
Patrick: Thank you so much for coming alone

Christine: I know, I know… I-I really don’t wanna mess this up, you know ah, stupid
Richard’s stupid fiancé said something so stupid a-and I-I think she might be right ah, I think
that I’m trying to push you away because I’m scared of how much I like you.

Patrick: Phu, I really liked you too, and if you were trying to push me away you really did a good job, a really good job. Seriously I almost changed my phone number.

Christine: That’s happened
Patrick: What are you afraid of?
Christine: Ah, well I’m in my thirties…

Patrick: And you’re afraid I’m gonna find out you’re not in your thirties?

Christine: No, I’m always gonna be in my thirties

Patrick: But ah I-I’ve dated a lot of guys and I know all the things that can go wrong in a relationship
Christine: Like what

Patrick: No

Christine: No, but we did, you know things fall apart even when they seem perfect. Love changes to hate, hate to repulsion, repulsion to lust, lust to revenge, then fun, then sad, it it’s awful

Patrick: It is awful, God I was so sad after my divorce

Christine: Right, and even if we’re one of those rare cases that don’t break up and we’re happy, bam! one of us dies, and the other is left devastated and alone
Patrick: Oh my God

Christine: It is scary Patrick

Patrick: It really is scary

Christine: So what do you wanna do?

Patrick: Well obviously it would be insane to put ourselves through that kind of pain, especially when we like each other so much

Christine: Yeah, so we’re breakin’ up?

Patrick: I think it’s best

Christine: Yeah
Appendix 5

Context, conversation V

The fifth conversation starts with Patrick’s entrance in Christine’s house. He has come there because he regrets their breaking up and wants to get back together. There is no one else in the house except the two of them.

Conversation V

Patrick: I don’t care that I’m scared

Christine: What?

Patrick: And I don’t care that you’re trying to scare me of

Christine: Oh I’m not ah, this is just what I look like without make up

Patrick: No, before. I know it’s scary I know we don’t know how it’s gonna end, but I wanna be with you anyway, because I also know that I would regret walkin’ away from this

Christine: Yeah keep going you’re good at this

Patrick: I wanna do this, do you?

Christine: Oh my God are you proposing, the answer is yes

Patrick: What, no

Christine: No no no the answer is no

Patrick: Are you trying to freak me out again?

Christine: No no I don’t know, I’m confused you know I-I-I don’t wanna get married again

Patrick: Neither do I

Christine: So what should we do?

Patrick: I don’t know

Christine: So are we breaking up then?

Patrick: I guess so

Christine: Okay well ah thank’s for comin’ over

Patrick: Wait that’s not why I came over. You’re confusing me. Can’t we just be together an’ take it slow?
Christine: Slow Oh yeah I can do slow and then fast and then slow again, do you wanna see my bedroom?

Patrick: yes I do