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English

Gender-Related Features in the Use of the Hedge *You Know*

**A Case Study of Conversations on the Radio Station,
*London's Biggest Conversation 97.3FM***

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ABSTRACT

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- Title:** Gender-related features in the use of the hedge *You Know*
A case study of conversations on the radio station,
London's Biggest Conversation 97.3FM
- Author:** Takae Dubar
- Supervisor:** Larisa Gustafsson Oldireva
- Aims:** To examine gender-related features in conversations with the focus on
the use of the hedge *you know* and compare the findings with previous
studies.
- Method:** A quantitative study of the use of *you know* in conversations on the radio
station.
- Material:** The phone-in radio station *London's Biggest Conversation 97.3FM*
- Main results:** The main results are that women tend to use *you know* as a marker of
politeness particularly with a female addressee; they also use it as a
marker of optional element. By contrast, men tend to use it as a marker
of obligatory constituents when the utterance is imprecise. These
findings agree with previous studies, but there are also some findings
which disagree with them, namely that women seem to use *you know* as
a marker of camaraderie similar to men, and men use *you know* as false
start in a way that women have been found to do in the data of previous
research.
- Key words:** gender-related features, hedges, Lakoff, functions, context, formal,
informal, category, speech, conversations, women, men, speaker,
addressee

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1. Introduction

Gender-related features in linguistic behaviour have been discussed over the years by many scholars. The discussions tend to refer to two main sources; one refers to findings of biological studies based on laboratory work, and the other employs findings of socio-cultural studies on speech communities.

The biological approach focuses on the functions of brain's two hemispheres. As it has been hypothesised, women might use both hemispheres for language functions, which consequently results in their better verbal skills. On the other hand, men predominantly use left-hemisphere for language functions, which might lead to less well-developed verbal abilities (Deborah 2009). Another biological approach called 'new biologism' has been recently influencing the discussions of gender-related features. Its followers maintain that the habitual engagement of early human female in such as child-rearing and gathering contributed to the functional evolution of the language areas of the brain, whereas men's engagement in hunting blocked that development (Joseph 2000).

Many studies have been made in order to confirm the hypotheses of the biological approaches, and not all of them support the postulates of the biological approaches, which remain a matter of dispute.

The socio-cultural approach focuses on social arrangements, for instance, people's professions, social networks, power relations, levels of literacy, etc. Thus, the American linguist, Robin Tolmach Lakoff brought male power into the discussion of women's language in her pioneering work *Language and Woman's Place* (1973). Since then Lakoff's work has been influencing the discussion of male-female differences in language, and many scholars have been testing Lakoff's claims.

This study applies Lakoff's work as a starting point for the discussion of gender-related features in conversations in order to discover whether these features can be found nearly four decades after Lakoff's work in the use of the hedge *you know*.

2. Aims

The aim of this study is to answer the following research questions:

- What gender-related features in the use of *you know* can be found in conversations on the radio station *London's Biggest Conversation 97.3FM*?
- Do the findings of the present research agree with findings of previous studies on hedges and on *you know* in particular?

3. Background

First, Lakoff's pioneering study on female conversations in *Language and Woman's Place* (1973) is introduced, and the pros and cons of Lakoff's claims are discussed. After that, the gender-related features of hedges in conversations are surveyed together with several studies on the hedge *you know*, as their methodology is implemented in this study.

3.1 Linguistic Features of Female Conversations in Lakoff's Study and Pros and Cons of Lakoff's Claims

Lakoff (1973) distinguishes ten linguistic features which characterize women's speech (all examples below are taken from Lakoff 1973: 49-79):

- i. words related to the specific female interests or occupations
- ii. avoidance of stronger expletives
- iii. empty adjectives
- iv. tag questions

- v. interrogative intonation in declaratives and statements
- vi. various kinds of hedges
- vii. hyper-correct grammar and pronunciation
- viii. superpolite forms
- ix. absence of jokes
- x. using intensifiers

Lakoff interprets these features as women's language and explains them by women's powerlessness and uncertainty in a male-dominated society.

The publication of Lakoff's study was met with criticism from scholars in fields such as anthropology, psychology, and sociology. One aspect which was subjected to harsh criticism was Lakoff's strong feminism. Lakoff (1973) maintains that women have been trained to sound inferior in order to socialise in a male-dominated society. However, Speer (2006) strongly argues that 'women are not *rewarded* for learning to "talk like a lady" by being accepted in society' (Speer 2006:23). Another aspect which received sharp criticism is Lakoff's method, which is basically based on her introspection. Holmes (1986), for example, points out her methodological weakness of various kinds, especially when it concerns the analysis of hedges; she maintains that in Lakoff's study there is 'no regard for variation in the linguistic form and context of the items, nor attention to the functional correlates of this variation' (Holmes 1986:4) in various forms such as formal and informal.

On the other hand, there are supporters for Lakoff's claims. Thus, Tannen (1992) incorporates many of the features identified by Lakoff into her own discussion of women's speech strategies. Glass (1993), a speech pathologist in Beverly Hills, was able to teach her male-to-female transsexuals how to sound and act like a woman by studying *Language and Woman's Place*. She was even asked to teach Dustin Hoffman for the movie *Tootsie*, where Hoffman acts as a lady.

3.2 Gender-Related Features of Hedges in Conversations

Lakoff maintains that hedges are used to show uncertainty and politeness of the speaker and to avoid unfriendliness and direct assertion and these features are characteristic of women's speech. However, other researchers interpret hedges in different ways and do not claim that hedges are features of women's conversation.

Some interpret hedges as markers of politeness. For example, House and Kasper (1981, cited in James 1993:197) argue that hedges are 'modality markers of the "downgrader" type as they contribute to the marking of degrees of politeness in interactive discourse'. Brown and Levinson (1978, cited in James 1993:197) claim that hedges are used as 'politeness strategies within "face-threatening acts", where [...] serves notice of reluctance to impinge, or, in other cases a cooperative avoidance of possible disagreement'.

In addition, hedges are interpreted as ways of softening or weakening the speaker's assertion. For example, Crystal and Davy (1975, cited in James 1983:197) interpret hedges as softening connectives which 'alter the stylistic force of a sentence, so as to express the attitude of the speaker to his listener, or to express the assessment of conversation as informal'. James (1983:198) states that hedges are 'compromisers' which 'constitute voluntary markers of imprecision of propositional content on the one hand and modifiers of illocutionary force on the other'. Dixon and Foster (1995:90) say that 'hedges refer to a class of devices that supposedly soften utterances by signaling imprecision and non-commitment'. Holmes (1995:74) states that 'hedges attenuate or reduce the strength or directness, mitigate face-threatening acts, and avoid imposition on the addressee'.

3.3 Previous Studies on the Use of Hedge *You Know*

A number of researchers have tested Lakoff's observation about the gender-related features in hedges. Since this study focuses on the hedge *you know*, the findings of six studies on this

hedge are surveyed: one study by Östman (1981), four studies by Holmes (1986, 1995), and one study by Dixon and Foster (1995).

3.3.1 *You Know* in Relation to Manners of Usage

Östman (1981) collected instances of *you know* from five conversations produced by men and women in the United States (conversations A, B, C, D, and E). The conversations were tape-recorded, and the instances of *you know* were counted per minute. In all the conversations, except the conversation A, women used *you know* more often than men did. Östman hypothesised that it was because the informants were university teachers in the conversation A, and this can support Lakoff's argument (1973) that the academic world does not show the linguistic manifestations characteristic of women's language.

In addition, Östman applied five parameters to the same instances of *you know* (examples below are taken from Östman 1981: 75-77):

(a) *you know* used between obligatory constituents in an utterance

- *We do need a towel or something -- unless one of us is -- **you know** -- certain.*

(b) *you know* used before optional elements, at transition-relevant places in an utterance

- *The family still sends these exquisite little gifts **you know** like a -- perfect pearl.*

(c) *you know* used between repetitions of a word or a phrase

- *They would -- **you know** they would -- do things*

(d) *you know* use after false starts

- *One person **you know** the reason why I was really going ...*

(e) *you know* used as an attention-getting, or topic-changing device

- ***You know** -- a -- Oh, I don't know when it was Sunday...*

This study showed that men used the (a) type more often than women did, whereas women used the (b) type more often than men did. Östman claims that it is because men are expected to behave as rational and mature human beings who are aware of the significance of every word in a conversation. As regards the (c) type, there did not seem to be any difference in men's and women's use. However, there was a remarkable tendency for women to use the (d) type more often than men did. Östman postulates that women tend to mitigate the error, whereas men would not be so apt to admit the error. Regarding the (e) type, it was only the conversation B where the older woman used it most often. Therefore, Östman concludes it is difficult to generalize gender-bound tendencies in the use of this hedge.

3.3.2 *You Know* in Formal and Informal Contexts

In the first study (1986), Holmes used a corpus of ca. 50,000 words of spontaneous speech which were produced by men and women in New Zealand; 20,000 words were collected in formal contexts from television and radio interviews, and 30,000 words were collected in informal, relaxed contexts in private homes, often around a meal time. 32 men and 32 women provided the data, and over 200 instances of *you know* were collected.

Holmes found out that *you know* occurs mostly in informal conversations; therefore, there were only 12 instances of *you know* in formal contexts, whereas 195 instances were reported in informal conversation. The results of this study did not show a significant difference in the speech of women and men in these two contexts as 6 occurrences per gender were reported in formal contexts, and 99 instances were produced by women and 96 by men in informal contexts.

3.3.3 *You Know* in the Categories of *Speaker Certain* and *Speaker Uncertain*

In the second study (1986), Holmes also used the same corpus of ca. 50,000 words of spontaneous speech produced by men and women in New Zealand, but she focused on the functions of *you know* by distinguishing two main functions: *speaker certain* and *speaker uncertain*. The *speaker certain* function is further categorised into: *conjoint knowledge*, *emphatic*, and *attributive*. The *conjoint knowledge* is related to situations when the speaker knows that the addressee already knows the information being asserted in the proposition as mutual knowledge. For example (All the examples are taken from Holmes 1986: 8-11),

- Woman to her husband introducing a narrative at dinner party

Well : you — *know we went to Sally's that night* ¹

The *emphatic* type emphasizes or intensifies the strength of the speech act, and it also stresses the speaker's confidence and reassures the addressee concerning the validity of the proposition asserted. For example,

- Young woman joking to neighbor in presence of flatmates.

I'm the boss around here you — *know//*

The *attributive* use expresses the speaker's confidence that the addressee knows the validity of the proposition as a result of his/her past experience or background knowledge. This type can also be interpreted as 'positive politeness', since the speaker believes that the addressee knows the proposition asserted. According to Lakoff, this type refers to women's tendency to show their politeness to the addressee. For example,

- Radio interviewee describing past experience

and that way we'd get rid of exploitation of man by man all that stuff /

you — *know / you've heard it before*

¹ The lengths of pause are indicated: ∴ (a short pause), / (a pause), and // (a long pause). The prosodic patterns are indicated: — falling pattern, and — rising pattern.

The *speaker uncertain* function, according to Lakoff, also refers to women's tendency to show their uncertainty. It can be categorised into: *appealing* and *linguistic imprecision*. The *appealing* use implies an appeal for reassurance or sharing feeling with the addressee in the context of embarrassing experiences or very personal information. For example,

- Young woman to close friend

and it was quite // well : it was it was all very embarrassing you — know

- Young man describing work supervisor to flatmates

but if a person is as blunt and as abrupt as C is / you — know / they can make it quite unpleasant for you

The *linguistic imprecision* can be further categorised into: *signaling lexical imprecision*, *introducing qualifying information*, and *indicating false start*. The *signaling lexical imprecision* type associates with situations when a speaker is uncertain about the choice of the following word or phrase as in example (a) below. The *introducing qualifying information* type is used when the speaker is aware of the need for more clarification of the previous utterance as in example (b) below. The *indicating false start* type is used when the speaker needs to restructure the message as in example (c) below.

- (a) Young man requesting clarification of previous speaker, his flatmates.

better / entertainment product or better / you — know / music musicians

- (b) Young man in discussion group

I think they're some of the senior children / you — know like prefects

- (c) Young man in discussion with flatmates

I mean look what Travolta as a as you — know / he's not a pretty face or anything //

This study revealed that women used the *speaker certain* function, especially the *attributive* and the *emphatic* types, more frequently than men did (63 instances of *you know*

by women and 43 instances by men), while men used the *speaker uncertain* function, especially the *linguistic imprecision* type of *you know*, more often than women did (59 instances of *you know* by men and 42 instances by women). These results, in fact, challenge Lakoff's statement which claims that women express uncertainty in speech more often than men do. However, Holmes admits that the *attributive* type of *you know*, namely 'positive politeness' is used more often by women than by men (29 instances by women and 20 instances by men), which agrees with Lakoff's statement that women show politeness in order to avoid unfriendliness or unkindness.

3.3.4 *You Know* in Same-Sex Interactions

Holmes' third study (1986) focused on the influence of the addressee sex on differences in the use of *you know* in same-sex interactions. She compared the same amount of casual speech produced by men and women in New Zealand in same-sex interactions, and the study showed that men used twice as many instances of *you know* than women did in the two major functions; the *speaker certainty* and the *speaker uncertainty*.

One of the potential factors which Holmes discusses is that *you know* characterises the feeling of 'camaraderie' or 'semi-intimacy', which men experience when they speak with a male addressee, and this increases the use of *you know*. This agrees with Lakoff's observation that 'men enter into bonding relationships and form relationships of camaraderie' (Lakoff 2004: 101).

Another potential factor, Holmes maintains, is that men feel some sort of obligation to entertain the male addressee in male-only contexts with the narration of interesting and amusing personal experiences.

3.3.5 You Know in the Categories of *Affective* and *Referential* Functions

Holmes' study in 1995 analysed over 200 instances of *you know* (105 produced by women and 102 by men) in New Zealand women's and men's speech. She classified her data in relation to two functions: *affective* and *referential*. The *affective* function is related to the *speaker certain* type of use, and the *referential* to the *speaker uncertain* in her previous study (see 3.3.3). She also interpreted the *affective* as 'positive politeness', adding two categories: *speaker-orientated* and *addressee-orientated*. In the previous study (see 3.3.3), the *speaker-orientated* use was referred to as the *appealing* and categorised under the *speaker uncertain*. However, in this study, Holmes re-defined them as *affective*, namely the *speaker certain* type.

This study showed that women used *you know* in the *affective* function, especially the type of the *addressee-orientated* positive politeness, more often than men did, whereas men use the *referential* function more often than women did. The findings of this study confirmed the result of Holmes' previous study (see 3.3.3)

Holmes comments on her findings saying that women's language is sensitive and caring rather than deficient. However, she concedes that her findings could be culture-specific as her informants were speakers only from New Zealand, and the diversity of *you know* functions can be interpreted in different ways.

3.3.6 In Competitive and Noncompetitive Uses of You Know, in Mixed-Sex Interactions, and in the Functions of *Confident* and *Unconfident*

In Dixon and Foster's study (1997), 104 instances of *you know* were collected from the conversations of South African undergraduate students (50 instances provided by men and 54 by women). These instances were analysed in relation to three factors: *male and female speaker*, *male and female audience*, and *competitive* and *noncompetitive*. In the *competitive* conversation, which is related to the *formal context* in Holmes' study (see 3.3.2), participants engaged in a brief debate, whereas in the *noncompetitive* conversation, which is related to the

informal context in Holmes' study, they were given a topic to facilitate communication.

Besides, Dixon and Foster applied two functions: *confident* and *unconfident*. The *confident function* is namely related to the *speaker certain* type of *you know*, and the *unconfident function* is related to the *speaker uncertain* in Holmes' study (see 3.3.2).

The study showed that men employed *you know* more often than women did when talking to female addressees in the use of *confident* type of *you know*. As regards contextual influences, the *confident* type of *you know* was used less frequently in the *competitive* condition than in the *noncompetitive* condition, which agrees with Holmes' study that *you know* is most common in informal contexts (see 3.3.2).

There were no significant gender-related differences in the use of *you know* in the *confident* and the *unconfident* functions; this observation did not agree with Holmes' findings that women use the *speaker certain* type of *you know* more than men do, or men use the *speaker uncertain* type of *you know* more than women do. The study also disagrees with Lakoff's claim that women have a tendency to use hedges more often than men do.

In their study, Dixon and Foster aimed at verifying four main hypotheses. Firstly, the hedging behaviour may not differ between men and women in South Africa in contrast to men and women in New Zealand and elsewhere. Secondly, a sample of students may provide group-specific results as students have less distinct gender-bound differences in their linguistic behaviour than members of other social categories. Thirdly, the formality of the experimental setting may reduce the use of *you know* compared to a real social setting. Lastly, the method of their statistical analysis differed from the one by Holmes' as Dixon and Foster applied an inferential analysis to their data, whereas Holmes applied raw scores, means and proportions.

4. Material and Methods

This study investigates gender-related features in the use of *you know* in mixed-sex interactions in relation to different functions of *you know*. The material used in this study is the radio station *London's Biggest Conversation 97.5FM* (henceforth referred to as *LBC*) which is a talk radio station based in London that transmits nationwide and even worldwide on the internet for twenty four hours. The presenters provide topics of current interest, for example, the London Olympics 2012, school education, unemployment, etc., and the listeners can phone in and present their view. This radio station is appropriate for the aims of this study because all the data is authentic and is provided by listeners' real life conversations.

There are several male and female presenters in *LBC*, so one male, Ian Dale who presents the show from 7 to 10 pm at the local time, and one female, Julia Hartley-Brewer who presents the show from 1 to 4pm at the local time, were chosen to this study in order to provide data on same-sex and mixed-sex interactions.

Selected conversations from 10th February to 2nd April were recorded, and a 12,000 word corpus of conversations was transcribed. In this corpus, 20 male informants and 20 female informants were preserved with a 300-word selection of conversations per person in which 10 conversations were with the female and male presenters respectively. 135 instances of *you know* were reported in the corpus; 65 instances produced by male informants and 70 by female informants.

All informants appear to be native speakers, although it is difficult to know their background variables, such as class and age, which might influence the interpretation of this study results.

As for the different functions of *you know*, Holmes' categories were applied: the *speaker certain* which was subcategorised into the *conjoint knowledge signal*, *emphatic*, and *attribute*, and the *speaker uncertain* which was subcategorised into *appealing*, *linguistic imprecision*:

signalling lexical imprecision, introducing qualifying information, and indicating false starts (see 3.3.3).

There were two main problems with the material and method. Firstly, some words were difficult to listen and transcribe due to a bad telephone connection. In this case, only the number of words was counted. Secondly, some instances are difficult to categorise, for example, the *conjoint knowledge* and the *attribute*, since both definitions are relatively similar as they are described in 3.3.3. The examples (1), and (2) are categorised in the *conjoint knowledge* in this study, but they can also be interpreted as the *attribute*.

- (1) A female informant talking with the female presenter about the difficulty of remembering the name of things after giving birth

But when I was in the office, ah, it it just flew, it's just flowed. It was no problem.

*It was anything out **you** — **know**, when you stop*

- (2) A female informant talking with the female presenter about birth and body shape

*when you had a baby, you had to start **you** — **know** being a size sixteen as you left the hospital*

In example (1), the female presenter also experienced the difficulty of remembering the name of things after giving birth. Therefore, the use of *you know* can refer to the mutual knowledge of the difficulty which women have in general, or it can refer to the previous experience of the female presenter. Similarly, in example (2), *you know* can be interpreted as the mutual knowledge in general about being a size sixteen during pregnancy, or it can refer to the speaker's confidence that the addressee knows it as a result of her previous experience.

Another example which is difficult to categorise is the *appealing* type of *you know*. The *appealing* type was in the category of the *speaker uncertain* in the study of Holmes in 1986, but it was moved to the category of the *affective*, namely the *speaker certain* in her study in 1995 (see 3.3.3 and 3.3.5). Holmes also says that it is crucial to identify the *appealing* type of *you know*. Example (3) below illustrates this:

- (3) A female informant talking with the female presenter about coping with death

I was sad, yeah, I was miserable. I was sad. I you know I don't want to get out of bed. I don't want to cope with them, trying to, I just wanted to you know shut myself in the roof, and not have to with kid

In example (3), the female informant shared her personal information and feelings with the female presenter. It is difficult to judge whether these instances are the *speaker certain* or the *speaker uncertain* type of *you know*. However, not so many the *appealing* type of instances were reported in the data, thus, it might not much affect the results of this study.

5. Results

5.1. *You know* in Mixed-Sex Interactions

Figure 1 shows the numbers of *you know* provided by 10 men and 10 women each with the male presenter and the female presenter.

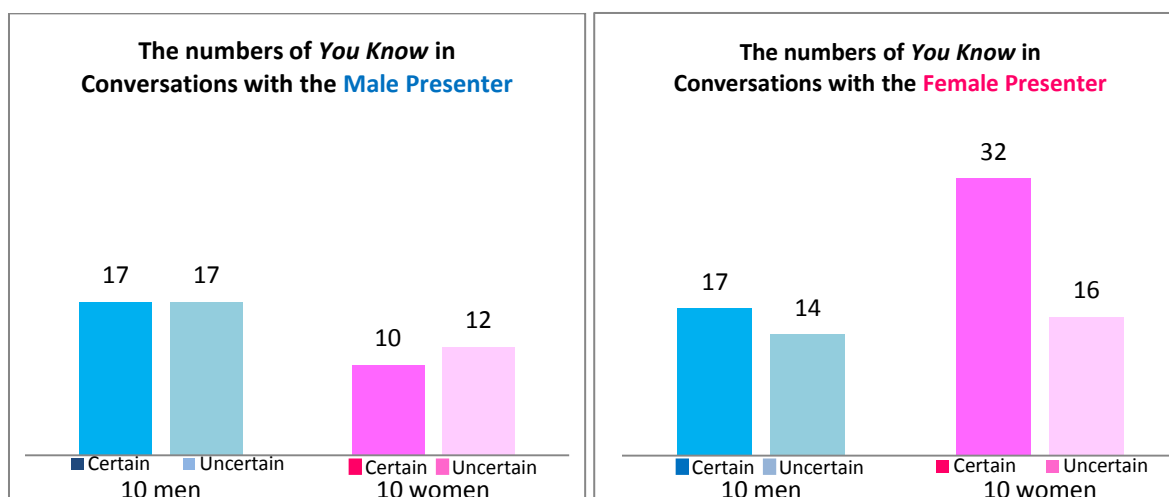


Figure 1: The numbers of *you know* in mixed-sex interactions in relation to the functions of *speaker certain* and *speaker uncertain*

To judge from Figure 1, there is no significant effect of the presenters' gender in men's conversations, which disagrees with Holmes' study that men tend to use *you know* more often than women in same-sex interactions in both categories: the *speaker certain* and the *speaker*

uncertain (see 3.3.4). Compared with the study by Dixon and Foster, the present data does not agree with their findings on men's speech which states that men employ the *confident* type of *you know* more often than women did in the presence of a female audience (see 3.3.6).

On the other hand, the number of *you know* instances of the *speaker certain* type in women's conversations with the female presenter is nearly three times higher than the number of such instances with the male presenter, which cannot be seen in either Holmes' or Dixon and Foster's data.

It is also notable that women used fewer instances of *you know* than men did, particularly the *speaker certain* type of *you know*, in the conversations with the male presenter, which seems to disagree with Lakoff's claim that women tend to use hedges more often than men do because women are uncertain about what they say and are expected to show politeness in a male-dominated society.

5.2. *You Know* in the Categories of *Speaker Certain* and *Speaker Uncertain*

Table 1 illustrates the distribution of *you know* across the subcategories of the *speaker certain* and the *speaker uncertain* categories. The numbers and percentages are given for each subcategory in men's and women's conversations. The same distribution is illustrated in the bar graph in Figure 2.

Table 1 and Figure 2 demonstrate that women used the *speaker certain* type of *you know*, especially the *attribute* type, namely 'positive politeness', more often than men did, which agrees with Holmes' studies (1986, 1995; see 3.3.3. and 3.3.5). This finding also agrees with Lakoff's claim that women tend to use hedges to show their politeness.

Table 1: Distribution of *you know* in the subcategories of the *speaker certain* and the *speaker uncertain*

| | men number | men percent | women number | women percent |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Speaker Certain Subtotal | 34 | 25,2% | 42 | 31,1% |
| conjoint knowledge | 1 | 0,7% | 3 | 2,2% |
| emphatic | 9 | 6,7% | 7 | 5,2% |
| attributive | 24 | 17,8% | 32 | 23,7% |
| Speaker Uncertain Subtotal | 31 | 23,0% | 28 | 20,7% |
| appealing | 2 | 1,5% | 3 | 2,2% |
| lexical imprecision | 9 | 6,7% | 4 | 3,0% |
| introducing qualifying info. | 7 | 5,2% | 10 | 7,4% |
| false start | 13 | 9,6% | 11 | 8,1% |
| Total | 65 | 48,1% | 70 | 51,9% |
| Total | 135 | | | |

The same statistical observations are presented in the bar graph below.

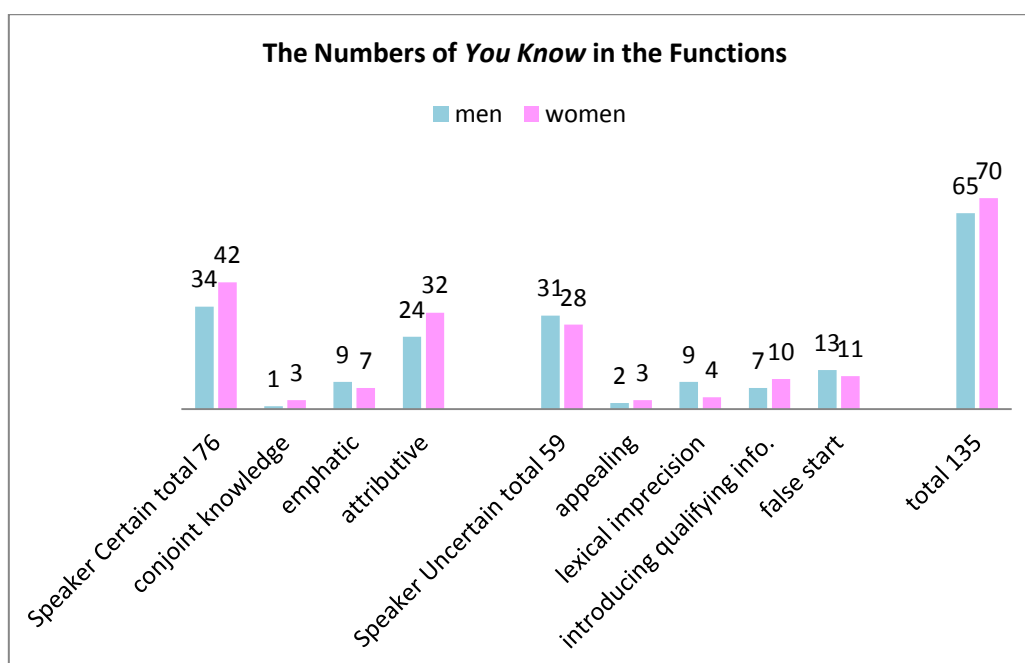


Figure 2: Distribution of *you know* in the subcategories of the *speaker certain* and the *speaker uncertain*

The present data also showed that men used the *speaker uncertain* type of *you know*, especially the *lexical imprecision* more often than women did, which agree with the results of Holmes' two studies (1986, 1995; see 3.3.3. and 3.3.5). As for the *false start* type, men used it slightly more often than women did, which disagrees with the study of Östman (1981) who found that women used *you know* as false starts more often than men did (see 3.3.1). In addition, the findings of this study do not coincide with Dixon and Foster's study (1997) for each category of *you know* as in their data that there were no significant differences in men's and women's speech in the categories, the *confident* and the *unconfident* (see 3.3.6).

6. Discussion

6.1. *You know* in Relation to Contexts and Type of Discourse

In the present data, there were no traces of a significant effect of the presenters' gender on men's conversations. The contexts, namely formal or informal, can be a factor which influences men's verbal behaviour. Holmes maintains that *you know* mostly occurs in informal conversations (see 3.3.2). Dixon and Foster's study also showed that the *confident* type of *you know* occurs more often in the *noncompetitive* condition than in the *competitive* condition (see 3.3.6). Since the conversations in *LBC* are publicly broadcasted, the context type is rather formal. However, it is not formal either because the context type may change towards informal after the informants have talked for a minute and felt less nervous. Therefore, it is understandable that this finding does agree neither with Holmes' study, in which casual speech was used in same-sex interactions, nor with the study of Dixon and Foster, in which both types of contexts were applied in mixed-sex interactions.

In relation to contexts, the type of discourse can also effect the use of *you know*. Holmes states that '*you know* seems to occur most frequently in sections of relatively sustained narrative or accounts of the speaker's personal experiences [...] *you know* occurs much less

often in sections of discussion, argument, planning or “phatic’ talk” (Holmes 1986: 15). When the male informants talked about some personal issues, particularly with the male presenter, they seemed to produce more instances of *you know* in both categories: the *speaker certain* and the *speaker uncertain*. There were two informants who talked about their personal issues with the male presenter, such as the discipline of his daughter and his days at a children’s nursing home, and they were the ones who used *you know* over the average of 3.4 instances in the male conversations with the male presenter; one used ten instances (five of the *speaker certain* and five of the *speaker uncertain*), and the other used eight instances (four of the *speaker certain* and four of the *speaker uncertain*). Even with the female presenter, one informant used nine instances when talking about education and his father (five of the *speaker certain* and four of the *speaker uncertain*), which was much higher than the average of 3.1 instances in the male conversations with the female presenter. However, there were two exceptions in the conversations with the female presenter. One informant who talked about grief and his ex-partner used only three instances (two of the *speaker certain* and one of the *speaker uncertain*). Another informant who did not talk about a personal issue, but about his opinion against the London Olympics used seven instances (two of the *speaker certain* and five of the *speaker uncertain*).

Similar to the male informants, female informants also used *you know* often when they talk about their personal issues, particularly with the female presenter. There were eight female informants who talked about some personal issues with the female presenter, such as coping with someone’s death, depression, and a son having chromosome disorder, and five of them used *you know* more than the average of 4.8 instances with the female presenter in both categories. On the other hand, there were six female informants who talked about some personal issues with the male presenter, such as gender identity, husband’s mental problem,

and the informant's own mental problem, and three of them used *you know* more than the average of 2.2 instances with the male presenter in both categories.

Thus, talking about one's personal issues seem to change the type of discourse from non-informal to informal for both male and female informants, which consequently causes the informants to use *you know* more often than in non-informal conversations, particularly when a male informant talked with the male presenter and a female informant talked with the female presenter. This finding in men's conversations with the male presenter could support Holms' hypothesis that men use *you know* in the speech with a male addressee as men feel a sort of 'camaraderie' or 'semi-intimacy'.

As regards the finding in women's conversations that women use the *speaker certain* type of *you know* nearly three times more often in the conversations with the female presenter than with the male presenter, it seems as if women also feel 'camaraderie' or 'semi-intimacy' with a female audience, which is not addressed in Holmes' hypothesis. This finding is discussed in the next section in terms of politeness.

6.2 *You Know* as a Marker of Politeness

As mentioned before, *you know* was analysed as a marker of politeness. Lakoff discusses three forms of politeness (2004):

1. *formality*: keep aloof
2. *defence*: give opinion
3. *camaraderie*: show sympathy

The *formality* type of politeness implies distance between the speaker and the addressee achieved by using formal terms, such as professional terminology, passives, hypercorrect forms, and impersonal *one*, showing that there is no emotive content in the speaker's

utterance. By doing so, the participants can remain aloof instead of being involved in the part of the speaker.

The *defence* type of politeness leaves upon the addressee to decide how seriously to take what the speaker is saying. Hedges and tag questions are examples of this type of politeness.

The *camaraderie* type of politeness aims at making the addressee feel that the speaker likes him or her and wants to be friendly by using gestures of friendliness, such as back-slapping and telling jokes.

It can be said that the *formality* and the *defence* types of politeness refer to female styles of polite behaviour, since women, according to Lakoff, tend to use hypercorrect forms and hedges such as the *attribute* type of *you know* to show ‘positive politeness’. The data in this study also showed that women used the *attribute* type of *you know* more often than men did. According to Holmes’ hypothesis, the *camaraderie* type of politeness refers to men’s tendency to use *you know* as a marker of ‘camaraderie’ or ‘semi-intimacy’ more often with a male addressee than with a female addressee (see 3.3.4). Lakoff also claims that ‘women’s language avoids the markers of camaraderie: backslapping, joke telling, nicknaming, slang and so forth [...] even in all-women groups, my impression is that typically there is less show of camaraderie than in all-men group [...], because women feel excluded by male type “polite” behavior toward them’ (Lakoff 2004: 99).

It makes sense to discuss the data of this study in terms of these three types of politeness. Thus, the finding that the female informants used the *speaker certain* more often with the female presenter than with the male presenter could be explained by the fact that the female informants used this hedge as a marker of the *defence* type of politeness, namely the *attribute* type of *you know*.

However, not only the *attribute* type of *you know*, but also other types of *you know* in the *speaker certain* category were used in the women’s conversations with the female presenter.

24 instances of the *attribute*, namely ‘positive politeness’, 3 instances of the *conjoint knowledge*, and 5 instances of the *emphatic* are reported in the data. Thus, some female informants seem to use *you know* as a marker of the *camaraderie* type of politeness. It might be possible that the male type of polite behaviour; using hedges as a marker of the *camaraderie* type of politeness, is becoming appropriate for women nowadays compared to the times of Holmes’ observations (1986, 1995) and Lakoff’s claim (2004).

It is also interesting to note that there were more female than male informants who did not employ any types of *you know* in 300 words, especially with the male presenter. According to Östman (1981), *you know* was expected to be associated with informal speech and was prototypically associated with ‘performance errors’. It seems that the female informants keep aloof from the male presenter by using the *formality* type of politeness, namely hypercorrect forms without using the hedge *you know*.

6.3. *You Know* as a Marker of Obligatory Constituents or Optional Elements

As regards the finding that men used the *speaker uncertain* type of *you know*, particularly the *lexical imprecision*, more often than women did, it make sense to refer to the study of Östman (1981; see 3.3.1). In Östman study, men employed the (a) type of *you know* which is used between obligatory constituents in an utterance more often than women did, whereas women employed the (b) type of *you know* which is used before optional elements in an utterance more often than men did. The (a) type can be defined as the *lexical imprecision* in the category of the *speaker uncertain* that associates with situations when a speaker is uncertain about the choice of the following word or phrase, which is, in fact, an obligatory constituent. On the other hand, the (b) type is similar to the type of *introducing qualifying information* in the category of the *speaker uncertain* that signals the speaker’s awareness of the need for more clarification of the propositional content, which is an optional element.

Examples of the *lexical imprecision* type in this study are:

- (4) A male informant talking with the female presenter about the London Olympics

picking up the tax the year coming, that's the before, you know the recession.

- (5) A male informant talking with the male presenter about his days at a children's nursing home

and ah we had sort of some holidays, from Friday night. Probably, you know a very nice time to be honest.

In example (4) the speaker sought the word which follows after *you know*, and in example (5) the speaker was thinking of the following phrase while saying *you know*. The word *the recession* and the phrase *a very nice time to be honest* are in fact obligatory constituents in both contexts.

Examples of the *introducing qualifying information* in this study are:

- (6) A female informant talking with the female presenter about birth and celebrities

If you are a friend of mine, ah, you know, as you said about the celebrities of a magazine.

- (7) A female informant talking with the male presenter about her gender identity

it was easy to to carry on through the youngest stages doing as ah ah as a child it has ah has has you know like a tomboy.

In examples (6) and (7), the phrases after *you know* are optional elements signalled by *as* and *like*.

According to Östman, using *you know* to modify phrases or lexemes as the type of (a) implies that 'you are a rational human being, weighing every word very carefully and giving the listener a feeling that you as a speaker are important in that you go through all this trouble of deciding every minutely which word to choose' (Östman 1981: 75). On the other hand, using *you know* to qualify the whole speech act as the type of (b) implies that 'you are actually giving with one hand and taking it back with the other. This, if anything, will make

anyone look irrational and insecure' (Östman 1981: 76). The finding of this study that men use the *lexical imprecision* more often than women can refer to Östman's claim that men are, as more rational human beings, aware of the importance of choosing the right term, whereas women are not so. However, it cannot be ignored that men also used the type of *introducing qualifying information* relatively often: seven instances used by men versus ten instances by women. Therefore, it is questionable whether men can be referred to as more rational human beings.

6.4. *You Know* as a Marker of False Start

The data of this study showed that men used the *false start* type of *you know* slightly more often than women did: 13 instances by men and 11 by women. This finding disagrees with Östman's study (1981; see 3.3.1) which showed that women used the *false start* type of *you know* more often than men did. Östman postulates that 'one function of this kind of *you know* would be to mitigate the fact that you have just made an error. Men, on the other hand, would not be so apt to admit that they make errors' (Östman 1981: 76). It seems that the male informants in this study admitted that they made errors, which does not support Östman's postulate based on the data collected nearly three decades ago.

6.5. Other Significant Features

Two significant features in the use of *you know* by two genders were discovered in this study. Firstly, most of them who did not use any types of *you know* used other hedges, such as *kind of*, *like*, *well*, and *right*. For example, one of the female informants used five instances of *kind of* and one *like*, and one of the male informants used three instances of *right*. Therefore, it would be overgeneralised to say that a person who does not use the hedge *you know* in speech, regardless of his or her gender and the addressee's gender, does not use any other hedges.

Secondly, it seems that *you know* occurs more often towards the end of a stretch of speech than in the beginning; seven male informants and six female informants did not use any types of *you know* in the first 150 words, but used some in the last 150 words. As it is discussed in 6.1, the informants might feel less nervous after they have talked for a few minutes, which might consequently change the context of discourse more close to an informal context.

7. Conclusion

This study demonstrated that women observed in this investigation use *you know* more often than men do with a female addressee, which might be as a result of showing the positive politeness and also as a marker of camaraderie. Moreover, women tend to use *you know* as a marker of positive politeness more frequently than men do in order to convey relevant background knowledge and experience to the addressee. Women also use *you know* as a marker of optional elements, whereas men use it as a marker of obligatory constituents to signal the message of their utterance when it is not precisely expressed.

These results support Lakoff's claim that women show politeness more often than men do, but they question another of Lakoff's claims that women use hedges because of their lack of self-confidence.

However, it is risky to generalise this aspect of *you know* usage only from the perspective of gender differences; it is necessary to consider the diversity of the functions of *you know* in different speech acts. Thus Holmes asserts:

the analysis of the function of particular occurrences of *you know* requires that careful account be taken not only of linguistic features such as intonation and syntactic position, but also of the illocutionary point of the particular speech act in the discourse, the purpose and degree of formality of the interaction, the relative statuses and role of participants, and the amount of shared background knowledge and experience they can assure. (Holmes 1986: 17)

In addition, there is a risk in misinterpreting the speakers' intention to perform several functions. As mentioned above, one might interpret the use of *you know* as the *conjoint knowledge* type of *you know*, even though a speaker uses *you know* as the *attributive* type, namely in order to show his/her politeness.

Moreover, the use of *you know* could be culture-specific as Holm, Dixon and Foster postulate above since the verbal behaviour of the English informants in this study could differ from the one of men and women in the United States, in New Zealand, in South Africa and elsewhere.

In conclusion, gender appears not to be clearly manifested in a certain speech act. Linguistic features are more complicated, and the diversity of factors of different nature must be taken into consideration. However, one should not forget that Lakoff's pioneering work has been perhaps the most influential text in the studies on language and gender, and Lakoff's claims have provided researchers with a conceptual framework which they can test against new data and find out whether the claims are true or not.

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