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Sailors and Tentative Talk-a-lots

A study of folk linguistic notions of gendered language in action films

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Abstract

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The relationship between reality and the media is a complex one; some say that media is the most important symbolic world for the shaping of our perception of reality while others argue that expecting the media to be representative of the real world may be potentially harmful for our understanding of this relationship. This study investigates this relationship by measuring the frequency of three folk linguistic notions of gendered language in action films. The selected notions are 'Women talk more than men', 'Men swear more than women' and 'Women use more tag and intonation questions than men'. These notions are studied in order to aid the understanding of the image of men and women projected by the action genre. The method used to achieve this aim is the quantitative method Content Analysis.

The material consists of 10 action films from 2002-2006. 4 of these action films feature a sole male protagonist, another 4 feature a sole female protagonist, and the last 2 feature both a male and a female character as co-protagonists. All in all, 1105 minutes of film are analyzed.

The study shows that male protagonists produce the highest number of each studied variable (lines, swear words as well as tag and intonation questions) providing grounds for the existence of one of the three studied folk linguistic notions. However, considering that the study also indicates that male protagonists speak more than their female counterparts, the higher production of all studied variables may be a result of this.

Keywords: Folk linguistic notion, Popular Culture, Feminism, Content Analysis, Gender, Film, Action, Genre, Protagonist, Swear, Tag question, Intonation question.

1. Introduction

In her book *Gender and the Media,* Rosalind Gill gives a striking description of our contemporary society:

"We live in a world that is stratified along lines of gender, race, ethnicity, class, age, disability, sexuality and location, and in which the privileges, disadvantages and exclusion associated with such categories are unevenly distributed. We also live in a world which is increasingly saturated by media and information and communication technologies. In many respects, the last four decades of research in feminist media studies has been an attempt to explore the relationship between these two facts." (Gill 2007:7)

This study aims to be part of this exploration by investigating the frequency of three folk linguistic notions of gendered language in action films using Content Analysis. The results are then compared to sociolinguistic findings on the specific variables studied. The studied notions are as follows:

1. Women talk more than men (Edlund, Erson & Milles, 2007:60-62)
2. Men swear more than women (Edlund, Erson & Milles, 2007:67)
3. Women use more tag and intonation questions than men (Edlund, Erson & Milles, 2007:67)

The reason for choosing these notions is that they favourably lend themselves to the chosen method as each notion concerns a difference in the frequency of production of one or more variables between the genders, a difference Content Analysis is apt for observing and analyzing.

There exists much research suggesting the significance that media has on the shaping of one's perception of reality; Cultivation theory is part of this body of research. Researchers Gerbner, Gross, Morgan and Signiorielli consider media the dominant symbolic environment for many people and the theory suggests that media messages are of significant import to people's views of social reality (Gross, Morgan & Signiorielli, 1986 quoted in Jay & Jaschewitz, 2008:118). In more recent times, it has been argued that Hollywood films have a "deep and 'dominant' (Hughes, 1991, p. 198) influence on American culture, as they are not only shown in theaters but are seen by millions more on television and through video rentals (Waterman, 2005)." (Jay & Jaschewitz, 2008:118).

With the above in mind, the action genre is especially interesting to investigate as it is one of the most popular and lucrative genres of films in contemporary society. The site Box

Office Mojo, which lists the total gross income of films in the United States, reveals that out of the top-grossing films of the last ten years, no less than eight were of the action genre (Yearly Box Office, boxofficemojo.com [online] & imdb.com [online]). This means that out of all available genres, action is the genre to reach and affect the most people. Because of this wide reach, the representations of gender in the genre are arguably more important to uncover and analyze than in, perhaps, any other genre. It has thus been chosen as the genre in focus of this study.

Having discussed the purpose and aims of the study, it is appropriate to have a closer look at the folk linguistic notions studied, as well as the action genre itself. Finally, the technique Content Analysis is detailed, as it is the chief instrument by which results are gathered from the material.

1.2 Folk linguistics and the notions studied

The term folk linguistics refers to theories of language held by those who do not study it (Edlund, Erson & Milles, 2007:60). Most, if not all, language stereotypes can be said to belong to folk linguistics and have typically little or no research to support them. In fact, many folk linguistic assumptions directly oppose the opinions and research of actual linguists. Below are detailed the folk linguistic notions of gendered language that are studied in this essay. Their perceived reasons for existence are also listed. It is important to note that the explanations listed here are not to be considered 'proof' of a notion's factuality, but rather as folk linguistic in nature as the notions themselves.

1.2.1 Women talk more than men

The folk linguistic notion that women talk more than men is a particularly widespread notion, acting as the basis for several idiomatic expressions such as the Dutch *vrouwentunge* meaning 'Womantounge' which compares the female tongue to an ever-fluttering leaf. Another example of an idiom born from this notion is the Chinese expression "A woman's tongue is her sword and she does not let it rust". The reason for this extreme verbosity was investigated by Cederschiöld in 1900 and Lindqvist in 1945 (Edlund, Erson & Milles, 2007:61). Both found that it was the inherent emotionality of the female language that caused her to be impulsive in her speech and this led to her having a high rate of it. Jespersen also found that the difference in speech could be attributed to a difference in work environment, both in our primitive past and in today's society. (Edlund, Erson & Milles, 2007:62)

A more contemporary explanation to the notion of women speaking more than men is provided by Talbot, who writes that it is a result of women's speech being compared to an

ideal of silence rather than men's speech. (Talbot 2003:473). Yet another explanation for the existence of the notion comes from Adelswärd, who suggests that the topics brought up by women in conversation might be considered uninteresting by men, an opinion which is then understood as truth by women. This would explain why women are considered more talkative, as continuously bringing up uninteresting topics oftentimes equals to talking too much. (Adelswärd, 1999:63)

1.2.2 Men swear more than women

In 1973, Robin Lakoff released the book *Language and woman's place*, a book which was to be the starting signal for feministic language study and up to this day acts as part of the feminist discussion of language with it being re-released with added commentaries in 2004. The book was written with the purpose to investigate women's position in society by analyzing the language use of and about women. Her reasoning is based on an introspective method, meaning that she had no empirical evidence for her findings (Edlund, Erson & Milles, 2007:66). In her book, Lakoff finds 9 ways in which the language use of men and women differs; the folk linguistic notion studied here is one of them.

Lakoff explains the phenomenon of men swearing more than women with boys being brought up with much larger leeway when it comes to expressing emotion than girls. Lakoff writes that: "high spirits are expected and therefore tolerated in little boys; docility and resignation are the corresponding traits for little girls" (Lakoff, 1973:51).

Another possible reason relates to the notion of women being more concerned with building and maintaining social relationships than men. Talbot provides a boiled-down version of this, illustrating the essentials of the idea (Talbot, 2003:491):

Closeness - Communion	*Distance - Control*
Sympathy	Problem-solving
Rapport	Report
Listening	Lecturing
Private	Public
Connection	Status
Supportive	Oppositional
Intimacy	Independence

The Closeness - Communion column is what is traditionally thought to be representative of female speech, while the Distance - Control column represents male speech. This table

provides a possible explanation for the reasoning behind the folk linguistic notion, as the Closeness - Communion column is in many ways concerned with the opinion of others, and swearing, as a potentially socially offensive act, could negatively impact this. the Distance - Control column, however, is much less concerned with the opinion of others, meaning that swearing has less of a negative social impact.

Another reason for this folk linguistic notion's existence comes from Adelswärd, who explains it as a result of the difference in social roles that women and men occupy, especially in past times. Women have to pay more attention to how they look and to superficial traits in their behaviour than men. (Adelswärd, 1999:139) This leads to women generally being considered to use 'nicer' language; a notion which, if accepted as truth by women, would lead to women producing less swear words.

1.2.3 Women use more tag and intonation questions than men

Yule (2006) describes tag questions as "short questions consisting of an auxiliary (e.g. *don't*) and a pronoun (e.g. *you*), added to the end of a statement [...]" (Yule, 2006:251). An example of this phenomenon from the studied material is this conversation between three characters from the film *National Treasure* (2004) (the comments within brackets are my own. Underlined section marks the tag question in the segment):

(1)

[The character Ian Howe has just jokingly suggested that the characters turn their ongoing expedition around due to the character Riley Poole's superstitious statements]

"Gates: Or we could pull over and just throw him out here"
[Gates and Howe laugh]
Poole: [sarcastic laughter] Okay...
Gates: Hey, Riley, you're not missing that little windowless cubicle we found you in, <u>are you?</u>" (*National Treasure*, 2004).

An intonation question is similar to a tag question in that it modifies a statement to become a question. However, instead of doing it through adding words to a statement, it is done through uttering the statement using the intonation of a question (Edlund et al. 2007:66). An example from the studied material is this conversation between two characters from the film *Mr. & Mrs. Smith* (2005) (the comments within brackets are my own. The underlined section marks the intonation question in the segment):

(2)

[The character Jane has recently purchased new drapes, and is requesting a reupholstering of their furniture and a new rug for them to match these drapes]

"John: Yeah, or we could keep the old ones. Then we don't have to change a thing.
Jane: We talked about this. <u>You remember?</u>" (Mr. & Mrs. Smith, 2005)

This folk linguistic notion argues that women are more prone to using the above detailed forms, and is another example of the 9 language traits that separate the language of females from that of males, according to Lakoff (1973). The notion stems from the idea that women are more polite than men, and one aspect of politeness is, according to Lakoff, "leaving a decision open, not imposing your mind, or views, or claims, on anyone else" (Lakoff, 1973:56). It is this aspect of politeness that is used as an explanation for the extensive use of tag and intonation questions; women allegedly want to invite others into the decision-making process by turning their declarative statements into questions. Lakoff argues that the more a statement resembles a request, the more polite, and unmasculine, it sounds and is therefore the form most likely to be used by women, given that women from a young age are taught to behave like polite "little ladies" (Lakoff, 1973:57). Cameron et. al. discusses the status of part of this folk linguistic notion, writing that "The idea that women use more tag questions than men because tags in many contexts indicate tentativeness and approval-seeking has passed out of the domain of academic speculation and into folk linguistic common sense [...]" (Cameron, McAlinden & O'Leary, 1988:80).

1.2.4 The specific variables studied

The variables studied for the purpose of determining the existence of each studied folk linguistic notion in the material are as follows:

- Number of lines produced
- Number of swear words produced
- Number of tag and intonation questions produced

The reasons for the choice of most variables are self-evident; for instance, studying the frequency of swear words uttered should provide a fairly accurate estimation of the usage of swear words in action films. However, special attention should be paid to the choice of studying lines instead of words, which is a more traditional variable of study in the linguistic field. The reason for the choice of lines is that scripts that accurately detail all the speech in a film were unavailable during the conduction of the study. Studying the amount of words

would thus require a transcription of all verbal utterances in a film, an undertaking which would unfortunately prove too time-consuming for a study of this scope. Thus, lines are considered a more appropriate variable to study; being roughly equal to a turn in conversation or a verbal utterance in a film format and therefore representative of the speech in an action film while being a less time-consuming variable to measure the frequency of. How a line is defined for the purposes of this study is detailed in the method section.

1.3 The action genre

The Collins English Dictionary defines an action film, or an "actioner", as "a film with a fast-moving plot, usually containing scenes of violence" (actioner, collinsdictionary.com [online]). The action genre has been "one of the most dominant genres of popular cinema since the early 1980's" (Brown, 1996:52). It is also safe to say that it has been, and in many ways still is, a predominantly male arena. Yvonne Tasker goes as far as to label it an "almost exclusively male space, in which issues to do with sexuality and gendered identity can be worked out over the male body." (Tasker, 1993:17 quoted in Brown, 1996:52). The female gender is not entirely unrepresented within the confines of the genre, however, as in the early 1990's films such as *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* and *Blue Steel* were produced, building upon the success of the few 80's action films featuring female protagonists. These films featured strong, capable heroines that were more than 'damsels in distress'; they could defeat the villains and save the day just as easily as any male hero could (Inness, 2004:2). Inness traces this development back to second-wave feminism, which swept through America during the last decades of the century. Feminists questioned the notions that women are not aggressive in nature, that they are not capable of facing the same challenges as men, and also taught women to challenge the gender status quo. This led to women pursuing roles that were previously almost exclusively held by men such as soldier, police officer and fire fighter (Inness, 2004:5). This change in reality was then reflected in popular culture, leading to the action heroine claiming her share of the spotlight and prompting this quote by Stephanie Mencimer in *Washington monthly:* "This year, the muscle-bound stars of the actions-film blockbusters of the '80s and '90s have found themselves ungraciously drop-kicked out of the genre by, of all things, a bunch of girls. Girl power flicks like Charlie's Angels, Crouching Tiger, and Tomb Raider are topping the $100 million mark once dominated by men like Schwarzenegger." (Mencimer, 2001:15).

1.4 Content Analysis

The term Content Analysis is sometimes used to refer to a variety of methods used to analyse texts, but typically refers to the method of quantitatively measuring certain aspects of a media text (Gill, 2007:43). The most well-known examples of the method being used are the three Global Media Monitoring projects carried out in 1995, 2000 and 2005. The projects were designed to be a part of the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing's Platform for Action as an urgent need for including media issues, something which had been downplayed in pervious conferences, was perceived. That the importance of including media was felt around the world was proven by the fact that no less than 71 countries took part in the study. Margaret Gallagher wrote this on the import of the study:

"The significance of this project was enormous. The 1995 Global Media Monitoring Project gave women a tool with which to scrutinize their media in a systematic way, and a means of documenting gender bias and exclusion [...] The process of monitoring their news media proved an eye opening, educational experience for many of those involved. For some it created new awareness of the pervasiveness of gender stereotyping. For others it provided concrete evidence to support long held personal opinions." (Gallagher, 2001:27)

As the quote illustrates, Content Analysis has been a valuable tool for exposing and questioning representations of gender in the media as well as documenting the prevailing stereotypes of men and women. Despite this, many of the underlying assumptions of the technique have been criticized. It has been argued that the notion of media being a mirror for society is inherently faulty and could be damaging for our understanding of the relationship between gender and the media (Gill, 2007:44). This issue is not taken into consideration during the execution of this study, however. Another problem with the method is presented by Gill when she writes that "[...] research in the content analytic tradition tells us little about the images it examines, except how frequently they occur". This problem should have a minimal impact on the study at hand; however, as the folk linguistic notions studied only concern the frequency of certain variables, and what would otherwise be a weakness in the technique is thus a strength in the case of this study.

2. Method and Material

2.1 Method

The study focuses on the speech of the protagonist(s) in the researched films. The definition of the word 'protagonist' used for this study comes from oxforddictionaries.com, which

describes it as "The leading character or one of the major characters in a play, film, novel, etc. " (protagonist, oxforddictionaries.com [online]). The reason for the choice of these characters as the object of study is that characters in this position have been found to get the most time on screen in the studied material. Because of this higher exposure, the opportunity for studying their language use is much greater than if the object of study had been the speech of other characters with less exposure on screen.

As the official and finalized film manuscripts were unavailable during the conduction of the study, all folk linguistic notions were researched through a thorough watching of the material in question. Each film and variable was analyzed and counted twice, to minimize the risk of a variable passing unnoticed. Even so, the risk could not be eliminated completely as the method necessarily suffers from the human factor.

Both clearly audible and more-or-less inaudible variables are measured, meaning that, for instance, a swear that is merely mouthed is still considered a swear for the purposes of this study. In other words, the character is considered to be 'speaking' even if what is said is not audible.

For the 'Women talk more than men' notion, the amount of lines a protagonist utters are counted. Much like a turn, a line can be as short as a single word and as long as several sentences and like a turn, lines are considered separated by shifts in turn-taking. However, unlike turns, lines can be uttered outside of conversation, as reactions to changes in the context in which the character finds themselves, and sometimes with no apparent recipient present. To account for this, lines are considered separated by shifts in turn-taking or by events which significantly change the context in which the lines are spoken. To illustrate to process of defining a line, observe this example from the material (the comments within brackets are my own):

(3)

[In this segment, the character Frank Martin finds a syringe that he has been looking for in a closed-off hospital, when he is ambushed by the henchmen of the antagonist of the film]

"Henchman #1: [to Martin] Don't move. [to Henchman #2 in the other room] Smith! [to Martin] Drop it.
[A fight-scene occurs, after which Martin finds that the syringe has been broken]
Martin: Fuck!" (*The transporter 2*, 2005)

In the quoted passage, Frank Martin utters a word, although not as a turn in a conversation, and with no apparent recipient. It is nevertheless counted as a line for the purposes of this

study, and is thus added to the total amount of speech produced by this protagonist.

It should also be mentioned that in order for a line be used in this study, it has to consist of words codified in a dictionary. Thus, sounds like screams of pain or non-verbal acts like nodding one's head are not considered lines for the purpose of this study, as they hardly could be considered "speech" and are thus not relevant for the study of the folk linguistic notion.

For the study of the 'Men swear more than women' notion, all types of profanity naturally can not be included. The range of words that can be considered profane is simply too large to be fully encompassed in a study of this kind. Furthermore, there are also issues with determining whether a word should be considered offensive or not, a problem The British Board of Film Classification encountered that led to the statement that "The definition of 'bad' language was clearly a very personal issue [...]" (BBFC, 2000:27). Even so, Mike Thelwal compiles a list of profane words for his study *Fk yea I swear: Cursing and gender in a corpus of MySpace pages*. As the goal of this and Thelwal's studies are similar in that they seek to provide insight into the usage of swear words, most of Thelwal's list of profane words is used for the research of the source material of this study. The part of Thelwal's list not used for the purpose of this essay is the section containing profane words classified as "Very Mild" (see Appendix 2). The reason for the exclusion of this section comes from Thelwal himself, who writes that "these are problematic because many are ambiguous, and it seems impossible to get a large enough list to give reasonable coverage." (Thelwal, 2008:9).

For the 'Women use more tag and intonation questions' notion, different approaches had to be taken for the two types of questions. For tag questions, the definition detailed by Yule (2006) (see pg. 4) is used to identify instances where this variable is used. For intonation questions, only instances are used in which a statement is modified to resemble a question by the usage of a rise in tone at the final position of the utterance. Factors such as context, tone of voice, and other potential contributing factors are also taken into account in order to judge whether an individual line actually serves the purpose of a question or not. This is because intonation in questions, in some cases, has hardly audible shifts, and by using the context and the response of other characters, its nature can be determined more precisely.

The results from the research of the three folk linguistic notions are compared. Firstly, comparison is made between male and female protagonists in general. This means that data from the research of the language use of sole male protagonists and males acting as co-protagonists are compared to that of sole female protagonists and females acting as co-protagonists. Secondly, comparison is made between the male and female co-protagonists.

2.2 Material

This study concerns itself with three types of action films. These types are as follows:

1. Films in which the protagonist is of the male gender.
2. Films in which the protagonist is of the female gender.
3. Films in which both genders are represented as co-protagonists.

Out of the 10 films chosen for this study, 4 films are of the first category, 4 are from the second, and 2 are from the third.

To determine whether or not a film is of the action genre, the Internet Movie Database (hence referred to as the IMDb) is consulted. The IMDb provides guidelines for would-be contributors to the database. There is one such guideline for every genre, and the one for the action genre reads as follows: "Should contain numerous scenes where action is spectacular and usually destructive. **Note**: if a film contains just one action scene (even if prolonged, e.g., airplane-accident) it does not qualify. Subjective." (Submission Guide: Genres, IMDb.com [online]) The word "Subjective" in the quote means that the decision of whether or not a film belongs to this genre is not always clear and that judgment based on more-or-less subjective reasoning has to be done for every film. Nevertheless, the criteria listed by the IMDb are deemed satisfactory for this study, as the categorization of any work of art into a genre tends to be subjective to some extent.

Another criterion for a film to be used in the study is that the main spoken language in the film must be English. The film does not have to be set in an English-speaking country, however. Moreover, for a film to be used in the study, it has to be produced in the western world. This is because the folk linguistic notions that are researched in this study are more relevant to western society.

Yet another criterion is that the film has to be set in modern-day society. Thus, any film set in a period earlier than the late 1900's will be excluded from the study. The reason for this is that time has significant impact on the results, as language use is in a state of constant flux. Because of this, what was once considered foul language may no longer carry this status. Thus, results gathered from a film set in a period earlier than the late 1900's are not relevant as they do not provide information about the present-day usage of swear words in action films.

Films were selected on the basis of the Motion Picture Association of America's (MPAA) rating system. The system categorizes films into the five categories G, PG, PG-13, R and NC-17. A rating of 'G' indicates that the film is approved for general audiences, meaning that all ages are admitted. 'PG' indicates that parental guidance is suggested for the watching of the

film. The rating 'PG-13' means that a film is not advisable for children under the age of 13. 'R' stands for restricted, meaning that children under 17 are not allowed to watch the film without a parent present. Finally, 'NC-17' indicates that no children under the age of 17 are admitted (What Each Rating Means, MPAA.org [online]). Out of these five categories, only films rated PG-13 and R are selected for the study, with 50% of the material consisting of films rated PG-13 and 50% consisting of films rated R.

The material under study consists of a total of 1105 minutes of film. To prevent the production of variables being dictated by the length of the individual films, films were selected so that an almost equal amount of minutes were distributed to either gender. Out of 1105 minutes, 437 minutes were provided by films featuring a sole male protagonist and 442 minutes by those featuring a sole female protagonist. The remaining 226 minutes were provided by the films featuring both a female and a male protagonist.

2.2.1 The curious case of *Underworld: evolution*

Lastly, it is appropriate to devote some attention to a specific film in the material: *Underworld: evolution*. The reason for this is that this film contains two elements that are otherwise unrepresented in the material. First*, Underworld: evolution* is part of the *Underworld* series, in which the character Selene is a recurring protagonist. This is the case in *Underworld: evolution* as well, meaning that while the male protagonist Michael still has a clear position as protagonist, Selene should be considered a bit more so, due to her role as sole protagonist in the previous film *Underworld* (2003). Second, at one point in the film, the character Michael dies only to be resurrected about 10 minutes later into the film. During the short period of Michael's death, however, Selene's role transforms from being a co-protagonist to being the sole protagonist. This means that the film essentially changes category for 10 minutes, which, while it barely has any effect on the actual results, as a minimal amount of variables (lines, swear words, tag and intonation questions) are uttered by Selene during this time and Michael remains silent until the end of the film even post-resurrection, affects the potential results, as Michael could have produced many variables had he not been dead; something that cannot be tested.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

3.1.1 Folk linguistic notion #1: Women talk more than men

A total of 2533 lines were observed in the material under study. Table 1 shows the number of lines produced by each protagonist. The results are presented alphabetically in a table separated into two columns with the first detailing the production of male protagonists and the second detailing that of female protagonists.

Table 1. *Number of lines produced by protagonists sectioned according to the gender of each protagonist.*

Male Protagonists			Female Protagonists		
Title	Lines	U.S. Year of Release	Title	Lines	U.S. Year of Release
A Man Apart	213	2003	Kill Bill 2	131	2004
Blood Work	409	2002	Mr. & Mrs. Smith	301	2005
Mr. & Mrs. Smith	376	2005	Resident Evil	113	2002
National Treasure	364	2004	Tomb Raider II	193	2003
Transporter 2	156	2005	Ultra Violet	145	2006
Underworld: Evo	45	2006	Underworld: Evo.	87	2006
Total: 1563 (62% of grand total: 2533)			Total: 970 (38% of grand total: 2533)		

3.1.2 Folk linguistic notion #2: Men swear more than women

A total of 199 swear words were observed in the material under study. For this particular notion, the results are presented according to the rating of the films. The number of incidences of swear words per 100 lines is also listed.

Table 2. *Number of swear words produced by protagonists sectioned according to the gender of each protagonist.*

	Male Protagonists				Female Protagonists			
Rating	Title	Swear words	Incidence of S.W. (per 100 lines)	Year of U.S. Release	Title	Swear words	Incidence of S.W. (per 100 lines)	Year of U.S. release
R	A Man Apart	41	19.2	2003	Kill Bill 2	11	8.40	2004
R	Blood Work	12	2.93	2002	Underworld: Evo.	5	5.75	2006
R	Underworld: Evo.	6	13.3	2006	Resident Evil	4	3.54	2002
PG	Mr. & Mrs. Smith	15	3.99	2005	Ultra Violet	11	7.59	2006
PG	Transporter 2	2	1.28	2005	Mr. & Mrs. Smith	10	3.32	2005
PG	National Treasure	0	0.00	2004	Tombraider II	2	1.04	2003
Total: 76 (64% of grand total 119 and a total of 4.86 S.W. per 100 lines)					Total: 43 (36% of grand total 119 and a total of 4.43 S.W. per 100 lines)			

3.1.3 Folk linguistic notion #3: Women use more tag and intonation questions

A total of 32 tag questions and 122 intonation questions were observed in the material under study. The results from this final notion are presented alphabetically in two tables separated into two columns with the first column detailing the production of male protagonists and the

second column detailing that of female protagonists. The number of incidences of tag and intonation questions per 100 lines is also listed.

Table 3. *Number of tag questions produced by protagonists sectioned according to the gender of each protagonist.*

Male Protagonists				Female Protagonists			
Title	Tag Questions	Incidence of Tag. Q. (per 100 lines)	U.S. Year of Release	Title	Tag Questions	Incidence of Tag. Q. (per 100 lines)	U.S. Year of Release
A Man Apart	5	2.35	2003	Kill Bill 2	3	2.29	2003
Blood Work	11	2.69	2002	Mr. & Mrs. Smith	3	1.00	2002
Mr. & Mrs. Smith	7	1.86	2005	Resident Evil	2	1.77	2005
National Treasure	7	1.92	2004	Tomb Raider II	3	1,55	2004
Transporter 2	1	0.64	2005	Ultra Violet	6	4.14	2005
Underworld: Evo	1	2.22	2006	Underworld: Evo.	2	2.30	2006
Total: 32 (63% of grand total 51 and a total of 2.05 Tag. Q. per 100 lines)				Total: 19 lines (37% of grand total 51 and a total of 1.96 Tag. Q. per 100 lines)			

Table 4. *Number of intonation questions produced by protagonists sectioned according to the gender of each protagonist.*

Male Protagonists				Female Protagonists			
Title	Intonation Questions	Incidence of Int. Q. (per 100 lines)	U.S. Year of Release	Title	Intonation Questions	Incidence of Int. Q. (per 100 lines)	U.S. Year of Release
A Man Apart	44	20.7	2003	Kill Bill 2	7	5.34	2003
Blood Work	24	5.87	2002	Mr. & Mrs. Smith	24	7.97	2002
Mr. & Mrs. Smith	28	7.45	2005	Resident Evil	9	7.96	2005
National Treasure	18	4.95	2004	Tomb Raider II	12	6.22	2004
Transporter 2	6	3.85	2005	Ultra Violet	9	6.21	2005
Underworld: Evo	2	4.44	2006	Underworld: Evo.	2	2.30	2006
Total: 122 (66% of grand total 185 and a total of 7.81 Int. Q. per 100 lines)				Total: 63 (34% of grand total 185 and a total of 6.49 Int. Q. per 100 lines)			

3.2 Discussion

The most prominent result of this study is that men produce the highest number of every variable studied. However, the production of studied variables between male and female protagonists differs by roughly the same percentage for every variable. The production of any studied variable by male protagonists varies between 62-66% of the total occurrences of the variable, including the number of lines uttered. This means that the high number of studied variables uttered by male protagonists is likely to be a result of male protagonists uttering more lines than female protagonists. This theory receives further support from the fact that the

numbers of incidences per 100 lines are very similar between the two genders for all variables studied, differing with 1.32 variables per 100 lines, at most. The results of this study could thus be attributed less to the existence of notions of gendered language and more to the unequal distribution of speech in general, which is likely to be a result of the male domination of the action genre.

Due to the limited material of the study, statistical significance is an issue, and the results can thus not be used as a basis for the explanation of themselves (i.e. the result from the study of the line variable explaining the results of the study of other variables) in a satisfactory way. Thus, analyzing the results from the study of each folk linguistic notion more in-depth as well as comparing the results to other relevant studies with larger material, and thus more representative results, provides a more credible insight into potential gender-related aspects of the results. For the sake of clarity, the results of each folk linguistic notion are discussed in their own section. After the results from the study of a folk linguistic notion have been discussed, films featuring both a male and a female as co-protagonists are discussed in relation to the studied notion.

3.2.1 Women speak more than men

As is evident from viewing Table 1, the male protagonists have more lines than the female protagonists in almost every film studied. The reasons for male protagonists having a significantly higher number of lines than female protagonists is likely to lie partly in the way speech is distributed between protagonist and supporting characters and partly in the genre this study concerns itself with (action). In action films containing a male as sole protagonist, the supporting characters would most of the time act as stepping stones for the main character to verbally move the story forward. In films featuring a sole female protagonist, however, there were often prominent supporting characters present who would handle much of the speaking alongside the protagonist, many of them having a 'sidekick' type of role. Interestingly enough, these supporting characters were in almost all cases males.

Films featuring a sole male protagonist were not completely void of 'sidekick' types of characters, however. These characters were present in two of these films and were in the first case male, in the second case a male and a female. However, in films featuring a sole male protagonist, these characters had a role much more like the average supporting character, whereas in the films featuring a sole female protagonist they seemed to be almost competing for the role as protagonist, handling a much larger part of the dialogue than what would normally be allotted a supporting character.

Another likely reason for the unequal distribution of lines is the genre of the studied films. As the quote by Yvonne Tasker in the description of the action genre indicates (see pg. 6), the genre has a legacy of being dominated by the male gender and because of this, it might seem 'natural' for a male action protagonist to take up more space than for a female one, leading to an unequal allocation of lines. Another related reason for the inequality lies with a type of character that produced a large number of lines: detectives. This is likely due to the actions that these types of characters carry out in their line of work, such as investigation, interrogation etc. These acts often lead to the protagonist partaking in conversation with other characters, which in turn leads to a large number of lines being produced. Two films, *Blood work* and *A man apart*, featured a character in this position, both with a sole male protagonist. This might then serve as part of the explanation for why the protagonists of these two films had a high total number of lines.

3.2.1.1 Films featuring a male and female as co-protagonists

As Table 1 shows (see pg. 12), Selene, the female protagonist of *Underworld: evolution* has almost twice as many lines as Michael, the male protagonist. This means that *Underworld: evolution* can be seen as going against the trend where men have more lines than women. The film thus adheres to the studied notion of gendered language. A possible explanation for this situation lies in the fact that this particular film is part of a series where the female protagonist Selene holds the position of a protagonist, as was explained in the "The curious case of *Underworld: evolution"* section (see pg. 11).

Judging from the results, *Underworld: evolution* can be seen as going against the trend, but can the same be said for *Mr. & Mrs. Smith?* The total number of lines in the material is distributed so that 62% of them are uttered by male protagonists and 38% by female protagonists. In *Mr. & Mrs. Smith* the distribution is more equal, with 56% of the lines uttered by the male protagonist, and 44% of them by the female protagonist. While this break from the trend might not be as marked as that in *Underworld: Evolution*, it is nevertheless a more equal distribution than what is the tendency in the entire material.

A possible reason for the increased equality of line distribution lies in the circumstances of this type of film. In films featuring a sole protagonist, only the lines produced by this character were measured. Thus, any lines produced by a supporting character in response to those uttered by the protagonist went unregistered by the study. In films featuring two protagonists, however, the lines produced by one protagonist were often directed to the other

protagonist, who would in most cases respond. The response would in this case be registered, unlike the response of a supporting character, meaning that all turns in a conversation between two protagonists were registered, which leads to a more equal production of lines between the genders.

3.2.2 Men swear more than women

The results presented in Table 2 are similar to those of a study conducted by Cressman, Callister, Robinson & Near (2009) on swearing in teen films where the language use of both protagonists and supporting characters was studied. In their study, Cressman et. al. found that out of a total of 2311 swear words, female characters uttered 28% and male 72% (Cressman, Callister, Robinson & Near 2009:125). While the numbers of this and Cressman et. al.'s study do not match exactly (possibly due to them not dealing with the same genre or the same type of characters), they do seem to point to the same conclusion: men swear more than women in films.

Why is it that male protagonists swear more than female protagonists in action films? Is it possible that men swear more than women in the real world and that the language use of male protagonists in action films in this instance are accurate portrayals of a real world phenomenon? The researchers Jay and Janschewitz would probably disagree, as their study has demonstrated that, while offensiveness of the language varies depending on the gender of the speaker and that of the listener, men and women swear at roughly the same rate (Jay & Janschewitz, 2006 quoted in Jay & Janschewitz, 2008:272). What has been proven, however, is that both men and women are more likely to swear in same-sex environments than in mixed-sex ones (Jay, 1992 quoted in Jay & Janschewitz, 2008:274). Considering that women often had a male 'sidekick' with them, this might serve as an explanation for their low frequency of swearing.

Another reason for male protagonists having a higher number of swear words in the study is the inclusion of the character Sean Vetter from *A man apart* (2005). This character skews the results of the male protagonists side in a significant way, with his total of 41 swear words (almost three times as many as the next highest producer) and 19.2 incidences of swear words per 100 lines (more than twice the number of the next highest producer). Should he be excluded from the study, the number of incidences per 100 lines for the male side would decrease by 2.27. This change would lead to female protagonist having a higher number of incidences of swear words per 100 lines than male protagonists which would mean that the opposite situation of what has been claimed in the studied notion of gendered language would

be present in the material.

A break from the trend of men swearing more than women can be found in the PG section of Table 2 (see pg. 12). In this section, women swear more than men in all cases but one. The reasons for these results are unclear. One explanation could be that men have been proven to use more offensive words than women when they swear (Jay, 1992 quoted in Jay & Janschewitz, 2008:274). This might mean that films that contain male protagonists who swear are more likely to receive an R-rating than those with female protagonists doing the same. Due to the narrow material of the study, however, any conclusions have to be considered highly speculative.

3.2.2.2 Films featuring a male and female as co-protagonists

Having discussed the results all-in-all, it is interesting to look at the special case of the films which feature both a male and a female protagonist. On a surface level, we can see a similar tendency as in the first folk linguistic notion, i.e. that the distribution of variables between female and male protagonists is more equal. However, looking at the number of incidences per 100 lines, we see that while the number of swear words between the two protagonists in *Underworld: evolution* only differs by one instance, the numbers of incidences differ by as much as 7.55 swear words per 100 lines. It thus seems that this particular folk linguistic notion is stronger in this film than what it is in the overall material. This goes against the findings of Jay (1992) presented earlier in this section, which show that both genders swear less in mixed-sex environments. A possible explanation for this is that the writers of the script, or perhaps the actor himself, affected by the folk linguistic notion in question, saw a need to assert the character's masculinity through a use of what is thought to be a traditionally 'male' mode of speech, i.e. swearing.

The situation is not the same in *Mr. & Mrs. Smith*, however. In this film, the number of swear words produced and the ratio of swear words per 100 lines differ by 5 instances and a ratio of 0.63 swear words per 100 lines. This film thus reflects the situation in the overall material, with the male and female protagonists having about the same number of incidences per 100 lines, but with male protagonists producing a higher number of swear words due to them having more lines than female protagonists.

3.2.3 Women use more intonation and tag questions than men

The results from the study of this folk linguistic notion reflect those of the other notions with male protagonists producing higher values than their female counterparts (which is, as was

mentioned on pg. 13, likely to be a result of male protagonists having more lines than female protagonists).

The results in Table 3 (see pg. 13) reflect those found by Cameron et al. in her study of the usage of tag questions in male and female casual speech. In fact, the results correlate almost exactly, with her study resulting in the 62.5% as 37.5% ratio in favour of male users (Cameron, McAlinden & O'Leary, 1988:85). This might suggest that the action films under study to some extent reflect a real world phenomenon where men, in fact, use more tag questions than women.

A possible reason for the high number of intonation questions produced by male protagonists in Table 4 (see pg. 13) is, as in the 'Men swear more than women' notion, the inclusion of the character Sean Vetter from *A man apart* in the material. Vetter produces the highest number of intonation questions out of all the characters under study and this may be partly a result of his usage of AAVE (African American Vernacular English). Namely, when asking questions, Vetter's syntax suggests that he is making a statement. An example of this can be found in this scene from the material under study (the comments within brackets are my own):

(4)
[In this scene, Vetter and his partner Hicks are interrogating the character Monroe, but Monroe starts to have second thoughts about cooperating]

"Vetter: You're sure about that?
Monroe: Take it like you want to, man.
Vetter: You're not gonna tell us anything else?
Monroe: Nothin' else!
Vetter: [To Hicks] He don't wanna talk anymore?
Hicks: [That's] what he's saying, he ain't gon' talk.
Vetter: You're sure about that?
Monroe: Here you go..." (A man apart, 2003)

Four questions are asked by Vetter in this short segment, all of which have the structure of a statement but are meant to be understood as questions and feature the studied form of question intonation. The fact that this character frequently utilizes this type of question increases the number of intonation questions asked by male protagonists drastically. Should Vetter be excluded from the study, the production of intonation questions by male protagonists would decrease by 2.3 instances of intonation questions per 100 lines. This change would lead to

female protagonists having the higher number of incidences per 100 lines with 6.49 compared to the 5.78 incidences per 100 lines of the male protagonists.

3.2.3.3 Films featuring a male and female as co-protagonists
Looking at Table 3 (see pg. 13), the trend of male protagonists providing the higher numbers seems to stay strong in *Mr. & Mrs. Smith*, where the male protagonist has more than twice as many tag questions as his female counterpart. Moreover, the male protagonist's number of incidences per 100 lines is almost twice as high as the number produced by the female protagonist of the same film. In *Underworld: evolution*, however, the proportion of tag questions is much more equal with the female protagonist only uttering one more tag question than the male. The numbers of incidences per 100 lines are also similar, with the female protagonists producing only 0.08 more tag questions per 100 lines.

Looking at Table 4, the male protagonist of *Mr. & Mrs. Smith* has one more intonation question than the female protagonist of the same film. The film also features very similar numbers of incidences per 100 lines between the genders, differing only by 0.52 intonation questions per 100 lines. In *Underworld: Evolution*, however, the difference is more pronounced. While the number of variables produced between the genders is exactly the same, their numbers of incidences per 100 lines differs by 2.14, favouring the female protagonist. We can thus in this film see a marked break from the trend of men having the higher ratio of intonation questions present in the overall material. Keeping in mind that this is a film which presents breaks from the overall trend in all of the previously discussed folk linguistic notions, as well, a pattern begins to form. All observed breaks from the trend in this film lead to the male and female protagonist behaving according to their respective folk linguistic notions. In other words, the male protagonist swears at a considerably higher ratio than the female counterpart, and the female protagonist produces more lines, more tag questions, and twice as many intonation questions as the male protagonist. A possible explanation is thus that the writers may have wanted the characters to adhere to the folk linguistic notions relating to the gender of the characters, as a way of pronouncing the 'femininity' of the female protagonist, and the 'masculinity' of the male protagonist.

4. Conclusion

The fact that male protagonists generated the highest numbers of all studied variable instances lead to the existence of only one of the three folk linguistic notions being verified in the material under study: Men swear more than women. There is research which suggests that this

might actually be representative of real life, as both genders have been found to swear less when in a mixed-sex environment (Jay, 1992 quoted in Jay & Janschewitz, 2008:274). Considering that this was the case more often for female protagonists, the lower number of swear words could be partially attributed to this tendency. Nevertheless, the pervasiveness of a folk linguistic notion should not be ignored, and the fact that male protagonists in the material swore more could also be an example of stereotypical notions of gendered language affecting the scripts of the studied films.

While it is clear that male protagonists produce the highest number of occurrences of any studied variable, the rate at which they do so is interesting. Male protagonists produce about 2/3 of the total number of occurrences of a variable, including the line variable. Considering that the numbers of incidences of all studied variables per 100 lines are relatively similar between the genders, it is likely that the inequality of produced variables stems from the unequal distribution of lines between the genders. An explanation for this unequal proportion of lines per gender is the traditional male domination of the action genre which could lead to them being considered 'entitled to' or more fit for a larger part in an action film. This is further illustrated by the fact that most of the female protagonists in the material had some form of male 'sidekick', which almost competed for the role as protagonist.

One character was found to skew the results of the study. This character is Sean Vetter from *A man apart* (2005). Vetter had a significant impact on the overall total on two of the folk linguistic notions as well as on their respective number of incidences per 100 lines. If this character was to be excluded from the study, female protagonists would have the highest number of incidences per 100 lines for both folk linguistic notions.

The study of the films featuring both a male and female protagonist simultaneously revealed that these types of films may be more notably affected by the folk linguistic notions studied than what is the case in the overall material. While *Mr. & Mrs. Smith* in most cases reflected the overall results, the film *Underworld: evolution* took a marked break from the overall trends. In this film, both protagonists behaved as dictated by the folk linguistic notions, and the male protagonist thus swore more than the female protagonist, while the female protagonist talked the most and used both intonation and tag questions more frequently than the male protagonist. A possible reason for this is that the writers felt a need for both characters to overtly display their gender through gender-stereotypic behaviour in order for some basic disparity between the personalities of the characters to be displayed. This might have been an attempt to create a dynamic relationship between them or perhaps project a 'traditional' image of the relationship between a man and a woman. Considering that this was

the case in only one of the two studied films, however, further research has to be conducted on the subject in order for the existence of a trend to be ascertained.

5. Suggestions for further research

There are many opportunities for further research in this field, some of which have been uncovered in the process of this study. One such is to expand the study quantitatively by studying more films from more years in order for the material to be more representative of the genre as a whole. Another suggestion is to include more folk linguistic notions of gendered language which would provide us with a deeper understanding of the possible existence of these in the action genre of films. It would also be interesting to include more genres of films in the study, as the results would then deepen our knowledge of how the film industry portrays the language of men and women in modern society. This would also allow for genres to be compared, something that would be interesting as the usage of folk linguistic notions of gendered language could differ between them.

Aside from quantitative expansions, it is possible to adapt a qualitative approach to the subject matter, studying each folk linguistic notion more closely. This would allow for the study of exactly which types of swear words are the ones most commonly used and if male protagonists in fact swear more severely than female ones. It would also be possible to gain a better understanding of the usage of tag and intonation questions as well as of the speech distribution between genders. However, this should be done with the more conventional approach of observing words uttered instead of the line variable used in this study as observing words uttered would provide a better insight into the actual amount of speech produced in the studied material. This would grant more knowledge concerning the existence of the 'Women talk more than men' notion in action films.

Another opportunity for further research lies in investigating films containing both female and male characters as co-protagonists. In the results of this study, one of the two studied films of this type shows exceptional adherence to the studied folk linguistic notions. It would thus be interesting to study more films of this type, in order to determine if these films are more heavily influenced by folk linguistic notions of gendered language than movies featuring sole protagonists are.

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Appendix 1

Details of the films studied.

Bloodwork
Genre: Action, Crime, Drama
Runtime: 1h 50 min
MPAA rating: R
Release (U.S.): 9 August, 2002

Protagonist(s): Terry McCaleb (Clint Eastwood)
Box Office gross: $26,235,081

Resident Evil
Genre: Action, Horror, Sci-Fi
Runtime: 1h 40 min
MPAA rating: R
Release (U.S.): 15 March, 2002
Protagonist(s): Alice (Milla Jovovich)
Box Office gross: $40,119,709

A Man Apart
Genre: Action, Crime, Drama
Runtime: 1h 49 min
MPAA rating: R
Release (U.S.): 4 April, 2003
Protagonist(s): Sean Vetter
Box Office gross: $26,736,098

Lara Croft: Tomb Raider: The Cradle of Life
Genre: Action, Adventure, Fantasy
Runtime: 1h 57 min
MPAA rating: PG
Release (U.S.): 25 July, 2003
Protagonist(s): Lara Croft (Angelina Jolie)
Box Office gross: $65,660,196

National Treasure
Genre: Action, Adventure, Mystery
Runtime: 2h 11 min
MPAA rating: PG
Release (U.S.): 19 November, 2004
Protagonist(s): Benjamin Franklin Gates (Nicolas Cage)
Box Office gross: $173,008,894

Kill Bill: Vol. 2
Genre: Action, Crime, Thriller
Runtime: 2h 17 min
MPAA rating: R
Release (U.S.): 16 April, 2004
Protagonist(s): Beatrix Kiddo (Uma Thurman)
Box Office gross: $66,208,183

Transporter 2

Genre: Action, Crime, Thriller
Runtime: 1h 27 min
MPAA rating: PG
Release (U.S.): 2 September, 2005
Protagonist(s): Frank Martin (Jason Statham)
Box Office gross: $43,095,856

Mr. & Mrs. Smith
Genre: Action, Comedy, Romance
Runtime: 2h
MPAA rating: PG
Release (U.S.): 10 June, 2005
Protagonist(s): John Smith (Brad Pitt), Jane Smith (Angelina Jolie)
Box Office gross: $186,336,279

Underworld Evolution
Genre: Action, Fantasy, Sci-Fi
Runtime: 1h 46 min
MPAA rating: R
Release (U.S.): 20 January, 2006
Protagonist(s): Selene (Kate Beckinsale), Michael (Scott Speedman)
Box Office gross: $62,318,875

Ultraviolet
Genre: Action, Sci-Fi
Runtime: 1h 34 min
MPAA rating: PG
Release (U.S.): 3 March, 2006
Protagonist(s): Violet Song Jat Shariff (Milla Jovovich)
Box Office gross: $18,535,812

Appendix 2

Swear words analyzed for the purpose of this study (as presented in Thelwal, 2008).

Swear words	Strength**
Cunt, jew, motherfuckin, motherfucking, muthafucker, muthafuckin, mutherfucker, nigga, niggah, niggas, niggaz, nigger, nigguh, paki	Very strong
Fuck, fucked, fucken, fucker, fuckin, fucking, fuckstick, spastic	Strong
Arsehole, asshole, bastard, bollock, cock, dick, gay, piss, pissin, pissing, poof, poofter, poofy, prick, pussy, queer, shag, shagged, shagging, twat, wank, wanker, wanking, whore	Moderate
Arse, arsed, ass, bitch, bugger, butthole, christ, cow, dickhead, dipshit, fanny, fart, jesus, moron, pissed, retard, screw, screwed, screwing, shit, shite, shithead, shittin, shitty, slag, slagged, slut, tit, titties, tosser	Mild
Bap, bimbo, bird, bloody, bonk, bonking, boob, bullshit, butt, butthead, crap,	Very

damn, dork, dorky, git, god, hell, hussy, idiot, jerk, jug, knocker, pig, pillock, pimp, sod, tart, tarty, turd, wuss	mild*

**"words are not categorised by the degree of offence given but by public average perceptions, which depend partly upon usage. For example *nigger* and *queer* could be extremely offensive in an abusive context but inoffensive in a reclaimed context. Similarly, *Jew* and *gay* could be used as insults or as neutral self-descriptions" (Thelwal, 2008: 18)

*Words in this category were not used for the purposes of this study.