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Gender Performance in Writing

Pedagogical Implications for Gender Performance in the English Language Teaching Classroom

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Abstract

Title: *Gender Performance in Writing – Pedagogical Implications for Gender Performance in the English Teaching Classroom*

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Abstract: The aim of this text based upon social constructionism is to discover if, and how, gender is performed in written texts by adult second language learners in English language courses in the UK, and to discuss the pedagogical implications of this. The primary materials were scripts written by students and the method was quantitative as well as qualitative. Literacy skills among students may differ, but this research pointed towards the fact that there is no different language for males and females. It was difficult to say whether or not the gender factor was important in the scripts, but the conclusion drawn was that it is important to continue discussing the gender issue throughout the teacher training programme, since teachers' treatment of students affect how students form the conception of themselves.

Keywords: gendered language, gender performance, heteronormativity, social constructionism, communicative approach, communication, gender-typical writing

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

In the upper secondary school teacher training programme at Gothenburg University, *gender awareness* is an important topic throughout the whole programme. The programme is divided into three parts, one General Education Field 1-3 and two directed towards the subjects, and the question of gender is presented in the mandatory literature throughout the General Education Field courses.

Sexism in language has been a debated topic, with focus on the power-relationship in language. Feminist activists have challenged the view of the preferred principal strategy, using men as the norm (Pauwels, 2003:557). This is what has occurred in Sweden with the emergence of the *hen*-pronoun. The gender aspect is interesting due to the emergence of the Swedish gender-neutral personal pronoun *hen*, which can be used instead of the gender specific *han* (he) or *hon* (she). Whether or not the word hen should be used, has been a widely debated question in Sweden, being connected to the gender and equality discourse (Institutet för Språk och Folkminnen, 2014).

However, not much research has been done on the gender perspective in language teaching, which is why this research project wants to fill the gap, raising an awareness of the gender issue in classrooms by discovering in what ways gender is performed and to discuss the pedagogical implications of it.

1.2 Aim and Scope

This interdisciplinary essay in the field of linguistics and pedagogics is based upon a sociolinguistic small scale research project conducted at the University of Sussex for the University of Gothenburg. Pedagogical aspects will be integrated throughout the whole essay, and in the discussion there will be a specific chapter discussing the pedagogical implications of gender in linguistics.

The aim of this essay was to conduct original primary research and analyse scripts in the form of written texts, in order to do a qualitative analysis to see if, and how, gender is performed in

written texts by students studying English as a Second Language. Raising an awareness of the gender issue in the classroom was set as main objective for this research. The gender issue is a hot topic for Swedish teacher trainees, and PISA results from 2012 show that there is a performance gap between boys and girls (OECD, 2013:166). With the results of this small scale project, it was expected to open up possibilities for further research in the area. The intention was to answer whether or not the hypothesis of this essay was applicable to the findings of this study. The hypothesis is that students will treat gender stereotypically: both performing gender in a stereotypical way, and describing males and females as they are stereotypically described. This hypothesis is based on the statement by Judith Butler (2010/1990:2552) that gender is a repeated *performance*, and that *heteronormativity* is the ruling hegemonic structure (Berlant & Warner, 2010/1998:2600).

1.3 Material and Method

A problem-oriented approach (Bell, 2010:125) has been used for this essay that also relies upon social constructionism. Previous research helped to discover a research gap, namely *gender performance* in written production, and its implications for teaching. Sunderland (2006:166) analysed labelling practices where lexical choices and social action were examined. When it comes to lexical choices, noun phrases were in focus; Sunderland wanted to see how social actors were referred to. Verbs were in focus when it comes to social action; verb types and verb phrases looking at whether the subjects and objects were active or passive. This content analysis method will be used in this essay, too. In other words, this essay will look at how sexes are described in the written texts, but also in what ways different sexes write. In order to analyse and code the scripts, indicators of gender performance were established, based on linguistics (see section 2.1.1 Indicators of Gender Performance), thereafter the scripts were mapped against these indicators. This was done in order to find answers for questions such as; where is the main focus of the texts, on people and their interactions, or on events and accomplishments? What is stated in the text? Are clear opinions presented, or is cautious language used? What kind of lexis is used; is a descriptive language preferred or a straightforward language? In other words, is the language produced objective or subjective? What is being evaluated positively in the text? Are the characters presented in a stereotypical way, following heteronormative rules?

Chosen topics and personal stances were interpreted as signs of gender performance to indicate whether the gender performance takes place in a gendered language. Not all amplifiers and hedges were included, but an attempt was made to count the most common ones, to make sure that they were evaluated in the same way. Due to this being a small scale research project, a general impression was established as guideline to identify what was evaluated. Further research could adjust its main focus on the actual lexis itself, to see whether the lexis used was more denotative or connotative. It could be investigated whether or not the adjectives used are empty, or evaluative, which Lakoff (1973:49) suggests is typical for women's speech.

This essay will also try to go beyond the tables of analysed data, which in themselves would suggest fixed rules for gender performance, although this essay has a dichotomous view of gender. It is qualitative in the way that it investigates the perceptions of the world that certain individuals have (Bell, 2010:6), and quantitative in that way that it was measured how many times certain elements occurred in the scripts (Bell, 2010:6). Even though this is a small scale project, a percentage of the results have been presented when mapping the results of the analysed data against the established indicators of gender. It has been done in order to make the comparison more apparent, since the number of boys and girls was different.

Especially the qualitative part may have been effected by the fact that the researcher of this study was a young female, having to evaluate and interpret the scripts according to the previous research that was there to support the conclusions that were drawn. Communities of practices use language as a way of communication (Holmes, 2006:15), therefore it is a question of interpretations whether gender performance is taking place or not. But, in order for the research to be successful, the researcher must be aware of how the society in question is constructed, to be able to draw the correct conclusions.

The original idea was to use Swedish 18-20 year-olds from Upper secondary schools but due problems in getting schools to participate a different route had to be taken. Hence, this specially designed task (see appendix 1: Writing Task) was handed out to students at the University of Sussex studying either a Foundation English Language Course or a Diploma English Language Course. Thirteen students, aged 18-23, agreed to participate in this voluntary research. Nine students were male and four female. The chosen target group differs from Swedish students both in level of proficiency and cultural background. However, since a teacher may encounter many different groups, the choice of students can be justified.

Diversity will be part of a teacher's reality in any classroom when it comes to different aspects such as *gender, cultural background* and *level of language proficiency*, which justifies the choice of a group that first may seem very different from the groups an English teacher in a Swedish upper secondary school may encounter. The study was part of a University of Gothenburg Bachelor course, wherefore Swedish ethics, as recommended by Vetenskapsrådet, have been respected. The ethical aspect means that this task was completely voluntary, and in completing the task, the students gave their consent to be analysed in this paper. The students had not been prepared for the task in advance and they only knew that their scripts would be analysed by a student studying to become a teacher, but they did not know that it was the gender aspect that was investigated. The teachers of the students were responsible for handing out the task, for collecting the results, and for handing them back in to the researcher. Although the task was not part of the education, students may have written as they thought their teachers expected them to write, since the data was collected by their teachers (Meyerhoff, 2011:73).

In order to conduct this kind of research, signs of gender and gender performance were established, based upon research on language and gender. Thereafter, a specially designed task was formed to help collect data. The task is based upon original research and the task was that the students would describe a male or female person, dead or alive, whom they admire. What was required was a descriptive piece of writing, directed towards a neutral audience, to open up the possibility to analyse the way students of English as a Second Language describe other people. Due to the request to produce descriptive scripts, the language used may have been affected. The aim was to create an authentic task, according to *the communicative approach* (Hedge, 2000), even though the task itself was not part of the students' education. Errors were not interpreted in order to follow the communicative approach, focusing on meaning rather than form (Hedge, 2000:57). Moreover, errors can reflect the students' *interlanguage* (Hedge, 2000:14). That implies that due to the fact that they were second language students, using their interlanguage, their gender performance, as well as their writing proficiency as a whole, may have been hindered by a lack of knowledge. If this task would have been set up as a classroom task, a suggestion would have been to follow the *PPP-method* suggested by Hedge (2000:61). That way, it could have been a chance to avoid interlanguage errors, which in itself could have led to some students producing different texts, using a wider range of gender performance as an example.

The expectation was that obvious evidence would be provided in the scripts, confirming or rejecting the idea of gender performance in writing. Several factors came into consideration at this point; such as under what conditions the texts were produced. Some of the texts were written in class time, while others were written at home; which might have caused some to use dictionaries, while others were lacking the same opportunity.

Most of the background information presented information about spoken language, rather than written language, which may have been a limitation. However, this essay will try to investigate whether these features exist in the written productions of the students, and whether what has been said about speaking can apply for written communication as well.

A dichotomous way of looking at gender was established, limiting other possible variants to exist, reinforcing conservative dichotomies. However, this research project had the strength that it was conducted among students of almost the same age and the same level of education. Since they were second language learners, cultural factors may have contributed to them having differing conceptions of gender. That the research product was conducted in a classroom setting might have affected the results, since students know that the same things are expected from them all; which might make them more limited in their gender performance. Another limitation was also that gender is a part of one's identity, mixing with other areas such as age, class and ethnicity (Meyerhoff, 2011:232); therefore, this essay could also be a starting point for further research on whether gender is an important factor or not. That means that the language produced, might not only have been a product affected by gender. Rather than expressing social identity, and gender, the students may have been using the audience accommodation theory where they either maintain or challenge group frontiers (Meyerhoff, 2011:73). Asking the students to produce a text for a neutral audience, such as the readers of a student lifestyle magazine, was a way to omit the risk of the students adapting too much to the hypothetical readers

The research was carried out in England, while it is based upon the Swedish teacher training programme and the Swedish curriculum.

1.4   Plan of Study

The first chapter consists of the introduction, presenting the aim and method of this research project. The theoretical background, also presenting the previous research is found in the

second chapter. Chapter three will present the results, and also the discussion. In chapter four, a summary and the conclusions will be found. A list of references is also included, as well as relevant appendices.

2. Theoretical Background

This essay is grounded in *social constructionism,* where it is believed that the reality is constructed essentially by language (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1995:29). Therefore, language has a way of forming both thought and behaviour (Sunderland, 2006:11).

Gender in this essay refers to the United Nation's (2001) definition of it, gender being context/time-specific and changeable attributes, opportunities and relationships related to being male/female that are socially constructed and have been required through a socialization process. The United Nations (2001) stated that *gender equality* – women and men having equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities – is a human rights issue, necessary for sustainable people-centered-development.

Butler (2010/1990:2536) claims that gender is *performative*, a statement based on Simone de Beauvoirs (2010/1949:1262) ideas that one is not born a woman, rather one becomes one. The construction of identities is linked to the language (Daly, 2004:57) and in doing gender; gendered behaviour can both construct and reconstruct the gender (Claire, 2004:13) by being closely related to norms, standards of proper or acceptable behaviour. Gender as a social construction implies that the members of society agree on what is accepted and expected from someone belonging to a certain gender. Gender performance is therefore restricted by society and the performance is often habitual (Sunderland, 2006:200).

Heteronormativity is a set of inexplicit lifestyle norms. Men and women are seen as complements to each other, and they fall into these natural heterosexual roles, roles that Sunderland (2006:169) refers to as part of a compulsory heterosexuality. The nuclear family is part of these norms, but heteronormativity is also present elsewhere, since it is a hegemonic social structure (Berlant & Warner, 2010/1998:2605).

One book from the mandatory literature from the General Education Field 1 at the University of Gothenburg is here presented to get an overview of how the gender issue is dealt with in the Teacher Education Programme. Kajsa Svaleryd (2002:30) agrees with Butler on gender

not being dependent on biological factors, but rather on individual interpretations of the differences. The conception of the self is created in school; in the meeting between the teacher and the student, and depending on how the student is being treated, this conception of self is formed (2002:32). Svaleryd (2002:30) points out research that has found that schools amplify gender-related differences, leading to limitations for both boys and girls.

2.1. Previous Research - Gender and Language in Sociolinguistics

Understanding the cultural representations of language and gender, can give control over the situation (Cameron, 2003:465). Describing language from a gender perspective is somewhat difficult due to its complexity, since gender intertwines with other identity categories, such as age, social class and ethnicity (Meyerhoff, 2011:232). Elder-Vass (2012:254) problematizes the relationship between individual action and the power of the social structure, since individuals may reproduce certain behaviour or transform it; therefore, the concept of gender does not have to correspond to an individual's sex (West & Zimmermann, 1991:127). Hence, sociolinguists see language as both something that shows the identity of a person, but also as a tool to create that identity (Meyerhoff, 2011:217).

The binary view of gender can lead to stereotyping, which in itself leads to "simplification, reduction and naturalization" (Talbot, 2003:470). Gender stereotypes within the linguistic field indicate expected kinds of linguistic behavior, rather than representational practices (Talbot, 2003:472). Stereotyping is problematic because "making generalizations about people can always be countered by particular expectations", since there is *human equity*, but also *human variety* (Weatherall & Gallois, 2003:497).

Language ideology is the term used to describe feelings about language used in their social world (Cameron, 2003:447) and a *genderlec*t is a speech variety linked together with a specific gender. *Speech accommodation* is when speakers vary their linguistic behaviour depending on their interlocutor, and whether they want to identify themselves with the other or not (Meyerhoff, 2011:75). William Labov was the first to observe the sociolinguistic phenomenon called *the gender paradox*. The gender paradox says that women tend to use prestige forms of the language more than men, and that they tend to avoid stigmatized variants, but the paradox lies in the fact that the likelihood of leading language change by using innovative forms of variables is greater among women (Meyerhoff, 2011:231).

In language, there are ways to *directly index gender* (Meyerhoff, 2011:214), when the word itself shows whether it is related to a female or male, but there are also *indirect indexing*, which will be the focus of this essay. Indirect indexing is related to sex-preferential features, which help to create what it means to be a man or a woman (Meyerhoff, 2011:214); in other words, it is with indirect indexing that the gender performance sets in. This has led to some theorists saying that men and women speak different languages (Meyerhoff, 2011:214) and, according to Meyerhoff (2011:242), Tannen suggests that the differences in style between men and women should be interpreted in the same way as cross-cultural communication is interpreted. Lakoff (1973) is of the opinion that women and men speak differently, but she suggests that what she calls women's language might be children's first language, "since the mother and other women are the dominant influences in the lives of most children" (Lakoff, 1973:47). Lakoff (1973:50-53) suggests that while women may adopt men's language in certain contexts in adulthood, women's language is only adopted by homosexual or academic men. According to OFSTED (2003:7) the classroom culture is non-macho, and therefore this kind of behaviour is both accepted and expected. However, some linguists disagree, since it is only a question of preferential uses and the difference in the usage will always undergo the tendency of men and women to speak similarly (Sunderland, 2006:6).

Acts, activities and stances can indicate whether gender is performed according to the ruling norms or not. According to Holmes (2006:6) female speakers tend to be *affectively oriented*, striving to be liked, being person/process-oriented, while male speakers are likely to be *instrumentally oriented*, striving to be respected, being more direct and having a referential orientation (Holmes, 2006:6). Politeness in speech is therefore related to women's language, according to Lakoff (1973:57). Mahmud (2010:174) says that Deborah Tannen suggests that female speakers have a *rapport style of speaking* where they say what they experience, focusing on the relationships, while men have a *report style*, focusing on events.

In order to strengthen relationships, female speakers are therefore suggested to use *self-disclosure* more, using a more *hedged language*, and being more *hesitative* (Lakoff, 1973:56), and use more *tag questions*, than male speakers (Lakoff, 1973:53).

Women are also often said to be described by their looks, while men tend to be evaluated by their actions or their social importance (Caldas-Coulthard & Moon, 1999:124). Women also complement each other more than men do, and certain verbs are likely to be more used by women than men.

Effects of the women's language are that it places the woman as an object and prevents her from strongly expressing herself (Lakoff, 1973:48). Mahmud (2010:174) suggests that because of *the emotional language*, women may be ignored for higher positions in the professional life. Men are said to swear more than women (Lakoff, 1973:50). In lexical choice, women are said to use more *empty adjectives*; they describe colours more precisely (Lakoff, 1973:49) and use more empty, or evaluative, adjectives such as *adorable, charming, sweet, lovely, divine,* in comparison to neutral words such as *great, terrific, cool, neat* (Lakoff, 1973:51). Amplifiers (words such as *really, very, quite*) are more frequent in speech than in writing, and in speech there is little difference in the usage between men and women, but in writing, amplifiers tend to be more used by women (Xiao & Tao, 2007:248).

When it comes to objectification, *derogatory words* are often linked to women's speech (Lakoff, 1973:57). Women are also often portrayed as objects (John's wife), while men are considered autonomous individuals (John) (Lakoff, 1973:65). When talking about women, they are usually presented with their first name, while men can be referred to with their last name only (Lakoff, 1973:71).

In the masculine hegemony, words are often pre-assumed to be masculine, taking *doctor* vs. *women doctor* as an example (Lakoff, 1973:59). English is a *sex-marked language*; since talking about a person requires the use of pronouns, and these pronouns are sex marked, so the objects sex has to be known. Unknown objects are also referred to with masculine pronouns, since these are considered to be unmarked or neutral (Lakoff, 1973:72), which makes the masculine the ruling norm. According to Lakoff (2003:162), different words are used for different sexes when talking about the same thing. In addition, Dale Spender (1985:15) found out that English has more masculine words and that they tend to have more positive connotations than their female equivalents. Female equivalents tend to have sexual connotations (Spender, 1985:17) or in other ways have degrading connotations; an example can be the difference in the connotations of the words *bachelor* and *spinster* (Sunderland, 2006:244).

Most of the information has been about differences in speech; however, this essay will focus on written production. Results from PISA have shown that male students were outperformed by female students in literacy in every participating country (Klinger et al, 2009:3), and Peterson and Parr (2012:154) found that writing in a typically female way might give better results. This may be due to the kind of writing valued in school, which is according to

OFSTED (2003): "diversity of style and approach, succinctness and elaboration, logical thought and expressiveness".

Peterson and Parr (2012:154) suggest that when it comes to writing, topics related to home and family are usually preferred by girls, while boys tend to write about topics that go beyond these territories. When writing about characters belonging to the same sex as the writer, these were often stereotypically described (2012:154). They had also found evidence that it had been impossible to recognize the gender of anonymous writers (2012:154), but that writing in a typically female way might give better results (2012:154). Typically boyish texts had similarities with TV and computer games, with a lack of details (2012:154).

Nevertheless, Thomson, Murachver and Green (2001:171) present some critique against Lakoff's (1973) view of female speech differing from male speech, saying that it overlooks the dynamism of linguistic exchange, basing it on studies of written production. According to them, "language (…) is a process whereby people adapt their language to fit the situation"(2001:171). Also, in mixed-sex groups, gender-preferential is less prominent than within same-sex groups (2001:171). When it comes to electronic discourse, Thomson et al (2001:171) believe that gender identity may be particularly noticeable. Their method was also based on analysing texts, and one advantage was that it had no other clues to gender than the language that was used (2001:171). In their studies, they found out that individuals changed their writing style according to whom they were writing to, rather than depending on their own gender (2001:172). However, in one study they found out that females tended to refer more to emotion and have more self-derogatory comments, while males instead used more opinions, although this was also dependent on whom they were writing to (2001:173).

2.1.1 Indicators of Gender Performance

Based upon the previous research presented in section 2.1, a set of indicators of gender were established. The following list was used with mapping the scripts against these criteria.

Table 1: Indicators of Gender Performance

Object of Analyse	Indicate Femininity	Indicates Masculinity	Reference
Topic Choice	Topics related to Family and Home	Topics beyond the territory of Family and Home	# Peterson & Parr, 2012:154
Focus Area	People/Interactions - How things happened - How they are is important	Events or Actions - What happened - What they do is important	# Females as affectively oriented and men as instrumentally oriented (Holmes, 2006:6) # Boys' texts having similarities with TV (Peterson & Parr, 2012:154)
Character Description	Evaluated by looks	Evaluated by actions	# Caldas-Coulthard and Moon, 1999:124
	Character as Object	Character as Subject	# Language restricting women to express themselves strongly (Lakoff, 1973:48) # Men as autonomous individuals (Lakoff, 1973:65)
	Stereotypes & Heteronormativity: Girlish Girls.	Stereotypes & Heteronormativity: Boyish Boys.	# Mary Talbot about stereotyping (Talbot, 686-forward)
Lexis • **Adjectives**	Descriptive – Connotative. Empty Adjectives (*divine, adorable, gorgeous*).	Straightforward – Denotative.	# Women using empty adjectives (Lakoff, 1973:51) # Men as instrumentally oriented (Holmes, 2006:6)
	Uncertainty, Hedges (*sort of, kind of, it seems like, could, would, might*), self-derogatory comments	Clear opinions.	# Women using a more hedged language (Lakoff, 1974:56) # Language restricting women to express themselves strongly (Lakoff, 1973:48)
	Amplifiers (*really, very, quite*)	Swearing	# Amplifiers (Xiao & Tao, 2007:248) # Swearing (Lakoff, 1973:50).

2.2 Education

English teaching has implemented *a communicative approach* to language learning (Hedge, 2000:44). Hedge (2000) suggests that the learning activities provided by teachers have to be different, in order for the students' needs to be fulfilled, since students' *learning styles* may differ. A learning style is a "preferred way of approaching learning and possessing information" (2000:18). Culture may have a strong impact on learning style, according to Hedge (2000:19).

When producing language, the communication has to show a reflection of the students' knowledge (2000:45). *Interlanguage* is the language produced by a person on the way towards a fully accurate language, and in the communicative approach, it is considered that errors mirror the interlanguage development.

2.2.1 The Swedish National Agency for Education

The curriculum for upper secondary school established by the Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket) states that the school has the following tasks:

- To base norms and values upon equality (Skolverket, 2013:10)
    - "No one in schools should be subjected to discrimination on the grounds of gender" (Skolverket, 2013:4)
    - Students should be supported to develop their interests regardless of sex (Skolverket, 2013:5)
- "to impart knowledge and to create the preconditions for students to acquire and develop their knowledge" (Skolverket, 2013:5)
- "preparing them to work and participate actively in society" (Skolverket, 2013:5)

Aims stating competences that the students should develop through education have been set up by the Swedish National Agency for Education in the curriculum for the subject of English (Skolverket, 2011:1). The aims are:

- Correctness in language use
- Ability to express themselves with variation and complexity
- Ability to use different communicative strategies

The produced language has to show *variation, clarification* and *specification*, it has to be *structured, coherent* and *context adapted* (Skolverket, 2011:4).

To support the work of the teachers, the Swedish National Agency for Education has established a set of core content that the teaching should cover, and knowledge requirements to support the process of assessment. Discussion material can be found to discuss the material produced by the Swedish National Agency for Education, and they state that in the end, teachers themselves assess, but the curriculum is there as a support to make the assessment fair and secure (Skolverket, 2012:38). The Swedish National Agency for Education has

provided a set of questions that teachers can ask themselves in order to make sure that their students receive a good education. These questions provide help to judge and evaluate students' abilities and to see where their weaknesses that need to be improved are. When working with a specific educational area, teachers should ask themselves how that area is introduced, how the students are allowed to work with the content presented, and how the thematic area is finished. The question then is whether the content helps the students to develop towards the aim of the subject, so that they will be able to fulfill the knowledge requirements (Skolverket, 2011:15).

2.2.2 Gender in the Classroom Setting

As mentioned in the introduction, raising gender awareness is a significant aspect of the teacher training programme at Gothenburg University; especially in the courses of the General Education Field. This goes in line with the statement that "adolescence is a critical site for the study of language and gender" (Eckert, 2003:281); since it is an important period in people's lives in constructing their own identity. Eckert (2003:281) goes on to saying that adolescence institutions, especially school, limit the gender construction. Phoenix (2004:35) agrees with this, saying that learning takes place in *communities of practice*.

Joan Swann (2003) discusses how identity is formed in the school environment through language. The curriculum asks the students to perform in a certain kind of way linguistically, which she means turns them into "certain kind of students (…) and certain kinds of people". (Swann, 2003:624). She goes on to arguing that this affects their development and what they get out of school (2003:624). Much of the research highlights that girls perform better in literacy than boys, but according to Swann (2003:625), this does not help girls outside the school environment when it comes to achieving high-status careers. Mahmud (2006:174) explains that "in terms of leadership (…) women may be ignored for high position due to their emotional language." Swann (2003:626) goes on linking this to the fact that female speakers are associated with *cooperative speaking styles*, while male speakers are more *competitive*, recognizing the fact that both aspects "may exist simultaneously in interactions" (2003:627). Returning to the fact that high achievements in literacy might not be linked to achieving a high-status job, this can be connected to the fact that writing tasks often require a narrative type of writing; while later on in life, informing might be more important, which boys can be more skilled at (2003:635). Girls were not prepared for high-status careers in the

subject of English since they lacked practice in other genres than the narrative (2003:635). Nevertheless, with the raise of electronic communication, this has started to change (2003:638).

Deborah Cameron (2003) has identified a paradigm shift for the view of language. Earlier, female speech was seen as insufficient, but instead it has been replaced with the view of a "linguistically unskilled man" (Cameron, 2003:454). The reason for this is that what is valued as good communication skills, are those focusing on relationships, in line with "traditionally 'private' speech genres (…) rather than public ones" (2003:461).

PISA results from 2012 mirror the statements of Cameron, showing that there is *a gender gap in performance*, which "mirrors the gender gap in student's drive, motivation and self-beliefs" (OECD 2013:166). Boys outperform girls in mathematics, while girls outperform boys in reading (OECD 2014:3). As mentioned, a female approach to writing can be benefitting in the school environment, with stylistic variation and richness in description (Peterson & Parr, 2012:154). This is supported by the curriculum, as can be seen in section 2.2.1 The Swedish National Agency for Education. Merisuo-Storm (2006:111), even though in this case talking about reading, states that "pupil's interest should be a key factor" for the material that is worked with.

Mahmud (2010:179) suggests that learners of different sexes use *different strategies for learning* English. His research also showed that females and males may prefer to use different means of communication; in his research, female students preferred writing, while males preferred speaking (2010:180).

School, as well as the language class room, plays a vital role in the forming of gender (Sunderland, 1994). Sunderland and Swann (2007) suggest how gender can be approached in the classroom setting. Gender can be worked with in a *historical, topical, theoretical/methodological or eclectic approach*. This is important because

> And in so far as language is gendered in educational settings, this will affect girls' and boys' development as 'schooled subjects', their experiences of education, and what they get out of it. (Swann, 2003:624).

Sunderland (2000:150) discusses the term gender and how according to previous research it has been looked at in language education not giving place to *flux, agency, diversity* and *individuality*, which appear in every classroom. She also discovered that language textbooks have greater gender asymmetry than the societies they were supposed to mirror (2000:152).

However, Sunderland (2000:155) also discusses that a text can be interpreted in many ways, consequently the teacher's treatment of the text determines whether it was a good text from a pedagogical aspect. Sunderland (2000:157) problematizes that teachers can *ignore, endorse or extend the gender representation* in texts. Gender groups will always contain diversity, and the acknowledgement of this is important in the classroom (2000:164). Classroom activities both reflect the students' beliefs, and also shape them, thereby shaping their identities as well (2000:168).

Writing can be used as a tool to detect differences in people's language, which can extend the understanding of gender in language (Bijami et al, 2013:8). Bijami et al (2013:9) view writing as a means for creating a social identity. Since differences have been discovered in the writing proficiency between boys and girls, Bijami et al (2013:10) suggest that teachers adapt a tendency to vary their *teaching strategies*, and also that gender is discussed so that teachers can offer equal possibilities for learning for all students.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Results and General Discussion

Data was collected from 13 writers, 9 of them being male and 4 of them being female. 5 of the male writers were describing other men, while 4 of them were describing women. 3 of the female writers were describing other women, while 1 of them was describing a man. This means that 6 texts presented male characters, while 7 of them presented female characters.

The length of the texts varied, female writers tending to write more than male writers. The texts had between 89-467 words, even though the students had been asked to produce 350 words per text. Below is the average number of written words in the texts.

Table 2: Average Number of Written Words

Average Number of Written Words	
All Writers	200 Words/Average
Female Writers	241 Words/Average
Male Writers	181 Words/Average

The students did not do exactly as they were told in the task; they chose to write about one person each and did not produce the correct number of words, which of course can have affected the results. A probable explanation for this could be that it was a voluntary task that did not count as school work. This can also be a sign that the students did not adapt their writing according to their audience in every aspect. Due to the fact that male writers used fewer words, this may suggest that their language is more *instrumentally oriented*, as suggested by Holmes (2006:6).

Together with a discussion follows more tables presenting the data. In the following table, one X stands for a descriptive text, while two X:s represent that it was a descriptive text with many details. F/H means Family/Home. NPC stands for No Personal Connection.

Table 3: Data Analysis of the Number of Words, Topic Choice and Type of Language Used, together with Information of the Sex of the Writer and the Sex of the Character in the Text

Sex of Writer	Description of Same	Description of Opposite Sex	Words	Topic Choice	Descriptive, Detailed Text	Clear Opinions	Hedges	Amplifiers
F1		M	325	F/H	XX	X	4 (*more or less, some, kind of, most of*)	9 (*quite, very* x4, *a lot, really, exceedingly, excessively, extremely*)
F2	F		338	NPC	XX	X	1 (*we tend to*)	2 (*great, greater*)
F3	F		203	NPC	X	X	1 (*according her memory*)	1 (*so*)
F 4	F		98	NPC	X	X	1 (*some*)	2 (*most popular, more better*)
M 1	M		173	NPC	XX	X	4 (*one of* x2, *if not, may seem*)	3 (*the most* x2, *the biggest*)
M 2	M		140	NPC	X	X	2 (*as it may sound, the majority*)	2 (*very* x2)
M 3	M		138	NPC	X	X	1 (*some… but others*)	4 (*most, very* x2, *better*)
M 4	M		89	NPC	X	X	3 (*would, one of* x2)	2 (*very, best*)
M 5	M		467	F/H	XX	X	1 (*some*)	8 (*a lot* x2, *very, too low, high* x2, *higher, the best*)
M 6		F	177	NPC	X	X	4 (*would* x2, *one of, probably*)	2 (*the most, greatest*)
M 7		F	135	NPC	X	X		4 (*extremely, the most* x2, *the greatest*)
M 8		F	161	NPC	X	X	1 (*if.. will*)	1 (*really*)
M 9		F	150	NPC	X	X	1 (*perhaps one of*)	3 (*the most* x2, *very*)

11 out of 13 scripts included topics going beyond the family/home-territory, while 2 of them dealt with family members. The texts presenting family members had been written by one female and one male writer. These two texts, dealing with family members, were also the texts with most words. Merisuo-Storm (2006:111) talks about interest as a key factor, and traditionally 'private' speech genres tend to be more valued as presenting features of good communication skills (Cameron, 2003:461). To this, it can be considered that even though

they did not have personal connections to these people, the students might have felt familiar with them, and interested in them, since the topic was to describe someone whom they admire. Events and actions were the main focus in almost every essay, instead of relationships and interactions. This may be because the writers chose people outside of their own family.

Both the use of hedged language and amplifiers are said to be more typical for females. In these scripts, there were no big differences. The female writers used 1-4 hedges/script, with an average of 1.75 hedges/script. The male writers used 0-4 hedges/script, with an average of 1.89 hedges/script. The female writers used 1-9 amplifiers/script, with an average of 3.5 amplifiers/script. The male writers used 1-8 amplifiers/script, with an average of 3.2 amplifiers/script. Only two writers in total used more than 4 amplifiers.

All of the scripts can be considered as descriptive, even though some were more detailed than others. All of the scripts also had opinions in them. This may be dependent on the task itself. The students were asked to produce descriptive language, and also the language would be about someone whom they admired. When stating whom they admire, they would therefore have to include opinions. When analysing whether the texts were descriptive or not, consideration was also given as to whether many details were provided in the texts, making the texts feel more vivid. Two female writers and two male writers had added many details to their texts, meaning that half of the females gave many details, while only 22% of the male writers did so. That is in line with previous research, where females tend to be affectively oriented, while males tend to be more direct (Holmes, 2006:6).

Table 4: Data Analysis whether Characters were Evaluated by their Actions or by their Work

Sex of Writer	Focus on Actions, Events or Work
F 1	Head of a huge company, reads a lot, learns languages, experienced (many jobs), wealthy
F 2	Interested in fashion, endlessly celebrating the self, conquers challenging situations by empowering all aspects of her personality, successful businesswoman, travels, teaches women to accept and love themselves, rejects narrow standards of society, created her own life, major inspiration to others, lives life to the fullest
F 3	Popular actress, many awards, models, tough start in life, studied
F 4	Popular, Influenced Chinese history, first+last king, published useful policies, helped the country, killed her own family
M 1	Respected author, famous, agreed to hand rights to make movies, way of portraying characters in his books, dedicated his entire life to the novels
M 2	Well-known philanthropist, has huge charity events, lifestyle does not involve drugs nor guns, does not drink nor smoke
M 3	Successful basketball player
M 4	Popular actor, best comedian, created funny theatre, many viewers of the programme, won awards, has acted for a long time, admired by many
M 5	Got married early, helped siblings, had 2 jobs, responsible for younger siblings, government worker and business man, paid for weddings, looks after parents, built a house and bought a car
M 6	Famous actress, began working early, programme described
M 7	Famous role model, hard working, powerful, benefits others with charities, many awards, influential, philanthropist, campaigns against racism
M 8	Wrote lyrics, singing performance, encouraged people to face and cope with challenges and to stop being sad for the past
M 9	Model, made the most out of the situations

When it comes to how the characters are evaluated by their actions, it is clear that a lot of focus is put on having powerful jobs. All of the students mentioned some kind of work. Some of the scripts dealt with people helping others (F1, F2, F4, M2, M5, M7, M8). F4 stands out by saying that the person described helped her country, so she is positively valued, even though she killed members of her own family. M5 stands out in that a lot of focus is put on the family and relationships, something that according to Holmes (2006:6) is typical for females. Also, M5 had a detailed language and used many amplifiers, making the script seem to be written by a female. That could be a confirmation of Lakoff's (1973:50-53) statement that academic men share the same language as females.

Some of the writers have portrayed characters who had a tough start, but who took control over their own life (F1, F2, F3, M2, M5, M7, M5, M9). Generally, the odds that have been against the characters were money-related (life conditions, hard to find a job). F2, M7 and M9 portrayed being female as one of the odds that had been against the characters; M7 also presenting ethnicity as one of the factors. F2 is described as doing something to change the

view people have; the character wants to teach women how to love themselves. In the same way, the character portrayed by M2 wants to show how the prejudices from society are not always correct. An interesting discovery in these scripts have been that when the characters are living during poor life conditions, they are portrayed as victims of these conditions; but when they succeed to accomplish something, it is thanks to themselves being active and powerful, and therefore they are depicted as subjects.

Table 5: Data Analysis of how the Personality was Described and whether the Text was Relationship-Focused

Sex of Writer	Focus on Personality	Focus on Relationships
F 1	Happy, cheerful, relaxed, intelligent, careful, concerned about family members, friendly and helpful, described as an active person, organized, supports family, wise, warm and mutually supportive relationsip	X
F 2	Proud of imperfections, positive outlook, healthy self-confidence, bold, bright, grateful, busy, puts heart in her work, feminine, against stereotypes, adventurous, joyful, gratitude	X
F 3	Charming	X
F 4	Sceptical at one point	
M 1		
M 2	Philanthrophist, kind hearted, lifestyle does not involve drugs, guns, drinking, nor smoking	
M 3	Causes different reactions in people, others call him successful, and others a loser. Perfectioist, hardworking, gritty. Not good with relationships.	
M 4	Talented	
M 5	Strict, serious, fair, square. Relationship-oriented (got married early, responsible for the family), full of energy, yet tired, preservance and kidness, wants good education for his children, liked by friends and family, respected by colleagues	X
M 6	Talented	
M 7	Hard working, powerful, influential, philanthropist, greatest joy is to make others smile	X
M 8	Encouraged people to face and cope with challenges and to stop being sad for the past	
M 9	Mature at a young age, lived in the moment, made the most out of everything, saw herself as a lion, came alone but learned to cope with it	X

Texts written by males tend to be focused on events, portrayed like films (Peterson & Parr, 2012:154). The most typical example of that is M1 who portrays it that way. Focusing on details not related to any events is said to be more typical of female writing, since they are *affectively oriented* (Holmes, 2006:6). The personality is well described in the scripts by F1, F2, M3, M5 and M9, meaning that 50% of the females focus on personality, while only 33% of the men do. In total, 38% focus on personality. 75% of the females focused on

relationships with others in some way, while 33% of the male writers did the same, which gives a total of 46% focusing on relationships.

Heteronormativity was present in the scripts; with some stereotypical features describing what the person did and how the person was, and with nuclear family structures being present. F2 was the only one explicitly dealing with this issue; stating that Gala was "rejecting the narrow standards of society", adding that "she does not deny her femininity, and is a great fan of pink, of sequins and heels – only if they are seen as attributes of adequate fun and self-expression – not as an oppressive limitations over what is acceptable or desired" (Appendix 2, script F2-F).

Table 6: Data Analysis of the Description of Looks

Sex of Writer	Looks Description
F 1	Tall, Well-built, Good-looking, Deep brown dark eyes with a spark of intelligence Roman nose = looks serious and confident, black beard = gives more age
F 2	Not a conventional beauty, petite height, thin hair, prominent nose
M 7	Black

The results of this table provide interesting results. Only 3 scripts describe looks. Previous research says that women tend to be evaluated by looks (Caldas-Coulthard & Moon, 1999:124), and since 7 out of 13 essays deal with female characters, following previous research more than half of the scripts should present looks. Also, 1 out of these 3 scripts is dealing with a male rather than a female character. A common feature for all of the 3 scripts is that they do not evaluate looks; they merely seem to describe it. Also, F2 presents a female fighting against stereotyping, and that is why her looks are described. That could possibly be an indicator that something is changing in the society; that young people value what one does, rather than what one looks like, is more important.

Table 7: Data Analysis with the General Impression of the Complete Texts

Sex of Writer	General Impression
F 1	Powerful, intelligent and wealthy. Portrayed as the firm foundation of the family. Describes looks, but does not give a feeling of evaluation, but rather trying to give a detailed description.
F 2	Powerful female is described. Looks seems to be described only to give more evidence of what she actually does. Powerful.
F 3	Focus on her work. Had a tough start, so the character is subjectified when she takes control over her own situation (as opposed to being objectified; a victim to circumstances).
F 4	Powerful. Evaluated by her actions. Not a typical female style; work is more valued than relationships (she is described as a good ruler of the country, but she killed her own family)
M 1	Evaluated by work. Short, descriptive piece that gives the feeling of watching a movie.
M 2	Focus on lifestyle choices, personality and what he does. The personality is described as effect of his choices.
M 3	Evaluated by work and performance.
M 4	Evaluated by work.
M 5	Family man, responsible and hard working. The mother is also mentioned, as support for her husband. Focus on relationships, wealth and power.
M 6	Evaluated by work.
M 7	Evaluated by work and wealth. Powerful female described. Focus on wealth and power, but linked to helping others. Judged by being a black female, but gives the impression of her being even more powerful.
M 8	Evaluated by work
M 9	Powerful female described. Portrayed as an object that took control of her life and became a subject of her own life.

Table 7 above presents the general impression that the reader can possibly get after reading the character descriptions. That sums up the stereotyping and the focus on connotative or denotative words, which in 2.1.4.1 Indicators of Gender are pointed out as important for gender performance. In future research, this could be more thoroughly explored.

In general, the people described are judged by their actions (all mentioned some kind of action, for example work). That most focus was put on actions may depend on the fact that most students wrote about people whom they did not have personal relationships with. When information was provided on their looks, which occurred in one quarter of the texts, it was to give a more vivid description, rather than to evaluate the character by it. Almost half of the scripts focused on relationships in some way, and this was more apparent in the scripts by the females, with three quarters of them focusing on personal relationships or on how the characters helped society. This is where the biggest gap between male and female writers was found. 38% of all of them focused on the personality; this occurring more among female writers than male writers.

Females tend to be relationship-oriented and evaluated by looks, according to Holmes (2006:6). These findings show that the women presented here, are more valued by their actions, turning them into powerful females. Therefore, this could suggest that they are not stereotypically described. F4 describes a powerful woman who kills her family. That is a feature that would not seem to be typical, since it does not value family relationships, yet she is described as a person whom F4 admires.

M2 and M5 are also prominent, in the way that they are not perceived as stereotypical. M2 describes a rapper, doing the opposite of what he is expected to do, and being portrayed as a kind man, helping society. M5 is even more noticeable. Like F1, it is a description of a family man. The main focus on why the man M5 describes is admired is the fact that he values family ties. Also, while the other male writers used 1-4 amplifiers each, M5 used 8. M5 includes a description of a female, the mother, and she is depicted in a stereotypical way, as support for her husband.

3.2 To What Extent is Gender Performed in the Written Texts?

No strong visible differences are apparent stating that female and male students would perform gender differently in written communication, making it difficult to say whether the writers *created, reinforced, challenged* or *simply did not take into account* existing *gender structures*. The difficulty with identifying gender analysing written texts has been recognized before (Peterson & Parr, 2012:154). However, the results presented in table 8 do show a tendency to include features interpreted as typical for male writing. *Simplification* does not refer to representational behaviour, but rather expectations of behaviour (Talbot, 2003:470). This can be interpreted as being closely linked to gender as performance. Remembering that gender is performed, and that stereotypes involving gender are not a fixed set of actual behaviours, it is easier to see beyond the binary set of gender expectations. Certain kind of features may be interpreted as typical for men or women, but they will never be the only existing possibilities to choose from. Moreover, Sunderland (2006:6) claimed that similarities in spoken communication will always be greater than the differences, as a contrast to Lakoff's (1973) claims of an existing women's language. However, it is important to treat the students as individuals and acknowledge their specific needs (Hedge, 2000:16).

Table 8: Results Mapped Against the Indicators of Gender

Area of Analysis	Indicate Femininity	Indicates Masculinity	Comment
Topic Choice Female Area: Family/Home Male Area: Beyond Family/Home	25% females 11% males	75% females 89% males	The majority chose to write about people whom they did not have personal connections with, indicating masculinity.
Focus Area Fe1male Area: Relationships/Interactions Male Area: Actions	75% females 46% males	100% females 100% males	Females had more relationship focus than men. All of them focused on actions.
Character Description Female Area: Looks Male Area: Actions	3% describe looks, none gives the feeling of being evaluative.	100% females 100% males	Looks where not evaluated, while actions were in 100% of the cases.
Female Area: being an object Male Area: being a subject	7 out of 13 start with having the odds against them, 3 of them being male characters, 4 of them being female. None end up staying in objectified-position.	100% females 100% males	The characters were described as being in control of their own lives, being active subjects.
Stereotyping	Females tend to be evaluated by their actions, and not to be judged by looks. Also, they tend to be portrayed as powerful.	Men tend to be judged by work, but some focus on family relationships as well.	The only thing that seems prominent is that males tend to be judged by work, but so does females, and especially in the texts dealing with female characters, there are indicators of stereotypes being challenged instead of reinforced.
Lexis Female Area: Hedges Male Area: Clear Opinions	Females used 1.75 hedges/script (1-4hedges each) Males used 1.89 hedges/script (0-4 hedges each)	100% females 100% males	In average, the writers used about the same number of hedges. All of them included some kind of opinions.
Female Area: Amplifiers Male Area: Swearing	Females used 3.5 amplifiers/script (1-9amplifiers each). Males used 3.2 amplifiers/script (1-8amplifiers each).	0% females 0% males	In average, the writers used about the same number of amplifiers. Noteworthy is that one of the male writers used a significantly larger number of amplifiers than the others, which affected the results.

Also, when discussing whether the students were performing gender or not, it has to be considered how these signs are interpreted. If the students' scripts would correspond

completely to what is expected from their sex, this may imply either that they are successful performers of gender, or that gender is not a performance, relying upon a social construction, but rather something that one is born with. Instead, if a writer does not correspond to the features listed as typical for its sex, it can be a sign of gender performance, but also a question of literacy skills. Research has valued female writing higher, meaning that when a female does not write as she is expected to write, she can either be a less skilled writer or unsuccessful in performing gender according to her sex. M5 as an example, is he simply a skilful writer, or does he fail to perform his gender like a man, or is he on purpose trying to challenge fixed gender roles, signalling that while his sex is male, his gender is female? Taking cultural factors into account, it can also have been a result to M5 having a different style due to his culture (Hedge, 2000:19). Therefore, the results may have been different if native speakers would have written the same kind of texts. It could be claimed that the findings of this essay support the fact that it is insufficient to split individuals into two gender categories, since there might be huge individual variations among students, not only depending on gender. It has also been clear that many aspects can exist simultaneously, in accordance with Swann (2003:627). These findings could also suggest that it is incorrect to claim that certain language is typical for females and males; implying that both females and males speak the same language, just with a variation.

A binary view of gender was established, but this research might be a window towards showing that that might not be the only possible way of dealing with the gender aspect. Different cultural habits or different expectations rising from the school environment can have affected the results. As mentioned, gender is only one aspect of an individual's identity (Meyerhoff, 2011:232). That means that the writing style can be affected by other factors such as *age, class* and *ethnicity*. Due to this being a small scale project, it is impossible to conclude whether or not the writing styles presented were mostly affected by gender or any of the other aspects. This essay has shown that gender in linguistics is not a black and white-issue, but rather like fifty shades of grey. Students may show features from both the female and the male categories; some of them oscillating rapidly between the sides, and some relying more on communication that is more stereotypical for one gender. Therefore, the findings of this essay support the fact that it is insufficient to split individuals into two gender categories, since there might be huge individual variations among students, not only depending on gender. It has also been clear that many aspects can exist simultaneously, as according to Swann (2003:627).

When it comes to the hypothesis of the research question that this study was to answer, the findings do not point towards gender performance being evident in written production, it seems to be more a question of literacy skills possessed by the students. In some cases, stereotypes were present, but while Lakoff (1973) seems to present females as less powerful than men, this is not the case in these essays, where all of the females described are powerful in their own ways. They have also been evaluated rather by what they do than what they look like. These findings seem to support the statement of heteronormativity as the ruling hegemonic structure (Berlant & Warner, 2010/1998:2600); even though F2 presented a female character who was questioning this.

The findings of this essay showed little evidence that difference in written production derived from the gender factor. Many similarities, but also exceptions, were demonstrated. Thus, a similar study in a different school environment but with the diversity between students would most probably result in similar findings. That is, differing literacy skills, rather than a different language usage depending on gender. The work done language wise by feminist activists (Pauwels, 2003) might therefore have had some impact.

3.3 Pedagogical Implications

Asking a teacher to grade the texts would have been interesting from a pedagogical angle, to see how the texts are valued. Nevertheless, since there is little evidence in this essay that gendered writing exists, it would have been individuals receiving grades, rather than saying that females receive high marks, if that would have been the case. One general comment is that the more words that were produced, the more information and details were provided, also indicating that there would be a greater possibility to receive a higher grade, since the curriculum asks students to show *variation* and *complexity, clarification* and *specification* (Skolverket, 2011:4).

The question that this essay raises is whether certain ways of communication should be labelled as typically male or female. Maybe value should only be emphasized on what is required of the task, but maybe teachers should make sure that students learn what is appropriate for the future. The problem might not lie in what the students choose to work with in the future, but rather in the value placed upon certain kind of jobs, with some high-status careers being more valued. Future research could investigate why girls perform better in school, possessing higher literacy skills, yet boys tend to take roads leading them to high-

status careers. Do schools fail to prepare girls for working life, as is one of their aims (Skolverket, 2013:5)? Or is it an indicator that jobs that females normally acquire are not as highly valued in society as typical jobs for men?

When Swann (2003:635) discusses that girls were not prepared for high-status careers because they lacked opportunities to practice in other genres, this seems not to be true anymore, at least not in the Swedish class room setting, where the subject of English is supposed to teach learners to communicate within a variety of fields. Also, Swann (2003) recognised this when stating that electronic communication had made changes to what types of texts were required in school.

Research suggests that male writers are *instrumentally-oriented*, which would suggest that they in some cases fail to "express themselves with variation and complexity" (Skolverket, 2011:1), but the requirement of using *diverse strategies of communication* (Skolverket, 2011:1) indicates that female writers also should possess the ability to use a straightforward language to get their message through. In other words, if being skilful writers, girls should be equally prepared for high-status careers. The curriculum asks for the students to develop a wide range of skills, which should be remembered if female qualities are required in school, while male qualities are required outside of school, as claimed by Mahmud (2010:174). Peterson and Parr (2012:154) say that in a school environment, *a female approach to writing* is highly valued, with *stylistic variation* and *richness in description*. Support for this can be found in the curriculum, and is often reflected in the tasks designed by teachers. But – are teachers asking students to develop female qualities, or are they asking students to develop a wide range of skills?

If it is still considered that Lakoff (1973) in some ways was right in women and men speaking different languages, this could indicate that due to having different *communication styles*, they might also have different *learning styles* (Hedge, 2000:18). Students failing to fulfil certain knowledge requirements may then be evidence of a failed *teaching style*. In order to achieve knowledge requirements, teachers have the task to provide an environment suitable for learning, and providing knowledge, which then should help the students to obtain and develop their knowledge (Skolverket, 2013:5).

Since school is seen as an area for creation of the identity (Eckert, 2003:381), it may imply that teachers influence on how the students perform gender. This is the main reason why this essay is based on social constructionism. Language, providing a link between thought and

behaviour (Sunderland, 2006:11) is therefore important for how identities are created, and how gender is performed; reinforcing or challenging society's conceptions of gender. This suggests that it is important how teachers communicate with their students, but also how they teach their students to communicate. This is linked to learning taking place in communities of practices (Phoenix, 2004:35), and the claim that schools can limit gender construction (Eckert, 2003:381). Understanding the relationship between language and gender can empower the individuals (Cameron, 2003:465). This is why teachers-to-be have to discuss the issue of gender in their teacher training; not to provide them with a fixed set of rules, but to open up possibilities to act differently. A way of doing this can be to implement communication strategies to avoid gender biased language, which connects back to the emergence of the Swedish gender neutral personal pronoun *hen*. Teachers can avoid splitting students up by the sexes, both linguistically with the used language, and by not dividing students up after their sex when doing certain activities.

The link between language-thought-behaviour suggests that when teaching how to communicate, teachers also teach their students what kind of individuals they should become (Swann, 2003:624). In that way, including gender issues in the teacher education programme is a way to change the statistics of future research, so that gender-related issues no longer will be a field of limitation for students, as Svaleryd (2002:30) reported was the case in schools.

How students engage with the subject, what attitude they have and how students see themselves can be affected by gender bias in classrooms. Furthermore, having certain biased expectations of students, may lead to the choice of the wrong teaching strategy for a certain student, or for the omitting of a teaching strategy as a whole, since a teacher might assume that it will not fit the group.

Language teaching, where writing is included, is important since it can function as a tool to change people's thoughts. Language can become *a tool for changing identity*; for reconstructing or deconstructing it. If students reproduce stereotypical elements, teachers can question them, offering the students a chance to develop their conception of themselves and the world. Eliminating gender inequalities will help teachers provide equal learning opportunities for everyone.

Discovering these pedagogical implications has enabled the researcher to set up suggestions for pedagogical strategies that will enforce gender awareness in the language classroom, which could lead to the disappearance of gender bias in classrooms. They are:

- ➤ Maintaining a critical approach towards the used pedagogical strategies. Discuss teaching and learning outcomes together with other teachers.

- ➤ Awareness of what role communication between teacher and students play, which for example can be done in the way the teacher is expecting the students to respond or to initiate talking.

- ➤ Experimenting with different learning styles. All students have unique needs, but should be granted equal possibilities for learning, which means that one learning style cannot possibly fit all.

- ➤ Choosing material with a purpose. Then, approach it critically.

- ➤ Scrutinizing different gender roles, allowing students to test different roles.

- ➤ Avoid making distinctions between boys and girls, for example when pairing them up in groups. That way, students are considered as individuals rather than as individuals of a certain gender. Also avoid gender biased language and defining students after their sex.

- ➤ When it comes to writing, write for different purposes and audiences and in different genres. This will allow students to develop their versatility within writing.

4 Summary and Conclusion

This interdisciplinary essay in the field of linguistics and pedagogics investigated written scripts for certain language features to see if, and how, gender was performed by young adult English as a Second Language students. The main aim of this research was to raise awareness of the gender issue in the classroom. Frequencies were counted and common signs were analysed to provide evidence.

Traditionally, research has focused on the differences in speech between men and women. However, this essay has examined to what extent gender performance took place in written texts by adult second language learners. The main difficulty has been the presupposed binary view of gender; a black-or-white perspective, only giving space for the existence of two types of gender; the female and the male gender.

This essay succeeded in opening up for further areas of research. This essay could not answer whether the writings were dependent on the gender factor only, as they could have been products affected by other parts of the writers' identities. Since schools provide students with

an environment where identity experimenting is accepted, it is also difficult to answer whether gender was performed in the writings. If gender was performed, it was also difficult to state whether it was due to students adopting their writing styles to fit the requirements of the task and of the expectations of their teacher, or if they failed to perform gender, or if they instead were challenging the structures. Thus, the findings suggested that there was no different language for males and females, but that there might be differences in the literacy skills.

Heteronormativity was present in the scripts. Nevertheless, as most characters tended to be evaluated by their actions and by their work, it is an indicator that gender performance in society might have changed. Women are more likely to have entered previously male dominated areas in work, since welfare has a high status. This points out that teachers are preparing actively participating members of society, as is the goal in the curriculum. The results indicate that both sexes speak the same language, just with a variation. Here enters the importance of the teachers. Their teaching styles affect the students' possibilities for learning, which will influence how the students develop their written production, and also on how they perform gender. Therefore, it is important that teachers recognize the importance of their role, and that they avoid gender bias in the classroom, so that students get equal possibilities for learning and developing.

This essay highlighted the importance of including the gender topic in the teacher education programme, not to provide teachers with a fixed set of rules, but rather to open up for the possibility for them to act differently.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Writing Task

Appendix 2 – Analysed Scripts

Appendix 1: Writing Task
Participation in a Research Project
Johanna Vedenpää, Göteborgs Universitet
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GÖTEBORGS UNIVERSITET

My name is Johanna Vedenpää, and I am studying to become a teacher in Spanish and English. I am studying at Göteborgs Universitet, but I am currently conducting a research project at the University of Sussex.

I am now asking you as an adult second language learner in an English language course to participate in my study. Your participation is voluntary and will be completely anonymous. By completing this written task that I am now handing out to you, you are giving your consent to be a participant of this research project.

Your task is to write two texts of 350 words each to a student lifestyle magazine at your university, directed to both students and professors. Both texts will treat the same topic. Write about someone who you admire, dead or alive. In the first text you will write about a male person and in the second text about a female person. Answer the following questions, being as descriptive and specific as you can;

- What is the person like? Describe his/her appearance and personality.
- Why do you admire that person? Give descriptive examples.
- Is the person related to you in any way? Do you have any kind of relationship with the person?

This writing task is part of a research project conducted by Johanna Vedenpää, as part of the teacher training programme, at Göteborgs Universitet (University of Sussex). Taking part in this research project is completely voluntary. Anonymity is guaranteed, and therefore, it will not be possible to identify you afterwards; you are only requested to state whether you are a male or a female.

Thank you for your participation!

The Analysed Scripts

F1-M

The person I admire more than anyone else in the world is my father. He is quite tall, well-built and good-looking. The most distinguishing elements of his appearance are deep brown dark eyes with a spark of intelligence, a Roman nose which makes him look very serious and confident and his black beard which gives him a bit more age than he actually has.

He is the head of a huge company and the work always takes the most of him. However, he always tries his best to leave the work behind the threshold of his office and come home happy, cheerful and more or less relaxed. He reads a lot in English, Ukrainian and Russian both academic books and novels, he does not skip a day without reading. Moreover, every evening he learns either German or English from the self-study books. This is why he is extremely intelligent. Also, he is very careful and concerned about all family members. Furthermore, every weekend he tries to do some sports, go to a cinema or do any other sort of entertainment. Withal, he is utterly friendly and helpful.

I admire my father because he is exceedingly smart and, therefore, is always able to reply on most of my questions and give a considerable, worthy advice. He is also very organized and I know I am always able to rely on him. I adore his passion to studying, to broadening the mind horizons. Also, he always supports me in any situation I appear in and in all my start ups. Additionally, he is very experienced because he went through many jobs and life conditions in his life and, therefore, is excessively wise. He is a kind of role model for me because I would really love to achieve the welfare he has managed to get in his life.

I consider our relationships to be warm and mutually supportive and I really appreciate everything he does for me.

F2-F

It is a strange thing that we tend to admire people who profess their personality, lifestyle and choices in an open and entertaining manner, those who persuade us to believe in their goodness and become inspired by their ways – we love celebrities. However, nowadays one

does not need to employ an office full of public relation assistants to construct an artificial positive image, worthy of recognition and emulation. I am talking about a more honest and personal approach to the matter, developed by bloggers in general and a New York based blogger, writer and entrepreneur Gala Darling in particular. Despite her keen interest in fashion world, Gala is not a conventional beauty and is proud of her imperfections, with which she boldly experiments in an endless celebration of self. The phenomenon of Gala turned petite height, thin hair and prominent nose into perfectly acceptable individual trademarks and attributes to be proud of. Gala developed a concept of Radical Self Love and practices it daily – it can be described as a mixture of positive outlook, healthy self-confidence and constant cognition work, which enables her to conquer challenging situations by empowering all aspects of her personality. Bold, bright, grateful and busy, she is a successful businesswoman, who still puts heart in her work and travels around the world teaching women to accept and love themselves by rejecting the narrow standards of society. Despite these radical ideas, she does not deny her femininity and is a great fan of pink, of sequins and heels – only if they are seen as attributes of adequate fun and self-expression – not as an oppressive limitations over what is acceptable or desired. Gala's figure online stands for courage to step up against stereotyping, adventurous life that virtually anyone can create for themselves and seizing opportunities with joy and gratitude. She has been a major inspiration to thousands of women who strive to gain greater confidence and become self-sufficient. Her message of living the life to the fullest without the unnecessary self-torment is sure to be spread across.

F3–F

A popular actress in my country at the moment is Tang Wei. Although she is a young actress, she still gains many important awards, which are about movies, in China even globally. Everything is difficult when it beginning, Tang Wei's movie career is also same. Before she becoming an actress, she was a model. According her memory, it was a hard time for her to live during that time, because she was too young and she can't find a good job. However, she has a good chance to run for actress for a movie which is called Last caution, and she became that movie ___ actress. In that movie, she her act skill was brilliant and many people like her from that movie, and due to this movies, she gained many awards. But at that time, she stopped her movie career, on the contrast, she came to Britain and studied in University of the Arts London for two years. I'm so admire about her act skills and her ___ that she gave up

her career. After she studying, she start her new movie career, and more and more people becoming like ner not only her act skills but also her charming.

F4–F

The most popular woman which influence Chinese history is Wu Zetian. She has become the first and the last king in Chinese Tang dynasty. She has also published some useful policies to improve labour production such as reduce revenue of farmers. Also she was always heart others advance to change the policies to help country more better than before. To be honest, some people hate her because Wu killed her husband and son to become the king of Tang Dynasty. But in my opinion these reasons cannot change the advantages that she bring to the country and citizens.

M1-M

George Remmy Martin, is one of the most respected authors of our time. He achieved the title "famous" when two other individuals approached him one day asking him if they could turn his books into a television show. At first he was a bit sceptical and left the two with one question, who is Jon Snow's mother? (A ---- popular character in the series, if not the most). They got, in secret, back to him with the correct answer and he agreed to hand them the rights. This may seem as though he did not put time to consider whether or not this was the correct way forward, but to any true fan it is one of the biggest mysteries in the book. I admire George R.R because he has dedicated his entire life to the novels, even before they became popular and started making money. The first book was released in 19956 and the first volume (vol.7) has yet to be released. The way he portrays his characters is beyond this world

M2-M

America is famously known of its love for hip hop and the vast amount of rappers in the music industry. 50 Cents out of all this rappers is my favourite. Although his music sounds doing drugs and selling drugs and guns, this is the direct opposite of his actual lifestyle, beyond the flashing lights. 50 Cent is a well-known philanthropist, he has very huge charity events as well: which all the money is been given to struggling children in Asia and Africa. This shows that he has a very kind heart. As impossible as it may sound, he doesn't drink nor smoke marijuana, which is what majority of the rappers of this generation talk about. This shows that it does not matter what your job description is. You can still live a good and respectable life, job does not matter.

M3-M

Kobe Bryant is the most successful basketball star in my mind. He is a basketball player in NBA now who causes two different views in many person. Some people think he is successful, a person who got 5 champion and a ---- in NBA, but others think he is a loser. Every time when I watched his match, I was always excited if he was gain the score. Actually, he is a person who want be very perfect in his basketball skill, so he is very hard work and grittiness on basketball. But to be honest, he is bad in deal with the relationship between people and people, so he gained many bad news on this in my opinion. I love his hardworking and the expression on basketball so I hope him will do better in the future.

M4-M

I would like to talk about a popular actor in my country his name is Tariq Al Ali he is one of the best a comedian actors in Arab countries in the last 5 years. Moreover, he created one of the funniest theathers in Middle East, its name was "Albeat batk" that comedian show achieved a high views, and won the reward of best show of the year. Tariq Al Ali is very talented. He starts acting since he as 13 years old, and all Kuwaiti people admire him.

M5-M

Every person has someone who he likes a lot. Trying to copy his behaviour, learning his biography and his phrases all these means admiration. My country used to be a part of the USSR, but now it is independent. This essay is about a person I admire, exactly my father who got married early age and helped his siblings get a good education during the communistic regime.

My father is strict, serious, fair and square. His friends and relatives like him very much, moreover his colleagues respect him a lot. He is 50 yeas old and he is the oldest son in his family, it means that he is responsible for his young brothers and sisters. He started working at the age of 22 in a factory during the USSR period. At that time my parents had one child - my older sister, and my mother was pregnant with me. Besides, it was a difficult time for them, because they did not have their own accommodation, the salary was too low and goods were expensive. Apart from his younger age sister came to the capital city to study and my father was in duty to look after her. Thus, he had to work in two places, in the morning he worked in a factory, in the evening he did some entrepreneurship, notwithstanding it was illegal to be at the same time a government worker and a businessman. He did not have his

own car, because it was almost impossible to get a car in the USSR if you are not a high official.

When my mother gave a birth she decided to help my father and began working, as she was a high educated person. Hardly they manage to buy their own house after several years of hard working poor, hard working. Later, he organised and paid half of the weddings of his younger brothers and he helped them with their carrier.

Nowadays he looks after his parents, for example every year he sends his parents to a health resort to check their health condition and have a rest. Also, he built a new house for them and bought a new car. Interestingly, He has been working for 2 years and he is still full of energy, but sometimes I notice that he is tired of everything. in spite of this he is trying to give his children a high qualified education, he says that the best investment of the money is education.

To sum up, I want to underline that I admire not only my father, but my mother too, because she has been supporting him for a long time women there for her man. Without the backstop provided by my mother, my father would not succeed. I admire my parents for their perseverance and kindness.

M6-F

I would to talk about famous actor who has been ___ acting about 50 years. It's Souad Abdullah, she is a Kuwaiti actor, she began her career since 1964 as a child on stage with one of the most facours actors Mohammed Noshmi he discovers her talent when he saw her acting in a public school. Then she grew up with her famous friend Hayat Al Fahad. Both of them have donce such a nice tv series such as Mahtotha and Mabrouka in English means "The lucky lady and her blessed sister", probably I have watched this TV series more than 8 times and I never felt bored, and I would like to watch it again. This tv series was talking about two sisters who lost their parents since they where babies, so they went to live in their uncle's house who is an aggressive man and unhonest aunt wants to steal their fortune in a comedian way and sorrowful at the same time. Finally, I think Souad is one of greatest actors in Arabian gulf.

M7–F

My famous female role model is Oprah Winfrey. Oprah was brought up in broken home of abuse and poverty, but this did not stop her from working extremely hard to become the most powerful black woman in the world. Although Oprah is a multi billionaire, all her sources of income benefit the world, especially the female and --- community. For example, her television programme, this programme has won numerous awards, for the most influential tv programme. Oprah doesn't stop there, she is also a well-known philantrohpist with a numerous amout of multi-million dollar charities. She has shown the world that the greatest joy is making other people smile. Due to the colour of hers kin she went through a phase of racism in her life. Oprah now organises campains discussing the eradication of racism.

M8–F

If somebody asks me who is the famous women that I like, I will say this woman is Karen Carpenter. She was the vocalist of the American duo, the Carpenters, which was also formed by his brother. Although the Carpenters is a 1970's band, the songs of it are still famous at the present and impress me. For me, the Carpenter's songs will never be old fashioned, as those songs are not only the songs but also the artistic works. The lyrics she wrote and the vocal she performed do really inspire me and are impressive to me, as the melody and lyrics are not only for letting people getting high like the current pop music, they also encourage people to face and cope with the challenge, as well as telling people to stop being sand for the past. Although she is no longer live in this world, but I believe her voice and lyrics will stay in my heart forever.

M9–F

Marilyn Monroe is perhaps one of the most famous women to have ever lived. She was born in the summer of 1926, Los Angeles, California. She grew up during the times of war and realised that America at that time was a mans world. She spent her early years growing up from foster home to foster home, which I believe made her mature at a very young age. I admire her because I believe that she knew how to make the most out of the situation she was in, which is something I can relate to. When she was 18 she began her life as a model and never looked back. She lived in the moment. I respect Marilyn because she saw herself as lion, who wouldn't lose sleep over the opinion of sheep. She was in the world alone, but she learned to grow a custom to that accustomed.