

Shala Barczewska, Agata Andreassen

Department of History and Culture Studies, Institute of Foreign Languages, Jan Kochanowski University, Kielce, Poland

shadanielle@gmail.com

***Good or marvelous? Pretty, cute or lovely?* Male and female adjective use in MICASE**

Nearly half a century after Lakoff's controversial publication *Language and a Woman's Place* (1975), the verdict is still out as to the exact relationship (if any) between language and gender (cf. Baker 2014: 3, Cameron 2005). The proposed theories addressing the similarities and differences between male and female speech often focus on social and cultural influences that may cause a man or woman to act or speak in a certain way; for example, use more adjectives or a broader variety of adjectives. Moreover, they often use as their source materials anecdotes and personal data. As a result, the studies, and the papers they produce, are often influenced by researcher intuition (Baker 2014; Schmid 2003). Only within the last fifteen to twenty years has it really been possible to analyze large collections of spoken data to test this intuition. Nevertheless, even with the advent of computer-assisted data analysis, the results are ambiguous. The aim of our study is to analyze male and female use of adjectives in the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE). We compare the use of select basic adjectives (*good, bad, big, small, pretty, ugly, important, and different*) and their near synonyms in an attempt to support or call into question intuition-based claims that certain adjectives are more 'feminine' or 'masculine', or that women use more and a greater variety of adjectives than men. This paper hopes to contribute to the ongoing discussion regarding gender differences and language.

1. Introduction

As Baker (2014: 3), Cameron (2005) and others have mentioned, scholars are divided when it comes to determining the influence gender has on language use. Theories addressing the similarities and differences between male and female speech often focus on social and cultural influences that may cause a man or woman to act or speak in a certain way; for example, claims that women use more ad-

jectives or a broader variety of adjectives than men do. As a result, these studies are often influenced by researcher intuition. Only within the last fifteen to twenty years has it really been possible to analyze large collections of spoken data to test this intuition (Baker 2014; Schmid 2003). Nevertheless, even with the advent of computer-assisted data analysis, the results are ambiguous. The aim of our study is to analyze male and female use of adjectives in the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE) against some of the prevailing theories.

There are a variety of perspectives when it comes to understanding *sex* and *gender*. Most simply, gender is as “the social elaboration of biological sex. Gender builds on biological sex, it exaggerates biological difference” (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2002: 8). Queen (2013: 368) defines *gender* as a social category which manifests itself in interactions and is contingent on complex factors such as institutions, social values or cultural rules. Schilling-Estes and Wolfram (1998: 185) see gender as functioning in a way similar to social class as both constitute social determinants. Tannen (1990) views different genders as different cultural groups with different communication styles. The term *sex*, on the other hand, typically refers to biological aspects and anatomical features of the human body. However, in the literature, these terms are often used interchangeably to simplify communication (cf. Paoletti 2012: 2).

The process of developing one’s own way of behaving is complex. According to Wardhaugh (2006; Chambers and Schilling-Estes 2013), men and women do not develop their communicative habits based on their linguistic competence alone. The author claims that male and female performance may depend on their occupation or social position. Gender identity is also shaped through interaction and participation in various communities. Moreover, as Wardhaugh (2006) points out expectations regarding male and female behavior changes with each generation and depends on race, ethnicity, social class, and religion. For these reasons, gender should be studied in each generation anew.

Thus, while the starting point is biological, theories addressing the similarities and differences between male and female speech often focus on social and cultural factors that may cause a man or woman to actor speak in a certain way. This is not to say that the scientific community has reached a consensus as to whether or not these differences exist. Among those who argue for gender differences in language are Lakoff (1973; 1975) and Tannen (1990). Opponents of this dichotomy include Cameron (2005; 2008), MacGeorge et al. (2004) and Hyde (2005). Others are hesitant to take a firm stand either way, but suggest caution, arguing, among other things, that culture and other social influences also have an impact on speech, and that influence may be stronger than gender (e.g. Baker 2014; Gu 2013).

One of the frequently mentioned areas in which men and women are supposed to differ is in their choice and use of adjectives. Women are said to use a greater variety of adjectives with more frequency; moreover, certain adjectives are said to belong primarily to the female domain. According to Lakoff (1973), women are

more frequent users of adjectives such as *fantastic, lovely, sweet, cute, precious, awful, pretty, nice, charming, wonderful, dreamy, adorable, and divine*. Men, on the other hand, are said to prefer basic adjectives, such as *good or bad*.

The organization of our paper proceeds as follows. In Section 2, we present some of the issues and theories of the connection — or lack thereof — between gender and language use and describe some of the research that has been conducted to date. In Section 3, we explain our research methodology as well as our reasons for choosing the MICASE corpus. In Section 4, we present the results of our analyses in a series of tables followed by discussion. In the conclusion, Section 5, we discuss the implications of this study and possible future research.

2. Language use and gender

This section looks at a variety of approaches to studies in gender and language from both a theoretical and practical perspective. Section 2.1 presents different understandings of gendered language – including whether or not such a feature of language exists. Section 2.2 describes some of the studies that have been carried out to test these theories.

2.1. Proposed reasons for differences in male/female speech patterns

Several theories have been proposed to explain possible differences between male and female speech. Although Vandergriff (1984) claims that interest in this subject can be traced back to 1582 and Haas (1979) cites studies from 1922, it is commonly accepted that the intersection between language and gender became an object of study in sociolinguistics in the mid–1970s. Robin Lakoff’s *Language and a Woman’s Place*, published in 1975, which was an extension of her 1973 article of the same title, is said to have not only introduced the concept of studying gender within linguistics but also within other disciplines as well (Bucholtz 2004: 3). She emphasizes the social significance of gender and distinguishes between features of male and female speech patterns, and the ideas discussed in that seminal work continue to inspire sociolinguistic research, including this study.

2.1.1. The dominance approach

For Lakoff (1973; Lakoff 1975), the language men and women use represent power and social codes; hence, her approach is now referred to as the ‘dominance’ approach to language and gender (cf. Baker 2014). Accordingly, the differences between female and male language use are seen as emerging from hierarchical organization and inequality of society, in which women tend to be subordinate to men. As she explains, this view of language and gender was a product of the spirit of the equal rights movement, during which language began to be analyzed in terms of social identities (Lakoff and Bucholtz 2004). This perspective still influences re-

search and has been continued by organizations such as the International Gender and Language Association (IGALA) and the Berkeley Women and Language Group (BWLG), which were founded in the 1990s (Queen 2013: 370–371). The former focuses on the correlation between language and gender, while the latter focuses on the interdisciplinarity of gender studies and language. This phenomenon goes beyond linguistics and can be found in a variety of other disciplines, e.g. psychology, philosophy, literature, history, religious studies, politics, cultural and media studies, or even in law and management (Bucholtz 2004: 3).

Differences in female language observed by Lakoff (1973) include a greater variety of adjectives, preference for words such as *cute* and *lovely*, preference for euphemisms over taboo language, more frequent use of hedges and polite language.

2.1.2. The gender differences model

A student of Lakoff, Deborah Tannen (1990) calls for a shift in focus from a power dominance model to a ‘gender differences’ model. Tannen (18) argues that ‘[t]he effect of dominance is not always the result of an intention to dominate.’ Instead, these linguistic behaviors that appear domineering may result from a difference in styles of communication and interaction learned during childhood.

Even if they grow up in the same neighborhood, on the same block, or in the same house, girls and boys grow up in different worlds of words. Others talk to them differently and expect and accept different ways of talking from them. Most important, children learn how to talk, how to have conversations, not only from their parents but from their peers. (43)

Specifically, boys’ relationships focus on hierarchical structures. Status is gained and lost based on one’s (in)ability to give orders, tell jokes, and win at the games they play. Conversely, girls’ play usually occurs in smaller groups, perhaps with a best friend. Closeness and feeling accepted are prioritized and most girl games, as identified by Tannen (e.g. jump rope or playing house) do not have winners. As a result, she claims: ‘If adults learn their ways of speaking as children growing up in separate social worlds of peers, then conversation between women and men is cross-cultural communication’ (47). Hence, in her work she applies theories and observations from inter-cultural studies.

This seems to coincide with ideas put forth in the ‘prestige-based’ theory of gender differences. Schilling-Estes and Wolfram (1998: 188–192) describe this approach as explaining language differences by an assumption that women, more than men, use language to maintain or gain social prestige. In part, this is said to be due to the different roles men and women fill in society. However, Schilling-Estes and Wolfram express doubt regarding this theory. Not only do they cite disparate research, but they also chart other variables that affect the differences in ‘presti-

gious' linguistic choices, such as class and profession. For example, male blue-collar workers power was achieved rather through the use of vernacular forms as they gained success through physical work rather than through negotiating Holmes (1997) claims that women may be linguistically more flexible than men due to the desire for prestige.

Another explanation is a desire to appear masculine or feminine. According to Wolfram and Schilling-Estes (1998: 187, 189), men tend to use more sub-standard vocabulary as it makes them masculine. Women who express this trait may be considered less feminine. Consequently, social expectations greatly affect the linguistic patterns used by both sexes. It is worth indicating that the way of speaking reflects social identity and there are strict rules regarding gender language.

2.1.3. Post-structuralist paradigm

Cameron (2005) distinguishes between two main approaches to linguistic gender: a modern feminist approach and a postmodern feminist approach. According to the former, gender is built on the basis of biological sex. This approach assumes that men and women comprise two different homogeneous categories that each possess gender identities and gender-related linguistic codes of conduct, which are developed during their early stages of life. In view of the modern approach, gender is something that everyone possesses, as opposed to the postmodern approach, which perceives gender as something that people perform (Butler 1990). From the postmodern point of view, sex is not a natural feature; it is constructed. Consequently, proponents believe that individuals assume male or female characteristics and identity depending on their social environments. For example, Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (2002) cite the claim that men and women tend to be more categorical, success-oriented and sometimes even aggressive as the result of socialization. Thus, they argue, gender is determined by a complex array of social factors, rather than by biological sex alone. The process starts from the very beginning when a child is born and gets a name attributed to their sex. There are then introduced to gender expectations created by society, for instance, pink clothing for girls and blue for boys.¹

Despite the fact that both women and men learn certain sex-related behaviors as participants in a gendered society, the postmodern view seems to be lacking because it minimizes the role sex plays in gender identity. For the purposes of this paper, gender is identified on the basis of biological sex, but this does not ignore the influences of the socio-cultural environment, expectations, etc.

1 It is worth emphasizing that these social expectations change over time. For example, the above-mentioned use of pink for girls and blue for boys, which now seems natural, is a relatively recent phenomenon (cf. Paolletti 2012).

2.1.4. The role of cultural environments and upbringing

Wolfram and Schilling–Estes (1998: 203) point out that socialization is crucial in children’s development. During the age when children acquire language skills, girls and boys also learn certain contrasting linguistic patterns. As a result, apart from learning gender–related activities, they also learn gender–specific language behavior. Thus, differences in language patterns between both sexes are established early on and have a huge impact during social interactions in the later stages of their life.

One explanation for distinct ways of communication may be that children usually acquire their language and code of behavior in single–sex peer groups. Herring and Kapidzic (2015) and Tannen (1990) notice that the social context in which children’s play occurs differs according to gender. For example, they claim that boys favor larger groups with hierarchical ordering. From a pragmatic point of view, boys’ speech seems to be more authoritative, while girls tend to be more agreeable. Tannen (1990) observes that males learn how to combat and gain status through negotiating. Their games have rules often established during the process of arguing. Adolescent males are also apt to boast about their achievements and skills. Adolescent girls, on the contrary, prefer smaller groups or pairs. Their main goal is to establish a friendship based on intimacy. They do not tend to boast or give direct orders. This is replaced by acceptance and making suggestions. Their expressions are polite and signal that they want to emphasize with the audience. Tannen emphasizes that these differences do not mean that men value close relationships less, simply that they have different ways of developing and maintaining them.

2.1.5. Gender similarities

At the early stages of gender studies, the disparities between women’s and men’s speech were regarded as biologically conditioned. Wolfram & Schilling–Estes (1998) claim that this view was undermined later when scholars observed that biological sex in and of itself has nothing to do with this dichotomy. At the same time, biological differences result in gender–differentiated language (Wardhaugh 2006). In other words, the differences are not innate, but because of the sex one is born with, individuals are raised to speak and act according to social conventions. It is debatable whether cross–sex language patterns emerge from the access to political, economic and social power, or from various social roles and the process of socialization. This question was also raised by the popular debate called ‘difference vs. dominance’ during the 1980s and 1990s. However, as Cameron (2005: 486) observes, in hindsight, these two positions do not differ so much as they both treat gender norms, in terms of how men and women speak, as a product of society. Moreover, they also viewed the groups of male and female as ‘well defined and internally homogeneous’ (Cameron 2005: 486). As recent research has shown (cf. Amir et al. 2012; Baker 2014), while there are tendencies for male and female language use, there is also great variation within each gender.

Others, such as Cameron (2008) and Hyde (2005), disagree with Lakoff completely. Hyde (2005) proposes the ‘gender similarities hypothesis’ and argues that in nearly all aspects, males and females are alike in more ways than they differ. Cameron (2005) argues that Lakoff’s essay was written many years ago and the way females speak has changed. Moreover, she argues that Lakoff’s assumptions were based on intuition rather than scientific evidence. In her book, Cameron (2008) presents opposing views supported by research carried out by Judith Baxter in groups of 14–15-year-old school pupils. In Baxter’s study, no dissimilarities in cooperativeness vs. competitiveness between boys and girls were observed. Both female and male speech included cooperative and competitive elements. Since this distinction is the basis for many theories of gender and language, it does indeed call the foundation of these theories into question.

Baker (2014) draws attention to the fact that an expectation of differences may bias not only the way the results are described but also the very way in which a study is designed. For example, he highlights the problem of keyword analysis, which by nature extracts differences, while ignoring or hiding similarities (2014: 24). He also points out that it is also important to recognize the context in which the data was collected. In particular, he mentions the BNC, in which male language primarily comes from professional settings and female language from domestic settings (2014: 29–30)

Gu’s (2013) position is more one of caution than outright rejection of either the gender differences or gender dominance position. The author claims that, besides their gender-based ‘sub-cultures’, both women and men:

(...) still have their national culture, which make them belong to the same nation. Whether males or females, on one side, they form their values and way of behavior within their national culture; on the other side, they have their own values and way of behavior within their sub-culture. So their behavior, including language behavior must have differences and similarities. (2013: 251)

Thus, not only are speech patterns influenced by gender, but they are also influenced by national and ethnic cultures. Hence, it is necessary to use caution when talking about how men and women use language to communicate as this may lead to inaccurate generalizations. In looking at gender and language it is important to control for content and be aware of national and ethnic culture. Moreover, it is also important to look at similarities.

To summarize, although female and male speech styles seem to differ to some extent, they may also share many similar characteristics. According to Baker (2014), similarities are often overlooked in gender studies because of a drive to produce differences. Moreover, generalizations may be stereotypical and do not appear to apply equally to all women and men. Additionally, attitudes to gender-related speech patterns are changing over time. For these reasons, gender issues should be studied in each generation anew.

2.2. Previous studies connecting language and adjective use

Studies in language and gender abound, although, as Baker (2014) and Schmid (2003) observe, much of this research is conducted using small amounts of data focused on qualitative rather than quantitative results. Here we will briefly present a few studies conducted in the 1970s and after the popularization of the tools of corpus linguistics.

Hass (1976: 621) mentions four studies conducted in the 1970s, i.e., around the time of Lakoff's seminal publication, that compare adjective use by men and women with differing results. Hartman (1976) analyzed interviews with men and women in Maine who had been born around 1900. Her results confirmed some of Lakoff's hypotheses; namely, that women use more "feminine" words than men, e.g., *lovely*, *delightful*, *wonderful*, *nice*, *pretty* (12) and that women's language is 'more "evaluative–flowery," more polite, more tentative, more qualified' (13). Two other studies with younger participants produced similar results: Brandis and Henderson (1970) analyzed the spoken language of 5-year old British children, whereas Entwisle and Garvey (1972) looked at written stories of ninth-graders. Both found that females used more adjectives than their male counterparts. However, not all studies from that time period were in agreement. Kramer's (1974) study of linguistic variation in written descriptions of black and white photographs by college students revealed no gender-based difference in the frequency or type of adjectives or –ly adverbs.

Although these studies are interesting, they are all small-scale and dated. Now that we have the option of using corpora, one would expect these questions of gender differences, particularly when it comes to the frequency of certain adjectives or –ly adverbs, which can be retrieved from computer programs with relative ease, to have been answered. However, research in this area is still wanting. As an example of this, Baker (2014: 6) notes that he could only find four papers that applied corpus-linguistics methodology out of the 63 published in the journal *Gender and Language* between 2007 and 2012. Granted, he found other articles that used the word *corpus*, but the studies turned out to have been conducted manually and were more qualitative than quantitative in nature.

Schmid (2003) undertook one of the first broad, corpus-based analyses of gender differences in spoken British English. He analyzed a series of claims made by Lakoff (1975) and others, including hedging, adjectives, and semantic domains. His results seemed to confirm many of Lakoff's intuitions. For example, he found that females use more 'women's words', more hedges, and more tag questions than men. Specifically, he notes the high frequency of *lovely* and the difficulty with *pretty*, which will be discussed in our analysis. However, as Baker (2014: 29–30) observes, these results may have been skewed by the types and locations of conversations recorded for either gender.

Bamman et al. (2014) study Twitter use and notice that many language patterns appear to agree with expectations put forth in the literature; e.g., women use

more words related to emotion and men use more words related to technology. However, not all of their data aligned with the stereotypes; e.g., for many of the grammatical markers there was no statistical difference. Moreover, they observed other factors that influenced language use beyond the binary categories of male/female.

In their study of adolescent bloggers, Huffaker and Calvert (2005) find girl bloggers to be no more polite or passive than their male counterparts. Moreover, they note that men used more emoticons, i.e. emotional ‘language’, than their female counterparts, which contradicts what the literature suggests we should find. This could be because language is constantly changing, as suggested by Cameron (2005); alternatively, this could be because of the intuitive nature of Lakoff’s first publication or the anonymity provided by the internet.

Amir et al. (2012) studied posts over the span of a year for four teenage Malaysian bloggers writing in English (two male and two female). One of the areas they looked at was the frequency of so-called ‘empty adjectives’, including those mentioned by Lakoff (1973) as ‘women’s words.’ Although both male and female bloggers in Amir et al.’s study used these adjectives, they were definitely favored by the females.

In analyzing taboo language among adults and children ages one to twelve, Jay and Jay (2013) found that differentiation according to gender occurred after the children reached five years of age, that is, after they entered school. For the most part, both boys and men exhibited a greater taboo lexicon which they used more frequently than women. The one exception is girls ages 3–4, which produced more taboo language than the boys their age. As a result, Jay and Jay conclude that, from the earliest stages of childhood, girls and boys learn certain speaking patterns through social interactions. They suggest that this begins when a child enters different social environments, such as school, in which they spend time with same-sex peers and begin to take on gender norms.

2.3. Summary

Although a great number of scholars highlight the differences between women’s and men’s speech patterns, there are studies which call into question the conclusion of differentiating between female–male styles of communication. Our study focuses on one area of this discrepancy: the use of adjectives. Lakoff (1973; 1975), (Brandis and Henderson 1970; Entwisle and Garvey 1972), Hartman (1976), Bamman et al. (2014), Schmid (2003) and Amir et al. (2012) argue that adjective use differs between the sexes, whereas Kremer (1974), and Cameron (2008) claim that it does not, and Bamman et al. (2014)’s study seems to suggest that not all differences align with the stereotypes as men may be equally, if not more, expressive than women. Baker (2014) is hesitant to come down strongly in support of either position. Since it cannot be clearly stated which claims about male/female speech patterns are best supported by the data, more corpus-based analysis is

needed. The paper presents the results of a study carried out with the use of the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE). Section 3 describes the method we employed and is followed by our analyses.

3. Method

What can be concluded from the research described above is that it has produced conflicting results. One of the reasons for this is that the scholars were sometimes extrapolating from experience or using their intuition rather than linguistic data. This is in part due to the fact that only relatively recently have we developed the tools to collect and analyze large bodies of language. Even with having these tools, it is often easier to access, and hence analyze works of fiction than real, impromptu conversations. While such analysis tells us how writers believe we speak, and of course, must be convincing or the show will lack an audience, it is still based on perception as opposed to real language in use. Another problem that has been revealed is that real language data may have been gathered from different contexts, thereby eliciting different types of language. According to Baker (2014: 29), this is one of the problems with using the spoken BNC to analyze gendered language: data for male speech was largely gathered in the workplace, whereas data for female speech was largely gathered in the home or domestic settings. Hence, Schmid (2003)'s conclusions that women use more words describing the home and domestic activities than men may be the result of context rather than gender.

Of the many questions that could be asked, this paper focuses on one that keeps reappearing in the literature: do women tend to use more and a wider variety of adjectives than men? Do they really prefer *pretty* and *cute* and *lovely* over their male counterparts? If we are to answer these questions, we not only need real language data that has been tagged according to gender, but we also need language that is produced in the same context, so as to rule out other variables. While there are currently many online–corpora available for linguistic analysis, few distinguish between the sex of the speakers. For this reason, the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE) was used. It enables us to select for gender (male/female) and focus solely on English used in one context: the American university.

3.1. MICASE Corpus

The Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE) (Simpson et al. 2002) is a collection of transcripts of academic speech events collected by the English Language Institute at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor from 1997 to 2002.² It includes 152 transcripts totaling approximately 1.85 million words from college life across a variety of disciplines and events (see Figure 1 and Table 1).

2 The best online description of MICASE is Römer (2010), as the interface itself is no longer maintained and many links intended to provide information about the corpus do not work.

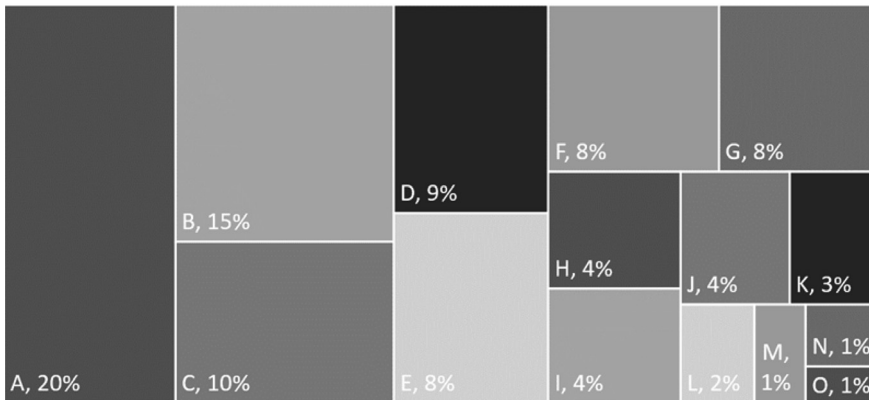


Figure 1 *Speech events in MICASE (according to data provided by Römer 2010)*

Letter	Type of speech event	Letter	Type of speech event
A	Small Lectures	I	Labs
B	Large Lectures	J	Meetings
C	Office Hours	K	Dissertation Defenses
D	Colloquia	L	Advising
E	Student Presentations	M	Service Encounters
F	Seminars	N	Tours
G	Study Groups	O	Interviews
H	Discussion Sections		

Table 1 *Key to Figure 1*

The MICASE interface allows the research to select for a variety of variables including type of interaction, student/faculty, English language fluency and gender. Non-native speakers of English are not excluded from the corpus and represent approximately 12% of the speakers (Römer 2010); thus, this project, despite using a corpus created in the US has an international flavor (cf. Swales 2006).

The choice to use MICASE was determined by several factors. First, it is one of the only, if not the only, freely available online corpus interface that enables the researcher to select for gender. Secondly, the corpus contains a large database from a variety of genres of speech with natural conversations of men and women in academia, both inside and outside the classroom, in formal and informal settings. Thirdly, different generations and academic levels are represented: faculty (49%), undergraduate students (22%) and graduates (22%). Finally, as Römer (2010) highlights, efforts were taken to collect roughly the same amount of male and female texts for each genre and discipline.³ As a result, it does not run up against the same

3 Communication events at the professional departments (e.g. law or medicine) were not included.

problem as the BNC, mentioned above, in which different genders are primarily recorded in different contexts (cf. Baker 2014). That said, despite efforts on the part of the corpus’s compilers, there are more words spoken by females in all categories described above as they represent 54% of MICASE (909,053 words), whereas men represent 46% (786,487 words).⁴

3.2. Procedure

To answer the first question, eight basic adjectives were chosen, and their near synonyms were collected with the aid of *Thesaurus.com*. These adjectives can be found in Table 2.

The study of these near synonyms makes it possible for us to check the claim that women use more elaborate adjectives than men and/or a greater variety. Each synonym in Table 2 was concordanced in MICASE, but only those near synonyms which occurred at least twice are analyzed in the sections that follow.

Adjective	Near synonyms
good	acceptable, fine, excellent, exceptional, favorable, great, marvelous, positive, satisfactory, wonderful
bad	atrocious, awful, crummy, dreadful, lousy, unacceptable, rough, poor, horrible, wrong
big	large, great, colossal, considerable, enormous, gigantic, sizable, huge, massive, tremendous
small	tiny, cramped, limited, meagre, microscopic, miniature, minuscule, modest, slight, short
pretty	beautiful, charming, elegant, good-looking, graceful, handsome, lovely, neat, attractive, cute
ugly	awful, grisly, hideous, horrid, unseemly, unsightly, disgusting, terrible, gross, unpleasant
different	unlike, dissimilar, disparate, distant, distinctive, divergent, offbeat, contrasting, distinct, various
important	essential, valuable, decisive, extensive, far-reaching, imperative, meaningful, critical, crucial, significant

Table 2 *The adjectives and their near synonyms analyzed according to the MICASE*

In the section that follows we present the frequency with which men and women are recorded using these words in the MICASE corpus and discuss how these results conform to or contradict previous studies. We pay particular attention to the use of ‘women’s words’, i.e., so-called empty adjectives, and preference for near synonyms over basic adjectives.

4 This totals less than the 1.87 million mentioned on the MICASE website. The most likely explanation for this is that the remaining words belong to the unknown category.

4. Results and Analysis

In this section, the distribution of the adjectives used by men and women according to MICASE is analyzed. As mentioned in the previous section, the basic adjectives studied here are *good*, *bad*, *big*, *small*, *pretty*, *ugly*, *different*, *important*. For each, near synonyms were collected from *Thesaurus.com*. In the sub-sections that follow, the frequencies of each basic adjective and its near synonyms as used by males and females are presented and discussed. Normalized values that are higher for each pair are shaded in grey, while those uses that are statistically significant have been bolded.

4.1. Good and bad

This section looks at the use of *good* and *bad* and their near synonyms: *great*, *fine*, *wonderful*, *excellent* and *wrong*, *poor*, *awful*, *horrible*, respectively. The number of occurrences of each adjective in MICASE according to gender is presented in Table 3, along with the p-value suggesting the statistical significance of any observed differences.

Adjective	Males		Females		P-value
	per 1000	raw frequency	per 1000	raw frequency	
good	988	1.256	1344	1.478	0.0001
great	312	0.397	423	0.465	0.0324
fine	164	0.209	258	0.284	0.0019
wonderful	40	0.051	63	0.069	0.1236
excellent	18	0.023	38	0.042	0.0324
favorable	3	0.004	1	0.001	0.2501
satisfying	1	0.001	4	0.004	0.2380
marvelous	12	0.015	4	0.004	0.0214
Total 'good'	1522	1.935	2126	2.339	0.0001
Near synonyms total	550	0.683	791	0.861	0.0001
bad	209	0.266	228	0.251	0.5485
wrong	222	0.282	201	0.221	0.0121
poor	62	0.079	99	0.109	0.0455
awful	20	0.025	20	0.022	0.6455
horrible	14	0.018	25	0.028	0.1902
Total 'bad'	527	0.670	573	0.630	0.3125
Near synonyms total	318	0.404	345	0.380	0.4122

Table 3 The frequency of *good*, *bad* and their near synonyms used by males and females according to the MICASE

The first thing that we notice in looking at this table is that females use most of the positive adjectives analyzed more frequently, and, in many cases, this difference is statistically significant. Moreover, this includes words at both ends of the intensity spectrum, from *fine* to *great* and *excellent*. *Marvelous* here stands out: we would expect it to be a predominantly female adjective; however, in the MICASE it is not only used more frequently by male speakers, but this difference is statistically significant ($p=0.0214$). Conversely, when it comes to *bad* and its near synonyms, we see that men use these words comparatively more often than females. While as a set, the difference is not statistically significant ($p = 3.125$), *wrong* does stand out as statistically more frequent among men than women ($p = 0.0121$). At the same time, *poor* and *horrible* are the only two negative adjectives listed that are favored by women, and only the former is statistically significant ($p=0.0455$ and 0.1902 , respectively).

This brings us to the third observation: within MICASE, occurrences of *good*, and its near synonyms, far outnumber occurrences of *bad*, and its near synonyms. The positive adjectives listed here (3648 instances for both males and females) occur 3.61 times more frequently than the negative ones (1010 instances for both males and females). In order to evaluate whether this is unique to MICASE or unique to academic English, a comparison was made with the different subsections of COCA: *The Corpus of Contemporary American English* (Davies 2008–). Table 4 presents the proportion of the words *good* vs. *bad* in the COCA sub–corpora.

Corpus	good(/1,000)	bad(/1,000)	Proportion
MICASE	1.262	0.24	5.336
MICASE (men)	1.256	0.266	4.722
MICASE (women)	1.478	0.251	5.888
COCA (academic)	0.394	0.07	5.648
COCA (magazine & news)	0.791	0.20	3.877
COCA (spoken)	1.484	0.31	4.810
COCA (fiction)	0.991	0.29	3.379

Table 4 *Good and bad* in COCA

The results demonstrate that, in terms of the occurrences of these adjectives, MICASE is comparable to academic language if we consider both genders; however, when we look at the difference between the two genders, we notice that the proportion of *good* to *bad* is much higher among the females than for the males. In fact, the *good/bad* proportion among women speakers in MICASE is higher than for COCA (academic), which cannot be differentiated according to gender. This difference would be an interesting area for further research in broader contexts. Nevertheless, while it is tempting to focus only on this observable difference, it cannot be overlooked that both men and women prefer *good* to *bad*. Of course, this does not

mean that contemporary American society is necessarily more positive adjectives than negative – as the results for *good* may include negative phrases such as *good riddance*, *not good enough*, etc. At the same time, *bad* can also be negated and has a positive slang meaning. This would also be an area worth studying.

4.2. *Big and small*

The table below (Table 5) presents the occurrences of *big* and *small* and their near synonyms in the MICASE corpus.

Adjective	Males		Females		P-value
	raw frequency	per 1000	raw frequency	per 1000	
big	378	0.481	464	0.510	0.3843
large	174	0.221	191	0.210	0.6241
huge	51	0.065	130	0.143	0.0001
tremendous	24	0.031	32	0.035	0.5961
massive	17	0.022	20	0.022	0.9601
Total 'big'	644	0.819	837	0.921	0.0251
Near synonyms total	266	0.338	373	0.410	0.0160
small	194	0.247	251	0.276	0.2380
short	74	0.094	88	0.097	0.8572
limited	53	0.067	49	0.054	0.2585
tiny	36	0.046	28	0.031	0.1141
slight	9	0.011	9	0.010	0.7566
miniature	1	0.001	3	0.003	0.3898
Total 'small'	366	0.465	425	0.468	0.9522
Near synonyms total	173	0.220	177	0.195	0.2543

Table 5 *Big and small*

Once again, we see that female speakers use most of these adjectives more often than men, but, with the exception of *huge* ($p=0.0001$), these differences are not statistically significant. However, the difference between the total use of near synonyms of *large* between genders is not statistically significant. That said, when we compare the number of times near synonyms are used, it is interesting that women use near synonyms for *big* more often than men ($p=0.0160$), whereas men use a greater variety of near synonyms for *small* than women. Although this latter difference is not statistically significant, it does run contrary to expectations and might be worth further analysis.

4.3. *Pretty and ugly*

Table 6 presents the use of the adjectives *pretty* and *ugly* according to gender.

Adjective	Males		Females		P-value
	per 1000	raw frequency	per 1000	raw frequency	
pretty	445	0.566	434	0.477	0.0117
beautiful	46	0.058	55	0.061	0.8650
cute	4	0.005	20	0.022	0.0035
lovely	12	0.015	10	0.011	0.4413
attractive	12	0.015	8	0.009	0.2225
charming	3	0.004	1	0.001	0.2501
Total 'pretty'	519	0.660	527	0.580	0.0357
Near synonyms total	77	0.098	94	0.103	0.7188
ugly	12	0.015	9	0.010	0.3222
terrible	21	0.027	24	0.026	0.9681
gross	8	0.010	9	0.010	0.9522
disgusting	3	0.004	8	0.009	0.2041
unpleasant	3	0.004	5	0.006	0.6171
Total 'ugly'	47	0.060	55	0.061	0.9522
Near synonyms total	35	0.045	46	0.051	0.0588

Table 6 *Pretty and ugly*

Keeping in mind the analyses of the previous tables, the number of occurrences of both *pretty* and *ugly* is interesting. Firstly, once again, the positive adjectives occur much more frequently than their negative counterparts. Secondly, several of the words occur more often in male speech than female speech, even if these differences are not always statistically significant.

Indeed, there are some surprising differences between male and female speech that warrant further investigation. At first glance, it appears that, apart from *cute*, men use *pretty* and its near synonyms more frequently than women do, whereas their use of *ugly* and its near synonyms are more or less equal. In particular, they use *charming* and *lovely* more often than women. Although this is not statistically significant, it does run contrary to expectations. Nevertheless, when it comes to *pretty*, a closer look at the corpus is necessary as the lexeme can function as both an adjective and an adverbial. Analyzing the concordance lines individually reveals that 99.1% of the male uses of the word are adverbial and could be glossed as *rather*. In terms of female usage, 96.1% are adverbial. When adjectival use is compared, women use *pretty* more frequently than men and the difference is statistically significant ($p=0.0121$).

Adjective	Males	Females	Males	Females	P-value
	per 1000	raw frequency	per 1000	raw frequency	
pretty	4	0.005	17	0.019	0.0121

Table 7 *Adjectival use of pretty*

This conforms with what we would expect from the literature review. The frequency of *cute* also conforms to expectations. In light of this, the comparative frequency of *lovely*, which, according to Lakoff (1973), women supposedly use more than men, stands out. Here the opposite trend is visible. Although the difference is not statistically significant, and limited to one particular genre, it does suggest that Lakoff's intuitions may have been off and more work should be done into the notion of 'feminine' or 'masculine' adjectives.

4.4. Different and important

Finally, in Table 8 we can see the occurrences of *different* and *important* and their near synonyms.

Adjective	Males		Females		P-value
	per 1000	raw frequency	per 1000	raw frequency	
different	952	1.210	1438	1.582	0.0001
various	98	0.125	84	0.092	0.0434
unlike	24	0.031	13	0.014	0.0244
distinct	7	0.009	14	0.015	0.2301
contrasting	4	0.005	3	0.003	0.5687
Total 'different'	1085	1.380	1552	1.707	0.0001
Near synonyms total	133	0.169	114	0.125	0.0188
important	323	0.411	500	0.550	0.0001
significant	50	0.064	56	0.062	0.8729
critical	42	0.053	57	0.063	0.4295
crucial	23	0.029	10	0.011	0.0071
essential	9	0.011	16	0.018	0.2983
Total 'important'	447	0.568	639	0.703	0.0006
Near synonyms total	124	0.158	139	0.153	0.8026

Table 8 *Different and important*

As was the case with the other results, we see that the basic adjectives are used more frequently by women than men, and these results are statistically significant

($p=0.0001$). Moreover, this continues to be the case when the near synonyms are also included, suggesting that perhaps female speakers feel a greater need to emphasize difference and importance. However, contrary to what has been suggested in the past or what has been seen with the other adjectives we have looked at so far, in the case of *different*, it is the male speakers rather than the female speakers who display greater linguistic dexterity, and this difference is statistically significant ($p=0.0188$). This gives reason to question whether the preference for variety is solely dependent on gender, or if it also depends on the type of word a speaker is looking for.

Moving on to *important*, the uses of *crucial* and *critical* demand further attention. Both are given as near synonyms in dictionary entries of the other, and Oxford Learner's Dictionary (<https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/>) lists both as keywords, but only *crucial* is listed as an academic word. Moreover, in differentiating the two terms, the dictionary explains '[c]ritical is often used in technical matters of business or science; crucial is often used to talk about matters that may cause anxiety or other emotions'. Thus, stereotypes regarding male and female language use may prompt the conclusion that this difference is due to the fact that women choose *critical* for its emotional impact. However, that would ignore the fact that, in the context of the academy, *critical* takes on a variety of scientific definitions including '(a) a tendency to find and call attention to errors and flaws, (2) characterized by careful evaluation and judgement, (3) (chemistry and physics) at or of a point at which a property or phenomenon suffers an abrupt change especially having enough mass to sustain a chain reaction' (<https://www.wordandphrase.info/>). In addition, when both terms are checked on COCA's (Davies 2008–) academic word list, *critical* appears an average of 0.193 words per thousand and *crucial* 0.172 words per thousand. Thus, it is difficult to say whether the preference for *critical* over *crucial* is related to the gender of the speaker or is a characteristic of the academic genre. Also, once again it must be mentioned that both men and women prefer *critical* over *crucial*, which is in line with what could be expected from the COCA.

Conclusion

This paper analyzed the male and female use of eight basic adjectives and their near synonyms in the context of university life as made available by the MICASE corpus. The results presented above exemplify both similarities and differences in male/female adjective use. Some of the results add further support to previously observed tendencies in differences between male and female speech. For example, overall, women were recorded as using more of the studied adjectives than men. Moreover, they use *pretty* (adj.) and *cute* more often than males. However, there were also some surprises. For instance, men use *lovely* and *marvelous* more frequently than women. Moreover, while women in the corpus show greater linguistic

dexterity when it comes to using near synonyms for *good and big*, men use more near synonyms for *different*. All of these values are statistically significant.

Not only does this study identify differences in male and female adjective use, but also points to a number of similarities. Firstly, of the adjectives chosen for this analysis, *good* and *different* are used most frequently by both men and women. Secondly, both genders tend to use positive adjectives more than negative adjectives. Thirdly, males and females use *ugly* (and its near synonyms) and *small* (and its near synonyms) in equal proportions. The results for *bad* (and its near synonyms) show only a slight difference. Finally, for the most part, the basic adjectives are used much more frequently than their near synonyms. Deviations from the norm are *bad* (among male speakers) and *pretty* (adj.). Regarding the latter, when only the adjective forms were counted, *beautiful* becomes the most frequent for both sexes.

The mixed results of this study, although limited to one genre, do suggest that Lakoff's intuitions, and the stereotypes they represent, do not always hold and more work should be done into the notion of 'feminine' or 'masculine' adjectives.

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Good or marvelous? Pretty, cute or lovely?

Upotreba pridjeva među govornicima i govornicama u korpusu MICASE

Gotovo pedeset godina prošlo je od izlaska kontroverznoga izdanja Robin Lakoff *Language and a Woman's Place* (1975), a još uvijek nema jasna odgovora na pitanje koji je odnos (ako on postoji uopće) između jezika i roda (v. Baker 2014: 3, Cameron 2005). Dosadašnje teorije koje se bave sličnostima i razlikama između muškoga i ženskoga govora najčešće su usredotočene na društveni i kulturni utjecaj koji može potaknuti muškarca ili ženu da se na određeni način ponašaju ili govore, npr. da upotrebljavaju više pridjeva ili da upotrebljavaju širi raspon pridjeva. Nadalje, te teorije često upotrebljavaju anegdote i osobne informacije kao izvor podataka, što rezultira istraživanjima, a onda i člancima, na čiju provedbu i pisanje utječe intuicija istraživača (Baker 2014; Schmid 2003). Tek je u posljednjih petnaest do dvadeset godina postalo moguće analizirati velike baze govornih podataka kako bi se testiralo spomenutu intuiciju. Ipak, rezultati se i dalje mogu različito tumačiti, unatoč računalnoj analizi podataka. Cilj je ovoga rada analizirati kako govornici i govornice upotrebljavaju pridjeve u korpusu Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE). Usporedit ćemo upotrebu odabranih pridjeva (*good, bad, big, small, pretty, ugly, important* i *different*) i njihovih sinonima kako bismo podržali ili doveli u pitanje tvrdnje temeljene na intuiciji o tome da su određeni pridjevi više 'ženski' odnosno više 'muški', ili da žene upotrebljavaju više pridjeva ili širi raspon pridjeva nego muškarci. Nadamo se da će ovaj rad pridonijeti raspravi o rodnim razlikama i jeziku.

Keywords: use of adjectives, men's speech, women's speech, gender differences in language, MICASE

Ključne riječi: upotreba pridjeva, muški govor, ženski govor, rodne razlike u jeziku, MICASE