

A SOCIOLINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE ON WOMEN'S TALK IN THE TV SERIES "SEX AND THE CITY"

Abstract

Research on language use and differences between male and female speech has quite a long tradition. Nevertheless, the topic is still intriguing, sometimes even scandalous, depending on the social and cultural context. The paper aims at better understanding of women's talk and discovering subtle distinctions and characteristics of female conversations. It seeks to show how women communicate among friends, which characteristics they use and in what amount. The collection of texts is taken from the TV series "Sex and the City". The initial hypothesis states that the most used characteristics of women's talk in conversation among women is *telling stories*, but the results showed that the most used characteristics in conversations among women friends are *questions / tag questions*. Second most used characteristics is *collaborative floor*, and *telling stories* came in the third place.

Keywords: *gender studies, male and female speech, women, telling stories, sociolinguistics.*

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Introduction

One of the distinguishing features of a person is how one speaks. The connection between language and identity is very strong and therefore language plays an enormous role in the life of an individual (Coulmas, 2007, Edwards, 2009). Different characteristics of the speech one uses can tell a lot about someone. In sociolinguistics it is claimed that there is a difference between how women and men use language and its features (Baron, 1986; Dixon, 1971). In the literature we find that analyses of typical female ways of interacting have identified features like “cooperative, facilitative and ‘other-oriented’”. By contrast male talk has been characterized as competitive, argumentative and verbally aggressive (Holmes, 1992). If we look back in the past, all the way back in the 1920s, Sapir (1929) observed that some languages do seem to prescribe different forms for use by men and women. To exemplify this let us mention the Yana language of California, which contains special forms for use in speech either by or to women. Some languages, like the language of the Dyirbal people of North Queensland, Australia, even have a special language which is sex-differentiated (Dixon, 1971). When it comes to certain grammatical matters in English, we find that Brend’s (1975) and Lakoff’s (1973) claims about tag questions to statements and women’s insecurity were found wanting (Dubois and Crouch, 1975; Cameron, McAlinden, and O’Leary, 1989). However, latter researchers did find that the sex of the addressee was important when phrasing a particular question. Nowadays the sociolinguists do agree that sex-linked differences exist. According to Tannen (1990), the differences between the communication styles of men and women go far beyond mere socialization, and appear to be inherent in the basic make up of each sex.

Since the topic of difference between male and female talk is very wide, this paper focuses only on characteristics which women use, in a restricted context, a popular TV series. The research is motivated by listening to everyday claims how women do, or should do something in one way or another. Lakoff (1973) was the first author to discuss and focus on characteristics which women use and how the use of these characteristics places them in society. Even today the topic of women’s place in society provokes debates. Therefore, there is a need to do more research on gender and its role in the language.

The focus of this paper is on women’s talk and its characteristics, on the views how women embody language, how it represents and places them in the society. *Women’s talk* is the term used for summarizing strategies that women use when talking with friends. Linguistic strategies deployed by women friends are designed to construct

and maintain connection and minimize social distance. It is argued that the self does not pre-exist conversation, but arises dialogically within a conversation (see Weedon, 1987). The paper analyses conversation between women friends, demonstrating the richness and complexity of the language used in such talk (cf. Coates, 1991).

The research uses qualitative and quantitative methods. Starting from Coates' work, the initial hypothesis states that the most used characteristics of women's talk in conversation among women is *telling stories*. The analysis will be done on the texts taken from the popular TV series "Sex and the City".

1. Language, gender and women's talk

The relationship between language and society can be explained through wider encounters that consist of business talk, family discourse, gender issues and similar, to the narrowest ones, such as intrapersonal communication. In this paper we aim at analysing highly intimate type of conversation, the one between women friends, in close friendships.

So far there is an extensive literature on the issue whether women and men talk differently. In the modern research on language, gender and sexuality we differentiate *dominance approach* and *difference approach* (cf. Bucholz, 2014 for an overview of the feminist and linguistic approach and development of the topic). One often thinks it is easy to distinguish sex and gender, but many sociolinguists have spent a great time trying to make the distinction. The distinction between sex and gender as a distinguishable independent variables is an abiding accomplishment of the feminist movement of the second half of the 20th century (Chambers, 2008). The turning point was the paper *Language and Woman's Place* written by Robin Lakoff in 1973. She was the first one to warn about gender differences in ways of speaking. In her paper, Lakoff (1973) draws the following conclusions:

1. People working on the women's liberation movement, and other social reformers, need to realize that there is discrepancy between English used by men and women.
2. Teachers of second languages need to realize that these discrepancies are important when teaching and learning a new language.¹

¹ This is also important when teaching – a female teacher might unconsciously use women's talk when teaching girls, and thus make their language different in different areas of living or different context of language use.

3. The acceptability of a sentence is determined by a combination of many factors, in which we can include the social context and the assumptions about the world made by all the participants in the discourse.

The understanding of language and sex has started with Robin Lakoff's influential essays but has progressed far beyond that. The research on the topic of same-sex, female conversations is perfectly described in Coates' *Women's Friendships, Women's Talk* (1997) in which she punctuated different forms of language use that are distinctive in conversations among women.

Talk is one of the main points of developing a relationship. Learning how to use language properly among friends is one of the social priorities that most women develop unconsciously. Women's talk in this paper will be revised through conversations among women friends. The reason for this is the fact that the floor on which female friends make conversation is one of the best resources for researching the behaviour and language of women.

The paper will focus on women's friendships and what the used language and characteristics have to do with the construction of our identity and the formation of close relationships among women.

Women's friendships and women's talk

It is not easy to define what a friendship is, but it is surely something where a bond is created through conversation. Male and female friendships do have some different characteristics:

"Women's friendships are characterized by intimacy, mutual self-disclosure, and a focus on talk, while men's friendships are characterized by sociability, a lack of self-disclosure, and the focus on activity." (Coates, 1997, 245)

However, Tannen (1990, 2017) explained that the friendships between women and friendships between men are on the one hand the same. However, the distinction can be made on this matter; namely women friends talk more between themselves.

But generally speaking, women friends tend to talk more — more often, at greater length, and about more personal topics —while men's friendships tend to be based more on doing things together. For example, a man once told me he was surprised to learn from his wife that a couple they see regularly were getting divorced; though he'd played tennis with the other husband weekly, the topic of his friend's marriage had never come up. For most close women friends I spoke to, that situation would be unthinkable. (Tannen, 2017, 1)

One can clearly see that friendships among women and friendships among men differ. Linguistic strategies deployed by women friends are designed to construct and

maintain connection and minimize social distance. It is argued that the self does not pre-exist conversation, but arises dialogically within a conversation (cf. Weedon, 1987).

The elements of women's talk are essential in discovering what strategies women use. Before we continue the focus will be put on one common stereotype. It is a common disbelief that women talk more than men, but why do people think so? Research has shown that women are more talkative in private settings (at home, talking to a friend, in a known friend group...), while men talk more when in public.

“Women are believed to talk too much. Yet study after study finds that it is men who talk more at meetings, in mixed group, discussions, and in classrooms where girls or young women sit next to boys or young men.” (Tannen, 1990, 111)

2. Strategies in female conversations: hedges, telling stories, questions, and collaborative floor

As regards strategies that women use in conversation, the following strategies were taken into account as the basis for our research: hedges, telling stories, questions and collaborative floor (cf. Coates, 1997, 2015).

2.1 Hedges

Hedges are linguistic forms such as *I think*, *I'm sure*, *you know*, *sort of* and *perhaps* which express the speaker's certainty or uncertainty about the proposition under discussion (Coates, 2015, 88). Their usage is multifunctional, but one of the main reasons they are used in women's talk is to maintain a conversation even when a topic is sensitive, so to express their feelings in a non-aggressive way. Coates states that in order to be themselves in friendship relationships, women often use hedges in order to be sensitive to other people's feelings, as well as to protect them from vulnerability (1997, 250). Hedges also help with avoiding closure and conflict. Even though Coates in her earlier paper (1997) notes these functions of hedges, in her later work (2015) she adds other functions such as “to express confidence”.

2.2 Telling stories

In general, stories play a powerful role in one's life. They are used in different ways. Some of the ways include entertaining, explaining arguments, forming and keeping social connections, phatic functions, etc. Stories are used to present ourselves, who we are, where we come from, to impress someone, but they also function in order to flatter and praise others, make distinction between opinions, etc.

Different things are valuable to different people, meaning that the audience who listens to the story plays a significant role. Story does not develop all by itself. It is developed through the narrator who chooses on which parts they will put the emphasis on, also with paying attention to its audience which participates in different ways, and helps the narrator to interpret their story. Related to that, Goodwin (1986, 283) explains that the meaning of a story emerges not from the actions of the speaker alone, but rather as the product of a collaborative process of interaction in which the audience plays a very active role.

This strategy of making conversation is something that comes naturally to most people, both men and women, but the exchange of stories among women is something that has multiple purposes. Telling stories among women is one of the fundamental ways of exchanging information. In her article, Coates (2015, 248) states some of the purposes of building friendship among women that are based on telling stories:

- Telling stories fulfils women's needs to stay in touch with each other's lives
- Hearing about other's experience helps to place our own experience into explanatory perspective
- It follows a pattern of mirroring, a significant strategy in women's friendly talk
- Stories serve at introducing and developing new topics

All these purposes can easily be confirmed through hearing a regular talk among women, but that is not the only place where we can find confirmation for this. Telling stories is something that has started a whole literary genre of fairy tales, and exactly women, wives and mothers, were those who were often using stories to start a conversation, teach a lesson, or engage in a social contact. There is no limit regarding topics. If one starts a conversation with some bad or good experience they had, other participants of the conversation will share similar or different pieces of experience. However, a conversation does not have to include everyone's story. A conversation can be built up even with comments, or minimal responses, contradiction, etc.

Coates (2015) describes another term correlated to women telling stories. Even though the term “gossip” has had negative connotations, and was almost always related to women’s talk, Coates puts this into a new perspective, and quotes Jones (1980) with the following: “Gossip is a way of talking between women in their roles as women, intimate in style, personal and domestic in topic and setting” (Jones, 1980, quoted in Coates, 2015, 88).

The topic of gossip is important when talking about women’s stories, since this term was, as previously stated, almost always negatively related to women’s conversations, and when it went to men, it was considered “real talk”. Whether we talk about gossip or simple storytelling we have to look into data that brings us to further conclusions on this topic. Holmes (1997) did research on storytelling in New Zealand based on 55 stories from 30 women which occurred in random conversations. Her research was based on the idea of constructing gender identity. New Zealand, at the time, had dominantly structured roles of men and women. Constructing gender identity through storytelling would mean creating a gender appropriate image of oneself through highlighting stories and your contribution in them. The women in the New Zealand sample tell stories about small events in their daily activities reflecting their relationship with others, which is a proof that the exchange of stories among women is something that has multiple purposes, as we claim.

2.3 Questions

One of the ways to keep the conversation going is asking questions. This is listed as women’s talk characteristics because it is said that women use questions, also tag questions, more than men do (cf. Lakoff, 1973). Questions are an important part of sustaining a friendship. Using questions, one can include the other person in conversation. Sometimes questions are rhetorical and do not need an answer, however other participants of conversation are somehow obliged to give some feedback, even if it is only nodding with your head. As already mentioned, telling stories has a significant role in women’s friendships, so after one side tells its story, it can simply ask a question in order to let other sides involve themselves into telling their opinion, story, etc.

Tag questions are questions that do not need a direct answer, and are usually used in order to receive confirmation of what one said. For example,

- A) It’s cloudy, isn’t it?
- B) Is it cloudy?

Here we can see the obvious difference in certainty; the person asking in example A) is probably looking at the sky, seeing the clouds, and asking for confirmation and starting conversation. The person in example B) is asking a question in need of information. Using questions or tag questions is also a way of making “small talk” and fulfilling the phatic function of language.

When putting this into perspective of women’s talk, it is said that women ask more tag questions than men do. Of course, this topic is also the basis of much research, with different conclusions. However, the most differences in opinion among researchers come from the search for the reason as to why women ask more tag questions than men.

In Lakoff’s view of this language form the use of tag questions in women’s talk is a sign of lack of assertiveness:

These sentence-types provide a means whereby a speaker can avoid committing himself, and thereby avoid coming into conflict with the addressee. The problem is that, by so doing, a speaker may also give the impression of not being really sure of himself, of looking to the addressee for confirmation, even of having no views of his own. This last criticism is, of course, one often levelled at women. (Lakoff, 1973, 55)

2.4. *The collaborative floor*

The collaborative floor would, most easily explained, mean that speakers are enjoying a conversation, and showing that by speaking simultaneously. One may think that these interruptions have a negative connotation, or that by interrupting someone we will break their thought process, but if it is done correctly, this conversational tactic tells the speaker that we are interested and listening.

Coates (2015) describes two strategies in the collaborative floor:

1. The shared construction of utterances
2. Overlapping talk

The first strategy shows the speaker’s ability to operate as a single speaker. This strategy is used in order to join in together in the conversation. This means that when one speaker is talking about something, the other one finishes their sentence, or adds something to it. Let us consider the following examples:

A: I was talking to that guy; I think his name’s Petar or something. He’s from...

B: Croatia! I talked to him yesterday too.

A: Yes, he’s really nice, and he told me...

B: He's super nice!

A: He told me he's coming here in October.

In these examples, we can see that the speaker A is getting interrupted, but the speaker B is just adding information in order to keep the conversation alive and share the floor. Coates (cf. 1997, 2015) also mentions that women use minimal responses and laughter to assert their presence in the shared conversation.

When talking about overlapping talk, it is very similar to the first mentioned strategy, but the difference is in timing of the responses, overlapping talk would mean that the speakers are talking at the same time. In the first strategy, speaker B starts talking when seeing a pause in speaker A's sentence. These overlaps can happen for many reasons, but here are a few of them:

- Transition relevance place (speaker A thinks that speaker B has come to the end of the clause, starts talking, but stops in order for the first one to finish)
- Overlap-as-enthusiasm (enthusiasm about the topic forces one speaker to interrupt in order to join in on the conversation)
- Active listenership – if a person is actively listening, they will, most usually, interrupt the conversation with minimal responses, laughter, nodding, adding information or similar.

Collaborative floor in friends' groups is a common way in which women communicate and show their interest in the conversation and genuine reactions to what is being said. Still, the difference in style can sometimes cause problems in this category, since some people may find this rude or disruptive. However, when joining in on a conversation with a known friend, most women do this without even pointing attention to it. An example of overlapping would be:

A: I found this amazing dress, it's pink and...

B: I already absolutely love it!

A: I know! It's also short and sparkly, let me show you a...

B: I got to see the picture, I'm already obsessed.

A: I was just searching for it, here it is...

3. Methodology

The collection of texts was taken from the TV series "Sex and the City". The series was televised in the year 1998 by Darren Star and its story revolves around four female friends living in New York. It was filmed in 6 seasons with 94 episodes

describing their everyday life. Three episodes of the series were taken into account. The purpose of the study was to investigate the way in which women talk with friends and which strategies they use most. We aimed at analysing the strategies and characteristics of women's talk in modern context. However, we are aware of the fact that TV series is a scripted piece of discourse and that the language used is reproduced, which we are taking into consideration. What we might expect to get here are stereotypical notions of how women converse. Still we find it important and relevant to investigate it. The type of intended audience of the TV series are primarily women. Considering the limitations of our study, we shall analyse this reproduced language in a modern context.

The research was both qualitative and quantitative. As far as quantitative tools are concerned, the desk method and data analysis were used, while the qualitative method was applied in answering questions "Why?" and "How?". In other words, the research is based on finding aspects of women's talk through three episodes of "Sex and the City" as well as analysing the data to convey the reason and method on using the mentioned elements. The reason we took only three episodes for the sample is because we wanted to do a preliminary study which could serve as a basis for further research.

The quantitative research or the research based on counting the times each of the characteristics was noticed, was based on the following:

- Counting each of the characteristics found in the researched episode when the conversation was based among the female characters;
- Counting how many of the characteristics were found inside the "Collaborative floor";
- Counting how many of the characteristics were found inside "Telling stories".

This method was used in order to show the most transparent results, since characteristics such as "Questions" or "Hedges" could be found inside other characteristics, therefore counting these overlaps helps the researcher to find out which of the characteristics are actually used most commonly.

The hypothesis set for the research is "The most used characteristics of women's talk in conversation among women is telling stories". This hypothesis came from the researcher's personal experience and the theoretical data from gender studies. We believe that telling stories is one of the main tools in which women exchange experience. The research is used in order to approve or disapprove the hypothesis through analysis of discourse between the four different characters (Carrie, Miranda, Charlotte and Samantha).

4. Analysis

The analysis of the episodes was based on finding the mentioned characteristics of women's talk, and discussing the importance and meaning of each of the characteristics. In the text to follow, it can be seen how these elements are used in conversation between women. Each characteristics was analysed episode by episode.

The following example is the transcription of the second conversation between Carrie and Miranda in season 4, episode 15.

<p><i>I just faked a sonogram. - I'm sorry?</i></p> <p><i>I was lying there, the technician's giving me a guided tour of my uterus, then she tells me I'm having a boy.</i></p> <p><i>My God! You're having a boy?</i></p> <p><i>You see? That. That's what this woman wanted out of me, but I couldn't get it up for her. So, I faked it.</i></p> <p><i>What exactly does a fake sonogram look like in case I ever need to do it?</i></p> <p><i>Everyone else is glowing about my pregnancy. When will I?</i></p> <p><i>I get the same thing every time someone hears I'm engaged. I'm supposed to be all excited about picking a date, and a place, and a theme. And I just want to lie down and take a big nap. I feel like a deadbeat bride.</i></p> <p><i>So, don't do all that stupid stuff. Fuck them.</i></p> <p><i>I better do something soon because I'm getting the distinct feeling my Grace period is OVER. I don't even want to look for a dress. Me, no dress! What's wrong here?</i></p> <p><i>Maybe it's like the dentist. You put it off and put it off, and then you finally go and afterwards you feel great.</i></p> <p><i>God, I have to go to the dentist.</i></p> <p><i>Okay, wait. I'm having a radical idea here. There's a horrible bridal shop a couple of blocks away.</i></p> <p><i>We could go.</i></p> <p><i>How do you even know this?</i></p> <p><i>Because every time I pass by it, I go "blech." We could run in, you could try on the worst dress they have, just face the dragon, get it over with. And then I'll treat you to a TastiDelite. It's like aversion shock therapy.</i></p> <p><i>You want me to try on a bad wedding dress? You're gonna have to do a lot better than TastiDelite.</i></p> <p><i>I'll try one on too?</i></p>
<p>Table 1. Transcription of second conversation, S4E15</p>

In the example above, we found instances of questions, telling stories and collaborative floor. However, in which contexts, and with what purpose were these characteristics of women's talk used in conversation? The analysis will start with presenting various examples of each of these characteristics and looking into the purpose for using them.

4.1 Questions

The first example that will be used is the transcription above. Table 2 presents the questions that are asked and their purpose.

Question	Purpose
<i>I just faked a sonogram. - I'm sorry?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expressing shock Expressing her wish to hear more details
<i>My God! You're having a boy? You see? That. That's what this woman wanted out of me, but I couldn't get it up for her. So, I faked it.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expressing shock Using a question to indicate conversation about the topic Using a question to confirm her opinion
<i>What exactly does a fake sonogram look like in case I ever need to do it?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using a question for humorous purposes, not expecting an answer
<i>Everyone else is glowing about my pregnancy. When will I?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expressing a genuine concern
<i>Me, no dress! What's wrong here?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using a question to ridicule the situation
<i>How do you even know this?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Searching for an answer
<i>You want me to try on a bad wedding dress? You're gonna have to do a lot better than TastiDelite.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using a tag question to ridicule the situation
<i>I'll try one on too?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using a question to persuade her friend into doing something

Table 2. Purpose of questions, second conversation, S4E15

Looking at the examples above, it can be seen that the questions used in this example have various purposes such as expressing shock, humour, concern and also for finding out information. This tells us that women often use questions in order to start or induce the conversation they are having. Tag questions are most commonly used for this purpose, but we can see that even a "regular type" question can induce the conversation in the same way.

Example two is based on the season 4, episode 16. The third conversation between the four friends is used for research purposes. The table below is the transcription of the conversation presented.

<p><i>Big offered me the money for my down payment. But I could never take it. Could I?</i></p> <p>- <i>No, you couldn't. - He just gave you \$30,000?</i></p> <p>- <i>As a loan. I would pay him back. - Take the money.</i></p> <p><i>When a man gives you money, you give him control.</i></p> <p><i>It's just money. Man, woman, who cares? It's fluid. Someone needs it, you give it. You need it, you take it.</i></p> <p><i>I'm uncomfortable with this conversation. We shouldn't be talking about money.</i></p> <p><i>Why not? We talk about everything else.</i></p> <p><i>People are funny about money. Like Richard, he's happy to buy me gifts, but...</i></p> <p>- <i>Still no "love"? - No, but he continues to send his best.</i></p> <p><i>Don't cash Big's check. I'll loan you the money.</i></p> <p><i>You're about to have a baby. I can't take your money. And furthermore, do you have that much?</i></p> <p><i>I have about half that.</i></p> <p>- <i>What? Does no one else shoe shop? - I could loan you the rest.</i></p> <p><i>Look...that is really...sweet of you two to offer. It's really sweet. But I'm gonna do this on my own.</i></p> <p><i>So I can't tape it back.</i></p> <p><i>I have news. Looks like I have gotten a job as a docent at the Museum of Modern Art.</i></p> <p>- <i>What does that pay? I can docent. - It's a volunteer job, but they're very coveted positions.</i></p> <p>- <i>You'll come back. - I have no fortune. I didn't need a cookie to tell me that.</i></p>
<p>Table 3. Transcription of the third conversation, S4E16</p>

There are nine questions posed in this particular conversation and their purposes are presented in the table below.

Question	Purpose
<i>But I could never take it. Could I?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using a tag question to confirm her thoughts on the dilemma
<i>He just gave you \$30,000?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expressing shock and disbelief Using a rhetorical question that does not need an answer to express surprise
<i>It's just money. Man, woman, who cares?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using rhetorical question in order to explain to her friends that something is not important

<i>Why not?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using a direct question to find out an explanation for the statement
<i>Still no 'love'?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A follow up question on a situation
<i>And furthermore, do you have that much?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expressing genuine interest and curiosity Expressing surprise
<i>What?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expressing surprise
<i>Does no one else shoe shop?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expressing surprise Linking the surprise with personal interests and passion
<i>What does that pay?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Genuine interest

Table 4. Purpose of questions, third conversation, S4E16

As it can be seen, there are again different purposes of using questions. Questions turn one-way conversation into a dialogue with the right use of them. Person engages another person in conversation by posing questions. Using questions, a person can make a small talk, ask for further information, ridicule the situation, show agitation, ask and seek for approval and confirmation. Also, their purpose is to express curiosity, shock, disbelief, humour, interest, surprises, etc. Questions are an integral part of friendships and conversations in general.

4.2 The Collaborative Floor

Counting the instances where the collaborative floor took place as a characteristics in episodes of the series was a bit problematic. The reason for this is unclarity of where the collaborative floor starts and where it stops. The characteristics, as explained earlier (see Section 2.4), shows itself in overlapping and the shared construction of utterances, and counting when and where the conversation overlapped in a series where the women usually interrupt each other and fill each other's sentences was problematic.

For the purpose this research, every interruption used to fill the sentence or shift the subject, was counted as collaborative floor. With that in mind, in the table below, we can find three examples of the collaborative floor, however they are divided into two parts in order not to repeat the conversation in the table.

Collaborative floor instances	Purpose
<p><i>Everyone else is glowing about my pregnancy. When will I? I get the same thing every time someone hears I'm engaged. I'm supposed to be all excited about picking a date, a place, and a theme. And I just want to lie down and take a big nap. I feel like a deadbeat bride.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving an example from her own life, in order to show compassion and understanding.
<p><i>I better do something soon because I'm getting the distinct feeling my Grace period is OVER. I don't even want to look for a dress. Me, no dress! What's wrong here? Maybe it's like the dentist. You put it off and put it off, and then you finally go and afterwards you feel great. God, I have to go to the dentist.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First instance used to express compassion and understanding through an example • Second instance used to interrupt with own experience, but only for the purpose of keeping up with the conversation.

Table 5. Purpose of the collaborative floor, second conversation, S4E15

In these examples, it can be seen that the collaborative floor is used in order to show compassion, understanding and keeping up with the conversation. These purposes were taken out of the short text above, but collaborative floor is not limited to them. This technique showed to be used a lot in conversations between women, it is what kept the conversation going. We showed no examples of when the collaborative floor had a negative impact on the conversation, since all of the instances seen in the episodes presented, actually showed that the purpose of using this technique between women is a positive one.

In the two examples in the table above it can be noticed that the interruptions had a massive impact on the way the conversation was going, and were used for positive reinforcement on the friend's way of communication.

4.3 Telling stories

It is slightly more complicated to define what counts as a story and what not. The following paragraphs will present what we saw as a story in a conversation among women friends.

The example of telling stories that we want to present is from season 4, episode 15, the fourth conversation among friends.

I can't do it, I can't get married. ch- This is all your fault.

How could you take her to that dump? m- it was an experiment. It went awry.

Okay, let's just slow down. This is classic cold feet. Let's not do anything rash.

Rash, yes exactly, rash. Look at this. My body is literally rejecting the idea of marriage. Look!

Once you get a rash from a guy, It's time to heave ho.

No, it's not him, it's me. I'm missing the bride gene. I should be put in a test tube and studied.

It's not just you, I don't want to get married. - Ever?

Why do we even have to get married? Why? Give me one good reason. Aside from the not wanting to die alone thing. Which is something to think about, I admit.

For me, when it was good, it gave me a sense of security.

But I feel secure now. Things are great with us. You know what they say, "If it ain't broke, "

Don't marry it.

- What are you afraid would change? - I don't know. Nothing. Everything.

- Every bride feels that way at one point. - Why aren't they speaking up?

Carrie, I'm going to ask you an unpleasant question now. Why did you ever say yes?

Because I love him. A man you love, kneels in the street and offers you a ring, you say yes.

That's what you do.

You get married, you hope for the best. It doesn't work out, you get divorced. You can take tap with Bo Jangles here.

No, I can't take a vow of forever and ever, if what I mean is for the foreseeable future. I can't do that to Aidan.

Talk to him about it.

How do you talk about this? "Aidan, what's up? "I've just been thinking, having some doubts about the whole 'I do' thing." It'll break his heart. I should never have said yes. I'm a bad person.

It's amazing. in a courtroom, reasonable doubt can get you off for murder. In an engagement, it makes you feel like a bad person.

Look, everyone has anxiety around weddings. Maybe your anxiety threshold is just lower than other people's.

Interesting theory. You think that dress is still outside the dumpster at TastiDelite?

Table 6. Transcription of the fourth conversation, S4E15

The conversation starts with Carrie saying "I can't do it. I can't get married", which is considered her telling a story because Samantha uses a collaborative floor by saying "Why did you take her to that dump?". We assume she was telling where they went before lunch, and what made her decide she cannot get married.

Telling a story develops through the conversation. Carrie explains she even got a rash because of the idea of marriage. She confides in her friends and wants to consult with them. Every person has doubts, and with her telling a story she expresses trust in her friends. The purpose of the story is achieved because Samantha shares similar thoughts with her friends. She sympathises with her friend Carrie because she does not want to get married either. Sharing similar thoughts, experiences make friendship truly valuable. However, considering the fact that every person is an individual, it helps to have different opinions on topics related to friendships.

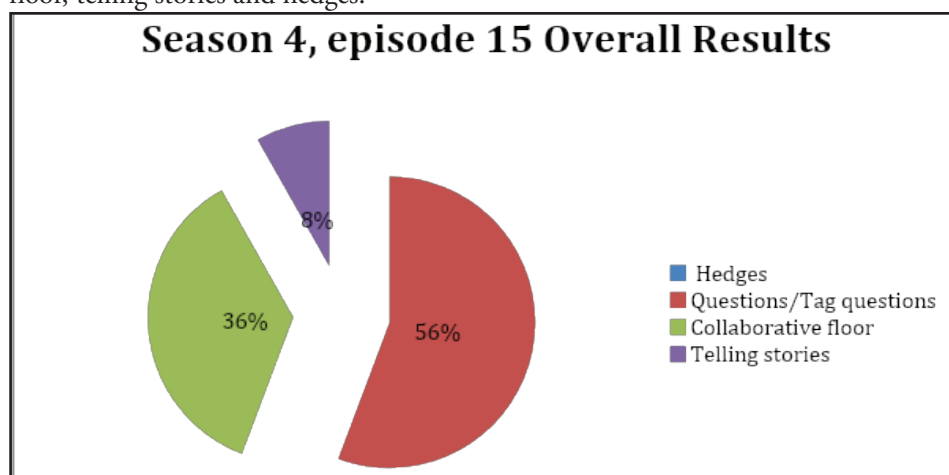
The next story is inside the collaborative floor. Miranda uses a collaborative floor and asks Carrie why she wants to get married, Carrie answers with a story: “Because I love him”. They develop a new story about her choices. The story development is her talking about the love she has for that man but despite of it she cannot get married.

In this example of telling stories one can see how stories impact friends and their relationships. They have multiple uses (See Section 2.2).

Telling stories is a useful characteristics of talk by which someone connects with others on multiple grounds. Different uses of telling stories enable different relationships with people.

5. Results and discussion

The characteristics / strategies taken into account were questions, collaborative floor, telling stories and hedges.



Graph 1. Overall results, S4E15

As it can be seen in the graph there are no examples of the characteristics hedges in season 4, episode 15. None of the conversations in this episode contained this characteristics. Hedges are multifunctional, however they are mostly used to express something in a non-aggressive way (Coates, 2015). We think that the relationship among the four friends in the TV series “Sex and the City” is very strong and perhaps that is the reason there are no examples of hedges. There is no holding back among them, they say what they mean and do not have to soften the matter they are discussing. If the conversations analysed were professional, an example of business relationship among women, there might be examples of hedges.

When we remember Robin Lakoff’s (1973) “women’s language” and her claims about hedges², which refer to the mixed sex talk, we might argue that the reason why there are no hedges here is because in our research of women’s talk, we have a single sex talk. But since we do not think these differences must be sex-determined, we were very much surprised by the result – the complete absence of hedges. Therefore, after this preliminary study, there is a need to do more research on the topic, on a larger sample, in order to check the presence of hedges.

As already stated, the characteristics were also counted inside other characteristics. Therefore, inside telling stories in episode 15, season 4, there are seven questions/tag questions and eight examples of collaborative floor.

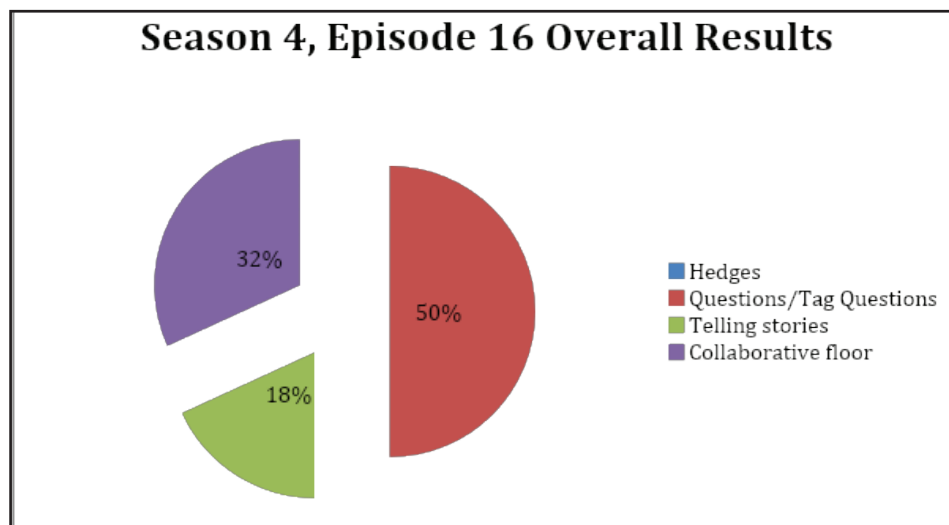
Inside the collaborative floor there are three examples of telling stories and eighteen examples of questions/tag questions. Overall results in this episode are zero hedges, five examples of telling stories, thirty-four examples of questions/tag questions and twenty-two examples of collaborative floor. The most used characteristics in this episode is questions/tag questions.

The following results are from season 4, episode 16.

² Namely R. Lakoff (1973) asserted that women use more hedges than men and that women’s use of hedges is related to their lack of confidence. What Robin Lakoff had proposed was that women’s speech varies from men’s in several significant ways: 1. Hedges; 2. (Super) polite forms; 3. Tag questions; 4. Speaking in italics; 5. Empty adjectives; 6. Hypercorrect grammar and pronunciation; 7. Lack of a sense of humour; 8. Direct quotations; 9. Special lexicon; 10. Question intonation in declarative contexts (O’Barr and Atkins, 2009, 160).

Her paper was criticized later by many. For example, in her 2015 paper, Coates criticizes the lack of research and provable information in Lakoff’s essays stating that Lakoff claimed that women’s speech contained more hedges (a claim based on no empirical evidence), and argued that this was because women ‘are socialised to believe that asserting themselves strongly isn’t nice or ladylike, or even feminine’.

The only conclusion one can draw at this moment is that the use of hedges is a part of women’s talk. Sometimes the hedges function as a defence mechanism, sometimes as a confidence cue, but no matter their function, they are common among women.



Graph 2. Overall results, S4E16

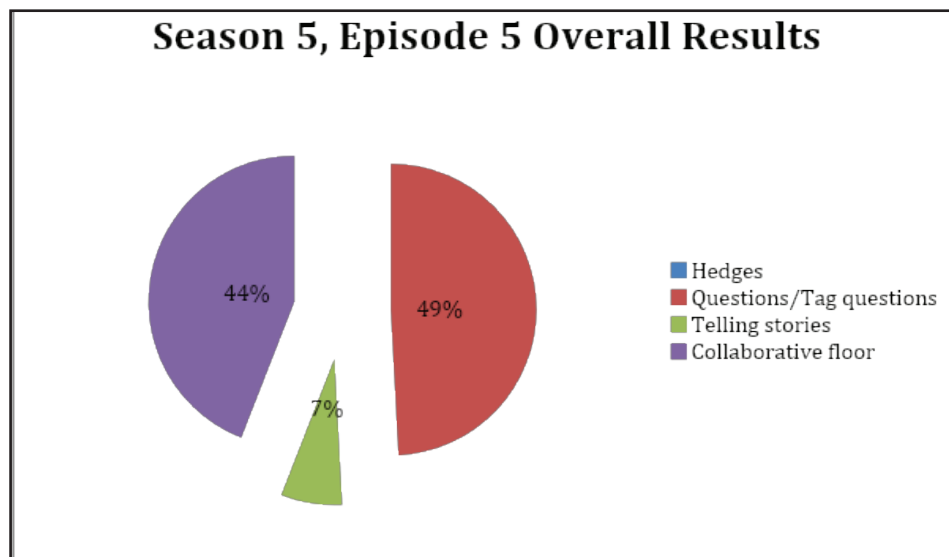
Graph 2 illustrates the percentage of characteristics used. One can see that half of the characteristics used are questions/tag questions, and the other half are telling stories and collaborative floor. The pie chart is divided into three parts as there is no usage of hedges at all, thus zero percent in the graph above for the hedges.

Inside the characteristics telling stories there are six questions, which are asked in the second and third conversation in season 4, episode 16. First, fourth and fifth conversation in this episode do not contain questions inside telling stories. Considering there is no usage of hedges throughout the entire episode, the next characteristics analysed inside telling stories is collaborative floor. Collaborative floor is used five times inside this characteristics. Friends did not use this characteristics in the first and fifth conversation in the episode, which means that second, third and fourth conversations have collaborative floor inside telling stories.

Characteristics used inside the collaborative floor are questions/tag questions and telling stories. There are 16 questions/tag questions asked inside the collaborative floor. Every conversation among friends in this episode contains questions. However, that is not the case with telling stories. Telling stories inside the collaborative floor is used in the second, third and fourth conversation. The results in this episode show that there are 33 posed questions/tag questions, 21 uses of collaborative floor and 12 instances of telling stories. Results referring to the characteristics used in this episode are similar to the episode 15, season 4. The most used characteristics are questions/

tag questions, then collaborative floor, telling stories, and finally zero instances of hedges.

The third episode analysed is season 5, episode 5. Overall results are presented in the pie chart below (Graph 3).



Graph 3. Overall results, S5E5

The results show that the most used characteristics is questions/tag questions (49%). The next one is collaborative floor (44%) and then telling stories (7%).

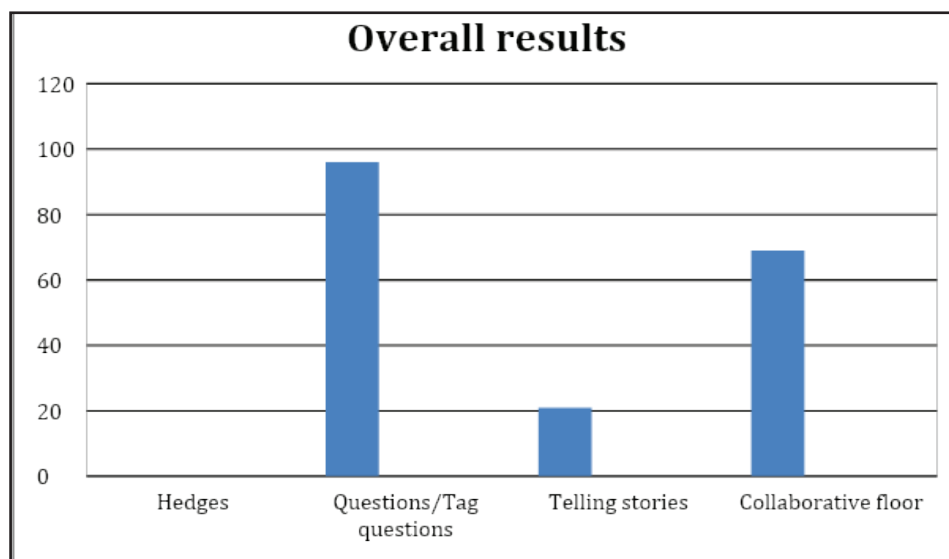
Characteristics questions/tag questions and collaborative floor are used in every single conversation among the friends in this episode. Hedges are not used at all, while telling stories are not used in the third and fourth conversation of episode 5, season 5. Telling stories is used one time in the first and second conversation and two times in the fifth conversation. Other characteristics are used more times in each conversation, except hedges.

Characteristics used inside telling stories are questions/tag questions and collaborative floor. There are four instances of questions/tag questions, and eleven instances of collaborative floor.

Inside the characteristics collaborative floor, there are thirteen posed questions and three examples of telling stories. What we find interesting is the fact that there are four instances of telling stories all together and three of those are inside the collaborative floor.

In this episode there is not a big difference in numbers between characteristics questions/tag questions and collaborative floor. They are very close in numbers. Questions/tag questions are used 29 times, while collaborative floor is used 26 times. However, telling stories are closer to numbers of hedges than to numbers of other two characteristics. As we have already emphasised, there are only four examples of telling stories.

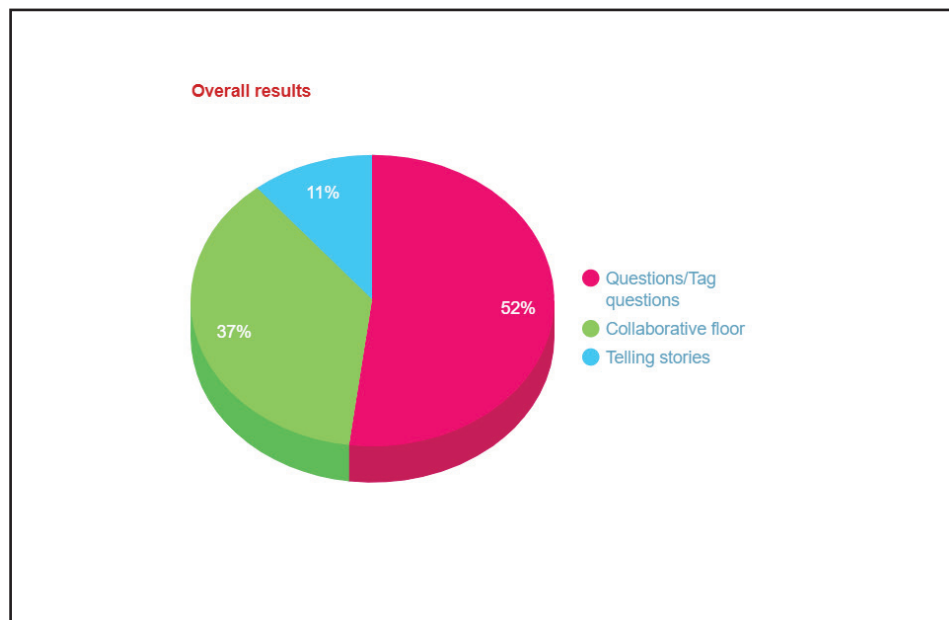
The next graph (Graph 4) shows overall results for the three episodes together.



Graph 4. Overall results of the three episodes, bar chart

This graph illustrates which characteristics is the most used in the TV series “Sex and the City”. As it was already said, there are no examples of hedges. The most used characteristics is questions/tag questions, which was used 96 times altogether. The next most used characteristics is collaborative floor with a number of 69 instances. Telling stories is third out of four characteristics. It was used 21 times in the three episodes altogether.

In the following graph overall results for all three episodes, analysed for the purpose of this research, are presented in the form of a pie chart.



Graph 5. Overall results of the three episodes, pie chart

More than a half of instances are questions/tag questions which hold 52%. The analysis of questions/tag questions revealed that their purpose is not only to seek information, but also to express shock and surprise, to confirm opinion, to ridicule the situation, to ask for advice, etc. In our opinion this is a very high percentage of the characteristics, considering there are three others.

Just like questions/tag questions, collaborative floor was also used in different ways. In the overall results of the three episodes there is 37% of collaborative floor instances.

As already discussed, the surprising result is related to hedges. There is not an instance of this characteristics in the three episodes. Being said that women use hedges in conversation in order to mitigate the effect of different information, to sound polite, non-aggressive, etc., the four friends did not use it at all even though two episodes have five conversations among friends, and one has six. However, it is not the case that these four friends are rude, impolite, and aggressive because of the lack of this characteristics in conversations.

Looking at the results, we may conclude that the initial hypothesis was not proved. We hypothesised that the most used characteristics of women's talk in conversation among women is telling stories. The share of telling stories as one of the

characteristics analysed in this TV series is 11%, which makes the characteristics third after questions/tag questions and collaborative floor. Considering the fact that the four characters in this TV series are in ways much alike, yet so different, it is this low percentage of telling stories that is a surprising result for us. However, there are no whole conversations in scenes played which limits what can be counted as a story. Also, to some it can seem that there are more or less telling stories because there are no clear lines for this characteristics.

Conclusion

The hypothesis of this research “The most used characteristics of women’s talk in conversation among women is telling stories” was not proved. The results show that questions/tag questions are the most used characteristics in conversations among women friends. Second most used characteristics is collaborative floor, and telling stories came in the third place. What is interesting is that the women characters of the TV series did not use hedges at all, therefore there are zero instances of this characteristics/strategy.

The scientific contribution of this paper could be seen in the fact that we have combined a well-established methodology with the female talk of a very popular contemporary TV series and offered our perspective. The importance of this analysis is also to be seen in the fact that it deals with a highly influential series about Western pop culture. Therefore, this sociolinguistic gender based research sheds light onto a very important aspect of how women in Western culture talk and influence large masses of young people worldwide.

The limitation of the study is the small sample, a certain amount of subjectivity in the analysis and the fact that we analysed reproduced language. In our opinion the four characters of the TV series do not represent average (American) women. They are stereotypes whose linguistic behaviour, among others, is being imposed upon recipients. The collection of texts consisted of three episodes analysed. “Sex and the City” has six seasons so far, therefore results could be different if the wider sample was taken for analysis. This research can spur other researchers to do further similar studies in gender discourse, which we highly recommend.

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SOCIOLINGVISTIČKO VIĐENJE ŽENSKOG RAZGOVORA U TV SERIJI *SEKS I GRAD*

Sažetak

Istraživanja o uporabi jezika i razlikama između muškoga i ženskoga govora imaju dugu tradiciju. Unatoč tomu ta je tema još uvijek intrigantna, a ponekad čak i skandalozna, ovisno o društvenome i kulturološkom kontekstu. Cilj ovoga rada jest postići bolje razumijevanje ženskoga razgovora i otkriti suptilne razlike i karakteristike ženskih konverzacija. Nastoji se prikazati kako žene komuniciraju kada su među prijateljicama, koje karakteristike koriste i u kojoj količini. Skup tekstova preuzet je iz TV serije „Seks i grad“. Inicijalnom hipotezom navodi se da je najčešća karakteristika ženskoga razgovora u konverzacijama među ženama *pričanje priča* (engl. *telling stories*). No, rezultati istraživanja pokazali su da su najčešće karakteristike u konverzacijama među ženama *pitanja / upitne fraze*. Druga karakteristika po učestalosti je *collaborative floor* (hrv. *suradnički odnos*), dok je *pričanje priča* na trećem mjestu.

Ključne riječi: *rodna istraživanja, muški i ženski govor, žene, pričanje (priča), sociolingvistika.*