

# **Dominance or not in the Classroom?**

**A synchronic study on gender differences in a Swedish classroom  
in the subject of English.**

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## 1. Introduction

All over the world people believe women talk more than men. Is this statement true or is it only cultural stereotypes people tend to believe in? Linguists like Coates (2004) have found proof that this statement origin from the perspective of the Androcentric Rule as men ruled the world of the written and the spoken language. Since it was men who established the correct language to use, the spoken and written language of women was excluded when the standard language was decided upon.

'Men will be seen to behave linguistically in a way that fits the writer's view of what is desirable or admirable; women on the other hand will be blamed for any linguistic state or development which is regarded by the writer as negative or reprehensible'. (Coates, 2004:10)

The above quotation describes the Androcentric Rule well, as men have been perceived as superior compared with women, both generally and linguistically, a fact which also has generated cultural stereotypes. As people still tend to believe in these stereotypes, men and women, boys and girls tend to identify the linguistic behaviour of the stereotypes related to their gender.

The school environment is another place where children learn about gender identity. Even if pupils are supposed to be treated as equals according to the Swedish curriculum and as all learners, both girls and boys, are required to obey the same rules, different expectations are still placed on girls and boys, which is, in the long-run, a factor of continued and further gender differences. In compliance with the curriculum of the Swedish school system, *Lpo 94*, schools in Sweden are responsible of providing opportunities based on the individual's ability and not according to gender, with the purpose of neutralizing traditional gender roles. As people still consider women as talkative and as girls at the age of four according to Coates (2004) dominate the conversation, perhaps the curriculum of the Swedish school system has succeeded in neutralizing traditional gender roles and equality in conversation has reached the Swedish schools?

### 1.1 Aim and Scope

The aim of the present investigation is to study which group of pupils, boys or girls, dominates the ongoing conversation in the classroom with a teacher present, with a focus on turns taken.

## **1.2 Material**

The material used in this study is the pupils of four classes in secondary school, in two separate schools, from two different towns in the southern part of Sweden. Two classes in year eight and two class in year nine are investigated. One class in each year belongs to one school and the other classes (year nine and year eight) are found in the other school. In order to separate the classes without revealing the identity of them, the researcher will name the classes A, B, C and D and the towns will be named X and Y. The first class in year eight will be named A, and this class belongs to town X. The other class in year eight will be called class B and this class belongs to a school in town Y. The first class in year nine will be named class C and this class is found in the same school as class B, which is located in town Y. The second class in year nine is named class D and is to be found in the same school and town as class A, which is town X. The classes involved in this investigation are found through personal contacts. To make the study as reliable and valid as possible the teachers involved were not informed about what was investigated when the observations took place.

### **1.2.1 Class A**

Nine girls and eight boys, at the age of fourteen, attended class A, the day of the first sampling. In other words two boys and two girls were absent the day of the first observation. When the second observation took place two girls and three boys were absent, in other words nine girls and seven boys in total were present in the second investigation. The class had one regular teacher and one standby teacher in the first visit and when the second observation took place only the regular teacher was there. The length of these lessons was sixty minutes.

### **1.2.2. Class B**

In class B one girl and three boys were missing the day of the observation which means seven girls and eight boys in the age of fourteen attended when the researcher visited the class the first time. The regular teacher was present when the first visit took place. When the second observation took place only one boy was absent. As the ordinary teacher was ill when the second study took place a substitute teacher attended instead of the regular teacher. The length of these lessons was forty-five minutes.

### **1.2.3 Class C**

In class C eight girls and ten boys, at the age of fifteen, attended the day of the observation. One boy was absent when the researcher visited the class the first time. The regular teacher and a standby teacher attended the day of the first visit. When the second observation took place only one girl was absent. In the second visit a substitute teacher replaced the ordinary teacher who was ill. The same standby teacher attended for this visit as well. The length of these lessons was forty-five minutes.

### **1.2.4 Class D**

This class consist of eleven boys and ten girls. In class D ten girls and nine boys, in the age of fifteen, were there when the first observation took place. When the second observation took place two girls and one boy were absent and two boys attended late for this visit. This class had their regular teacher present both of the visits. The length of these lessons was sixty minutes.

## **1.3 Method**

To conduct a study which investigates who dominates the conversation in the classroom, observation of the conversation in the classroom were made. The investigation consists of noting the current speaker's turn in every class and timekeeping each noted turn in order to find out how many turns were taken by the boys and by the girls and how long their respective turns are. The study is of a synchronic nature as it occurs on one occasion at the time of each observation.

### **1.3.1 The Observations**

Within a fortnight four classes were observed twice. In other words a total of eight observations took place during a period of two weeks. The researcher of the present investigation was placed in the back of the classroom in order not to disturb the pupils. This worried the researcher in the beginning of the investigation. However there was no problem to note the turns or to note the length of the current turn.

To make this investigation as reliable and valuable as possible the teachers of the classes were not informed about what was observed when the researcher was visiting the classes. However the teachers were notified that observations of several phenomena made by both genders would occur in order to produce a C-essay in the subject of language and gender. Even if the teachers could assume what was studied any eventual attempt (which was not detected by the researcher) to affect the results probably would not be possible as gender patterns are well established by the time of the observation. According to Öhrn “any impact from the teacher is fairly little as the events in the classroom happen in a rapid speed and there is no time for any attempt of reflection and elucidation of the conversational process” (1990:73). Öhrn is also referring to earlier investigations which “reveal that gender patterns are well establish so any attempt to change them, for one or two visits by a researcher, would have no significant impact on the results” (1990:74, present authors translation).

The observation includes only verbal communication while non-verbal communication is excluded, which means that nodding answers from the pupils were overlooked.

A normal turn-taking procedure in a classroom is that utterances are allocated and controlled by the teacher. However, in all of these classes answers were called out most of the time instead of the pupils waiting for permission to speak and because of this calling out system the pupils often spoke all at once. As soon as this phenomenon occurred the researcher decided for practical observational reasons to count the first speaker’s turn and noting the time of the turn of the first speaker. Even if many turns were missed because of the classes calling out system a presentable number of turns were noted by the researcher.

In all of the classes the activity altered from official contacts towards private contacts. Official contacts are the contacts which are addressed to all of the participants in the class, while private contacts are the contact only between the pupil and the teacher. Öhrn (1990) argues that there are no difficulties to note the turn-taking of any speaker even if it is of a more private nature compared with the official conversation. Both official and private conversations are included in this investigation. Even though other learners of the class would not notice the conversation between the teacher and the learner, an observer has no problem to note the current turn and the length of the turn by the present speaker in a private conversation in the classroom.

## **2. Theoretical background**

In the following sections theoretical background related to the investigated phenomenon, turn-taking, gender differences is described.

### **2.1 Sex and Gender**

In the Western society women and men are divided both according to sex and to gender. However there are significant differences when the definition is looked upon. Sex is what a person is born into, man or woman. In other words the “biological distinction” (Coates, 2004:4) differs if a person is a man or a woman. The most significant dissimilarity is that women and men are born with different genitals, chromosome (X, Y chromosome) and different hormone system (oestrogen and androgen) (Edlund et al, 2007:29).

Gender is the division of correct behaviour of men and women according to expectations of the society. Men and women are, in other words, distinguished into masculinity and femininity. Graddol and Swann argue that this division of gender, masculinity and femininity, also divides men and women into “social groups” (1989:8). In other words as women and men seem to behave differently, society separates both genders into different groups. However, Edlund et al. argued that “sex is created by dynamical, cultural and social issues from interests, such as sex-ideological, economical, and political, of organisation of reproduction and sexuality. These interests are changing over time and space. Since scientists in Scandinavian countries have gained insights of rotation in these interests they prefer to use the word sex again instead of the word gender.” (2007:33)

Even if there are individual differences in the behaviour of both men and women the division of their behaviour gives no room for individual differences as the most obvious characteristics of femininity and masculinity is favoured.

### **2.2 The Androcentric Rule**

According to the Androcentric Rule women are regarded as deviant from men. Men’s behaviour and attitude are the norm and women are treated as dissentient because of this norm. The Androcentric bias also includes linguistic behaviour of men and women, where the

men's behaviour is considered to be normal whereas women's linguistic behaviour is believed to be deviant.

'Men will be seen to behave linguistically in a way that fits the writer's view of what is desirable or admirable; women on the other hand will be blamed for any linguistic state or development which is regarded by the writer as negative or reprehensible'. (Coates, 2004:10)

In other words men are superior to women in the spoken and the written language which is considered to be the norm in society.

According to Smith (based on Reid & Wormald, 1982) "women as a group" (1985:170) today, year 2009, still have lower status compared with men and they are "socially disadvantaged to men in our society, not just in reputation, but in fact" (1985:170).

## **2.3 Gender identity**

Coates (2004) argues that gender identity is a process of learning about how to behave as a girl or as a boy. In other words as children grow up they will observe and imitate the behaviour of both men and women. Smith states that "femininity is in general the more important component of women's gender identity, and masculinity of men's" (1985:136), which means that to become a woman feminine characteristics need to be imitated and to become a man masculine characteristics are required. Feminine characteristics are related "with communality, expressivity, nurturance, and affiliation" (Smith, 1985:137) while characteristics of a man are associated "with agency, instrumentality, dominance and control" (Smith, 1985:137). Smith also argues that gender identity should really be reflected on as "a matter of degree" (1985:165) as there are great "individual differences in both femininity and masculinity" (1985:165). Despite individual variations in both femininity and masculinity children tend to identify and imitate the most obvious characteristics of their gender.

### **2.3.1 Gender identity in society**

When children are learning a language they will attain insights in gender identity as they obtain "communicative competence" (Coates, 2004:85). In other words a child needs to learn "when to speak, when to remain silent, what to talk about – and how to talk about it - in

different circumstances” (Coates, 2004:85-86) in order to become communicatively competent.

A child learns how to speak through listening and imitating spoken language of other people, men and women, girls and boys, in their surroundings. The child acquires how the language is structured, which is the basic or formal rules of the language. In other words “grammar, phonology and lexicon, with particular emphasis on the development of syntax” (Coates 2004:147) is learnt or acquired through listening and imitation. However, learning a language is more complicated than just learning about the grammar and the syntax. Children also need to meet other requirements of the society to become both “communicative” (Coates, 2004:85) and “linguistically competent” (Coates, 2004:147).

The first concept, communicative competence, can be defined as “knowledge of how language is used in a given society which constitutes communicative competence” (Coates, 2004:86), which means in order to function linguistically in a particular society children and adults must apply rules “when to speak, when to remain silent, what to talk about – and how to talk about it - in different circumstances” (Coates, 2004: 85-86). These rules may vary in every society and they can also be situation based.

To become “linguistically competent” (Coates, 2004:147) children need “knowledge of the cultural norms of spoken interaction” (Coates, 2004:147). In this concept social order is included as the child is learning about members’ social status in the society or even in a specific culture. Within this concept children are learning to differentiate women’s and men’s linguistic behaviour. In other words they learn how to “do` femininity or masculinity” (Coates, 2004:148).

### **2.3.2 Gender identity in school**

Girls and boys learn about their gender identity in school since this environment really establishes and maintains the division of gender as boys and girls are treated differently and according to their gender. However all participants, teachers, girls and boys, are all involved in re-establishing and maintaining the division of gender. Boys are allowed to dominate in a way that girls would not be permitted to do as boys can for example call out answers without any notice. However if a girl breaks the rule of not calling out the answer the rule will be

explicitly invoked (Coates 2004). To make such a distinction signals that boys are allowed to break rules whereas girls are not allowed to do so.

Boys can talk aloud and this is considered to be normal behaviour of boys but if a girl speaks loudly it is considered to be “unfeminine” (Coates, 2004:191, based on Payne 1980) as girls are taught to be silent. Boys can ridicule girls without any reprimands, however if a girl ridicules boys it is considered to be rude and girls will explicitly be told off by both the teacher and the boys. Boys can also fool around in the classroom without any notice as it is considered to be normal behaviour of boys. Supposing a girl fooling around in the classroom this girl is considered to have an abnormal behaviour of girls.

Since teachers know that boys will complain if the topic chosen is considered to be too feminine, teachers will instead choose topics which reflect boys’ interests rather than the girls’, as the girls will not object to masculine topics. This signals topics related to boys are more interesting than topics related to girls.

In mixed-sex work in school, boys are normally dominating and set the rules of how to manage the task. Boys also often present the results of the work done while girls act more like a mother and clear “up afterwards” (Coates, 2004:192). Another phenomenon will occur when girls and boys work together namely that, the girl will support the boys but a boy would not support the girl. Most teachers might also value boys cooperation higher than the girls, for the reason that girls are supposed to be able to cooperate better and they are also because of that reason “judged more harshly” (Coates, 2004:195).

In most classrooms the conversation is divided according to the rule of two thirds, which means that the teacher speaks most of the time, more exactly with two thirds of the conversation. The third of the speaking time that is left is also divided into two thirds, which is most often dominated by the boys with two thirds, and the third that is left is the speaking time of the girls (Einarsson & Hultman 1984). Graddol and Swann (1989) also argue in the same direction as Einarsson & Hultman (1984) and declare that boys speak of an “average three times” (Graddol and Swann, 1989:71) more than the girls. In other words girls get less amount of talk in the classroom compared with the boys. Even if teachers try to be equitable in the amount of talk with the girls and the boys, boys use different strategies to talk more than the girls. For example, boys call out answers, they interrupt the girls, and they hog the floor which means talking too long compared with what is considered to be normal. Boys also

take more chances and they speculate more compared with the girls. Schoolboys can also start talking about private matters which girls seem to avoid.

Since all participants contribute in both establishing and maintaining gender differences, girls and boys will identify the behaviour in accordance to their gender.

### **2.3.3 Gender identity in the family**

Men in most families seem to dominate the conversations in the family domain, and as they can dominate the discussions it both signals and creates “□Father knows best□ dynamic” (Coates, 2004:156). Since fathers can dominate the conversation without any significant protests or attempts to break this structure, all members contribute to maintain the “traditional and asymmetrical – family power structures” (Coates, 2004:156). Most often the mothers interrupt less than fathers, on the other hand mothers are often interrupted by fathers.

Parents’ conversations with daughters are more controlled compared with the conversations with the sons, which indicates daughters have less right to speak (Coates, 2004:157). When adults speak with boys and girls they tend to alter their voice differently when they speak with boys compared with when they speak with girls. As children imitate adults they also imitate the adults’ different linguistic behaviour when addressing girls and boys. All of these issues generate dissimilar linguistic behaviour but it also establishes and maintains gender identity of boys and girls.

### **2.4 Gender differences in women’s and men’s conversational style**

Men and women seem to have different conversational styles, since female speakers endeavour unity and solidarity with each other whereas men strive for power among their group. In other words women use a “collaborative style” (Coates, 2004:126) and men use a “competitive style” (Coates, 2004:126). As women and men have different conversational styles, their respective style can cause conflicts in conversation when both sexes interact. Further down in this section such conflicts will be discussed, but first a more detailed description of women’s collaborate style and men’s competitive style will follow.

### 2.4.1 Collaborative style opposed to Competitive style

The collaborative style of women originates from the fact that women cooperate while they speak among each other whereas men compete for the floor in a conversation with other men. Women cooperate in order to establish and maintain a good relationship with their friends. Talk and choice of topic is one strategy for maintaining good relationship among women. Female speakers often speak about personal things, such as affection, feelings and emotions while men speak about things rather than feelings and affection. If men somehow touch upon more personal topics they seem to avoid talking about feelings and emotions, and instead they talk about “drinking habits or personal achievements” (Coates, 2004:133).

From time to time men hog the floor for a long time, in other words they speak in monologues and it seems as if the function of the monologue is to play the expertise of the topic (Coates, 2004). “Hogging the floor” (Coates, 2004:116) means talking too much according to the turn-taking model, which demonstrates that all speakers have “equal rights to the floor” (Coates, 2004:116). Men give the impression to enjoy the role as an expertise as this technique is frequently used among them, while the role of expertise is rarely used by women. Coates discusses further that men also speak with rapid utterances and this procedure often happens in friendly verbal sparring among male friends.

Information seeking questions are related to the role as an expert and as men take pleasure in playing the expert this type of question seem to stimulate men whereas women avoid them. The reason for the avoidance of this type of question is according to Coates (2004), that it gives an asymmetrical structure to the friendship between women. Questions are however used by women but when they are used their purpose is to invite other speakers into the conversation.

Women often apply several strategies to support the current speaker, one of these strategies is minimal responses, *mmh, hmm, right, yeah*, which is defined by Yule as “vocal indications of attention, /.../, when someone else is talking” (1996:127). This strategy is not excluded by men but when minimal responses are used it is often delayed and it signals “lack of interest and lack of support” (Coates, 2004:123). As women frequently speak about topics of sensitive nature, hedges are a strategy used by women to “respect the face needs of all participants” (Coates, 2004:129). Hedges like *you know, perhaps* are “cautious notes expressed about how an utterance is to be taken, /.../ used when giving some information” (Yule, 1996:130). To respect a person’s face need, consideration about the feelings of a person is required.

In the process of turn-taking women and men uses different strategies. When a group of women speak, overlaps, which means “more than one speaker talking at the same time in conversation” (Yule, 1996:132), and co-construction of expressions often are used. These two strategies, overlaps and co-construction, are according to Coates (2004) working together to support the current speaker and to compose the meaning of the utterance. Strategies like these are not used by men, who instead they prefer a method of one speaker at a time. Coates discusses that overlaps can occur in gossip or when men become very engaged in the conversation about an interesting topic.

According to Coates (2004) as well as Graddol and Swann (1989) men tend to use more interruptions than women especially in a mixed sex conversation. Interruptions are considered to be violations of the turn-taking model, and as men use interruptions in conversation with women, they also violate women’s right to speak. Women are instead expected to be silent when men speak. This strategy is considered as a technique of dominating the conversation. Even if interruptions are a technique of dominating the conversation, interruptions can be interpreted as supportive and not rude in other circumstances, (Graddol and Swann, 1989). However in mixed sex conversation interruptions are deemed as violation and as rudeness.

## **2.5 Gender differences in girl’s and boy’s conversational style**

Boys and girls tend to have different conversational styles. Most often they play separately from each other and because of that they develop different styles of interaction. Girls tend to play two and two together and build relationships of a symmetrical nature whereas boys are organized in groups which are based on hierarchy. Boys play in groups together while girls tend to talk as they play and when the girls play they use more proposals instead of commands for further activity (Graddol and Swann, 1989). Based on Maltz and Barker (1982) Coates asserts that girls have more of a “**collaboration-oriented**” (2004:161) conversational style while boys use a “**competition-oriented**” (2004:161) style.

The topics spoken about between boys and girls varies according to gender, where common topics of girls according to Coates are “school, identity, wishes and needs” (2004:166) and favourite topics of boys are “sports and location” (2004:166). The conversational style of girls and boys is more or less imitations of adults’ spoken language.

## **2.6 Turn-taking**

Many components are involved in the phenomenon of turn-taking and, on the other hand, turn-taking is a constituent of conversation and all elements included in the process of turn-taking are discussed in the sections below.

### **2.6.1 Conversation**

As turn-taking is an element included in the phenomenon conversation, one definition of a conversation by Oreström is quoted below.

Conversation is a two-way process in which the interactants are also constantly picking up clues from each other's non-linguistic behaviour. They 'negotiate' in various ways to have their intention realized, for example, whether they want to take the speaker or the listeners role. (Oreström, 1983:35)

This definition means that a conversation needs participants who speak in turns, however the people involved in the conversation require conciliation of the turns. In other words a conversation consists of participants, turns, turn-taking and transition relevance places.

### **2.6.2 Turns and turn-taking**

There are many definitions of what a turn and turn-taking is and to find the best definition including all parts is a difficult task. However, a definition of a turn by Yule follows like this, a turn is "the opportunity to speak at some point during a conversation" (1996:135).

A definition of the turn-taking process is according to Yule "the change of speaker during conversation" (1996:135). This statement does not include everything which is included in the phenomenon of the turn-taking as Coates argues that turn-taking is "the organisation of talk" Coates (2004:111). A turn-taking is, with these two definitions in mind, the organised change of speaker during conversation. A third definition of turn-taking is found in The Free Dictionary's (2009) homepage, and where turn-taking is defined as to doing something in turns, which implies that utterances made by different speakers need to be uttered in turns or as Oreström (based on Schegloff 1968:1076) argues by "one party at a time" (1983:26). In other words if the three definitions are combined, turn-taking is the organised change of one speaker at the time during conversation.

### 2.6.3 Transition Relevance Place

Transition Relevance Place is defined by Yule as “a possible change of speaker point in an interaction” (1996: 135). This definition means that during the conversation between the participants there are places where the current speaker exchanges place with the listener. Graddol and Swann argue with help of (Sacks et al., 1974) “[...] *transition-relevance places* – points where a sequence is grammatically complete, and at which it might be reasonable for a turn to end” (1989:77). This definition could be interpreted as if the Transition Relevance Place is at the end of grammatically complete sentences. Since Graddol and Swann (1989) argue that a sentence require grammatical completeness before a Transition Relevance Place can occur, then a turn consisting of only a word such as *Hello*, *Yes* or *No* or no word at all such as *mhm*, *aha* (which are minimal responses) are of no relevance to their definition, as such words are not complete grammatical sentences. On the other hand if Graddol and Swann (1989) mean that an utterance needs to be grammatically complete before a Transition Relevance Place, words like *Hello*, *Yes* and *No* can be included in the definition of Graddol and Swann (1989). In other words a Transition Relevance Place is where sentences with or without grammatical completeness ends. The participants of the conversation can often notice by a few seconds of silence when the utterance is completed.

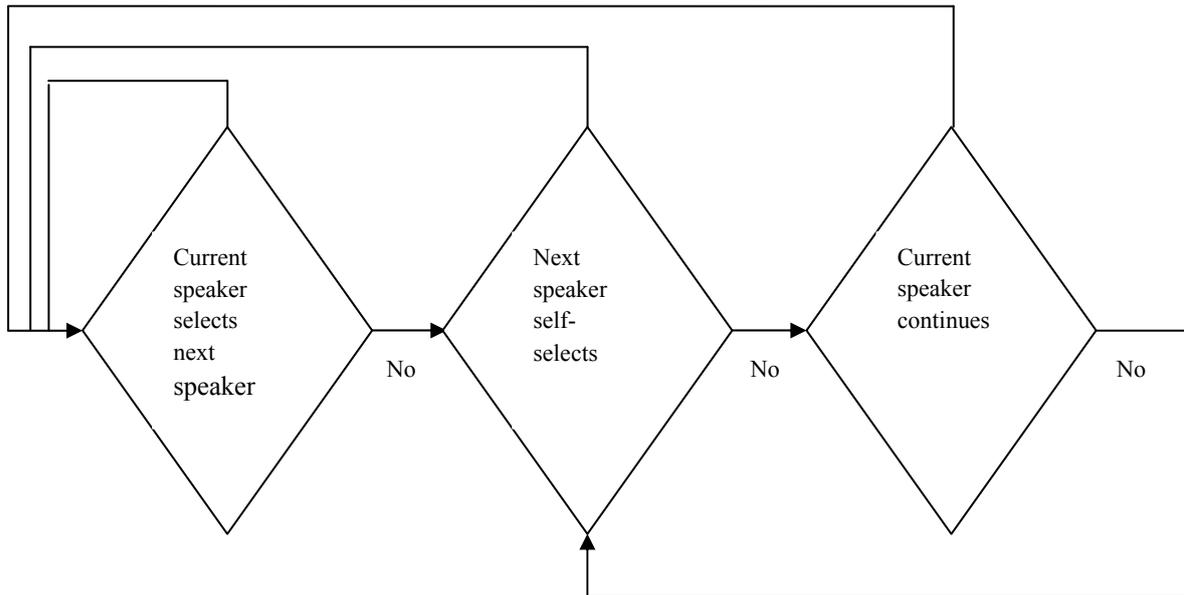
To sum up the above sections about turns, turn-taking and Transition Relevance Place (TRP) an example is illustrated below. The first sentence is the first turn of speaker A and after the end of the first sentence a few seconds of silence can occur and this is where the Transition Relevance Place is found. This is a sort of a signal for the next speaker to start talking. When speaker B has finished talking the procedure of silence and Transition Relevance Place repeats itself. The whole scenario is called turn-taking as the speakers are talking in turns.

#### Example 1

A: *What are you doing?*  
B: *Reading the news paper.*  
A: *Okay.*

## 2.6.4 The turn-taking model

Another way of describing what takes place in a conversation is to look at the illustrated turn-taking model below.



**Figure 1** “Flow chart showing turn-taking in conversation (based on Zimmerman and West 1975:110)” by Coates 2004:112.

Every rhomb in this model shows that a choice need to be made after a speaker is finished. The choice of the next speaker is most often the present spokesperson. Another way of interpreting the turn-taking process is that “each part acts as a starter to all other parts” (Oreström, 1983:14 based on Satir (1972:3ff and 112ff)). The spokesperson can ask or address the next person to talk, however if the present speaker fails to get an answer or stops talking anyone in the group can start speaking. The third rhomb shows us that the current speaker can continue to speak if no one else takes the next turn.

The above model is of a symmetrical nature, which means that everyone in the conversation has equal time to talk and that one person speaks at a time with no interruptions. An interruption is in this model considered as a violation of the turn taken and is a method of “**grabbing the floor**” (Coates, 2004:113). If someone talks longer than expected this speaker is according to Coates “**hogging the floor**” (2004: 113). A person could also stop talking before the turn is expected to end and this will probably cause a brutal end to the dialogue (Coates, 2004).

## **2.7 Turn-taking in the classroom**

The turn-taking in the classroom requires a different model as there are more participants who should share the floor and as the teacher should dominate the conversation, for the reason that an educator is responsible for giving the pupils the accurate education. Oreström argues that “[i]n the classroom, the teacher both distributes the utterances and controls their length” (1983:21), which is a description of the ideal situation in the classroom.

## **2.8 English in the Swedish School**

English can be taught from year zero until year twelve, in other words pupils can start learning English at the age of six up until the age of eighteen (Skolverket, 2000). In most schools in Sweden, English as a subject is taught from the age of nine. This means that if a pupil continues to study in upper secondary school after compulsory school, which is primary school and secondary school, the child will have studied English for nine years altogether. If the child leaves school after secondary school the pupil will have studied English for six years.

### **2.8.1 Syllabus in the subject English**

In Sweden it is the National Agency for Education (Skolverket) that decides the objectives of the subject English. English has become an important language to learn since it is an official language of many countries and English is also widely spread throughout the world. The National Agency for Education in Sweden claims it is essential to study English for the reason that it is important for further education, for travelling around the world and for social and work related contacts. After year nine the pupils should have a stable level of knowledge in English which also gives opportunities to deepen the knowledge even more with further education.

By the end of year nine all learners should be able to participate in any conversation in the subject English. All pupils are expected to be able to verbally speak and describe anything in English related to the subject English. Below are two abstracts from the Swedish National Agency for Education.

Pupils should;

- be able to actively take part in discussions on familiar subjects and with the help of different strategies communicate effectively,
- be able to orally relate and describe something which they have seen, heard, experienced or read, as well as express and give their reasons on how they understand a topic that is of personal importance, (Skolverket, 2000-07)

An interpretation of the aim of the subject English is to provide each pupil in Sweden, which includes both girls and boys, with a proficient level of knowledge in the target language by the year nine. To acquire proficient level of knowledge in the target language researcher's like Lightbown and Spada argue "the importance of introducing a second language as early as possible" (2006:186), which is also reflected in the Swedish National Agency for Education's syllabus of the subject English.

### **3. Analysis**

In the following sections analyses of the findings from the observations of four classes in secondary school in the subject English are given. The findings include the number of turns and the length of turns. As most of the pupils, during all of the observations, used a calling out system the first speakers turn was counted for practical observational reasons. In following the tables with the length of turns, an average length of both the girls and the boys speaking time are presented.

#### **3.1 Analysis of the findings of Class A**

The activity in both observations was to watch a video of an English program and after that the pupils were asked to answer questions from their workbook. Both genders called out answers and questions aloud to the teacher. This class consists of eleven girls and ten boys. In the first observation two girls and one boy were absent and in the second observation three boys and two girls were missing. One of the boys needed a standby teacher in the first visit but when the second observation took place this boy was ill and there was no need for the standby teacher to attend the class. Below the results from both observations are given, and the results are divided into tables according to number of turns and length of turns.

**Table 1** Number of turns according to gender from the observations of class A.

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Girls</b>		<b>Boys</b>	
	<b>Instances</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Instances</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1 <sup>st</sup> visit	17	43%	23	57%
2 <sup>nd</sup> visit	29	42%	40	58%
<b>Totally</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>58%</b>

In the first visit, the boys' instances of the turns taken were higher compared with the girls' number of turns, twenty-three turns contrasted with the girls seventeen turns. This means fifty-seven percent of the total amounts of instances observed. In the second observation the boys still took more turns compared with the girls. The boys' amount of turns was forty contrasted with twenty-nine turns taken by the girls. In a comparison between the two observations the percentage of turns is almost consistent in relation with the number of instances, as it only differs with one percentage unit. However, in the second observation the overall number of turns was higher compared with the number of turns during the first visit.

As the tasks in these lessons were almost identical this could be an answer to the consistency in the percentage of the number of turns.

The figures reveal evidence of the boys' dominance in the conversation with the teacher. This class consist of one more girl than the boys and this could be the reason why the boys do not dominate with two thirds which is stated by Einarsson and Hultman (1984). However the truth in that statement needs to be questioned, as Öhrn (1990) has not found any evidence of dominance if there is more of one sex than the other. Even if the boys do not dominate with two thirds in number of instances they still stand out in the number of turns taken.

**Table 2** Length of turns according to gender from the observations of class A.

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Girls</b>				<b>Boys</b>			
	<b>Length of turn</b>	<b>Seconds</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Seconds</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Average</b>
1 <sup>st</sup> visit	76,7s	30%	4,5s	37%	175,7s	70%	7,6s	63%
2 <sup>nd</sup> visit	349,7s	55%	12,06s	62%	291,9s	45%	7,3s	38%
<b>Totally</b>	<b>426,4s</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>16,56s</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>467,6s</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>14,9s</b>	<b>47%</b>

When the results from the observation of class A in lengths of turns are studied there are greater variations between the two observations. In the first visit the boys dominated with two thirds in the length of turns. Even if the average length of turns were adjusted a bit the boys overall dominated according to the length of turns in the first observation.

In the second observation the girls dominated the total amount of seconds in the length of turns which means a dominance in the percentage with fifty-five percent compared with the boys forty-five percent. The average length of turns taken by the girls was even longer in seconds in the second observation, 12,06 seconds compared with 7,3 seconds, and even higher in percentage as the girls scored sixty-two percent contrasted with the boys thirty-eight percent.

In the column of the total this class shows an equal average length of turns between the girls and the boys. An explanation for this result could be that the teacher tries to help the pupils as evenly as possible.

### **3.2 Analysis of the findings of Class B**

This class consists of eight girls and eleven boys. In the first observation three boys and one girl were absent. When the first observation of this class took place, the pupils read out loud one at the time from an English textbook. Afterwards they were asked to answer questions what the text was about. The pupils who read were chosen by the teacher. When the second investigation was conducted one boy was not present. In the second observation the pupils had a reading comprehension test as the ordinary teacher was ill and because of her illness she was replaced by a substitute teacher who was not a teacher in the subject English. Even

though a test was carried out the researcher managed to investigate the number of instances and the length of turns from the time before, during and after the test.

**Table 3** Number of turns according to gender from the observations of class B.

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Girls</b>		<b>Boys</b>	
	<b>Instances</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Instances</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1 <sup>st</sup> visit	10	22%	35	78%
2 <sup>nd</sup> visit	1	7%	13	93%
<b>Totally</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>81%</b>

The result from the observations of class B reveal the expected two thirds dominance by the boys both in number of turns and in the length of turns, as stated by Einarsson and Hultman (1984). The number of turns is ruled by the boys with thirty-five number of turns out of forty-five in total which gives seventy-eight percent of the number of instances. The dominance by the boys is even higher in the second observation in relation to how many turns were taken in total. The boys dominated with ninety-three percent according to the number of turns taken. However, the result might be deceptive as a reading comprehension test was conducted at the time of the second observation. Even if the result could be misleading because of the test the dominance by the boys in the turn-taking is obvious.

**Table 4** Length of turns according to gender from the observations of class B.

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Girls</b>				<b>Boys</b>			
	<b>Seconds</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Seconds</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1 <sup>st</sup> visit	139,6s	21%	13,9s	49%	513,9s	79%	14,7s	51%
2 <sup>nd</sup> visit	2s	2%	2s	20%	101,9s	98%	7,8s	80%
<b>Totally</b>	<b>141,6</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>15,9s</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>615,8</b>	<b>81%</b>	<b>22,5s</b>	<b>59%</b>

The results from the length of turns reveal almost the same pattern of dominance by the boys, with the exception of the average length of turns by boys and girls, where the dominance is modified, especially in the first observation. It seems as if both girls and boys, related to the results from the findings, have equal right in the length of time speaking with the teacher. Evidence of equality in the length of the contact with the teacher is also found in Öhrn's findings and Öhrn argues that every contact with the teacher will give equal right to respond (1990).

As the boys dominated the turns taken this also affected the total amount of the length of the turns in the first visit. On the other hand this was evened out in the average length of turns as the girls' percentage was forty-nine percent while the boys was fifty-nine percent. When the first study took place the number of pupils was even and in the second visit only one boy was absent. With this in mind, an even number of girls and boys or a boy absent, these factors seem to have no effect on the results. The figures from the second inspection reveal something totally different as the boys' number of turns taken is thirteen compared with only one turn taken by the girls, which is in percentage by the boys a total of ninety-three percent and seven percent by the girls. The decrease in number of turns seems to be related to the test which was conducted that particular day.

The findings show an overall supremacy both in the number of turns and in the length of turns by the boys.

### **3.3 Analysis of the findings of Class C**

The total number of girls and boys in class C is eight and eleven respectively. The day of the first observation only one boy was missing, which means eight girls and ten boys attended in the first visit, and the regular teacher and a standby teacher were also present that day. In the first investigation, which consisted of a forty-five minutes long lesson, the teacher was going through grammatical issues in front of the whole class. Afterwards the learners worked with grammar exercises related to the presentation by the teacher.

In the second observation of this class only one girl was missing. The same standby-teacher was there to help one boy. As the regular teacher was ill a substitute teacher went through grammatical exercises with the learners instead of the regular teacher. This teacher was mostly speaking Swedish instead of English. The substitute teacher also approached the

learners differently compared with the regular teacher. The researcher experienced her to be more authoritarian compared with the regular teacher, as she did not tolerate the calling out system as much as the regular seem to do. The substitute teacher chose topics which appeared to appeal to the boys more than to the girls.

**Table 5** Number of turns according to gender from the observations of class C.

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Girls</b>		<b>Boys</b>	
	<b>Instances</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Instances</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1 <sup>st</sup> visit	19	40%	28	60%
2 <sup>nd</sup> visit	20	30%	46	70%
<b>Totally</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>65%</b>

The results from the first observation give evidence of the fact that the boys dominate in the number of turns with twenty-eight instances contrasted with nineteen instances by the girls. These results give the boys a dominance of sixty percent in the number of turns. The results from the second investigation reveal the same dominance by the boys as the results from the first observation. However if the results from both visits are contrasted, the number of instances by the boys are higher in the second observation compared with the instances in the first observation. It seems as if the substitute teacher had something to do with this result.

Even if the substitute teacher did not tolerate the calling out system mostly used by the boys, she approached the boys with topics which appealed to them more than the girls. This approach automatically gave a closer relationship with the boys compared with the girls and it also gave the teacher the authority to invoke rules towards the boys. At the same time as the schoolteacher invoked rules the teacher also allowed the boys to speak more often and longer compared with the girls.

The results from class C show an overall dominance by the boys both in the number of turns and in the length of turns.

**Table 6** Length of turns according to gender from the observations of class C.

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Girls</b>				<b>Boys</b>			
	<b>Seconds</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Seconds</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Length of turn</b>								
1 <sup>st</sup> visit	186,4ss	30%	9,8s	39%	425,9s	70%	15,2s	61%
2 <sup>nd</sup> visit	267,9s	30%	13,4s	50%	613,8s	70%	13,3s	50%
<b>Totally</b>	<b>453,3s</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>23,2s</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>1039,7s</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>28,5s</b>	<b>55%</b>

The above table shows the results from analysing the length of turns according to gender in class C. The figures in the first visit show the expected dominance by the boys. The boys dominate both in seconds, which is seventy percent, but also in the average length of turns, in which the boys dominate with sixty-one percent. The findings from the second observation reveal dominance by the boys with seventy percent. However, the results in the average length of turn, in the result from the second visit, disclose an adjustment, in that both girls and boys are given equal right to speak in the length of turn. This means that even if the substitute teacher gave the boys the right to speak more often she gave the girls the same right to speak as long as the boys spoke. In other words both genders are given equal right in the speaking-time.

The results from class C show an overall dominance by the boys both in relation to the number of turns and in the length of turns.

### **3.4 Analysis of the findings of Class D**

This class consists of ten girls and eleven boys. When the first observation took place the teacher tried to involve the ten girls and the nine boys in a discussion in English about a task found in the textbook used in this class. For the second observation the teacher had changed her approach toward the eight girls and the ten boys, in order to achieve more communication and response from the pupils. The educator divided the learners into four groups consisting of four or five learners in each group, and then the pupils were asked to decide what programs to broadcast in the timetable of a television-channel with teenagers as the target group. The task chosen by the teacher seemed to appeal to both genders as the nature of the task appeared to

be gender neutral. This approach gave the pupils a chance to speak English among themselves in the groups. Afterwards the pupils were asked questions related to the task which resulted in more spoken contribution in English.

When both genders addressed the teacher they called out answers instead of raising an arm to signal for the teacher's attention. Even if the calling out system were used in this class there was an atmosphere of calmness which did not occur in the other classes. When the teacher asked the pupils to perform different tasks no disturbance occurred, and all pupils accomplished what they were asked to complete. It seems as if this class were an ideal class to teach in. However, when questions were asked by the teacher she had difficulties to get any response from the learners. Because of the lack of a response from the pupils the result from this class is completely different compared with the results from the other classes.

**Table 7** Number of turns according to gender from the observation of class D.

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Girls</b>		<b>Boys</b>	
	<b>Instances</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Instances</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1 <sup>st</sup> visit	6	55%	5	45%
2 <sup>nd</sup> visit	12	44%	15	56%
<b>Totally</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>47%</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>53%</b>

The results from the observation of class D is of a totally different nature as the results stand out compared to the other classes observed. Both genders produced an almost even number of turns in both of the visits. The girls' number of turns was six compared with the boys' five instances, which in percentage gives fifty-five percent of the turns taken by the girls contrasted with forty-five percent turns taken by the boys. The results from the second observation show more or less the same pattern with twelve instances by the girls which is equivalent to forty-four percent and fifteen by the boys which is corresponding to fifty-six percent in the number of turns taken. However the results demonstrate a higher number of turns in the second visit compared with the first visit and that could be a result of the nature of the lesson.

**Table 8** Length of turns according to gender from the observation of class D.

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Girls</b>				<b>Boys</b>			
	<b>Seconds</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Seconds</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Length of turn</b>								
1 <sup>st</sup> visit	92,3s	83%	15,38s	81%	18,7s	17%	3,74s	19%
2 <sup>nd</sup> visit	350,1s	66%	29,18s	71%	181s	34%	12,06s	29%
<b>Totally</b>	<b>442,4s</b>	<b>69%</b>	<b>44,56s</b>	<b>74%</b>	<b>199,7</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>15,8s</b>	<b>26%</b>

The results from the length of turns reveal dominance by the girls with eighty-three percent in the length of turns in the first visit and with sixty-six percent dominance in the second visit. Altogether the girls dominated with an average of sixty-nine. The figures reveal a reverse pattern compared with the general dominance by the boys.

Since this result was totally different compared with the rest of the results, the researcher asked the teacher of class D why they did not communicate with her. The answer was that she had started teaching this class in August the same year as the investigation was conducted. The teacher also had her own theory and argued that the boys were extremely motivated to achieve good results compared with the girls' motivation. Another interpretation of these answers is a lack of reliance between teacher and pupils but also a lack of confidence to speak in front of the others in English. The boys in this class were not competing for the floor as boys normally would do. Instead they showed a more mature behaviour which could cause the high motivation to study.

### **3.5 Analysis of the findings in a comparison in the number of turns of all classes**

In the following section a comparison in the number of turns of all classes are analysed. The two observations of all classes are separated in order to be able to analyse and discuss gender patterns related to each visit. The findings from each observation are also compared in order to see if the gender pattern changes from one visit to another.

**Table 9** Number of turns according to gender from the first observation of all classes.

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Girls</b>		<b>Boys</b>	
	<b>Instances</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Instances</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Class A	17	43%	23	57%
Class B	10	22%	35	78%
Class C	19	40%	28	60%
Class D	6	55%	5	45%
<b>Totally</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>64%</b>

The above table, which is a compilation between all classes from the first observation reveals dominance by the boys in number of turns in three classes, A, B and C. Class B has the highest difference in the number of instance between boys and girls, as the boys dominate the conversation in the classroom with seventy-eight percent compared with twenty-two percent, which is higher than the general figure of two thirds of supremacy by the boys stated by Einarsson and Hultman (1984). In class A and C the girls' instances are higher compared with the general pattern of dominance in the classroom. In class D the pattern is different as the numbers of turns are evenly balanced between girls and boys. However, the total in the table reveals the general pattern of dominance by the boys.

**Table 10** Number of turns according to gender from the second observation of all classes.

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Girls</b>		<b>Boys</b>	
	<b>Instances</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Instances</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Class A	29	42%	40	58%
Class B	1	7%	13	93%
Class C	20	30%	46	70%
Class D	12	44%	15	56%
<b>Totally</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>65%</b>

The analysis of number of turns according to gender from the second observation of all classes reveals more or less the same pattern as the table from the first observation. In other words the boys dominate the conversation in the classroom in the second observation in all classes with exception of class D. This class has an even number of turns taken between girls and boys. Class C has the lowest number of instances in the second visit compared with the rest of the classes. Even if the overall number of instances is lower contrasted with the other classes, the dominance by the boys is striking. The overall low number of instances is a direct result of the test carried out the day of the investigation. The higher difference between the girls' instances and the boys' instances could also be a result of the fact that the regular teacher was ill. The results in Class C reveal higher number of turns by the boys compared with the girls, seventy percent contrasted with thirty percent. The figures from this class could also be a result of the replacement of the regular teacher, as she was ill. The gender patterns in the second observation seem to be the same as in the first observation. However in Class D the instances by both gender were higher in the second observation compared with the first investigation. The low number of instances in this class stands out contrasted with the other classes.

### 3.6 Analysis of the findings in a comparison of the length of turns of all classes

In the following section a comparison of the length of turns of all classes are analysed. The two observations of all classes are separated in order to be able to analyse and discuss gender patterns related to each visit.

**Table 11** Length of turns according to gender from the first observation of all classes.

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Girls</b>				<b>Boys</b>			
	<b>Seconds</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Seconds</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Length of turn</b>								
Class A	76,7 s	30%	4,5 s	37%	175,7 s	70%	7,6 s	63%
Class B	139,6 s	21%	13,9 s	49%	513,9 s	79%	14,7 s	51%
Class C	186,4 s	31%	9,8 s	39%	425,9 s	70%	15,2 s	61%
Class D	92,3 s	83%	15,38 s	81%	18,7 s	17%	3,74 s	19%
<b>Totally</b>	<b>495 s</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>9,52 s</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>1134,2s</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>12,46 s</b>	<b>57%</b>

The figures from table 11 reveal no significant shift in the pattern compared with the tables above, as the boys also dominate in the length of turns in three of the classes, class A, B, C. It is only class D which has a different gender pattern compared with the other classes from this investigation, as it is the girls who rule the speaking time with the teacher. It seems as if it is a reverse pattern compared with the general one, since the girls dominate the speaking time with eighty-three percent compared with seventeen percent by the boys. The average length of turn is also constant in class D, in other words the girls dominate in the length of turns with the teacher, whereas in the rest of the classes the average length of turn is where the dominance by the boys seems to even out a little in favour to the girls. However the figures exposed in the column of the total average length of turn once again disclose the boys dominance in the classroom.

**Table 12** Length of turns according to gender from the second observation of all classes.

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Girls</b>				<b>Boys</b>			
	<b>Seconds</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Seconds</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Length of turn</b>								
Class A	349,7s	55%	12,06s	62%	291,9s	45%	7,3s	38%
Class B	2s	2%	2s	20%	101,9s	98%	7,8s	80%
Class C	267,9s	30%	13,4s	50%	613,8s	70%	13,3s	50%
Class D	350,1s	66%	29,18s	71%	181s	34%	12,06s	29%
<b>Totally</b>	<b>969,7s</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>15,64</b>	<b>60%</b>	<b>1188,6s</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>10,43</b>	<b>40%</b>

As the length of turn from the second observation of all classes is analysed the general pattern seem to have changed completely compared with the pattern from the first visit. However, in a closer analysis the pattern is more or less constant even if the figures seem to differ. The figures of the length of turn and in the average length of turn reveal a divergence in class A as the dominance by the boys is altered into dominance by the girls instead. Class D is the only class who reveals a constant pattern in both of the observations, even if the number of turns increased in the second observation.

The figures from class C and D are the ones which seem to differ the most compared with the other classes, as the difference in the average length of turn has evened out completely in class C. In other words, the result discloses an equal right to speak in the length of turn since the figures of class D illustrate dominance by the girls instead of the boys. In class B the length of turn is dominated by the boys with ninety-eight percent. This is the class who had a test in reading comprehension with a substitute teacher as their regular teacher was ill.

When examining the total length of turn, of all classes, the boys dominate the conversations in the classroom, however the result reveals little neutralisation of the dominance by the boys. The most significant change is the average length of turns which is dominated by the girls.

### 3.7 The overall results of all classes

In this section follows a comparison of the total number of turns and the total length of turns of all classes in order to look at the results from another angle.

**Table 13** Total number of turns according to gender from both observations of all classes.

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Girls</b>		<b>Boys</b>	
	<b>Instances</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Instances</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Class A	46	42%	63	58%
Class B	11	19%	48	81%
Class C	39	35%	74	65%
Class D	18	47%	20	53%
<b>Totally</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>64%</b>

The results from the total number of turns according to gender from both observations of all classes disclose no significant differences compared with the results from the above tables. The boys in class A dominate the floor in the number of turns both in instances and in the percentage even if the dominance by the boys is lower compared with the general pattern of classroom interactions. Class B is the class which has the highest difference in the speaking

time between the boys and the girls compared with the other classes. In this class the length of turn by the boys is eighty-one percent contrasted with girls nineteen percent, in other words the boys rule the conversation in the classroom. The result of Class C discloses the same pattern of dominance as the general pattern since the boys rule the conversation. The result of Class D reveals that both genders have an equal right to speak according to number of instances compared with the other result from the other classes.

**Table 14** Total length of turns according to gender from both observations of all classes.

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Girls</b>				<b>Boys</b>				
	<b>Length of turn</b>	<b>Seconds</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Seconds</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Class A		426,4s	48%	16,56s	53%	467,6s	52%	14,9s	47%
Class B		141,6s	19%	15,9s	41%	615,8s	81%	22,5s	59%
Class C		453,3s	30%	23,2s	45%	1039,7s	70%	28,5s	55%
Class D		442,4s	69%	44,56s	74%	199,7s	31%	15,8s	26%
<b>Totally</b>		<b>1463,7s</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>12,84s</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>2322,8s</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>11,33</b>	<b>47%</b>

The results from analysing table 14 reveal no major changes in the pattern of dominance with the exception of class D, who is still constant in the dominance by the girls in the amount of speaking time. The result from Öhrn's (1990) findings also exposes classes which has the reverse gender pattern with a salient dominance by the girls. The only noticeable difference is found in class A's result in the average length of turn, where the results reveal dominance by the girls with fifty-three percent compared with the boys' forty-seven percent of the speaking time. Class B and C are the classes with the strongest gender differences in the length of turns. The boys dominate the floor in these classes both in seconds and in percentage. The fact that the classes do not attend the same year, as there are two classes in year eight and two classes in year nine, seem to have no importance for the results as the boys overall dominate the floor in the classroom.

The overall result reveals the same gender pattern in the conversation in the classroom as both Einarsson and Hultman (1984) and Öhrn (1990) discusses.

### **3.8 Further discussion in connection with the results from the observations**

Since the pupils in all of the classes called out answers, instead of waiting for permission to speak or in other words utterances distributed and controlled by the teacher (Oreström, 1983:21), which is considered to be the normal turn-taking system of the classroom, this system seems to have collapsed in all of these classes. All of the participants are involved in this phenomenon as the teachers seemed to avoid invoking rules, such as raising an arm before the learner speaks, but also as the pupils avoided the normal turn-taking system of the classroom. It seems as if an attitudinal problem towards both applying rules and following them are related to this problem. To keep or establish a gender balance in the classroom a normal or functioning turn-taking system is essential as this is a tool that a teacher who is conscious about gender issues can work with.

When the calling out system is discussed with the teachers, attitudinal problems were brought up as a factor to the problem. Pupils' attitude to study seem to have changed over the years as the learners give the impression to be less motivated to study, but the attitude toward the teacher has also changed as lack of respect has been mentioned and also observed during this investigation. The pupils are surrounded by a much harder and tougher climate in the classroom the last couple of years and the teachers seem to blame the attitude among the learners for this change.

Even if there is an attitude change among the pupils it is still the teachers responsibility to give every child adequate education according to the syllabus established by the National Agency for Education. In order to give children in the Swedish school adequate education, rules such as raising an arm if the learner wants to answer must be promoted and invoked. It seems unfortunate to blame the calling out system on the learner's attitudinal problems because teachers are also a product of the attitudinal problem since they are not invoking rules as answers could be called out.

Another phenomenon observed was the more or less absolute silence of both girls and boys in one of the classes. Even if the teacher tried to drag the words out of the pupils it seemed to be impossible to involve them in any discussion. The words or sentences uttered occurred only when the teacher addressed an individual directly. As an observer of this class a kind of distance keeping from the pupils towards the teacher seemed to be the problem. After the first observation this dilemma was discussed with the teacher and awareness of the silence was obvious as the teacher wanted more involvement from the pupils. Since this teacher started

teaching this class in August 2009, a reliance issue might be an answer to the silence. However, the teacher also mentioned that most of the learners had a proficient level of knowledge in English as they had no problem to communicate in English amongst themselves.

It seemed as if the problem had different aspects as they were able to speak in English one-to-one or in small groups but not in front of the whole class. The first aspect of the problem seems to be confidence to speak English in front of the others in the classroom and the second aspect could be a reliance issue towards the teacher. However as the question was raised and thought about, the teacher changed her approach towards the pupils for the second observation. When the second observation took place the teacher divided four or five students into four groups. The learners were asked to discuss, only in English, what programs to broadcast in a television channel with teenagers as the target group. Most of the pupils seemed to like this activity as they were more motivated to contribute in the official discussion which occurred afterwards. Pupils must be interested in the task and enjoy the activity in the classroom in order to be motivated and to contribute in the lessons and it is the teacher's responsibility to find solutions for motivation and involvement of the learners.

The importance of motivation is emphasised by Lightbown and Spada (2006) in order to engage pupils to contribute in the classroom and to get the learner to enjoy learning a second language. Lightbown and Spada argued that "varying the activities, tasks and materials can help avoid decrease in attention and an increase in boredom and instead increase students' interest level" (2006: 65). As the teacher of this class varied the activity an instant increase in the official contribution occurred, which could be a sign of confirmation of the above statement by Lightbown and Spada (2006).

An answer to the important issues discussed could be that it is the teachers' ultimate responsibility to give Swedish pupils adequate education according to the syllabus of English and in order to do that teacher must find solutions in how to manage problems like calling out answers or break silence in the classroom.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This synchronic study has discussed and analysed findings of the counted instances and the length of turns, from eight observations in four Swedish classrooms, two classes in year eight

and two classes in year nine. Despite the Swedish National Agency for Education's (Skolverket) ambition to erase traditional gender roles from the Swedish school, it seems in relation to the evidence from this investigation, as if they are far too established to be eliminated.

The first evidence of above statement is that boys dominate the conversation in the classroom in the number of turns as this investigation overall number of turns are ruled by the boys with sixty-four percent. The length of turns is the second evidence of the boys' dominance in the Swedish classroom as the boys speak with sixty-one percent compared with the girls' thirty-nine percent. The third and last evidence of the supremacy by the boys is that the average length of turns is more or less also ruled by the boys. However in two classes the results of the average length contradict the last statement as the findings reveal equality, as the girls' and boys' turn are equally long. It is reassuring that equality in the contact with the teacher rules in some classes even if these classes do not represent the general male dominance. Even if the classes do not attend the same year the result reveals no importance to the conclusion of the boy dominance in the Swedish classroom

The result of this investigation is concordant with other researcher's findings, for example Einarsson and Hultman (1984). Even if the findings of this study disclose boy dominance in the classroom these might not give the full picture. For any researcher who desires to include all issues of interest from an observation of the conversation in a classroom and to ensure a more accurate result, video recording is recommended.

## List of references

### Primary Material

The primary material consists of observation-material of four classes of English learners and their teachers from two different secondary schools in the southern part of Sweden.

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