

Who dominates the class, boys or girls?

**-A study on gender differences in English classroom talk
in a Swedish upper secondary school**

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1. Introduction

Women are conventionally believed to be subordinate and supportive in a mixed-sex conversation, while men are considered to be relatively dominant and competitive. In the school context, gender identity is hugely salient. There has been a traditional assumption that competitive tendencies are much rewarded in the school context and that female students' and male students' classroom participation is not equal, especially the male students are more likely to dominate (Coates, 2004:196). Some changes have taken place in gender difference in school environment over the world in recent decades. Statistics show a trend that more and more girls are graduating from high school and college and going into professions and businesses. Is the assumption still sound under such worldwide circumstances, even in the background of Swedish educational system which advocates that boys and girls enjoy equal opportunities and rights?

Factors contributing to a speaker's relative dominance in conversation may be multiple. If a speaker is described to dominate the conversation, he or she might have talked too much, and might have spoken in a competitive rather than a cooperative way. The amount of talk in terms of the number of turns and the time of turn-length is a main factor and constitutes the focus of this study. In addition, gender identity and different speech styles used by male students and female students in peer interactions in classroom context are taken into consideration. Cultural influence on the Swedish conversational style, together with Swedish educational system including the government's policies, school's principles and teachers' responsibilities plays a joint role in shaping the different conditions for the boys' and the girls' classroom talk.

By observing and comparing the amount of talk of boy students and girl students in English classroom participation in a Swedish upper secondary school, specifically in terms of their quantity of grabbing the floor and their time of holding the floor, as well as their difference in speech styles in peer interaction, we may arrive at a conclusion as to which group, boy students or girl students, relatively dominates the class.

1.1 Aim and Scope

The purpose of this study is to find out whether it is true that boys' and girls' classroom participation is not equal, especially that boy students are in relatively dominant roles. If not, what are the changes? Certain questions are designed to cover the different aspects of this study, in terms of amount of talk, styles of talk and intervention on talk.

The questions are:

- Is there any inequality in the amount of talk, in terms of the number of turns taken and the time of talk, between girl students and boy students in classroom?
- If there is imbalance or inequality in the amount of talk between girl students and boy students, what factors may contribute to this?
- Is there a party of dominance in classroom talk? If so, which group tends to dominate the class, girls or boys? And what factors may lead to this?
- Is there any difference in speech styles between girl students and boy students? If so, what are the main differences? And what factors may lead to this?
- Are there any new tendencies in the speech styles for young women and young men? If so, what are the changes, and why ?
- What is the teacher's role in intervening in the equality or inequality of classroom participation?

1.2 Material

The primary material consists of samples of classroom participation from English courses with two classes in a Swedish upper secondary school. The subjects are the students of grade one in a Swedish upper secondary school, located in a town in the south. The number of boy students in class 1 is nine (31%), and the number of girl students is 20(69%). There are 10 boy students (32%) and 21 girl students (68%) in class 2. The girl students outnumber the boy students in both class1 and class 2. Most of the students are sixteen years old. Both classes have been observed twice each on

the whole class discussion set-up and each observation lasted for sixty minutes, aimed to find out gender-based inequality in classroom talk. In addition, opportunities were given to the researcher to observe the differences in speech styles between girls and boys on the group discussion set-up, so two more extra visits to group discussions on English literature in class1 have been included into the research.

The teachers involved in the study are female teachers, and they were not informed about what was carried out during the observation, in order to make the results as reliable as possible. After the classroom observation, the researcher had an interview with the teachers with an aim to find out if the teacher has a role in intervening in the classroom talk.

1.3 Method

To find out if there are any differences in classroom talk between the girls and the boys, and so to see which gender speaks more on the whole class discussion set-up, two items concerning the number of turn-taking and the length of turn-linking, have been measured during the observations. Specifically, the two items were “In this class, how often do the girl students or boy students get the floor to ask questions, to answer questions, and to make some comments?” and “How long do the girl students and boy students hold the floor?”. The number of turns taken by both girls and boys was counted, and the length of each turn was timed (in seconds) and written down. The statistics have been collected and analyzed in section 3.

To find out if there are any differences in speech styles between the girls and the boys, and so to see which gender might be more competitive or cooperative in conversation, observations concerning some linguistic features such as the topic choice, minimal responses, attentive expressions and so on were carried out in the literary group discussions in class 1.

An interview with the teachers after the observations on the classroom participation

was adopted into the research, in order to find out the teacher's role in the intervention on classroom talk.

1.3.1 Observation

Two observations on the whole classroom participation were carried out in class 1 and class 2 separately, in order to find out which gender talked relatively more in class. The length of each observation was 60 minutes equally. During the observations, the researcher took down the number of turns taken and the talking time (in seconds) for girl students and boy students separately.

In addition, the researcher observed the group discussion on English literature twice in class 1, in order to find out whether girls are more cooperative and the boys are competitive in conversation. These observations were focused on the different conversational strategies the boys and girls adopted in peer interaction in the academic context, in terms of some linguistic features such as topic choice, minimal responses, attentive expressions, questions and so on, as well as some non-linguistic features like eye-contact and gaze-attention.

1.3.2 Interview

In order to find out the teacher's role in intervening in the students' classroom participation, the researcher had an interview with the teachers after the classroom observations, exchanging ideas about the differences in the girls' and boys' classroom participation, especially about which gender is relatively dominant in the classroom context. The interview was centered on the question of whether the teachers have an idea of intervention in order to give the girls as much attention as the boys, or more.

2. Theoretical Background

The structure of this section is built on five levels from top to bottom. Two different interpretations, from a general point of view, to the inequalities or differences between men and women are discussed at the first level. One is aimed to the male's dominance

(see 2.1), and the other is focused on the different subcultures of men and women (see 2.2). At the second level, theories of gender identity (see 2.3) and communicative competence (see 2.4) point out two ways to understand the differences between men and women, biologically and socially. At the third level, factors concerning the gender differences in conversation are discussed (see 2.5), in particular, the gender differences in classroom talk (see 2.6). At the fourth level, didactic (see 2.7 and 2.8) and educational (see 2.9) influences on gender-based differences in the classroom talk are also taken into consideration. At the last but not the least level, a new trend of girls' advantageous or dominant status in classroom context which contradicts previous assumptions that boys dominate the class is also discussed (see 2.10).

2.1 Male dominance theories

Women are stereotyped as a relatively powerless social group compared with men, who are thought of being powerful and dominant in most spheres of lives. In a statistical sense, men financially, politically, conventionally and institutionally, tend to have more social power than women. This status-based model might predict that what men do and speak are 'normal', when women's and men's behavior differs, women's behavior is treated as deviant and in need of explanation (Graddol & Swann, 1989: 53). The ways we talk may be a reflection of the inequality between women and men, and may also reinforce the inequality, making it seem natural and normal. There is evidence that men are more likely to use certain strategies being associated with male dominance in mix-sex conversations, for instance, interruption, a way to deprive others of the right to speak. The strength of male dominance is particularly obvious in some cases, such as in a conference for work colleagues of different status, where female bosses are more often interrupted by male subordinates, whereas male bosses spend more time holding the floor than subordinates. Female speakers have difficulties in getting the floor, are more often interrupted by male speakers, and their points are not taken as equally serious as men's are. Male dominance theory makes it clear that women are 'powerless victims', and on the other hand, it casts men as undermining, excluding and demeaning women (Thomas & Wareing, 1999: 79).

2.2 Gender difference theories

Women and men are said to come from separate 'subcultures' and each group have their own 'sub-cultural norms', that is, rules for behavior, in particular, talking (Thomas & Wareing, 1999: 79). Deborah Tannen (1992) claims that, women tend to see themselves as individuals in a network of connection, and desire for intimacy, equality, understanding, support and solidarity. Men on the other hand are inclined to view themselves as individuals in a hierarchical social order, perusing social status and independence. These different 'sub-cultural norms' for men and women have an effect on their different styles of talking, and their different interpretations to some conversational features, for instance, to women minimal responses signal an interest in what the current speaker is saying as well as an invitation to continuing speaking, however, for men minimal responses have a stronger meaning that amounts to agreement with the speaker. (Graddol & Swann, 1989:90).

2.3 Gender identity

Coates (2004) discusses that learning how to be and how to do things like a man or a woman, a boy or a girl is a way to acquire gender identity. People are born with a physical identity as a boy or a girl, while they learn how to perform masculinity or femininity in a particular speech community as they grow up in a hierarchical social order where men and women differ in a wide variety of ways. Children begin to sound like a boy or a girl, to speak gender-differential language, and to do masculinity or femininity. Some research suggests that male children are socialized to dominate conversation from an early age with the support from all participants in family and community, for instance, parents try to control the conversations with their daughters more than those with the sons, which indicates that the daughters are more interruptible and less entitled to speak (Coates, 2004:157). Boys and girls learn to behave as girls and boys throughout childhood and adolescence, and create new gender identity and modify their behavior in changing circumstances as they step into adulthood.

2.3.1 Gender identity in the school settings

In the school settings, gender identity is hugely salient, as Graddol and Swann (1989) discuss, saying that girls and boys use certain conversational features to signal their adherence to their respective gender group. Various studies show differences in male and female children in a wide range of linguistic forms (Coates, 2004:162-168). Boys use different conversational strategies from those of the girls to achieve dominance. For instance, they are more likely than the girls to interrupt others including the teacher to get the floor, and use more directives in their comments. Girls, on the other hand, are inclined to achieve solidarity and consensus of the interaction by giving more minimal responses to support the current speakers or signal interest in the topic, and use less directives and more attentive expressions to show cooperation. In addition, doing gender is another way of establishing one's gender identity, as Coates points out that leaning to perform masculinity or femininity in our society also means learning to use gender-appropriate language (Coates, 2004:169).

2.4 Communicative competence and gender

Communicative competence in a broad sense refers to incorporation of the social and cultural factors into linguistic description. In other words, it is an ability to recognize when to speak, when to remain silent, what to talk about, and how to talk about in different circumstances (Coates, 2004: 85-86). Women and men seem to develop differentiated communicative competence, which means they have different insights into the contexts where they could speak more or should keep silent, and how to make a comment to get things done. Women and men also differ in the conversational strategies, for instance, women use more hedges and attentive expressions to achieve connection and solidarity, while men use more aggravated directives and explicit commands to establish his status and authorities (Coates, 2004).

Children learn to acquire language and social and cultural competence in an integrated process since they are born (Tryggvason, 2002). Family, school and community play a

joint role in shaping children's gender-appropriate and social-appropriate behavior. In the school settings, for instance, girls are much more aware of whether it is permissible to interrupt and how to mark a speech of politeness, while boys are allowed to call out answer and use more directives. Thus, boys' communicative competence enables them to dominate in the classroom context (Coates, 2004:190).

2.5 Gender difference in conversation

Women and men are considered to have different conversational interaction. In the first place, the amount of talk differs. Women are stereotyped as talkative, while some evidence shows that it is men who talk more, particularly in formal and public occasions (Coates, 2004). These research findings contradict the stereotype of women that they are considered to talk more than men. Why are women stereotyped as talkative since the evidence points to the contrary? Spender claims that people have different expectation of male and female speakers: men have the right to talk, while women are expected to keep silent, and are allowed no more than 30 percent of talking time (Coates, 2004: 118).

In the second place, as for the conversational style, women's interaction is said to be based on relationship and aims to achieve solidarity and closeness, so they use more supporting and cooperative features. Men, on the other hand, whose interaction is based on information and competition, desire for status and dominance by using more competitive strategies (Tannen, 1992).

2.5.1 Conversational dominance

According to Coates's definition of "conversational dominance" (Coates, 2004:111), it refers to the phenomenon of a speaker dominating others in interaction. Specifically, it means how a speaker makes use of certain strategies to get the floor and maintain the floor. Thus, the amount of talk is the main measurement for the dominance of the conversation. Whether a speaker dominates the conversation or not would be measured by the number of turns taken and the length of turns. In this section, three

concepts concerning conversational dominance such as turn-taking, turn-length and transitional reference places are presented.

2.5.1.1 Turn-taking

Turn-taking refers to “speech exchange system” (Stenström, 1994: 696). It is the organization of talk, to ensure that talk is distributed on a base of turn-by-turn. One basic rule for the change of speaker towards which the participants orient themselves is “one party at a time”. In other words, turn-shifts occur at transition-relevance places. The allocation of a next turn to one party could be fulfilled by two patterns of turn-allocational techniques, one is the current speaker’s selecting next speaker, and the other is the next speaker’s self-selection (Stenström, 1994:703).

The following is an example (Stenström, 1994:703) illustrating how self-selection technique and one speaker selecting next speaker technique work:

Sara: Ben you want some ()?

Ben: We all right I’ll have a,

((pause))

Sara: Bill you want some?

Bill: No,

Here Ben and Bill’s turns are allocated by Sara, which means the current speaker, Sara, selects the next speaker and Sara’s turns are got by self-selection.

If a speaker is to some degree violating the underlying rules of “one party at a time”, for instance, when a speaker interrupts the current speaker to grab the floor, or when she or he hogs a very long turn without concerning other speakers’ rights to talk, the speaker might be described as dominating the conversation (Coates, 2004:113). Men are said to be more likely to interrupt others to grab the floor. Female speakers, particularly in a single-sex conversation often adopt a way of turn-taking so called

“joint talking”, where the rule of “one party at a time” does not play. However, such kind of simultaneous talk of women differs from the grabbing the floor; instead, it is a signal of high involvement.

2.5.1.2 Turn-length

One definition of turn-length is the continuous period of time during which a person is talking (Oreström, 1983: 23). There are two main approaches used to measure the participants’ spoken activity: one is linguistically in terms of utterances sentences, tone units, words, the other is non-linguistically in terms of speaking time. Coates (2004) discusses that participants in conversation are equal so that they have equal rights to speak and their talking time is normally shared among them. Different speech events determine how long the speaker could hold the floor and the listeners could endure, for instance, it would be endurable if a friend had something emergent that he or she talked non-stop and deprived us of the right to speak.

2.5.1.3 Transitional Reference Place (TPR)

A Transitional Relevance Place (TRP) is regarded as the possible completion of a sentential, clausal, phrasal, or lexical construction (Oreström, 1983: 27). There might be some markers of completion of utterance, such as some kind of response accompanied with a question. A silent pause after a grammatically complete utterance is a further marker of completion (Oreström, 1983: 33-34). As the example above shows, Sara directs the first question, initiating the first speaking turn. A few seconds of silence can occur after Ben answers the question, and this is where the TPR takes place. Thus, TPR is a sort of signal for the next speaker to start talking.

2.5.1.4 Turn-taking patterns in the classroom talk

Transitions (from one turn to a next) with no gap or overlap, together with those of slight gap or overlaps make up the majority of transitions in classroom context (Oreström, 1983: 27). Since in most cases, it is the teacher who always plays the role of the first speaker that directs questions to the students, and the turns are constructed

as to involve the use of “current speaker selects next” technique, then the student selected has the right or obligation to take the next turn to speak, and transfer occurs at that TRP.

2.5.2 Conversational style

Women and men differ in the way of talking, in that men seem to pursue a style of interaction based on power, while women pursue a style based on solidarity and support (Coates, 2004: 126). Some of the linguistic features in conversation, including topic development, minimal responses, interruption and overlaps, turn-taking patterns and so on, are used to characterize women’s cooperative style and men’s competitive style. As for the women, they are characterized by preferring some topics concerning emotions, family and friendship, and they are focused more on the maintenance of the relationships among the speakers. Hence, the female speakers are more likely to use frequent and supportive minimal responses, less interruptions but high-involvement overlaps, more tentative expressions such as *as far as I know*, *I mean* and *sort of* in both single-sex conversations and mixed-sex conversations. All these conversational features arrive at a distinctive style of cooperative speech of women. On the other hand, men tend to select more impersonal topics that are generally information-oriented, delay their minimal responses to signal the lack of interest or the lack of support for the current speaker, use more interruptions to get the floor and tend to hog the floor as to monopolize the conversation. The combination of these features amounts to another distinctive style of competitive speech of men (Coates, 2004). In addition, the ways of talking would change in different circumstances, just as Cameron concluded that context is more important than gender in determining how cooperative or competitive speakers are (Cameron, 1992: 52).

2.5.2.1 Cultural influence on Swedish conversational style

Swedish conversational style has been influenced to a large degree by Scandinavian culture which speaks highly of solidarity and belongs to the “floor-giver” culture. Swedish people tend to be silent, to accept silence in interaction and lack small talk,

and they seldom interrupt another speaker or interfere in discussion (Tryggvason, 2002: IV: 3). The high frequency of minimal responses and gaze patterns in Swedish conversations indicates that Swedish people demand high cooperativeness rather than competitiveness.

2.6 Gender difference in classroom talk

There is evidence that boys tend to get more attention from the teachers and can dominate in classroom circumstances (Coates, 2004). As far as the amount of talk is concerned, boys talk far more than the girls, not only for the turns they take but also for the number of words they uttered or the time they hold the floor. Graddol and Swann's (1989) research on classroom interaction shows that boys contribute twice more than the girls to the classroom talk both in terms of number of turns taken and the number of words uttered.

It seems that boys are good at taking advantages of the sources available, such as achieving more attention from the teacher by calling out answers, making noise and other undisciplined behaviors, and making use of the silence or cooperation of the girls. Research shows that boys' dominance in the classroom is co-constructed by all participants, including the teachers (Coates, 2004:190). For example, boys are allowed to call out the answers, while girls are not treated in the same way if they do like the boys. Even on condition that calling out is not encouraged and the teacher select the student who raises hand first, the boys still dominate by getting the gaze from the teacher when the teacher directs a question, or put up hands earlier than the girls to ensure their greater participation, particularly more speaking-turns (Graddol & Swann,1989).

As for the conversational strategies boy students and girl students adopt in classroom talk, some evidence indicates that boys are more competitive than the girls to speak up and express themselves. They tend to interrupt others more often than the girls to direct a question, not only for information, but in most cases, to challenge the

statement of the speaker, or to grab the floor. There is evidence showing that in the group play of girls and boys, boys use different sorts of directives from the girls, particularly the boys use explicit commands and ‘aggravated’ directives, while the girls typically use more ‘mitigated directives’ (Coates, 2004:94-95). In a word, the difference in the amount of talk for boys and girls, as well as the difference in their speech styles co-constructs male dominance in class.

2.7 Classroom talk and second language learning

Linguistic input and output play very important roles in second-language acquisition and learning (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). Most language teachers believe that students benefit a lot in using the second language as often as possible in classroom context. There is evidence that second language learners find their progress depends to a considerable extent on access to the floor and to the teacher’s attention. In some situations, the teacher might be the only source of second-language input and chances of using the second language are slim. Therefore, it is of great significance for the second-language learners to make full use of the opportunities of practice speaking the second language in class (Holmes, 1995: 198-200).

Some researches show that male-dominated interaction pattern is prevailing in second language classrooms, and “female language learners are not getting their fair share of the talking time and the equal opportunities for monitored practice to male learners” (Holmes, 1995: 200). It seems that getting a fair share of the talking time and teacher’s attention is a particular problem for female students in mix-sex classrooms.

As for most Swedish schools, English as a subject is learned from year of nine to year of eighteen. English, as a second-language for the Swedish students has been attached much importance to by both the National Agency for Education and the families. Schools and teachers have the responsibilities for ensuring each student has an access to equal education (Skolverket, 2010). So, the Swedish students are entitled to enjoying equal opportunities to practice speaking English in class and being evaluated

by their performance.

2.8 Teacher's intervention on the classroom talk

In the classroom, it seems that the teacher both distributes the utterances and controls their length (Oreström, 1983: 21). Previous research shows that girls are at disadvantage in classroom context. Male dominance still prevails in public or semi-public spheres like school (Homes, 1995:209). Graddol and Swann (1989) discuss the strategies for linguistic intervention which are adopted successfully in Britain in many contexts to eliminate gender imbalance, in particular a case of a project adopted by Jackie Hughes, which is aimed to challenge racist and sexist stereotypes (Graddol & Swann 1989: 185). It suggests that teacher should know about the differences in ways of talking between the boys and girls, focus on inequality in the share of classroom talking and raise consciousness to play a role in coordinating gender balance. Some strategies teachers could adopt to ensure the girl students get an equal share of the classroom talk. When they direct or organize activities, teachers can ensure that girl students get fair shares of attention and talking time. Small group discussion is often used as a preparation for a whole classroom discussion of issues, so the girl students are encouraged to talk and to gain the confidence in a less threatening context (Holmes, 1995).

2.9 The influence of Swedish educational system on gender equality

The main objective of the Swedish government's policy on gender equality is that "women and men shall have equal power to shape society and their own lives" (Skolverket, 2009:3). It means that women and men, girls and boys, shall enjoy the same opportunities, rights and obligations in all spheres of life.

As for the Swedish educational system, the National Agency for Education is to work actively for the goals that ensuring all pupils have access to equal education and enjoy equality in the assessment of their performance (Skolverket, 2010).

According to the statistics shown in the table below on the number of women and men applying to university for the medicine major in Sweden from 2006 Autumn to 2009 Autumn (Skolverket,2009: 7), it is obvious that women outnumber men in taking privilege of higher education. Under such educational circumstances in Sweden, traditional gender identity is neutralized and the improvement of students' capability and quality come first.

Medicine		
Term	Sweden Women	Sweden Men
Autumn 06	67,9	32,1
Spring 06	67,9	32,1
Autumn 05	69,9	30,1
Spring 05	70,3	29,7
Autumn 04	71,7	28,3
Spring 04	71,5	28,5
Autumn 03	71,7	28,3
Spring 03	69,2	30,8
Autumn 02	69,0	31,0
Spring 02	66,6	33,4
Autumn 01	66,8	33,2
Spring 01	62,6	37,4
Autumn 00	61,9	38,1
Spring 00	62,1	37,9
Autumn 99	61,0	39,0

2.10 Contradictory theory: Masculinity in crisis?

Coates discusses the phenomenon that the old certainties about the male role are disappearing and that the traditional assumptions about gender identity are being challenged (Coates, 2004: 206). Some researchers argue that the classroom has been

feminized and that girls now do better than boys in terms of the educational qualifications (Coates, 2004: 207). It is no longer true that girls begin to fall behind as they hit adolescence. Girls outperform boys in public examinations and outnumber the boys in entrance of high education. This has led to an anxiety among some people that boys are at a disadvantage (Skolverket, 2009: 4-7).

The main factor is that boys' subculture determines their resistant or negative attitudes towards school. Coates points out that for the boys aged 11-14, popular masculinity is characterized by toughness, by being good at football, and by resistance to teachers and education (Coates, 2004: 207). It seems widely accepted by the boys that working hard academically is seriously uncool, and even would be teased (Skolverket, 2009: 4). At the same time, another interpretation to boy's silence in classroom is their intention of adhering to male gender identity, because women are stereotyped as overtalkative and somewhat gossipy with more small talk (Graddol & Swann, 1989).

The teacher's role in intervention on classroom talk should not be neglected. Teachers in the past might be criticized by giving more attention to boy students, both disapproval and praise. Teachers are suggested to have a conscious aim to divide their attention equally between girls and boys, for instance, the choices of stories read in class and writing tasks set have been adjusted to girls' interest. Cooperativeness is also being much rewarded in class, in particular, the female teachers are better than male teachers at assessing girls' cooperative style (Coates, 2004).

The problem may also lie in the curriculum. English, for example, is increasingly seen as a girls' subject, both for the majority number of the female learners and the achievements female students make. However, there is also a trend that girls seem to dominate the landscape academically that they outperform the boys in other subjects such as medicine, math and science, which are considered to be dominated by the male students. Under such circumstances, more and more educators are calling for a new effort to put boys on an equal footing with the girls. As a program in Jefferson

Academy in Long bench (Skolverket, 2009: 5) shows, schools have begun to do something to put a brake on the trend. In the program, the genders are separated during academic periods, that boys are in one room and girls are in another. The teachers use more physical activity and competition in the all-boy classrooms and appeal to the boys' interest, selecting more topics like war and science fiction. It turns out that boys' score on the test have dramatically jumped.

3. Analysis

The results of this study consist of three parts. The first part, the core of this study, is about the amount of talk for the girls and the boys in terms of the number of turns taken and the time of turn-length based on the observations on the whole class discussion set-up in class 1 and class 2. The second part is about the differences in speech styles between girls and boys based on the observations on the literary group discussion set-up in class 1. The third part is concerned with the teacher's role in the intervention on girls' and boys' classroom participation based on the interviews with the teachers after the classroom observation.

3.1 Amount of talk: findings in classroom observations

Amount of talk is measured by two standards in this study, one is the number of the turns taken, and the other is the turn-length (in seconds). The researcher counts the total number of turns as well as the total time taken by the girls and the boys respectively. Since the girls in the two classes are both in the majority, the percentages of these two items should be calculated and compared so as to compensate for the uneven distribution of the boys and the girls. The question how they get the turns, in particular whether they are given the turns by the teacher or they grab the turns by speaking out is considered but not the focus of the observation and the analysis. The tables show the results of the total and average number of turns and turn-length (in seconds). In order to make the difference clear in the amount of talk between the girls and the boys, the findings in class 1 and class 2 as well as the overall tendencies

resulted from the observations in both classes are analyzed and summarized.

3.1.1 Findings in Class 1

This class consists of 20 girls and 9 boys. The analysis is presented in three parts, the first two are about each observation and the third is about the overall results.

3.1.1.1 The first observation

The observation was carried out in a class where a comprehensive training of English took place. The teacher organized the class activities on the bases of listening, speaking, reading and writing. After 6 minutes of listening to a video-tape, the students were required to discuss with deskmates about the questions from the listening material and then to answer the questions of the teacher. The researcher took down the number of turns the girls and the boys took and the time they spoke during this activity. In the second stage, the teacher handed out some reading material and organized the students to read and discuss them in small groups. Each group was required to give a group presentation before the fellow students. The students followed the teacher's instructions and demonstrated group presentations in turn. Each student got at least one turn to speak in the group presentation. The researcher took down the number of turns and amount of turn-length for girls and boys in group presentation. It must be mentioned that the discussion in small groups are not included in the observation due to the difficulties in distributing equal observation for each group and also for fear of interrupting the normal process of the class activities. The statistics resulted from the observations are presented in table 1.

Table 1 Gender-based difference in contributions made to the class

	Boy speaker	Girl speaker
Number of contributor	9 (31%)	20 (69%)
Total number of turn-taking	34 (40%)	51 (60%)
Average number of turn-taking	3.8	2.6
Total turn-length (in seconds)	175(39%)	273(61%)
<u>Average turn-length (in seconds)</u>	<u>5.1</u>	<u>5.4</u>

It is obvious that the girl students contribute greatly to classroom talk, as they make up the majority of the speakers and occupy 60% of total turns and 61% of total turn-length. Girls in general enjoy an advantage in classroom talk. Two main factors may explain it. One is that the fact that girls' outnumber boys help to establish a less threatening speaking environment for female speakers as they gain more confidence and support from each other. The other factor may lie in the interaction pattern of group presentation. Each member enjoys an equal turn to speak as they are required to make a comment in turn. Thus, there are less opportunities of grabbing the floor for both groups. Girls are in the majority so that they have gotten more turns.

What must be pointed out is that the number of girls and boys is not even. The boys make up 31% of the speakers and they also account for 40% of total number of turns and 39% of total turn-length. Boys seem not to be at a disadvantage in class performance.

Average number of turns and average turn-length are also taken into consideration. The boys, at the average level, have an advantage in getting the turns, as each boy has one more turn than each girl. Two factors may explain it. Firstly, boys are more likely to get the gaze from the teacher by raising their hands faster than the girls. Secondly,

since boys are in the minority, the teacher might pay more attention to this group. As for the average turn-length, there is no obvious imbalance between the girls and the boys.

3.1.1.2 The second observation

There was one boy absent from the class. As planned, the teacher gave the floor to a group of students, letting them take the role as teacher to organize the class. The group is made up of three students, one boy and two girls. One girl was very competent and took the role as leader. She wrote her teaching plan on the board and arranged the class activities. The class began with an episode of an American movie about a girl, which took about 25minutes. The second stage is the group discussion about the ending of the movie. In this stage, the class was divided into 6 groups and each group had a rather heated discussion. At the end of the discussion, it was the time for group presentation before the whole class. Each student in each group was required to make contributions to the group presentation. In the last ten minutes the teacher organized an evaluation on the performance of the teaching activity, and other students made comments too. The statistics about the number of turns taken by the girls and boys, and amount of turn-length are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Gender-based inequality in contributions made to the class

	Boy speaker	Girl speaker
Number of contributor	8 (29%)	20 (71%)
Total number of turn-taking	23 (39%)	36 (61%)
Average number of turn-taking	2.9	1.8
Total turn-length (in seconds)	105(31%)	231(69%)
<u>Average turn-length (in seconds)</u>	<u>4.6</u>	<u>6.4</u>

The girls gain an upper hand in the total number of turns (61%) and turn-length (69%),

which means they in general make major contributions to the classroom talk. The girls benefit a lot from an advantageous speaking environment characterized by support and co-operation from each other.

Compared with the percentage of the number of the boys (29%) in this class, the percentages of the two items on the boys' side are all higher than 29%, which reinforces the conclusion that the boys still enjoy an equal share of talking time in the class.

The difference in the average number of turns and the average turn-length indicate a fact that the boys and the girls have different advantages in classroom participation. The boys are better at grabbing the floor as they are more likely to get attention from the teacher by speaking out the answers or raising their hands earlier than the girls. While the girls are better at hogging the floor and providing elaborative answers since they always considering the questions carefully before raising their hands.

3.1.1.3 Overall results from the observations in class 1

The findings of the two observations in class 1 turn out to be similar. For the first part, girl students in general contribute a large part to classroom talk. It is obvious that girls have an advantage in the total amount of classroom talk, in terms of both the number of turns and the amount of turn-length. Two main factors may explain it. Firstly, it is because girl student are in the majority. The fact that girls outnumber boys helps to establish an advantageous environment for the girls to speak up, because girls will gain more confidence in a more cooperative and supportive circumstances co-constructed by the fellow female speakers. Secondly, the class activities and its interaction pattern influence the performance of the girls and the boys. For example, each student is required to speak in turn in the group presentation, which produces a turn-taking pattern as "one party at a time". It is uneasy or impossible for the boys to grab the turn. Girls, on the other hand, have gotten the floor more often and held the floor longer than the boys since they are in the majority.

For the second part, the inequality in the average number of turns and the average turn-length taken by the girls and the boys shows a tendency that the girls hold the floor longer than the boys and are good at elaborating the issues. It might be because they always consider thoughtfully before raising up hand. Boys outnumber the girls in the average number of turns, which shows their desire and eagerness to grab the floor, to speak up and to achieve a status in classroom participation.

For the third part, the comparison of the percentage of the number of the boys and the girls with the percentages of the total number of turns and the total turn-length shows a fact that the girls and the boys enjoy a different advantage in the classroom talk.

3.1.2 Findings in Class 2

This class consists of 21 girls and 10 boys. The result and the analysis will be presented in three parts, the first two are about each observation and the third is about the overall results from the findings in this class.

3.1.2.1 The first observation

Three girls were absent from the class. After a brief introduction to the goals and teaching plan for the class, the teacher began the lesson with vocabulary paraphrase. She listed some new and complicated words involved in the material on the board, then asked and inspired the students to explain them in turn. Most students responded positively to the teacher's instruction. As for the classroom talking in this stage, the researcher took down the number of turns and length of turns of girls and boys. The next stage was to watch a video episode, because of some problems with the electronic equipment, the teacher decisively skipped to the next activity which is about course evaluation. The students were divided into seven groups, with at least one boy in each group. The students were required to discuss the material and exchange ideas in group at first, meanwhile, the teacher went around to answer the questions of the students and to make sure that every student is clear about the

instructions. In this part, the research observed the number and time of the girls and boys to ask questions for information. The last activity is to present the conclusions of group discussion by a spokesperson selected by each group. After each spokesperson spoke up, the teacher would ask the other group members if they would like to add something. So, turn-taking pattern in this part is more like self-selection that students are encouraged to get the floor on their own. The number of turns taken and amount of turn-length were taken down and included into the statistics.

Table 3 Gender-based difference in contributions made to the class

	Boy speaker	Girl speaker
Number of contributor	10 (36%)	18 (64%)
Total number of turn-taking	20 (25%)	59 (75%)
Average number of turn-taking	2	3.3
Total turn-length (in seconds)	79 (19%)	331 (81%)
Average turn-length (in seconds)	4.0	5.6

The statistics show an obvious inequality in classroom talk between the girls and boys in this class. Girls seem to dominate the class, in terms of the amount of talk both at general level and at average level.

Two main factors may explain the girls' relative dominance. One is that girls are not only in the majority, but perform actively and competently in class, for instance, the girls take up the roles as leaders in the group discussion and as the spokespersons to speak up. The other might be the boys' awareness of gender identity, because there are some interesting phenomenons in this class. The researcher observed that the boys took the chairs on the right side of the classroom, which separated them from the girl students. Only two boys took the chairs in the first row on the middle side because they came in late. It seems that the two boys would rather sit before the teacher than to be blended into the group of the girls. In addition, all the spokespersons selected to

speak up in the activity of the group presentation were girls. The boys gave up the floor unanimously except only one boy who spoke something when the teacher directed him. The boys' choices of seats as well as their silence or incompetence in the group interaction may indicate their interpretation to gender identity that to be talkative is to be feminine.

3.1.2.2 The second observation

Two girls were absent from the class. The whole class was arranged in a big conference room, so the girls and boys were mixed-seated. The classroom activities consisted of two parts, one was a news quiz, and the other was listening and speaking training. A great amount of opportunities were provided for the students to practice speaking English in class. The teacher adopted a rather competitive pattern of group interaction. The whole class was divided into two large groups and to have a competition on guessing the meaning of words involved in the listening material. One student got a word from the teacher and paraphrased it in English, and then other group members guessed what the word was. The group which achieved more right answers would win. Thus, team work was desirable in this group interaction. During the observation, the researcher took down the numbers of turns as well as the turn-length taken by the girls and boys. The researcher also observed the difference in the turn-taking pattern of the girls and boys. The statistics shown in Table 4 reflect the inequality in their contributions made to class.

Table 4 Gender-based inequality in contributions made to the class

	Boy speaker	Girl speaker
Number of contributor	10 (34%)	19 (66%)
Total number of turn-taking	28 (31%)	62 (69%)
Average number of turn-taking	2.8	3.3
Total turn-length (in seconds)	155(22%)	547(78%)
Average turn-length (in seconds)	5.5	8.8

Table 4 reinforces the result from the first observation in this class, that the girls enjoy an advantage in classroom talk. In the first place, the girls make a great contribution to classroom participation, as they have taken the majority number of turns and hold the turns for the most time. In the second place, at the average level, the girls still gain the upper hand in the classroom talk, because the average number of turns as well as the average turn-length taken by the girls are both more than the boys’.

There are two main factors influencing the girls’ dominance in classroom talk. First of all, as the activity of guessing the words needs cooperation and mutual understanding among group members, girls are good at team-work and benefit a lot from cooperation. On the other hand, the activity seems advantageous for the girls to speak more, as they are more likely to be the person who would explain the meaning of the words, and when they get the turns, the girls are more likely to elaborate the words as detailed as possible.

However, what must be mentioned is that the four longest turns (about 40 seconds) the girls have taken are all given by the teacher, as she directed the girls to read the materials. In total, the teacher asked two boys (22%) and seven girls (78%) to read the materials. Here the teacher plays a very important role in distributing the turns for the students and in controlling classroom talk, which reinforces the assumptions in 2.8 Theoretical Background.

3.1.2.3 Overall results from the observations in class 2

The findings in the two observations in Class 2 point to a fact that girls relatively dominate the classroom talk. The general tendencies of girl’s dominance are convincing as they obviously control the majority amount of classroom talking in terms of the total time of turn-length and number of turns. The tendencies that girls are relatively dominant in classroom talking are evident as the average number of turns and the average turn-length for the girls show that they get more turns than the

boys and hold the floor longer than the boys too.

Three factors may explain it. Firstly, it is not only because girls are in the majority, but also for their active roles in class participation. Additionally, the boys' awareness of gender identity and masculinity may influence their performance in class. It seems that they keep silent or give the floor to the girls with an intention to separate themselves from the stereotype of women that women are talkative. Finally, the teacher seems to give relatively more attention to the girls as she thinks that girls are shy to speak up. Some activities organized by the teacher are relatively advantageous and preferable to the girls.

3.1.3 Summary: overall results of the findings in both classes

There are some similarities in the findings of both classes. In the first place, girls outnumber boys, which may partly due to the English subject and helps to establish an advantageous speaking environment for the girls. In the second place, the girls contribute a great part in the classroom talk in terms of the total number of turns and amount of turn-length. In the third place, the girls seem relatively better at elaborative talk since the average turn-length of the girls is longer than the boys' in all four times of observation.

Differences also exist in the findings of the Class1 and Class2. The findings in Class 1 indicate that there is no obvious equality in the classroom talk between the girls and the boys, since the girls enjoy a relative advantage in the total classroom talk but the boys still have a fair share of talk. The girls and the boys seem to enjoy a respective advantage in the classroom talk, as the girls are good at holding the floor and the boys are good at getting the floor. However, findings in Class 2 reveal a new trend in classroom talk that the girls are very competent and are to dominate the class.

The results confirm a conclusion that generalizations should not be done on the question which group is to dominate the class. In general, boys are no more dominant

in class, particularly in some subjects like English in which the girls always outnumber and outperform the boys. On the other hand, girls are becoming more competent to achieve dominance in classroom talk.

3.2 Speech styles in conversation: findings in the literary group discussions in class 1

The teacher in class 1 organized two classes of argumentative speeches in groups for English literature. Students were divided into 10 small groups, and each group consisted of at least two students and at most 4 students. The group members were chosen by themselves, then both single-sex and mix-sex conversational patterns happened to take place in the researcher's observation. Each member of the group is required to deliver a speech about the English novel she or he had been assigned to read. Some of the novels are recommended by the teacher, and some are chosen by the students. The groups were marked by the number, and the teacher called in the groups by turn. The teacher would inform each group of the rules for interaction and for assessment on their performance at the beginning. Each student was supposed to present his argument at first, then to answer the questions from other group members. Among others, questions and defenses would be included into assessment.

The purpose of this kind of activity is to ensure equal opportunity for each student to read and speak English, aimed to achieve the input and output of second language learning. Meanwhile, the requirement for questions and defenses helps to initiate team work, because good questions reflect listeners' attention to what the speaker has delivered and co-construct the speaker's further elaboration. The observation was focused on the difference in conversational styles for girls and boys, with a main goal to find out which group tends to be more cooperative or competitive in an academic peer interaction.

The findings show that girls in general are more supportive and cooperative both in single-sex interactions and in mix-sex interactions, in terms of some linguistic

features such as topic choice, minimal responses, and attentive expression as well as some non-linguistic features but function equally effective in conversations like eye-contact or gaze-attention. As for the topic choice, 24 (83%) students chose the novels recommended by the teacher, and 5 (17%) students chose others on their own. Girls and boys differ in topic choice since some of them read the same book. Girls in general pay much attention to the individual fates of the main characters, in particular their friendships, family relationships, and emotions. Boys are concerned more about the background of the story, and are more likely to tie the destinies of the main characters to some social phenomenon such as homelessness, joblessness and heroism. For example, many students choose the novel named *Goodnight Mister Tom*, which tells a story about a boy named Tom and his experience after World War Two. Girls are concerned more about the mother-son relationship, Tom's miserable childhood, his friendship with Zack and his life experience during the war. Boys, on the other hand, are more interested in talking about the disasters brought about by the War, as well as the miserable fates of individuals suffered from the War. These differences in topic choice between the girls and the boys fit the assumptions about the conversational styles of women and men mentioned in 2.5.2, especially convince the claims that the female speakers typically choose to talk about people and feelings (Coates, 2004: 127-128) while the male speakers avoid self-disclosure and prefer to talk more impersonal topics such as current affairs, modern technologies or sport (Coates, 2004: 133). These differences also reflect the different subcultures of adult women and men, that women view themselves as individuals in the net of connection while men view themselves as individuals in a world of competition.

As far as minimal responses are concerned, it is obvious that girls use frequent and well-placed minimal responses to give a positive feedback and support for the current speaker. The statistics indicate that girls use 85.7% of minimal responses during the interaction which is in a majority compared with the boys'. Besides, girls more often than the boys give gaze attention to the listeners including the teacher who is the examiner in the interaction. Boys, on the other hand, are more likely to remain silent

except when the teacher directs him to ask the speaker question. And they provide less feedback or eye-contacts both when they speak and when they listen to others. For instance, when a girl made several pauses during her speech for the lack of confidence, the other two girls in the group gave short minimal responses to relieve her tension and embarrassment, signaling the message as encouragement, while the boy in the group remained silent. One explanation to this phenomenon might be the socialization of gender identity. Boys learn to avoid frequent use of minimal responses and make use of silence, a symbol of power to achieve status and dominance in the conversation.

Considering the attentive expressions such as *I think, as well as I know, I don't know whether*, girls are inclined to use them more. There is a typical example that a girl used seven uncertainty expressions during her speech. Only one boy uses once "*I think*" in his speech. The low frequent use of attentive expressions for both genders in this activity might partly because of the academic context and the assessment on their performance.

All those findings show a general tendency of gender difference in group interaction, and reinforce the statement made by a lot of researches that girl students are more cooperative. However, cooperation of girls does not mean that they are at disadvantage in group talking. New tendencies are also found in this research. Some girl students have brilliant ideas and powerful expressions. They analyze the conflicts of the novel in a logical way, and probe into the issues with a subtle and far-reaching insight. They are generous to give support for others, and at the same time speak up without any hesitation or uncertainty. Thus, the question whether cooperativeness could be integrated with competitiveness is put forward. The new tendencies found in the girls indicate that cooperativeness is not opposing to competitiveness. Girls play cooperatively as well as competitively in conversation, which partly because women or girls are being encouraged to challenge some stereotypes of them and are getting an immense amount of support to do masculinity. On the contrary, it seems that the boys'

motivations for study are not as strong as the girls', as two boys in this class are not prepared for the group discussion and one is even not finished reading the novel. One explanation might be that boys get some mixed message about what it means to be masculine and what it means to do well in academic performance. It is not cool and even to be teased by peers if they do well in school. As boys use more taboos and swear more to do masculinity and to salient their gender, their lagging on study somewhat reflects their desires for adhering to their gender identity.

3.3 The teacher's role in the intervention on classroom participation

The teachers in Class 1 and Class 2 obviously have an idea to provide equal opportunities for each student to speak in class. They make good use of various teaching methods or strategies to motivate every student to speak more or read more in English, for example, the activity like argumentative speech in group, group discussions which are used to increase understanding of the material, as well as group presentations, in order to encourage second language learners to practice the target language as much as possible and to ensure equality in the classroom participation. Cooperativeness is much rewarded in the class interaction, for instance, team-work and contributions of each member are desirable and valuable in the group discussion and presentation, which helps to construct a less threatening but advantageous context for girls to speak.

Changes have taken place with the teachers' conscious intervention on the balance of the contributions made by each group. The findings in Class 1 indicate that girls enjoy an advantageous speaking environment in English class. Boys, on the other hand, still have an equal share of classroom talk. Both sides are benefited from the class interactions. The findings in Class 2 obviously show an opposing wind to male dominating world that it is young female speakers that dominate the class. Teacher's role in distributing the turns is relatively preferable to girls since she thinks that girls may shy to speak up.

Generally speaking, some strategies the teachers have adopted to ensure the girl students get an equal share of the classroom talk. When they direct or organize activities, they tend to select topics of interest to girls which will encourage them to contribute more to the discussion. Small group discussions and group presentations are often used not only as a preparation for a whole classroom discussion of issues, but as an effective way of cooperation, so that the girl students are encouraged to talk more and to play an active role in a less threatening but advantageous context.

4. Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to find out if there are any inequalities or differences in the classroom participation for girl students and boy students, in terms of amount of talk and styles of talk. The number of the turn-taking and the amount of turn-length for both genders are measured.

Based on the findings of the observations in two classes, a conclusion that boys no more dominate the class might be reached. Girls and boys enjoy respective advantages in classroom talk. Girls make a great contribution to classroom participation, not only for the total amount of talk they have contributed but for their cooperative co-construction for the class interactions. Girls are better at holding the floor and elaborating their statements. Boys, on the other hand, are better at getting the floor and achieving attention from all the participants in class.

A new trend should not be neglected that girl students are being more competent, even to dominate the class, as the girls in the four times of observations dominate the amount of time talked both at the total turn-length level and at the average turn-length level. The girls like to be leaders in the group interactions.

Factors influencing the gender differences in classroom talk may cover four aspects. Firstly, gender identity and social circumstances are of significance in the outcome of young students' academic performance, in particular the classroom participation.

Secondly, the interaction patterns in class play a very important role in the students' speaking performance. Thirdly, teacher's conscious intervention on the balance of classroom participation accounts. Finally, the subject as well as the class composition plays a joint role in shaping the situations for girls' and boys' performance

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Primary Material

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