Gender differences in Swedish students’ written English and students’ identification of female and male language features
The purpose of this study was to investigate if any linguistic differences between the sexes can be found in Swedish students’ compositions in English. My aim was also to investigate what features students perceive to be typically male or female. By studying a number of Swedish students’ English compositions, I was able to detect differences between boys’ and girls’ language and also compare my discoveries with earlier research. I investigated both the features that separate the genders in their writing and also what students identified as female and male language use. In my investigation, I found some linguistic differences between the sexes which were more distinct than others; for example their use of stative and dynamic verbs. But, on the other hand, I found no noticeable difference between boys’ and girls’ use of adjectives; words which are often said to be more commonly used by girls.
Table of contents

1. Introduction ...................................................................................................................1
   1.1 Aims ..........................................................................................................................1
2. Background ....................................................................................................................2
   2.1 Sex and gender ..........................................................................................................2
   2.2 Socialization into gender roles ..................................................................................2
   2.3 Gender roles in school ...............................................................................................3
   2.4 Gender stereotyping .................................................................................................4
   2.5 Research on gender differences in language ............................................................6
       2.5.1 Vocabulary and grammar ..................................................................................6
       2.5.2 Taboo language .................................................................................................7
3. Methods ..........................................................................................................................8
   3.1 Informants ................................................................................................................8
   3.2 Essays .......................................................................................................................9
   3.3 Linguistic analysis of the compositions .....................................................................9
   3.4 Questionnaire study .................................................................................................11
4. Analysis and results .....................................................................................................12
   4.1 Analysis of the compositions ..................................................................................12
       4.1.1 Sentence length and complexity .......................................................................12
       4.1.2 Verbs with stative and dynamic meaning .........................................................15
       4.1.3 Adjectives and adverbs ....................................................................................16
       4.1.4 Correctness .......................................................................................................17
   4.2 Students’ identification of male and female writing ..................................................18
       4.2.1 Identifying the sex of the writer: girls’ texts correctly identified .....................19
       4.2.2 Identifying the sex of the writer: girls’ texts incorrectly identified .................21
       4.2.3 Identifying the sex of the writer: boys’ texts correctly identified .....................22
       4.2.4 Identifying the sex of the writer: boys’ texts incorrectly identified .................24
5. Discussion .....................................................................................................................25

6. Conclusion ....................................................................................................................27

References .......................................................................................................................28

Appendix 1 .......................................................................................................................29

Appendix 2 .......................................................................................................................31

Appendix 3 .......................................................................................................................32

Appendix 4 .......................................................................................................................33
1. Introduction

In today’s society language plays an important role. We use it every day to communicate, to express ourselves and our opinions. The way we talk tells us a lot about each other and we are often judged by how we speak and write. Already as children, boys and girls develop ways of using language in a gender-appropriate manner. Our language becomes an important part of our social identity as our “linguistic habits reflect our individual biographies and experiences” (Graddol and Swann 1994:5). Our society shapes us and as we grow up we learn not only how to act but also how to speak by observing and interacting with other people. Not only do we learn to speak differently, we often have preconceptions about how men and women use language differently. A common stereotypical picture of women is that they use language more correctly while men swear and use more slang words (Poynton 1989:67).

After all, gender and language are linked together in a way that makes them hard to separate because language becomes part of one’s gender identity. Coates claims that

\[
\text{in becoming linguistically competent, the child learns to be a fully fledged male or female member of the speech community; conversely, when children adopt linguistic behavior considered appropriate to their gender they perpetuate the social order which creates gender distinctions. (Coates 1993:144)}
\]

To children, it is important to belong to a group and one way of demonstrating their connection to others is by using gender appropriate behavior. Children learn how to speak to be accepted in society. Men and women communicate and use language in different ways. Thus it is important to study gender differences since language plays a significant role in our socialization process.

1.1 Aims

My primary aim with this paper was to find out if there are gender differences in the language Swedish students use when they write in English. Can any linguistic differences be found and do they agree with earlier research? My aim was also to find out about students’ biases and preconceptions about male and female language. Is it possible to tell if a text is written by a female or a male student? What criteria are used to tell who wrote the text?
The first part of my study is based on English compositions written by Swedish upper secondary school students in their first year. The purpose is to examine if any gender-based linguistic differences can be found in the compositions. The second part is based on a questionnaire with samples of the texts where students had to decide whether the text was written by a male or female student and also indicate what led them to their conclusions.

2. Background
In this section I will present what different researchers say about gender differences in language use. I will focus on how society shapes us into a gender-appropriate language use. I will also look at reasons for these language differences and look into what preconceptions people in general have about what is considered to be male and female language.

2.1 Sex and gender
Differences between men and women are due to both biological and social factors. It is important to keep them apart and, in order to do that, the terms sex and gender are often used. Eckert and McConnell-Ginnet define sex and gender in the following way:

Sex is a biological categorization based primarily on reproductive potential, whereas gender is the social elaboration of biological sex. Gender builds on biological sex, it exaggerates biological difference. (Eckert and McConnell-Ginnet 2003:10)

This means that sex is something we all are born with while gender is something we are introduced to while growing up. Boys learn how to act by observing other boys and men; they learn how to act and speak according to their gender. Girls go through the same procedure when they learn how to paint their nails and put on makeup because that is what their mothers and other women do. There are no biological reasons for these actions but society shapes us all into our gender. Gender, unlike sex, is “a continuous variable” and a person can be more or less ‘feminine’ or ‘masculine’ (Graddol and Swann 1994:8).

2.2 Socialization into gender roles
Language is a medium for expressing gender identity (Holmes and Meyerhoff 2003:489). Children can, in the way they speak, identify themselves with other children of the same sex.
Children of the same sex, who play together, learn and solidify a gender-appropriate style of language use (Tannen 1993:85). Girls learn to be more careful in their speech while boys do not mind showing their strength and power through their language. Boys’ speech is often competition oriented and by the way they speak they often want to get a position of dominance and also attract an audience. Girls’ speech, on the other hand, tends to be collaboration oriented as they often ask questions and give supportive comments. Girls often try to create and maintain a relationship of closeness and equality (Tannen 1993:87). This process where children learn to speak in a gender appropriate way is called language socialization. Language has a major influence on how children learn about gender, just as gender has a major influence on how children use language (Tannen 1993:84). Coates (1993:204) supports this, claiming that language and gender are “inextricably linked” and both our gender and language are “developed through our participation in everyday social practice”.

In addition, children do not only have to know the rules of the language; they also have to learn the rules for the appropriate use of language on the basis of their sex. Basically, all cultures distinguish between gender roles in society, and learning to speak means learning to be a member of a particular culture. Children learn how to speak to fit into their gender roles in the specific culture (Coates 1993:143). They create gender distinctions because of their gender-appropriate linguistic behavior, and therefore they become competent male or female members of a speech community. According to Trudgill, men and women have different social roles because of our society and, consequently, language simply reflects these social facts (Trudgill 2000:79). Children are born with a sex but they are very soon introduced to their gender. However, Trudgill states that most western societies have changed over the past few decades and are altering the way people feel about what is appropriate when it comes to gender roles (Trudgill 2000:183). Just as time and society are changing, the rules of appropriate gender roles are changing with them. What was considered normal and appropriate in the past is changing and will probably change even more as we move into an unknown future.

2.3 Gender roles in school
The prime difference between the genders in the classroom is that the boys talk more than the girls. In a study of over 100 classes, the boys spoke on average three times as much as the girls (Graddol and Swann 1994:71). Even though teachers try to give boys and girls the same
amount of time, one teacher found that she spent an average of only 38 percent of her time interacting with the girls even though she thought she gave an equal amount of time to both the boys and the girls (Graddol and Swann 1994:71).

Thus, research has shown that boys often get benefits in school; they get more attention from the teacher because, most of the time, they demand more attention. Teachers tend to give more time and attention to the boys and they, in their turn, tend to monopolize the time given to them. Certain behaviors, such as calling out, are acceptable from boys but not from girls (Mills 1995:135). Teachers also give boys more praise and encouragement (Graddol and Swann 1994:71). Not only do boys get more attention, they are also favored when it comes to topics that are discussed in school. Studies have shown that teachers plan their lessons according to the boys’ interests because they know that the boys will object if they do not find the topic interesting, while the girls will accept it (Coates 1993:200).

Girls and boys do not only speak differently; they also make different reading choices, write in different ways and choose different topics to write about. From a very early age, girls and boys write about different things. Girls write about home activities, romance and fantasy worlds, whereas boys write about playing or watching sports or other physical activities (Poynton 1989:34). Swann (cited in Holmes and Meyerhoff 2003:625) points out something interesting concerning school-books: she found that books and other resources used in schools contain many more male than female characters. She also found that the male characters in the stories were more active and less restricted than the female ones.

Differences in language use are partly due to the fact that boys play in larger, more hierarchical groups while girls often play in pairs or small groups. Boys’ friendships are based on activity while girls’ friendships are, from an early stage, based on talk. All the way from pre-school up to high school, girls find it very important to talk to each other for advice and support. Boys want to get a position of dominance while girls want to create relationships using language (Coates 1993:158). This shows that boys and girls have different goals with their interaction and that is one reason why their language develops in different directions.

### 2.4 Gender stereotyping

As pointed out in the introduction, the belief that women and men use language differently is widespread. According to Coates (1993:16), comments from old letters, poems, novels and so
on provide us with folk-linguistic beliefs about gender differences in language. Proverbs such as “A woman’s tongue wags like a lamb’s tail” and “The North Sea will sooner be found wanting in water than a woman at a loss for a word” show that preconceptions about how women talk have been perpetuated for a long time. This is one explanation why stereotypes about language and gender are so deeply embedded in us.

Coates asks the question, when do children acquire these cultural beliefs about language? She looks at a study done by Edelsky who gave words considered to be masculine/feminine to children aged 7, 9 and 12. At age 7, only two out of twelve variables got the expected response: *adorable* as a female word and *damn it* as a male word. At age 9, the variables had increased to eight and at age 12 all the variables were put under the expected category. The children’s preconceptions had grown during these years of growing up. This shows that children gradually acquire and internalize the folk linguistic beliefs of our society (Coates 1993:156-157).

As stated above, one stereotypical idea about language use is that taboo language is mostly used by men. According to Coates, taboo language has always existed but it seems that the use of that kind of language during the Middle Ages is what really strengthened linguistic taboos in general. During this time, women were put on a pedestal and the use of vulgar language was condemned among women. They were expected to be pure and sweet; an image which would have been completely ruined by the use of vulgar language. Men did not have these strict rules and it was therefore more accepted for them to use that kind of language. In Elyot’s *The Governour* from 1531, he advises that the child of a gentleman should be brought up by women because they would not speak or allow any unclean words around the baby. No men should be allowed in the nursery room because they might utter such words (Coates 1993:21-22). Here, Elyot tries to describe women’s language but according to Coates (1993:34), the text rather seems to serve as prescriptions of how women ought to talk.

Even though Elyot wrote this a long time ago we still today use expressions such as ‘nice girls don’t swear’ and ‘speak like a lady’, which reflect how we should speak to be accepted in society. We all learn that we ought to follow these guidelines on how to speak in order to act appropriately according to our gender. Many girls feel the pressure to be ‘a good girl’ and they adapt to the norms just as boys adapt to being ‘a real man’. The expression ‘boys don’t cry’ teaches boys from an early age how they should act. They should not show their
emotions and our language emphasizes the fact that they should talk and act as big strong men.

Stereotypes of women’s and men’s language have a long history and they are documented and reflected in proverbs, jokes and literature (Graddol and Swann 1994:2). A common belief about men’s and women’s topics of conversation is that men talk about sports and cars while women ‘gossip’ about relationships and trivialities. Men like to talk about themselves while women are good listeners. Women are also expected to be more polite and use a more polite language than men. These folk linguistic ideas stem from stereotyped beliefs about how men and women should talk and act in society (Speer 2005:30). Women are often referred to as the sex who speaks, chatters, a lot more than men. They are not only considered to talk more but also to talk about nonsense and unimportant subjects. Furthermore, women’s language is also believed to be “grating and trivial, therefore easy to ignore” (Weatherall 2002:6). Coates (1993:152) claims that girls and women are believed to talk more. Even though this is shown to be true, research has also shown that women actually talk less than men in mixed company (Coates 1993:152).

2.5 Research on gender differences in language

2.5.1 Vocabulary and grammar

Studies carried out on child language show that girls acquire language earlier than boys, which means that, at any given age, girls are superior to boys also in the size of their vocabulary (Coates 1993:146). Chavez supports this, saying that girls are superior in comprehension and vocabulary and also overall more proficient language learners (Chavez 2001:50). Even though women have a larger vocabulary, Robin Lakoff argues in an article from 1972 that women use language in a way which reflects and produces a subordinate position in society. She claims that women use words such as sort of and I think and also inessential qualifiers like really happy and so beautiful (cited in Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003:1). Poynton agrees with this, saying that women use more intensifiers such as so and very. Women also tend to use more words of approximation, such as about and around (Poynton 1989:72).

Different researchers have shown that women use more adjectives and adverbs than men. ‘Empty’ adjectives such as divine, charming and cute are considered to be part of womens’
language (Coates 1993:20). Wonderful, darling and gorgeous are evaluative adjectives which Poyton (1989:72) claims are adjectives used by women. Women use a wider range of color terms (beige, ecru and lavender) which are practically nonexistent in men’s language. Men also use adjectives but men and women often use different adjectives where words such as adorable, sweet, and lovely are considered to be adjectives used by women. According to Lakoff, men does not have any adjectives of their own but words such as great, terrific, cool and neat are described as neutral adjectives and used by both sexes (Lakoff 1989:12).

Another thing that separates men’s and women’s language is that women use more tag questions than men. Questions like he was nice, wasn’t he? imply that women want confirmation of what they are saying. They also use hedges, i.e. utterances like sort of and you know, used to signal uncertainty (Lakoff 1989:15).

When it comes to sentence length, Poynton claims that “there is limited evidence that girls produce longer sentences than boys but that in adulthood the reverse may be true” (Poynton 1989:72). Anastasi (1958:473), on the other hand, found that girls in several studies used longer and “more mature sentence structure than boys”. Girls also begin to use sentences earlier than boys. Poynton (1989:34) says that girls generally write better than boys as a group even though the really excellent writers may be males. Chavez found in her study from 1996 that females made more spelling and word order mistakes but fewer morphological mistakes than the males (Chavez 2001:65).

2.5.2 Taboo language
According to Poynton (1989:73), men are considered to use more slang and swear words than women. Women’s language is believed to be more polite, more ladylike. Trudgill (2000:69) claims that it is traditionally more acceptable for men to swear and use taboo language than it is for women. He continues by saying that female speakers tend to use better linguistic forms than men. Flexner states, in his preface to the Dictionary of American Slang, that “most American slang is created and used by males” (Wentworth and Flexner 1967:12). He continues by saying that many slang words, including taboo and strongly offensive ones, refer mostly to male interest and that women have very little of their own slang. Lakoff discusses ‘women’s language’ and claims that a woman’s choice of vocabulary is restricted because she has to think about what impression she will make on people. Instead of words like shit or damn, women use weaker expletives like oh dear or goodness, which implies that women are
not allowed to show strong feelings (Lakoff 1989:10).

In a study including a total of 87 men and 87 women, Johnson found some differences concerning the use of taboo language. She found that the male respondents rated themselves as more frequent users of taboo language than the female respondents rated themselves. Something else separating the genders is that 55 percent of the women only use taboo language when they need to ventilate their emotions compared to only 24 percent of the men. Even though a majority of both men and women thought that taboo language should be equally appropriate to use for both sexes, the majority still believed men to use taboo language more than women. This was confirmed when 50 percent of the women reported using taboo language very rarely as opposed to only 20 percent of the men. Looking at the frequency of taboo language use, the percentage for women was eight and the percentage for men was 23. Furthermore, more men than women reported using taboo language to get attention, establish social power, shock people and signal friendship (Johnson 1993).

3. Methods
I had two aims with this investigation: first, to examine texts written by male and female students in upper secondary school, to see if any linguistic differences between the sexes could be found in the texts. My second aim was to investigate what features students perceive to be typically male or typically female in samples of texts written by boys and girls.

3.1 Informants
I carried out my investigation in two steps. First, I had a class of 18 upper secondary students write an essay. The students were in a theoretical program and there were twelve female students and six male students who participated. To be able to compare the essays, I decided to only use six written by boys and six written by girls. Since all the girls’ essays were similar in length, I randomly picked out six of them. The remaining six I did not use.

In the second part of my investigation, students from two classes answered a questionnaire. The students from the first class were in a theoretical program and those from the second class were in a construction program. A total of 17 boys and 16 girls participated and all of the students were in their first year of upper secondary school. I randomly removed one of the questionnaires filled in by a male informant, in order to even the numbers.
3.2 Essays
I collected texts written by male and female students in order to compare the students’ writing and also to get material that could be used in the questionnaire. In order to be able to compare the students’ writing, I had to be careful to choose a topic that could be regarded as gender neutral. I also wanted a topic that would involve description, which implies the use of adjectives, since, as pointed out in the background, the use of adjectives has been found to be a distinguishing feature in boys’ and girls’ writing. Finally, I chose the topic “A portrait of my grandmother/grandfather”.

The students were not told what would be examined in their texts since that might have affected their writing; all they knew was that their texts were going to be used in an investigation. The students were told to write their names on the essay, partly because the teacher wanted to grade them but also because it was necessary for me to know the sex of the students.

I did not expect the students to have any problems coming up with things to write about, but some of the students had problems and I had to give them some suggestions on what they could write about besides a mere description of what the person looks like. Despite this, they all tried their best and they were given 45 minutes to finish the task. Since their teacher wanted to give them feedback and grade their papers, they were all even more eager to do a good job.

3.3 Linguistic analysis of the compositions
When analysing the essays, I looked at different features such as sentence length, number of sentences per essay, verbs, adverbs, adjectives and correctness to be able to compare boys’ and girls’ different features in written texts. I also compared my results with earlier research.

In order to see whether there was a difference in the number of sentences used, the length of sentences, and the number of distinct words, or tokens, used in the essays, I calculated the number of words per essay and per sentence using the wordlist function in the program Wordsmith Tools. In this program I got the following: one frequency word list, where I could see how many times each word was used; one alphabetical word list, which listed all words
used in an essay in alphabetical order; and a list of statistics where I could see the number of tokens and types as well as the type/token ratio.

I also used this program to calculate the different types of words used in each essay, to see if any differences could be found. For example, if a text contains 200 words it is said to have 200 tokens. But some of these words will be repeated many times in the text and therefore the number of types (or distinct words) will be lower than the number of tokens. The type/token ratio is used as an index of language diversity (Miliander 2003:27) and it measures how many different words there are in a text in relationship to the total number of words. A high type/token ratio is a result of many different words in a text and therefore implies that there is variation. By dividing the number of types by the number of tokens and then multiplying it by 100, one will get the type/token ratio in percent (Miliander 2003:27). I used the statistics to find the type/token ratio in each essay.

Subordinate clauses are usually a sign of a more complex language, and in order to see if there were any differences between boys’ and girls’ language, I calculated the frequency of subordinate clauses in the essays. To be able to identify the subordinate clauses, I marked all subordinate and main clauses in all the essays. After that, I counted all the subordinate clauses found in the essays written by boys and then the subordinate clauses written by girls in order to see if any differences could be found concerning the frequency of use of such clauses.

I did not find any research concerning the use of verbs among males and females, except that women have a tendency to use the verb *think* more than men (cited in Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003:1). However, I still wanted to examine if there was a difference in the use of verbs by boys and girls. Since boys are usually said to be more action-oriented than girls, they could be expected to use more dynamic verbs, whereas girls, who are claimed to be more emotional, might use a larger number of stative verbs. Stative verbs are verbs which usually refer to a state or condition which is not changing or likely to change while dynamic verbs are verbs which usually describe actions we can take, or things that happen (English Language Study Zone). I marked all verbs in all of the essays, categorized them, by using English Language Study Zone, into stative or dynamic and compared how often such verbs were used by the boys and the girls.
Adjectives are usually said to be more frequently used by girls than boys (Poynton 1989:72), which is why I wanted to examine the use of adjectives in the essays. Just like adjectives, adverbs are found to be more commonly used by girls, especially words as really and very (Poynton 1989:72). To be able to compare the frequency of adjectives and adverbs in the essays, I marked all of them and then I counted and compared the usage in boys’ and girls’ essays.

Chavez (2001:65) found that women made more spelling and word order mistakes but fewer morphological mistakes than men, and I wanted to examine if this was shown to be true in the texts I investigated. In order to measure correctness, I counted the number of finite verbs in the wrong form (e.g. She live in a big house alone but sometimes my sister stays there a longer period. She also have her own forest around the house1) and also the total number of finite verbs (e.g. She live in a big house alone but sometimes my sister stays there a longer period. She also have her own forest around the house) to be able to calculate a percentage of correct finite verb forms in each essay. I applied the same method when measuring spelling: first I marked, and then I calculated the number of spelling errors. Finally I divided the number of correctly spelled words by the total number of words in the essay, which gave me the percentage of correctly spelled words.

3.4 Questionnaire study
Once I had collected all the compositions, I randomly picked out five essays written by girls and five essays written by boys. I copied the second paragraph of each of the essays selected for the questionnaire study into a computer file. The reason I chose the second paragraph was that almost all the students wrote the name, their parents’ names and the name of the place where their grandparent lives in the first paragraph and I found that information irrelevant for my investigation. I also limited the size of the text samples to one paragraph since it would be too time-consuming for the students to examine whole essays.

The students chosen for the second part of my investigation were given the questionnaire (see Appendix 1) and asked to read the passages one at the time and circle whether they thought it was written by a boy or a girl. Before they started I told them that my aim was to see if they could identify differences in the way boys and girls write. I asked them to write

1All examples are written as produced by the students. Errors are not corrected.
what criteria made them come to their conclusion and I also asked them to focus on the language rather than the content. I explained that a person who plays football with one of the grandparents could lead one to the conclusion that the author is a boy because of the content, so I emphasized that I am more interested in language differences. These classes were given about 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire. Just like the other class, they took the task seriously and they all did their best to state the criteria they used for their decisions.

4. Analysis and results

In this section I will present the results of my investigation. I will start by examining the twelve written essays. Here my focus will be on linguistic features. I will compare sentence length, number of words per sentence, type/token ratio, types of verbs used, adjectives, adverbs and finally correctness as measured by the use of correct/incorrect verb forms and spelling, to see if there are any differences to be found.

In 4.2, I will account for the results of the second part of my investigation, the questionnaire. I will examine whether students are aware of gender differences in language use and state the reasons which made them come to their conclusions.

4.1 Analysis of the compositions

4.1.1 Sentence length and complexity

In the material I used for my investigation, I found that the girls wrote longer essays than the boys (see Table 3). On average, the girls wrote 28 more words per essay than the boys. On the other hand, as shown in Tables 1 and 2, the girls wrote more and shorter sentences than the boys.
Table 1: Number of sentences in the boys’ and the girls’ essays.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Number of sentences in essay</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Number of sentences in essay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boy 1</td>
<td>12 sentences</td>
<td>Girl 1</td>
<td>13 sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy 2</td>
<td>11 sentences</td>
<td>Girl 2</td>
<td>19 sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy 3</td>
<td>10 sentences</td>
<td>Girl 3</td>
<td>14 sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy 4</td>
<td>15 sentences</td>
<td>Girl 4</td>
<td>12 sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy 5</td>
<td>12 sentences</td>
<td>Girl 5</td>
<td>20 sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy 6</td>
<td>13 sentences</td>
<td>Girl 6</td>
<td>15 sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>12.1 sentences</strong></td>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>15.5 sentences</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Previous research has shown that girls tend to write longer and use more mature sentence structure than boys (Anastasi 1958:473). Examining the number of words per sentence I found, as seen in Table 2, that the girls in this class actually wrote shorter sentences than the boys. On the other hand, the sentences the students produced were not always correct sentences since I found run-on sentences in both the boys’ and the girls’ essays.

Table 2: Average number of words per sentence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Number of words per sentence</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Number of words per sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boy 1</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>Girl 1</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy 2</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>Girl 2</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy 3</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>Girl 3</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy 4</td>
<td>10.1</td>
<td>Girl 4</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy 5</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>Girl 5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy 6</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>Girl 6</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>13.0</strong></td>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>11.8</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coates (1993:146) claims that girls are superior to boys when it comes to the size of their vocabulary and I wanted to examine if that was shown to be true in my investigation. To be able to do that, I wanted to examine not only the quantity of words but also the quality since many words can be uncomplicated and used several times in one essay. As mentioned above, the girls wrote longer essays than the boys but I wanted to examine how many times a distinct word, also called types, was used compared to the total number of words, also called tokens. Table 3 shows tokens, types and type/token ratio used in the essays.
Even though the girls wrote on average longer essays than the boys, I found a higher average of type/token ratio in the boys’ essays, which implies that the boys have a larger vocabulary since they were able to use a more varied language. Thus, my investigation contradicts Coates (1993:146) since she claims girls to be superior in their vocabulary. However, according to Miliander (2003:27), one has to be cautious when using the type/token ratio as a measure of variation in a text since the ratio decreases in a long text because the same words are likely to be repeated. This explains why the longest essay in my material also has the lowest type/token ratio. However, in my investigation, most of the essays were similar in length which made it possible for me to compare the type/token ratio.

More subordinate clauses are usually a sign of a more complex language. According to Poynton (1989:34), girls generally write better than boys as a group, but my investigation shows little difference between boys’ and girls’ use of subordinate clauses and therefore implies that their skills are about the same. All the students used at least one subordinate clause, and no one used more than six. I found temporal clauses, reason clauses and relative clauses in both the boys’ and the girls’ essays. I also found one concessive clause in an essay written by a girl.

Examples of boys’ subordinate clauses:

(1) When he was younger he worked as a farmer. (temporal clause)
(2) She had for 3 years ago 2 pretty dogs, but they died because they got too old. (reason clause)
(3) She have her own silver mopedcar that she got on her birthday. (relative clause)

Examples of girls’ subordinate clauses:

(4) And she always tells stories which she made up when I was smaller. (temporal clause)
(5) My cat Sara lives with my grandfather and grandmother because we couldn’t keep her. (reason clause)
(6) He has his own sågverk, that his father first started. (relative clause)
(7) My grandparents are very healthy even though they are old. (concessive clause)

Altogether, the girls used 25 subordinate clauses, as compared to the boys, who used a total of 23. Thus, there was no significant difference in the use of the subordinate clauses.

4.1.2 Verbs with stative and dynamic meaning
I have categorized all the verbs as either stative or dynamic in meaning to see if there are any differences in the use of verbs between the sexes. Stative verbs usually refer to a state or condition which is not changing or likely to change while dynamic verbs usually describe actions we can take, or things that happen. Table 4 shows the use of stative verbs in the students’ essays.

Table 4: Stative verbs in essays.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stative verbs</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adore</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notice</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remember</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>See</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>36</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As shown in Table 4, the girls used a much larger number of stative verbs than the boys: 36 compared to only 15. The most noticeable differences are in the use of the verbs *love* and *think* since they were each used seven times by the girls but only once and twice, respectively, by the boys. *Love* was used at least one time by all the girls except one, while it was only used (twice) by one boy. In addition, this boy was not talking about his own feelings; he said that his grandmother loves to dance and that she loves him. In contrast, four out of five girls used the word *love* to describe their own feelings towards their grandfather or grandmother.

Concerning the verb *think*, Lakoff (cited in Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003:1) claims in her article from 1972 that women use language in a way which reflects and produces a subordinate position in society. According to her, women use words such as *I think* much more than men and my results support her claims since many more girls used the stative verb *think* than boys.

In contrast to the stative verbs, there were practically no differences in the use of dynamic verbs between boys and girls. I found 56 dynamic verbs in the girls’ essays and 49 in the essays written by boys (see Appendix 2). Altogether the girls used 92 verbs while the boys used 64.

### 4.1.3 Adjectives and adverbs

Several studies have found that girls use more adjectives than boys (Poynton 1989:72). I found that the total number of adjectives in the girls’ essays was 48 compared to 46 in the boys’ essays (see Appendix 3), which is not a significant difference. The average number of adjectives was 7.6 in the boys’ essays and 8.1 in the girls’ essays. The most frequently used adjective in the boys’ and the girls’ essays was *old* which was used six times by boys and seven times by girls. Most of the adjectives were used by both male and female students. However, *nice, sweetest, healthy, funny* and *slim* were adjectives only used by females, while *pretty, good-tasted, silver, crazy, calm, yellow* and *black* were exclusively used by males.

According to Lakoff (1989:12), women tend to use more colour adjectives but I found the opposite in these students’ essays. The boys used a total of six colours which were used seven times. The girls, on the other hand, used only a total of three colours, which all were used once each.
Concerning adverbs, Robin Lakoff (cited in Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003:1) argues that women use the adverbs *really* and *so* more than men. Her theory is supported by Poynton (1989:72), who claims that women use more intensifiers such as *so* and *very*. I counted the frequency of these three adverbs in all of the essays and found that there was a significant difference in the usage of *very*. I found *very* used 18 times in the girls’ essays compared to seven in the essays written by boys. *So* was used nine times by the girls and five times by the boys while none of the girls used *really*; on the other hand, it was used twice by the boys. Another difference I noticed concerning adverbs was the use of *much*. It was used twelve times in the girls’ essays compared to only two times in the boys’ essays. It was almost exclusively used to emphasize the phrase: *I love him very much*.

### 4.1.4 Correctness

Women are usually believed to use a better and more grammatically correct language than men (Poynton 1989:67). I examined the essays to see if there were any differences concerning the use of verb forms. Table 5 shows the ratio of correct finite verb forms found in the boys’ and the girls’ essays.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Percentage of correct subject-verb agreement</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Percentage of correct subject-verb agreement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boy 1</td>
<td>78.5 %</td>
<td>Girl 1</td>
<td>84 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy 2</td>
<td>100 %</td>
<td>Girl 2</td>
<td>91.3 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy 3</td>
<td>100 %</td>
<td>Girl 3</td>
<td>85 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy 4</td>
<td>65 %</td>
<td>Girl 4</td>
<td>91 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy 5</td>
<td>84 %</td>
<td>Girl 5</td>
<td>87.5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy 6</td>
<td>73 %</td>
<td>Girl 6</td>
<td>100 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average:</strong></td>
<td><strong>83.4 %</strong></td>
<td><strong>Average:</strong></td>
<td><strong>89.8 %</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As Table 5 shows, the girls had a higher percentage of correct subject-verb agreement on average. Altogether the boys made 24 concord errors while the girls made 13 (see Appendix 4). But on the other hand, there were two boys who did not make any concord errors at all, compared to only one girl. The girls were more alike as no one had more than three mistakes compared to the boys where one had eight errors and two had none.
Correctness also involves spelling. Chavez found, in her study from 1996, that females made more spelling and word order mistakes, but fewer morphological mistakes, than the males (Chavez 2001:65). Table 6 shows the number of spelling mistakes and percentage of correctly spelled words.

Table 6: Number of spelling mistakes and percentage of correctly spelled words.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Number of spelling mistakes</th>
<th>Words correctly spelled</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Number of spelling mistakes</th>
<th>Words correctly spelled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boy 1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>94.7 %</td>
<td>Girl 1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>87 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy 2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>88.2 %</td>
<td>Girl 2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>94 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy 3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>97.8 %</td>
<td>Girl 3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>95.7 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy 4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>96.7 %</td>
<td>Girl 4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>97 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy 5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>93 %</td>
<td>Girl 5</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>91 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy 6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>93.4 %</td>
<td>Girl 6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>93.8 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average:</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>93.9 %</td>
<td>Average:</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>93 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 6, the boys had a slightly higher percentage of correctly spelled words than the girls. The boys made 56 spelling errors altogether while the girls made 76. Just like Chavez, I found more spelling mistakes in the girls’ essays. The boys made fewer errors but, on the other hand, the girls wrote, on average, longer essays. This could result in more errors which is why I showed spelling errors in both percentages and numbers. I found spelling difficult to evaluate since I suspect that many students would rather use an easy word than risk making a spelling mistake. However, even though my investigation shows that the boys made fewer spelling mistakes than the girls, the results are so close that the difference has to be ignored.

4.2 Students’ identification of male and female writing

My aim with the second part of my investigation was to see whether students could accurately identify the sex of a writer by reading a paragraph selected from a text. Table 7 will show to what extent male and female students were able to do this. Four girls did not answer question no. five on the questionnaire, and one girl left question seven blank, which is the reason why the total results are lower for the girls than the boys. Overall, the students were very good at identifying the author’s gender. Both the majority of the girls and the majority of the boys
managed to correctly identify the gender in seven of the passages. However, of the two groups, the boys were more proficient in determining the gender of the author. Table 7 shows to what extent male and female students were able to identify the gender of the author.

Table 7: Questionnaire results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Passage</th>
<th>Boys right</th>
<th>Boys wrong</th>
<th>Girls right</th>
<th>Girls wrong</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Passage 1</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(written by a girl)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passage 2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(written by a girl)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passage 3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(written by a boy)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passage 4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(written by a boy)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passage 5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(written by a boy)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passage 6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(written by a boy)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passage 7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(written by a girl)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passage 8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(written by a boy)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passage 9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(written by a girl)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passage 10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(written by a girl)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.1 Identifying the sex of the writer: girls’ texts correctly identified

The majority of both the boys and the girls managed to identify that the author was a girl in three out of five of the passages written by girls. I will now summarize the criteria the students used to arrive at their conclusions. Before each passage, I will write a brief introduction where I will mention what characterises the text, and whether these characteristics are typical of male or female language according to my earlier research. I will only account for the correct perceptions, since they were the majority, and, in addition, not all students gave explanations for their decision.

The first passage is characterized by the author’s use of adjectives and her descriptive way of writing. She also uses the stative verb love, and the adverb very which is more often used by girls.
1. My grandmother is the sweetest grandmother in the world. She is very kind and carefully. She is very good at cooking. Always when we are at her place, she feed us so we can’t move. My grandmother works with feets and she has her own little studio in the garage at home. That is very nice because every time we are at her place she does our feets. I love my grandmother!

This passage only generated explanations about the content. Twelve girls agreed that it was written by a girl because it involved a lot of emotions such as sweetest, very kind and love. Two girls claimed that it was written in a girly way while the last girl did not give an explanation for her choice. Similarly, most of the boys gave emotions as the reason for their decision; 13 boys said that a boy would never describe his grandmother as sweet, nor would he say that he loves her. Three boys gave “female stuff” (such as taking care of feet) as an explanation for their decision.

Passage two is written in an emotional way and also contains the adverb and intensifier very. The writer also uses the stative verb think. These words are more often used by girls.

2. My grandmother is a very special person in my life and she has always bin on my side. What I’m trying to say is that she means a lot to me. Let me put it this way, she’s a very gently person which means that it’s quite easy to like her. For a few years ago I remember I was thinking “…oh, gusch! I wish I’ll be like her when I’ve growe up to a adult”.

Here, ten of the girls and ten of the boys based their decision on the content, saying that “no boy would like to be like his grandmother when he grows up”. One girl claimed the author was a girl because it was “a sensitive text”.

Only two girls commented on the language, claiming that the author of the text writes well and therefore must be a girl.

The author of passage nine uses the intensifier so three times, which I found to be characteristic of girls. She also uses the stative verb love.

9. I would like to be like my grandfather because he is so good at everything. He even supports me very much with my athletics. He drives me to and from the practis very much when my parents cant do that. Now he helps me with the drive license.
We have done so much together me and my grandfather and he has leard me so much. I love him.

Seven girls and eight boys believed this passage was written by a girl because of the word love. None of them thought that a boy would say that he loves his grandfather. One boy thought she described him so nicely and in such positive terms that it had to be a girl who wrote it.

Two boys commented on the language. They both believed the author to be a girl because of the word athletics – a “fancy word” which is more likely to be used by girls.

4.2.2 Identifying the sex of the writer: girls’ texts incorrectly identified

Passage seven does not have any characteristic gender-related features except the adverb very and the stative verb think, which both are more commonly used by girls than boys.

7. My grandfathers name is Bruno and he is 67 years old, I think, or something near that. He lives with my grandmother Birgitta in a big brown house hear in [place name]. I like my grandfather very much because he always do his best to help me and my brother with our problems. And he all so support us to 100 % in our sports.

All the students, except for one, based their decision on the passage’s content. Six girls and six boys believed the author was a boy because he/she talks about sports, which are associated with boys. One girl and two boys claimed that the text was written by a boy because boys are often closer to their grandfathers.

One female and one male student commented on the language in this passage. The male student believed the author to be a boy because “of his straightforward language” and the female student believed the author to be a boy because there was “no flow” in the text.

The author of passage ten uses a descriptive language, the stative verb remember twice and the intensifier so once, which I found to be more commonly used among girls.

10. My grandfather has been dead scens I was eight. But I still remember him. He was short, not that much hair on his head and he was a little bit fat, but not so much. He had told me when he was younger he work in the church gardian, he was a gardianman. My grandfather had diabetic.
remember specially one thing. That was when I was maybe six-seven years old. My grandfather and I were sitting on the couch and he told me lots of stuff.

This passage was the one which generated most confusion among both male and female students. 18 students claimed that the text was written by a boy, and 17 of them based their decision on the content. Three girls said that the author does not get personal, which implies that it is written by a boy. One girl believed it was a boy because of the word *stuff*, which she thought was a word mostly used by boys. Two boys claimed it was written by a boy because of the way the author expresses himself; if it had been a girl, the text would have been more emotional and more descriptive. One boy claimed it was written by a girl because of the phrase “but not so much” which he thought was something a girl would say. Three boys gave the explanation that it is more likely for a boy to sit and talk with his grandfather than for a girl.

One girl commented on the language, saying that the text was written with poor grammar and spelling and because of that, it was probably written by a boy.

**4.2.3 Identifying the sex of the writer: boys’ texts correctly identified**

The majority of both the boys and the girls managed to identify that the author was a boy in four out of five of the passages written by boys and I will now summarize the criteria the students used to arrive at their conclusion. Again, I will write a brief introduction before each passage where I will mention what characterises the text, and whether these characteristics are typical of male or female language according to the first part of my investigation.

The author of passage three makes six concord errors since he uses the finite verb form incorrectly in six places. I found this to be more common among boys than girls.

3. My grandmother is on my father side and she is very kind and calm. Her name is Märtä Carlsson and she live in [place name] in a big yellow house. She is 72 years old so she is retired. She does all kind of things a retired person do. She play bingolotto, bake and she be with her friends. When she was young she worked on a school and she was a teacher. She have two sisters and one brother and they lives also in [place name].
13 girls thought this passage was written by a boy, but it only generated nine explanations and five of the girls based their decision on the content, claiming that the text was not personal and it did not involve any emotions. All the boys identified this text as a text written by a boy, but only eleven gave an explanation for their decision. Seven boys looked at the content, saying that the author describes what the grandmother does, but not how she really is as a person.

Four girls and four boys based their decision on the author’s language. The four girls all gave “easy language” as the main reason for their decision while the four boys believed the author to be a boy because of the way he writes (no further explanation).

Similarly to passage three, the author of passage four makes five concord errors, as he uses the finite verb form incorrectly in five places.

4. My grandmother name is Åshild. She is 72 years old. She live in [place name], on the mountain. She live in a big house alone but sometimes my sister stays there a longer period. She also have her own forest around the house. My grandmother have black short hair, not very tall and brown eyes. She have her own silver mopedcar that she got on her birthday.

Even though 29 out of 32 students believed this passage to be written by a boy, there were only eight boys and eight girls who gave an explanation for their decision. Five girls and eight boys believed the author to be a boy because of the word mopedcar, which they all claimed is associated with boys. Two girls claimed it was a boy because he describes her looks but not her personality.

Only one student commented on the language. She believed the author to be a boy because the text was not very well written and she had heard that girls are better than boys in English.

The author of passage five has not mastered the use of correct finite verb forms. He also writes long sentences, which I found to be more common among boys.

6. When I was little I allways went to the market together with my grandmother and then she buy candy or some toys for me. Now when I goes to my grandmother and grandfather I often helps my grandfather with his computer, or I jusst keep them company and talks with them about all kinds of things for example sports and news.
In this passage, most of the students based their decision on the content. Eleven of the girls and 13 of the boys believed the author to be a boy because of the words *computer* and *sports*. The difference between the genders was that while the girls said they were not interested in computers and sports, most of the boys claimed that girls are not good at computers and that is why it had to be a male author. Two girls also included *news* in their explanation, claiming that boys are more interested in news than girls.

One boy and one girl commented on the language, claiming that the author was a boy because he made many grammar and spelling mistakes.

Passage eight is characterized by the fact that it does not contain any spelling mistakes. I found spelling errors slightly more common among girls, but the difference was hardly noticeable.

8. My grandfather is a rather short person. When he was younger he worked as a farmer. Then as he became older he worked as a busdriver, now he’s just walking around and does almost nothing on the days. I have many memories together with my grandfather. For many years ago he took me fishing. I caught a lot of fishes but grandpa didn’t catch anything.

This passage only generated explanations about the content. Five girls and twelve boys believed it was written by a boy because the grandfather took him fishing, which he probably would not have done if his grandchild was a girl. Two boys also said that it is more likely for a boy to brag about his catch than a girl. Two girls claimed it was a boy because of the way he describes incidents but not his grandfather’s personality, which is a typically male way of writing.

4.2.4 Identifying the sex of the writer: boys’ texts incorrectly identified

The author of passage five has not quite mastered the use of finite verb forms but besides that, it is hard to discern any gender-related characteristic features in this passage.

5. My grandmothers name is Eina. She is 65 years old and she s the only left of my grandparents. She is very short and have white hair and she is pretty fat. When she was younger she used to help my grandfather at the farm. I live on a farm. But now she don’t do so much except go to the church and
on the Birka boats because she loves to dance. When I am home I used to
dance with her.

Nine girls and nine boys thought that the author of this passage was female. Both the majority of the girls and the majority of the boys based their decision on the passage’s content. Six girls and eight boys claimed that a boy would never dance (or admit dancing) with his grandmother.

Only one student based her decision on the language, saying that the author writes well and therefore must be a girl. There were four girls who did not answer this question, and many girls could not give a reason for their choice, which indicates the neutrality of this passage. Many students found that it was the last sentence which made this passage so complicated.

5. Discussion

In my study, I found linguistic differences between boys’ and girls’ language which both supported and contradicted earlier research. As indicated in previous research, the girls wrote longer essays but, on the other hand, they wrote shorter sentences, which contradict earlier findings. Furthermore, girls are said to have a larger vocabulary, but my study showed the opposite since the type/token ratio was higher in the boys’ texts on average. Previous research has also emphasized the difference in the usage of adjectives, girls being said to use many more adjectives than boys. I did find that girls used more adjectives, but the difference was hardly noticeable, as the girls used 48 adjectives compared to 46 used by the boys. By contrast, I found a striking difference between the genders in their use of stative verbs. Stative verbs express more feelings since they involve words such as love, like, remember and think, which implies that girls do tend be more emotional in their writing compared to boys. The girls turned out to be more proficient in their use of inflectional morphemes, as measured by the ratio of correct subject-verb agreement, but less proficient in spelling. This also supports earlier research.

Looking at students’ ability to identify whether a text was written by a boy or a girl, one could see that they were right most of the time. The most common explanation was that girls are more emotional and personal in their writing. One girl thought the author was a boy because “he doesn’t say that he loves her like girls often do; boys are often insecure when they tell that they like someone”. This kind of explanation was very common among both boys and girls.
Many students claimed that they could tell if the author was a boy or a girl by the way the text was written without giving any further explanation: they just assumed that I would understand what they meant by that. In addition, both boys and girls claimed that boys often use a more straightforward language as compared to girls. One boy gave the explanation that the text must have been written by a girl because a boy would have said that his grandfather was fat while this person said he was a little bit fat, but not so much. He claimed that girls tend to “go around it” instead of spelling it out since they are more careful in the way they express themselves. Another common idea was that poor spelling and grammar were associated with boys, just as bad language in general. There was no one who associated those features with female language, which is interesting since my investigation actually shows that there was no real difference concerning spelling mistakes between the sexes.

Something which I found interesting was the fact that passage number two contained a sentence saying “I wish I’ll be like her when I grow up to be an adult”, which generated 20 explanations claiming that this must be a girl because no boy would like to be like his grandmother. However, passage nine contains a similar sentence saying “I would like to be like my grandfather” but here, there was not a single explanation saying that no girl would like to be like her grandfather. Both these passages were written by girls (which the majority correctly guessed), but only the first one got a reaction to the content in that specific sentence.

Just like the students, I observed that girls have a tendency to be both more emotional and personal in their texts. They describe their feelings and, in contrast to the boys, they are not afraid of using strong emotional words such as love. The boys express emotions too, but they tend to use weaker expressions such as like instead of love and neither do they use as many intensifiers (such as very and so) as the girls do. In general, the girls describe things in more detail, which often makes their texts more vivid and alive compared to the boys, who tend to describe things more concisely and in a more informative way without involving too many emotions.

Some of the differences I discussed in my background could not be found in my results because of lack of information on that specific area. For example, slang and taboo language are difficult to examine in written assignments since students have been taught not to use such language. I believe slang and taboo language to be an interesting topic for further research.
since both are strongly associated with male language. But, as pointed out, that might be easier to find in a study of spoken language.

6. Conclusion
To sum up, boys and girls seem to have more linguistic features in common than the other way around, even though there are differences which definitely could be related to their gender. Our society is constantly changing and the fact that my results partly differ from earlier research suggests that gender differences in language are changing and becoming less obvious. Despite the decreasing differences, society still influences us to use a gender-appropriate language. Nevertheless, I believe that the fact that women’s language is seen as trivial while men’s is seen as serious and important (Coates 1993:115) says more about our society than our language differences. Language and gender are linked together in an inseparable way and I believe that as long as there are gender differences in our society, there will also be gender differences in our language.
References


Appendix 1

In the passages below, young people describe their grandparents. For each paragraph, indicate whether you believe it was written by a boy or by a girl by circling the alternative of your choice. Explain what made you come to this conclusion (use the dotted lines).

1. My grandmother is the sweetest grandmother in the world. She is very kind and carefully. She is very good at cooking. Always when we are at her place, she feed us so we can’t move. My grandmother works with feets and she has her own little studio in the garage at home. That is very nice because every time we are at her place she does our feets. I love my grandmother!

Boy        Girl           …………………………………………………………………………….

…………………………………………………………………………………………………..

2. My grandmother is a very special person in my life and she has always bin on my side. What I’m trying to say is that she means a lot to me. Let me put it this way, she’s a very gently person which means that it’s quite easy to like her. For a few years ago I remember I was thinking “…oh, gusch! I wish I’ll be like her when I’ve growe up to a adult”.

Boy        Girl           …………………………………………………………………………….

…………………………………………………………………………………………………..

3. My grandmother is on my father side and she is very kind and calm. Her name is Märta Carlsson and she live in [place name] in a big yellow house. She is 72 years old so she is retired. She does all kind of things a retired person do. She play bingolotto, bake and she be with her friends. When she was young she worked on a school and she was a teacher. She have two sisters and one brother and they lives also in [place name].

Boy        Girl           …………………………………………………………………………….

…………………………………………………………………………………………………..

4. My grandmother name is Āshild. She is 72 years old. She live in [place name], on the mountain. She live in a big house alone but sometimes my sister stays there a longer period. She also have her own forest around the house. My grandmother have black short hair, not very tall and brown eyes. She have her own silver mopedcar that she got on her birthday.

Boy        Girl           …………………………………………………………………………….

…………………………………………………………………………………………………..

5. My grandmothers name is Eina. She is 65 years old and she s the only left of my grandparents. She is very short and have white hair and she is pretty fat. When she was younger she used to help my grandfather at the farm. I live on a farm. But now she don’t do so much except go to the church and on the Birka boats because she loves to dance. When I am home I used to dance with her.
6. When I was little I always went to the market together with my grandmother and then she buy candy or some toys for me. Now when I goes to my grandmother and grandfather I often helps my grandfather with his computer, or I just keep them company and talks with them about all kinds of things for example sports and news.

7. My grandfather’s name is Bruno and he is 67 years old, I think, or something near that. He lives with my grandmother Birgitta in a big brown house near [place name]. I like my grandfather very much because he always do his best to help me and my brother with our problems. And he all so support us to 100 % in our sports.

8. My grandfather is a rather short person. When he was younger he worked as a farmer. Then as he became older he worked as a busdriver, now he’s just walking around and does almost nothing on the days. I have many memories together with my grandfather. For many years ago he took me fishing. I caught a lot of fishes but grandpa didn’t catch anything.

9. I would like to be like my grandfather because he is so good at everything. He even supports me very much with my athletics. He drives me to and from the practis very much when my parents can’t do that. Now he helps me with the drive license. We have done so much together me and my grandfather and he has leard me so much. I love him.

10. My grandfather has been dead scens I was eight. But I still remember him. He was short, not that much hair on his head and he was a little bit fat, but not so much. He had told me when he was younger he work in the church gardian, he was a gardianman. My grandfather had diabetic. I remember specially one thing. That was when I was maybe six-seven years old. My grandfather and I were sitting on the couch and he told me lots of stuff.
Appendix 2

Dynamic verbs in girls’ essays

- Answer
- Ask
- Come (3)
- Cook
- Cry (2)
- Die (2)
- Drive (2)
- Describe
- Feed
- Go (3)
- Help (3)
- Keep
- Lay
- Learn
- Laugh (3)
- Live (3)
- Marry
- Meet
- Move (3)
- Ride
- Raise
- Sit
- Sleep
- Smile
- Start
- Support
- Tell (4)
- Talk
- Travel
- Visit (2)
- Walk
- Work (3)
- Write (3)

Dynamic verbs in boys’ essays

- Bake (2)
- Buy
- Catch (2)
- Call
- Devastate
- Dance
- Die
- Drink
- Drive
- Eat (2)
- Fish (2)
- Go (3)
- Help (2)
- Hunt
- Keep
- Live (8)
- Play
- Ride
- Sit (2)
- Stay
- Talk
- Visit (4)
- Walk
- Watch
- Work (5)
- Write (2)
- Yell
### Appendix 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjectives in the girls’ essays</th>
<th>Adjectives in the boys’ essays</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Best</td>
<td>Big (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big (5)</td>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brown</td>
<td>Brown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fat</td>
<td>Crazy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funny (3)</td>
<td>Calm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grey</td>
<td>Different</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy (2)</td>
<td>Fat (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthy (2)</td>
<td>Good (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last</td>
<td>Good-tasted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little (4)</td>
<td>Grey (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long (3)</td>
<td>Little</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nice (4)</td>
<td>Longer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old (7)</td>
<td>Many (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short (3)</td>
<td>Old (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slim</td>
<td>Pretty (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small (2)</td>
<td>Short (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweetest</td>
<td>Silver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tall (2)</td>
<td>Small (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>Tall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young (3)</td>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yellow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Young (5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 4

Number of concord errors in essays.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Number of concord errors</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Number of concord errors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boy 1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Girl 1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy 2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Girl 2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy 3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Girl 3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy 4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Girl 4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy 5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Girl 5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy 6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Girl 6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average:</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Average:</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>