

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN NEGATIVE POLITENESS STRATEGIES
IN THE AMERICAN ADULT CARTOON
THE SIMPSONS

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Introduction

In this research I analyze the gender differences in negative politeness strategies adopted by the characters of the American adult cartoon *The Simpsons*. *The Simpsons* is a comedy, created in 1990, which draws a sarcastic picture of the modern American society, presenting a "usual" middle-class family's life.

This kind of analysis can be important, as it helps us to understand our society, our attitude towards the world around us. The way in which the characters are presented reflects what we think about our society; how we think things usually happen. The author gives a description of the postmodern American society. The question rises, whether this description is realistic or not. In my research I concentrate on the gender differences in the use of polite expressions (e.g. *thank you, please, sorry*) and discourse markers (*well, you know, you see, I think, I mean, I guess, kind of*) adopted by the characters. This comedy shows a mirror on our society, though it is a deformed picture and my aim is to investigate how female characters are presented in it.

Theoretical Background

It is claimed by most of the sociolinguists who study gender differences in language use (Lakoff (1973), Tannen (1986), Holmes (1986, 1995, 1998), Brown (1998) and others) that women developed a kind of language which shows tentativeness, hesitation, uncertainty, and seems to be less powerful than men's language. Women are claimed to use more hedges, tag questions, polite forms, pause fillers, which also reflects this weakness. In this research I examine the negative politeness strategies used by male and female characters of *The Simpsons*. First, I wish to clarify what negative politeness and politeness in general is based on the relevant literature.

Holmes (1995) points out that politeness involves the meaning of two different concepts, showing concern for two different kinds of face needs: first, "negative face needs or the need not to be imposed upon"; and secondly, "positive face needs, the need to be liked and admired" (pp. 4-5). In usual understanding the term 'politeness' describes a special kind of behavior which is "somewhat formal and distancing, where the intention is not to intrude or impose" (ibid. p. 4). Being polite means expressing respect towards the person you are talking to and avoiding offending face of the other. This is the more familiar interpretation of the term 'politeness' which is identical to the so called negative politeness opposed to the behavior which expresses positive concern to others, good-will or camaraderie, which refers to the other type of politeness, namely positive politeness. Holmes uses the term politeness in her study in a broad sense including both meanings (Holmes 1995: 3-24).

According to Holmes (1995) “any utterance which could be interpreted as making a demand or intruding on another person’s autonomy can be regarded as a potential face threatening act” (p. 5). People try to avoid obvious face threatening acts with different strategies, such as softening the force of utterances or expressing themselves indirectly (p. 5).

Holmes (1995) claims that women tend to be more polite than men, they use positive politeness strategies more often, they express their feelings more frequently and more explicitly than men do. The appropriate degree of linguistic politeness is associated with the power or hierarchical status of the speakers, that is: high power attracts deferential behavior. The less powerful avoids offending the more powerful one. If women are considered to be inferior to men in society, it may follow that in their speech the instances of negative politeness strategy can occur more often than in men’s speech (Brown, 1998: 81-100).

High level of politeness is expected from inferiors to superiors. Politeness is a “rational strategic, face oriented behavior” (Holmes 1995: 5), a “special way of treating people, saying and doing things in such a way as to take into account the other’s persons feelings” (Brown 1998: 83.). Polite utterances are then less straight-forward and more complicated, as the speaker takes into account the addressee’s feelings (Holmes 1995: pp. 192-226).

Negative politeness is “avoidance-based” (Brown 1998: 85). The linguistic devices used are 1. apologies (using expressions as *sorry*, *terribly sorry*); or hedges (e.g. using expressions as *maybe*, *possibly*, *perhaps*). Women tend to gain status through how they appear more than what they do; they try to secure their social status through their speech, so this is a possible answer why they typically hypercorrect and speak more formally (Holmes 1995: 192-226).

“Women express themselves hesitantly, tentatively, weakly, trivializingly, “politely” (O’Barr & Akins: 1998: 379). According to Lakoff’s explanation these are associated with women’s feeling of inferiority and uncertainty (O’Barr & Akins: 1998: 379).

O’Barr and Atkins (1998) carried out research, in which the use of intensifiers, hedges, polite forms such as *please*, *thank you* was observed. They came to the conclusion that the features of women’s language may be related more to social powerlessness than to sex. The speech patterns of three men and women were examined, where the individuals of each sex varied according to their social status from relatively less power to relatively more power. They suggest women’s tendency to speak a more powerless language than men is due to the fact that the socially powerful positions (e.g. doctor) are mostly occupied by men, while women are more likely to have a relatively powerless position (e.g. housewife) (p. 379).

The apology is the most obvious example of a speech act whose primary purpose is redressive action. According to Holmes' findings (1995) women use significantly more apologies than men, they use many more apologies to each other than men to each other; women's apology is mostly other oriented, while men tend to use strategies that focus on the apologizer's loss of face; both women and men use more apologies to power equals (pp. 154-187).

As my other focus area is the gender differences in negative politeness strategies through the analysis of discourse markers, more precisely hedges, it is also of crucial importance to clarify what the term discourse marker means and what functions it can have. Fraser (1990) says that discourse markers are items that indicate "a sequential relationship between the current basic message and the previous discourse" (Furkó 2007: 13). Redeker (1990) defines DMs as expressions that are used "with the primary function of bringing to the listener's attention on a particular kind of relation between the discourse unit it introduces and the immediate discourse context" (p. 3).

From a sociolinguistic perspective of the meaning of DMs, it is of interest how DMs change the force of an utterance. DMs can serve either as a softener or as an intensifier of the pragmatic force of a given utterance. According to this DMs can be divided into two groups: 1. softeners referred to as hedges and 2. intensifiers referred to as boosters. Thus the two interpersonal functions of DMs are mitigation and emphasis, as Furkó (2007: 44) points out.

Another relevant question can be as pointed out by Furkó, why speakers choose to soften or to strengthen the force of their utterances. Hedges can be associated with politeness, markers of powerless, inferior speech. Since women's language is mostly labeled with these attributes, Lakoff identifies DMs such as *you know*, *you see*, *I guess*, *sort of*, *kind of* as features of women's language (Furkó 2007: 47). However, the assumption that women use these to a greater extent cannot be confirmed by later findings, For instance Dubois & Crouch (1975) claim that men used them even more frequently than women (Furkó 2007: 46). As for the expression *you know*, Holmes (1986) found that there was no significant differences in the frequency in the speech of men and women, but men used it to express uncertainty more often than women, while women used *you know* referring to the addressee's background knowledge. Men used twice as many instances of *you know* in same-sex interactions (pp. 12-13).

It must also be taken into account that the same discourse marker can function as a hedge in one context or as a booster in another, so the analysis of context and suprasegmental

features of speech is essential in the case of this type of research. As a result we cannot draw reliable conclusions from the data through the use of quantitative analysis alone.

It is also important to clarify the meaning of irony and sarcasm, because the expressions I analysed occurred in ironic statements, and they did not always express politeness. There exist three types of irony: dramatic, situational and verbal. According to Bryant and definition, „verbal irony is a form of nonliteral language in which speakers communicate implied propositions that are intentionally contradictory to the propositions contained in the words themselves” (Bryant and Fox Tree 2005: 257.). They claim that in a number of studies on how people use and understand verbal irony, researchers tend to rely on the concept of an „ironic tone of voice” (or how they also call it „sarcastic intonation”). They define the so called ironic tone of voice as a particular prosodic (i.e., pitch, loudness, and duration) pattern that is systematically associated with verbal irony (Bryant and Fox Tree 2005:257). Intonation features that are thought to represent irony are prolonged articulation and exaggerated pitch. People often indicate sarcasm by lowering their pitch, raising their amplitude, and speaking more slowly, although results are mixed. These characteristics have previously been described together as an ironic tone of voice. (Bryant and Fox Tree 2005: 257-258.). However it is pointed out that there are studies presented by them which suggest that there is not a particular ironic tone of voice (Bryant and Fox 2005: 261.).

According to previous findings, prosody of ironic speech is vary, as „speakers are communicating multiple messages by layering propositional and non-propositional information, and providing prosodic cues in contextually dependent ways that map differentially onto the simultaneously presented information (e.g., a pretend anger pitch contour superimposed onto laughing to assist a listener with an ironic implicature)” (Bryant and Fox Tree 2005: 272.). The affective prosody serves to communicate metarepresentational and direct affective information. According to them „attempts to make one-to-one mappings between acoustic parameters and ironic content seem futile...” (p. 272.). An utterance can be sarcastic, angry, inquisitive, provide new information, and be spoken with authority at the same time. According to Bryant and Fox Tree „what seems like an ironic tone of voice is likely an emergent product of interpretations informed by multiple sources of information, many not acoustic” (p. 272.). Sex stereotypical judgments are related to gender and authority. Ironic utterances are higher pitched, and so are possibly identified as more likely to be female or a child, and therefore possessing less authority. Another possibility is that lower voices, on average, are perceived as more dominant, and more authoritative. Another acoustic variable also examined in ironic speech is nasality as an indicative of a sarcastic intention. Researchers

suggest that there is some kind of relationship between the emotion of disgust and voicing that represents removing air from the nasal passage, however Bryant and Fox Tree argue that nasality is not specific to verbal irony, but is merely closely associated with it. Another example of verbal irony is when a speaker engages in pretense. „Vocal imitation allows speakers to comment on a whole variety of aspects related to personalities, behaviors, and attitudes of others. Prosodic shifts from baseline speech are used by natural conversationalists when speaking ironically” (Bryant and Fox Tree 2005: 273).

It can be concluded that acoustic analyses and perceptual studies of spontaneous ironic speech carried out so far provide little support for the notion of an ironic tone of voice; that is, there is no prosodic consistency across verbal irony utterances. The „perception of any such tone appears to be a result of the integration of multiple sources of information” (as for Bryant and Fox Tree including non-acoustic) and thus are likely „more an illusion than an actual speech production phenomenon” (Bryant and Fox Tree 2005: 273).

According to Nakassin and Snedeker most of the study of irony has focused on sarcasm, which is considered to be a specific type of irony. Sarcastic utterances are „critical utterances that are assertions with positive literal meanings, negative intended meanings, and clear victims” (Nakassin and Snedeker 2002: 432). The two terms has become interchangeable, but it has to be noted that ironic utterances come in many forms, e.g.: inappropriate questions, over polite requests, understatement can also be ironic. Sarcasm appears to be available for metalinguistic analysis as it is culturally salient (as a genre of speech and type of personhood), easily labeled, and offers a clear cut case of a discrepancy between the context and literal meaning (in contrast to hyperbole or understatement). It also appears to be more frequent than many other forms of irony (Nakassin and Snedeker 2002: 432).

It is also noted by Nakassin and Snedeker, ironic statements are frequently spoken with a marked intonation. Though they also acknowledge, it is not necessary for an ironic construal, as „intonation’s robust correlation with the actual use of irony makes it potentially useful cue for comprehension” (Nakassin and Snedeker 2002: 433). Researches that have explored children’s use of intonation for detecting or understanding irony, ended up with contradictory results. It is unclear what the role of intonation is and whether it changes over development (Nakassin and Snedeker 2002: 433).

In studies that describe the “ironic” or “sarcastic” intonation (many do not and simply presuppose its meaning) it is usually a nasal, stressed intonation conveying negative affect (Nakassin and Snedeker 2002: 433). They also point out similarly to Bryant and Fox that there are a multiplicity of ‘tones of voice’ usable to convey irony, including even e.g. a positive

tone of voice. As they say: „just as we cannot conflate irony with its most salient cultural form, sarcasm, we cannot conflate the intonation stereotypically paired with sarcasm with the role of intonation in irony in general” (Nakassin and Snedeker 2002: 433) According to them, researchers do not know how different kinds of intonation act in the construal of different kinds of irony (Nakassin and Snedeker 2002: 433).

Description of Research

The aim of the research is to investigate the gender differences in the use of polite expressions and hedges. In this research I investigate the use of the following polite forms: *thank you, thanks, sorry, excuse me, pardon/pardon me* and discourse markers: *well, you know, you see, I think, I mean, I guess, kind of*.

My hypotheses:

Female characters speak less than males;

Female characters use polite forms (expressions of politeness) more often than males;

Female characters use DMs more often than males do;

Female characters use hedges more often to express uncertainty than males.

Data: I examined 15 episodes [titles: Bart the Mother, Bart's Comet, Das Bus, Homer and Apu, Homers Enemy, Last Exit to Springfield, Roasting on an Open Fire, Rosebud, Secrets of a Successful Marriage, The Cartridge Family, The Itchy and Scratchy and Poochie Show, The Springfield Files, Treehouse of Horror, Two Cars in every Garage, Worst Episode Ever], randomly selected from the cartoon. I have chosen to examine randomly selected episodes to get more relevant data. The average time of one episode is about 21 minutes. The total time of the source is approximately 315 minutes. The total number of words uttered by the characters is 35 429.

Method: during my research I compiled the corpus from the transcripts of the episodes, and made the analysis with the help of the video files of the episodes too as a next step. I counted the number of words uttered by male and female speakers (I had to do this to be able to distinguish between the quantities of their speaking. If female characters speak less, it can prove to some extent the hypothesis, that they have an inferior status in the cartoon as well as in real world). Then I counted the tokens of DMs and of words expressing politeness used by males and females, analyzed the data and made my conclusions.

Results

As it was mentioned before, the total number of words uttered in the **15** episodes is **35 429**. Out of this **29 846** words are said by male and **5 583** words by female characters. This seems to prove my first hypothesis, according to which male characters speak much more than females. Female characters speak about **5.3** times less than males. This is due to the fact there are more male characters than females in the cartoon, however, the number of the speaking main characters is distributed equally by gender. The main characters are: Homer, Marge, Bart, Lisa and Maggie (who does not speak during the series, she is a small child). The representatives of both gender use words expressing politeness. Because of the great difference in the amount of speech of male and female characters, I divided the number hedges and of words expressing politeness uttered by males with **5.3** to balance the difference (Table 2). The results are demonstrated in diagrams and tables and are explained through some examples.

Table 1. *The frequency of occurrence in general*

The Expression	The Number of Occurrence
thank you	16
thanks	18
please	70
sorry	52
excuse me	14
pardon me	5

According to the results it is the expression *please* that occurred the most frequently in the corpus, after it comes *sorry* with 52 occurrences, than *thanks*, *thank you*, *excuse me* with similar numbers and the less frequently occurring expression is *pardon me* (n=15). Overall less formal expressions are more frequent. *Thanks* is more frequent than *thank you* and *sorry* is much more frequently uttered than *excuse me* or *pardon me*, which can probably attributed to the genre features of the cartoon, as it tries to mirror the conversations of every-day life. The dialodues mostly take place between power equals.

Table 2. *Frequency (corrected according to the amounts of speech)*

The Expression	Male Characters	Female Characters
thank you	14/5.3≈2.6	2
thanks	16/5.3≈3	2
please	59/5.3≈11	11
sorry	43/5.3≈8	9
excuse me	8/5.3≈1.5	6
pardon me	4/5.3≈0.75	1

As I have already mentioned, I present the number of occurrences, divided between the genders in a way that correlate with the great difference in the proportion of speech. In the following I introduce my findings, presenting the expressions under analysis one-by-one.

Polite Forms

The use of *thank you* and *thanks*

Thank you is a more formal expression, while *thanks* is a more colloquial one. In my corpus both are used by both genders, although quantitative differences can be identified. *Thank you* (n=14) and *thanks* (n=16) are used by males almost equally, however, *thanks* is used more frequently by males (see Table 2.). Females use *thank you* and *thanks* equally, two times (see Table 2.). This doesn't confirm previous findings on women's formality. Even if we take into account the fact that males speak 5.3 times more than females, males seem to use *thanks* and *thank you* more frequently (see Table 2.).

The major differences cannot be captured with a mere quantitative analysis, as if we analyse the meaning and role of the expressions in context it can be observed that *thank you* and *thanks* are not always used in their primary meaning by men, but in contrast women used them to express politeness in each case. Men also use them to express irony (n=10) (see examples 1, 2, 3, 4), impoliteness (n=6), used for getting rid of someone (6 cases) (see examples 5, 6). When trying to focus on the implied meaning of the utterances it is also important to take into consideration our background knowledge about the speakers, suprasegmental features of speech are also essential.

In example 1 the ironical implicature can be easily inferred from the context, it doesn't require much processing effort, just like in the examples 2, 3, and 4. The expression *Thanks a lot* is said to be very likely used in ironical utterances (Kreuz, Roger J.; Glucksberg, Sam: 1989). The results of my research seem to support this finding (see examples: 2, 3). In example 5. the expression is used to get rid of someone, but in kind of more "polite" way (however it is not polite either), example 6. is obviously an impolite request.

1. NED

Well, howdily-doodily, neighbors. Shouldn't you be in your shelterini's by now?

MOE

We haven't got shelterini's. We want in yours!

NED

Ho ho, well sorry, the shelter's kind of full.

MOE

Really? Oh. Well, we'll just go off some place and die then. *Thanks*.

2. MILHOUSE

Morning. Is it time to eat?

Nelson pokes Milhouse in the stomach with a stick.

NELSON

Looks like you already did.

MILHOUSE

What're you talking about?

LEWIS

You ate our food!

TERRI

Thanks a lot, Milhouse. Now we're all gonna die because of you!

3. *Thanks* a lot, Carl. Now I've lost my train of thought.

4. Dear God! We paid for this stuff ourselves, so *thanks* for nothing.

5. Thank you, come again.

- But, I must---

But...

- *Thank you*, come again

(...)

Oh *thank you*, yes, *thank you*.

6. *Thank you*. Get out. Next!

The use of *please*

Please occurs 70 times in the text, 59 times uttered by a male, 11 times uttered by a female character. From the data we can see that *please* is equal in frequency in the speech of both genders (Table 2.). *Please* often occurs with interjections (examples 10, 11, 12), intensifiers or other words expressing politeness (examples 7, 8,) in men's speech. Repetitions also often occur (example 9). *Please* occurs in the meaning of nonsense (n=3) exclusively in the speech of males (examples 10, 11). While it can also express persuasion in the speech of both males and females (examples 9, 12). In examples 7 and 8 *please* occurs in its primary meaning, expresses politeness, in examples 9 and 12 it expresses a stronger persuasion through the use of repetition and interjections. In examples 10 and 11 it expresses non-sense, which can be easily inferred from the use of interjections and from the suprasegmental cues.

7. I'm sorry, please forgive me. So let's kick Flanders out. Sorry.

8. Oh, I'm so sorry. Please accept five pounds of frozen shrimp.

9. Please! Please! Please! Please! Please! Please! Please! Please!

10. Monster, pfft oh, please.

11. Oh, please, there's only one fat guy that brings us presents and his name ain't Santa.

12. Dad! Can we go Dad, huh, huh, please!

The use of *sorry*, *excuse me*, *pardon/pardon me*

The word *sorry* is used 43 times by males and 9 times by females (see Table 1.), however, after calculating frequency the result reveals that female speakers used it more frequently (Table 2). *Sorry* is used solely in its direct meaning both by males and females. It expresses politeness. We can observe some repetitions of the word (examples 8, 13). Interjections and intensifiers can also be found (examples 8, 13). *Excuse me* and *pardon me* are more formal expressions. Their occurrence is considerably higher in female character's speech (Table 2) that proves the claim of women's formality. The following dialogue took

place between Homer and his wife, Marge. Homer here expresses himself extremely politely and tentatively:

13. HOMER

Oh, uh, I'm sorry. Are you planning to stay the whole night?

MARGE

- All right. Vote Quimby!

HOMER

- Marge? Sorry. Marge? Sorry. Marge?

MARGE

- Vote Quimby.

HOMER

- Sorry

Discourse Markers

The expressions under analysis can have multiple functions. It was important to identify in which cases did these words function as discourse markers and as something else. Results are demonstrated on Diagram 1 (where "Total" stands for the total number of occurrences of the expression within the corpus and "DM" refers to the number of occurrences as a discourse marker) and in Table 3 in percentages. The most frequently occurring discourse marker is *well* (n=165), the less frequently occurring one is *you see* (n=5). It can be seen clearly that each of the expressions had the discourse marker function in most of the cases.

Diagram 1. *The total number of the occurrence of the words and the frequency of words functioning as DM*

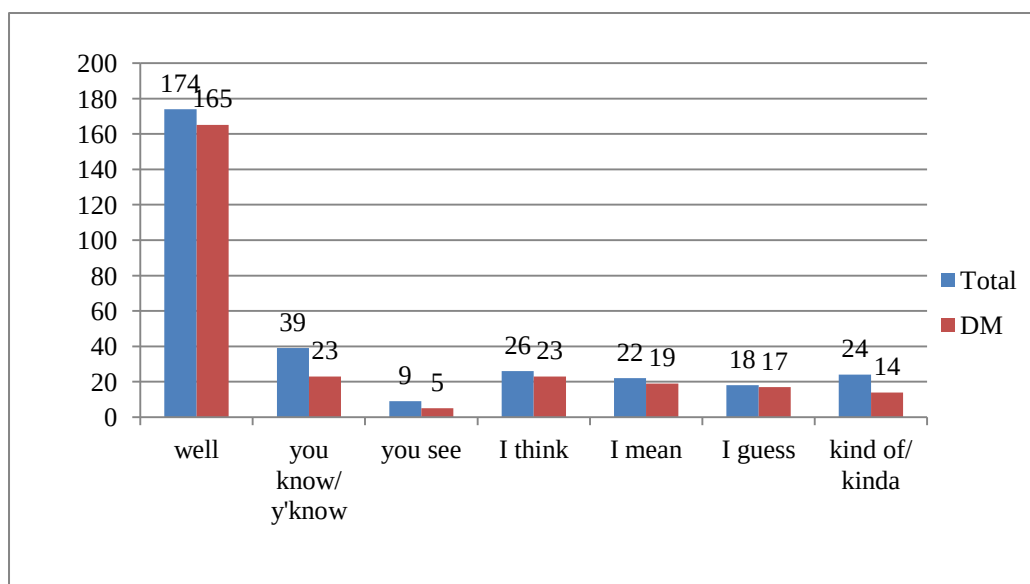


Table 3. *The frequency of the words functioning as a DM in percentages*

Word	% DM
well	95,93
you know/y'know	58,97
you see	55,55
I think	88,46
I mean	86,36
I guess	94,44
kind of/kinda	58,33

In Table 4 we can see that each discourse marker was uttered by male speakers more frequently than by females, which is predictable from the difference in the amount of speech.

Table 4. *The proportion of the frequency of DMs in male and female characters' speech*

DM	Males	Females
well	141	24
you know/y'know	22	1
you see	5	0
I think	14	9
I mean	20	0
I guess	11	6
kind of/kinda	14	0

More reliable judgements can be made with the help of the results indicated in Table 5.

Table 5 *Corrected, balanced results according to the proportion of the amount of speech*

DM	Male	Female
well	26,6	24
you know/y'know	4,15	1
you see	5	0
I think	2,64	9
I mean	19	0
I guess	2,08	6
kind of/kinda	2,06	0

As I said it previously according to the relevant literature discourse markers also perform multiple functions (Fraser 1990, Schiffrin 1985, Redeker 1990). Even the same discourse marker can function differently in different contexts. Diagram 2 and 3 (where (M) stands for males and (F) for females) show the proportion of each discourse marker functioning as a hedging device (showing tentativeness, uncertainty) and as a discourse marker with a non-hedging function, separately in male and female characters speech.

Diagram 2. *The total number of tokens/ the number of DMs functioning as hedges in males' speech*

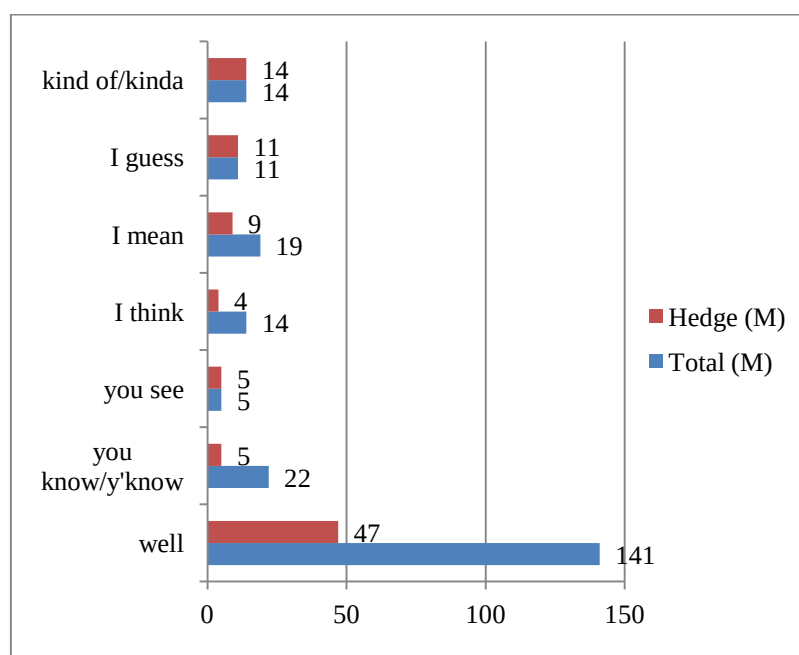


Diagram 3. *The total number of tokens/ the number of DMs functioning as hedges in females' speech*

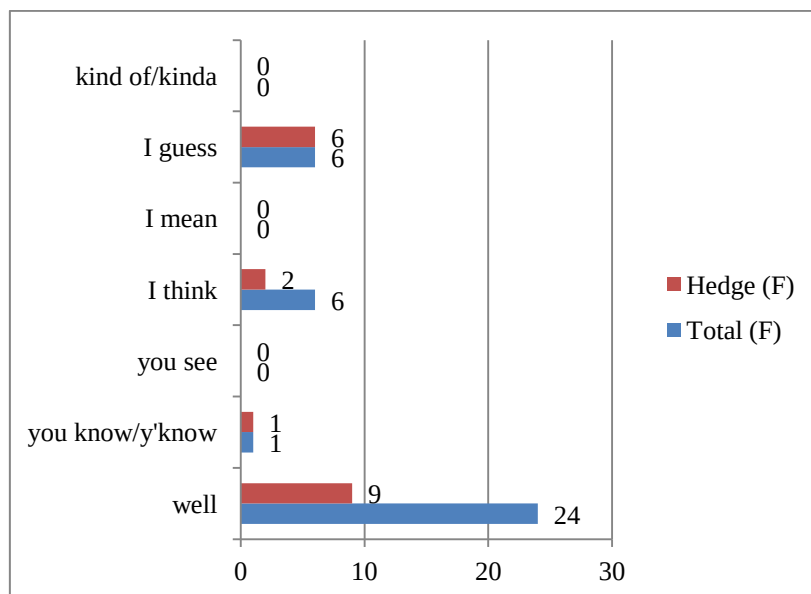


Table 6. shows, how often each discourse marker functions as a hedge in percentages (where the total number of occurrences uttered by males or females are accepted as 100% out of which the demonstrated values in percentages stand for the frequency of hedges).

Table 6. *The proportion of the frequency of hedges in males' and females' speech in percentages*

DM	% Hedge (M)	% Hedge (F)
well	33,33	37,5
you know/y'know	22,73	100
you see	100	
I think	24,5	33,33
I mean	47,36	
I guess	100	100
kind of/kinda	100	

The use of *well*

Overall there are 174 tokens of *well* in my corpus, out of which it functions as a DM in 165 cases (Diagram 1. and Table 3.). *Well* is mostly uttered by males (n=141) (Diagram 2) and it functions as a softener in male characters' speech 47 times (Diagram 2.) (examples 14,

19, 23,). In other cases it is not a hedge, but has a different function (example 25, 26). In most cases it doesn't have a hedging function in females' speech either (Diagram 3, Table 6.). Out of the 24 occurrences it softens the pragmatic force of the utterance 9 times (see example 15). In examples 14 (dialogue between employer and employee) and 15 (dialogue between husband and wife) *well* serves as a hedging device for mitigating disagreement.

(14.) BURNS

Is this true?

GRIMES

Well, uh, technically it is true, sir, but--

BURNS

Come with me.

(15.) HOMER

Yeah, yeah, that's his problem, he's a nut! It's not about me being lazy, it's about him being a crazy nut.

MARGE

Well... maybe. But I bet he would be less crazy if you were just a little more, um, professional in your work. Just a little more! Then he won't have any reason to resent you.

The use of *you know*

A number of functions has been attributed to the DM *you know* by linguists (Frazer (1990), Holmes (1986), Redeker (1990), Schiffrin (1985). In the episodes I investigated it mostly has the function of emphasis (examples 17) or explanation, elaboration (example 16). But it can also serve as a softener in the cases of lexical search, information search or mitigating disagreement and shows the speaker's uncertainty both in males' and females' speech (example 18).

(16.) WOODS

Hey, you're Apu Nahasapeemapetilon, aren't you? *I mean*, you're the... God, you're like THE guy, you're a legend around here. Can I ask you, is it true you once worked 96 hours straight?

APU

Oh yes, it was horrible I tell you. By the end I thought I was a hummingbird of some kind.

WOODS

Oh yeah, *you know*, I studied your old security tapes.

(17.) HOMER

Yeah, you're right. Guys are always patting my bald head for luck, pinching my belly to hear my girlish laugh.

MARGE

Mmm... it doesn't sound like they like you at all.

HOMER

You know, I think you're right. First thing tomorrow morning, I'm going to punch Lenny in the back of the head.

(18) WOODS

75, 85, 90, and a dollar. Thank you, and come again. (Jimbo starts to leave) Hey wait a minute! Hey! Uh, could I just ask you a question? Did you, heh, did you believe that, I mean, the way I gave you the change, that I sound like a real Kwik-E-Mart, *you know*, kinda guy?

The use of *I think* and *I mean*

The discourse marker *I think* can also have different kinds of functions, it can serve as a hedge or even as a booster. In males' speech it mostly behaves as a booster (n= 10) (Diagram 2 and Table 6) (see examples 17, 23), but also occurs as a hedge (n=4) (examples 19, 25). In female characters' speech *I think* occurs in both meanings, similar to the case of males as it is predominantly used as a booster (77,77 %) (see example 26). It functions twice as a softener (example 24).

The DM *I mean* normally precedes utterances containing explanation, clarification of the previous information or self-correction (see example 21). Out of the 19 occurrences 9 it has a hedging function (examples 19, 20,). This expression was used as a DM by males only.

(19.) BART

You believe me, don't you? You're my friend who believes me: sweet, trustworthy Milhouse.

MILHOUSE

Actually, Bart, you're *kinda* creeping me out. Uh, *I think* I'm gonna go sit... uh, with that foreign exchange student!

(20.) BART

Well, yeah, Mom. *I mean*, we love you and Dad too, but God knows we don't need to see you every day.

MARGE

An occasional hug is all I ask. [hugs him]

BART

Mom! You can hug me when I'm asleep.

MARGE

I do!

BART

Ahhh!

(21) MEYERS

I have figured out how to rejuvenate the show. It's so simple, you egghead writers would've never thought of it! What we need is... a new character! One that today's kids can relate to!

[The writers look at each other, uncertain.]

OAKLEY

Are you absolutely sure that's wise, sir? *I mean*, I don't want to sound pretentious here, but Itchy and Scratchy comprise a dramaturgical dyad.

(22) MILHOUSE

It's the monster!

[Milhouse takes a few tokes from his asthma inhaler.]

BART

No it's not, it's my tummy. *I mean*, stomach! Gut! Crap factory!

(23) *[The song finishes and the curtain closes].*

RAMONE #4

Hey, *I think* they liked us.

(24) HOMER

Oh. *You mean* about you. *Well*, maybe I said some things, some personal things. But you should have seen them, Marge, they really wanted to hear what I had to say.

MARGE

Mmm, I'm happy about that. But *I think* you can still be a good teacher and not invade our privacy.

(25) FLANDERS

Excuse me sir, *I think* you've got my TV. Sir!

(26) BART

Well, Lis. What do you think about the alien now?

LISA

I think there must be a more logical explanation. And *I think* the people of this town aren't going to be won over by three seconds of videotape.

The use of *you see*, *I guess* and *kind of*

The DMs *you see*, *I guess* and *kind of* are normally treated as hedges. The data represents that they are used with a hedging function. They are associated with 'women's language' by Lakoff (Furkó 2007: 47). Especially *you see* has the function of signing social togetherness and is a marker of cooperative speech. That's why it would be reasonable to expect *you see* to occur more often in female characters' speech, however, I only found instances of it in men's speech. The same tendency holds in the case of the DM *kind of*. It serves as a softener in males' speech and in my data it is not uttered by females (examples 27, 28.). *I guess* also softens the force of the utterance in both gender's speech, where it expresses uncertainty, tentativeness (example 29.). *I guess* was uttered 6 times by females and functioned as a hedge too.

(27) MILHOUSE

Yeah? *Well* your treehouse looks *kinda* crummy, too. *Kinda* REALLY crummy!

(28) CARL

There's a new guy at the plant. Uh, maybe we oughta say hi to him.

HOMER

Oh, I don't know. I'm *kinda* dizzy. I should probably go home sick.

(29) LISA

Milhouse, did you steal the food?

MILHOUSE

Nuh-uh, no way.

LISA

Could anybody else have taken it?

MILHOUSE

Well... I guess you could have!

LISA

Milhouse, I am defending you!

MILHOUSE

Oh, sorry, I'm just saying it was either you or the monster.

Conclusion

In the research I have analyzed the gender differences in negative politeness strategies used in the cartoon *The Simpsons* through the analysis of the following expressions in the text: *thank you/thanks, please, sorry, excuse me, pardon me* and discourse markers: *well, you know, you see, I think, I mean, I guess, kind of*.

My hypothesis, according to which female characters speak less than males seems to be confirmed as males speak 5.3 times more than females, however, this great difference is simply due to the fact that there are more male characters than females presented in the cartoon. In cross-gender interactions there are not any significant differences between the number of words said by males and females. There are many more male supporting characters than females; they are mostly the male friends of Homer, who is one of the main characters. There are few female friends of the female chief character, Marge, are presented. As a result, the majority of interactions are between males, and the topics are mostly masculine. Therefore the comedy can be said to be slightly male-centered.

Women used the polite expressions I have investigated 31 times, men used them 144 times. (Table 1.) If we count that men spoke proportionally more than women, dividing the results (144) with 5.3 to equalize the difference, we get 27, which proves my second hypothesis that women use these polite forms more frequently in the series. The most frequently used expressions from the analyzed ones were *sorry* and *please* (Table 1.). *Thank you* and *thanks* occur more frequently in male characters' speech, *please* is used in equal frequency, while *sorry, excuse me* and *pardon me* are used more frequently by females.

However, there is no great difference in the number of occurrences, there are qualitative differences. Men used these words much more diversely. According to their primary meaning of these forms, they express politeness, but men also used them to express irony, impoliteness, non-sense, or to express the will of getting rid of someone. One can see that the real difference is in the function of these words. They express politeness in women's speech but not always in men's speech, according to the data, female character's speech appears to be more polite than that of the males' and it can be observed that they use *excuse me* and *pardon me* more frequently, to sound more formal. I have analysed here expressions connected to positive politeness strategies, but context, speakers power relations are also important in defining whether face threatening acts occur.

The use of repetitions, interjections, intensifiers increase the emotional force of the utterances. They are widely used along with the expressions I have analyzed both by male and female characters.

While I analysed discourse markers the same problem appeared. It was of crucial importance to carry out a qualitative analysis after the quantitative one, because the DMs I investigated could have various functions, therefore they could not always be treated as hedges.

The most frequently used DM I analysed is *well*. Each of the DMs I have analysed were used by male characters, but 3 of them, namely: *you see*, *I mean*, *kind of* were not used by females.

As for the proportion of frequency, we have to take into consideration that male characters speak 5.3 times as much as females. To solve this problem I divided the number of occurrences in males' speech with 5.3 (see Table 5).

There is a significant difference in the frequency of occurrences of DMs *well*, *you know*, *you see*, *I mean*, *kind of* in favour of male characters. As regards the DMs *I think* and *I guess*, the difference of frequency was in favour of female characters. However, overall male characters used DMs more frequently than females, females used them slightly more frequently to express uncertainty and tentativeness, but this difference is not great enough to conclude that women characters spoke a kind of tentative language in the episodes under analysis. My third and fourth hypotheses do not seem to be confirmed. It reflects the fact that male characters of the series use hedging devices often attributed to women's language also frequently.

There would be other approaches to test the view that women's language is weaker and they use more polite forms than men do, and women's social inferiority which is claimed to cause differences in their language use also can have an impact in the way female characters are shown in cartoons presenting our postmodern culture. While one is investigating politeness not just the use of these polite forms and hedges, can be examined. Other areas of future research could focus e.g. on the analysis of tag questions, back-channeling utterances and prosodic features of the characters' speech. I have made my conclusions based on my findings, on a limited amount of data and on limited objects of study.

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