The Representation of Female and Male Characters in Regard to Topic Management

in Conversation Investigated in the American TV Sitcom

Happy Endings

Denisa Bialá

Kristianstad University

English department

English III

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Tutor: Anna Ekström

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1. Introduction

Most everyday tasks require interaction and cooperation with other people and for that to be successful there has to be a form of communication, a language. The field that deals with this phenomenon is linguistics, which is divided into many sub fields that then cover specific aspects of the language in detail. One of them, which is also fundamental for this piece of work, is sociolinguistics which, as the name suggests, is interested in the relationship between society and language (Holmes, 2008:1). A society is a group of people who are involved with each other in a certain way. One of the phenomena constructed by it is gender. There are two forms of gender distinguished. Firstly, being a gender, a static form that is based on sex – female or male. Secondly, doing a gender, which is constructed by society and depends on sex. Language and gender, a field of study that only started to develop several decades ago (Coates, 2004:3), is the field of study under which this thesis falls.

Based on studies done within sociolinguistics in regard to language and gender, demonstrated in Jennifer Coates' *Women, men And language* (2004), one can observe that certain differences occur in the interactions and these differences may be attributed to gender. It is argued that different genders have different conversational styles and that solidarity in speech is achieved differently by women and men (Coates, 2004:126). It is, for example, argued that men are more dominant and competitive than women and they are also often associated with a powerful language. Women, on the other hand, are cooperative when it comes to speech and they try to support other participants. There are different ways of how dominance or cooperation can be achieved. One of them is topic management in terms of topic changes and topic shifts done in conversation which is also the main orientation of this thesis.

Topic is the content of the conversation. It is what participants are talking about and there is thereafter a certain topic development (Stenström, 1999:150). Firstly, a topic is suggested. If it is accepted, then it is developed. Development can also be done through a topic shift, which moves the conversation to a relevant topic and thereafter is usually cooperative, or through a topic change which changes the topic rather irrelevantly to something new and thereafter is usually competitive (Stenström, 1999:154-156). By the aid of these two linguistic features it can be thereafter studied to which extent a participant was, through topic change or shift, cooperative or competitive, in other words if he or she supported the topic or a sign of dominance was observable, which thereafter implies certain control over the topic present.

1.1 Aim and Scope

The aim of the present investigation is to find out how male and female characters are represented in terms of topic management and thereafter how dominance or/and cooperation may be achieved by the aid of the topic changes and topic shifts in a conversation. Both male and female exclusive conversations and mixed-gender conversations are investigated in the TV show *Happy Endings*.

1.2 Material

- American TV sitcom, 2011, *Happy Endings*, season 1, episodes: 1, 2 and 4 (63.86 minutes).

In order to investigate the way men and women are represented in terms of the topic in fictional TV shows the sitcom *Happy Endings* has been selected for analysis. The study is limited, because the way the characters speak is manipulated, purposely, to drive the plot forward, but the sitcoms are creations of people who aim to resemble a sense of reality. The material chosen is representative of everyday language use among six friends who hang out and come across the joys and problems of daily life. That is also the reason why this sitcom seems to be sufficient material for this study, because it can be used to observe the ways in which men and women are represented in terms of handling the topic management in regard to topic changes and topic shifts in conversation within close relationships. In addition to that it is a relatively new series, since the first season was released in 2011.

Happy Endings is an American TV sitcom which ran on ABC from 2011 to 2013 with a total of three seasons. The adventures of six main characters living in Chicago, three men and three women, are depicted. These six characters come across every day joys and problems and spend a lot of time together. First, there is the happily married couple, Jane and Brad, then Jane's younger sister, named Alex, who used to be engaged to their friend, Dave, until she ran away from their wedding. Dave is also part of the group. Lastly, there is Penny, a girl who is desperately looking for Mr. Right and Max, who is part of the group and also a homosexual. The diversity amongst the characters helps the story develop in many ways and offers various topics to discuss.

Three episodes from the first season, each approximately 20 minutes long, are studied. In total, the episodes are 63.86 minutes, used as primary material, which give enough data for analysis since all of the scenes are being studied. The episodes were chosen based on the availability of the scripts

and also the length of single-sex conversations as they are aimed to be approximately of equal time for both female and male groups. Based on these criteria the episodes 1, 2 and 4 are used, skipping on episode 3 because it did not have scripts available. It must, however, be pointed out that the scripts found were not sufficient for this study as the written conversations were not the same as in the sitcom itself, that is why both scripts and the actual TV show were analysed together. Moreover, the scripts can only be taken partially into consideration, because they do not depict precise word emphasis, intonation and other relevant information.

1.3 Method

In order to study the topic management in conversation and thereafter in which way female and male characters' conversational behaviour are represented, the sitcom *Happy Endings* is analysed. The data from episodes 1, 2, and 4 are collected as these are the first episodes from the first season that have scripts available. By looking into the topic development of the conversation, it can be observed that competitive and cooperative behaviour may be achieved through the way the topic is developed. In order to investigate how cooperation and dominance can be achieved through the topic development in the conversations in the sitcom *Happy Endings,* topic changes and topic shifts are going to be analysed and classified into different categories. Topic shifts are done within the topic, they just slightly shift the ongoing topic, usually to develop the conversation. That is also the reason why they are usually cooperative. To summarise, topic shifts move the topic to something relevant (Stenström, 1999:156). Topic changes, on the other hand, are rather obvious changes of the current topic that usually change it to something rather irrelevant. That is also the reason why they are in most cases competitive in their linguistic behaviour as they bear a certain control over the topic. Topic changes move the topic to something new (Stenström, 1999:154).

Based on this information, the difference between topic changes and topic shifts is in the extent of their relevance to the previously ongoing topic. This is basically the maxim of relevance which is fundamental in classifying the contributions of the speakers as it reveals to which extent they are relevant to the previous speaker's contribution and thereafter to the ongoing topic. Moreover, this is the reason why topic shifts are usually cooperative since they support the topic. On the other hand, topic changes, which change the topic to something rather irrelevant, are usually competitive since they control the topic of a conversation. Therefore, showing awareness and distinguishing between these two ways in which a topic can be developed, through a topic shift or a topic change, is important. However, the maxim of relevance is not the only factor that reveals whether the topic development was done in a cooperative or competitive way as there are many other factors that

influence classification and these are introduced in the following paragraph. It is therefore fundamental that both topic changes and topic shifts can be done in either a cooperative or competitive way depending on these other factors. Thus, data shown in tables do not separate topic changes and topic shifts because they both serve as a development of the topic and they both can be done in cooperative and competitive ways. That is why their separation is not needed. Further discussion on the matter of topic changes and topic shifts can be found later on, in section 2.4.1 Topic management in terms of topic changes and topic shifts.

The classifications are done based on the following phenomena:
    1) Form, in other words how the topic changes and topic shifts look.
    2) Function which shows how it contributes to the topic development.
    3) Content which is what is being said.
    4) Context which explains how it is being said and whether there are external factors that influence the development of the conversation.

Moreover, the already mentioned maxim of relevance is fundamental in classifying the contributions as well, since it shows to which extent they are relevant to the previous speaker's contribution.

Topic changes and topic shifts serve towards developing a conversation and based on the way they are done, they can, therefore, be classified as cooperative, competitive or neutral behaviour. However, it must be pointed out that in order to change or shift the topic, one topic must already be introduced, accepted and thereafter ongoing. That is why a certain topic must be ongoing before any topic shift or change can be done. That is also the reason why too short scenes are not used as there is not enough time in order to accept the real topic and investigate the development. Thereafter, based on all of these factors, it can be investigated whether a topic change or shift supports the topic or if there are any signs of dominance.

There are three main categories. These are the cooperative behaviour, competitive behaviour and neutral behaviour categories. Based on the criteria mentioned above, topic changes and topic shifts can be classified as one of them whilst keeping track of the gender that the action came from. The neutral category is created to address all the cases when the classification is not that simple and straightforward and topic changes and shifts are done in a both competitive and cooperative way. In addition to that, cases when external factors influence the topic development are classified as neutral since the speaker is influenced by them. Instances that were classified as cooperative

supported the topic and the topic development which did not support the topic were usually classified as being competitive. In order to create a better idea of how these classifications were done, specific examples of these categories can be found later in section 3.2 Classifications, where everything is described to detail.

The investigation is based on six main characters and some minor characters that had to be taken into consideration due to their participation in conversation. However, it must be pointed out that even the number of side characters is equal and thereafter no differences that could create biased results are present.

The topic development is investigated in both single-sex and mixed-sex conversations. As far as single-sex conversations are concerned it is important to point out that the scenes are timed so it is made sure that there is an approximately equal time of only female and only male speakers included in conversations. The difference between them is approximately one minute, however, the results are demonstrated also in percentage in order to show results that are not biased by this minor variation in time.

Based on all the information, it can be also concluded that the study conducted within this specific field and the characterization introduced are both quantitative and qualitative.

2. Theoretical background

This section deals with terminology as it strives to depict all necessary information in order to fully understand the terms used later, in the section of analysis.

2.1 Conversation

Cooperation and interaction is part of our everyday lives and in order to achieve a mutual understanding, one must communicate. To communicate is to partake in an activity through which individuals exchange information and that is done by the aid of language.

Language is a signalling system that is used in order to communicate with other individuals (Barber, Beal and Shaw, 2009:2). The study of this field is called linguistics and according to one of the books that deals with this field, language itself is one of the most remarkable tools that humans have ever invented and it is also the one that actually makes human culture possible (Barber, Beal and

Shaw, 2009:1). Language is thereafter divided into spoken and written, however, the spoken form will be the one that will be discussed in the following investigation. With that in mind, spoken conversation is the main focus of this study.

As Bengt Oreström claims: "We are intuitively aware of what can be said and what cannot be said in a given situation, in a specific place, on a specific occasion, to specific people. Every such situation where language is used (speech event) has its own unwritten conventions about what is appropriate in the matter of communicative conduct" (Oreström, 1983:20). People do speak differently to their family or to their employer and such choice of register is part of a person's communicative competence. Conversation is a speech event which involves a mutual exchange of information, thoughts, ideas and emotions which takes place anywhere (Oreström, 1983:21). It could be defined as an activity when for the most part, two or more people take turns in speaking. Typically, only one person speaks at a time and avoidance of silence between turns tends to be present (Yule, 2010:145). However, the arrangement when only one speaks at a time is an ideology rather than a practice as sometimes two speakers speak at the same time or try to talk and one of them usually stops, which may be observed as an act of violence to establish right to speak. These facts lead to two terms connected to this phenomenon which are overlaps, the moment when two speakers speak at a time, and interruptions, when a person starts to talk without another person being finished.

However, conversation is not simply just 'linguistic' knowledge as Yule argues, for example (Yule, 2010:145). It is a speech event which requires more in order to reach some kind of coherence. This is the moment when context takes an important role as sometimes what is meant in conversation does not have to be actually said (Yule, 2010:144). Such a situation is demonstrated in the following example.

(1) A woman wants to point out to her male companion that a telephone is ringing.

Her: That's the telephone.
Him: I'm in the bath.
Her: OKAY

In this context, she mentions the phone implying a request for him to perform an action. He states the reason why he cannot do so and she understands it (Yule, 2010:145) without any further information having to be said.

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The process of turn-taking is then also closely related to the matter of the conversation. A turn is the period of time when a participant is talking. It conveys a certain message or information and expands the topic (Oreström, 1983:23). There are also spontaneous reactions in the way of back channel items, called minimal responses, which are short utterances that are produced to show listenership to the person speaking. These short utterances, however, are not considered to be a turn by themselves (Oreström, 1983:23).

The process of turn-taking is done by the people involved in a conversation who then decide who will speak next. What is presupposed is that one of the participants is in speaking-mode and the other one in listening- mode. Both of them are, of course, engaged in both simultaneously, however, the rule is that only one has a turn at a time (Oreström, 1983:24). That is why, participants usually wait until other participants indicate in some way that they are finished in their contribution by the aid of a completion point. Speakers can mark the end of their turn through various ways such as for example asking a question or pausing. There are also many ways for the opposite situation, for those who want to take their turn, to signalize it by the aid of body language or by making short sounds indicating their interest in contribution (Yule, 2010:146).

Sacks, Schofield and Jefferson were studying the process of turn-taking and based on their observations they reached a number of ordered rules within this linguistic phenomenon. Firstly, turn-transfer occurs at a 'transition-relevance place'. Secondly, first starter gets the turn. Thirdly, if 'current-speaker-selects-next techniques' is used, the next speaker selected gets the turn. And lastly, if 'current-speaker-selects-next technique' is not used, the turn is free at a transition relevance place, which is determined by a possible completion point such as the ones mentioned in the previous paragraph (Oreström, 1983:27).

Turn taking is also highly connected to topic changes as Ralf Fasold argues: "If the turn-taking rules have been recycled enough times for the silence to become a substantial multiple of a 'decent' gap (...), a member of the group may assume that indeed no one else has anything else to say about what the group was talking about, so a new topic can safely be introduced" (Fasold, 1999:71). Therefore, in cases of silence, which may occur in conversation for various reasons, it is to a certain extent expected that the topic is about to develop in a certain way. Thereafter, this is highly relevant to the way such changes are classified to categories since topic changes that are done irrelevantly of the previously ongoing topic, do not necessarily have to be competitive. Despite the fact that topic changes are usually competitive because they control the topic of the conversation, due to the

presence of silence and context, their function in such situations is changed and they may be classified as neutral or even cooperative in terms of conversational behaviour.

2.2 Conversational styles

Based on many studies done within sociolinguistics that deal with language and gender, especially while studying same-sex groups, it can be claimed that women and men do have different conversational styles and that solidarity in speech is achieved differently by women and men. It is argued that while men tend to ignore or disagree with each other's utterances, pursuing a style based on power, women take them into account and build on them while pursuing a style based on solidarity and support. These conversational variations are often described as cooperative and competitive conversational styles and they will be discussed in order to create a more precise idea of what they are.

2.2.1 Cooperative style

In terms of the topic development in regard to topic changes and topic shifts, cooperative behaviour occurs in the instances when a topic is supported by the contributions of the speaker which may be done in a way of adding one's opinion, experience, agreeing or disagreeing or other contributions which are relevant to previously ongoing topic. As far as the support of the topic is concerned and therefore also the cooperation of the speakers in general, questions and minimal responses were occurring the most while observing supportive participants (Coates, 2004:128-130). They were used in order to keep the conversation going and show interest (Coates, 2004:129). In terms of questions, it is argued that women ask more than men, and it is seen as a sign of weakness, when they try to keep conversation going (Coates, 2004:93). On the other hand, there are also types of questions that are considered to be a sign of powerful language as they control what other speakers say since they oblige the addressees to produce a relevant answer. In this case, however, men where found to use them more, based on the great deal of research done within this issue as Coates argues (2004:94).

Tag questions, which are related to questions, are by some linguists associated more with women than with men. However, in this case, there is no straightforward answer whether women indeed use them more and whether one can claim that it is a sign of weakness. In one of the studies done within this area, it was found that women use tag questions slightly more than men. However, one must pay attention to the fact that tag questions can be divided into different types and that surprisingly

the ones expressing uncertainty were found to be used more by men than by women (Coates, 2004:91).

Tag questions may be generally perceived as supportive. However there are many different kinds of tag questions. According to Jennifer Coates, it could be argued that one of the division could be based on whether they are speaker-oriented or addressee-oriented. Tag questions with a modal meaning are the ones that are oriented to a speaker and express uncertainty, whilst affective meaning is connected to tag questions which are oriented to addressees and are done in order to be supportive (Coates, 2004: 91). Janet Holmes suggests a slightly different division and based on *Women, Men And Politeness* it can be observed that the tag questions that are used in order to be supportive, the ones with affective meaning, are also called 'facilitative tag questions'. This linguistic device has the ability to invite the addressee to a conversation and show interest or attention, in other words they are cooperative and support other speakers in the topic (Holmes,1995:81). There are also two types of tag questions, formal and informal, such as the following demonstration illustrates.

(2) Formal and informal types of tag questions

a) You are going with us, aren't you?
b) You are going with us, right?

On the other hand, research is completely unanimous in the area of the study of minimal responses, where linguists claim that women use them more than men, and in addition to that in appropriate moments. However, since the issue of minimal responses is not one sided, it must be clarified into detail which function they may have and in which cases the women are associated with them. Minimal responses are short utterances such as *yeah, mm, right* and they indicate cooperation in a conversation as they imply support and interest in current speaker's contribution. This is the case in which minimal responses are indeed a sign of empathy and support and these are also the ones that are connected to female speakers. On the other hand, when men use them they are usually delayed and tactical, thus reinforcing male dominance (Coates, 2004:88). This statement can be supported by the fact that men's use of minimal responses suggests a lack of interest and support since they resort to using minimal responses only in their turn, after a woman's longer contributions of trying to share some information.

When lack of support is observed, one may also notice that hedges are related, as for example use of

the phrase *you know* was argued to be used more by women than by men, usually in situations when a woman expected some response from a man but did not get it (Coates, 2004:120). Therefore it can be claimed that hedges are cooperative as they try to keep conversation going. In general, the study of hedges, which can for example also be *I think*, *sort of* and *maybe,* is linked to the argument that a woman's language is tentative and thereafter that women use hedges more as they are associated with some kind of uncertainty. However, this area of study is not that straightforward because one has to take into account that there are different kinds of hedges and some of them are not necessarily a sign of weakness. In studies when hedges were distinguished based on type, expressing confidence or uncertainty, it was actually found that women use more hedges when they express confidence and less when they are implying uncertainty (Coates, 2004:89). In cases where girls were arguably using more hedges than boys, more precisely *like* which is also used in order to avoid boasting while speaking about sensitive topics, it is also argued that it might have been connected to an issue of the content of the topic, because men in general are believed to tend to speak about personal and more sensitive topics less than women.

Compliments, another aspect of speech which differs according to gender, are also often associated with cooperative behaviour. Moreover, it was found that women give compliments generally more than men and when they give them they are also more personal (Coates, 2004:99). For example, women tend to compliment each other on their appearance while men compliment on possessions or skills as compliments on appearance could send wrong signals, like for example being seen as a homosexual. Compliments seem to function as positive politeness strategies and women are strongly associated to them (Coates, 2004:100). On the other hand, compliments may be face-threatening, especially in cross-sex situations from a man's side. As far as acceptance of compliments is concerned, women tend to accept them more often from men than in opposite situations which suggests that women and men are not seen as status-equal (Coates, 2004:99). The reason for this is that it may be hard to accept the compliment because the receiver would have to agree with the speaker but at the same time would be trying to avoid self-praise and thus assert that they are equal. Based on this investigation, compliments have the ability to change or shift the topic in cooperative way as they are supportive and create a relaxed and friendly atmosphere, which will also be seen later in the analysis.

2.2.2 Competitive style

There are, however, situations when a suggested topic is not accepted or even if it is, there is a lack of support and it is eventually, in some cases, even dropped. This could imply dominance of a user

of these linguistic behaviours as the topic is thus being controlled. In this case, it is mainly silence that does not support the current speaker and seems to be a way to signal dominance since the topic is not supported. However, there may also be other competitive linguistic features present.

Grabbing the floor is connected to the already slightly touched linguistic features known as overlaps and interruptions. These two terms stand for different situations and both of them are perceived differently as overlaps are usually understood in a neutral or even positive way while interruptions are associated with being negative. Overlaps are moments when just a part of the statement of speaker A occurs at the same time with a short statement of speaker B and they are usually supportive. On the other hand, interruptions are moments when a speaker grabs the floor while another speaker is not finished. However, even interruptions may sometimes be presented with good intentions. Nonetheless, in both cases, how people perceive these two phenomena depends on many factors such as, for example, the context of an interaction, subcultural, cultural and individual predispositions (Tannen, 1994:60).

According to Deborah Tannen, one cannot simply count overlaps in conversation and call them interruptions, while also assigning blame to the speaker whose voice prevails (Tannen, 1994:54). The overlaps are usually supportive and they are associated more with women than with men. The same could be argued for interruptions since one has to be aware of all the facts influencing the interaction such as for example what was being talked about, the speaker's intentions and also what effect did this interruption have on the conversation (Tannen, 1993:189). It is also observed that interruptions are perceived in numerous ways and as Deborah Tannen argues, it is a matter of how individuals perceive rights and obligations which grow out of individual habits and expectations (Tannen, 1993:192). The context of a conversation usually plays a significant role in interruptions, like for example offering food at a dinner, but even then it can be perceived differently by different people. However, Zimmerman and West did a study within the issue of interruptions when same-sex and mixed-sex groups were examined (Coates, 2004:113) and in mixed-sex groups it was found that all overlaps and forty-six out of forty-eight interruptions were done by male speakers. In addition to that, in same-sex groups the numbers were significantly lower and it was also observed that men did not interrupt other men but only women. As Jennifer Coates suggests, these results indicate that in mixed-sex groups, the men violate the women's right to speak, as they do not let them finish their turn. This suggestion is supported by more studies in which male speakers were always found to be more competitive and more likely to interrupt a woman while female speakers were careful to let male speakers finish (Coates, 2004:115).

Monologues and playing the expert is a linguistic behaviour that is typical for men rather than women. It is a moment when one speaks for a considerable period of time and it is usually associated with pretension of expertism, which means that a participant talking for a long time is usually interested in and good at the subject being discussed. One could think that this would bother other participants, however, the opposite is true as they seem to be happy to receive the information and they actually support each other. They also all get their turn in the right time (Coates, 2004:134). Based on this study and in terms of topic changes and topic shifts, this linguistic phenomenon is usually perceived as being done in a competitive way as they change or shift the topic in the middle of the conversation by supporting one of the participants to share something they are not aware of. What can sometimes happen is that by supporting this behaviour, the ongoing topic can be changed in a competitive way as it is being controlled through seeking information related to different topics. This so called 'expertism', as Jennifer Coates describes it, is also connected the feature known as hogging the floor, when one speaks for considerable amount of time.

Hogging the floor, otherwise known as talking too much, is an aspect of conversational behaviour that may be connected to dominance which is associated with women rather than men, at least in mixed-sex talk. However, this widespread belief is constantly being proven wrong by the aid of research findings which show that in public spheres it is definitely the men who do the talking (Coates, 2004:117). Spender attributes this to expectations from the female and male speakers since when a man speaks a woman must be silent, on the other hand, if a woman speaks for a longer time, she is too talkative. Also research in classrooms show that even teachers give two thirds of their attention to boys (Coates, 2004:118). The right to speak in a mixed-sex conversation does not seem to be equal for both women and men, based on the studies done within this issue.

As the discussion above shows, talking too much may be connected to dominance. However, there are situations where hogging the floor may mean the opposite and silence becomes the linguistic behavior to imply dominance instead. These situations take place mostly in a private sphere with informal talks and minimal responses or silences are used by men as a part of male dominance (Coates, 2004:120). This statement supports the American researcher Pamela Fishman as her studies in Graddol & Swann' *Gender Voices* showed that men used only minimal responses as a turn and in addition to that in a way that seemed to lack interest and support. Furthermore, the use of hedges like *you know* were present and found to be used by women as they support turn-taking. Moreover, Victoria DeFrancisco examined seven married couples and concluded that women worked harder to

keep a conversation going and were also less successful in achieving this. She observed that even though women were talking more and also trying to suggest more topics than men, it was not a sign of dominance as their topics were often not accepted. In some way, the men were 'choosing' what is worth talking about and what is not. By the aid of no responses, delayed responses, inadequate responses and interruptions women were not supported by men (Coates, 2004:121). It can be therefore observed that silence is not always a sign of weakness unlike how it could be understood from a first glance. Silence may be used in order to control the topic in a non-cooperative way and to violate turn-taking norms. Thereafter, in some cases, it may be associated with dominance.

2.3 Sociolinguistics – Language and gender

Discussion within the issue of conversation and other terms, that are closely related, is fundamental because this investigation deals with the way the characters of *Happy Endings* speak with its main focus being on topic management. However, the analysis will take into account the gender constructed by society. Thereafter, the relationship between language and society will be present, which is a study of the field of sociolinguistics. Such study as sociolinguistics strives to answer questions such as why we speak differently in different social contexts and is concerned with identifying the social functions of language together with the ways it is used to convey social meaning. It provides information about the way language and social relationships in a community work but also the way individuals signal their aspects of social identity through language (Holmes, 2008:1). There are sub fields of this study which deal with certain aspects of linguistic variations in depth and several decades ago, more precisely in the 1970s, one of them started to be the centre of attention - a new area of study focused on language and gender within sociolinguistics, applied linguistics (Coates, 2004:4). This area of study is interested in the relationship between the use of language in connection to gender as it strives to answer whether women and men talk differently.

There has been a great deal of studies within the area of language and gender and some of the results have been introduced in the previous sections of conversational styles. When it comes to the study of the differences between two genders a concept known as communicative competence must be discussed before this analysis goes into more detail. This term was firstly used in 1972 by Dell Hymes and constitutes a language user's grammatical knowledge of syntax, morphology, phonology and also social knowledge about appropriateness (Coates, 2004:85). The research evidence suggests that women and men develop differentiated communicative competence and based on these differences, some researchers started to talk about different female and male conversational styles (Coates, 2004:86). Women and men draw on different conversational strategies and the previous

discussion gradually supported this statement with evidence taken from various studies. Moreover, since this investigation is concerned of topic management, it is also necessary to connect conversational styles to the linguistic phenomena called topic changes and topic shifts and that is the content of the following sections.

2.4 Introduction and acceptance of topic

An interesting linguistic feature that differs when it comes to gender and also the one that is the main focus of this investigation is topic. As it has been already discussed in section 2.1, a conversation is an activity with two or more participants who are involved and take turns in order to contribute information. However, for a conversation to take a place a topic must be introduced and pursued by the ones involved. The topic can be defined as the subject of the conversation or discussion (Stenström, 1994:150). The issue of introducing the topic was studied by Pamela Fishman, who argues that if a topic is successfully accepted depends on whether a woman or a man introduced it. Based on the studies she has conducted, when the conversations of couples at home were examined, she suggested that when men introduced the topic, it was accepted and supported by women through the use of minimal responses as well as questions put in order to keep conversation going (Graddol & Swann, 1989:75). However, the results differed when women introduced a topic as men gave very little conversational support, often producing only minimal responses. In addition to that it was observed that minimal responses, usually perceived as a linguistic feature used in order to support the participant talking, were used differently by women and men. When a woman used them, they were inserted in the stream of men's flow, in order to show listener-ship and support. However, when men used them, they were basically only giving minimal responses after long floors of women trying to share information. Thereafter it seemed more like a lack of interest and support of the ongoing topic.

When it came to the numbers of accepted topics whilst taking into account the gender, 28 of 29 suggested topics by men were accepted, however, only 17 out of 47 topics suggested by women were successful, based on Pamela Fishman's research (Graddol & Swann, 1989:76). This suggests that women tried to suggest more topics than men but acceptance of them by men was lower than acceptance of men's topics by women. In other words, women were very supportive as far as acceptance and support of the topic are concerned while men were more dominant. That also supports the fact that men did not give enough feedback to support the topic and often changed it to something irrelevant, which is usually perceived as competitive behaviour as it implies control over the topic. Moreover, it was also observed that women asked more questions and used attention-

getting devices such as *Do you know what?* This was also supported by other studies such as the one done by Hirshman (Graddol & Swann, 1989:76).

These facts lead to topic management, how a topic can be changed or shifted and in which cases it is done in a cooperative or competitive way.

2.4.1 Topic management in terms of topic change and topic shift

A conversation is an activity that consists of two or more participants who take turns and thereafter contribute with their floors. In order to converse there must, however, be a certain topic ongoing, which is therefore in the process of development in a certain way. The topic development may be claimed to have certain stages as there is a so called 'first topic slot' as well as an 'opening section of the topic'. This is the moment when the topic is suggested – introduced and usually also accepted by other participants (Levinson, 2003:312). Furthermore, there is a certain development noticeable in every conversation and this development may be done in a certain way. After the topic is accepted, there may be instances when it can slightly be shifted or even changed. This is when it comes to conversational styles, as by looking into topic management in terms of topic shifts and topic changes, one can notice how the topic develops by the aid of them as well as the varied extent of cooperation and competition. In the following discussion, the way such topic shifts and topic changes may be done in cooperative and competitive ways, is explained.

Topic changes and topic shifts do not necessarily have to be a sign of dominance only, as it may seem from first impression, since it may imply a certain control over the topic. These two linguistic features are not different fundamentally as they both develop the topic in a certain way. The only difference between them is the extent of relevance to the previous ongoing topic as a topic shift moves to relevant topic while a topic change is a linguistic behaviour in the conversation which changes the topic ongoing to something irrelevant. That is also why topic changes are usually perceived as competitive behaviour as they bear a certain control over the topic management. Anna-Brita Stenström defines topic shift as a move to a relevant topic and topic change as a move to a completely new topic, as it has been explained already on page 1. However, as Stephen C. Levinson explains in *Pragmatics* (2003:315), it is to a certain level expected that topic changes will not be completely irrelevant since they are always somehow topically tied. In addition to that, the primary material is scripted and controlled in order to be comprehensible by the audience. That is also the reason why it is expected that not many completely irrelevant topic changes will be present. Topic changes are usually done by the participants who express a lack of support of the ongoing topic and

that can be thus interpreted as a sign of competitiveness as they have a certain control over the topic development. These changes may also support expertism, since by doing so they support in the group because they support a speaker that knows more information about it. Moreover, since they also support long turns, they are perceived as competitive (Coates, 2004:134). However, it must be pointed out, that context is extremely fundamental because in certain situations, the topic may actually be changed in order to be cooperative. For instance, in situations where one observes that the ongoing topic might be uncomfortable for other participants or the topic ongoing is actually not strong enough, the topic is changed in order to avoid silence and keep conversation going. Such instances can be seen later, in analysis section, in examples number 5 and 6. In such cases even irrelevant topic changes can actually be cooperative in terms of linguistic behavior as it is expected that the topic will be changed. As Fasold claims and as it has been explained in section 2.1 Conversation, on page 7, when silence creates a 'decent' gap, participants can assume that no one else has anything to say and thereafter, the topic can be safely changed or shifted

Topic shifts are done, on the other hand, usually within the topic ongoing and thereafter they are usually considerably relevant as they move to relevant topic, as mentioned in the section of the Introduction, on page 1. That is also the reason why these minor topic shifts are usually cooperative because by being relevant they also support the topic ongoing. However, context and content are extremely fundamental because even slight topic shifts that are done within a topic can be competitive if by the aid of the content they focus the topic on themselves and show no interest in what the previous person actually said. Such a situation is demonstrated in example number 8.

In this investigation it is important to be aware of the difference between topic changes and topic shifts, no matter how small it may be. However, by taking into consideration other factors such as context, it can be noticed that both minor topic shifts and major topic changes can be actually done in both cooperative and competitive ways. However, for the purpose of this study, a neutral category was created in order to take into account those instances that are not so easy to classify. This is due to their level of both cooperativeness and competitiveness at the same time as the combination of both of these, in some cases, to the same extent cancel each other out. Moreover, in some other cases, the combination is too complex to be assigned anywhere. Furthermore, situations where the topic development was influenced by external factors were classified as neutral. These were moments when one of the participants changed or shifted the topic as he or she reacted to surroundings and thereafter it could not be classified as competitive behaviour. Such a situation can be seen in examples 16 and 17, for instance. Other examples of neutral behaviour can be seen in detail in section 3.2.3 Neutral topic changes/shifts.

The issue of the topic development in terms of topic changes and topic shifts and in which conversational way they are done is closely connected to the phenomenon of the Cooperative Principle which also covers the four Gricean Maxims. To which extent speakers follow these maxims is fundamental because their contributions, based on how relevant, qualitative, quantitative and clear they are, show to which extent they are also being cooperative or competitive to the previous speaker and thereafter the previous topic (Levinson, 2003:101).The cooperative principle describes in which way people interact with each other and is part of the analysis of conversations which is fundamental for this investigation, because the usage of linguistic means in conversation and thereafter topic management is the main focus of this study. In Paul Grice's words: "Make your contribution such as it is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (Yule, 1996:37). With that also four maxims were created. The Maxim of quality, which requires truthfulness, the Maxim of quantity, that requires a contribution of enough information, the Maxim of relevance which requires a level of relevance and the Maxim of Manner which requires a talk exchange to be clear enough. It can be thus observed that the more maxims are followed, the more a conversation is comprehensible and thereafter also cooperative. It is connected to topic management as the topic is inseparably part of the conversation which therefore means that if a speaker is relevant to the previous comment, he or she is also most likely relevant to the previous topic. This is the reason why the maxim of relevance is fundamental in this investigation.

Based on these facts it could be theoretically argued that based on the maxim of relevance, topic shifts are usually cooperative and topic changes are usually competitive since topic shifts move to a relevant topic and by doing so they also support the subject and topic changes change the topic to something irrelevant and by doing so they control the subject. However, through the discussion above it can be observed that the cases show that the issue of relevance is not simple and straightforward and it is not the only factor. Depending on the context even irrelevant topic changes that could seem to be done in a competitive way, are actually done in cooperative way and on the other hand, relevant topic shifts could be actually done in competitive way. Context is important due to the fact that the ongoing situation may influence the way characters communicate since conversation is not just simply 'linguistic' knowledge, but it requires more in order to reach coherence (Yule, 2010:144).

2.5 Form and function

The form and function of utterances are closely related to each other while the form could be described as being syntactical and the function as being communicative (Stenström, 1999:23). The form of utterances could be explained in the way the utterances look. Utterances' form could be classified as being declarative, directives, questions or on the other hand statements. Form signals a certain kind of meaning. However, in addition to that, an utterance has also a function, which is important as well. A function is typically contextual and depends on the context in which the utterance is made (Holmes, 2008:270). Functions thereafter bear a meaning, as for example when someone is unsure and he or she wants to find out something, or on the other hand when someone commands someone to do something. However, through the context one can find that something that might seem, based on its form, as something positive can actually be produced in a negative way. The use of sarcasm is, for instance, a good example where its form could signal agreement but its function the opposite.

2.6 Fictional language in TV shows

It is also important to address the language written by authors of TV shows and films as all conversations and scenarios on TV shows are controlled in order to create a story, drive the plot forward and also amuse the audience. That is also the reason why some linguistic behaviours are expected as it must be cohesive in order to achieve certain qualities. Fictional languages are languages that are constructed and created as parts of fictional settings such as are the ones that can be found in movies, sitcoms and books. Fictional languages are intended to be part of a fictional world and are also often designed to give more depth and a look of plausibility to the fictional worlds they are associated with (Conley & Cain, 2006:19). Based on this information, it can be concluded that since this investigation is based on the TV show *Happy Endings,* which is also scripted material, the characters and the way they speak are controlled for the purposes mentioned above. Therefore, one must bear in mind that the results show a representation of male and female speakers because what is examined is not reality.

In the sitcom investigated, the characters and the way they are depicted is fictional. Because the general context of the series is important to this investigation, a short introduction to the main characters is necessary. The sitcom used consists of six main characters, however, minor characters

are also taken into consideration as their contribution is not only fundamental to the topic development but also due to their frequent participation in conversations. First, there are Brad and Jane who are married. Brad is a businessman but when he is not at work he likes to have fun and is up to many adventures. Jane is Alex's older sister who likes to dictate how everything is done. She is a very competitive and well organised woman who likes to have everything done according to what she considers proper and she currently works as head of the home owner's association. Jane can seem as one of the stronger characters and her personality is probably connected to her conversational behaviour. She is quite dominant as a person which thereafter reflects on the way she speaks as she is the most dominant out of all the female characters when it comes to developing the topic. The aforementioned younger sister of Jane, Alex, likes food, going out and fashion. She also owns her own boutique with clothes called Xela. She is also their other friend's, named David, ex-fiancée after she ran away from their wedding, which is the source of some uncomfortable moments between her and Dave later on. This fact, though, opens more possibilities as to how the plot will develop because all of the six friends want to keep their friendship going. Thus, David, or Dave, is trying to find himself after the events in front of the altar. He is a dreamer and quit his office job in order to start his own food truck business. Max, the fifth member of the group, is their homosexual friend who is extremely lazy and tries to avoid any kind of responsibilities and is usually unemployed. He enjoys playing video games, watching sports and likes to joke and make pranks on everyone else. He is honest and straightforward and that also reflects in his linguistic behaviour as he is without a doubt the most dominant character when it comes to the topic development. Last but not least, Penny, the sixth member of this group, is known mainly for her fear of never finding her Mr. right. She keeps dating many men, which makes her the target of many jokes within the group. Even though she keeps having troubles with men, which is usually connected to her crazy, immature behaviour, she keeps being very optimistic and humoristic.

As it already has been mentioned above, there are six main characters that have a very close relationship with one another and spend a lot of time together. Thereafter, since they are all arguably different people, it is expected that competitive behaviour, however limited, will exist. Furthermore, minor characters were also examined in these three episodes and it was made sure that the number of male and number of female side-characters were equal. Through these three episodes of season one, there were five side-characters of each gender collected and their relationship and also status played a role in the story development, at least in the case of male speakers. In the case of women, there were side-characters, such as the two potential room-mates, the mother of one of the main characters and two partners of the male main characters. Furthermore, it was observed that mainly cooperative topic changes and topic shifts were done as there was no imbalance in terms of the

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status as the women side-characters were rather friendly and tried to support the topic. Especially for the potential room-mates, it was almost expected as they wanted to get the apartment.
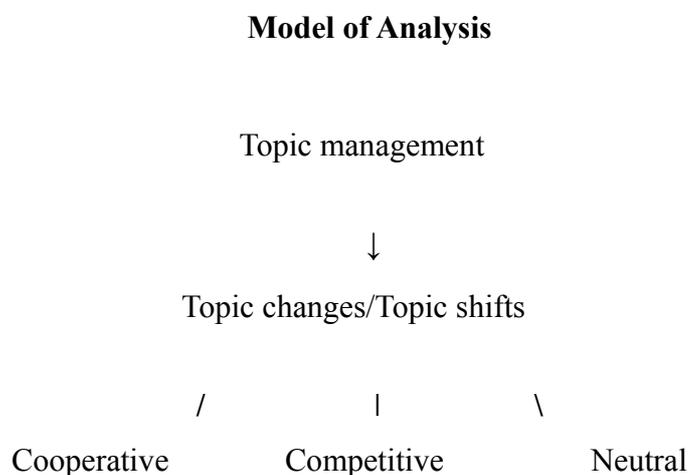
In the case of men side-characters, there were two partners of the female characters, one friend and the father of one of the main characters and finally the man whose name remained unknown and who obviously had a different position in the conversation as he was in charge of the decision of whether two of the main characters would be approved as members of a club called Country Club. With the exception of one of the side-characters, in the case of male representation, the relationships between participants are rather similar as they are friendly and balanced. There are two partners and the father and the friend. These relationships are similar to the representation of the female minor characters. However, more competitive behaviour was collected, in this case, and in addition to that it was competitive towards the female main characters.

Noticeable is the fact that the last of the male characters has a high position and has to decide whether the two main characters, Jane and Max, will be accepted to the Country Club. This could, thereafter, influence and bias the results as the relationship and position is different than in other cases, as well as the information available to him regarding the situation, and thus competitive behaviour is indeed present. However, it must be also pointed out that this minor character occurs only in one short scene and his contributions are so limited that the results could not be influenced by them. Moreover, one must bear in mind that this is still a TV sitcom which means that it is the creation of people and through the representation of the characters, what the people who created this sitcom perceive as the norm of a certain gender can be observed since the theme of the show is that of a realistic group of friends in today's society spending time together summarized in the short time available to these episodes, thus only including moments that would seem interesting to the audience.

3. Analysis and discussion

This section serves to present the model of analysis, the way classifications were done and thereafter the results followed by a discussion and a summary. The following model of analysis is demonstrated in order to show clearly what is being examined in this investigation.

3.1 Model of analysis

Model of Analysis

Topic management

↓

Topic changes/Topic shifts

/ | \

Cooperative   Competitive   Neutral

Based on this model of analysis, it can be observed that, whilst the topic management is examined, the focus is put on any topic changes and topic shifts present in the conversation. Moreover, they are examined based on factors such as their form, function, content and context. The maxim of relevance is fundamental as well, as it is able to reveal to which extent contributions made are relevant to previous speaker's turn and therefore to the topic. Based on this information it is thereafter concluded whether the topic changes and topic shifts present were done in a cooperative way, in which case the topic was supported, in a competitive way, when the topic was not supported or in a neutral way, for cases that cannot be precisely defined or other factors influenced their development.

3.2 Classifications

In this section, specific classifications with examples are presented in order to create a more precise idea of how the investigation was done. The results were shaped based on these classifications and can be found in the next section.

The topic changes and topic shifts were done mainly in competitive or cooperative ways but there are instances when topic changes and shifts were classified as neutral. By the aid of these neutral linguistic behaviours, it can be observed that this study is a perfect example that not every linguistic behaviour is simple and straightforward. Both form and function must be taken into consideration alongside the context which plays a fundamental role. Often, the statements could have been seen as

being competitive linguistic behaviour, but by the aid of the context they ended up being neutral or cooperative. The form is important because it shows through which linguistic mean a topic change or topic shift is done (Stenström, 1999:23). The function is important because it demonstrates by the aid of the context how a topic shift or change is done and thereafter what its implications are in the topic's development (Stenström, 1999:26). However, the content and the already mentioned context of a contribution are fundamental too, as they help to understand the situation for a better analysis. There may be other external factors that may influence what was being said and how it was being said and thus must be taken into consideration.

The fuzzy boundaries were created in order to create three main categories for classifications of speaker's contributions in terms of topic changes and topic shifts. Based on how they were done they were classified as either cooperative, competitive or neutral.

3.2.1 Cooperative topic changes and shifts

Cooperative behaviour achieved through topic management was expected to have more instances occurring in comparison to competitive behaviour. Topic changes and shifts were classified as cooperative in the cases when the speaker supported the ongoing topic. As it is argued, in order to be cooperative one should follow the four maxims of the cooperative principle, the maxim of relevance being one of them, as explained in the theoretical background on page 17. Minimal responses, tag questions and questions were often present. Based on the investigation, participants often supported the topic by adding more information, experience and opinions. Therefore, they were being relevant and supported the topic, as observed in the following example.

> (3) Penny and Doug are having a conversation during which Penny finds out Doug's surname.
>
> Penny: You know, that is an interesting name... Hytler.
> Doug: Its Hitler.
> Penny: Oh, its not pronounced Hyteler?
> Doug: No
> Penny: Could it be?
> Doug: Oh, this always happens. <u>Whenever girls hear my name all they can think is "is he related to that Hitler"</u>

This is a conversation with a topic shift done in a cooperative way because the participant contributes to the development of the topic by adding his own experience. It is a slight shift, but it is done within the topic, the maxim of relevance is followed and by adding his own experience the topic is thus supported. (Yule, 1996:37) The maxim of relevance is, in this case, very fundamental as it is known that in order be cooperative one must be relevant and if Doug would have added an experience of his own which would have been irrelevant to the previous speaker's turn and thereafter also the topic, he would have changed the topic in a competitive way.

Another conversation is demonstrated to illustrate a situation when shifting the topic by adding an opinion supports the topic.

(4) Dave is coming late to his date with Andrea.

Dave: I know, I know. I am so late. See, I don't own a watch because what is time anyway but a man made shackle?
Andrea: That is almost literally my high school yearbook quote verbatim. I hate rushing places. Soul mates!
Dave: Oh

(*Happy Endings*, episode 2, 11:02-11:25)

In this case, Andrea moves the topic just slightly to something relevant and that means that she shifts the topic, as it has been explained in the theoretical background on page 15. In this conversation, she supports during her turn the topic suggested by Dave and she does that by the aid of shifting the topic through her opinion, attitude and also experience from past. She does so in order to support what Dave claimed during his turn. Even though she agrees with him, it does not mean that a disagreement would not support the topic as it would be a relevant contribution that would develop it. The maxim of relevance is followed and therefore cooperation is achieved (Yule, 1996:37). Based on these facts, this topic shift was done in order to support the topic and was thereafter classified as cooperative behaviour.

Topic changes and topic shifts were also classified as cooperative when the speaker controlled the topic in situations that could be regarded as uncomfortable or the topic was weak and thereafter

there was nothing more to say. The relevance was broken, but the context played an important role as well as the function of the topic control was changed (Holmes, 2008:270) and done with good intentions – whilst being supportive.

> (5) All friends are having lunch in a restaurant while the conversation becomes a bit uncomfortable because Alex, Dave's ex-fiancée, is pushed to be around Jackie, Dave's new girlfriend.

> Alex: So Jackie, what do you want to be when you grow up?
> Jackie: I either want to be a veterinarian or have a reality show
> Alex: Wow, those are things!
> Jane: Say something! (To Brad)
> Brad: So ... <u>Where did you two love-birds meet?</u>
> Todd: Date. We instantly connected.

<div align="right">

(*Happy Endings*, episode 1, 11:07-19:12)

</div>

Based on the information given it can be observed that Alex does not feel really comfortable around Jackie and pokes her. The topic Alex suggests is accepted, however, weak as it is later not supported enough to develop and eventually silence took over, which is known for its lack of support and cooperation (Coates, 2004:120). In addition to that, as it has already been mentioned, the situation was uncomfortable. Jane, thereafter, pushes her husband to say something in order to break the uncomfortable silence and then Brad does so. According to Stenström, topic change is the movement from one topic to completely new one. This can also be observed as an act of dominance as it bears control over the topic. In this case, Brad changes the topic by suggesting a new one, however, he does so in order to be cooperative as he wants to break the silence and therefore limit the presence of non-cooperation in the conversation. Even though the maxim of relevance is important in order to achieve cooperation (Yule, 1996:37), the topic change in this case was classified as a cooperative topic change as it was done with good intentions. As it has already been mentioned, in certain cases, when silence creates a gap, a new topic can be safely introduced in order to break the uncomfortable silence. Even though Brad is in control of the topic, which is also irrelevantly changed in this case, the context must be taken into consideration (Yule, 2010:144). As Yule argues, conversation is not just simply 'linguistic' knowledge, it requires more in order to reach coherence and this is when context comes into the discussion (Yule, 2010:145). In addition to that, the topic change was done by the aid of a question which is known for its cooperative ability since

it invites other participants to talk (Coates, 2004:93). By the aid of the context, the situation ongoing, it can clearly be observed that Brad was being cooperative, not competitive, in terms of conversational behaviour.

Another similar situation can occur when the topic ongoing is weak and there is nothing more to talk about, as seen in the following conversation. Such a situation is quite similar to the one mentioned above, the only difference is that the situation is not uncomfortable, but the topic is too weak so another person changes it with good intentions, as in the following example.

> (6) Brad, Penny and Max are watching Alex fighting with another girl on the computer when Dave walks into the room.

> Brad: Oh, go Alex!
> Penny: Cute t-tops. So this just popped up on the computer?
> Brad: Why do you people keep asking me that? I do not control the internet, all right?
> Penny: <u>Hey Dave, how is it going?</u>

> (*Happy Endings,* episode 2, 17:32-19:07)

It can be observed that the first topic is not strong enough and there is nothing left to say. Thereafter it is expected that the topic is about to change in order to support the conversation. In addition to that, Dave comes to the room and Penny, by changing the topic through a question, invites him to the conversation. She shows interest and support as she also notices that Dave is upset. Then she asks him how it is going and thus suggests a new topic again after already changing the previous one. Based on all the information and also the context, which is fundamental (Yule, 2010:144), this topic change was classified as cooperative.

3.2.2 Competitive topic changes and topic shifts

The competitive category consists of instances when speakers controlled the topic in a competitive way, which means that their contributions did not really support the ongoing topic. In other words these participants controlled the topic during that moment and even though all topic changes are somehow topically tied, as discussed on the page 15, it can sometimes be observed that in some cases it is a more competitive than cooperative or neutral change. The maxim of relevance is fundamental (Yule, 1996:37) and in the cases of competitive topic development, it was usually

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broken. When the speaker controlled the topic irrelevantly to the previous topic and the result was that the topic was changed, usually for his/her own need, was classified as competitive behaviour. It was sometimes also connected to so called expertism. Absence of silence, grabbing the floor or hogging the floor in terms of the topic development were present. This is most likely for the TV sitcom's comprehension purposes. The first example nicely demonstrates how the maxim of relevance can be broken.

(7) Dave is trying to share his problems with his friends, however, Max changes the topic to something rather irrelevant.

Dave: Yeah. Apparently, she told me while we were having sex the other night. I just thought she was telling me to do her like it was her birthday next Wednesday.
Brad: You are in serious chick-sand.
Max: <u>Not a word.</u>
Brad: I am making it one.
Max: You can't just make a word.
Brad: It is. I submitted it to the dictionary.

(*Happy Endings,* episode 2, 9:55-11:00)

In this conversation it can be observed that Dave is going through some trouble and he does not know what to do so he shares it with his friends. Brad then comments relevantly on his problem but Max then changes it to something different. As it has been demonstrated in the theoretical background on page 15, there will always be some kind of relevance and connection to the previous comment, as it is present here as well, since Max comments on the word Brad used. However, that does not change the fact that he controls the topic in that moment and does not react to Dave's contribution. Thereafter, he does not support the topic.

In order to show that women were also being competitive another example of a similar case is demonstrated below.

(8) Penny is trying to talk about her problem when Jane shifts the topic to her own.

Penny: I had the weirdest date last night.

Jane: <u>Okay, I made out with Max in front of his parents last night, so you might not wanna play weird date poker with me.</u>

<p align="right">(<i>Happy Endings</i>, episode 4, 10:28-10:52)</p>

In this short demonstration, the female participants were also competitive in terms of the topic development as Jane shifts the whole conversation slightly, within the topic, however, it is about her experience. Despite the fact she starts her turn with the use of the linguistic feature *okay* which is a minimal response known for being cooperative (Coates, 2004:129), the content of her contribution must be taken into consideration and that is the fact that she does not show any interest in what happened to Penny. Jane is being competitive in her turn as she controls the content of the conversation.

Furthermore, cases when the speaker supported expertism and the actual current topic was ignored were classified as competitive topic development, as it can be observed in the following example.

(9) Max and Brad share their opinion about the girls around them.

Max: I feel like all these girls look like Jane.
Brad: Yep, <u>it is like they took the roof off a Tory Burch store and emptied it into this apartment.</u>
Max: <u>What's Tory Burch?</u>

<p align="right">(<i>Happy Endings</i>, episode 2, 11:43-11:56)</p>

In this short conversation, there are two topic shifts present. The first one is made by Brad and it is done in cooperative way as he supports the topic by adding more information, which happens to be his opinion. In addition to that, Brad's contribution starts with minimal response which is known for its level of cooperativeness since it shows Brad's interest in topic suggested by Max (Coates, 2004:129). Max is then being competitive in his turn as he does not support the topic ongoing and shifts it to something different. Therefore, he controls the topic during that moment. In addition to that, he supports competitive behaviour since he supports expertism which creates an imbalance in the conversation and supports holding the floor for a long time (Coates, 2004:134). Even though Max's question supports conversation as it keeps it going, it must be reminded that this study investigates topic changes and topic shifts and in this case the topic is changed to something

different and Max controls the topic in a competitive way because he does not support the previously introduced topic. This case is actually similar to a competitive topic change shown in the next example.

Lastly, a topic change or shift was classified as competitive in cases when the topic change/shift was done by asking about something different, reacting to a previous comment, however not supporting the topic. The following example is of such a situation.

(10) Brad reacts to Penny's contribution.

Penny: Yeah, I am. I am going on a blind date tonight with the most amazing sounding guy, Roger.
Brad: <u>Are people still named Roger?</u>

(*Happy Endings*, episode 4, 00:00-1:58)

In this conversation it can be observed that a topic is already in progress and Penny continues during her turn to add more information. Brad is then being competitive in his contribution as he changes the topic to something different and breaks the maxim of relevance (Yule, 1996:37). As it has already been discussed on page 17 in the theoretical background, the maxim of relevance is important in order to achieve a cooperative conversational style, as discussed on the page 17, and in this case, Brad changed the topic to something different than what Penny wanted to talk about. As Levinson argues, the topic is always somehow topically tied and in this case Brad was reacting to the name of the guy Penny is supposed to meet. Regardless, he controls the topic as he does not support the original one – the fact that Penny is going to a date, which she obviously shared with her friends in order to talk about it. Therefore, it can be claimed that Brad is in control of the topic and chooses to change it in a competitive way.

The next example illustrates that women were also competitive in this way.

(11) Penny and Jane are talking about Penny's birthday party.

Penny: Really? You are not gonna come to my 30th birthday party? I will just tell Todd that you couldn't make it. You didn't want to meet him.
Jane: <u>I am sorry, who is Todd again?</u>

In this conversation, there is a topic already being discussed. Jane, then, comments relevantly on the contribution of Penny, however, she does not support the topic and she changes it to something slightly different – the question of who Todd is. The maxim of relevance is slightly broken as it can be observed that Jane changed the topic to something new (Yule, 1996:37). Despite that, there is certain connection between Penny's and Jane's contribution, an interest in the guy named Todd, it is important to keep in mind that a new topic will be always somehow topically tied to the the old topic, as it is explained on the page 15. Even though she seeks information that is perhaps needed for the conversation to going on, one must bear in mind that the study strives to depict topic management in terms of topic changes and topic shifts and Jane is in this moment controlling the topic in a competitive way as the previous topic before is dropped.

Based on results, as far as competitive behaviour achieved by the aid of the topic is concerned there are fewer instances present than in cases when cooperative behaviour was achieved. This fact may be, in theory, influenced by the fact that TV shows are created to amuse their audience and in order to do so there must be a relevant amount of cooperation achieved, otherwise, it would be very confusing and hard to relate to if the topic were to change in a competitive way very often. This would mean that the topic would have to be changed irrelevantly of what is being said. In addition to that, it can also be observed that the TV show used is about characters who are generally very close friends which also implies that the competitive behaviour is going to be quite limited, in order for it to be reasonable to the audience.

3.2.3 Neutral topic changes and shifts

Neutral topic changes and shifts were the ones that could not be, for any reason, classified as neither cooperative nor competitive or the ones that were a mixture of both. Thus, cases when a speaker changed the topic while speaking to just one specific person in order to say something that he or she needed to do, for example leave, were classified as neutral topic changes. The following example is stated to demonstrate such a situation.

(12) Penny's friends are meeting Todd for the first time.

Todd: Penny has told me so much about you guys.

Penny: So much.

Todd: <u>It is awesome how close you all are.</u> Really special. <u>I am just gonna run and wash my hands, okay babe?</u>

<div align="right">(Happy Endings, episode 1, 11:07-19:12)</div>

In this example it can be observed that there is a topic already being discussed and Todd, through his contribution, shifts the topic two times within one turn. His first shift is done in a cooperative way as he adds more information in order to support the topic but the second one is rather irrelevant. However, he is talking to Penny only and he does so because he needs to express his desire to wash his hands. These instances are classified as neutral, because they cannot be classified as cooperative or competitive.

A similar case of a topic changed in neutral way due to the need to express a necessity, this time done by a female speaker is demonstrated in following example.

(13) Doug came to pick up Penny for their date.

Doug: So, Penny, I am really glad you decided to go out with me.

Penny: Me too, It was silly, I really honestly … <u>I don't have a problem with your name. In fact, I kinda like it. Doug Hitler. I am gonna go grab my bag cause I am going on a date with Hitler.</u> Sound good to you, Hitler?

<div align="right">(Happy Endings, episode 4, 15:27-16:33)</div>

In this case, Penny accepts the topic suggested by Doug and supports it by adding her opinion about it during the first part of her turn. This topic shift is done in cooperative way as it supports the topic suggested by Doug. In addition to that, the 'hedge' kinda is present. Hedges are known for their tentativeness and ability to aid cooperation because they serve to keep the conversation going (Coates, 2004:120) and that can also be observed in the way Penny used it. Then she shifts it in neutral way because she needs to grab her purse in order to go to the restaurant with Doug.

Neutral topic changes and topic shifts were also classified in the cases when a speaker changed the topic as he or she came in the discussion. Since he or she was not a part of the conversation before, the topic change could not really be classified as either cooperative or competitive. However, since

all cases have to be taken into account for a study to be consistent, these situations need to be classified as neutral, as demonstrated in the following example.

> (14) Alex and Jane are in the middle of certain topic when Samantha comes to the room.

> Alex: This is so crazy, I thought Samantha was a cool girl, you know? Is there any way that this is a mistake?
> Samantha: <u>Hey, great, your sister is here. Do you guys wanna have a pillow fight or shave your legs together?</u>

> (*Happy Endings*, episode 2, 16:08-17:27)

In this case, it is noticeable that the topic change was done by Samantha, but it is important to notice also the fact that she was not a part of the conversation before and thereafter also the topic. That is why her topic change cannot be really classified as competitive. A similar example is demonstrated below, in order to illustrate a situation when a male character changes the topic this way.

> (15) Todd, Max and other friends are having a casual conversation.

> Todd: I am sorry, It is just so hard to get the soot off. I am a volunteer fireman.
> Max: Yep, there it is.
> Brad: <u>Happy birthday, happy people!! Dirty thirty !!!</u>

> (*Happy Endings*, episode 1, 11:07-19:12)

In this short demonstration, Brad changes the topic. However, there was a conversation in progress already before, during which Brad was not present. He just came in wishing "*Happy birthday*" and that is why it is a rather neutral topic change.

Lastly, moments when a speaker changed the topic by reacting to the surroundings were classified as neutral. External factors cannot be controlled by a speaker and such situations cannot be claimed to be competitive, as seen in the following example.

(16) Penny and Doug are having a good time in a restaurant.

Penny: I can't believe we just met. You are so easy to talk to.

Doug: You too. <u>And usually on first dates, I feel so much pressure to pretend I read.</u>

Penny: I know. I hate reading.

Doug: Ugh. (Gets the bill) <u>Oh, no, let me get this.</u>

<div align="right">(Happy Endings, episode 4, 6:09-6:50)</div>

This short demonstration is of a situation when it can be observed that topic is not supported and is even changed to something completely irrelevant. However, it is not done in a competitive way as the speaker reacts to something that he does not have control over. First, Penny suggests the topic by complimenting which is then accepted by Doug who does the first topic shift in this conversation. This topic shift is done in cooperative way as he shifts the topic to something slightly different. However, it is still done within the same topic and he actually does it in order to support the topic suggested by Penny as he adds more information and experiences of his own. Penny then agrees with Doug, but she just simply reacts to Doug's contribution, she does not shift the topic. Then comes the moment when the context is extremely fundamental (Yule, 2010:144), as the participants of this conversation are in the restaurant, a waiter comes and places the bill on the table. This is the moment when Doug does not support the discussed topic and changes it to something irrelevant, not with any particular intentions of controlling the topic, but simply in order to show that he wants to pay for Penny. By taking the content of the conversation into account, it can be observed, that Doug is being a gentleman and he wants to pay so he changes the topic to that matter quickly in order to show early his desire to do so, to avoid further complications. This is the reason why this topic change is classified as neutral rather than competitive as he did not control the topic with the intention to change it, but he was rather pushed to do it by the aid of other factors/people – in this case, the waiter with the bill. Another similar situation is demonstrated in the example number 17.

(17) The group of friends is in the middle of a conversation.

Brad: Jane and I are on our pre pregnancy cleanse. No meat, no sugar, no booze.

Jane: I like to keep a tidy uterus.

Brad: She does.

Penny: <u>Oh, Dave just texted me.</u> Okay, he says he does not wanna talk, but he is all good in the hood?

(*Happy Endings,* episode 1, 2:00-3:03)

In this conversation, a similar situation occurs and the topic change was classified as neutral. However, in this case, it was done by a female speaker. There is an ongoing topic and Penny changes it to something completely irrelevant. She does so because she received message from Dave who is going through some bad situations and as he is a friend of all the participants present, Penny probably supposes that this information would be interesting for all of them. Therefore, she does not control the topic in competitive way as she cannot control external factors, such as, in this case, the message.

3.3 Results

The following table illustrates how often men and women changed or shifted the topic in the sitcom and in which ways it was done. With the use of this data, it is thereafter discussed to which extent female and male characters are represented in cooperative, competitive and also neutral ways in terms of the topic development. In the data shown, topic changes and topic shifts are not separated because they both serve to develop the topic and they both can be done in cooperative and competitive ways. That is why their separation is not yet required.

Table 1. Mixed gender conversation – the number of topic changes/shifts

Linguistic behaviour	Women	Men
Cooperative	67	100
Neutral	12	20
Competitive	15	42
Total	94	162

This table shows women's and men's share of the total amount of topic changes and shifts in mixed-sex conversations, in other words, in moments when both genders were present. This table clearly shows that the total number of times that men changed the topic is considerably higher than the total number of times when women changed the topic. However, this information is not enough in order to draw any conclusions yet, as the changes and shifts of the topics may be implying both support and dominance, since they can be done in cooperative and competitive ways. This is why the following table is presented in order to show to which extent women and men were changing or

shifting the topic in a cooperative, competitive or neutral way.

Table 2. Mixed gender conversation – the number of topic changes/shifts in percentages

Linguistic behaviour	Women	Men
Cooperative	71.00%	62.00%
Neutral	13.00%	12.00%
Competitive	16.00%	26.00%

These figures indicate the percentages within their respective groups and based on these results from the mixed gender conversations it can be observed that when comparing the way the two genders changed or shifted the topic in conversations, in cooperative, competitive and neutral ways, men were being less cooperative, slightly less neutral and more competitive. This information suggests that men were more competitive when it comes to topic management, as they control the topic more often in a competitive way. Even though the differences are not enormous, minor variations are indeed present in the three episodes of *Happy Endings* studied. A more detailed analysis of the results is demonstrated later in this section.

The following table strives to depict the number of changes and shifts of the topic made by women and men in single-sex conversations.

Table 3. Single sex conversations – the number of topic changes/shifts

Linguistic behaviour	Women	Men
Cooperative	35	29
Neutral	8	8
Competitive	6	10
Total	49	47

Table number three indicates women's and men's share of the total amount of topic changes and topic shifts but this time separately, in single-sex conversations. In this case it can be observed that the total number of changes and shifts of the topic are almost the same. However, these data are not enough to make clear conclusions and that is the reason why the results are demonstrated in percentage in the following table as well.

Table 4. Single sex conversations – the number of topic changes/shifts in percentages

Linguistic behaviour	Women	Men
Cooperative	72.00%	62.00%
Neutral	16.00%	17.00%
Competitive	12.00%	21.00%

The last table indicates percentage within their respective groups, in this case single-sex conversations. Based on the results it can be observed that men changed or shifted the topic in single sex groups less often, however, when the percentages are taken into account, it can be also noticed that they were slightly more competitive as they changed or shifted the topic more often in a competitive way and less often in a cooperative way. The results are, again, not that obvious and striking, especially for neutral topic shifts and changes, however, the differences are there and in addition to that they also support the results from previous studies stating that men are more competitive in their linguistic behaviour. Based on this information it can be thereafter concluded that the representation of female and male speakers in the three episodes of season one of the sitcom *Happy Endings* support previous studies as men are represented in a more competitive way and women in a more cooperative way. As Pamela Fishman presented in her research, women were more supportive when accepting a topic while men were more dominant, usually controlling the topic in competitive ways such as through lack of support or changing the topics irrelevantly (Graddol & Swann, 1989:76).

The category of neutral topic changes and topic shifts was created in order to take into account events that are very hard to classify and it is uncertain in which way they are really produced because these instances are in some ways both cooperative and competitive or the topic changes and topic shifts are done through the influence of external factors. That is also the one of the reasons, alongside their relatively small number of occurrences, why the results of this category are not fundamental in drawing conclusions.

Some differences in the representation of female and male speakers in the sitcom *Happy Endings* may, however, be observed. Firstly, data shows that in terms of the topic changes and topic shifts, women controlled the topic in a more supportive way. On the other hand, men tended to change the topic out of nothing and to completely irrelevant issues which shows lack of feedback and at the same time control over the topic. In the following discussion it is, however, also demonstrated by which linguistic means the topic changes and topic shifts are actually done and how they can help to

achieve cooperation or competitiveness within the topic development. Based on the observations from the episodes it can be claimed that the representations in this case really support some statements from previous studies of conversational styles because certain linguistic features are present and are used by one of the genders more than the other. For example, women often gave compliments in order to support the conversation as it creates a relaxed atmosphere. This linguistic feature was sometimes present in the contributions, which slightly shifted or changed the topic in cooperative way. Compliments are believed to be mainly a part of the female conversational style, just like Jennifer Coates claims (Coates, 2004:98). This fact therefore supports the previous studies done on this issue. In the following example such a situation is demonstrated.

(18) Andrea is meeting Dave's friends.

Max: Okay, well, I am Max, this is Brad, of course, you know Dave.
Andrea: <u>Hahaha, your friends are so funny.</u> <u>I am gonna grab my purse. Don't go anywhere.</u>
(To Dave)

(*Happy Endings*, episode 2, 00:37- 00:56)

In this short demonstration it can be observed that the ongoing topic is that of introducing and getting to know other people. It can be noticed that first topic development is done by Andrea as she shifts the topic by complimenting Dave's friends. This topic development just slightly moves the topic to something relevant and thereafter is perceived as relevant topic shift. The previous topic of introducing each other is also slightly weak as it is limited in terms of what can be said. A topic change or shift is thereafter expected in order to keep the conversation going, as it has been discussed in the theoretical background, on page 7. The contribution made by Andrea is relevant and as a compliment accomplishes a nice and relaxed atmosphere, as well as supporting the current topic (Coates, 2004:100). It must also be pointed out that Andrea was not being sarcastic. Hence, this topic shift was classified as cooperative. She also changes the topic twice within the same turn after a short pause as her second sentence is more irrelevant, but she is talking to David only because she needs to tell him that she is going to take her purse so they can leave, a plan that was most probably organized prior to meeting David's friends. This is a neutral behaviour as it is not done in order to control the topic but rather to express her need as she wanted to leave.

Moreover, the belief that men see the conversation as a battle (Coates, 2004:133) has been observed as they often disagreed and they even wanted to bet and make the conversation slightly more

challenging. However, it is interesting that a linguistic behaviour such as disagreeing, which is classified as a competitive behaviour, can be the opposite in terms of topic changes and topic shifts. In the following example, the topic shift done by disagreeing supported the topic ongoing.

(19) Two friends are watching from a distance their mutual friend talking to a woman.

Max: Look at our cute little guy, making friends.
Brad: <u>Bet ya five bucks he tells her about the time he raced across Michigan Avenue to save that puppy.</u>
Max: No way. He is going with his story about when he returned that fumble for a touchdown junior year.

(*Happy Endings*, episode 2, 00:00-00:37)

This demonstration is chosen in order to show that men disagreed often. However, it did not mean that the topic was controlled in a competitive way when they disagreed because this is an extract from a conversation when two participants, in this case both males, were being cooperative and supported the topic. How disagreeing can actually support the topic can be observed as both of Brad's and Max's turns developed the topic by expressing their opinions and even though they disagreed, both contributions supported the topic. There is, however, only one topic change observable and that is made by Brad, who firstly developed the topic by adding more information by contributing his opinion about what Dave is talking about but at the same time changed the topic since even though he is relevant to Max's first comment, the topic is indeed changed to something relatively new. This example shows that even in cases where the topic development is done by the aid of topic change, when the topic is moved to something new and could be perceived as an act of control over the topic and thereafter also of dominance, it can be still relevant to the previous comment and thereafter the topic. By following the maxim of relevance, cooperation was achieved. This topic change was relevant to Max's contribution and the topic was therefore supported. That is why this topic change is classified as cooperative. Max then disagrees as he suggests something different, however, it can be observed that his contribution is negative, yet supportive of the topic ongoing. Max's second contribution is not classified as he does not change or shift the topic.

In addition to that, men were also very often joking and poking other participants, in both single sex and mixed-sex conversations. This linguistic behaviour is also classified as competitive. However, in this study, it was not found when topic changes or topic shifts were done as joking is closely

connected to the ongoing topic and the content of the conversation is thereafter supported. Women were observed to do it as well but it was not as often as men.

Another linguistic phenomenon that could has been observed in the study of the topic development are tag questions which are known for their ability to support the conversation and thereafter also the topic ongoing (Holmes,1995:81). Tag questions were observed as cooperative in terms of the topic development as they supported the floor of another participant and thereafter also the topic. The following example is used to illustrate how the topic was supported by a tag question.

(20) Two sisters are in the middle of a conversation.

Alex: Well, I guess I did not totally think about all of that.
Jane: But I did. Okay. And judging people comes so easy for me, which is why you should let me help you.
Alex: Okay, fine. You can help, <u>but you are not gonna come in and take over everything and get all 'jane' on me, are you?</u>
Jane: Of course not.

(*Happy Endings*, episode 2, 06:22-21:41)

In order to introduce the situation it should be mentioned that Alex is looking for a new room-mate and her older, perfectionist and organized, sister Jane wants to help her. The topic ongoing was the matter of choosing a room-mate and Alex shifted the topic in her contribution slightly as she started talking about her fear of Jane becoming too much in charge of things. This topic shift is fundamental for this discussion as it contains a formal type of a tag question. Moreover, because Alex shifts the topic relevantly and supports the topic to go on, her linguistic behaviour is cooperative. In addition to that, it can clearly be seen that the tag question used by Alex shows cooperative behaviour, since Alex supports not only the topic but also Jane in her turn (Holmes,1995:81).

The linguistic feature called hedges was also found in the study while looking into the topic development and was found to be contributing to cooperative topic changes and shifts. Hedges are argued to be used usually in situations when lack of feedback is present or simply to support the other participants. These are also the reasons why they are associated more with a cooperative behaviour (Coates, 2004:120). In order to demonstrate such a case, part of the example number 14

is used, however, extended for the analysis' purpose.

(21) Jane and Alex are talking about Samantha, Alex's room-mate.

Jane: Your awesome Samantha makes a living by moving in with cute girls, setting up web cams, and charging people to watch.

Alex: Oh my god, that is why she wanted to eat popsicles and have a cream cheese fight yesterday.

Jane: Oh, yeah, that is a popular one.
Alex: Wait, how did you find this?

(Short, funny scene about the way Jane found it out.)

Alex: This is so crazy, I thought Samantha was a cool girl, you know? Is there any way that this is a mistake?

(*Happy Endings*, episode 2, 16:41-21:41)

In this conversation, more topic shifts are present, however, only one is highlighted and that is in order to discuss the aforementioned hedges. Alex finds out a quite uncomfortable fact about her new room-mate and that becomes the topic of the discussion. In her contribution, she shifts the topic slightly as she goes from a discussion of how Jane found out about Samantha's webcam to a discussion about her feelings towards Samantha. The hedges *I thought* and *you know* are present in one turn and it can be observed that she uses them in order to show Jane support in her turn (Coates, 2004:120). Moreover, she continues with a question that reassures Jane to take the floor. In addition to that, it can be observed that the whole topic shift is done within the topic relevantly and therefore it is not perceived as an act of competitive control over the topic. Alex's speech behavior is, based on these facts, clearly cooperative.

The linguistic features introduced in the theoretical background serve to build a certain idea of how competitive and cooperative conversational styles look. Topic changes and topic shifts are mainly classified based on context and to which extent they are relevant. They are usually formed in the way of a statement, opinion, experience or question and some of the linguistic features mentioned above can either help cooperation or competition in terms of conversational behavior. Despite the fact that interruptions and overlaps can be fundamental in terms of the topic development (Coates, 2004:116), in this study, very little of this linguistic phenomenon was noticed and in addition to that, they supported the topic because, even though they were competitive in their nature by

grabbing the floor and not letting other participants finish, they were cooperative in terms of the topic development as they were relevant and supported the current topic.

The concept of hogging the floor was thereafter in a similar position because, even though, hogging the floor is mainly perceived as competitive behavior in its nature since it does not let other participants talk (Coates, 2004:120), in terms of the topic development the current topic was nevertheless supported, regardless of how long turns were. Except for situations when expertism was supported, because by doing so participants supported long floors, also known as hogging the floor, since they asked for more information about something they did not know and supported the monologues and dis balance among the participants. This feature is believed to be associated with competitive behavior and with men rather than women (Coates, 2004:134). Expertism was not found in cases of female representation at all, unlike in cases of men where there were some instances. By the aid of such contributions they were usually competitive in terms of topic changes and topic shifts as they changed the topic to something irrelevant to the previously discussed topic. Such a situation can be seen in the following example.

(22) Dave is trying to share his problems to his friends.

Dave: Then we went down to the Field Museum where she convinced me to buy a joint membership for two years because you get free parking.
Brad: Damn Dave, you are stuck in chick-sand.
Max: <u>What is it?</u>
Brad: Its uh, its a quicksand, except I replaced the quick with chick.
Max: Come on, man. You are better than that.

(*Happy Endings,* episode 2, 4:30-5:25)

In this short conversation, there is only one topic change done and it is done by Max. By his contribution he does not support the topic being discussed about Dave having a problem and sharing it with his friends in order to receive some piece of advice. Brad then comments on it with a phrase that means that Dave is stuck with his new, unwanted girlfriend. Max does not support Dave's topic because he ignores it. Even though he reacts to the comment of Brad, as he wants to find out what it is, it is not relevant of the topic itself – Dave's problem with a girl. He, therefore, supports expertism since an imbalance of participants in the conversation is created and long turns are taken (Coates, 2004:134). Despite the fact that Max wants to find out some information needed

in this situation, it should not be forgotten that this investigation focuses on the topic's development and Max controls the topic at that moment. Despite the fact that expertism may support hogging the floor, in this case it is not present. Furthermore, the fact that expertism may support hogging the floor does not always have to be true as no long turns are taken after Max's topic change. In general, in this study, hogging the floor, grabbing the floor and silence were almost never present. The reason for it is maybe the fact that the primary material is a TV show where competitive behavior will always be limited for plot development purposes.

3.4 Summary of results

It must be pointed out that the study did not provide unambiguous conclusions as both genders used both cooperative and competitive ways of handling the topic management, however, as it has already been touched, the differences were present and these differences support the studies that were previously done.

Throughout this investigation, it can be observed that topic changes and topic shifts are two linguistic phenomena that are indeed not that different from one another. On one hand, topic shifts are usually done within a topic, they just slightly shift the topic, usually in order to develop the conversation at hand and are also usually cooperative. Topic shifts do not really change the topic to something different, but rather create a sub topic of the topic ongoing, as they for example mention something that has something in common with the topic ongoing. For example, adding an experience by a speaker can be viewed as a topic shift and usually seen as being cooperative, as it supports the topic. In this study, most topic shifts were, indeed, usually cooperative or neutral.

On the other hand, topic changes are more obvious developments when the topic is changed to something different. In this study, it is observable that even the topic changes may be slightly relevant as they react on previously said comments. However, they also do not support the original topic as they change it to something different. The reason for that may be that the primary material is a TV show and should be comprehensible and interesting to the audience. If the topic of the conversation changed completely and irrelevantly quite often, the sitcom would have no organization and it would be confusing for the audience since the conversation would not stick to any topic in particular. Thus, no specific point would be established for the show to become entertaining. Despite that, even some topic changes happened to be classified as neutral or even cooperative by the aid of the context. For instance, during one scene, one of the character changes the topic by posing the question: *Are you crying?*. This example that brings out exactly how

important it is to take into account the context as well as what is actually being said (Yule, 2010:144). The topic was changed completely irrelevantly in regard to the previously discussed topic. Nevertheless, it was done because one of the participants noticed that the other person was not in a good state. Moreover, it was done by asking a question that shows that the character is interested in the other person's well-being. This topic change was thereafter classified as neutral because, even though the topic was controlled, it was influenced by external factors that the speaker did not have any control over – his friend crying.

Topic changes can even be cooperative, which may be the case when the topic is changed on purpose, as one of the participants notices that the topic is actually uncomfortable for other participants. Such an instance was the example number 5. Another example, which occurred quite often, is the case when a topic change was actually done in a cooperative way by being changed by participant back to the original topic. It occurred in situations when the original topic was slightly shifted and thus, someone tried to change it back to the original topic. That is perceived as a cooperative rather than a competitive way, as these participants try to support the topic that was originally suggested and did not shift to something different. They thereafter did not support any previous competitive behaviour.

Both topic shifts and topic changes that were questionable and not certain in the way that they were done were usually classified as neutral behaviour.

Despite the fact that this investigation deals with fictional characters and that the way they speak is controlled it is also important to remember that TV shows are part of our lives and through the representation of gender roles they can influence many aspects of an individual's thinking on the way one perceives genders. There are many scientists who argue that women and men are not that different and that gender is learnt and perceived through life. (American Psychological Association, 2005) It is not something that one is born with as Coates argues: "Gender identity is seen as a social construct rather than as a 'given' social category" (2004:6).

4. Conclusion

Based on the results and data gathered, it can be concluded that female and male representation in the sitcom *Happy Endings* differed and varied in terms of the topic management. Furthermore, women were represented in a cooperative rather than a competitive way. The opposite can be said for male speakers who were more competitive. Women were mostly supportive of the topics

discussed and when they changed or shifted them, it was more often done with cooperative intentions, in order to support the topic. Men, on the other hand, were observed to be more often competitive as they often changed the topic in the middle of the conversation or they supported expertism and thus they changed and shifted the topics and thereafter controlled development in a competitive way.

The results were not unambiguous, such that only competitive or only cooperative behaviour occurred for each sex. Thus, it cannot be claimed that men were simply competitive and women cooperative. Both genders used linguistic means that resulted into both cooperative and competitive behaviours. Women were also in many cases found to be competitive in terms of topic changes and topic shifts and men were also found in many cases to be rather cooperative. However, based on the results it can be concluded that the representation of female and male speakers in the sitcom *Happy Endings* varied in terms of the topic management and men were found to be more competitive whilst women were found to be more cooperative.

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