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## GENDER DIFFERENCES IN DISAGREEMENT STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY SPEAKERS OF HUNGARIAN

**ABSTRACT.** Since the publication of Robin Lakoff's groundbreaking book, *Language and Woman's Place* (1975), the study of gender and politeness has become an extensive field for research, but until recently, the relationship between gender and impoliteness has received much less attention. This paper aims to contribute to this unfairly neglected field of research through the investigation of the interrelationship between impoliteness and gender in face-to-face spoken interaction of female and male native speakers of Hungarian. In the central strand of my investigations, I set out to reveal the specificity of female and male discourse, with particular attention to the gender-related disagreement patterns of language use. My research purpose in this paper is twofold: (1) to investigate people's perception of and attitude toward the speech of men and women and (2) to examine what impact, if any, gender has on the preferred disagreement strategies and linguistic markers used by Hungarian university students. The research findings reveal that the women participating in this study in general used a higher number of disagreements compared to men. However, no statistically significant gender difference was found in my data in the use of the three broad categories of disagreement strategies in terms of their frequency. The results do, however, suggest that certain strategies are preferred by men while others are used more freqently by women.

**Keywords:** gender, disagreement strategies, im/politeness

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Since the publication of Robin Lakoff's groundbreaking book, *Language and Woman's Place* (1975), the study of gender and politeness has become an extensive field for research, but until recently, the interrelationship between gender and impoliteness has received much less attention. As Haugh (2010) puts it "impoliteness research is still arguably in its infancy (at least in comparison to politeness research)" (p.7). In the past, impoliteness was treated as an absence of politeness or something exceptional, a deviation from politeness (Brown and Levinson 1987, Leech 1983). This paper aims to contribute to this unfairly neglected field of research through the investigation of the interrelationship between impoliteness and gender in face-to-face spoken interaction of female and male native speakers of Hungarian. In the central strand of my investigations, I set out to reveal the specificity of female and male discourse, with particular attention to the politeness/impoliteness dichotomy and gender-related disagreement patterns of language use.

Following Eckert (2000), gender in my research is viewed as a socio-culturally constructed concept. I would like to point out that the speakers' language behaviour, including the disagreement strategies they use, is the sociolinguistic reflection of their social standing in society. I believe that gender differences influence the way people talk. Among the most influential social-contextual variables that have impacts on how interlocutors interact with each other are social distance, power relations and the degree of imposition (Brown and Levinson, 1987: 15). Bearing these Brown and Levinsonian variables in mind, I intend to investigate the influence of gender on disagreement strategies employed by speakers.

Disagreements have been defined in many ways by various scholars. According to Sornig's (1977) definition "any utterance that comments upon a pre-text by questioning part of its

semantic or pragmatic information (sometimes its formal structure as well), correcting or negating it (semantically or formally) will be called an act of disagreement or contradiction" (p.363). I agree on defining disagreement as an utterance, as my study focuses on verbal expressions of disagreement. I am aware, however, that there are also nonverbal ways of expressing disagreement, but these expressions are beyond the scope of my research. Rees-Miller (2000) defines disagreement as "[a] Speaker S disagrees when s/he considers untrue some Proposition *P* uttered or presumed to be espoused by an Addressee A and reacts with an utterance the propositional content or implicature of which is *Not P*" (p.1088). This definition allows the S to disagree even if A has not actually said or meant *P*, but it rules out irony, nonserious verbal dueling and teasing. Edstrom (2004) views the enactment of disagreement as "the communication of an opinion or belief contrary to the view expressed by the previous speaker" (p.1505) and this definition allows the interpretation of nonverbal disagreements, too. In my research, I focus on verbal disagreements and interpret an act of disagreement as the verbal expression of an opinion that is contrary to the view uttered by the previous speaker.

Verbal disagreements constitute a rich area of investigation in the study of face-to-face interactions as they entail conflicting views and their enactment may pose a challenge for the interactants if they intend to "get one's point across without seeming self-righteous or being injurious" (Locher, 2004:94). Disagreements have been investigated within the framework of speech act theory (Sornig, 1977), politeness theory (Holtgraves, 1997), conversational analysis (Pomeratz, 1984), discourse analysis (Schiffrin, 1985; Kakavá, 1995; Georgakopoulou, 2001), relevance theory (Locher, 2004), and social psychological pragmatics (Muntigl and Turnbull, 1998). Mine is a pragmatic, corpus-based approach to the functional analysis of verbal disagreements in informal conversations of Hungarian university students.

The general goal of this study is to investigate and identify the gender differences in the patterns of disagreement strategies employed by Hungarian university students in face-to-face encounters. More specifically, my research purpose in this paper is twofold: (1) to investigate people's perception of and attitude toward the speech of men and women and (2) to examine what impact, if any, gender has on the preferred disagreement strategies and linguistic markers used by Hungarian speakers.
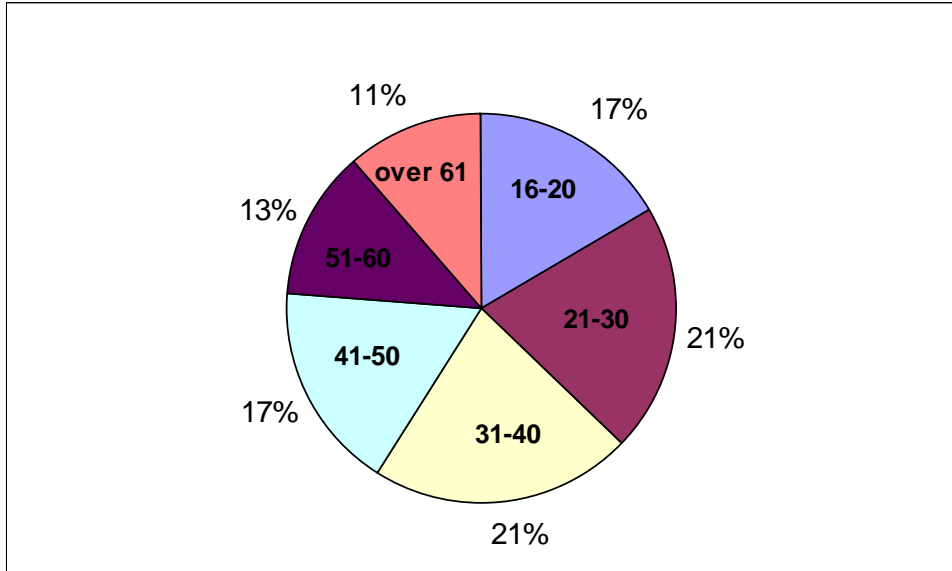
## 2. STUDY ONE: ATTITUDE TEST

In this section of the paper I give a short description of my Attitude Test and present the results. In the first phase of my research I investigated peoples' perception of the speech of men and women with the help of an attitude test, and extended my previous research (see Koczogh 2010) to 370 informants. Table 1 shows the questionnaire with the statements the present study concentrates on set in italics and its results: **TABLE 1**

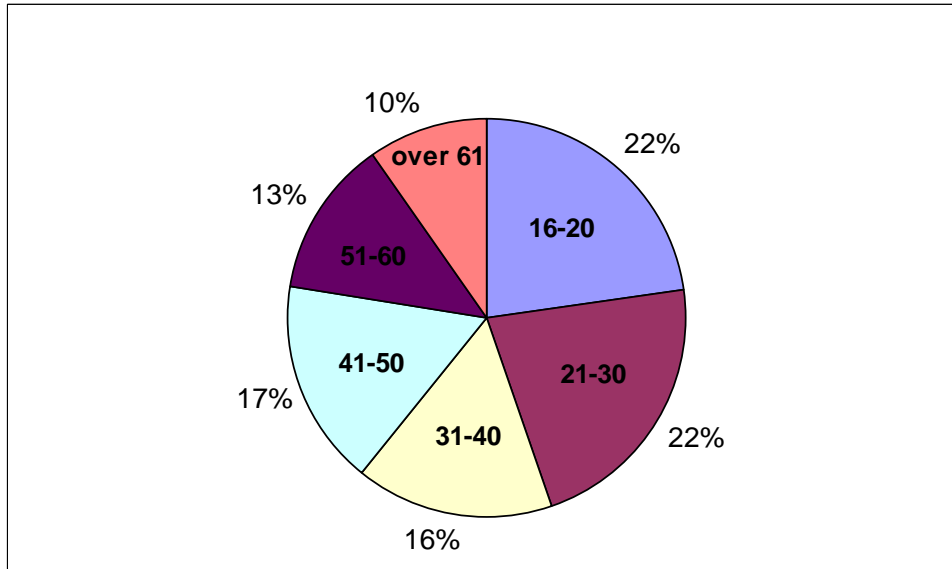**Attitude Test Questionnaire And Results**

| | Statements | Men | Women |
|---|---|---|---|
| | They are likely to… | | |
| 1. | *speak in a polite way.* | *4.09* | *3.94* |
| 2. | talk a lot. | 3.53 | 5.21 |
| 3. | use rude, offensive language, swear words. | 4.6 | 3.32 |
| 4. | *tell their opinion openly and honestly.* | *3.91* | *4.01* |
| 5. | *disagree.* | *4.19* | *4.42* |
| 6. | *tell jokes.* | *5.02* | *3.06* |
| 7. | gossip. | 3.83 | 5.04 |
| 8. | govern the conversation. | 4.28 | 4.41 |
| 9. | use only a few words, short sentences to express themselves. | 4.51 | 3.25 |
| 10. | *avoid saying sth in a clear, straightforward way.* | *3.6* | *4.27* |
| 11. | interrupt the other speaker's speech. | 3.99 | 4.11 |
| 12. | hesitate and use verbal fillers such as 'um', 'er', etc. | 4.14 | 3.65 |
| 13. | *pretend to agree with the speaker.* | *3.89* | *4.33* |

The questionnaires were completed by 370 informants (151 men and 219 women) from all age groups (16-83). The age distribution of informants are illustrated on Figures 1 and 2:

**FIGURE 1**
**Age Distribution of Male Informants**

| | |
|---|---|
| 11% | 17% |
| over 61 | 16-20 |
| 13% | |
| 51-60 | 21-30 |
| 41-50 | 21% |
| 17% | 31-40 |
| | 21% |

**FIGURE 2**
**Age Distribution of Female Informants**

| | |
|---|---|
| 10% | 22% |
| over 61 | 16-20 |
| 13% | |
| 51-60 | 21-30 |
| 41-50 | 22% |
| 17% | 31-40 |
| | 16% |

As seen in Table 1, according to the informants men are likely to tell jokes (statement 6), use rude language (statement 3) and short sentences to express ideas (statement 9). Women, on the other hand, received the two highest scores for the features of talking a lot (statement 2) and gossiping (statement 7). These results reinforce the existing stereotypes in term of the communication styles of men and women.

Regarding the results that were in the focus of my study, namely statements 1, 4, 5, 6, 10 and 13, we find the following: men (4.09) were judged as slightly more polite than women (3.94), though the difference is not statistically significant. This does not duplicate the results of my previous study (Koczogh 2010), where women were judged to be much more polite than men. Informants gave higher scores to women for the features of telling their opinion openly and honestly (statement 4), and disagreeing (statement 5), although the difference is not marked. This is in correlation with my previous study, but since there were more participants in this study the difference in the case of disagreements decreased. Women were also thought to avoid expressing their thoughts in a clear, straightforward way (statement 10) and to pretend to agree with the other speaker (statement 13), which is in contradiction with the previous statements. The most significant difference was vobserved in the feature of telling jokes, where men were assigned 5.02, while women only 3.06 points out of six. In terms of these three items, the results do not correlate with the findings of my previous attitude test.

## 3. STUDY TWO: DISAGREEMENT STRATEGIES

In the second phase of my research I investigated the influence of gender on disagreement strategies employed by close relatives and couples. I studied disagreements uttered by speakers of Hungarian in mixed-sex dyads in semi-controlled settings (guided conversations, task-based and controlled topics). The participants were university students, aged 18 to 24, and native

speakers of Hungarian. They were either siblings or couples who have been dating each other for at least one year. Therefore, all the participants knew each other very well, shared common interests and interacted with each other on a regular basis.

My research is based on a corpus of spoken interchanges recorded with the help of a digital voice recorder in such a way as to cause as little alteration of interactants' behaviour as possible. That is, while the speakers were doing their tasks, I left the room so that they would not monitor their speech because of my presence. In this way I managed to gather data that was more natural and produced in a more relaxed setting. After the recording, the informants were asked to mark on a six-grade scale the degree they were disturbed by being recorded on a background questionnaire and their answers resulted in a mean average of 1.8, which also supports that the data I gathered is comprised of natural, relaxed conversations. Another indicator of the relaxed, casual nature of the data is that the recordings were full of laughing, joking, teasing, swearing, and personal stories. However, leaving the room while the speakers were doing their tasks also meant recording without being able to directly make observations about other non-verbal means of expressing disagreement; thus this study focuses only on verbal means of expressing disagreement.

The participants' first task was to read and talk about the results of a contextualized made-up survey. Topics in the survey included highly controversial issues such as higher education tuition fees, the death penalty, abortion, euthanasia, gender differences in cooking and driving skills, and so on. As pointed out by Schiffrin (1984), conversational topics may contribute significantly to the emergence of disagreement. It is assumed that more controversial topics generate more disagreements, although this is probably culture-dependent (cf. Kakavá, 1993). Another influential factor is the speaker's familiarity with the topic. Therefore in task one,

the statements reflected everyday topics that do not need any special background knowledge. The conversational topics were also chosen to provide conflict and to generate disputes and heated discussions that would produce a high occurrence of disagreement. In the second task, informants were asked to listen to a story and list the characters in order of preference. They completed this task on their own followed by a joint discussion of their individual ordering. Finally, the informants were asked to fill in a questionnaire about their social background and social network (their age, relationship, qualifications, interests, partents' qualifications, how frequently they meet and talk to each other, what they think of each other, how long they have known each other) and, as already mentioned, mark the degree they were disturbed by the fact that their conversation was recorded.

The data for my analysis was recorded by me between December 2009 and March 2010 and then transcribed and analysed. The corpus consists of nearly 18,000 words, which constitute 112 minutes of task-based speech. In the analysis of the data, the speaking turn was used as the basic unit of talk. All in all, I identified 203 turns containing disagreements in the corpus. The data was analysed following Rees-Miller's (2000) model with some modifications. The disagreement strategy in her model was organized into three categories (softened, aggravated, and neither softened nor strengthened disagreement) based on the presence or absence of identifiable linguistic markers. I use the term 'strengthened' disagreement instead of 'aggravated.' In my analysis the focus is not on the linguistic markers but on the functions of disagreement. First, I assigned the samples of disagreement to the three broad categories, next I created subcategories based on the functions and finally I identified the linguistic markers. Table 2 illustrates the softened disagreement strategies that have been identified (illustrated with examples) as well as some of their linguistic manifestations:

**TABLE 2**
**Softened Disagreement Strategies And Their Linguistic Manifestations**

| Functions/Strategies | Linguistic manifestations |
|---|---|
| **1. Partial agreement, token agreement**<br>(1)<br>A: Jól van, kiegyezhetünk az egyenbe.<br>  Fine, let's agree that they are equals.<br>B: Esetleg.<br>  *Maybe.*<br>(2)<br>A: Az olyanok esetében kellene alkalmazni, akik ölnének mindenkit egyetemen vagy valahol.<br>  This should be applied to those, who would kill everybody at universities or somewhere.<br>B: Hát jó, de azt most … nem lehet tudni, hogy … …<br>  *Well fine, but* we don't know that… | *(Well,) fine/OK, but…*<br>*Yes, but …*<br>*You are right, but…*<br>*Maybe. / Perhaps.* |
| **2. Give/ask for reasons, give example**<br>(3)<br>A: Mindenkinek be kellene oltatnia magát H1N1 vírus ellen.<br>  Everybody should get vaccinated against H1N1.<br>B: Hát szerintem nem, mivel én se oltattam be magam.<br>  Well, I don't think so, *since* I haven't made myself vaccinated either.<br>(4)<br>A: Na, ki az első? A Bölcs.<br>  Well, who is the first one? The wiseman.<br>B: Nekem a Vőlegény.<br>  For me, it's the fiancé.<br>A: Tudtam, hogy ezt fogod.. De miért?<br>  I knew that you would… *But why?* | *… since/because/as…*<br>*Why…?* |
| **3. Joke**<br>(5)<br>A: Mér, a férfiak azok meg versenyeznek! A nők nem versenyeznek annyira.<br>  Why? Men race. Women don't race so much.<br>B: Figyelj már, szerinted egy egy hatvan éves tata szerinted versenyzik? Örül, hogy ha beül a kocsiba. *(nevetve)*<br>  Listen, *do you think a a 60-year old guv races? He is happy if he can get in the car. (laughing)* | Joking, funny remarks |
| **4. Ask questions**<br>(6)<br>A: De igazság szerint tényleg azért illegálissá kell tenni ö: mert amivel egyet értek az<br>  But to tell the truth we should make it illegal, uhm: because what I agree with is<br>B: Mi?<br>  *What?*<br>A: hogy ölsz vele.<br>  that you kill with it. | Questions excluding reason |

| | |
|---|---|
| **5. Hedge**<br>(7)<br>A: …ha jól tudom a nők tudod több helyre tudnak figyelni, emiatt előnyben vannak.<br> … if I'm not mistaken, women can pay attention to more things at the same time and they have an advantage because of that<br>B: Hát, nem tudom…<br> *Well, I don't know…*<br>(8)<br>A: Hát jó, de hát most aki nem akar, az védekezik. Nem? Jó esetbe.<br> Fine, but those who don't want it (to have a baby) use protection, don't they? In the ideal case.<br>B: De történhetnek is balesetek<br> But accidents *could* happen *as well*. | *Well,…*<br>*I think*<br>*I don't know…*<br>*to some extent*<br>*maybe*<br>*might/could* |
| **6. Impersonalize Speaker to Hearer, point-of-view distancing**<br>(9)<br>A: Szerintem a férfiak sokkal intelligensebbek a nőknél.<br> I think men are much more intelligent than women.<br>B: De ö: azt mondják, hogy egy nő tud több dologra figyelni egyszerre … jobban használja agyának mindkét felét.<br> But u:hm *it is said that* women are able to pay attention to more things at the same time … they use both sides of their brain. | Passive structures (*It is said that…*)<br>*Some people say that…* |

As illustrated in Table 2, six functions were identified in the case of softened disagreements in which no strengthening linguistic device was used and the illocutionary force of disagreements were softened by hedges (*well, I think*), expressions of uncertainty (*perhaps, maybe, might*, etc.), partial agreement, supporting disagreements with reason, using interrogative forms instead of stating disagreement, funny remarks and passive structures. In some cases laughter and intonation were used as signs of identifying strategy 3. Strategy 6 (impersonalize speaker to hearer) is a supplementary category not recognized by Rees-Miller (2000). It is manifested by passive structures and phrases expressing others' opinion, such as *'Some people say/believe/think that…'.*

Table 3 lists the functions of those disagreements whose illocutionary force was neither softened nor strengthened:

**TABLE 3**
**Neither Softened Nor Strengthened Disagreement Strategies And Their Linguistic Manifestations**

| Functions/Strategies | Linguistic manifestations |
|---|---|
| **7. Verbal shadowing**<br>(10)<br>A: Ezzel szerintem megleckéztete a Szépleányt.<br>I think he read the pretty girl a lesson with that.<br>B: Megleckéztette? Hát ö:…<br>  *Did he read her a lesson?* Well u:hm… | Repetition or slight alteration of previous utterance |
| **8. Contradictory statement**<br>(11)<br>A: Akkor is a nők sokkal intelligensebbek.<br>  Still, women are much more intelligent.<br>B: Ez nem igaz.<br>  *This is not true*!<br>(12)<br>A: Ő jó tanácsot adot neki.<br>  He gave her good advice.<br>B: Nem adott neki semmiféle tanácsot.<br>  *He gave her no advice.*<br>(13)<br>A: De azért javaslatokat tehetnének, hogy mi lenne jobb.<br>  But they could make suggestions about what would be better.<br>B: Javaslatokat tesznek is.<br>  *They do make suggestions.* | • Negation (*This is not true. / No.*)<br>• Linking word expressing contast (*but, however*) + contradictory statement<br>• Contradictory statement without linking word expressing contrast |
| **9. Stating disagreement**<br>(14)<br>A: Ott van neki a házimunka, amit el kell végezni, a gyerek…<br>  She has the housework to be done, the child…<br>B: Ezzel én nem értek egyet.<br>  *I don't agree on this.* | *I don't agree.*<br>*I disagree.*<br>*We can't agree on this.* |
| **10. Clarify speaker's meaning**<br>(15)<br>A: Mér? Akkor mondd meg, hogy a nők mér lennének intelligensebbek a férfiaknál?<br>  Why? Then tell my why should women be more intelligent than men?<br>B: Hát nem azt mondom, hogy feltétlenül intelligensebbek, de…<br>  Well, *I'm not saying that* they are necessarily more intelligent, but… | *I'm not talking about that.*<br>*I didn't mean it that way.*<br>*I mean…* |

These are the following illustrated with examples (10)-(15): verbal shadowing, contradictory

statement, stating disagreement, and clarifying speaker's meaning. In the case of verbal

shadowing a previous speaker's utterance is repeated by another speaker word by word or with

slight alteration. The illocutionary force of disagreement is usually expressed by intonation.

Contradictory statements do not bear any markers of disagreement, but the proposition of the

utterance contradicts that of the previous one. In some cases the opposing view is expressed with

the use of a contradictory linking word accompanying the contradictory statement or by simple

negation (11). The direct statement of disagreement is another strategy, which is usually

expressed by a metastatement like '*I don't agree*' or '*I disagree.*' The last function I identified as

a token of disagreement that was neither softened nor strengthened is the clarification of

speaker's meaning. This is another strategy that does not occur in Rees-Miller's taxonomy. This

kind of disagreement is employed in the case when speaker A's utterance is misinterpreted by

speaker B, therefore speaker A has to disagree with speaker B in order to explain or clarify the

intended meaning of one's previous utterance. This is illustrated with the phrase *'I'm not saying*

*that…'* in example (15).

The last broad category of disagreements include those utterances whose illocutionary

force is strengthened by the use of one or more linguistic markers. These strengthened

disagreement strategies are shown in Table 4 with their linguistic manifestations and some

examples:

**TABLE 4**
**Strengthened Disagreement Strategies And Their Linguistic Manifestations**

| Functions/Strategies | Linguistic manifestations |
|---|---|
| **11. Judging**<br>(16)<br>A: Illegálissá kellene tenni az abortuszt.<br>  Abortion should be made illegal.<br>B: Hülyeség!<br>  *That's nuts!* | *(That's) nonsense/nuts/rot.*<br>*That's all junk.*<br>*Bullshit.* |
| **12. Irony, sarcasm**<br>(17)<br>A: Lehet, hogy a révész és a haramiák haverok voltak.<br>  Perhaps the ferryman and the ruffians were buddies.<br>B: Ó: igen.<br>  *O:h, yeah.*<br>(18)<br>A: Jó, most néha eltévedek, de alapból a férfiaknak<br>  OK, sometimes I get lost, but men fundamentally<br>B: Né:ha?<br>  *So:metimes?* | Ironical statements |

| | |
|---|---|
| **13. Intensify disagreement**<br>(19)<br>A: Az amerikai irodalom sokkal nehezebb.<br>   American Literature is much more difficult.<br>B: Dehogy is! Tökre érthető!<br>   *No way!* It is *totally* clear. | *at all, much more, absolutely,*<br>*completely, totally, still, no way* |
| **14. Ask rhetorical questions**<br>(20)<br>A: De az is szívtelenség eléggé.<br>   But that's pretty heartless, too.<br>B: Örökbe adni? Bolond vagy? Legalább lesz valaki, aki szereti.<br>   *To give it up for adoption? Are you crazy?* At least it will have<br>somebody who will love it. | Rhetorical questions |
| **15. Challenge**<br>(21)<br>A: Nem igaz! … A nők nem tudnak odafigyelni a vezetésre!<br>   It's not true. … Women can't concentrate on driving.<br>B: Ha! És elmondanád, hogy miért?<br>   *Ha! And could you tell me why?* | Questions, imperatives |

Judging, using irony and sarcasm, intensifying disagreements, asking rhetorical questions and challenging the other speaker are the strategies that display some markers of strengthened disagreements. Judgemental vocabulary (*nonsense, bullshit*), ironic remarks, intensifiers like *absolutely, completely, at all*, etc, rhetorical questions, imperatives and questions expressing challenge proved to be the most characteristic strengthening devices in this category of disagreements. Intonation played a significant role in identifying most of the disagreements belonging to this category. I also created a ragbag category called 'Miscalleneous' for those examples that did not fit into any of the identified categories above. For instance, consider the following:

Example (22)
A: [Nekem pedig] a Széplány. Azért mert mert szerintem ő volt a leggonoszabb azért,
   mert mert [megcsalta a … megcsalta a vőlegényét.] …
   [For me] it's the pretty girl. Because because she was the meanest because because
   she [cheated cheated on her fiancé.] …
B: *[Látszik hogy, látszik hogy ellenkezően gondolkodunk].*
   És a Szépfiú? Hogy mondhat olyat neki?
   *[It seems it seems that we think the opposite way.]* And the pretty boy? How could he
   say something like that to her?

Before presenting the distribution of disagreement strategies in my data, it is important to note here that in some cases more than one function has been assigned to a single occurrence of disagreement since judging speaker intentions is problematic for the analyst. Therefore, total percentages exceed 100%. A remedy for this problem could be to ask the participants themselves to identify the instances of disagreement as well as their intention/function. Another empirical problem I had to face was that in some cases individual strategies of disagreement co-occurred within a turn. Moreover, sometimes more than one strategy was combined in an utterance. Culpeper, et. al (2003), also described combinations of impoliteness strategies to be the norm in their data. Bearing these in mind, in the future a solution has to be found to these puzzling empirical problems.

**TABLE 5**
**The Occurrence of Disagreement Strategies**

| Functions/Strategies | | Distribution of strategies (% of turns) |
|---|---|---|
| Softened disagreements (49.7 %) | 1 | 18.7 |
| | 2 | 10.8 |
| | 3 | 4.4 |
| | 4 | 2.4 |
| | 5 | 12.3 |
| | 6 | 0.9 |
| Neither softened nor strengthened disagreements (35.9 %) | 7 | 3.9 |
| | 8 | 26.1 |
| | 9 | 1.9 |
| | 10 | 3.9 |
| Strengthened disagreements (29.5 %) | 11 | 5.4 |
| | 12 | 7.8 |
| | 13 | 6.8 |
| | 14 | 1.9 |
| | 15 | 7.3 |
| Miscellaneous (1.4 %) | 16 | 1.4 |

Table 5 summarizes the distribution of strategies of disagreements, with 49.7% of the turns including disagreement softened, nearly 30% strengthened, and nearly 36% neither softened nor strengthened. The three most frequently used strategies were 8 (contradictory statement), 1 (partial agreement) and 5 (hedge).

In literature, women have been portrayed as generally more polite and more indirect in expression of face threatening acts then men (Lakoff, 1975; Tannen, 1994). As a result, we would predict that women would disagree less frequently than men, and that they would use more softened and fewer strengthened disagreements. However, out of 203 turns containing disagreement, 130 (64.1%) were uttered by women and only 73 (35.9%) by men. It must be noted here that out of 17,809, words 8088 were uttered by men (45.4%) and 9721 (54.6%) by women. However, this difference cannot account for the significant gender difference in the ratio of disagreements.

Table 6 contains the distribution of each strategy employed by men and women:

**TABLE 6**
**Distribution of Disagreement Strategies Employed by Men and Women**

| Functions/Strategies | | Women | Men |
|---|---|---|---|
| Softened disagreements | 1 | 20 % | 16.4 % |
| | 2 | 12.3 % | 8.2 % |
| | 3 | 2.3 % | 8.2 % |
| | 4 | 2.3 % | 2.7 % |
| | 5 | 11.5 % | 13.6 % |
| | 6 | 0.7 % | 1.3 % |
| | Total | 49.1 % | 50.4 % |
| Neither softened nor strengthened disagreements | 7 | 3.8 % | 4.1 % |
| | 8 | 23% | 31.5 % |
| | 9 | 2.3 % | 1.3 % |
| | 10 | 4.6 % | 2.7 % |
| | Total | 33.7 % | 39.6 % |
| Strengthened disagreements | 11 | 6.1 % | 4.1 % |
| | 12 | 10 % | 2.7 % |
| | 13 | 2.3 % | 15 % |
| | 14 | 2.3 % | 1.3 % |
| | 15 | 9.2 % | 4.1 % |
| | Total | 29.9 % | 27.2 % |
| Miscellaneous | 16 | 1.5 % | 1.3 % |

It can be seen that men and women used almost equal percentages of softened (50.4 % and 49.1 % respectively) and strengthened disagreements (27.2 % and 29.9 % respectively). Men, however, employed more turns where the force of disagreement was neither softened nor

strengthened, but the difference is not statistically significant. So, the results of my study did not replicate the findings of previous studies.

This table also shows that female speakers preferred strategies 8 (contradictory statement), 1 (partial agreement) and 2 (give/ask for reasons, give examples), while male speakers were in favour of strategies 8 (contradictory statement), 1 (partial agreement) and 5 (hedge). The last one is surprising, as women have been claimed to use much more hedging devices to soften the force of their utterances (Lakoff, 1975; Holmes, 1995). Comparing the use of strategy 3 by men and women, we see that men (8.2 %) proved to use jokes much more frequently than women (2.3 %), which is in accordance with previous studies and the results of the attitude test introduced in the previous section. Similarly, men used a higher percentage of contradictory statements (function 8) than women did and intensified their disagreements six and a half times more frequently (function 13). Female speakers, on the other hand, used almost four times more irony and sarcasm (function 12) and twice as many challenges (function 15) than their male counterparts. The use of irony and sarcasm by women could be explained by the fact that the utterances containing these devices can be face-saving, as they are cancellable. However, the relatively high number of challenges uttered by women confute previous findings.

## 4. Conclusions

The women participating in this study in general used a higher number of disagreements than men. However, no statistically significant gender difference was found in my data in the use of softened, strengthened and neither softened nor strengthened disagreement strategies in terms of their frequency. My results support previous findings about the claim that men use jokes much more frequently than women do. However, my findings do not confirm claims about women's frequent use of mitigating devices, and this study revealed a remarkable gender difference in the

use of irony and sarcasm. It must be noted that considerable individual variation was observed in conversational style in the data, so the expression of disagreement is subject to personality traits. Also, it would be a mistake to make generalizations about the disagreement strategies employed by men and women based on a small-size research like this and based on the investigation of one specific age group. Using a corpus containing more informants from various age groups and with various relations would ensure more representative results.

One of the chief merits of this research is that it offers insight into the area of gender differences in verbal disagreements in Hungarian, which I believe has been an unmapped area of research up till now. Secondly, it may provide a better understanding of the functions of verbal disagreements and their lexicalization in Hungarian. It can also help reduce miscommunication and communication breakdowns between Hungarians and foreigners and used as a tool for pragmatic-awareness raising. Consequently, it might have some useful implications in language teaching and learning as well. Finally, it will contribute to the understanding of interactional styles of Hungarian speakers.

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