

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN MINIMAL RESPONSES

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ABSTRACT

In this paper I analyse data gathered by myself in an attempt to ascertain whether or not there are gender differences in the communicative competence of speakers with respect to their use of minimal responses. Although I found that there were indeed some differences, not all my findings concur with earlier studies. In some instances, such as the high usage of minimal responses in female pairs, my findings support those of earlier researchers but in other areas, like the use of minimal responses in mixed pairs, they are contrary to previous claims. Minimal responses were analysed in terms of both intra- and inter-group interactions. While my findings indicate that there are some gender differences in speech at discourse level between same sex pairs, the analysis of mixed pairs indicates that this is neutralized by linguistic convergence, a concept of the Interpersonal Accommodation Theory of Giles & Powesland (1975).

1. 1 Introduction

Labov (1972:73) lists sex as one of 'five major classes of factors that have been found to influence linguistic rules in one sociolinguistic study after another'. In this paper I examine the area of gender differences in speech relating to the use of minimal responses, comparing previous studies in this area to data collected and analysed by myself. Before discussing minimal responses, I outline some important terms which are central to my study and describe my data collection procedure. After a review of earlier work on the subject I then analyse my data in terms of intra-group and inter-group differences.

That there is indeed a difference in the communicative competence of males and females has been demonstrated in many areas, including tag questions (Holmes 1987), interruptions (Zimmerman & West 1975, West & Zimmerman 1983), minimal responses (Woods 1988), linguistic hedging devices (Holmes 1987), topic development (Coates 1988b) and verbosity (Woods 1988). The explanations for these differences can be categorized as belonging to either what Coates (1988a:65) calls the 'dominance approach' or the 'difference approach'. Exponents of the 'dominance approach', such as Zimmerman & West (1975), interpret the differences as reflecting male dominance and female subordination while those who support the 'difference approach', introduced by Maltz & Borker (1982:200), attribute the variation in communicative competence to different but equal 'sub-cultures' or 'genderlects'. Under the difference approach it has been claimed (for example, Coates (1988a:70)) that men base their conversational style on competitiveness, while women base theirs on cooperativeness. Both approaches are relevant to my study. I found that power was indeed a significant factor in inter-group conversation, although in my data it was the female interviewer who was in the dominant position. At the same time, in the intra-group analysis, where the status of the group was equal, the differences could only be attributed to genderlect. I believe researchers should bear both views in mind when examining data.

I chose to use soldiers for my data collection as I believe far too many linguistic studies use university students or graduates. While these are easily accessible groups for researchers, they only represent a small proportion of society at large and therefore, findings in this area need to be substantiated using subjects of a different background. My study was conducted as an attempt to test the hypotheses already presented regarding the existence of gender differences in speech using participants from a different stratum of society.

1.2 Turn-taking

In order to study the data I collected, I used the model of turn-taking outlined by Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson (1974). This model was devised to analyse conversation. However, some of the basic tenets of the system are, at best, questionable. For example, Sacks et al observe that ‘overwhelmingly, one party talks at a time’ and that ‘transitions (from one turn to a next) with no gap and no overlap are common’ (1974:700). However, my study looks at points in conversation where these two of the 14 ‘grossly apparent facts’ they discuss are not in evidence.

In conversation people are said to take ‘turns’ at speaking. Sacks et al characterize these turns as consisting of ‘unit-types’ which ‘for English include sentential, clausal, phrasal, and lexical constructions’ (1974:702). Both (1) and (2) below are unit-types, (1) being sentential and (2) lexical:

- (1) *F5*: As I said it just depends what the situation is.
- (2) *F5*: Sorry.

Turns are typically completed at the end of the unit-type currently in progress, if the turn is not extended by various strategies. These possible completion points are called transition relevance places (see definition below). However, there may be more than one possible transition relevance place in each turn. At each transition relevance place either the speaker can continue, extending the current turn, or someone else can speak, beginning a new turn. While a speaker is taking a turn s/he is said to hold the ‘floor’. According to Sacks et al, evidence for transition relevance places is found in the fact that conversation involves the smooth transition from one speaker to another with little or no time lapse intervening. When transition relevance places are misjudged or ignored, we find instances of simultaneous speech.

1.3 Transition Relevance Place

A basic notion relevant to the following discussion is the transition relevance place. This term was introduced by Sacks et al (1974) as part of their discussion on turn-taking in conversation but was never explicitly described by them. It is simply mentioned in regards to the ‘unit-types’ used in the turn-taking system and is given the quality of ‘projectability’.

‘That organization appears to key on one main feature of the construction of the talk in a turn - namely, that whatever the units employed for the construction, and whatever the theoretical language employed to describe them, they still have points of possible unit completion, points which are projectable before their occurrence.’ (1974:720)

These ‘points of possible unit completion’ are transition relevance places (TRP), points at which another speaker may gain the floor, that is, the projected end of the current speaker’s turn. Just how these points can be defined is still being debated. For example, Murray (1985) argues that interpretation is always required to distinguish transition relevance places and that ‘even the import of proximity to what is interpreted as a possible completion point varies, depending on prior speech’ (1985:38). This comment arises from his research into interruptions and the varying interpretations of co-conversants and analysts of the same pieces of conversation. Murray goes so far as to say that ‘there are *no absolute syntactic or acoustic criteria* available either to those involved in conversing or to those analyzing records made of them’ (his italics) (1985:33).

I used the same approach to discourse analysis as Chafe (1987), Tao & Thompson (1991) and Ford & Thompson (1992). Accordingly, I used the definition offered by Ford & Thompson (1992), which seems to be the most comprehensive and to offer positive criteria to identify

transition relevance places. These are deemed to be identifiable by a convergence of cues relating to intonational, conversational-semantic and grammatical completion.

‘Intonational Completion almost always involves Grammatical Completion and Semantic Completion; hence intonation units are a major component of Convergence Points, and therefore of the turn-taking system itself. Projecting when a new turn could start must centrally involve the perception of intonation units and pitch peaks within intonation units’ (Ford & Thompson 1992:27).

When transcribing my own data I used the system devised by Du Bois, Schuetze-Cobum, Paolino & Cumming (1990) which indicates a completed intonation unit by the use of a full-stop (.)¹. An intonation unit is ‘a stretch of speech uttered under a single coherent intonation contour’ (Du Bois et al. 1990:2).

(3) F11: ..And I was the world’s worst person.

Other studies using this method of transcription for their databases are Tao (1992), Chafe (1987) and Du Bois & Thompson (1990). The system also allows for continuing intonation units, illustrated by (4) below, indicated by a comma (,).

(4) F11: It’s anti-female,
F11: it really is.

However I did not count these as transition relevance places unless they were followed by a long pause where it was obvious that the speaker was merely filling in and did not in fact have anything of significance to say, as in (5) below where the three dots indicate a lengthy pause.

(5) M22: ...My parents never have but before I joined the Army I used to work in a um,
M22: In at the Age.
M22: In the advertising there.
M22: And um the amount of Ms in there is incredible. ((NODS))
M22: Mainly journalists and accountants.
M22: We had er one big F for feminist as an accountant,
M22: er she was in Green Peace all that and she hated Miss.
M22: And she’d actually get up ya,
M22: for calling her Miss. ((NODDING))
M22: Miss Smith.
M22: ..But um,
→ I: ...So who would you think it’s limited to then?

False starts were not considered to be transition relevance places in my data as I believe the speakers had something significant to say but simply had trouble expressing themselves.

Transition relevance places indicate a point where another speaker can take the floor and I do not believe it is the intention of the speaker who produces a false start to relinquish the floor, therefore I did not class false starts as transition relevance places. Example (6) illustrates this point, with M1 making three false starts before producing a complete intonation unit.

¹ This system has been devised for the transcription of colloquial data for the Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English and is being further developed by the Languages of the Pacific Rim Project at the University of California at Santa Barbara.

- (6) MI: I mean,
MI: ..I've,
MI: When I'm talking,
MI: ..when I'm around women sort of thing I'll say 'he or 'she'.

1.4 Chi-Square Test

Throughout this study I use the chi-square test for nonparametric data. The expected frequency for each cell is shown in brackets in each table which uses the test. Any result which is shown to be significant in this study should be verified by reproducing the study before a claim to true significance can be made.

1.5 Data Collection

The data used in my own research was collected at the Simpson Army Barracks in November, 1991. The subjects were all young soldiers aged between 17 and 25 years. Each person was given a questionnaire regarding their personal history to check that the group was as homogeneous as possible. This ensured that the participants were all within the same age and salary groups and were of equal status. The questionnaire used is shown at Appendix 1.

All participants in my study were young Australian soldiers. These people are a unique group in many ways as they have a lifestyle which is conducive to forming a far closer-knit social network than most other occupations, the soldiers being members of an identified group who live, work and socialise together (see Milroy (1982) for social network theory). These people are all put through several months of basic training, cut off from the outside world, which engenders a strong feeling of mateship. This continues once they are posted to new jobs, due in part to the Army's encouragement and in part to the way in which the civilian community in general is viewed 'as placing little value on defence activities and having little or no esteem for those who choose defence as a career' (Hamilton 1986:15). Soldiers tend to work and socialize together, forming strong bonds of friendship. The participants in my study have all known their conversation partners for at least three months and for as many as eighteen. Since they were allowed to choose their own partner for the interview I think it is safe to assume that they were, in each case, friends, or at least on good terms, with their partner. After a few minutes most participants appeared to be comfortable in my presence also. There was certainly no sign of animosity in any interview. In fact, one mixed dyad was obviously boyfriend and girlfriend. Since all participants are between 17 and 25 years of age, have the same status and are on approximately the same salary, any general tendencies found in the speech habits of this homogenous group could be reasonably hypothesized to arise from a difference in 'genderlect'.

I interviewed a total of 22 pairs using both video and audio tapes, both operated by myself. On several occasions one or other of these failed to work. One pair was unsuitable as, on checking the questionnaire, I found that one participant was in fact 30 years old. However, of the remainder I transcribed data for five female pairs, five male pairs and five mixed pairs, the minimum number of five per cell being suggested by Labov (1972:38). Five per cell was also used by Horvath (1985) in her study of Australian English. The individuals involved in the mixed pairs were not the same as those in the same sex pairs. I used a different subjects design because I wanted to compare the data from a set of prompt questions and it would not be appropriate to ask these same questions in two different conditions because of the practice effect. As far as possible the subjects who participated in the mixed condition matched subjects in the non-mixed condition in terms of age and rank.

The interviews began with me introducing myself and then leaving the participants alone to complete the questionnaire. Upon my return I asked their opinions on two questions relating

to gender and language. As suggested by Labov (1972:47), to reduce the effects of observation an interviewer should: (i) work for interest and involvement of the speaker, and (ii) simulate the conditions of an ordinary conversation.'

The former elicits more excited speech where formalities are 'over ridden' and the second helps to elicit casual speech where formalities are 'set aside'. In order to comply with the first principle I chose to ask questions relating to the use of generic 'he' and the use of the address term 'Ms'. I hoped that these subjects would be topical enough for most people to have an opinion without being too contentious. This being true, it would distract their attention from the fact that they were in an interview situation and therefore their speech would be more natural. In most cases the topics were of interest to the participants, particularly when viewed in light of women's comparatively recent acceptance into male roles in the Army at large. The questions were not read out but asked as casually as possible. I attempted to help the participants relax by relating anecdotes or making comments of my own. This was intended to put the interview on a more friendly basis. Once these areas had been covered, I attempted to strike up a friendly conversation with the participants. In most instances this was successful. This section of the interview complied with Labov's second principle.

When choosing the data to be transcribed, I attempted to find a section where there was maximal interaction between the soldiers with minimal input from myself. However, at times it was necessary to use data where there was more input from myself than I would have liked because of the reticent nature of the interviewees. I omitted monologic questions, explanations and comments by myself from the data but I did note the number of minimal responses which occurred during these monologues to see if there was any significant difference between the subjects' responses to their partners and to myself. Sometimes the passages with the most interactive material occurred during the 'question' period and sometimes these occurred during the 'friendly conversation' time. The time when the participants were alone did not yield any useful data. The average duration of each interview was approximately fifteen minutes and of this I have transcribed approximately five minutes for each pair. While I began by using time as a measurement this was not always satisfactory due to the number of my own monologues and the varying rapidity of speech of the participants. Therefore I finally transcribed approximately six pages of data for each pair, even though in some cases this represents seven minutes. With the exception of a few long intonation Units, each line in the data represents either a continuing or completed intonation unit. This yielded approximately 2,600 continuing and completed intonation units uttered by the soldiers.

As with any data collection, not all obstacles can be overcome. Even when the interaction involved only the interviewees, I was still present in the room. When the study involved male pairs this was particularly relevant since I am female and my presence may have been significant even though I was silent. However, I have endeavoured to ensure that gender is the only variable between the interviewees. Any claims I make must, of course, be considered in terms of an interview situation.

2.1 Minimal Responses

In this section I will examine the use of minimal responses by the participants in my study. After reviewing earlier studies, making comparisons with mine where possible, I will define and classify minimal responses before going on to discuss my own findings and analysis. Most previous studies of minimal responses have been a small part of much larger studies, such as Zimmerman & West (1975) and Fishman (1983). Many of these have been inadequately handled, with few offering explicit definitions of the terms used or the means of analysis.

2.2 Previous Studies

Most studies of minimal responses are only part of a larger study of turn-taking, power in conversation or interruptions. Below I will give a brief summary of several studies and, where possible, a comparison of their findings with my own, using their definitions. In order to research turn-taking in conversation, Yngve (1970) devised an experiment using an unknown quantity of young university students. Each pair were unacquainted but aware that their partner was also a member of the university community. They were left alone in a room for one hour after being told to pretend that they had met by chance while travelling and had discovered that they were both from Chicago. They were given the task of getting acquainted. While the gender of the various dyads was not given, all examples involve “he” and “she”. Yngve (1970:574) believes that minimal responses relate to ‘appropriateness’, and gives the example of appropriateness relating to ‘the status of a referential expression’. Here Yngve states that the listener uses a minimal response only when they are familiar with the person or place referred to. There is no definition of ‘appropriateness’ given and the reader is left to form their own one from the example. The examples given appear to be from the same dyad with the female as speaker and the male as listener. However, it is highly unlikely that Yngve asked each and every participant whether or not they were in fact acquainted with the referent mentioned when the minimal response was uttered. There is no other way that he could be sure whether the person was responding to a known referent or for some other reason such as cooperativeness. This hypothesis relies too highly on the judgement of the researcher regarding the knowledge of the participant.

The other relevant comment which Yngve (1970:574) makes is that the speaker of a minimal response in a particular example ‘has the intonational and gestural characteristics of enthusiastic and animated agreement’. This is in fact what I found in my own data - that the majority of minimal responses were signs of agreement.

Zimmerman & West (1975) examined power and dominance in mostly two-party conversations recorded, for the most part, surreptitiously in public places at a university. This research involved ten male pairs, ten female pairs and eleven mixed pairs. Obviously there was no homogeneity in the sample group. They found that male dominance is exhibited through control of their conversational interaction with women. One of the means by which men do so is the use of delayed minimal responses which function as a topic control mechanism (1975:124) by signalling disinterest in the topic at hand. This pattern was evident in three out of ten mixed sex transcripts. In contrast to this, there were no delayed minimal responses in my own data.

Fishman (1983) was concerned with studying the power relationship between men and women in their own homes. Her data is taken from twelve and a half hours of transcribed conversation between three white, professionally-oriented, heterosexual couples in their own homes. All were aged between 25 and 35. Fishman (1983:95) found that men and women use minimal responses in different ways. While men used them merely to fill a turn, showing a decided lack of encouragement and displaying a lack of interest, women used them mostly to do “support work”, indicating attention, participation and interest. It is her belief that women do all the interactional work in a conversation by inserting minimal responses ‘throughout streams of talk rather than at the end’. This equates to my non-transition relevance place as transition relevance places occur when the current unit-type is concluded, not during the utterance. When I examined my data concerning non-transition relevance places I found that, in mixed sex conversations, men made nine responses at non-transition relevance places while women made only four. Additionally, at transition relevance places men made ten responses while women made twelve. In other words, my study shows the converse: men were doing more support work than women, using Fishman’s criteria of support work

occurring at non-transition relevance places, in the conversations I taped. But as an overall picture, women and men seem to be doing almost an equal share of interactional work in my mixed dyads. My data is given below in table form.

TABLE 1: **Minimal responses in mixed dyads.**

	TRP	-TRP	TOTAL
Females	12	4	16
Males	10	9	19

These data are also contrary in nature to a statement by Coates (1988b:105) that women use minimal responses more than men in mixed interaction and therefore, suggests caution should be used when making claims made on the basis of this.

Meyerhoff (1987:38) reports on two unpublished studies dealing with minimal responses. The first found no support for the greater use of minimal responses by women, attributed to the similar status of the researcher's four subjects. Meyerhoff does not indicate who the subjects were, but **it** appears that they were in mixed dyads. If so, this equates with my findings above. In the second study mentioned by Meyerhoff, of which no details were given, 81.25% of all minimal responses were uttered by women. Of the total number of minimal responses in my own study, women used 65%, compared with the males 35%.

Coates (1988a:70) states that minimal responses 'are meant to signal 'I'm listening' in all-female groups, but 'I agree' in all-male groups'. Women are said to interpret men's rare use of minimal responses as indicating a lack of attention while men are confused when minimal responses are used even though the co-conversationalist disagrees.

In my own data, which will be discussed further below, I found that **in** male dyads 90% of all responses indicated agreement and in female dyads 85% indicated agreement. Therefore, my findings disagree with Coates' former statement as, generally, everyone in my study used more minimal responses indicating agreement.

Coates (1988b) studied tapes of a group of female friends who met on a regular basis over several years. She (1988b:106) found that these women used minimal responses in two **ways**. In interaction-focussed discussions, minimal responses were used in a supportive manner, mostly at the end of an information unit, for example a tone group or clause. But when narratives occurred, minimal responses were used less often. When they were **it** was to signal agreement among the participants that a particular stage of conversation had been reached. For example, when a speaker introduced a new topic, minimal responses only occurred at the end of her turn. This latter usage is also characterized by the absence of minimal responses during the course of the narrative. Coates (1988b:106) believes this demonstrates women's recognition of different types of talk and the use of minimal responses appropriate to each. Since this study involved groups, it is not comparable with my own data.

To ascertain the effect of sex and status in conversation, Woods (1988) studied nine triadic conversations involving co-workers of varying status, each conversation being of two minutes duration. She (1988:153) found that women do not use more assent terms in subordinate positions than they do in more powerful positions. However, men in subordinate positions do use far more than their more powerful counterparts. It appears that power is more relevant to men than to women in regards to their use of minimal responses. This hypothesis is substantiated by my inter-group findings discussed below, where men increased their usage of minimal responses when conversing with the interviewer compared to the number used to their partner, while women did not.

Tao & Thompson (1991) examined the use of backchannel tokens by bilinguals to assess the extent to which a second language can influence a speaker's first language. Part of their corpus consisted of monolingual data sets for both English and Mandarin, each of about five minutes duration. These were compared with data collected from interview-style conversations between native speakers of Mandarin, one of whom had 'spoken English almost exclusively on a daily basis, both at home and at work, for almost twenty years' (1991:213). Here I am concerned only with their findings for English speaking monolinguals. Tao & Thompson (1991:211) found that of 271 speaker changes, 63, or 25%, were backchannel responses. Of these 63 backchannels, 32 or 51%, occurred in overlap. This appears to equate with my non-transition relevance place minimal responses and as such differs from my results where only 31 out of 115, or 27% of all minimal responses could be said to occur in overlap. Tao & Thompson (1991:211) classified their backchannel responses as being either 'continuers', 'claims of understanding', 'signals of confirmation' or 'acknowledgements of agreement'. They found that 19% of all monolingual English backchannels were continuers. Continuers signal that the 'non-primary speaker expects the primary speaker to continue talking' (1991:211). This is comparable to my facilitative minimal responses which have the same function. In fact, my data produced a similar figure for this type of minimal response, that is, 16%.

2.3 What are Minimal Responses?

Minimal responses are verbal and non-verbal indicators of a person's co-participation in a conversation. They are sometimes referred to as back-channel responses (Yngve 1970, Tao & Thompson 1991) or assent terms (Woods 1988). However, a review of the literature serves to illustrate that there is no agreement on the delimitation of what is or isn't a minimal response. Zimmerman & West (1975:108) mention only "um hmm", "uh huh", and "yeah" as minimal responses, a view shared by Meyerhoff (1987:38). Similarly Fishman (1978:402) believes minimal responses to be "yeah", "umm", "huh", and only that'. Woods (1988:143) adds "yes" and "right" to this list. Coates (1988b:106) lists minimal responses as "mm" and "yeah" but examination of her data and discussion on pages 100-101 shows some inconsistencies in that she also includes "oh my god", and "no". This listing approach is inadequate for other researchers who wish to test the claims of the above. Minimal responses need to be defined formally and/or functionally.

Yngve (1970:574) gives a more comprehensive, but still inadequate, definition. He includes not only "yes" and "uh-huh" but also instances where the listener simultaneously '[volunteers] appropriate words instead of mere indications of assent'. He illustrates this by a section of his data where the speaker says "When you've accumulated possessions,..." and the listener simultaneously utters "piece-by-piece" as the speaker says "possessions". He points out that since there is no hesitation on the part of the speaker, the utterer of "piece-by-piece" was not merely attempting to supply a word which the speaker could not find. The utterance in (7) is an example of a minimal response which I believe is the same as the one found by Yngve where the utterer was volunteering 'appropriate words'.

(7) F11: Oh you must've slept with [someone] to get [[it]].

F10: [someone]

F10: [[yeah]]

The square brackets indicate simultaneous speech. As can be seen F10 was not trying to begin a turn, nor was F11 lost for a word. Yngve believes that minimal responses range from simple nods and utterances of agreement, through short questions such as "You've started writing it then - your dissertation?" up to quite complex digressions. One of the

latter took about thirty seconds and involved several sentences which were in turn back-channelled. However, I believe that the minimal responses given to these sentences indicate that the sentences themselves were more than a mere back-channel but would be better classed as a form of interruption or simultaneous speech.

Duncan (1973:38) includes five types of behaviour in his definition of back-channel. These include terms like “mhm”, “yeah” and “right”, sentence completion, brief requests for clarification, brief restatements and head nods and shakes. I have not included sentence completion or brief requests for clarification as minimal responses as I believe both of these are better handled within theories of simultaneous speech.

Tao & Thompson (1991:210) define backchannels as ‘short, non-lexical utterances produced by an interlocutor who is playing primarily a listener’s role during the other interlocutor’s speakership’. For Tao & Thompson back-channels are not disruptive nor do they claim the floor. ‘Aha’, ‘uh huh’, ‘mhm’ and ‘yeah’ are considered to be typical backchannel tokens.

The criteria I used to distinguish minimal responses are as follows:

- i) They must be brief since they are only intended to be indicators of participation in the conversation.
- ii) They must be made in response to another speaker. This ensures they really are a ‘response’.
- iii) They are devoid of any true semantic content since they serve only to indicate participation or, at most, agreement.
- iv) They do not generally interrupt the flow of speech from the first speaker.
- v) The second speaker, that is, the one who produces the minimal response, is not attempting to takeover the floor.
- vi) Each verbal minimal response constitutes either a completed or continuing intonation unit.

The following are all the forms which I have counted as minimal responses: “yeah”, “hmm”, non-verbal nods and shakes of the head, “ha”, “no”, “yep”, “bloody oath”, “that’s right”, “aha”, “ya have to” and “someone”. These same forms can and do often fulfill other functions, such as answers to questions or fillers and in these instances they were classed as such and not as minimal responses. Laughter was also excluded even though at times it did appear to be a form of minimal response. However, since it may well have been nervous laughter, it was omitted. These forms have all been analysed as minimal responses according to context and function.

Minimal responses are distinct from interruptions for several reasons. Generally the speaker does not falter when the listener utters a minimal response. As will be discussed below in more detail, most minimal responses in my data occur at a time when there is a brief pause from the speaker, that is, either at a continuing intonation unit or transition relevance place. This is in line with Fishman’s (1978:402) findings that minimal responses ‘seldom...cause even slight overlaps’ throughout the stream of talk. Finally, there is generally nothing in the way that minimal responses are used to suggest that they are an attempt to gain the floor. The fact that some minimal responses are in fact non-verbal also indicates that these in particular are not an attempt to gain the floor.

Whether or not minimal responses constitute a turn in conversation is also a matter of dispute. While Sacks et al (1974) imply that a change of speaker indicates that a change of turn has taken place, they also state (1974:706) that a change of turn can only occur at a transition relevance place (TRP). In other words, those minimal responses that occur

at non-transition relevance places (-TRP), like (7) above, could not be considered turns. Zimmerman & West (1975:108) do not class minimal responses as ‘unit-types’ which fill turns and therefore exclude them from being turns. However, Sacks et al (1974:702) define unit types for English as including ‘sentential, clausal, phrasal, and lexical constructions’. In fact, under note 12 on page 702 of their article, they include the forms “yeah” and “mm hmm” as turns. Fishman (1978:402) however, does include minimal responses as turns both when they are delayed, and hence at a transition relevance place, and when they occur ‘throughout streams of talk rather than at the end’ and are therefore at a non-transition relevance place. Both Coates (1986:99) and Yngve (1970:568) believe minimal responses do not constitute a turn. But Yngve’s extended back-channel mentioned above which, unfortunately, he did not give in detail, and which was itself back-channelled, appears to me to constitute a turn. It is rather difficult to imagine a thirty- second digression that is not a turn, given that intonation units are typically of two seconds duration (Chafe 1987:22).

My own data indicates that minimal responses can be turns but are not necessarily so, therefore this is not a defining criteria. As mentioned above, turn changes occur at transition relevance places and therefore if the minimal response occurs at a transition relevance place, as in (8) below, it should be considered a turn.

- (8) Fl 1: It’s gonna take a long time.
Fl 1: . .Now that all the girls can go into the field units.
Fl0: Hmm.
Fl1: Its,
Fl 1: its yet another thing that they whinge about.

A full stop indicates a completed intonation unit and hence a transition relevance place. Here Fl0 acknowledges Fl1’s statement with a brief turn of her own. Fl1 then continues on with a new turn. However, when a minimal response occurs at a non-transition relevance place it cannot constitute a turn, in line with Sacks et al’s (1974) definition given above.

- (9) M14: I was tryin’ to get directions [somewhere],
M13: [Aha]
M14: flag someone down as they’re walkin’ past,
M14: it’s unbelievable.

A comma indicates a continuing intonation unit, where the speaker is not relinquishing the floor, merely drawing breath. M14 does not falter during this exchange, there are no pauses and M13 is in no way attempting to take over the floor. There are however instances where a minimal response acts as an introduction to a turn, that is, in what I term ‘complex’ constructions. Here the speaker acknowledges the previous speaker’s comment before continuing on to make their own comment. This illustrates the fact that some speakers feel that minimal responses are necessary for smooth interaction since it could quite easily have been omitted. Consider (10) below:

- (10) Fl: You’re right in the middle.
F2: **Yeah,**
F2: That’d be about two hours.

2.4 Classifying Minimal Responses

2.4.1 Types of Minimal Responses

In my data, minimal responses occurred either singly, in what I shall refer to as a 'simple' construction and as illustrated by (11) below, or in a 'complex' construction, as seen in (12) where the minimal response introduces a new turn.

- (11) M1: I mean it was just,
M1: ..The normal thing I sort of grew up with.
F3: **Hmm.**
M1: Like,
M1: I s'pose it was,
M1: ..there when I,
M1: before me sort of thing.
- (12) F1: Just means you're not silly enough to get married.
ALL: @@@@
F2: **Yeah,**
F2: ...Or sensible enough to get a divorce.

Simple and complex minimal responses can occur at both transition relevance places and non-transition relevance places. Examples (11-12) are in transition relevance places and (13-14) below in non-transition relevance places.

- (13) F3: I think there's a couple [stay]ing behind.
M1: [Yeah]
- (14) F5: ..And they're divorced or something [so]
F4: [Yeah],
F4: [[That's what I thought]].
F5: [[they're not]] either.

That some minimal responses are made as gestures of agreement is indisputable. Indeed, the various forms of the affirmative are the most prevalent type of minimal response in my data, accounting for 96 occurrences out of 115. But not all minimal responses indicate agreement, as (15) illustrates.

- (15) M24: You're all one with,
M24: outside it doesn't worry me if I get called 'he' or 'she'. ((M22
SHAKES -TRP))
M24: Well,
M24: I don't,
M24: I mean like separate ones.

Being present in the room, it was obvious to me that M22 was indicating his disagreement with M24's statement - M22 did not want to be called 'she'. M24 then quickly clarified his statement in response to M22's minimal response. However, this was the only instance of outright disagreement in my data. A further type of minimal response is what I call 'facilitative', that is, one which is used to indicate that the addressee is listening, encouraging the speaker to continue talking.

- (16) F5: She's travelled a long way.
F4: **...Yep.**
F5: ((NODS)).
F4: Considering I wanted Brisbane I ended up here.

After F4 makes an agreement style minimal response to F5's comment, F5 then encourages F4 to contribute more to the conversation by nodding. The fact that F4 takes the next turn shows that she recognizes F5's encouragement as her comment is an extension of F5's original one, which was ironic.

Since all comments but the one in example (15) above were either agreement or facilitative, that is the division I have made for the minimal responses in my data. However, given more data, there is likely to be a need to make a triadic distinction and include disagreement as a type of minimal response. I have included (15) statistically amongst the agreement type.

2.4.2 Criteria for Determining Functions of Minimal Responses

Fishman (1983:95) used the term 'support work' for, I believe, what I am calling facilitative minimal responses. However, I found her definition of these being 'throughout streams of talk rather than at the end' was inappropriate when I tested my data for the relevance of position relating to type of minimal response. Table 2 shows the number of simple minimal responses in the data in both transition relevance places and non-transition relevance places.

TABLE 2: **Simple minimal responses.**

Type:	TRP	-TRP	TOTAL
Agreement:	45	26	71
Facilitative:	10	1	11
Total	55	27	82

No chi-square test can be done on this or Table 3 because of the low expected frequency. As can be seen by examining the table, the majority of both types are at transition relevance places. The figures for complex minimal responses give a similar result.

TABLE 3: **Complex minimal responses.**

Type:	TRP	-TRP	TOTAL
Agreement:	22	3	25
Facilitative:	8	0	8
Total	30	27	82

Again, the majority of minimal responses are at transition relevance places. This indicates that there is no relationship between the function of the minimal response, that is, whether it is agreement or facilitative, and its position. Therefore, I am forced to reject Fishman's definition.

As shown above, position does not help determine the function of a minimal response. When judging the type of minimal response in my data, I took into account the context of the utterance, examining not only surrounding intonation units to see if they were the sort which required agreement or if indeed agreement was appropriate, but also the video tape for non- linguistic signs such as a gentle shake of the head in agreement to a

negative statement compared with a more vigorous shake in the case of (15) above. In cases like (16) above, where there were two consecutive minimal responses, the second was counted as facilitative for the reason outlined there, that is, the minimal responder was encouraging the other speaker to continue. Working this way I found that facilitative minimal responses consisted of nods, shakes, 'hmm', 'ha' and two 'yeah's, with the last occurring only in complex minimal responses. On the other hand, agreement responses were indicated by 'no' (indicating agreement to a negative statement), nods, shakes, hmms, and, predominantly, affirmative words. Therefore, it can be seen that form is no indication for function when classifying minimal responses.

Hence I am left to make the claim that there is a distinction between types of minimal responses based only on semantic and pragmatic factors. This is perhaps best illustrated by looking at some complex constructions.

- (17) F13: ...But then you go to the other extremes like the the really radical peace type people ya know,
F13: ..That march in the Street and stuff like that that use it and.
M15: **Hmm.**
M15: Like,
F13: (COUGHS)
M15: I I see it as basically there are two type of women that I've seen.

Here M15's 'hmm' is very perfunctory. He simply acknowledges that F13 spoke and then goes on to give his opinion. There was nothing in the tone of his utterance to indicate agreement. This also serves to illustrate the importance of acknowledgement in the mind of the speaker since M15 could quite easily have made the remainder of his turn minus the minimal response without losing anything semantically or syntactically. It is only at the discourse level that this minimal response was necessary.

(18) below comes from the same pair, but here the agreeing nature of the minimal response is substantiated by the reiteration of part of the previous comment.

- (18) M15: But speaking more generally outside the Army I think she means.
F13: **Yeah.**
F13: Outside the Army.

As can be seen from Tables 1 and 2, 96 out of 115 or 83% of all minimal responses in my data were affirmative in nature. However, I do not feel able to make any claims regarding this since the data was collected in an interview situation and this could be the reason for the high incidence of the agreement style minimal responses. Throughout the interview the soldiers were giving their opinions, with their partners either agreeing or disagreeing with these opinions. In a non-interview situation it is reasonable to expect that there would be less agreement type minimal responses since there would not be the need to either agree or disagree with your interlocutor's utterance.

2.5 Results and Discussion

I will begin by looking at my findings in regard to an intra-group analysis of the data and then take a brief look at some inter-group data, comparing the soldiers' reactions to their partners with their reactions to myself.

2.5.1 Intra-Group Analysis

I initially examined the data for the use of minimal responses at both transition relevance places and non-transition relevance places to see if there was a significant difference in the position of the minimal responses relating to gender. Transition relevance place minimal responses are turns and non-transition relevance place

responses are not turns. Continuing intonation units were counted as non-transition relevance places since it was not the intention of the speaker to yield the floor at these points. For researchers like Fishman, non-transition relevance place minimal responses are assumed to be of the ‘support’ variety. The figures are given below in Table 4. In the tables throughout my thesis, the mixed sex dyads appear in two columns to distinguish between the sexes. This means that same sex columns represent 10 subjects while mixed sex columns represent only five.

TABLE 4: Number of minimal responses made by speaker to addressee by sex and TRP type.

	Female/ Female	Male/ Male	Female/ Male	Male/ Female	Total
TRP	25 (43.10)	17 (15.34)	12 (11.69)	10 (13.88)	84
-TRP	14 (15.90)	4 (5.66)	4 (4.31)	9 (5.12)	31
Total	59	21	16	19	115

The chi-square figure for Table 4 is 5.03 (DF=3) (P<.05) therefore, there is no significant association between the gender of the dyads and the use of transition relevance places. Hence gender is not a determining factor as far as position of minimal responses is concerned.

It can be seen from Table 4 that the majority of all minimal responses occurred at transition relevance places. By converting the numbers in each TRP and -TRP cell to percentages of the total number used by that dyad type we get Table 5.

TABLE 5: Percentage of minimal responses used at TRP and -TRP positions by each dyad.

Type of Dyad:	% at TRP	% at -TRP	Total
Female/Female	76	24	100
Male/Male	81	19	100
Female/Male	75	25	100
Male/Female	53	47	100

It can be seen from Table 5 that it is only males speaking to females who use minimal responses at transition relevance place and non-transition relevance place positions almost equally, not women as implied by Fishman. Although women do use more minimal responses at non- transition relevance places in terms of absolute numbers, this higher figure as a percentage is not notable, unlike the corresponding percentage figure for males in mixed pairs. This will be discussed further below. For all other dyads

transition relevance places are preferred. The raw data for males in mixed pairs is given in Table 6.

TABLE 6: **Minimal responses of males to females at TRP and -TRP positions.**

Person:	TRP	-TRP	TOTAL
M1	1	4	5
M4	3	2	5
M15	1	0	1
M16	4	1	5
M25	1	2	3
Total	10	9	19

Here it can be seen that M1 is inclined to use minimal responses at non-transition relevance places and M16 to use them at transition relevance places. All other males had a fairly even distribution of usage. Therefore, the idiosyncratic usage by M1 is balanced by that of M16 in this sample and the remaining 3/5 of the informants do in fact divide their usage fairly equally. Of M1's non-transition relevance place minimal responses, three were non-verbal and the other a simple 'yeah', therefore they were not an attempt at interruption. This indicates that the males in this group were indeed doing more support work, given Fishman's definition, than their female partners, who mainly used minimal responses at transition relevance places. As mentioned above, this contravenes Fishman's findings. However, as discussed above, transition relevance places are not an indicator of the function of a minimal response.

Table 7 below shows the figures for the number of minimal responses used by people in same sex dyads and those in mixed sex dyads, regardless of position, compared with the sex of the addressee.

TABLE 7: **Minimal responses by sex of addressee and type of dyad.**

Addressee:	Same Sex	Mixed Sex	Total
Female	59 (59.26)	19 (23.74)	78
Male	21 (25.74)	16 (11.26)	37
Total	80	35	115

The chi-square figure for this table is 4.23 (DF=1) ($P < .05$), therefore there is a significant association between the sex of the addressee and the type of dyad involved at the .05 level. Inspection of the table shows that when women address women they use almost three times as many minimal responses as when men address men. This is corroborated by Table 8 below which relates sex of speaker to the type of dyad involved.

TABLE 8: **Minimal responses by sex of speaker and type of dyad.**

Speaker:	Same Sex	Mixed Sex	Total
Female	59 (59.17)	16 (22.83)	75
Male	21 (27.83)	19 (12.17)	40
Total	80	35	115

The chi-square figure for this table is 8.44 (DF=1) ($P < .05$), therefore there is a significant association between the sex of the speaker and the type of dyad at the .05 level. Together, Tables 7 and 8 indicate that there is definitely a relationship between the sex of the coconversationalists and the number of minimal responses used. As there were five pairs in each cell in my study, this means that the figures in the same sex cells represent ten people each while those in the mixed sex cells represent only five. Table 9 below shows the average usage by people in each cell.

TABLE 9: **Average usage of minimal responses per cell.**

Cell:	Average usage
Female/Female	6
Male/Male	2
Female/Male	3
Male/Female	4

As can be seen from Table 9, the highest use of minimal responses occurs when women are conversing with women and the lowest occurrence is with men speaking to men. While partners in mixed sex dyads respond almost equally, this is achieved because the women used only half the average number of minimal responses of those in same sex pairs while the men doubled the average of the male same sex pairs. This could indicate a tendency for women to decrease the amount of interactional work done when speaking to a man and, conversely, for men to increase the amount of interactional work done when speaking to a woman. This 'convergence' of style is accounted for in Giles &

Powesland's (1975) theory of interpersonal speech accommodation. Within this theory it is believed that people modify their speech to a style closer to that of their interlocutor in order to identify more closely with them. This seems to be what is happening here, with the men and women both changing their use of minimal responses to converge at an average midway between those of the same sex pairs.

Since Table 7 indicates that the sex of the addressee is relevant and Table 8 that the sex of the speaker is relevant, it appears that people may well adjust their usage of minimal responses in line with the gender of their co-conversationalist. It could be that women perceive men as requiring less interactive input than women and that men are in fact aware of women's greater need for cooperative gestures in conversation. That women do indeed seem to require more interactional work is evidenced by the high number of minimal responses used in female pairs.

It is quite clear that the women in my study do in fact use more minimal responses than the men in same sex pairs. However, my findings regarding mixed sex dyads differ from earlier works in that it appears to be the men who do more 'support' work, given Fishman's definition. Leaving aside this particular definition, my findings still contradict those of earlier studies in that both sexes in the mixed pairs in my study use a more or less equal amount of minimal responses, thereby doing equal amounts of interactional work. Table 10 shows the number of each type of minimal response used by each dyad.

TABLE 10: **Minimal response types used by each dyad.**

	Female/ Female	Male/ Male	Female/ Male	Male/ Female	Total
Agreement	50	19	12	15	96
Facilitative	9	2	4	4	19
Total	59	21	16	19	115

No chi-square test can be used on Table 10 as the expected frequency is too low. However, by examining the data contained therein, it can be seen that the majority of minimal responses in all dyads are of the agreement type. These data are converted to percentages in Table 11.

TABLE 11: **Percentages of minimal response types per dyad.**

	Female/ Female	Male/ Male	Female/ Male	Male/ Female
Agreement	85	90	75	79
Facilitative	15	10	25	21
Total	100	100	100	100

Table 11 shows that women increase their use of facilitative minimal responses by 10% in mixed dyads and men increase theirs by 11%. However, since neither males nor females are high users of facilitative minimal responses this is not a case of adapting to the style of the speaker's interlocutor. This increase in the percentage of facilitative minimal responses in mixed pairs causes a corresponding decrease in the percentage of agreement type minimal responses in the same cells. It appears that the co-conversationists are making a greater effort to keep the interaction flowing smoothly. The average number of each type of minimal response used in each dyad is given below in Table 12.

TABLE 12: Average number of minimal response types per dyad.

Speaker/addressee:	Agreement	Facilitative
Female/Female	5	0.9
Male/Male	1.9	0.2
Female/Male	3	0.8
Male/Female	2.4	0.8

The average number of facilitative minimal responses used by women remains reasonably constant despite the sex of their partners. However, the number used by males increases fourfold in mixed dyads. This seems to indicate that the men are in fact doing more 'support' work than women in mixed conversations, albeit in a very small way.

Before leaving the discussion of intra-group findings, I would like to make one other observation. I attempted to find a common denominator amongst those who used a greater than average number of minimal responses for their group. There were twelve people in all, out of a total of 30 - four in female pairs, three in male pairs and five in mixed pairs. Of these, two of the women from the female pairs were conversation partners and two women and two men in mixed sex pairs were partners. This accounts for half the number of high minimal response users. It may well be the case that high users feed off each other, encouraging each other to respond more often.

Alternatively, of the twelve high minimal response users, seven had female conversation partners. This could be because, as mentioned above, people appear to recognize women's need for more interactive work in conversation. However, three males do not fall into either of these categories. Upon checking their questionnaires for age, state of origin and education, I could find no common denominator amongst all twelve.

2.5.2 Inter-Group Analysis

In order to see if the status of the people involved in a conversation could have an effect on the number of minimal responses used, I compared the number of minimal responses made by each person to their partner to the number which they made to myself as interviewer. As an interviewer I held different status to the soldiers who were interviewees, particularly since the Army is highly rank conscious. This is evidenced by the fact that some of the soldiers initially referred to me as 'ma'am' a title reserved for superior female officers. However, I was quick to point out that I was not a 'ma'am' but

simply a student like themselves collecting data. I am also older than the participants and their awareness of my university background set me apart from them as none had a university education. While I did my utmost to put them at ease during the question time of the interviews, I was nonetheless in a more powerful position since, as Milroy (1987:41) says, ‘[the interviewer] controls the discourse in the sense of both selecting topics and choosing the form of questions’, causing asymmetrical participant roles. Below in Table 13 I have given the overall figures for the use of minimal responses by males and females to their partners and to myself.

TABLE 13: Number of responses to partner and interviewer.

Sex of speaker:	To Partner (either sex)	To Interviewer	Total
Female	75	92	167
Male	40	129	169
Total	115	221	336

The chi-square figure for this table is 16.83 (DF=1) (P<.05), therefore there is a significant association between the status of the addressee and the sex of the speaker. The data from Table 13 above is broken down in Table 14 below which shows the number of minimal responses made by each type of dyad to each other and to myself.

TABLE 14: Breakdown by dyad of minimal responses to partner and interviewer.

Dyad Type:	To Partner (either sex)	To Interviewer	Total
Female/Female	59	64	123
Male/Male	21	94	115
Female/Male	16	28	44
Male/Female	19	35	54
Total	115	221	336

As can be seen, the total number of responses to myself as interviewer was almost twice as many as those made to the participants’ partners. Interestingly, female pairs treated me in the same way as they treated their partners, responding similarly. However male pairs responded an astounding 94 times to me, almost five times as often as to their partners. Contrasting with this, both women and men in mixed pairs gave almost twice as many minimal responses to me as to their partners. Table 15 gives the average number of responses to me per dyad.

TABLE 15: Average number of minimal responses to interviewer per dyad.

Dyad Type:	Average responses
Female/Female	6
Male/Male	9
Female/Male	6
Male/Female	3

As can be seen the women averaged the same number of responses to me, regardless of the sex of their partner. However, men in mixed pairs used only 1/3 of the number of responses on average as those in same sex pairs. If one compares these figures with Table 9 above, it shows that the men in mixed dyads responded on average almost equally to me with minimal responses as they did to their partner (four versus three above). Their female partners doubled their use of minimal responses when speaking to me, bringing the figure up to six, which is the same as the figure for the female dyads in both Tables. All women appear to have treated me simply as another woman without regard for status. Similarly, the men in the mixed dyads treated both women equally, despite status. This could be because they were influenced by their female partner's disregard for my status. This is similar to my hypothesis that a high minimal response user can influence their partner, thereby increasing the partner's use of minimal responses. Here, however, the influence relates to the disregarding of status.

The most startling figure is that for the males in same sex dyads, who averaged an astounding nine minimal responses to me but only two to their partner. I do not believe this can be attributed to the traditional deference shown to women by men being more prevalent amongst Army men. The men in the same sex dyads responded with almost five times as many minimal responses to me compared with those to their partners, that is, an increase from two to nine, but the men in the mixed sex dyads used, on average, only four to their partners and three to me. This latter figure of three to me was only one more than the men in the same sex pairs averaged to each other, nowhere near five times greater. If it were deference to females which caused high minimal response usage, then I would expect the men in the mixed pairs to show a similar deference to at least myself if not to their female partners as well. Therefore, it seems unlikely that a response to or acknowledgement of my femininity was the cause of this high increase in minimal response usage.

Woods (1988) study discussed above found that power was an influential factor for men and that they increased their usage of minimal responses when speaking to a superior. This seems to be a likely explanation for the extraordinary number of responses to me made by the men in the male pairs. As shown above, even though men do increase their use of minimal responses when speaking to women, they certainly do not increase them to such a high degree. However, it should be noted that three men in male pairs had a particularly high number of responses to me, that is, 27, 15 and 15. The highest number of responses from the female pairs was 13, with ten being the most from a male in a mixed pair and 13 from a female in a mixed pair. Interestingly, the figures for the females are again the same, with the male in the mixed dyad being very close to this

figure. The fact that the women did not seem to be influenced by my status at all also agrees with Woods' findings. In fact, the women in the mixed dyads responded to my femininity exactly as predicted by Table 7. Men were also found to be influenced by status in some research by Holmes on compliment behaviour where 'for male complimenters status differences are more salient than sex differences' (1988:457). Holmes (1988:458) found that, especially for males, status differences generally reduced the occurrence of appearance compliments - so much so that it was statistically significant.

Finally, I checked the number of monologues made by myself during each interview to ensure that this was not an influencing factor on the number of minimal responses to myself since it could be claimed that people may use more minimal responses when listening to a narrative.² The interview with the highest number of minimal responses to me, that is, 27, contained only two monologues. This man's partner made only eight responses to myself. In another interview, there were five monologues, during which one of the men in the dyad made 15 responses and the other uttered only five. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that the number of monologues spoken during the course of the interview had any influence on the number of minimal responses given. The minimal responses which occurred during these monologues were counted for frequency in the inter-group analysis but were not examined for type.

2.6 Summary

All of the above data points to the fact that women do increase their usage of minimal responses when talking to other women, regardless of status, as opposed to when talking to men. However, I believe that, while women do generally use more minimal responses than men, having a female addressee is the most general reason for increasing minimal responses, since not only the women in female pairs showed high usage but also males in mixed pairs and the females in the mixed pairs when speaking to a female interviewer. Women as addressees are given proportionately more responses than men. Male speakers increase from an average of two with other men to four with women while female speakers also double their average usage from three with men to six with other women. Speakers appear to recognize that women prefer active listenership to total silence.

This harks back to Zimmerman & West's (1975) findings that men control the topic of a conversation by delaying minimal responses. Certainly my data seem to indicate that men are aware of women's preference for minimal responses and were they inclined to control the situation it would seem a logical move to delay minimal responses in order to do so. Since the men in my study showed no such desire for feedback, indicated by their low minimal response figures to each other, this strategy would not apply to them.

Power does seem to be a factor which influences men but not women in my study of minimal responses, as their reactions to myself indicate. However, this seems to be neutralized by what may be a more important factor - the influence of your partner's attitude and actions. It appears that people may react to their partner's use of minimal responses, hence the high proportion of high minimal response users in the same pair and the levelling of minimal responses in mixed pairs where men increase and women decrease their usage of minimal responses. Also the peculiar lack of reaction to my

² My findings regarding narratives are not comparable with Coates (1988b) as her study was made using a group of old friends. Friends could be expected to behave differently to those involved in an interview situation.

status by the males in the mixed pairs may be attributable to their partner's disregard for this. Indeed, these findings fall in line with Giles & Powesland's (1975) theory of interpersonal speech accommodation. Within this theory, speakers adapt various aspects of their speech, such as style, accent, pitch or rate of speech to gain their interlocutor's approval. This is called 'convergence'. On the other hand, 'divergence' is when the speaker modifies their speech in such a way that it dissociates them from their interlocutor, perhaps because of social values or attitude. 'Speech convergence is a strategy of identification with the speech patterns of an individual *internal* to the social interaction, whereas speech divergence may be regarded as a strategy of identification with regard to the linguistic norms of some reference group *external* to the immediate situation' (Giles & Powesland 1975:156). In other words, convergence occurs when a show of solidarity with interlocutors is required and divergence, when speakers desire to distance themselves from interlocutors and associate themselves with some other group. Accommodation within a dyad may be symmetrical or asymmetrical, dependent upon the status and desires of the speakers. For instance, when attending a job interview a speaker may modify their speech to more closely resemble that of the interviewer in order to impress the latter. The interviewer, however, may have no need or desire to modify their speech. The convergence then is asymmetrical. But if the situation was one where conciliatory discussions were taking place and it was to the benefit of both parties for them to succeed, you could expect to find symmetrical convergence, with both parties modifying their speech to a central point. This modification may be either 'upward' to a more prestigious accent or 'downward' to a less prestigious one. Accommodation is not limited to linguistic aspects of interaction such as accent or, in the case of bilinguals, the language spoken. People may also copy the gestures of interlocutors in order, to win their approval. 'The principle of accommodation implies that people show different facets of themselves to different acquaintances but maintain fairly consistent behaviour towards each of them' (Giles & Powesland 1975:180). The theory incorporates ideas from the theories of similarity-attraction, social exchange, causal attribution and intergroup distinctiveness (Giles & Smith 1979:47). Similarity-attraction theory suggest that the more similar our attitudes and beliefs are to those of others, the more we will be attracted to them, while social exchange theory asserts that 'prior to acting. we attempt to assess the rewards and costs of alternate courses of action' (Giles & Smith 1979:47). Causal attribution theory suggests that we interpret and evaluate other people's behaviour in terms Of their motives and intentions. Intergroup distinctiveness theory claims that when members of different groups come into contact, comparisons of personal attributes, abilities and so forth lead individuals to make themselves positively distinct from the outgroup. These four theories offer reasons why speakers may modify their speech and how these modifications might be interpreted by listeners.

Therefore, the male and female speakers in mixed pairs and the high minimal response users who were in the same pairs could be 'converging' their speech styles. In fact, since the tape indicates that I am a high minimal response user myself, all twelve of the high minimal response users may even have been converging with me.

3.1 Conclusion

The use of minimal responses by the participants in my study indicates that there is indeed a difference in the communicative competence of men and women where minimal responses are concerned. Women use more minimal responses generally in same sex pairs, while both sexes use more of the agreement type as opposed to the facilitative or cooperative type of minimal response. This is contrary to the claim by Fishman (1983) that facilitative minimal responses are used in greater number by women.

The findings regarding mixed sex pairs also disagree with many earlier studies. I believe in these dyads there is a convergence of style between the sexes and evidence for this is found in the participants' usage of minimal responses. It is my belief that speakers do tend to converge with the speech of their interlocutor in an effort to show solidarity and to diverge when wishing to dissociate themselves (Giles & Powesland 1975), particularly in the close knit social network of the Army. The 'power' factor was found to influence only men in the analysis of minimal responses. As a general rule, few people are even aware that they use minimal responses until it is brought to their attention. It is here that we find a difference in communicative competence, where there has been no explicit conditioning by our parents and others regarding what is or, isn't 'polite' behaviour.

I hope also that I have shown that language cannot be categorized on form alone but that each linguistic form may have several functions. For instance, minimal responses can **indicate** agreement or simply be a form of encouragement. Each utterance must be taken in **context** and its contents examined in order to discover its function. Studies which deal solely with form and do not consider content and context do not account for the function of the linguistic form being studied.

I began this study with the goal of testing the hypothesis that there are gender differences in speech at discourse level. The analysis of my data confirmed only a few earlier studies, with my findings often being contrary to those of other researchers. It is my belief that the gender differences in the communicative competence of men and women, which are evident in the same sex pairs, are neutralized by linguistic convergence, as illustrated in the data from the mixed pairs. The theory of interpersonal speech accommodation, which encompasses linguistic convergence, has been developed by Giles and several co-authors (Giles & Powesland 1975, Giles & Smith 1979, Ball, Giles & Hewstone 1985, Giles & St.Clair 1985) over the years. Giles et al believe that code variation may be triggered by the listener's social status, sex and age (Giles & Powesland 1975:155). Therefore, when women used the same number of minimal responses with the female interviewer as they did with their female partners, it could be seen as a show of feminine solidarity. On the other hand, when men increased their use of minimal responses with women while women decreased theirs with men, this could be attributed to a convergence of styles between interlocutors.

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APPENDIX 1

QUESTIONNAIRE

Names will only be used for my records.
 All data will be written up using interviewee numbers to ensure anonymity.
 The interview will be taped to facilitate analysis.

NAME _____

INTERVIEWEE NUMBER. _____

This study deals with language and gender. You will be asked your opinion of a current issue in this area. The following details are required to ensure that the interviewees all share a common background.

SEX: MALE/FEMALE

AGE: _____

RANK: _____

FATHER'S OCCUPATION _____

MOTHERS OCCUPATION _____

STATE AND CITY/TOWN OF ORIGIN _____

NATIONALITY OF PARENTS _____

HIGHEST EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION. _____

NAME OF HIGH SCHOOL ATTENDED _____

Thank you for your cooperation.

APPENDIX 2

SAMPLE DATA TRANSCRIPTION

The data in this appendix have been transcribed mainly in the manner suggested by Du Bois, Schuetze-Coburn, Paolino & Cumming (1990). The conventions used are as follows:

New line	New intonation unit
Hyphen (-)	Truncated word
Double hyphen (--)	Intonation unit which has not been completed because of simultaneous speech. This differs from Du Bois et al's use of the double hyphen.
Comma (,)	Continuing intonation unit, usually signalled by intonational, semantic and/or syntactic factors
Full-stop (.)	Completed intonation unit
Question Mark (?)	Question
@@@	Laughter, one symbol per pulse of laughter
Square brackets []	Simultaneous speech
Two dots (..)	Brief pause, 0.2 seconds or less
Three dots (...)	Medium pause, 0.3 - 0.6 seconds
Three dots plus number (...(0.9))	Long pause with number indicating duration in seconds
Single brackets ()	Type of vocal noise
Double brackets(())	Comment by researcher
Capital X	Indecipherable syllable
Bracketted X <X maybe X.	Uncertainty of transcription: the transcriber's best guess.
Dollar sign (\$)	Information regarding the transcription
M62/F62	Male speaker number 62/female speaker number 62
Bold	Agreement type minimal response to partner
<i>Italics</i>	Facilitative type minimal response to partner

Appendix 2 (continued)

F1 AND F2

TAPE 1

INTERVIEW 1

RECORDING DATE: 14 November 1991

TRANSCRIPTION DATE: 8 December 1991

DURATION: 5:40 TAPE POSITION: 0138

- F2: Isn't that all the um like,
 F2: .. yeah all the feminists use that isn't it?
 F2: Somethin' like that I heard the other day we were talkin' about that the other day actually.
 F2: Something about Ms.
 F2: Oh what what was it @@?
 F2: Um no it was something.
 F2: Some kinda,
 F2: ..I dunno,
 F2: Like feminist or something like that use it.
 F2: I don't know what she said.
 F2: She said somethin'.
 F2: Ask Sig Smith when she gets here she'll tell you what I'm tryin' ta say.
 I: Hmm
 F1: @@@[@@@@@@@]
 F2: [I forget what she said].
 I: ((EXPLANATION OMITTED - F1 NOD +TRP; F2 NOD -TRP))
 I: And most people say that they think the people who use it are divorcees [and unmarried mothers].
 F1: [That's what I thought it was for].
 F2: @@
 F1: Not for unmarried mothers but for divorcees.
 F1: That don't want to be Mrs Anybody anymore.
- F1: That's what I thought it was for.
 F2: Oh [I wouldn't know].
 F1: [Unedu]cated person I am.
 ALL: @@@@
 F2: Same 'ere.
 I: It's only personal opinion.
 I: That's all I'm after is sorta what the general population thinks about these things.
 I: In age groups.
 F1: @@@@
 I: XXXXX
 F2: Oh well,
 F2: Miss Ms what's the difference,
 F2: They're all women aren't they.
 F2: That's the way I see it.
 I: You don't feel like you're being labelled with a,
 I: I'm an unmarried woman I'm available tag?
 F2: I never thought Miss stood for that anyway,
 F2: So,
 F1: Just means you're not silly enough to get married.
 ALL: @@@@
 F2: Yeah.
 F2: ...Or sensible enough to get a divorce.
 F1: ((NODS))
 ALL: @@@@
 F1: Married and miserable.
 F1: What's that divorce thing?
 F1: ...[Separated] and,
- F2: [Happy]--
 F1: ..Was it single or,
 F1: ...(1.3) Used to be a saying.
 F1: ...(2.9) Single and sensible married and miserable.
 F1: ..What was the one for separated?
 F2: ...(0.3) I [don't know].
 F1: [Can't think] of it now.
 F2: Beats me.
 F2: So is there any more questions?
 I: Nup.
 F2: Is that all there is?
 I: Yeah, that's it.
 F2: We didn't help you much,
 F2: Did we?
 I: @@@@
 F2: XX here goin' ooh ooh.
 F2: @@@@
 F1: I'm goin' shopping.
 I: ...(3.3) You off home or something?
 F1: Yeah.
 F1: ... Get outa this dump.
 I: ... [Is this]--
 X: [XXX]
 I: Is this,
 I: Are you IETs or is this another course?
 F2: No [IETs]. ((NODS))
 F1: [IETs]. ((NODS))
 I: ... So that you get your first posting?
 F2: [Yeah]. ((NODS))
 F1: [Yeah]. ((NODS))
 I: Where ya goin'?
 F2: Canberra,