Strong female characters and femininity

Exploring feminine language in *Buffy the vampire slayer*

Sanni Ryderberg
Strong female characters and femininity
Exploring feminine language in *Buffy the vampire slayer*

Sanni Ryderberg

Abstract

It is widely accepted that gender is actively performed and a part of identity rather than biology, and that this is where gender differences in language stem from. Researchers have attempted to define what constitutes men and women’s language, and this paper uses some of these definitions to analyse the speech of the main character in the first season of the television show *Buffy the vampire slayer*. This research project investigates Buffy’s use of feminine language as well as whether her language changes when her performance is otherwise more masculine in the role of the slayer. This is done by comparing conversations between Buffy and her friends with conversations between Buffy and her enemies. The results show that Buffy uses some feminine linguistic features but that her speech is not distinctly feminine in general. Her language also does not change significantly when performing the role of the slayer.

Keywords

Feminine language, women’s language, Buffy the vampire slayer, conversation analysis, gender.
## Contents

1. Introduction ................................................................. 2  
   1.1 Background ................................................................ 2  
   1.2 Buffy the vampire slayer ............................................. 3  
   1.3 Aim and research questions ........................................ 3  
2. Literature review ............................................................. 4  
   2.1 Features of feminine language ..................................... 4  
      2.1.1 Topics .................................................................. 4  
      2.1.2 Indirect speech ..................................................... 5  
      2.1.3 Tag questions ....................................................... 5  
      2.1.4 Hedges ................................................................. 5  
      2.1.5 Turn-taking in conversations .................................. 6  
      2.1.6 Empty and evaluative adjectives ............................. 6  
3. Method and data collection ............................................... 7  
4. Analysis and discussion .................................................... 8  
   4.1 Extract 1 ..................................................................... 8  
   4.2 Extract 2 ..................................................................... 9  
   4.3 Extract 3 ..................................................................... 10  
   4.4 Extract 4 ..................................................................... 12  
5. Conclusion ........................................................................ 13  

References ......................................................................... 15  
Primary Sources ................................................................ 15  
Secondary Sources ............................................................ 15  
Appendix A ....................................................................... 17  
Appendix B ....................................................................... 18  
Appendix C ....................................................................... 19  
Appendix D ....................................................................... 20
1. Introduction

1.1 Background

In different languages and cultures, the language of men and women often differs. There are a few languages where men and women’s language is noticeably different from each other, and speakers will use different varieties of the same language depending on their sex, whereas in English these differences are much more subtle and often subconscious (Trudgill, 2000).

While it is easy to assume that any behavioural differences between genders are biological, the matter is not that simple, and it is important to distinguish between sex and gender. Butler, whose work in the 1990’s has been hugely influential in the field of language and gender, suggests that gender is not something one is born with, but is something one performs (Erlich & Meyerhoff, 2014). This means that while sex is determined by biology, gender is instead linked to identity, and gendered behaviour is therefore influenced by gender roles and expectations from society.

There have been many theories on what causes differences in language between genders, but the most influential ones are the difference model (also known as two-cultures model) and the dominance model (Hall, 2014; Bucholtz, 2014). The difference or two-cultures perspective explains that gendered behaviour starts early in childhood, when children tend to interact in single-sex playgroups, where they are socialised into different “cultures” and thereby learn different interactional styles (Hall, 2014). The dominance model, which is part of radical feminism, instead explains differences as results of the patriarchal structures of society, where men and men’s language are considered the norm and therefore have higher status, making women and women’s language deviants, resulting in their lower status (Hall, 2014).

One scholar who has written about this devaluation of women’s language as a result of the existing social structures that put men in positions of power and therefore in higher ranking than women is Robin Lakoff. In the text Language and Woman’s Place, she writes about her own observations on the differences between men and women’s language. She states that women’s language can be characterised by things like more frequent use of hedges, politeness and indirectness, and the use of certain kinds of adjectives that a man would likely be ridiculed for using. She also makes the point that “These words aren’t, basically, ‘feminine’; rather, they signal ‘uninvolved’, or ‘out of power’” (Lakoff 1973, p. 53), indicating that it is not necessarily only women who use “women’s language”, but anyone who has a lower social status or does not conform to the male norms.

It is probable that these linguistic features would then be found in films and television, as, although being constructed and not spontaneous, the speech of fictional characters mirrors real life. As Lakoff (1973, p. 46) puts it: “In some ways the speech heard, e.g., in commercials or situation comedies on television mirrors the speech of the television-watching community: if it did not . . . it would not succeed.”
1.2 *Buffy the vampire slayer*

The cult classic television show *Buffy the vampire slayer* was first aired in 1997, and has since, in addition to gaining a large following and fan base, also inspired a considerable amount of academic research – so much, in fact, that it has its own academic journal, *Slayage*, which was created by the Whedon Studies Association, named after the show’s writer, Joss Whedon. *Slayage* includes articles on other works by Whedon, but the vast majority has been written on Buffy. The show has often been called feminist, and in the earlier seasons the vampires can be seen as a metaphor for patriarchy, letting the girl who, in a typical horror film-trope, would normally be a helpless victim fight back against it (see Chandler, 2003). Whedon says about the idea behind the show that:

> It was pretty much the blond girl in the alley in the horror movie who keeps getting killed . . . I felt bad for her, but she was always more interesting to me than the other girls. She was fun, she had sex, she was vivacious. But then she would get punished for it. Literally, I just had that image, that scene, in my mind, like the trailer for a movie — what if the girl goes into the dark alley. And the monster follows her. And she destroys him. (Quoted by Udovitch, 2000)

In some ways then, *Buffy* aims to take the reoccurring tropes from film and television about high school students, and turn them around. Because the show has been praised as being very feminist, and Buffy in turn has been branded a strong female character, it could be interesting to see whether her strength is defined by traditional masculinity, or if she instead is strong despite her femininity. It could be argued that the latter option would be more feminist, as letting a woman be powerful and strong without needing to conform to male norms better corresponds with the idea that inequality exists because of patriarchal structures in society, and that women conforming to patriarchal norms does not help in reducing gender differences, because masculinity remains the norm and therefore retains its higher status.

This argument is based on the ideas of radical feminism, as defined by Bucholtz (2014), which seeks to reach equality by eliminating existing patriarchal structures, so no one identity is valued higher than another. Liberal feminism, on the other hand, would not agree with this view, as it does not seek to change the existing structures in society, but instead aims to work toward equality by allowing women to enter male-dominated spheres, which typically means that they need to conform to male norms by performing masculinity and downplaying their femininity, which in turn leaves any women, or people of other identities who do not conform to these standards, in the same position of lower status they are currently in. According to Bucholtz (2014), the values of liberal feminism are shared by many self-proclaimed non-feminists, and therefore many feminists would not call it “real” feminism.

1.3 Aim and research questions

In the show Buffy’s status as a slayer is often referred to as being her destiny, as she is “the chosen one” and has no choice in whether to fulfil those duties or not. It is also referred to as a job, which is the perspective Buffy tends to take, as she works hard to try to live a normal life while also being the slayer. It could be argued then, that being the slayer is Buffy’s professional identity, and it is reasonable to assume that this may
differ from her personal identity. As some previous research has shown, working in a
gendered occupation often causes employees to seemingly perform another gender, such
as male nurses appearing to perform femininity, because that is what is required of them
in that work role and in the community of practice that is the workplace (see McDowell,
2015). In this case, the line between her personal and professional identity is quite
blurry, and they keep overlapping despite her attempts to keep them separate. These
differing identities would be likely to result in her behaviour changing depending on the
situation and which identity needs to be performed at that moment.

Being the chosen one entails certain “super powers”, such as superhuman strength,
agility, and reflexes, which are required, as the job description inevitably includes
violence. While slayers are always female, the traits required in a slayer are typically
associated with masculinity, and so it is plausible to draw the conclusion that Buffy’s
behaviour might change and be less feminine when performing the role of the slayer.
Through a qualitative study of a sample of dialogues this paper aims to answer the
following research questions:

- Does Buffy’s use of feminine language in the first season change depending on
  the situation and the people she interacts with?
- Does her performing the role of the slayer make her language less feminine?

If Buffy does perform masculinity in her role as the slayer, that does not automatically
make the show non-feminist, as that also depends on other factors, such as the way in
which other women are portrayed on the show. The aim of this paper is not to decide
the feminist status of the show, but simply to see in what ways Buffy is a strong
character, and if that strength can be detected in her language use. This can contribute to
the discussion on whether the show is feminist, but further research is needed before
such claims can be made.

2. Literature review

2.1 Features of feminine language

There has been plenty of, often conflicting, research on what constitutes female or male
language. While it is hard to define what could be categorised as feminine, there exists
some form of consensus on linguistic features that are typically read as such. What most
of these features have in common, and keep coming back to, is politeness, as a higher
level of politeness is expected from women than from men (Lakoff, 2004). Here follow
some features of language that have been labelled as being feminine, or “women’s
language”.

2.1.1 Topics

Women and men will usually speak about different topics, especially in same-sex
interactions (Coates, 2013). According to Lakoff (2004), women use a larger variety of
words related to their interests, so they would, for instance, be more likely to use a
larger range of words to describe colours than men would, since that kind of knowledge
is associated to traditionally female interests, which men would typically consider to be
“trivial” information.
2.1.2 Indirect speech

Speaking in an indirect manner allows the speaker to not commit fully to what they are saying, thereby minimising the risk of a potential conflict. Indirect speech can be insinuating one thing by saying another, such as the statement “It’s cold in here”, which could mean, for instance, that the speaker would like somebody to close a window (Tannen, 1993).

2.1.3 Tag questions

A tag question is a question added to the end of a declarative statement, and again, by not making direct assertions, the speaker avoids getting into a possible conflict. Lakoff (1973, p. 54) explains a tag question as a “midway between an outright statement and a yes-no question: it is less assertive than the former, but more confident than the latter”.

Bonvillain (1993) brings up different kinds of tags, as simply calling all tag questions feminine is not accurate. Studies have shown that women do not necessarily use tag questions more frequently than men, and so the matter needed some closer analysing.

There are modal tags, and these have been found to be used equally by men and women. A modal tag is used to “request information from the addressee or request the latter confirm a statement about which the speaker is unsure”, and Bonvillain explains that it is more speaker oriented, as it “[supplements] the speaker’s knowledge” (1993, p. 194).

An affective tag, on the other hand, is addressee oriented, “indicating the speaker’s interest in or concern for addressees” (Bonvillain, 1993, p. 194). Some affective tags can mitigate the force of a command or criticism, as in Bonvillain’s (1993, p.194) examples: “Open the door for me, could you?” and “You’re driving rather fast, aren’t you?”. Affective tags are more often used by women.

A facilitative tag indicates “the speaker’s desire to engage [the] addressee in continuing conversation”, and an example of this is “Still working hard at your office, are you?” (Bonvillain, 1993, p. 194).

2.1.4 Hedges

Hedges are mitigating words, or as Bonvillain puts it, they are “words whose meaning implicitly involves fuzziness” (1993, p. 62). The use of hedges signals uncertainty or lack of confidence in what the speaker is saying, and is yet another way for them to not commit to their statement (Lakoff, 2004 [1975]; Coates, 2013).

Lakoff (2004) states that there are three ways in which hedges are used, of which two are “legitimate” or “justifiable”. The first is when the speaker is actually uncertain about their statement, and the second when the hedge is used as a politeness strategy to “[mitigate] the possible unfriendliness or unkindness of a statement” (Lakoff, 2004, p. 79). The third way in which Lakoff explains a hedge is sometimes used, which according to her is not justifiable, is when it is not used due to uncertainty or for politeness, but is used more as an apology of having made an assertion at all. Lakoff claims that hedges are more commonly used in this way by women than men, and she adds that it is “precisely because they are socialized to believe that asserting themselves
strongly isn’t nice or ladylike, or even feminine” (p. 79). Examples of hedges are sort of, perhaps, essentially, I think, and you know.

Lakoff also brings up “the intensive ‘so’”, where the word so would be used in place of absolute superlatives, such as really and very, in order to express strong feelings about something without expressively stating how strong (Lakoff, 1973 & 2004). For instance, someone might say “I like him so much” instead of “I like him very much” (Lakoff, 2004). Because this is yet another way for a speaker to not commit fully to an assertion they are making, the intensive “so” tends to be more commonly used by women.

2.1.5 Turn-taking in conversations

Previous research has suggested that men are socialised into a more competitive way of talking, whereas women learn to speak in a more cooperative style. When it comes to patterns for turn-taking in conversation, women have been found to prefer more collaborative patterns, while men tend to prefer “one-at-a-time patterns” (Coates, 2013, p. 5).

These differences can be seen in the forms of interruption that men and women typically use. As men prefer a one-at-a-time conversational floor, they expect to speak without anyone else speaking on their turn, and if that happens it is considered an interruption, and a violation of the turn-taking rules of that conversation (Coates, 2013).

In a collaborative conversational style, however, the floor is occupied, or shared, by all participants at once, and therefore they can speak at the same time as someone else without it being considered a violation or an interruption. Overlapping is common in a collaborative conversational style, but is avoided on a one-at-a-time floor (Coates, 2013).

2.1.6 Empty and evaluative adjectives

Another feature of women’s language that Lakoff (1973) brings up is the use of certain kinds of adjectives that do not add substance to the sentence or that express and emphasise the speaker’s admiration of something. According to her, women seem to use more nuance and variation in the adjectives they use, whereas men stick to standard forms. Contrast, for example, the word great, which is neutral, to the word divine, which is considered feminine.

In addition to these different features of language, there are several others that have been branded as feminine, among them the common stereotype of women being more talkative than men, but this has been disproven in practice, and the opposite has been found to be true (Bonvillain, 1993). The abovementioned features are, however, the ones that have been brought up the most in previous research.

To summarize, it could be argued that most of these features relate back to the expectation of politeness from women. Being indirect, using hedges to soften assertions and cooperative interruptions all serve to avoid causing conflict and building rapport in order to create a more pleasant interaction for all participants in the dialogue.
3. Method and data collection

The data for the research project was gathered from transcripts from the show *Buffy the vampire slayer* accessed via http://www.buffyworld.com. The episodes were a selection from the first season, as it should be representative of what the writer wanted to accomplish with the show. The first season seems to be an allegory of fighting back against the patriarchy, and this is clearly the predominant theme, whereas later seasons have more layers and deal with many different themes in addition to this (Chandler, 2003). While vampires and other monsters representing aspects of patriarchy can be applied to the show in its entirety, this theme is most prevalent in the first few seasons.

In order to analyse Buffy’s speech and see if there were any significant changes depending on the context, a selection of dialogues of Buffy’s interactions with other characters were used for conversation analysis. The characters with whom Buffy interacts in these dialogues were categorised as either friends or enemies. As these definitions can change and overlap throughout the show, I defined an enemy as someone who Buffy, at that point in the story, was actively fighting or working against, and who served as an antagonist in that episode. This definition made Angel, who was normally a friend or love interest, an enemy in one of the selected extracts. A friend, on the other hand, was defined as someone who, at that point in the story, belonged to the group of people who were helping Buffy in her quest as the slayer, or were part of the people closest to her at that point in her life. This excluded acquaintances and characters who only featured in one episode as a part of its story arc.

The dialogues were all at least 10 lines long, and a total of eight dialogues were selected, of which four were interactions with enemies, and four were interactions with friends. Two of each type are analysed in closer detail in this essay, and the remaining four dialogues are found in the appendixes.

A few different factors impacted the selection of dialogues. Firstly, throughout the first season, there were very few interactions between Buffy and her enemies where the conversations extended past a couple of sentences, as most of these interactions consisted of fighting sequences and witty one-liners. This considerably narrowed down useful dialogues of this kind.

Secondly, there were several episodes with plots that had the characters behaving uncharacteristically, usually because of spells or curses, and dialogues from those episodes were not included in the sample, as their speech in those cases would not be representative of the character. This further narrowed down the selection, and left only four eligible dialogues of Buffy interacting with enemies, all of which were used for analysis.

After excluding all episodes that did not qualify, including the first episode of the season due to the characters not yet knowing each other, and thereby not matching the definition of a friend, there were six episodes from which to choose dialogues between Buffy and her friends. The four extracts used for this study were taken from different episodes for more variety in topics being discussed.
The extracts from the transcripts were checked against the show to ensure their accuracy.

4. Analysis and discussion

If anything was omitted or changed within the transcripts, it was marked with square brackets. Changes were made to shorten the extracts and omit text that is not relevant to the analysis, such as long descriptions of action sequences, but no dialogue was deleted. Before each extract there is a brief description of the scene and characters.

4.1 Extract 1

Season 1, Episode 1: Welcome to the Hellmouth

Context: Buffy turns up at the vampires’ lair to save her friends. Darla and Thomas are vampires, and therefore Buffy’s enemies. Xander is Buffy’s friend.

01 Buffy: Well, this is nice. I-it’s a little bare, but a dash of paint, a few throw pillows... call it home!
02 Buffy moves behind the coffin to draw the vampires away from the others.
03 Darla: Who the hell are you?
04 Buffy: You mean there’s actually someone in this town who doesn’t know already? Whew, that’s a relief, I’m telling you! Having a secret identity in this town is a job of work.
05 Xander: Buffy, we bail now, right?
06 Thomas: Not yet!
07 Buffy: Okay, first of all, what's with the outfit? Live in the now, okay? You look like DeBarge!
08 The vampires close in on her. She turns to Darla.
09 Darla: Okay, first of all, what's with the outfit? Live in the now, okay? You look like DeBarge!
10 Buffy: Now, we can do this the hard way, or... well, actually there’s just the hard way.
11 Darla: That’s fine with me!
12 Buffy: Are you sure? Now, this is not gonna be pretty. We’re talking violence, strong language, adult content...
13 [Brief action sequence, Buffy kills Thomas]
14 Buffy: See what happens when you roughhouse?
15 Darla: He was young and stupid!
16 Buffy: Xander, go!
17 Darla: Don’t go far!
18 [Fighting sequence between Buffy and Darla]
19 Buffy: You know, I just wanted to start over. Be like everybody else. Have some friends, y’know, maybe a dog... But, no, you had to come here, you couldn’t go suck on some other town.
20 Darla: Who are you?
21 Buffy: Don’t you know?
On line 1, Buffy uses the mitigating hedge *a little*, which functions to mitigate her statement about the place, even though her comment is sarcastic, which means that her politeness is faked.

On line 10, Buffy insults the vampire for her poor fashion choices, insinuating that her clothes are out-dated. This can be categorised as Buffy expressing femininity, as fashion is considered a feminine interest and, therefore, making an evaluative comment on another person’s fashion sense, especially when it is intended as an insult, would be more likely to come from a woman or an otherwise more feminine character. She uses the tag *okay* to turn the imperative “live in the now” into a question. The tag is addressee-oriented, but does not invite a response, which is why it most closely resembles an affective tag. While it makes the imperative somewhat less direct as well as includes the addressee more in the conversation, it seems that its main purpose is to confirm that the addressee is still following the conversation. The line is, however, ended with a direct assertion and, on the whole, it does not come across as distinctly feminine, other than in the mentioning of fashion.

On lines 24 and 25, Buffy uses the hedge *you know*, which is one of the hedges Lakoff (1975) uses as an example for signalling uncertainty or mitigating an assertion. In this context, however, the hedge is neither mitigating, apologetic nor signalling uncertainty, but it works more like a tag question. Holmes (1986) has done some closer research on the use of *you know* in women’s and men’s speech, distinguishing between different ways of using this hedge. On line 24, when *you know* appears in the initial position of the utterance, its function is to get the addressee’s attention by “acting as a prestarter which gets the floor” (Holmes, 1976, p. 6). It signals that that the speaker’s turn is starting, and gets the attention of the addressee. On line 25, the *you know* appears in a medial position, and in this context it seems to be *attributive*, which Holmes says “can be paraphrased as ‘I’m confident you know the kind of thing I mean’” (1986, p. 9), and its function here seems to be to check if the addressee is still following. Holmes explains that *you know* is a verbal filler, but in contrast to other verbal fillers such as *sort of, I mean* and *well*, which all allow the speaker some time to pause and think, *you know* is addressee-oriented and more interactive, making it a “positive politeness” strategy. Therefore, despite signalling certainty, it is more commonly used by women, as it is a way to make speech more polite, and it also links back to the theory about women being more cooperative in discourse.

Despite interacting with an enemy, Buffy is still using what could be categorised as politeness strategies in this interaction, making some of her speech feminine. Most of her dialogue is not distinctly feminine, though, but is instead fairly direct and assertive.

**4.2 Extract 2**

Season 1, Episode 7: Angel

Context: Darla is a vampire, and an enemy of Buffy’s. Buffy has just encountered Angel (her love interest) for the first time since learning that he is a vampire and, at this
point in time, does not know whether he is “good” or “bad”. Darla appears in the middle of their interaction.

01 Darla: Do you know what the saddest thing in the world is?
02 Buffy: Bad hair on top of that outfit?
03 Darla: To love someone who used to love you.
04 Buffy: (looks at Angel) You guys were involved?
05 Darla: For several generations.
06 Buffy: Well, you been around since Columbus, you are bound to pile up a few ex’s. You’re older than him, right? Just between us girls, you are looking a little worn around the eyes.
09 Darla: (smiles) I made him. There was a time when we shared everything, wasn’t there Angelus? You had a chance to come home, to rule with me in the Master’s court for a thousand years, but you threw that away because of her. You love someone who hates us. You’re sick. And you’ll always be sick. And you’ll always remember what it was like to watch her die. (smiles) You don’t think I came alone, do you?
15 Buffy: I know I didn’t.
16 She kicks the bow up into her hands and aims it at Darla.
(Thompson, 1997c)

On line 2 Buffy, once again, makes an insulting comment about Darla’s appearance, or more specifically her fashion choices, which can be considered a feminine topic of conversation. This is a reoccurring phenomenon throughout the dialogues between Buffy and her enemies, which is discussed in closer detail later in this paper.

On line 7 Buffy makes a comment on Darla’s age and, once again, relates it back to her appearance. She uses the tag right, which is a modal tag, and hence is not gendered; the purpose of this tag is simply for the addressee to confirm the previous statement “You’re older than him” which, according to Bonvillain (1993), is the type of tag question used equally by men and women. Buffy then uses the mitigating hedge a little, which does soften the statement, but the intent behind the comment is still obvious; it is clearly an insult. Much like in extract 1, Buffy seems to be pretending to be polite, even though it is very clear to both parties that her politeness is not genuine.

4.3 Extract 3
Season 1, Episode 8: I, Robot … you, Jane

Context: Buffy and Willow are in the school’s computer lab. Willow has just told Buffy about a boy she has been talking to online.

01 Willow: It’s him! (types to get the message)
02 Message: I’m thinking of you.
03 Willow: He’s so sweet!
04 Buffy: (nods) He’s a sweetie. (smiles nervously)
Willow: What should I write back?
Buffy: (cautiously) Uh, Willow, I think it’s really great that you have this cool pen pal, but don’t you think you’re kinda rushing all into this? Y’know what I mean?
Willow: (excitedly) ‘I’m thinking of you, too!’ (crestfallen) No, that’s incredibly stupid!
Buffy: Will, down girl! Let’s focus here, okay? What do you actually know about this guy?
Willow: (disappointed) Oh, see, I knew you’d react like this.
Buffy: Like what? […] I just wanna make sure you’re careful, that’s all.
 […]
Willow: Buffy...
Buffy: He could be different than you think.
[Cuts to a different scene, away from Willow and Buffy, and back.]
Willow: His name is Malcolm Black, he’s eighteen, he lives in Elmwood, which is about eighty miles from here, and he likes me!
Buffy: Short, tall, skinny, fat?
Willow: Why does everything have to be about looks?
Buffy: Not everything, but some stuff is. I mean, what if you guys get really, really intense, and then you find out that he... has... a hairy back?
Willow: Well, no! Uh, he doesn’t talk like somebody who would have a hairy back. And anyways, that stuff doesn’t matter when you really care about each other. Maybe I’m not his ideal either.
Buffy: Hey, I’m just trying to make sure that he’s good enough for you. I think it’s great that you met someone.
(Thompson, 1997d)

On line 4 Buffy uses the word sweetie, which is a repetition of Willow’s previous line “He’s so sweet!” The word sweet, used in this context, fits under Lakoff’s (1973) category of feminine adjectives, even though Buffy turns it into a noun. Her repetition of Willow’s words shows that she is listening and also shows agreement, which builds rapport between them and creates a collaborative floor. This politeness and the confirmation of Willow’s statement through repetition might be a way for Buffy to soften the impact of the concerns she voices starting on line 6, as it seems that she is trying to approach the subject carefully, without hurting or angering Willow. On line 6, Buffy once again gives Willow some affirmation before she voices her criticism, which she presents through questions, making her statements about her concerns more indirect. By reformulating her criticism into the question “don’t you think”, it comes across less direct and aggressive. It functions as a tag question, and despite still revealing the speaker’s opinion, this formulation turns that opinion into a suggestion, which allows the addressee more freedom in reacting to it, as a suggestion does not require agreement. Adding the question “Y’know what I mean?” is a way to request a reaction from the addressee and make sure that they are following the thought or argument.

When Buffy’s careful, indirect approach does not work, as Willow in line 9 completely ignores the questions, Buffy switches to direct speech, starting with “Will, down girl!”
on line 11. The tag *okay* does not function to soften the statement, but is used more to catch the attention of the addressee by asking them to confirm that they are following. After switching from indirect, and thereby more polite, speech to direct speech, Buffy immediately gets the negative reaction from Willow that she was trying to avoid by initially being indirect.

4.4 Extract 4

Season 1, episode 9: The puppet show

Context: A dead body (Emily) has been found in the school. Giles (Buffy’s watcher, a form of mentor) is telling Buffy, Xander and Willow (both are Buffy’s classmates and good friends) about the situation.

01 Giles: (clears his throat) It was Emily.
02 Willow: Emily. Dancer Emily?
03 Xander: Oh, man! I hate this school.
04 Giles: Uh, it must have happened just after, uh, dress rehearsals. There was a cross-country meet at Melville. She, she, she never showed up for it.
05 Buffy: Vampire?
06 Giles: Um, I think not.
07 Buffy: Giles, share! What happened?
08 Giles: (exhales) Her heart was removed.
09 Willow: Yikes!
10 Buffy: Does that mean anything to you? Besides (shudders) ooooooo?
11 Giles: Uh... (exhales) There are various demons which, which feed off human hearts, but...
12 Buffy: But demons have claws. And teeth.
13 Giles: They look back and see the knife being put into an evidence bag.
14 Buffy: But demons have claws. And teeth.
15 Giles: Which more than likely makes our murderer...
16 Buffy: Human.
17 Xander: Did I mention that I *hate* this school?
18 Willow: So Emily was killed by a regular human person.
19 Giles: The evidence certainly points that way.
20 Buffy: No, wait. I-I'm not buying, you guys. Remember the Hellmouth?
21 Giles: Mystical activity is totally rife here. This to me says demon.
22 Buffy: I’d like to think you’re right. A demon is a creature of evil, pure and very simple. A person driven to kill is, is, um, it’s more complex.
23 Willow: The creep factor is also heightened. It could be anyone. It could be me! (gets looks from them all) It’s not, though.
24 Giles: Uh, demon or no, we have some investigating to do. I suggest we start with your... your talent show compatriots. One of them may have been the last to see her alive.
(Thompson, 1997e)
Throughout this conversation, Buffy is consistently direct in her speech, and is not using any hedges or tags. There is, however, a collaborative floor throughout this interaction, where everyone is allowed to come with their own input. The participants of this conversation must establish a collaborative floor, as they need to work together to reach a common goal, which is to figure out who or what killed Emily. An example of this can be seen after line 13, where Giles pauses instead of finishing his sentence, whereupon Buffy picks up and finishes the sentence for him on line 15. Although Giles has not technically finished his turn, Buffy’s overlap is not an interruption in the sense of being a violation of his turn. Had this been a one-at-a-time type floor, or a more competitive interaction, the same overlap would likely have been considered a violation.

On line 18, Buffy once again finishes Giles’s sentence, without it being an interruption. It is not quite clear from the transcript what kind of interruption this is, but upon watching the scene, it is clear that Giles pauses without finishing his sentence with the intention of letting someone else do it for him. His hesitation on this line signals that he leaves the floor open for another participant to take over, which Buffy then does.

5. Conclusion

In reviewing the data, it does seem that Buffy uses certain feminine features of language, even though her speech, for the most part, is more direct. In the extracts used for closer analysis, some feminine features of language could be detected, but in the extracts found in Appendix C and Appendix D, there was no significant use of feminine language. When she interacts with friends, she sometimes uses feminine linguistic strategies in order to be more polite, and to spare the addressees’ feelings, as can be seen in extract 3. When interacting with enemies, however, the same kinds of politeness strategies seem to be used sarcastically. Mitigating hedges, which would normally soften the impact of a statement, are used by her in insults, and thereby do not soften the blow of those insults, as the intention is still to harm the addressee, as opposed to sparing their feelings.

She keeps insulting her enemies by making comments on their appearance and sense of style, which can be seen as a feminine topic, and is not something that would be expected from characters performing masculinity. It should be noted that, among the few dialogues between Buffy and her enemies throughout the first season, there were very few conversations that lasted for more than a couple of lines, as most of those interactions consisted of fighting sequences and witty one-liners. In three of the four dialogues between Buffy and enemies used for this project, Buffy made derogatory comments about her enemy’s appearance in some way. There are examples of this in extracts 1 and 2, and in a dialogue from episode 12: Prophecy Girl, she says: “I might be dead, but I’m still pretty. Which is more than I can say for you.” (Thompson, 1997f; see Appendix A). The only dialogue with an enemy where she did not make comments about appearance was during an interaction with Angel. He had previously been her love interest, but at the time of this interaction, she believed that he had tricked her and tried to kill her mother, which is why he was counted as an enemy in this situation. Insulting her enemies’ appearances or sense of style seems to be a reoccurring element.
in the longer confrontations. Repeatedly talking about these feminine topics could be a way for Buffy to remain feminine in situations where she is expected to be more masculine in other aspects, such as being violent and aggressive, which are typically masculine traits. It might also be a way for the writer to remind the viewer about the trope that he is attempting to turn around, letting the pretty and feminine blonde fight back against the monsters who would normally simply kill her.

Buffy is consistent in her speech style, and while she does use some feminine language, it seems that for the most part her speech is very direct and not very feminine. This, however, does not mean that she is performing masculinity. While her speech is not distinctly feminine, she is allowed to have feminine interests and aspects to her character, despite her job requiring a more masculine performance from her. In reading the extracts of dialogue, it does seem that the other female or feminised characters on the show use more women’s language, but this would require further research, as the focus of this paper was not to analyse the other characters.

In conclusion, to answer the research questions based on the dialogues used for this project, it does seem that Buffy’s use of feminine language changes depending on whom she is interacting with, although not in the way that was expected. She uses some feminine linguistic features regardless of who she interacts with, but seems to be using politeness strategies in interactions with enemies in order to pretend to be polite, whereas her politeness strategies in interaction with friends are actually used to spare the addressee’s feelings. Performing the role of the slayer did not seem to make her language less feminine, but her language was instead consistently quite direct, regardless of the context. While the results of this project can give some insight into Buffy’s use of feminine language in the first season, future studies could explore the masculine aspects of her language as well, which could provide a clearer and more detailed picture of her language use. A comparison with other female or feminised characters could also provide better insight into the matter.
References

Primary Sources

Secondary Sources

Appendix A

Season 1, episode 12: Prophecy girl

Context: Buffy confronts the Master, who is the main villain of the whole first season.

Buffy: I don’t think it’s yours just yet.
The Master turns his head and stares at her in surprise.
Master: You’re dead!
Buffy: I may be dead, but I’m still pretty. Which is more than I can say for you.
Master: You were destined to die! It was written!
Buffy: What can I say? I flunked the written.
The Master growls and reaches his arm out to try his hypnosis on her again.
Master: Come here!
[Cut to another scene and back]
Buffy slowly approaches the Master, apparently hypnotized. He grabs her by the throat again.
Master: Did you really think you could best me here when you couldn’t below? (lets go of her neck)
Buffy: (looks at him curiously) You have fruit punch mouth.
Master: What?
She swings a wide hard punch to his mouth, and he falls down.
Buffy: Save the hypnosis crap for the tourists.
(Thompson, 1997f)
Appendix B
Season 1, episode 7: Angel

Context: Buffy confronts Angel (her love interest up until this point) believing that he tried to kill her mother when it was, in fact, another vampire.

Angel: I’m just an animal, right?
Buffy: You’re not an animal. Animals I like.

(He comes out of the shadows and she aims her crossbow at him)

Angel: Let’s get it done!

(brief battle sequence follows)

Angel: C’mon! Don’t go soft on me now!

(Buffy shoots and misses)

Angel: Little wide.

Buffy: Why? Why didn’t you just attack me when you had the chance? Was it a joke? To make me feel for you and then... I’ve killed a lot of vampires. I’ve never hated one before.

Angel: Feels good, doesn’t it? Feels simple.

Buffy: I invited you into my home and then you attacked my family!

Angel: Why not? I killed mine. I killed their friends... and their friend’s children... For a hundred years I offered ugly death to everyone I met, and I did it with a song in my heart.

Buffy: What changed?

Angel: Fed on a girl about your age... beautiful... dumb as a post... but a favorite among her clan.

Buffy: Her clan?

Angel: Romany. Gypsies. The elders conjured the perfect punishment for me. They restored my soul.

Buffy: What, they were all out of boils and blinding torment?

Angel: When you become a vampire the demon takes your body, but it doesn’t get your soul. That’s gone! No conscience, no remorse... It’s an easy way to live. You have no idea what it’s like to have done the things I’ve done... and to care. I haven’t fed on a living human being since that day.

Buffy: So you started with my mom?

Angel: I didn’t bite her.

Buffy: Then why didn’t you say something?

(Thompson, 1997c)
Appendix C

Season 1, episode 2: The harvest

Context: Buffy, Giles, Xander and Willow are trying to figure out where the vampires’ lair is located.

Buffy: There’s nothing here, this is useless!
Giles: I think you’re being a bit hard on yourself.
Buffy: You’re the one that told me that I wasn’t prepared enough. Understatement! (exhales) I thought I was on top of everything, and then that monster, Luke, came out of nowhere...
She flashes back to the fight in the mausoleum.
Xander: What?
Buffy: He didn’t come out of nowhere. He came from behind me. I was facing the entrance, he came from behind me, and he didn’t follow me out. The access to the tunnels is in the mausoleum! The girl must have doubled back with Jesse after I got out! God! I am so mentally challenged!
Xander: So, what’s the plan? We saddle up, right?
Buffy: There’s no ‘we’, okay? I’m the Slayer, and you’re not.
Xander: I knew yo”d throw that back in my face.
Buffy: Xander, this is deeply dangerous.
Xander: I’m inadequate. That’s fine. I’m less than a man.
Willow: Buffy, I’m not anxious to go into a dark place full of monsters. But I do want to help. I need to.
Giles: Well, then help me. I’ve been researching this Harvest affair. It seems to be some sort of preordained massacre. Rivers of blood, Hell on Earth, quite charmless. I’m a bit fuzzy, however, on the details. It may be that you can wrest some information from that dread machine.
Everyone stares at him. He looks back at them all.
Giles: That was a bit, um, British, wasn’t it?
Buffy: (smiles) Welcome to the New World.
Giles: (to Willow) I want you to go on the ‘Net.
Willow: Oh, sure, I can do that. (begins to type)
Buffy: Then I’m outta here. If Jesse’s alive, I’ll bring him back. (starts to leave)
Giles: Do I have to tell you to be careful?
(Thompson, 1997b)
Appendix D

Season 1, episode 7: Angel

Context: Angel (love interest) is spending the night at Buffy’s house.

Angel: Look, I don’t wanna get you in any more trouble...
Buffy: And I don’t wanna get you dead. They could still be out there. (moves to the center of the room) So, uh, (realizes) oh... two of us, one bed. That doesn’t work. (faces him) Um, why don't you take the bed? Y’know, you’re wounded...
Angel: I’ll take the floor.
Buffy: Uh, no, that’s not...
Angel: (reassuringly) Oh, believe me, I’ve had worse.
Buffy: Okay. Um, then why don’t you check and see if the Fang Gang is still loitering and, um, keep your back turned while I change?
Angel goes over to the window to have a look. Buffy goes to her closet and changes.
Angel: I don’t see them.
Buffy: Y’know, I’m the Chosen One, it’s my job to fight guys like that. What’s your excuse?
Angel: Uh, somebody has to.
Buffy: Well, what does your family think of your career choice?
Angel: They’re dead.
She has finished changing and comes over to him.
Buffy: Was it vampires?
Angel: (faces her) I-it was.
Buffy: I’m sorry.
Angel: It was a long while ago.
Buffy: So, this is a vengeance gig for you.
Angel: (pauses) Y-you even look pretty when you go to sleep.
Buffy: Well, when I wake up it’s an entirely different story.
(Thompson, 1997c)