

Male and female styles in 17th century correspondence:

I THINK

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ABSTRACT

When 17th century personal correspondence was studied, it was observed that women used the evidential expression *I THINK* more often than men. A closer analysis showed that women also used other 1st person evidential verbs as well as the 1st and 2nd person pronouns more frequently than men. This male/female difference was maintained even in different registers, although both sexes have higher frequencies of *I THINK* in more intimate circumstances, such as when the informants are writing to their friends or close family members. The male/female differences in frequencies are explained as a difference in the style of communication. Women's style is more "involved" and interactive: personal point of view is frequently expressed, and both the writer and the addressee are overtly included in the communication situation. Interestingly, similar differences have also been found in Present-Day English.

Researchers on Present-Day English and other languages often report striking differences in the male and female use of language. Some of these differences are so large that they may lead to misunderstandings, not unlike cross-cultural communication situations (Tannen, 1990, 1994:5). Sociolinguistic research on earlier periods also reports differences in male and female language, and gender appears to be one of the most important speaker variables, both for the present and the past. The exact mechanisms and patterns of gender-based variation, however, are far from clear.

The purpose of this article is to explore and explain some observed male/female differences in the 17th century: namely, why do women use the evidential expression *I THINK* significantly more often than men in the Corpus of Early English Correspondence? This article also extends the field of my earlier research on the evidential expression *I THINK*, which is used to signal the writer's point of view, opinion, or belief, as in examples (1), (2), and (3) (Palander-Collin, 1993, 1996, 1997, 1998, forthcoming). The present study shows that *I THINK* was the central 1st person evidential expression in the 17th century language, but several other verbs were also used.

- (1) I cannot but agree with you that a man's best witness is alwaies within him, as to the maine points of apparent vertue and vice, but humors and dispositions, habits, etc., the seeds of both are often *I think* better observ'd by an other then a man's selfe . . . (DUPPA: Justinian Isham to Bishop Brian Duppa, p. 18 (1650))¹

- (2) ... they are exstreme bad councellars that shall excite the King to begin a warr against his people. The first Blowes will wound deep. Ther is another remonstrance comming out from the Parlam^t that runns higher yet. I dare not committ to paper what I have heard of it. I fear 'twilbe seene to soone. *I thinke* we have no Peace makers left.
(KNYVETT: Thomas Knyvett to his wife, p. 105 (1642))
- (3) *I think* you will doe well to appoynt Mr Woodshaw to take order about the providing of firing, candles, spicery and such necessarys, because he understands how to buy them at the best rates much better then Garret ...
(CONWAY: Anne Conway to her husband, p. 229 (1664))

USES OF I THINK

The meanings of the verb THINK can be classified in various ways. The *Oxford English Dictionary*, for instance, presents a detailed classification of nuances, with four major categories and several subcategories of meaning. Aijmer's (1997:10–16) classification of meanings for Present-Day English captures the essential differences that also exist in the 17th century material: 1) 'cogitate', 2) 'find', 3) 'believe', and 4) 'intend'. I am interested in the evidential senses 'find' and 'believe', which cover the majority of the examples in the period. In the 'find' sense THINK expresses the speaker's attitude or opinion (*Believe me, I know him and I think he's crazy*); in the 'believe' sense the speaker is less certain (*He's crazy I think from what I have heard*). By "evidential" I mean the writer's "attitude to knowledge" (Chafe, 1986:262). I have separated the evidential cases from the rest.

The use of I THINK can be regarded as pragmatically motivated (for characteristics and functions of pragmatic markers, see Brinton, 1996:32–38). Rather than simply indicating genuine certainty or uncertainty on the part of the writer, I THINK is used as a politeness strategy in the sense of Brown and Levinson (1987). This model assumes that in interaction individuals aim at maintaining each other's "face": that is, they avoid embarrassment, humiliation, or "losing face." However, if another person's face is threatened, the situation can be remedied with politeness strategies. Brown and Levinson (1987:59–70) divided these into negative and positive strategies. In positive politeness the addressee is treated as an ingroup member, a friend who has some traits or characteristics that are known and liked. In negative politeness, the addressee is assured of his independence and freedom of action, and politeness shows formal respect. It is not difficult to find examples where I THINK signals the writer's approval or appraisal of the addressee's opinion, decision, or action as a positive politeness strategy, as in example (4). In other contexts I THINK can equally well be used as a negative politeness strategy to indicate respect. In example (5), for instance, the phrase has a softening effect, as if the writer did not want to impose himself on Sir Robert Cecil and claim that he must remember something which he may not after all remember.

- (4) *I thinke* you have done well to free your selfe from a businesse of that trouble of perplexity which the reconciliation of those partyes you mention must needs prove to any that shall undertake to effect it.
(CONWAY: Anne Conway to her husband, p. 67 (1652))
- (5) Yowr honor remembers *I thinke* that I once used this comparyson, that knighthood doth impresse a character of honor in to evry parson, how mean so ever, as babtisme dothe a marke of Christianitye.
(HARINGTON: John Harington to Sir Robert Cecil, pp. 81–82 (1600))

The 1st person overtly attributes the point of view to the writer and increases his or her subjective involvement in the communication situation. In both examples (4) and (5) the writer points to her- or himself explicitly with the 1st person pronoun. The addressee is also present in the 2nd person pronoun, as if the writer were intensely communicating with him.²

These classifications are overlapping at least to a certain extent. Alternatively, example (4) could be treated as “deliberative,” expressing Anne Conway’s definite opinion, whereas example (5) is “tentative,” suggesting Harington’s belief rather than opinion (for tentative and deliberative uses of I THINK, see Holmes, 1990). It is undoubtedly important to pay attention to the pragmatic role of I THINK, as this is an area where differences in male and female languages are most likely to occur. In this article, however, I shall not discuss the issue of politeness strategies any further but shall concentrate on the significance of quantitative differences.

DATA

This study uses material from the Corpus of Early English Correspondence (CEEC),³ which contains personal letters from 1417 to 1681. The corpus contains around 2.7 million words of text by 777 different informants. The total number of letters is 6,039, and 20% of the material comes from women (for details of the corpus, see Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brunberg, 1996; Nurmi, 1998, forthcoming). For this study 17th century letters were used. Although 1st person expressions were included in all tenses, the majority (80%) were in the present tense.

The bias in the male/female informant ratio is partly because surviving letters written by women before the 17th century are relatively rare, as literacy among women was low even among social and economic groups where men were generally literate (Cressy, 1980:128, 145). It may be that various archives and libraries have collections of letters by women that have not been edited. (Keränen, 1998:218, discusses the omission of letters to servants in the edition of Sir Thomas Wentworth’s correspondence, such letters being considered less important material.) Many women’s letters contain highly idiosyncratic spellings, and the subject matter often concerns everyday family life, which has not been of great interest to mainstream (political) history.⁴

Most of the letters used are autographs, as this is one of the criteria for inclusion in the corpus. Sometimes letters were written by professional scribes (see Davis, 1971:xxxv–xxxvii). What we do not know, however, is whether the letters were dictated to the scribes or whether the scribes were simply told to write a note on a particular topic. If dictation was the method, perhaps entire phrases and constructions, such as I THINK, were not particularly sensitive to scribal alteration even if minor morphological features were, and thus even these letters can provide valid evidence (see Davis, 1971:xxxvii–xxxix). In some cases, we do not know about the writing conditions or the actual writer, although such letters are kept to a minimum in the corpus. The (non)autograph status is coded in the identification line of each letter in the computerized corpus and can be taken into account if needed.

Letters provide good evidence of the language of past periods in many respects. They can often be dated precisely, and there is no lapse between the time of production and the time of publication as with many other types of writing. They also provide authentic communication between individuals. Moreover, the use of private verbs like THINK among some other features characterizes personal correspondence as a genre close to face-to-face communication (Biber, 1995:284).

The corpus material is used to test differences in male and female styles. I first discuss the theoretical framework of this study and then present an analysis of the data. The factors considered in the analysis include other possible sociolinguistic factors (i.e., stratification and register), alternative evidential expressions (i.e., passive constructions), and other 1st person evidential verbs. The notion of style is explored by checking other features characteristic of “involved” style, including 1st and 2nd person pronouns, possibility modals (CAN, COULD, MAY, MIGHT), and THAT deletion.

GENDER-BASED VARIATION

Gender-based variation has mostly been studied in Present-Day English. The following generalizations have been made by some sociolinguists: first, men use a higher frequency of nonstandard forms than women in stable sociolinguistic stratification, and second, women are generally the innovators in linguistic change (Labov, 1990). Neither of these principles seems particularly useful in this context. The standard language is difficult to define for the period, and since there is no easily definable linguistic variable for I THINK, the only way of making comparisons is through normalized frequencies.⁵

Gender differences have also been found in earlier periods (see, e.g., Nevalainen, 1996:78, for a short summary of studies). Studies by Nevalainen (1996) and Raumolin-Brunberg and Nurmi (1997) reported several cases where women led changes ahead of men, providing some evidence for the second principle in a historical context. Milroy (1992:169–172) separated speaker-level innovations, which may or may not enter the linguistic system, from system-level linguistic

change. In this sense, these studies did not show that women were the innovators but only that they were the early adopters of linguistic change.

Interactional sociolinguists have made generalizations about typical male and female strategies in conversation. A widely reported feature, for example, is that men interrupt women in conversation (Tannen, 1994:55). Holmes (1995:2) claimed that women “use language to establish, nurture and develop personal relationships,” while for men talk is typically “a tool for obtaining and conveying information,” “a means to an end.” Holmes viewed this fundamentally different perception of the purpose of talk as an explanation for a wide variety of differences in the way men and women use language.

Several theories have been suggested to explain differences between male and female language (see, e.g., Chambers, 1995:124–145; Holmes 1995:7–8). Some of them are neuropsychological, attributing such differences to inherent verbal skills, while others emphasize the importance of socialization in childhood. A third type of theory is based on the distribution of power in society. Following this line of thought, the female use of language is often seen as a reflection of women’s powerlessness in society. Tannen (1994:Ch. 1), however, pointed out that any linguistic strategy can serve for power or solidarity, and that the whole situation is therefore complex. Brown and Levinson’s politeness theory also accounted for this, and in their presentation hedges, for instance, serve as both positive and negative politeness strategies (1987:116–117, 145–172).

I have adopted the term “gender,” which is generally used to refer to the social role of men and women rather than to biological sex, although the gender of the informants is eventually assigned on the biological basis. This term emphasizes that male and female roles are defined in social interaction, but nurture and nature are intertwined in such a complex way that I am uneasy about the generalizations we can make about male and female language in different societies and in different periods. For instance, my findings concerning the 17th century language of personal letters are similar to the results of some Present-Day English studies. In both periods women seem to be more frequent users of I THINK and 1st person expressions in general (cf. Macaulay, 1998; Preisler, 1986; Rayson, Leech, & Hodges, 1997). So, is the explanation that women have an inherent genetic quality to express a personal point of view and involvement more than men do or is it that women express politeness in a different way? And why should this be so? Or, do the 17th and 20th century societies assign similar roles to men and women?

I THINK and other evidential expressions as gender-based phenomena

The use of I THINK was socially conditioned in the 15th and 16th centuries so that different social ranks used it to a different degree and in different ways in a corpus of correspondence (Palander-Collin, 1998). Gender-based variation cannot properly be observed for those periods because of the lack of material by female letter writers. Consequently, the focus of this article is on 17th century correspondence,

and gender-based differences are observed and analyzed in the use of the 1st person evidential expressions.

Studies on Present-Day English pragmatic particles or markers, such as I THINK, are the inspiration for this work as they have reported both social class (Macaulay, 1995) and gender-based variation (Aijmer, 1997; Holmes, 1990, 1995; Preisler, 1986). Holmes (1990), concentrating on tag questions and the pragmatic particles *sort of*, *you know*, *I think*, and *of course* in a database of New Zealand speech, found that the overall frequencies of I THINK were not very different in women's and men's speech, but that differences emerged when she analyzed the functional distribution of I THINK in more detail. Her analysis revealed that women use I THINK more often to express certainty than uncertainty, while men do the opposite. Holmes (1990:200) concluded her article by saying that women use language more assertively and confidently than has been acknowledged in earlier studies. Holmes (1995:94) found that women use I THINK as a politeness strategy more often than men and particularly as a positive politeness strategy, "boosting an utterance expressing agreement with the addressee."

Aijmer's (1997:23) focus was on the phrase I THINK in the London-Lund Corpus of educated British English. Her findings did not support Holmes, as she discovered that the overall frequency among male speakers is higher, but that there is hardly any difference with regard to function. The differences in Holmes's and Aijmer's results may be due to a number of reasons. Provided that the tentative (uncertainty) and deliberative (certainty) functions were analyzed in the same way, it seems plausible that pragmatic features such as these may behave differently in different societies and social contexts. On the other hand, factors relating to the context, such as register differences and differences in the social status of the speakers, may influence use, and it is difficult to account cohesively for all of these at the same time.

Preisler (1986) presented a detailed analysis of the expressions of tentativeness, including I THINK, in Present-Day English. The recorded material of the study was produced by 48 managerial, clerical, and manual workers in Lancaster, England (Preisler, 1986:35–36). Preisler aimed to account for stratification in relation to the informant's sex and conversational role; his results suggested that women in general are more frequent users of I THINK, but that social class and age also play a role (Preisler, 1986:168–172, 201–203). One of the conclusions he reached is that "*I think* in 'main clauses' also containing a hedge or a lexical internal modality" is characteristic of women regardless of age and social class (Preisler, 1986:203). Interestingly, other studies on Present-Day English usage have also found that I is typical of girls' speech (Macaulay, 1998), and that I and THINK are among the 25 most frequent words in female speech in the British National Corpus (Rayson et al., 1997).

An analysis of the language of a number of 17th century letter writers shows that women tend to use I THINK more often than men (see Figure 1; see the totals in Table 3 for absolute frequencies). That this observed difference can be explained as gender-based is discussed later in the article.

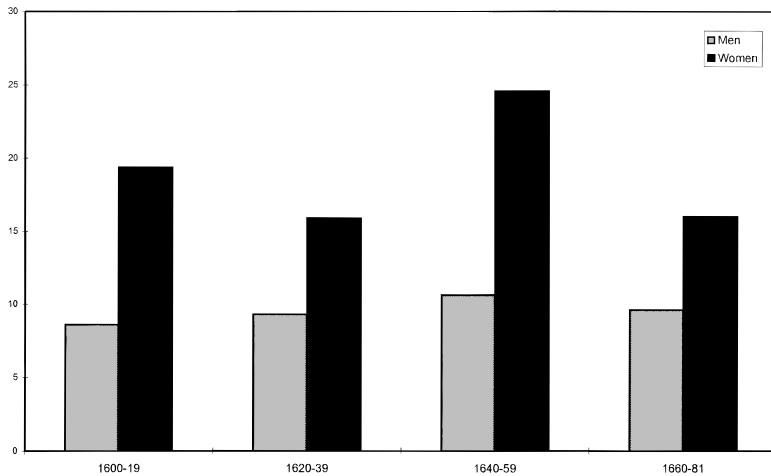


FIGURE 1. I THINK per 10,000 words in the language of the 17th century gentry informants in the Corpus of Early English Correspondence (1988 version).

Male and female styles

Biber and Finegan (Biber, 1988, 1995, 1998; Biber & Finegan, 1989, 1997) addressed register variation and identified linguistic features characteristic of different written and speech-based genres. They also mapped diachronic changes within genres from 1650 to 1990, showing that personal letters contain a high number of so-called involved features throughout the period (Biber & Finegan, 1997:266). Involvement refers to linguistic features that show interaction between the speaker/writer and the listener/reader (Biber, 1988:43). In their analysis, private verbs (e.g., *assume*, *believe*, *doubt*, *find*, *guess*, *know*, *suppose*, and *think*) and the 1st person singular pronoun are important markers of the involved style, among other features (for a list of verbs, see Biber, 1988:242; for the linguistic features in the involved vs. informational dimension, see Biber, 1988:Ch. 6–7, 1995:Ch. 6; Biber & Finegan, 1997:258).

I have chosen to approach the nature of the male/female difference in Biberian terms (Biber, 1988, 1995, 1998; Biber & Finegan, 1989). I argue that the female use of language in 17th century correspondence is more involved than the male use. In other words, women's style is more interactive, and both the writer and the addressee are present in the letters. I have adopted the term "style" from Tannen's "conversational style" (1994:5) to refer to the way the language is used in communication.

Using the statistical method of factor analysis, Biber identified co-occurring linguistic features characteristic of different genres and registers. In his latest work, Biber (1998) re-identified five dimensions of co-occurring features on the

basis of the historical material in the Archer Corpus (1650 to the present) (Biber et al., 1994). In his analysis 18th century letters are placed at the involved end of dimension 1, which is characterized by the co-occurrence of the following positive features: 1st person pronouns, 2nd person pronouns, present tense verbs, possibility modals, THAT deletion, private verbs (see Table 7), prediction modals, general emphatics, conditional subordination, DO as pro-verb, necessity modals, BE as main verb, indefinite pronouns, and speech act verbs. The negative features in this dimension are prepositions, agentless passives, nouns, reduced passive postnominal clauses, word length, past tense verbs, BY passives, and type/token ratio.

In earlier work, Biber (1995:141–145) interpreted dimension 1 as a difference between involved and informational production. The positive features of this dimension reflect direct interaction (1st and 2nd person pronouns), focus on the immediate circumstance (present tense) and on personal attitudes and feelings (private verbs), fragmentation or reduction in form (THAT deletion), and a less specific, generalized content. The use of possibility modals is seen as an expression of uncertainty or lack of precision (Biber, 1995:144). My analysis concerns the most frequent positive features (except for the present tense), and these features mostly relate to the intensity of interaction between the correspondents.

ANALYSIS

Other sociolinguistic factors

Since the social status of the writer and the register affect the frequency of I THINK, at least in 15th and 16th century correspondence, the impact of these variables has to be taken into account (Palander-Collin, 1998, forthcoming). Otherwise, the putative gender-based variation might actually prove to be based on register or social status.

Stratification. To create a situation of stable sociolinguistic stratification (i.e., to minimize the impact of the writer's social status), the analysis concentrates on informants from the gentry, (mostly) below the aristocracy. This restriction could not be strictly applied, as the sample of women would have been too small. Consequently, noblewomen were included when necessary. Many of these women were born into the gentry, and noble status was achieved through marriage. The majority of the women were members of the upper gentry (i.e., members of the families of knights), whereas the men came fairly evenly from the upper and the lower gentry. In any case, these social ranks constituted only a tiny minority of the English population in the 17th century and can be regarded as an adequately homogeneous group. It is generally acknowledged that the basic dividing line in society was between the gentry and the non-gentry, although finer divisions within the gentry existed, and different degrees of gentility were recognized (see, e.g., Wrightson, 1990:23–38). The numbers of the informants and word counts are given in Table 1.⁶

TABLE 1. *The number of male and female informants and word counts of the 17th century material in the Corpus of Early English Correspondence*

	Men	Word Count	Women	Word Count
1600–1619				
Nobility	—	—	8	42,915
Upper gentry	12	28,850	7	5,038
Lower gentry	10	79,064	6	5,781
Total	22	107,914	21	53,734
1620–1639				
Upper gentry	22	86,633	16	48,340
Lower gentry	34	107,112	10	15,216
Total	56	193,745	26	63,556
1640–1659				
Nobility	—	—	2	6,937
Upper gentry	11	41,109	8	88,140
Lower gentry	25	83,024	4	2,226
Total	36	124,133	14	97,303
1660–1681				
Nobility	—	—	9	16,222
Upper gentry	13	68,993	5	6,929
Lower gentry	9	57,067	2	2,531
Total	22	126,060	16	25,682
Grand total	136	551,852	77	240,275

Register. Register is basically understood as situationally governed variation (Biber, 1995:1). In the CEEC coding, registers are differentiated on the basis of the relation between the writer and the addressee. The codes FN, FO, TC, T, and FS are used to mark this relation: FN stands for a nuclear family member (parents, children and spouses), FO for other family members, TC for close friends, T for other acquaintances, and FS for family servants. Table 2 shows the word counts of each register for men and women included in Table 1. The majority of letters by both sexes are family letters (53% for men, 83% for women). Men have more letters in the T (26%) and TC (20%) categories than do women (10% and 7% respectively).

The role of register variation was one of the important factors affecting the use of I THINK in an earlier case study: I THINK seemed to be more frequent in letters written to close family members than in letters to more distant acquaintances (Palander-Collin, forthcoming). Register differences might therefore account for the more frequent use of I THINK in women's letters. Table 3 shows that this is not the case, and that, irrespective of register, women have more instances of I THINK. Chi-square tests were used to test the statistical significance of male/female differences, and the significance levels are indicated in Table 3.

Table 3 does not show a clear difference between registers. On the basis of Palander-Collin (forthcoming) one would expect a higher frequency of I THINK

TABLE 2. *Word counts of male and female letters in different registers according to the addressee*

	T	FN	FO	TC	FS
Men					
1600–1619	49,857	21,213	10,580	25,464	793
1620–1639	19,751	61,816	82,433	25,565	5,746
1640–1659	25,571	40,926	43,897	12,477	555
1660–1681	45,828	27,169	4,637	47,703	—
Total	141,007	151,124	141,547	111,209	6,394
Women					
1600–1619	18,892	3,416	23,521	7,456	—
1620–1639	643	42,282	19,901	—	669
1640–1659	1,798	88,885	5,280	1,337	—
1660–1681	1,817	10,431	5,165	8,149	—
Total	23,150	145,014	53,867	16,942	669

T = distant acquaintances; FO = other than nuclear family members; FN = nuclear family members; TC = close friends; FS = family servants

in letters to family members and close friends (FN, FO, and TC in the table) than in letters to more distant acquaintances (T), but the figures do not show a consistent pattern. Men, in particular, do not seem to vary their use in different registers, although women's letters to close family members do show a significantly higher frequency of I THINK ($p < .01$). This analysis may be inadequate, as it does not take into account social hierarchies between intimates, such as "intimate down," "intimate up," or "intimate equal." Whether the close family member is a spouse or a parent, or whether a friend is a close friend or not, probably affects the results.

For example, Anne Conway's letters to two addressees—her husband, Edward Conway, and a friend, Henry More—show an expected pattern. Conway's letters to her husband contain 27 examples (27.5 per 10,000 words) of I THINK, but those to Henry More contain only 6 instances (11.6 per 10,000 words). The letters to the husband give an impression of a close relationship between the spouses, whereas those to Henry More, a Cambridge intellectual, strike one as friendly but more eloquent and still formally polite.

The informants in Table 4 provide another example of the difficulties of register categorizations. Barrington (Bar) and Masham (Mas), although writing to family members, have the lowest frequencies of I THINK and other similar expressions (private verbs). But a closer look at the actual relationship between the correspondents gives a hint why this might be so: Barrington's letters were written to his mother and Masham's to his mother-in-law. On the other hand, Knyvett (Kny), also writing to a close family member, has a higher frequency of I THINK and 1st person evidential expressions in general, but he is writing to his wife. Although mothers and wives are both close relatives and family members, one

TABLE 3. *The frequency of I THINK per 10,000 words in different 17th century registers according to the type of addressee in men's and women's letters*

Register	T		FN		FO		TC		FS		Total
	Fq	N	Fq	N	Fq	N	Fq	N	Fq	N	N
1600–1619											
Men	8.2	41	8.5	18	13.2	14	6.3	16	(50.4)	(4)	93**
Women	20.1	38	(38.1)	(13)	18.3	43	(13.4)	(10)	(0)	(0)	104**
1620–1639											
Men	12.2	24	8.7	54	9.6	79	8.2	21	(5.2)	(3)	181**
Women	(15.6)	(1)	14.7	62	19.1	38	—	—	(0)	(0)	101**
1640–1659											
Men	6.6	17	13.2	54	9.6	42	14.4	18	(0)	(0)	131**
Women	(16.7)	(3)	26.3	234	(3.8)	(2)	(0)	(0)	—	—	239**
1660–1681											
Men	9.6	44	5.9	16	(6.5)	(3)	12.2	58	—	—	121*
Women	(16.5)	(3)	14.4	15	(17.4)	(9)	(17.2)	(14)	—	—	41*
Total											
Men	8.9	126**	9.4	142**	9.7	138**	10.2	113	(10.9)	(7)	
Women	19.4	45**	22.3	324**	17.1	92**	14.2	24	(0)	(0)	

Note: Statistical significance in male/female differences indicated as follows: ** $p < .001$, * $p < .01$. Figures in parentheses indicate cases where less than 10,000 words were available from a particular register, and therefore these figures cannot be considered entirely reliable.

TABLE 4. *Frequencies per 10,000 words and absolute frequencies of the 1st and 2nd person pronouns, possibility modals, and private verbs in the language of 8 men and 6 women in the 17th century*

	1st Person		2nd Person		Modals		Private Verbs	
	Fq	N	Fq	N	Fq	N	Fq	N
Men								
Has	668	480	379	272	88	63	42	30
Har	576	479	295	245	90	75	33	27
Wen	475	1,327	375	1,049	86	239	35	98
Bar	554	520	256	240	59	55	12	11
Mas	480	372	327	253	91	254	19	15
Kny	685	1,911	160	445	67	52	50	140
Ish	518	608	289	339	113	132	76	89
Pey	493	430	265	231	81	71	46	40
Total		6,127**		3,074**		941		450**
Women								
Stu	759	2,312	360	1,097	115	179	59	181
Rus	704	1,093	355	551	93	282	48	74
Pas	554	979	158	268	67	146	30	52
Har	760	1,659	513	1,120	75	128	57	125
Con	560	958	399	637	101	161	72	115
Osborne	805	1,000	425	527	118	146	73	91
Total		8,001**		4,200**		1,042		638**

Note: Highly significant male/female differences ($p < .001$) are indicated by **.

TABLE 5. *The frequency of I THINK per 10,000 words in letters to spouses, children and spouses of children, and parents and parents-in-law*

Addressee	Men		Women	
	Fq	N	Fq	N
Spouse	13.5	60	27.1	233
Child	7.3	9	16.2	63
Parent	7.6	22	22.7	14

can easily sense a difference between a mother–son relation and a husband–wife relation, which is possibly also reflected in the kind of language used (see Table 5).

Even if attention is paid to the more precise situation of the letter writing and the nature of intimacy between the correspondents, women still seem to use I THINK more often, although individual variation of course exists. The following categories were checked: letters to spouses, letters to children or spouses of children, and letters to parents or parents-in-law. In all of these categories, women

use *I THINK* more frequently. The difference between men and women is statistically significant in all categories according to chi-square tests (letters to spouses $p < .001$, letters to children $p < .05$, letters to parents $p < .01$). Both men and women are sensitive to register variation. Chi-square tests yield statistically significant results at the .05 significance level for men and at the .01 significance for women. Both men's and women's letters to spouses contain *I THINK* the most, whereas letters to children contain the least. I assume that in writing to their husbands women readily express positive politeness with *I THINK*, as in example (4), but a similar strategy of maintaining a relationship is not apparent in women's letters to their children. The results of this comparison are summarized in Table 5. It should be pointed out that Katherine Paston wrote to her son, unlike other women, and that her letters contain a markedly low frequency of 1st person evidential expressions. She also shows low frequencies of the other features tested (see Pas in Table 4).

Alternative linguistic strategies

It has been established that in stable stratification 17th century women used *I THINK* more often than men, irrespective of register. Did women simply express evidentiality more often than men or did men use different means for the same purpose? This is an open-ended question, as other means can include anything from modal verbs to various types of adverbials (see also Meurman-Solin, 1997, for means of expressing point of view). For practical reasons, I have restricted the scope of this investigation to other verbal means associated with the 1st person, such as *I BELIEVE*, *I TROW*, *I GUESS*, *I SUPPOSE*, *I PRESUME*, and *I FIND*. Expressions with the oblique experiencer *ME* were also checked, but they were very infrequent. Such verbs as *SEEM* and *APPEAR* were also used, though very rarely with the experiencer. It is possible that, instead of using expressions that overtly state the 1st person, men preferred means that hide their persona, such as passive constructions, which attribute opinions to people in general.

Passives. Passive constructions with *THINK* become more common in the 17th century, and phrases like *is thought* are used parenthetically. The use of the passive attributes opinions to a larger group of people than just the writer. My assumption was that male informants would use passives more often than female writers instead of overt 1st person expressions, but this was not the case. Both men and women use passives fairly infrequently: men have 1.4 instances and women 1.2 instances per 10,000 words. John Chamberlain, who clearly had more passives than other informants (6.7 instances per 10,000 words), was excluded; his inclusion would raise the male frequency of the passive. The use of the passive construction in Chamberlain's letters may be explained by the subject matter of his correspondence. He was a Londoner writing newsletters to his friends and acquaintances, and his letters dealt with current events in the capital, reporting local news and popular opinion. This topic might trigger the use of the passive, as it attributes opinions to people in general.

TABLE 6. *Informants included in the individual analysis*

	Word Count	Register	Rank
Men			
Francis Hastings	7,182	T, FO	Upper gentry
John Harington	8,294	T	Upper gentry
Thomas Wentworth	27,963	FN/O/S, TC, T	Upper gentry
Thomas Barrington	9,387	FN	Upper gentry
William Masham	7,745	FO	Upper gentry
Thomas Knyvett	27,896	FN	Upper gentry
Justinian Isham	11,736	TC	Upper gentry
Thomas Peyton	8,720	FN, FO	Upper gentry
Total	108,923		
Women			
Arabella Stuart	30,473	FN/O, T	Nobility
Lucy Russell	15,515	TC	Nobility
Katherine Paston	17,656	FN	Upper gentry
Brilliana Harley	21,821	FN	Upper gentry
Anne Conway	15,970	FO	Nobility
Dorothy Osborne	12,416	FN	Upper gentry
Total	113,851		

TABLE 7. *The frequency of 1st person evidential verbs in the language of 8 men and 6 women in 17th century correspondence*

	Fq/10,000 Words	N	Word Count
Men	41.3	450**	108,923
Women	56.0	638**	113,851

** $p < .001$.

1st person evidential expressions. Another assumption was that men would use 1st person expressions less than women. To find out whether this is the case, the frequencies of the 1st person expressions were checked in the language of some representatives of the nobility (women only) and gentry with more than 7,000 words. These informants, including 8 men and 6 women, are the focus of the analyses concerning other evidential verbs, the 1st and 2nd person pronouns, and modal verbs. The total word count for men and women was 108,923 and 113,851 words, respectively (Table 6). In this analysis individual use could be observed, and personal profiles emerged more clearly (see Table 4).

Different 1st person evidential verbs were checked, and the results are given in Tables 7 and 8. Not all the verbs in Table 8 can be regarded as strictly synonymous with THINK; rather, the verbs included refer to different points in the scale of

TABLE 8. *The mean frequencies per 10,000 words of the most frequent 1st person evidential verbs in the sample of 8 men and 6 women*

	Men	Women
Think	8.4	19.1
Know	8.6	11.6
Find	4.3	2.6
Doubt	4.1	2.6
Believe	2.6	5.6
Trust	0.8	2.4
Presume	2.3	0.8
Perceive	1.6	0.7
Suppose	1.4	2.3
Conceive	1.1	0.4
Am sure	1.1	3.1

Note: Other items found include *judge, esteem, take, assume, throw, see, imagine, seem, guess, unbelievably, consider, bethink, am certain, rest/am assured, am confident, am uncertain, am in doubt, make/have doubt, am of opinion, am of mind, have opinion*. The mean frequencies per 10,000 words of these items were less than 1.0 for both men and women.

(un)certainty (KNOW, DOUBT). Of the verbs listed, KNOW and THINK seem to be most frequent (prototypical) in their respective categories.

Women use 1st person evidential verbs significantly more often than men ($p < .001$). This can be seen both in the use of most individual items (Table 8) and in the total use of these verbs (Table 7). As to the individual items, the male/female difference seems to be greatest in the use of I THINK. Moreover, women apparently have a slightly wider choice of items than men, but the difference is small. On average, women use 14 different verbs or expressions, while the equivalent figure for men is 11. Individual variation naturally exists. Francis Hastings, for instance, had a taste for the verb PRESUME, while Anne Conway used SUPPOSE more than the other informants.

A word on METHINKS could be added. The occurrences of this item were also checked, together with other verbs taking the oblique form ME or TO ME as the experiencer. As mentioned, these were infrequent on the whole, and the occurrences of METHINKS were as follows: Wentworth, 8 cases; Barrington, 1; Knyvett, 4; Isham, 6; Peyton, 1; Russell, 1; Harley, 1; Conway, 4; and Osborne, 1. All in all, men have 20 cases (1.8 per 10,000 words), and women have 7.0 (0.6 per 10,000 words). Although absolute frequencies are small, the difference is statistically significant according to a chi-square test ($p < .01$). One is tempted to conclude that in this case men are sticking to the old, disappearing form longer than women.

Other features of involvement

Besides being alternative means of expressing evidentiality, the 1st person evidential verbs (or private verbs in Biber's terminology) discussed earlier are also

TABLE 9. *The mean frequencies per 10,000 words of 1st and 2nd person pronouns, possibility modals (CAN, COULD, MAY, MIGHT), and private (evidential) verbs in a sample of 8 men and 6 women*

	1st Person	2nd Person	Modals	Private Verbs
Men	556	293	84	39
Women	690	368	95	57

TABLE 10. *The constructions of I THINK*

	1600–1619		1620–1639		1640–1659		1660–1681	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Zero-THAT	40	42	70	50	58	123	50	23
	43%	40%	39%	50%	44%	51%	41%	56%
Parenthetic	19	11	60	17	29	67	34	5
	20%	11%	33%	17%	22%	28%	28%	12%
Other	34	46	51	34	44	49	37	13
Total	93	104	181	101	131	239	121	41

typical of the involved style. Here I present an analysis of some of the other features of involvement, including 1st and 2nd person pronouns, possibility modals, and THAT deletion. Tables 4 and 7 through 10 show that women's letters contain these features more than men's letters. The differences are statistically significant except for the use of possibility modals. Table 10 summarizes these features individually for the informants of Table 6.

Finally, THAT deletion appears to reflect a slightly different phenomenon in the language than the previous features and does not directly relate to interactivity or involvement. Nevertheless, it was an easy feature to check for the entire sample of male and female informants (in Table 1) by using the expression I THINK. The analysis shows that women delete THAT in 52% of the cases, whereas men do so in 42% of the cases. I THINK can occur in a variety of constructions, shown in Table 10. Zero-THAT and parenthetic use are the most common and account for over 60% of the cases for both sexes. The difference in the frequency of THAT deletion between men and women is statistically significant ($p < .05$).

The possible constructions of I THINK are classified into three groups in Table 10. Zero-THAT includes clause-initial cases where THAT is omitted. Cases of *I think that* are very infrequent and account for less than 1% of the instances of I THINK. These are included in the group "other," which also includes constructions with Od+Co complementation (*I think him good*), parenthetical *as* clauses (*he is good, as I think*), and collocations with the adjectives *good* and *fit* (*I thought good to write*). "Parenthetic" includes cases where I THINK is clearly placed

outside the sentence structure as a comment clause without the introductory word *as* (*He is good, I think* or *He is, I think, very good indeed*).

Interestingly, men and women use parenthetical phrases to a different degree. Whereas women have more instances of zero-THAT, men seem to use parenthetical phrases more often (the male/female difference is statistically highly significant at the .001 significance level).⁷ I assume that ultimately this results from gender-based differences in the use of politeness strategies. Men and women may also express certainty and uncertainty to a different degree (see Holmes, 1990, 1995).

CONCLUSION

The motivation for writing this article initially arose from the observation that women's private letters in the 17th century contained more instances of I THINK than men's private letters. The aim was to explore whether this difference could indeed be attributed to gender. After ruling out other sociolinguistic variables, such as social rank and register variation, women still stood out as more frequent users of I THINK and other 1st person evidential expressions.

This quantitative difference was linked to women's style of writing on a more general level. Other features that could be related to a high level of interaction between writer and addressee (e.g., other private verbs, 1st and 2nd person pronouns, possibility modals, and THAT deletion) were then checked. The frequencies of these features in a sample of male and female letters indicated that women's letters contained more of these features.

In conclusion, women's personal letters show a more involved style than men's letters. The writer and the addressee are both overtly included in the communication situation, and the writer's personal attitude is frequently expressed. It appears then that I THINK can be used as a style indicator. Interestingly, Biber and Finegan (1989, 1997) identified personal correspondence as a genre characterized by the high frequency of these features, among others. Consequently, it has been labeled as involved production, but, as this study has shown, male/female differences can also be detected.

NOTES

1. References in the examples are in the following format: (NAME OF THE COLLECTION: Writer to Addressee, page number (date)). For full bibliographical references of the collections, see the appendix of Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (1996).
2. See also Halliday's (1985:332–336) treatment of interpersonal metaphors of modality. He places 1st person expressions such as *I think* and *I'm certain* in the category of explicit subjective probability. Implicit subjective probability, on the other hand, is expressed with the modal auxiliaries *will* and *must*, as they express the speaker's or writer's point of view but do not overtly state him or her as the source of the opinion concerning the probability of the proposition.
3. The CEEC is being prepared at the University of Helsinki by a research group lead by Terttu Nevalainen and Helena Raumolin-Brunberg. The team also includes Jukka Keränen, Minna Nevala, Arja Nurmi, and Minna Palander-Collin. The full version of the corpus is not yet available, but the texts no longer under copyright have been published as the CEEC Sampler (CEECs) on the ICAME CD-ROM. For more information, visit our website at <http://www.eng.helsinki.fi/doe/projects/ceec/index.html/>.

4. Minna Nevala, for instance, found a number of previously unedited letters in the British Library written by Letitia Gawdy and some other women of her circle during the first decades of the 17th century (for the edition, see Nevala, forthcoming).
5. Palander-Collin (1998:Fig. 3) gave frequencies per 10,000 words for I THINK in 15th and 16th century correspondence (male informants of different ranks). According to these, the use of I THINK increased from the 15th to the 16th century. The frequency per 10,000 words for male members of the gentry was approximately 3 instances in the 15th century, 14 in the 16th century, and 9.5 in the 17th century. This points to the rise of I THINK in general. However, when male/female differences were looked for in the 15th and 16th century material, word counts for women were small, and no real differences in the frequencies between men and women were found. Consequently, it is difficult to say whether the difference between men and women remained stable during the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries.
6. The word counts in Tables 1 and 2 were calculated using the wp5.1 computer program on different occasions, leaving out certain identification codes. A slight variation in the word counts was noticed; but, as this amounted to a few hundred words at most in the totals, I decided to ignore this discrepancy.
7. The use of parenthetical constructions seems to have increased over time. Palander-Collin (1998:Table 5) showed that in the 15th century I THINK was used parenthetically in 9% of the instances (male informants of different social ranks), while the proportion of parenthetical instances rose to 18% in the 16th century material. I would interpret this process in terms of grammaticalization, so that I THINK was increasingly used as a disjunct rather than as a subject–verb combination governing a subordinate object clause (for grammaticalization, see also Palander-Collin, 1996, 1997).

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