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The weak voice of the witches

A comparison of adjectives
between male and female characters in
Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone
and
Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince

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Contents

1. Introduction	3
1.1 Aim.....	3
2. Previous research.....	4
2.1 Adjectives.....	5
2.2 Gender and language.....	5
2.3 Children's' fiction.....	6
2.4 Language and descriptions.....	7
3. Material.....	9
4. Method.....	10
4.1 Sample.....	10
4.2 Collecting data.....	11
4.3 Excluded examples.....	11
5. Analysis.....	12
5.1 Overall findings.....	13
5.2 Proper names.....	14
5.3 Adjective in attributive and predicative use.....	16
5.4 Premodification and comparison	18
5.5 Adjectives and their referents.....	23
6. Conclusion.....	27
Work cited	32

1. Introduction

Because of my intended professional career as a high school teacher in English I want to investigate how gender is presented in teenage literature. For the purpose of this essay the choice fell on the novel about Harry Potter because it is a popular series of books read by a great number of both boys and girls in their early teens. The teenage period in a person's life is most important for his/her forthcoming understanding of him-/herself as an individual and place in society. The marginalization of certain groups will generate future resignation about the individual's importance and right to be heard in society. Sometimes this kind of marginalization is not even recognized, but taken as natural. Another, maybe unconscious idea is how different words seem to be connected to certain gender groups. Is it a fact that girls' appearance more often are described with words like *Swaying hair* and *glittering eyes* while boys are more often described as just *a tall boy* or the *sandy-haired boy*? It seems to me that expressions like *swaying hair* and *glittering eyes* have a more evaluative meaning and focus more on the girls' appearance as an object while expressions like *a tall boy* or *the sandy-haired boy* only describe the height and hair colour of the boy without incorporating any subjective value into the expression. It is my true conviction that these kinds of descriptions will make young people adjust to the "right" kind of appearance in their search for an acceptable identity and at the same time exclude those who do not fit in these narrow patterns.

1.1 Aim

In my study I will, from a linguistic point of view, investigate if the gender roles in the series about Harry Potter get more stereotyped as the characters in the novel grow older. In the first book *Harry Potter and the philosopher's stone* (1997) the youngest characters are eleven years old, an age when they can still be considered children. In this book I expect to find less difference in the descriptions of the characters according to their gender. In the latest book in the series, *Harry Potter and the half blood prince* (2005), the main characters are sixteen and my hypothesis is that the descriptions of them are now more stereotyped and I expect to find more differences in this book according to gender.

To begin with I will investigate how many of the adjectives that I found in my samples in the two books, HP1 and HP2, that describe male and female characters respectively to see

if there will be any differences in numbers. I will also present figures for how many times proper names are mentioned. They are divided in five groups, one for men's names, one for women's names, one for boys' names, one for girls' names and one for Harry's name since he alone is mentioned very often. The next step will be to investigate adjectives that have predicative use in the clause and those that have attributive use. As I will explain later, these two functions can display gender differences in personal characterization. After that I will present what I have found out about adjectives that are premodified and what is typical of those premodifiers, or intensifier as I also have called them, from a gender perspective. Under the same heading I will present the figures for compared adjectives in my samples. I will investigate if this category displays any differences between male and female characters. Since the material in those categories is very small a quantitative study here would be of little interest. Instead I have analyzed the meaning of the premodifiers and adjectives from a gender perspective. The last category I will bring up is adjectives and their referents. Here I will present adjectives in part descriptions. They are divided in three groups; clothes and other things that could be worn such as spectacles, appearance such as body size and concrete body parts such as hands, feet etc. and abstract body parts such as voice, smile etc.

2. Previous research

In this chapter I will present researches that have been important for my study. There has been some research on the subject of gender differences in children's literature from a linguistic point of view in recent years. Previous research (principally concerning adults) in the field of linguistic gender differences is extensive and also interesting for my study since to a large extent the adult behavior and use of the language transmits to children not only in common life but also through children's fiction. The first part will present descriptions of adjectives that are relevant for this study. The next part will take up gender and language from a sociolinguistic point of view. It will discuss some research about why men and women speak differently. The last part will be about studies of children's fiction and gender differences that have been found in that area.

2.1 Adjectives

This part will present a few descriptions of what an adjective is, its different forms and its relation to other constituents in a phrase or clause. According to Jan Svartvik and Olof Sager (1980: 272) adjectives denote (1) properties such as *strong* or *kind*, (2) quality such as *crafty* or *slender*, or (3) condition/state such as *awake* or *asleep*. Also the preterite verb form such as *interested* and the ing-form such as *shimmering* can be used as adjectives. Rodney Huddleston and Geoffrey K. Pullum (2005: 112) more closely defined the criteria by declaring that adjectives denote properties relating to (1) age, e.g. *young*, *old*, (2) size, e.g. *tall*, *short*, (3) shape, e.g. *crooked*, *snake-like*, (4) weight, e.g. *heavy*, *light*, (5) colour, e.g. *black*, *red* and (6) merit or quality, e.g. *outstanding*, *stupid*.

Huddleston and Pullum (2005: 112) also describe the function of adjectives. They can appear in either attributive use as an internal pre-head modifier to a following noun as in *the pale boy* or in predicative use where they function as complement in a clause structure, as in *he was brave*.

Gradable adjectives can occur in the plain form *tall*, the comparative form *taller* and the superlative form *tallest*. Longer words such as *comfortable* can form comparative and superlative phrases marked by *more* and *most* (Huddleston and Pullum 2005: 112).

When it comes to modifiers nouns and adjectives differ. Nouns take adjectives as modifier such as *outstanding wizards* but adjectives mostly take adverbs such as *particularly famous*.

2.2 Gender and language

In *Language Its structure and Use* (2004) Edward Finegan discusses variations among social groups and states that language varieties are closely associated with our identity as men or women. Some words are more often used by women than by men, for example adjectives like *lovely*, *darling* and *cute* and therefore carry feminine associations. Finegan also emphasizes that women are more inclined to use precise shades of colour like *magenta* or *mauve* (Finegan 2004: 397). He continues to say, that women tend to speak more like a higher social class than they belong to, while men seem to be more likely to use a language associated with lower social classes (2004: 399). One reason for this behavior can be explained by “the Toughness Factor” which implies that language associated with the working

class characterizes a tough masculine behavior and that such characteristics would then be of more value for men than the higher status that comes with a higher social class. This discussion is highly relevant for my study since it shows that gender differentiated language and speech patterns are socially constructed and closely related to our social roles as men and women. These social roles are closely connected to how we expect our fellow humans to be. Boys are supposed to be brave and active and girls are supposed to be sweet and beautiful. These kinds of conceptions are not so easily disregarded, and become visible in the creation of fictional characters in children's fiction, in the shape of stereotyped gender roles. Finegan argues that a number of studies have established language as a central factor for a person's identity (2004: 402) and since gender is closely related to our identity different ways of speaking have developed to distinguish between male and female behavior. If a man wants to speak like a man he avoids female sounding expressions like *adorable* (2004: 403).

Women, Men and Language by Jennifer Coates (2004) takes up four different approaches to language and gender used by linguists. The deficit approach suggests that the language used by women is in some way deficient compared to men's language. According to Lakoff (1975) women more often use "[e]mpty" adjectives like *divine* and *charming* while men use neutral words like *great* and *terrific*. The dominance approach assumes language differences to be derived from men's dominance over women. The difference approach gives a chance to examine women's language without comparing it to men's language. It suggests that men and women belong to different groups in society and therefore have developed different ways of talking. At last the dynamic approach means that gender differentiated language is socially constructed to distinguish between male and female behavior (2004: 6). In this study I will assume the dynamic approach.

2.3 Children's fiction

The awareness of gender inequalities in society has generated interest to evaluate how gender roles are portrayed in children's fiction as well as in the society at large. Sveen (2005: 23) presents Nikolajeva's observation that "description as means of characterization seems to be one of the strongly gendered narrative patterns in children's fiction," since it is "predominantly used to introduce female characters" (2002: 189 quoted in Sveen 2005: 23). A large amount of research has been done on gender differentiated descriptions in contemporary

children's fiction and something highly relevant for this study is Romaine's discovery that "[f]emales appear less often [...], talk less, do less and have more stereotyped roles" (1999: 212). Romaine noted that "the word *boy* and *boys* are more frequent than the words *girl* and *girls*" in Australian children's books and that girls are more often described as "*young, little and pretty*" while boys are described as "*kind, brave and naughty*" (1999: 212). In Hene's study about adjectival descriptions in modern children's fiction (1984) she used adjectives and adverbs of manner to investigate differences in the descriptions of male and female characters. She found that some descriptions of male and female characters respectively are less evident and therefore more treacherous like for example *[g]ood girls, [a] well-behaved and sensible girl* for female characters and *[a]n honest man, [a] bold man* for male characters. According to Hene such phrases display that some adjectives are closely connected with female characters and others with male characters. Hene continues that "[i]t is reasonable to assume that those types of descriptions really influence the readers and their conceptions of how women and men are or should be" (1984: 247).

In my study I expect to find adjectival differences in descriptions of the characters, with boys described by adjectives of actions like *brave* and girls denoted by adjectives according to their looks like *sweet*.

2.4 Language and descriptions

In this part I will present research about male and female terms and the way people label each other according to gender. According to Bäcklund, in her paper about male and female terms in Jane Austen's work, "[e]very society and every period commands a set of terms to refer to the men, women, and children who belong to that society. These terms are used to designate the status, qualities, and doings of the members of society" (Bäcklund 1996:9). Even if Bäcklund's research mostly concerns the language usage of the eighteenth century it holds some similarities with my paper. Children's fiction mirrors the rest of the society and young people are fed with linguistic tools to differentiate people from each other. In my work I will give my attention to the adjectival category as a way to distinguish gender differences in children's fiction.

According to Ulf Magnusson (1996) how we classify and characterize each other the way we do reveals what kind of society we live in. In his paper "Labeling human individuals"

he found that we label people to express their physical or mental properties. Many of those labels are distinctly used either to describe female characteristics or male ones (1996: 93). The kind of label we put on a person has to do with behavior or actions we associate with that person. The adjectival nature of an expression such as *he is a real hero* is obvious since it can be changed into *he is so/really brave* and a *stunner* is a female label for an *exceptionally attractive girl* (1996:98). Magnusson's examples show just the kind of adjectival differences I will examine in this paper.

Idioms are "a group of words that cannot be deduced from those of the individual words (*e.g. over the moon*)" (The Oxford Compact English Dictionary 2003: 553). In Bengt Odenstedt's paper on Idioms denoting persons he gives prominence to how the attitudes revealed in his work are typical for our male-dominated society. He concludes that "[t]he salient features in the male idioms are STRONG and ACTIVE, in the female ones WEAK and PASSIVE" (1996: 150). This is also the kind of differences I assume to find in my study. Hanna Andersdotter Sveen's dissertation "Honourable" or "Highly-sexed": *adjectival Descriptions of Male and Female Characters in Victorian and Contemporary Children's Fiction* (2005) comes even closer to what I want to investigate. Her aim was "to investigate how male and female characters are described in British children's fiction ... by studying adjectives and adjectival expressions attached to nouns and pronouns that refer to characters" (Sveen 2005: 17). Two distinctions between her aim and mine is that (1) she compared fiction from two different epochs and therefore is more likely to come up with greater differences than I am and (2) her data derives from a large amount of fiction written by several different authors while I have focused on one author and only two of that author's works from the whole series about Harry Potter.

3. Material

My intention is to investigate if there are any differences in the use of adjectival descriptions of male and female characters in children's fiction. I wanted a material that is read by both boys and girls, because a text that has a gender mixed audience speaks to both sexes and may form norms of behavior among its young readers. If there, as I suspect, exists such differences as mentioned above it will show that there are different conceptions of and expectations on boys and girls. My choice fell on the novel series about Harry Potter since it is quite current in time and popular among both boys and girls.

The first book in the series is called *Harry Potter and the philosopher's stone* (hereafter referred to as HP1) and the head character is a boy (which may imply that it will be an overweight of male characters). The head character Harry is not aware that he is a wizard in the beginning and he is brought up by his evil non-magical aunt and uncle after his parents were killed by the dark wizard Lord Voldemort. When he turns eleven he is introduced to the world of magic and sent to Hogwarts school of Witchcraft and Wizardry where the main part of the plot takes place. At this school he becomes close friends with a boy, Ron and a girl, Hermione. At this point Harry and his friends are eleven years old and seem to be fairly equal. This is based on my impression when I first read the book and may be proven wrong.

The other book I have chosen is the latest in the series, called *Harry Potter and the half-blood Prince* (hereafter referred to as HP2). Harry, Ron and Hermione have now turned sixteen and the horrible dark wizard Lord Voldemort has returned from a long time of remote existence. His followers gather around him and all good witches and wizards have to get their strength together to fight him. It is obvious in this text that Harry and his friends are now more interested in the opposite sex which appears in more detailed descriptions of both boys and girls.

4. Method

This study will investigate if there are any differences in the description of male and female characters. Since adjectives display a great variety of words that can be used to describe personal characteristics such as *sweet*, *brave* or *intelligent* it is, in this case, the most appropriate word class. I use a linguistic framework and will focus on syntax (grammatical function) and semantics (meaning) when evaluating the different uses of adjectives. In addition I will study the frequency of proper nouns to see if there are any differences between how often male and female characters are mentioned respectively. I will include adjectives that describe the characters as a whole body, such as references to size and height as well as descriptions of body parts e.g. hands or feet and clothes or other things that can be worn, e.g. spectacles. The reason why I include size and height in the same category as concrete body parts, is that size and height has to do with appearance together with body parts such as hands and feet. This division is appropriate since I will divide adjectives that describe appearance in one group and adjectives that describe other things e.g. feelings, condition, state etc. in another group. Properties of the adjectives I will consider are the following: adjectives occurring in attributive and/or predicative use, adjectives that are inflect for grade and adjectives that are modified by adverbs.

4.1 Sample

In HP1 samples are taken from forty pages where most people are introduced and that is chapter six, seven and eight. Each page consists of about 400 words. I have counted the words in the first line of a page and multiplied them with the number of lines of a page and estimated the total sample to 16,000 words. In HP2 samples are taken from forty-nine pages since each page consists of 330 words and thus slightly less than in the first book. The chapters used in this book are chapter six, seven and eight plus five pages due to the fewer number of words per page. I used the same procedure to count the words as in the first book and estimated the total sample to 16170 words.

4.2 Collecting data

Collecting the data was a time consuming and difficult task that involved a lot of decisions. Since the sample mentioned above did not contain very many adjectives I chose to include even the participles where they had a very adjectival function such as *he was impressed*. Participles are usually considered as a problematic part of grammar since they can have the same function as many word classes (Ström later Sveen 1999: 19) The lexical phrase *taken aback* is also included when it can be paraphrased as *embarrassed* or *perplex*.

4.3 Excluded examples

In my study I have focused on adjectives that denote properties describing a person or his /her clothes. Sometimes nouns can function as a premodifier in a phrase and have a function that is typical of adjectives such as *traveling coat* and all such nouns have been excluded from this study. Likewise, compounds such as *invisible cloak*, where the adjective form a compound together with a noun, have been excluded. In such cases I have regarded the phrase as a whole and not its constituents separately and I have therefore excluded such phrases from my study.

Since my purpose with this research is to investigate differences in the use of adjectives from a gender perspective adjectives describing a group of people of different sex e.g. *we have been terrified* are irrelevant for my study and have therefore been excluded. The same procedure has been applied when sex of the referent is not obvious e.g. *well-connected people*.

The initial research on proper nouns only includes names that distinctively refer to people of one sex. Family names embracing a whole family consisting of several characters of different sex, e.g. *the Weasley's*, have been excluded. Since nicknames are rather common in the Harry Potter series they have been counted as proper nouns. For example, the person *Voldemort* is often referred to as *You-know-who* or *He-who-must-not-be-named*.

5. Analysis

This section will deal with the result of my findings. At first I will give information about the division amongst gender in HP1 to get an overall picture of how often male and female characters appear. For this purpose I have counted how many times male and female characters are described by adjectives respectively. Table 1 and 2 provide an overall picture of how the adjectival descriptions are divided between male and female characters.

The central point of this analysis will be on the interpretation of my results of the frequency of adjectives that are used in characterization. The two head categories are adjectives in predicative use and adjectives in attributive use. I will analyze how the results can be interpreted from a gender point of view with help from Hene's study (1984). I will also comment upon my results of adjectives used in comparative constructions and premodification of adjectives and the gender differences that may occur. This part is qualitatively analyzed from a semantic point of view. The third area of my analysis deals with the referents of the adjectives and is divided in adjectives that refer to clothes or other things that can be worn, such as spectacles, appearance and abstract body parts. Appearance includes both where adjectives describe different parts of the body like face, hands, hair etc., as well as the body as a whole (as mentioned in section 4), such as references to size and height. Abstract body parts here include adjectives that describe voice, laughter, smile etc. This part is both quantitatively analyzed with figures for each category and qualitatively analyzed from a semantic point of view. The semantic analysis will discuss the issue of typical male and female descriptions. Female characters are more often described according to their appearance and male characters according to inner qualities such as *mad* or *interested*.

5.1 Overall findings

Table 1 shows how many adjectives that describe male and female characters respectively. In HP1 I found 206 adjectives that describe male characters which correspond to 85% of all adjectives in my sample. I found 37 adjectives that describe female characters, which correspond to 15% of all adjectives in my sample. There is apparently a huge difference between the numbers of adjectives that describe male and female characters.

Table 1. Overall figures (HP1)

Category	Number of adjectives	Number of adjectives in %
All adjectives	243	243 = 100%
Male	206	206 / 243 = 85%
Female	37	37 / 243 = 15%

As can be seen in Table 2, In HP2 the number of adjectives that describe male characters is 212, which corresponds to 70% of the adjectives in my sample, and the number of adjectives that describe female characters is 92, which correspond to 30% of the adjectives in my sample. In HP1 only 15% of all adjectives described female characters, and in HP2 that number has increased to 30% of all adjectives. 85% of all adjectives in HP1 describe male characters but that number decrease to 70% of all adjectives in HP2. The figures in Table 1 and 2 accordingly seem to indicate that the differences between male and female characters reduce as they grow older even if the difference still is considerable.

Table 2. Overall figures (HP2)

Category	Number of adjectives	Number of adjectives in%
All adjectives	304	304 =100%
Male	212	212 / 304 = 70%
Female	92	92 / 304 = 30%

The number of occasions that female characters appear in an adjectival description has increased from 37 in HP1 to 92 in HP2. The corresponding increase for male characters is only from 206 occasions in HP1 to 212 in HP2. Even if the appearance of female characters has increased with more than 50% there is still a huge difference between how many times male and female characters appear in adjectival descriptions. The reason why the occurrence of descriptions of female characters has increased may have its natural explanation in the fact that when Harry and his friends grow older persons of the opposite sex become more interesting. It seems as even though female characters obviously have become more important for the story descriptions of them still take up less space than descriptions of male characters.

Because of the great difference between the amount of adjectives that describe male and female characters all figures, in what follows, are presented in percentage per sex in order to get a comparable result. There has been no dividing of the male and female characters between children and adults other than regarding proper names, which will give an overall picture of the division between adults and children as well as between male and female characters.

5.2 Proper names

I will only briefly touch upon how many times in my chosen sample male and female characters are mentioned respectively. To investigate the number of characters in the books is outside the scope of this study. However, the number of adjectival descriptions of characters found may be an indication of the uneven distribution of male and female characters in the texts. Because of the limited time reserved for this project this is only done in the first book to get an overall picture, and an explanation for the low number of adjectives that describe female characters in this book. I have divided them in five groups, where Harry Potter has a column of his own. If he would have been counted among the rest of the boys the result might have been misleading, since he alone is mentioned to such a great extent. That is maybe not that remarkable considering that he is the head character.

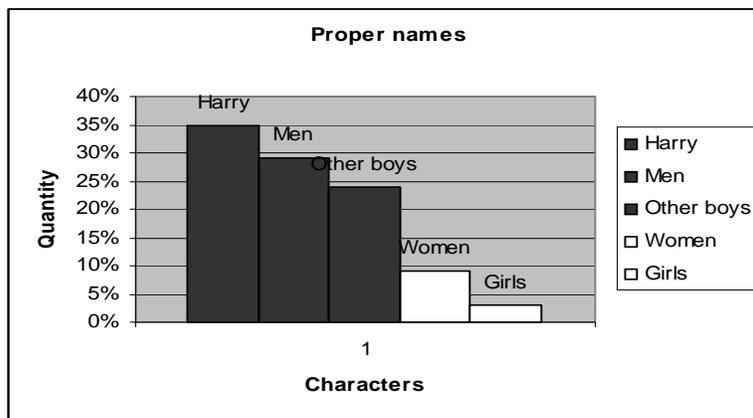
What is remarkable is to what small extent girls are mentioned at all in the book. Girls' names are only mentioned in my sample in 3% of the cases. Harry's name is mentioned in 35% of the cases. Other boys' names are mentioned in 24% of the cases and the difference

between how many times boys and girls are mentioned is, as can be seen in Table 3 and Figure A, huge.

Table 3 Proper names (HP1)

Category	Number of proper names mentioned	Proper names in %
Harry	757	$757 / 2152 = 35\%$
Men	623	$623 / 2152 = 29\%$
Boys	515	$515 / 2152 = 24\%$
Women	193	$193 / 2152 = 9\%$
Girls	64	$64 / 2152 = 3\%$

Figure A



Research has shown that boys prefer to read about boys, while girls might not do that distinction (<http://www.alba.nu>). That could be a reason to why authors mostly write about boys since this might widen their audience. Another reason to the low frequency of girls in children's fiction, from a feministic point of view, might be that in our patriarchal society girls and also women seem to be less important than boys and men. That is a phenomenon which is mirrored in fiction both for children and adults. As I mentioned in the introduction, this kind of marginalization might not even be recognized but taken as the natural order of things. I myself did not react upon this matter when I first read the book and not until I actually did the counting I became aware of it. As will show later the number of adjectives

that describe female characters increases in HP2 compared to HP1 and that might indicate that also the number of female proper names increase in HP2 compared to HP1.

5.3 Adjectives in attributive and predicative use

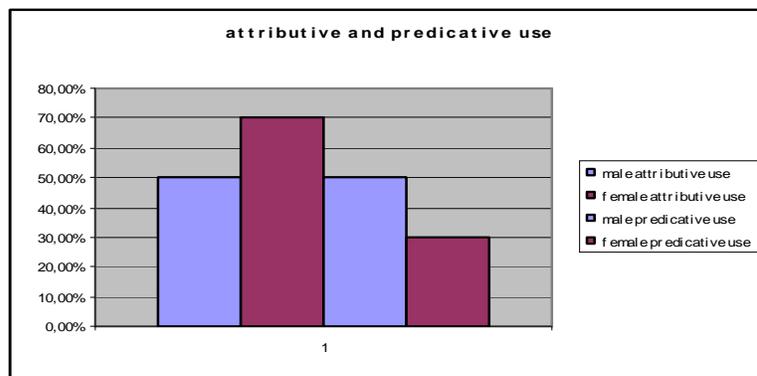
This part of the analysis will deal with adjectives in attributive use and predicative use. According to Hene, personal descriptions can give different weight to the information depending on whether the adjective has attributive or predicative use. She claims that adjectives in the predicative use give more weight to the information since it is presented as something new and noteworthy e.g. *the girl was pretty*. Information given by adjectives in attributive use e.g. *the pretty girl* can be seen as less important since it is presented as something well-known and obvious (1984:30).

In HP1 the male characters, as can be seen in Table 4 and Figure B, are described by adjectives in attributive use and predicative use to the same extent. The female characters in the same book are described by adjectives in the attributive use in 70% of the cases and in the predicative use in only 30% of the cases.

Table 4 Adjectives in attributive and predicative use (HP1)

Category	Male	Female
Attributive	103 / 206 = 50%	26 / 37 = 70%
Predicative	103 / 206 = 50%	11 / 37 = 30%

Figure B



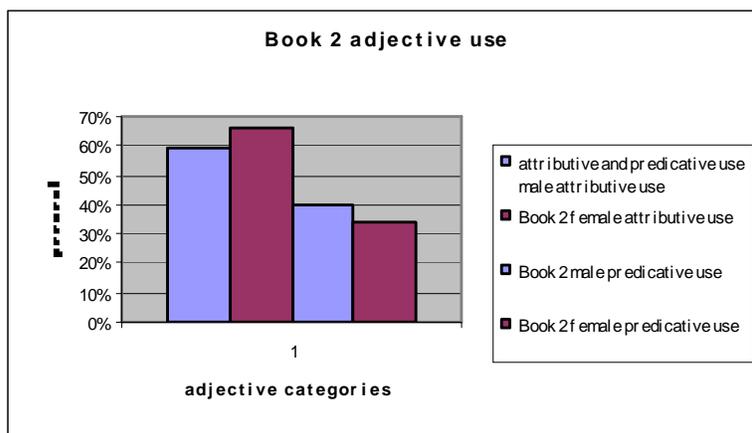
In the light of Hene’s thesis, female characters in HP1 are described in a less important way to a greater extent than male characters. I stated in my hypothesis that I did not expect to find so many differences between the genders in this book but obviously I was wrong. It is interesting that the author has described male characters in a way that indicates something noteworthy, and female characters in a way that is obvious or less important. This result might indicate that female characters would be of less importance than male characters.

When moving on to HP2, the picture has changed. It has become more equal from a gender perspective opposed to my hypothesis that the differences would increase between the two books. As can be seen in Table 5 and Figure C, the difference is no longer as distinct as before since adjectives in attributive use that describe male characters have increased to 59%. Adjectives in the predicative use that describe male characters have decreased to 41%. The attributive adjectives that describe female characters decreased to 66% and predicative adjectives has increased to 34%.

Table 5 Adjectives in attributive and predicative use (HP2)

Category	Male	Female
Attributive	126 / 212 = 59%	61 / 92 = 66%
Predicative	86 / 212 = 41%	31 / 92 = 34%

Figure C



Female characters occur more often in sentences with the adjective in predicative use in HP2 than in HP1. For male characters it is the opposite way around, and they occur less often with the adjective in predicative use in HP2 than in HP1. There is still a difference but it is no longer so striking. Information given about female characters is treated as less important to a greater extent than information about male characters, which support my hypothesis of gender differences in this book.

5.4 Premodification and comparison

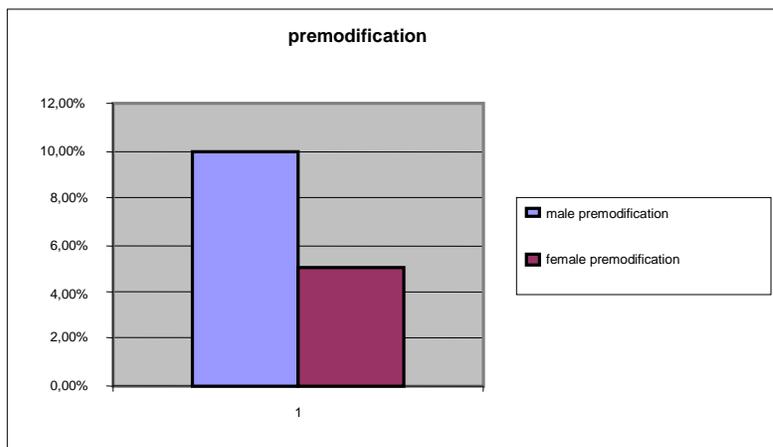
The third part of my analysis will take up adjectives that are premodified or intensified by other words and adjectives that form comparison. First I will consider premodified adjectives. The most common premodifier is the word *very* as in *very nervous*. Other intensifying words are verbs as in *howling mad* or adverbs as in *extremely mean*.

In HP1, as can be seen in Table 6 and Figure D, premodified adjectives that refer to male characters represent 10% of all adjectives referring to male characters in my sample. The corresponding number for female characters is 5%.

Table 6 Premodified adjectives (HP1)

Category	Male	Female
Premodified adjectives	21 / 206 = 10%	2 / 37 = 5%

Figure D



Only two occasions have been found of premodified adjectives that refer to female characters in my sample [*s*]he was ever so pleased and [*s*]he was so happy. The premodifier *so* is considered to be typical for female language or as Coates puts it “[s]o is also claimed as having ‘something of eternally feminine about it’ (2004: 12). Premodified adjectives that describe male characters display a much wider range of premodifiers. The premodifiers here are often adverbs such as [*h*]e was strangely kind, [*h*]e is really funny and [*h*]e found himself particularly famous.

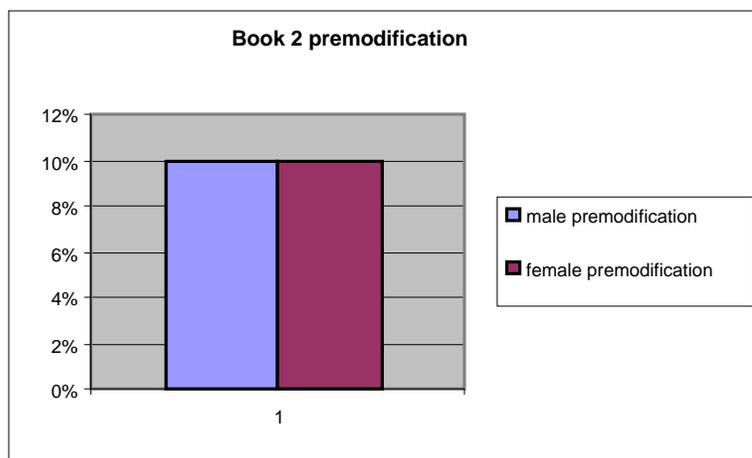
The premodified adjectives display inequality between the genders as the case was with the adjectives in attributive and predicative use. The female characters are still described with the most common features of adjectival descriptions while adjectives referring to male characters display more complex compounds. The premodifier in *She was so happy* can be exchanged with *She was very happy* without any change of meaning. The premodifier in *He was strangely kind* on the other hand cannot be exchanged with the more common *very* and still retain the same meaning. With this in mind I think that the premodifiers in sentences that refer to male characters are more complex and elegantly formulated than the premodifiers in sentences referring to female characters. The male premodifiers are in themselves descriptive whereas female premodifiers are mainly intensifying.

Like in previous cases the differences have leveled out in HP2 to become more equal, as can be seen in Table 7 and Figure E, in contrast to what I stated in my hypothesis. The percentage of occasions where premodified adjectives describe female characters has increased from 5% to 10% of all adjectives in this sample.

Table 7 Premodified adjectives (HP2)

Category	Male	Female
Premodified adjectives	21 / 212 = 10%	9 / 92 = 10%

Figure E



The variation of premodifiers has also increased from the only word *so* to for example *she did not look entirely convinced*. The amount of premodified adjectives that describe male characters expressed in percentages has not increased but is still 10% of the total amount of adjectives that describe male characters.

It seems to me as if female characters are described in a more respectful way by the author and are given more space and variation in HP2 than in HP1. They are no longer just *so happy* or *so pleased* but show a greater variety of characteristics as they can now be for example *entirely convinced*. In this material I also found something less uplifting from my gender equality point of view. Besides the most common modifier *very*, male characters are described as *quite keen* and *quite safe*, in the meaning ‘totally’ or ‘completely’, similar to *perfectly capable* and *fully qualified*. A common female modifier in this sample is e.g. *a little flustered*, *a little annoying* besides the more common *very*. Male characters seem to be described in a more confident way and female in a more uncertain way, which might indicate that the gender roles become more stereotyped as the characters grow older as I stated in my hypothesis.

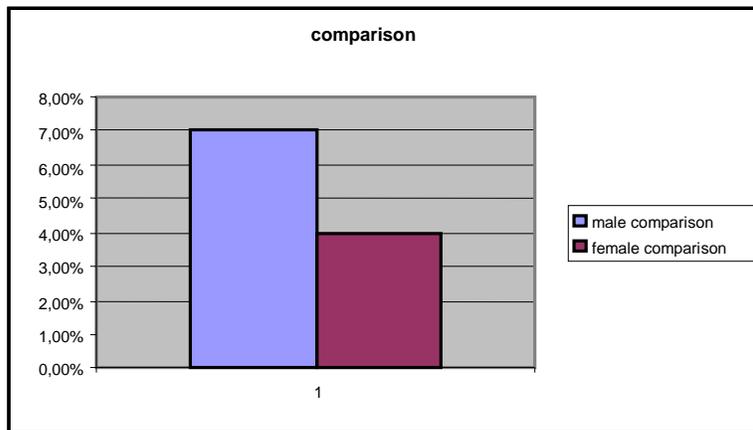
I will now discuss the result from my study concerning compared adjectives, which are even less frequent than premodified adjectives. In HP1 only 7% of all adjectives in my sample that refer to male characters occur in comparative or superlative form as can be seen in Table 8 and Figure F. The corresponding figure for female characters is 4% and consists of only one phrase: *Ron’s younger sister*. The most frequent form of comparison was the *-er* and *-est* endings and only in a minority of cases have *more* and *most* formed the comparative

and superlative forms. In cases such as *He looked most disappointed* the word *most* has been regarded as a premodifier since it could be exchanged for the word *very* without any change of meaning.

Table 8 Compared adjectives (HPI)

Category	Male	Female
Compared adjectives	15 / 206 = 7%	1 / 37 = 4%

Figure F



The reason for the low frequency of compared adjectives that refer to female characters can have its explanation in the fact that there are very few female characters to be compared. They might of course have been compared to boys or maybe even the teachers but that has not been the case in my sample. The male characters outnumber the female characters and might therefore be more comparable. The only compared adjective that refer to a female character in my sample is thus *younger*. The adjective *young* denotes age and does not refer to action of any kind, as several of the compared adjectives that refer to male characters do. Adjectives like *politer* and *nastier* denote some kind of action. If you are polite you do polite things or behave in a polite way and if you are nasty you do nasty things, but to be young is not the same thing as to behave young. This kind of description matches the idea that boys generally are considered to be more active than girls. As I mentioned earlier girls are more often described as “*young, little and pretty*” while boys are described as “*kind, brave and naughty*” (Romaine 1999: 212). Several of the compared adjectives that describe male

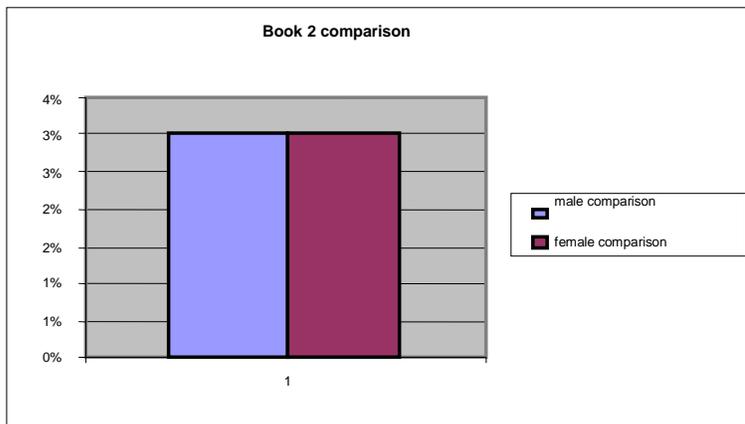
characters appear as superlative like *best* or *greatest*. The superlative form of the compared adjective seems to be reserved for the male characters. Even if the material is not very extensive in the case of compared adjectives there are signs of inequality in descriptions of male and female characters.

The results from the study of HP2 considering adjectives in the comparative and superlative form can be seen in Table 9 and Figure G. The figures are now the same for both male and female characters. To the only compared adjective that describe a female character in HP1 we can now add adjectives like *more serious* and *more purposeful*. The amount of compared adjectives that describe male characters has been reduced by half and this has obliterated the difference.

Table 9 Compared adjectives (HP2)

Category	Male	Female
Compared adjectives	7 / 212 = 3%	3 / 92 = 3%

Figure G



The female characters have now become more “active” in contrast to my hypothesis but they do still not deserve the superlative form of the compared adjective. No female character is described as *the best* or *the greatest* in my sample but the male characters still carry that kind of epithet. The difference in percentage has diminished in HP2 but female characters are still less *great* and less *good* than the male characters.

5.5 Adjectives and their referents

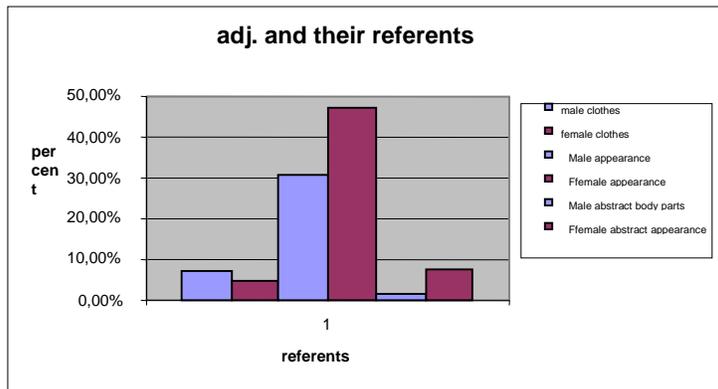
In this section I will investigate if there are any differences between male and female characters in adjectival descriptions of referents in HP1 and HP2. This will be a quantitative as well as qualitative study. I will, besides figures of frequencies, analyze the meaning of the adjectives in part descriptions. At the top of Table 10 I have put the number of adjectives in percentage that refer to part descriptions. 40% of all adjectives that describe male characters are descriptions of clothes, concrete or abstract appearance in HP1. The corresponding figure for female characters is 62%. The remaining 60% of all adjectives that describe male characters refers to age like *young* or *old*, merit or quality such as *good* or *nasty* and emotions such as *relieved* or *surprised*. The corresponding figure for female characters is only 38%. Adjectives concerning male characters also refer to the state in which the person is like *asleep* or *half-hidden*. Such descriptions did not occur at all among the female characters in my sample.

The first category of part descriptions is clothes and even spectacles are incorporated here since that is also something that you wear. As can be seen in Table 10 and Figure H, adjectives that describe clothes are rather equal in percentage concerning both male and female characters. The fact that the series about Harry Potter is set at a boarding school where all pupils wear school uniforms may explain the low amount of descriptions of clothes for both male and female characters.

Table 10 Part descriptions (HP1)

Male referents	83 / 206 = 40%	Female referents	23 / 37 = 62%
Clothes	15 / 206 = 7%	Clothes	2 / 37 = 5%
Appearance	63 / 206 = 31%	Appearance	18 / 37 = 47%
Abstract body parts	5 / 206 = 2%	Abstract body parts	3 / 37 = 8%

Figure H



Another category of part descriptions is appearance and it includes adjectives that describe a person's length or size as well as body parts like face, hands, hair etc. Female characters have more references to appearance in percentage than male characters in my sample. That is also the case concerning abstract body parts where the amount of adjectival descriptions in percentage that describe female characters is four times as high as the amount that describe male characters.

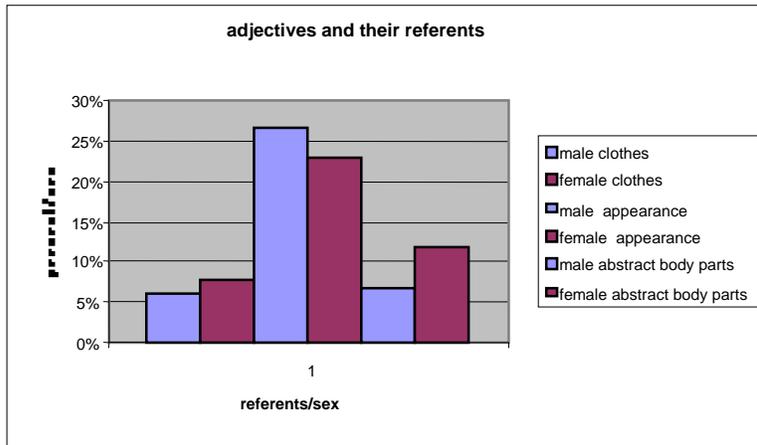
The most noteworthy result in this part is that female characters to a higher extent than male characters are described with adjectives that refer to the appearance like their clothes or body. Female characters seem to have less emotions or feelings than male characters and they do not appear at all in any kind of state. The girls and women in HP1 are mostly referred to by their looks than by their inner qualities. The boys and men in this same book on the other hand display a wide range of inner qualities like *brave*, *polite* and *nasty*. They also show a lot of feelings like *happy*, *desperate* and *surprised* to a higher extent than girls and women.

In HP2 adjectives that refer to clothes have decreased to 6% for male characters and increased to 8% for female characters, as can be seen in table 11 and Figure I. As it seems, clothes are still not such a big issue. The story is still set at a boarding school and both teachers and pupils wear uniforms in the shape of long black cloaks and pointed hats over a more regular suit.

Table 11 Part descriptions (HP2)

Male referents	85 / 212 = 40%	Female referents	39 / 92 = 42%
Clothes	13 / 212 = 6%	Clothes	7 / 92 = 8%
Appearance	58 / 212 = 27%	Appearance	21 / 92 = 23%
Abstract body parts	14 / 212 = 7%	Abstract body parts	11 / 92 = 12%

Figure 1



The descriptions of appearance, such as *hands*, *face* and *hair* of female characters have decreased from 49% to 23% but the corresponding decrease for male characters is only 3%. The difference between the genders is not as big as in the first book. Male characters in this book have more descriptions of *hands*, *face* etc. in percentage than female characters in contrast to HP1. Descriptions of abstract body parts like *voice* and *smile* have increased for both male and female characters but girls and women still have more referents in that category. 7% of all adjectives that describe male characters describe abstract body parts and 12% of all adjectives that describe female characters describe abstract body parts.

It is interesting that the number of descriptions of clothes and appearance has become more equal in HP2 compared to in HP1 between male and female characters. It could imply that the characters in this book have become more equal. Female characters still have more descriptions of abstract body parts in percentage than male characters. Even if there has been an increase of descriptions of abstract body parts concerning male characters, female characters still have almost twice the amount of referents to abstract body parts compared to

male characters. I interpret this result as girls and women are looked upon as being more abstract than boys and men. Male characters have more descriptions of body parts of flesh and blood than female characters. While female characters are diminished into *looks*, *noises*, *glances* and *moans* to a greater extent than male characters. Male characters seem to be more real and physically present than female characters that are more vaguely present.

The adjectives that describe abstract body parts are often of a soft or weak character like *weak* and *anxious* while adjectives that refer to looks and voices of male characters are of a more confident character like *familiar* and *satisfied*. As a matter of fact, the adjective *satisfied* is the most frequent one describing male characters' abstract body parts and the corresponding adjectives referring to female characters are *weak* and *anxious*. I find it remarkable if not surprising that female characters in modern children's fiction still are described as belonging to the weak sex.

I made this study of part descriptions because I had a feeling that it would display differences between male and female characters. I expected female characters to be described more often regarding to how they look than male characters. I also expected male characters to be described more often with reference to their actions or behavior than female characters and I was right.

As a last remark to this study I will comment on an elevating discovery which contrasts to my hypothesis that the differences would increase when the children grow older. The difference between male and female characters concerning the amount of descriptions of clothes and body parts has almost diminished. As mentioned earlier, female characters in HP1 are referred to by their clothes or body parts in 62% of the cases while the corresponding figure for male characters is 40%. In HP2 the corresponding figures are almost equal. Male characters in this book are referred to by clothes or body parts in 40% of the cases and female characters in 42% of the cases. Girls and women even have slightly less descriptions of clothes and body parts than boys and men. Male and female characters are now described with equal amount of descriptions of their appearance and other qualities such as *happy*, *surprised*, *mad* etc. Female characters are no longer described with references to how they look more often than male characters.

6. Conclusion

This last chapter will summarize the analysis and draw conclusions from my findings in relation to my hypothesis. My aim with this study was to investigate if the gender roles in the novel series about Harry Potter become more stereotyped as the characters grow older. The approach of this paper was linguistic and put emphasis on the adjectival category. It touches upon the semantic area to investigate the meaning of different words and it also has some remarks from a sociolinguistic perspective.

The investigation of proper names was intended to display to what extent male and female characters occur in the text respectively, and was only carried out in the first book, HP1. The result is not very encouraging from a gender perspective. Harry's name is not counted in with the other boys because his name alone is mentioned so many times since he is the head character that it would not be a fair comparison. In my sample Harry's name is mentioned in 35% of the cases, men in 29%, boys in 24% and women in 9% and girls in only 3% of the cases.

I find it remarkable that girls have such a marginalized position in a modern book for children as the series about Harry Potter. A logical consequence of the above finding would then be that the amount of adjectives describing female characters would be fewer than adjectives describing male characters. That is also what I found. Of all adjectives in my sample in HP1 85% describes male characters and only 15% describes female characters. This does not support my hypothesis since I expected the characters to be more equal in this book. In HP2 the figures look a little better but adjectival descriptions of male characters are still overrepresented with 70% of the total amount of adjectives in this sample. Only 30% of the adjectives are used in descriptions of female characters. At this point, in contrast to my hypothesis the gender differences seem to decrease even if not very much.

In my study I have classified three different properties of adjectives namely function, modification and grade. I considered adjectival function in attributive and predicative use to see if there would be any difference between male and female characters in that respect. Adjectives in predicative use give more weight to the information since it is presented as something new and noteworthy e.g. *the girl was pretty*. Information given by adjectives in attributive use e.g. *the pretty girl* can be seen as less important since it is presented as something well-known and obvious (Hene 1984: 30). In HP1 male characters are described

with adjectives in attributive use and predicative use in 50% each of the cases. The female characters are described with adjectives in attributive use in 70% of the cases and with adjectives in predicative use in 30% of the cases.

In HP2 adjectival descriptions of male characters in attributive use have increased to 59% and in predicative use decreased to 41% in my sample. The corresponding figures for female characters are 66% for adjectives in attributive use and 34% for adjectives in predicative use. The figures approach each other slightly in contrast to my hypothesis. However, adjectival descriptions of female characters still appear more often in sentences where the information is well-known or obvious than male characters.

Adjectives can be modified, most commonly by an adverb like *very* or *really*. In HP1 adjectival descriptions of male characters are modified in 10% of the cases and female characters in 5% of the cases. I found only two premodified adjectives referring to female characters in my sample [*s*]he was ever so pleased and [*s*]he was so happy which is considered to be typical female language. The male premodifiers display a wider range of variety with words like *strangely* or *particular*. Male premodifiers seem to be descriptive in themselves while female premodifiers are merely intensifying.

In HP2 adjectives describing male characters are still premodified in 10% of the cases but premodified adjectives describing female characters have increased from 5 to 10%. The female characters are no longer just so happy or so pleased but show a greater variety of characteristics as they can now be for example entirely convinced. Besides the most common modifier *very* male characters are described as quite keen and quite safe, in the meaning 'totally' or 'completely'. Common female modifiers in this sample are a little flustered, a little annoying besides the more common *very*. The conclusion is that male characters are described in a more confident way and female in a more uncertain way, which might indicate that the gender roles become more stereotyped as the characters grow older, which thus supports my hypothesis.

The compared adjectives are very few in my sample in HP1. Male characters are described in 7% of the cases with the adjective in comparative or superlative form. Some examples are words like *best*, *greatest*, *politer* and *nastier*, all of which denote some kind of activity. Female characters have only one adjective in the comparative form, *younger*, which denote age and not action. That only example is 4% of all cases that refer to female characters

in my sample. According to Romaine, girls are more often described as “*young, little and pretty*” while boys are described as “*kind, brave and naughty*” (1999: 212).

In HP2 the number in percentage for male and female characters concerning compared adjectives are equal with 3% each. The female characters now have compared adjectives like *more serious* and *more purposeful* but they are still not mentioned in the superlative form at all. Even though female characters have become more active they are still described as less *great* and less *good* than male characters.

The last issue of my analysis is adjectives that describe male or female characters’ clothes, appearance or abstract body parts. The story is set at a boarding school and both teachers and pupils wear uniforms in the shape of long black cloaks and pointed hats over a more regular suit. Descriptions of clothes in HP1 are therefore very scarce for both male and female characters.

The other referents are appearance like *length, hands, face* etc and abstract body parts like *voice, smile, laugh* etc. 30% of all male adjectives describe appearance and only 2% describe abstract body parts in HP1. The adjectives that describe female appearance are 49% of all adjectives that describe female characters and 8% describe abstract female body parts. Male characters thus have fewer descriptions of both appearance and abstract body parts in percentage than female characters. Female characters are described with reference to how they look to a greater extent than male characters. It seems as the most important issue about girls and women, in HP1, is how they look. Male characters are described with reference to their clothes, appearance or abstract body parts in 40% of all cases. 60% of all adjectives that describe male characters refer to age like *old*, merit or quality like *brave* or emotions like *relieved*. When it comes to the female characters the figures are reversed. Female characters are described with reference to their clothes, appearance or abstract body parts in 62% of the cases. Only 38% of all adjectives that describe female characters refer to age, merit or quality or emotions. In HP1 female characters are mainly described with references to their appearance and male characters are mainly described with references to their inner qualities. As I mentioned above the most important feature for female characters in HP1 is how they look. The most important feature for male characters, on the other hand seem to be how they act or think or feel.

In HP2 the figures look much better concerning adjectival referents. 27% of all male adjectives describe appearance e.g. *length, hands, face* etc and 7% describe abstract body parts e.g. *voice* or *smile*. The corresponding figures for female characters are 23% concerning appearance and 12% concerning abstract body parts. Female characters have thus almost twice as many descriptions of abstract body parts compared to male characters. Male characters are still described with reference to their clothes, appearance or abstract body parts in 40% of the cases and with reference to age, merit or quality or emotions in 60% of the cases. Female characters in my sample from this book have adjectival descriptions of clothes, appearance or abstract body parts in only 42% of the cases. 58% of all adjectives that describe female characters refer to age, merit or quality or emotions. The female characters in HP2 have taken a huge step towards more modulated descriptions of their character. They now display almost as many feelings, emotions etc. as male characters, and no longer have appearance as their most important feature.

These figures look very equal but there is still a difference when it comes to abstract body parts. Female characters have almost twice as many descriptions of smiles and voices than male characters. More than 50% of the adjectives that describes those smiles and voices are words like *weak, anxious* and *repressive*. Such words do not exist at all concerning male referents in my sample. Like Odenstedt noticed, female characters seem to be described as weak and passive more often than male characters (1996: 150). Since the most interesting result was found in this part of the study it would be intriguing to investigate that part further in a future study.

I started out with the hypothesis that the gender roles in HP1 were rather equal and that they would become more stereotyped in HP2. It turned out to be the opposite way around. The sample from the first text displayed much bigger differences in adjectival descriptions between male and female differences than the sample from the second text. In most areas the gender roles became more equal in HP2 than they had been in HP1. The area that contrasted the most in both books was the number of descriptions of abstract body parts. Female characters are to a greater extent diminished into smiles and voices than male characters. The most noteworthy with this study is that female characters in both books to a great extent are described with adjectives like *weak, nervous* and *anxious*. Male characters are in return described with adjectives like *brave, convinced* and *capable*. Female characters in modern

children's fiction are obviously still described as belonging to the weak sex even if they as in this study are composed of witches with magical powers.

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