Slide 1

The title of my presentation represents the two parts of it. First, I will focus on evasive conversational behaviour. I will present a model for the investigation of this very slippery, but in the context of a communicative society, more and more relevant, phenomenon. Second, I will present some results of the application of this model to male and female politicians and non-politicians. These results will be discussed in relation to the 'community of practice' approach of gender and conversational style.

Slide 2

In a programme on Dutch TV called the 'Song of life' (broadcast by NCRV) two Dutch celebrities have a conversation about the meaning of life and death. Listen now to the former bishop of Rotterdam, monsignor Bär – just resigned from his function and emigrated to a monastery in Belgium because of his liberal views and/or his supposed homosexuality – and Paul de Leeuw – a very popular, openly gay Dutch television comedian, singer and actor.

De Leeuw asks a question which is unanswerable by Bär in this context: Do you ever get worked up? This is not easy: *I mean, I can, well, something completely, erm I am*

not able to imagine that you never got for example and I. I mean I can say it easily to you because you are much yeah you are a much more modern ex- or eh former bishop than eh than the other. I don't erm actually I am not acquainted with any bishop apart from you then… and Ernst, because I read him in the Gay-journal, but you erm I think you will be worked up once in a while or once you will also be aphro… One cannot always not You cannot when you want to become a priest say like I disconnect myself from anyone. That is not really possible. You will also once in a while, yeah, uh …

Bär's answer is: *I haven't done that. It was not necessary*. What is the relationship between the answer and the question? De Leeuw offered a handful of marbles, from which Bär picked the one that was easiest to deal with, namely, "*Did he disconnect himself completely from others?*"

De Leeuw continues with a follow-up question about sexuality: *No, but there is a kind of that eh one says: 'You are homosexual, you are not homosexual'. What a nonsense question. What do I care whether you will be homosexual or not"*, but the fact is that these matters cannot be discussed in a normal way. That not… That you not…

Then Bär postpones the answer. He asks a counter question that results in a topic shift: "*Before I answer this, I would like to know, well, these matters can only be discussed well in an atmosphere in which at least some religiousness exists. Hey? Are you religious yourself?*" From now on, De Leeuw's religiousness is the topic of conversation.

The fragment shows a successful evasive action of Bär.

Slide 3

Previous to our model of evasive action

- Our model incorporates the findings of others (Harris 1991; Bull & Mayer 1993; Clayman 2001)
- It is based upon our own analyses (Bashir - Jackson; De Leeuw – Bär; media-interviews; police interrogations; family interaction)
- It starts with a broad definition of a question (based upon linguistics and pragmalinguistics) and some preliminary observations about answers

Result: a broad concept of evasive action

Slide 4

A question is …

Part of a question-answer sequence, i.e., part of an adjacency pair. It initiates an interactional activity – the exchange of information - , the answer completes it. It creates an expectancy

Our study concerns the reactions to questions that function as requests for information

Questions can be asked using the following sentence types:
- An interrogative sentence, i.e., a sentence that begins with a verb or a question word (a Wh-question)
- An affirmative sentence with a rising intonation
- An affirmative sentence followed by a tag question
- A prosodically and/or grammatically incomplete sentence

Questions can also be formulated *indirectly*:
- An affirmative sentence about a fact of the addressee or about something in his or her domain functions as a request for confirmation, i.e., as a question (Labov & Fanshel 1977)

In terms of Conversation Analysis, a question is part of ...

Pragmatically, our study concerns …

The form characteristics of questions are:
- An interrogative sentence ...

Questions can be formulated indirectly: ...

Slide 5

An answer is …

A 'real' answer fills the information gap that arises after a question:
- Reactions which contain an explicit *yes* or *no, of course, right,* etc., as well as the so-called 'copy types': reactions which copy parts from the question or incomplete sentences which can be completed by parts of the question. Also: the choice of a part of a complex or multiple question
- Reactions which provide the value of the lacking variable in a Wh-question
- Reactions which are longer than a minimal *yes* or *no* (Jucker 1986)

'Real' answers can be formulated indirectly:
- Reactions which initiate an inferential process, leading to either *yes* or *no,* or a position in between
- Reactions from which the value of the lacking variable in a Wh-question can be inferred

Our study focuses on answering behaviour, which encompasses providing 'real' answers as well as evasive action. In other words, its focus is the continuation of the conversation after a question

Slide 6

What is important in our model is the perspective on insertion sequences, more specifically on inserted adjacency pairs consisting of a request for clarification/repetition and the clarification/repetition provided. Irrespective of its nature, initiating such a sequence is considered to be potentially evasive, since the interviewee, by asking for clarification or repetition, delays providing an answer. The expectancy that was created by the question still exists, but the interviewee wins time. Apart from that, there is a chance that the question will be clarified or repeated in slightly different terms, which might be more suited to the interviewee. Initiating such a sequence thus yields a gain in time, while a strategic gain is also possible. So there are good reasons to start a clarification sequence even when there is no comprehension problem at all.

A qualitative analysis of insertion sequences such as the one initiated by Bär on slide 2 shows that their result can be that the question is lost. We also have quantitative data which underpin the position that insertion sequences are exploited as evasive actions. These are presented on the next slide.

Slide 7
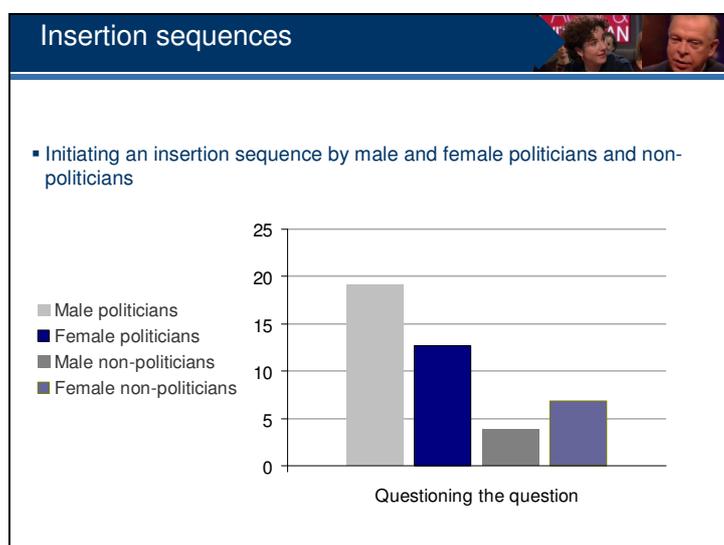
My analyses show that politicians use the insertion sequence remarkably often, more often than is motivated by a comprehension problem. Male politicians question the question in media-interviews in one of each five cases; female politicians show this behaviour in one in five; male non-politicians come down to one in twenty five and female non-politicians to one in fourteen. We can compare these data with data from two relatively ordinary Dutch families (not represented on the slide). In these families one of each 43 turns gives rise to a comprehension problem. These data underpin the position that politicians regularly demonstrate comprehension problems and that they exploit the clarification sequence to yield a time gain as well as a strategic gain.

Slide 8
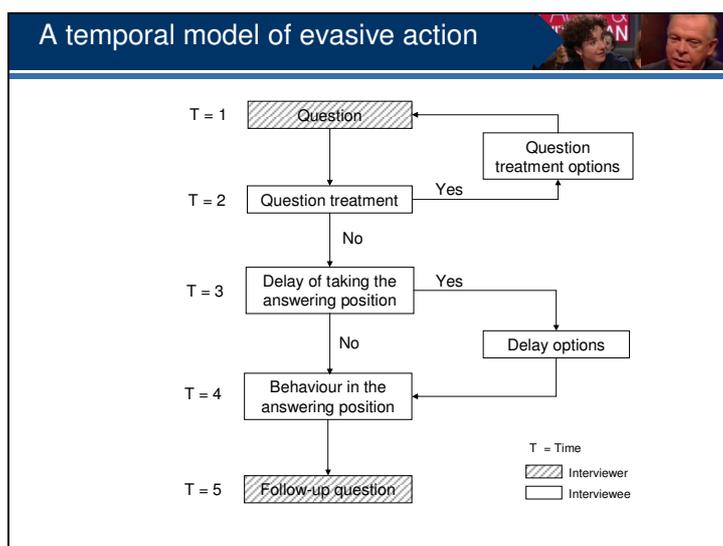
At time 1, the interviewer asks a question, as defined on slide 4. The interviewee can treat the question at point in time 2. For example, s/he can attack the question or play it down, ask a question for repetition or clarification, or react with a counter question. When the interviewee uses this option, it is the interviewer's move to reformulate, defend, clarify etcetera the question. When the interviewee does not use this option, s/he can delay taking the answering position at time 3. There are many means to reach this, such as hesitating, reformulating the question or showing respect to the interviewer. S/he can manoeuvre with these means, resulting in a covering up of the coming evasive answer or in a seemingly intelligible answer.
Either via detours, or directly, the interviewee reaches time 4, the answering position. Here, the interviewee can fill in the information gap after the question to a certain degree. S/he can provide a complete answer, an incomplete answer or an excessively elaborate answer. S/he can also make a statement about something other than the information gap or explicitly refuse to answer.
A totally different dimension on which the behaviour of the interviewee on the answering position can be ordered is the dimension of directness. S/he can react directly and concisely, s/he can formulate indirectly, or s/he can embroider the reaction with politeness.

In principle, the approaches of other scholars of evasive action (Harris, Bull & Mayer, Clayman, see slide 3) seize the process at time 4, the behaviour on the answering position. The consequence is a lack of attention to the temporal dimension of evasive actions. In our model, evasive action starts before the conversation has reached the answering state. What is characteristic of our model is that it contains two extra points in time that can be exploited for evasive action. You see these represented in

the flow diagram on the slide as 'Question treatment' and 'Delay of taking the answering position', both yielding a gain in time and possibly a strategic gain.

Slide 9
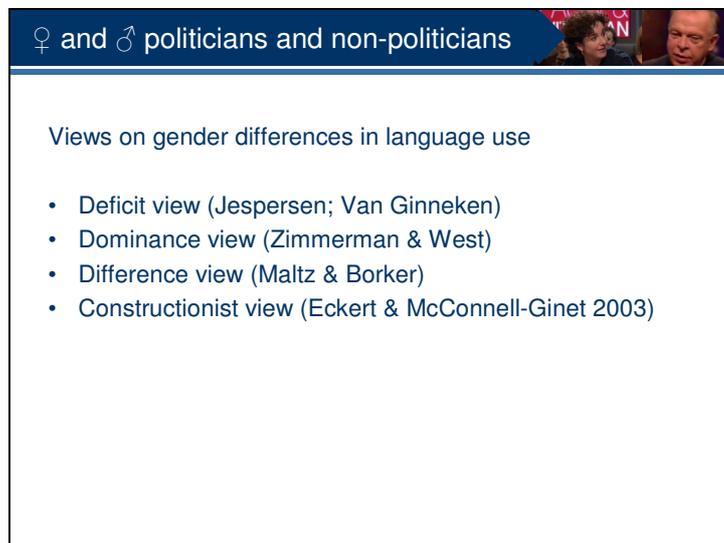
The second part of my presentation focuses on evasive actions of male and female politicians and non-politicians.

There are various views on gender differences in language use. We will not treat them all now. With respect to the first three views on the slide, I will only mention that they consider a dichotomy in human beings on the basis of the biologically distinctive feature 'sex' as an established fact. Characteristic of the fourth view, constructivism or the constructionist view is that it breaks this perspective.

Slide 10
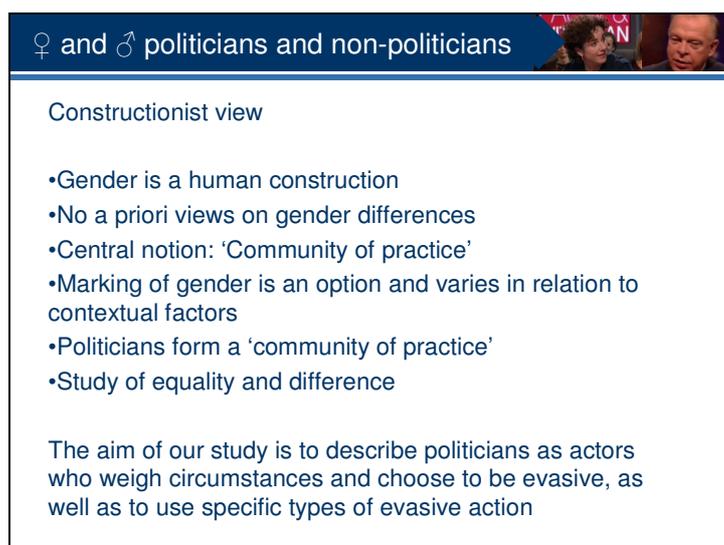
The notion of *sex* is replaced by *gender*, and this is more than applying a different label. Gender is no longer considered to be a characteristic that determines language use but it is a human construction. It is demonstrated – or not, depending on the participants – in the *community of practice,* defined as "an aggregate of people who

come together around mutual engagement in some endeavour" (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1998: 40). A *community of practice* is a professional group or collaboration – the family, the university, and editorial staff or the sports world. People behave as members of such a community and look for mutual equality. They develop practices: ways of doing, saying etcetera. They can choose to mark gender, as well as the means for doing this and the situations wherein. The idea is that the participation in such a community will lead to similarities in the language use of the members. Differences in language use of women and men are – according to this view – largely the consequence of a differentiation in the kinds of communities of practice in which women and men participate, while, when they participate in the same community, their form of participation is different.

What is characteristic of the research that starts from the constructionist point of view is that it is not based on ideas or hypotheses about gender differences. Generalizations of the type "Women are x, men are y" are considered uninteresting; the slogan is "away from properties, toward social practices" (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 1999: 196 and 198). The focus is on all kinds of variation: variation in the construction of gender, variation in the language phenomena that are used to express gender and variation within groups.

Our study might be perceived as a classical sociolinguistic study into the effects of sex on evasive action. This perception is inaccurate. Evasive actions has been investigated in relation to a great number of contextual variables, gender included. We applied logistic regressions – a technique that is not 'mainstream' and that might fit well into the '*community of practice'* – approach*.* Results showed relatively large and pervasive gender effects. Not a priori, but on the basis of these patterns in the data collection, gender received a specific position in the research design, distinguished from the other contextual factors.

The embedding of our study in the constructionist framework might be interesting. It shows how female and male politicians construct their membership of a professional group that is – in principal – open to both genders. We collected media-interviews with female and male politicians, people who belong to the same professional group and have the same job. We analyzed evasive action, a basic aspect of the communicative competence of every politician in the Netherlands, female or male. There is no reason to hypothesize that the politicians might want to mark their gender with any conversational feature. The constructionist view that there is no a priori difference, but that it is interesting to investigate the construction of equality and difference, is a good starting point. When differences appear to exist, these are not the most interesting; then the 'real' study begins. It brings to the fore the circumstances that nuance the picture: when does the difference exist and when not? And how do actors weigh circumstances and choose means when they show evasive actions?

Slide 11

♀ and ♂ politicians and non-politicians

Material

- 32 fragments of 10 minutes; 4 groups of interviewees
- radio- and TV-interviews in 2003, 2004 and 2005
- two-party interviews
- partly transcribed by ourselves; partly transcripts were available
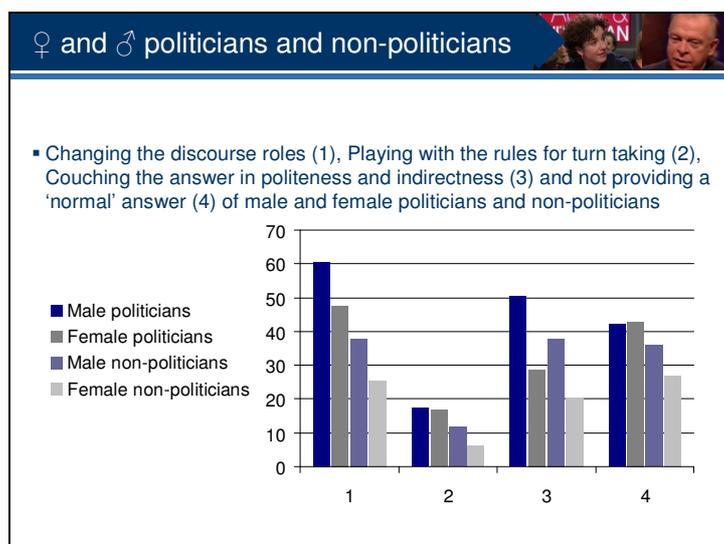- 947 interviewee reactions

Interviewees
Female politicians: Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Agnes van Aardenne, Sharon Dijksma, Femke Halsema, Tineke Huizinga, Tineke Netelenbos, Maria Liberia Peters, Gerda Verburg.
Female non-politicians: Ellen van Langen, Linda de Mol, Kristie Boogert, Esther Hart, Carine Hutsebaut, Cora Canne Meijer, Truus Menger, Leontien van Moorsel.

Male politicians: Pim Fortuyn, Geert Wilders, Gerrit Zalm, Jozias van Aartsen, Jan Peter Balkenende, Camiel Eurlings, Thom de Graaf, Rick van der Ploeg.
Male non-politicians: Theo Maassen, Cees Geel, Philip Cocu, Emile Ratelband, Eric Dekker, Flip van Duijn, Aad Veenman, Maarten Verkerk.

Slide 12

♀ and ♂ politicians and non-politicians

- Changing the discourse roles (1), Playing with the rules for turn taking (2), Couching the answer in politeness and indirectness (3) and not providing a 'normal' answer (4) of male and female politicians and non-politicians

Advantages of the model that I have just presented are that one can select different samples from the reactions of the interviewees, depending on whether one wants to be strict or lenient in the judgment of what 'counts' as evasion, and that one can compare various differing operationalizations of the concept 'evasion'. In short, the

model allows in- and exclusion of specific reaction forms from the notion 'evasive action'.

On the slide, I present four different samples of the reactions of the interviewees. Each sample represents a different type of 'evasive action'.

Sample 1 represents 'changing the discourse roles'. More specifically, the following reactions are included in this type of 'evasive action':
- Confronting the interviewer with his or her statement
- Completing an invitation of the interviewer
- Asking a counter question
- Giving minimal reactions and staying in the listening role
- Switching the topic and thereby shifting the agenda

Male politicians show this type of evasive behaviour most frequently. The female politicians show it to a lesser degree, followed by the male non-politicians and the female non-politicians. The pair-wise comparison is significant in each case.

Sample 2 represents playing with the rules for turn taking. The politicians (male and female) do this most often, followed by the female politicians and the male non-politicians. The female non-politicians differ significantly from the other three groups. Sample 2 refers to the following kinds of evasive actions:
- Starting one's turn before the transition relevant place TRP (interrupting or talking simultaneously)
- Being silent on a transition relevant place
- Producing an incomplete turn

Sample 3 represents the politeness of the different groups of interviewees. This sample refers to the following kind of evasive actions:
- Producing a direct, 'on record' answer, embroidered with or embedded in politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson), such as paying respect or showing solidarity.
- Answering indirectly. The addressee 'flouts' the Gricean maxims for cooperative conversation: literally, the interviewee's reaction is not relevant, 'true', etcetera, but the answer can be inferred from it.

The four groups of interviewees differ significantly in this sample of evasive actions. The pair-wise comparisons are all significant too. The male politicians are the least direct and bald on record. In this sample, they are not followed by the female politicians, but by the male non-politicians. Thereafter come the female politicians and non-politicians.

Sample 4, finally, represents 'not providing a "real" answer'. It covers the following broad categories of evasive actions:
- Answering unsatisfactorily
- Refusing to answer
- Discussing a presupposition

The female politicians are most evasive. More specifically, they discuss presuppositions relatively frequently. The male politicians also relatively often provide no answer. Their specific way of doing this is to refuse to answer. The male non-politicians relatively often provide an unsatisfactory answer. The female non-politicians stand out in providing *normal* answers relatively frequently.

The next slides show prototypical examples of the four samples of evasive action.

Slide 13: Listen to the soundclip

Examples

Four samples of evasive action were shown

1   Playing with the discourse roles

Interviewer Martin Bashir interviews pop star Michael Jackson about his relationship with his children and their mothers. Prince is Jackson's son. He does not have any contact with his mother. Jackson was married to Prince's mother, but they do not live together anymore

IR: *When I was talking to Prince one day, he said to me that erm, he he didn't have a mother.*
IE: *He said he didn't have a mother?*
IR: *Yeah, I, I said 'Prince, where's your mommy?' And he said: 'I haven't got a mother'.*
IE: *That's right.*
IR: *D-Did you tell him to say that?*
IE: *No.*
IR: *What do you think he means when he says: 'I haven't got a mother'?*
IE: *Like he said: 'He didn't have a mother'*

In this example, Jackson does not take the role of interviewee. First he echoes the question, next he restricts himself to an acknowledgement token, then he provides a minimal answer and finally he gives Prince's curious statement back without clarification.

Slide 14

Examples

2   Playing with the turn-taking rules

Interviewer Bashir investigates the role of plastic surgery in the changes that have taken place in Jackson's face

IR: *When we were talking some time ago, you talked about how you went through adolescence. You had a terrible time. And in fact, I had a look at some pictures of you during that period and you did have a lot of spots. One of the things you clearly used to overcome this, is changing your appearance. You have, you've kind of you, you know, you're phy-physically changed, haven't you? The photographs of you, if I look at you [//*
IE: [*No! It's called adolescence, it's called growing and changing.*

In this example, Jackson does not let the interviewer finish his turn of talk. In this way, he is constructing the question himself.

Slide 15

Examples

3   Couching the answer in politeness

Interviewer Bashir continues to investigate the role of plastic surgery in the changes that have taken place in Jackson's face

IR: *Your lips are very different now to what they were then*
IE: *Nope*
IR: *But they look different*
☞ IE: *No, I'm sorry. Same lips*

In this example, Jackson starts with providing a bald on record answer. However, later, he does more than that: he excuses himself, and shows respect by doing this.

Slide 16

Examples

4   Not providing an answer

4.1 Giving an unsatisfactory answer
    Bashir: *So when do you think you're gonna have your next child?*
    Jackson: *I wish I could have it today*

4.2 Discussing a presupposition
    Bashir: *So when do you think you're gonna have your next child?*
    Jackson: *I have nothing like that in mind*

If Jackson had reacted with 'Next year', 'In the near future' or 'Coming March', he would have provided a 'real' answer.

Slide 17

Mixed evasive actions

The several main types of evasive action do not exclude each other. For example, it is possible to interrupt the interviewer with a counter question about a presupposition in the question that is couched in politeness. Jackson could have done this as follows:

Bashir: *So when do you think you're gonna have your next [//child?*
Jackson: *[Sorry, but whatever gave you the idea that I'd wanna have another child?*

I call this type of evasive reaction, in which several kinds of evasive action are applied simultaneously, a 'cocktail'. These cocktails are extremely difficult to handle by the interviewer: when he or she reacts to one aspect of it, the interviewee gets away with the other ones

The next slide shows that male politicians use these cocktails more often than their female colleagues

Slide 18

Cocktails of ♀ and ♂ politicians

Changing the discourse roles, as well as using respect and solidarity politeness (1), Changing the discourse roles and playing with the rules for turn taking (2), Playing with the discourse roles, using solidarity and respect politeness and refusing to answer (3) and Playing with the discourse roles, using solidarity and respect politeness, as well as providing an unsatisfactory answer (4) of male and female politicians

■ Male politicians
■ Female politicians

The bars represent percentages of the turn repertoire of the male and female politicians.

We see a striking difference here between the male and female politicians. When female politicians act evasively, they relatively often choose one way to do this from a whole range of alternatives. On the other hand, when male politicians act evasively, they more often combine diverse means simultaneously.

Slide 19

Contextual factors

The gender difference that we found in the evasive actions of the politicians might be related to or even caused by contextual factors such as the interview type (is it informative or entertaining?) or the form of the preceding question (is the question formulated as an interrogative, an affirmative with a rising intonation, etcetera). We did not manipulate the data collection with respect to these contextual factors, but analyzed their effects later

Ten such factors were analyzed with regards to their effects on evasive-action-in-general. Four of them appeared to be relevant:
- Interview type (informative vs. entertaining)
- Medium (radio vs. TV)
- Politeness of the preceding question (bald on record, couched in solidarity or respect strategies, indirect)
- Topic of conversation (relatively public vs. relatively private)

I cannot show the results in detail. However, the pattern they showed is represented on the next slide.

These 10 factors can be found in Table 1 of my article in *Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies* (Huls 2008 in the list of publications on this website).

Slide 20

Pattern in the analysis of context

Gender and evasiveness in different contexts
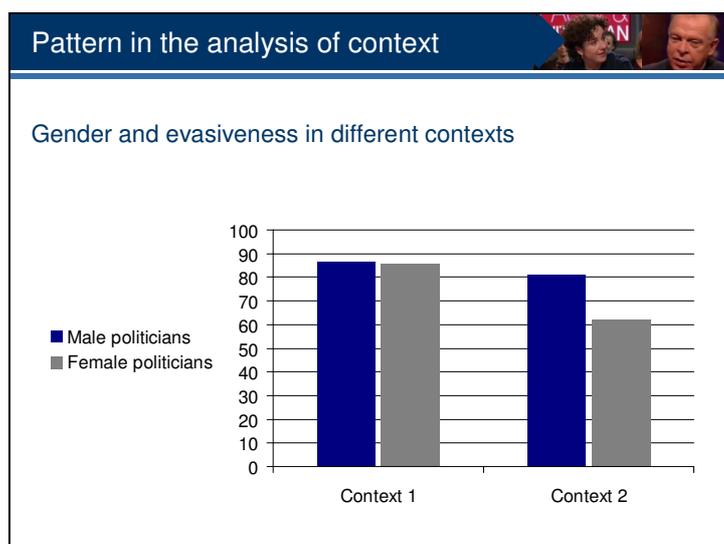
Context 1 is, for example, an informative programme, on TV, the preceding question is embroidered with solidarity and respect politeness or indirect, and the matters discussed are of public interest.
Context 2 is, for example, an entertaining programme, radio, the preceding question is direct and the topic of conversation is 'private'.

Slide 21

Pattern in the analysis of context

Conclusions

- The gender difference is not apparent in a number of contexts
- The gender difference is most apparent in entertainment programs on TV, when the interviewers ask questions directly about relatively private matters
- Female politicians adapt their evasiveness to context; male politicians evade the question as a kind of second nature in nearly all circumstances

Slide 22

Politicians as a community of practice

Conclusions

- Male politicians surpass female politicians in the rate of evasive actions and in the use of 'cocktails
- The gender difference is not apparent in a number of contexts
- The gender difference is most apparent in entertaining programs on TV, when the interviewers asks questions directly about relatively private matters
- Female politicians adapt their evasiveness to context; male politicians evade the question as a kind of second nature in nearly all circumstances

Slide 23

> ▪ Male and female politicians employ a different conversational model. In the conversational model of the males, contextual factors play a minor role. However, the females have many of these factors included in their model of a conversation
>
> ▪ Constructionist view: Both groups evade a lot and use many different means. Comparison with 1986
>> ▪ Females weigh more contextual factors than men
>> ▪ No marking of gender identity: *who* they are vs. *where* they are
>> ▪ Females and males are quite similar. The differences that we found indicate that they take part in current politics with a different historical background

To summarize: male and female politicians make use of a different conversational model. In that of the male politicians, contextual factors play a minor role. For them, evading is nearly a kind of second nature, an automatism, their autopilot heads for it. They employ many means. The only contextual factors they pay attention to are the form of the question and the sequential position. The conversational model of the females encompasses a large number of contextual factors. Evasive action is not an automatism for this group. They have a thorough command of the separate techniques, but in comparison to their male colleagues, they do not combine them as frequently.

On slide 9, different views on gender differences in language use have been shown. What do our results mean in relation the currently most interesting constructionist view that politicians form a community of practice with similar conversational characteristics? This view is partly, and not completely, reflected in the data. That male politicians as well as females often evade the questions is a part of their professional communicative competence, as well as their employment of a large number of means to do this. The time that women were not or nearly not heard in the Dutch political arena seems over. In 1986, this was still the case. This year marked a milestone: it was the first time that a woman participated in the political debate held on the eve of the elections. She experienced a lot of difficulties in getting herself heard in the middle of the male verbal aggressiveness: she was interrupted frequently, she lost simultaneous starts and her protests against this harmed her image instead of improving her position in the conversation. The political women who participated in this study fight for the floor and win.
However, not fitting in with the view that female and male politicians are a community of practice is the result that females pay attention to more contextual factors than males. The supposition that the women and men who participate in this study might mark their gender identity in this way is not very plausible. More than *who* they are, this difference marks *where* they are, and not in a geographic sense, but in political history. The women are on their way towards winning a position in a male bastion. The men there do not weigh the circumstances a lot, but are focused on the affairs – read: evading these. The women are a rising minority. One can hardly observe this in their conversational behaviour, though. They are socialized as professionals, but they did not give up one aspect that is considered to be characteristic of their primary socialization, namely that they are sensitive to the situation. The differences that we

found here between female and male politicians indicate that they are equal to a large degree, but participate in current politics with a different history.

Slide 24
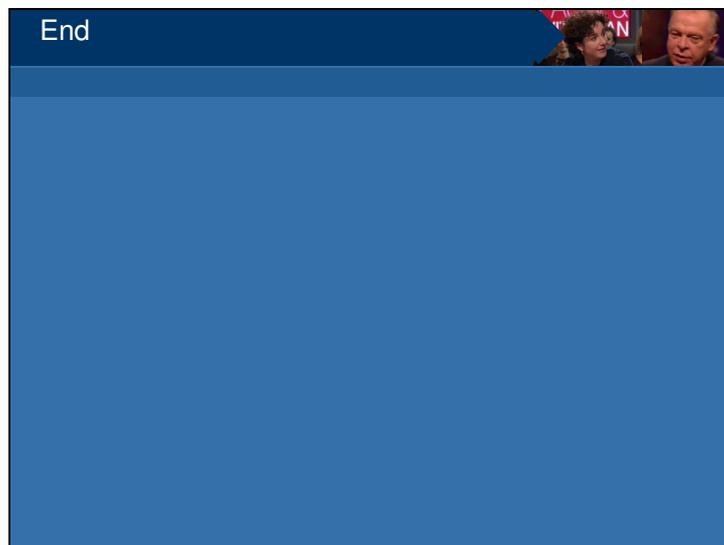
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