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Competitive Talk and the Three Main Characters in Supernatural

Essay in English Studies

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This study focuses on all-male dialogues in the popular television series *Supernatural*. The purpose is to determine if and to what extent some linguistic features that are said to be characteristic of competitive talk among men occur in these dialogues. Do modern, scripted dialogues correspond to the impression given in the literature? Can the principal male characters’ spoken interaction in *Supernatural* be considered competitive and thus stereotypically male?

The material for this quantitative and qualitative study consists of the entire third season of the series, which comprises 16 episodes that were originally broadcast in 2007-2008. The quantitative analysis consists in counting the occurrences of the linguistic features investigated in the dialogues between two or all three of the main characters. The qualitative aspect was about identifying and interpreting the linguistic features in relation to the contexts in which they occur.

The results show that the dialogues between the three main characters in *Supernatural* do contain some features said to be characteristic of competitive speech among men. While there are no occurrences of verbal sparring, the other phenomena investigated (questions, impersonal topics, monologues and playing the expert) are common. However, the results also show interesting aspects of these features that do not correspond with competitive speech style.

Keywords: English, gender, competitive talk, all-male interaction, television series, *Supernatural*
Table of contents

1 Introduction ........................................................................................................................................ 1
2 Background ....................................................................................................................................... 2
  2.1 Gender in the horror genre ........................................................................................................ 2
  2.2 Language and gender .................................................................................................................. 3
    2.2.1 Features of competitive speech style .................................................................................. 4
3 Material and method .......................................................................................................................... 8
  3.1 Material ........................................................................................................................................ 8
    3.1.1 Transcripts ........................................................................................................................... 10
  3.2 Method ......................................................................................................................................... 10
    3.2.1 Questions .............................................................................................................................. 11
    3.2.2 Monologues and playing the expert ..................................................................................... 12
    3.2.3 Topic choice .......................................................................................................................... 12
    3.2.4 Verbal sparring ..................................................................................................................... 13
    3.2.5 Turn-taking ........................................................................................................................... 13
4 Research results and discussion ......................................................................................................... 14
  4.1 Questions ..................................................................................................................................... 15
    4.1.1 The frequency of questions .................................................................................................. 15
    4.1.2 The functions of the questions ............................................................................................ 16
    4.1.3 Discussion ............................................................................................................................ 17
  4.2 Monologues and playing the expert ............................................................................................. 18
    4.2.1 The frequency of monologues ............................................................................................... 18
    4.2.2 The functions of the monologues .......................................................................................... 18
      4.2.2.1 Playing the expert in monologues .................................................................................. 19
    4.2.3 Discussion ............................................................................................................................ 20
  4.3 Topic choice ................................................................................................................................ 20
    4.3.1 The frequency of personal topics .......................................................................................... 20
    4.3.2 The functions of topic choice ............................................................................................... 21
    4.3.3 Discussion ............................................................................................................................. 22
  4.4 Verbal sparring ............................................................................................................................. 22
    4.4.1 The frequency of quick-fire exchanges ............................................................................... 22
    4.4.2 The functions of the quick-fire exchanges .......................................................................... 22
    4.4.3 Discussion ............................................................................................................................. 23
  4.5 Turn-taking .................................................................................................................................. 24
    4.5.1 Interruptions .......................................................................................................................... 24
      4.5.1.1 The frequency of interruptions ...................................................................................... 24
4.5.1.2 The functions of the interruptions .......................................................... 24
4.5.2 Overlapping .................................................................................................. 25
  4.5.2.1 The frequency of overlapping utterances .............................................. 25
  4.5.2.2 The functions of the overlapping utterances .......................................... 25
4.5.3 Discussion .................................................................................................... 26
5 Conclusions ........................................................................................................ 27
References ........................................................................................................... 29
1 Introduction

This study focuses on the dialogues between the three principal characters in the popular television series *Supernatural*. Different types of TV shows feature different types of verbal communication, and they spread new words, phrases and other linguistic phenomena to the public. The dialogues in *Supernatural* are thus a relevant topic for investigation since factors that may affect individuals’ use of language should be investigated and since it is possible that television series affect their target audience’s language use and linguistic development. Another reason for studying TV dialogues is that such dialogues are not only trendsetters, they can also be reflective of social developments, or at least of how scriptwriters may perceive and incorporate such developments.

According to Suzanne Romaine (1999, pp. 1-2), our biological sex is something we are born with and not something that we can control. Gender, however, is something that we communicate and do “with our words” (Romaine 1999, p. 2). Regarding sex and gender in the horror genre, it can be said that the majority of monsters and heroes are male while the majority of victims are female (Clover, 1992, p. 12). This is important since, according to Alexandrin (2009, p. 150), television series can affect the way people view not only others but also themselves. So, apart from being entertaining, television series can shape people’s attitudes and values, not least with respect to gender.

*Supernatural* is a popular horror television series whose main characters are male, but it has both female and male viewers worldwide, which is another reason to examine the dialogue between the three male main characters. I will try to determine if their speech style is competitive and thus stereotypically male. The results should be of interest to, and have possible implications for, people with an interest in language and gender studies, especially when it comes to scripted material and television series.

This study will focus on same-sex dialogues in which two or all three of the main characters, Sam, Dean and Bobby participate. The purpose is to determine if and to what extent some linguistic features that are said to be characteristic of competitive talk among men occur in these dialogues. Do modern, scripted dialogues correspond to the impression given in the literature? Linguistic behavior or features that are said to contribute to competitive speech style fall within the following categories: topic choice, monologues, playing the expert, verbal sparring, questions and turn-taking. In this study, I will try to answer the following research question: can the principal male characters’ spoken interaction in *Supernatural* be considered competitive and thus stereotypically male?
This essay is structured as follows: the theoretical background that forms the basis for this study is presented in section 2, while the methodology and materials are discussed in section 3. The findings derived from the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the material are presented and discussed in section 4. Section 5 provides a summary, conclusions and questions that may be relevant for similar, future studies.

2 Background

2.1 Gender in the horror genre

The horror genre has a number of essential features that distinguish it from other genres. According to Nickel (2010, p. 15) “[h]orror has two central elements: (1) an appearance of the evil supernatural or of the monstrous (this includes the psychopath who kills monstrously); and (2) the intentional elicitation of dread, visceral disgust, fear, or startlement in the spectator or reader.” Other frequently occurring components of the horror genre are humor and novelty. The horror genre also tends to be increasingly self-referential and parodic and to borrow from other genres and themes, and thus makes use of both repetition and variation regarding the stories. According to Fahy (2010, pp. 1-2), the stories usually meet the audience’s expectations but also surprise them with the unexpected. This balance “opens up new possibilities for frightening audiences, for innovation, and for fun” (p. 2).

Clover (1992, p. 99) stresses the importance of not confusing the action-movie genre and the horror genre, even though they have some things in common. In contrast to Fahy (2010) and Clover (1992), however, Twitchell (1985, p. 8) chooses not to describe horror as a genre but as “a collection of motifs on a usually predictable sequence that gives us a specific psychological effect – the shivers”. According to Twitchell (1985, p. 3), an interest in horror is reflected in for example music videos, books, art and television.

As mentioned in the introduction, the majority of monsters and heroes in horror contexts are male while the majority of victims are female (Clover, 1992, p. 12). More specifically, according to Twitchell (1985, p. 25), the victims in horror are “buxom young girls of the bourgeoisie” while the heroes are young men. The heroines that do appear are often masculine regarding clothing and behavior. When male victims appear in distress, they do so “in feminine postures at the moment of their extremity” (Clover, 1992, p. 12).

However, the horror genre is not at a standstill and important developments have taken place regarding the different roles and gender. According to Clover (1992, p. 16), it is
possible that “when we observe a consistent change in the surface male-female configurations of a traditional story-complex, we are probably looking, however obliquely, at a deeper change in the culture”. The idea of a female hero, for example, is more prominent in modern horror (Clover, 1992, p. 16). The women's movement has had some impact on some of the traditional aspects of the horror genre and one of its greatest contributions is "the image of an angry woman" who is capable of violence and can take on the role of offender/abuser (Clover, 1992, p. 17). Within the modern horror genre, the idea of a “new man” has emerged, too, and so has the idea of two distinct masculinities: the old and the new. The old masculinity can be compared to the action-movie character Rambo, while the new man is an individual who, after surviving death threats, nightmarish experiences, and physical and mental challenges in general, becomes a more humble man who at last has learned how to be open and honest with his loved ones (Clover, 1992, p. 99).

2.2 Language and gender

As mentioned in the introduction, our biological sex is something that we cannot easily control since we are born with it, but gender is something that we do. Romaine (1999, p. 2) gives examples of how this can be achieved: “[p]hysical appearance, dress, behavior, and language provide some of the most important means of identifying ourselves daily to others as male or female”. Holmes & Meyerhoff emphasize that there is noticeable development within language and gender as a field of language research. According to them, “language and gender is a particularly vibrant area of research and theory development within the larger study of language and society” (Holmes & Meyerhoff, 2005, p. 1).

Early research in communication and gender is said to have focused mainly on women and what distinguishes them from men. Men and their way of communicating were considered the norm while women and their way of communicating were viewed as an anomaly. In other words, such early studies did not equally include both men’s and women’s ways of communicating but rather seemed to single out women’s way of communicating as deviant since they did not question the “hegemonic worldview of white, male dominance” (Perry, Sterk & Turner, 1992, p. 1).

According to Pfeiffer (1994, p. 491), research regarding language and gender experienced an upswing during the early 1980’s due to the women's movement. He also claims that this field of language research has continued to grow and that an increasing number of earlier conclusions regarding female conversational styles have been questioned by
new generations of researchers. However, Pfeiffer (1994, p. 491) argues there are still preconceived notions about female conversations that circulate in everyday contexts, and these notions seem to be passed on from generation to generation. Romaine (1999, p. 4) proposes that the stereotypes we carry with us regarding male and female attributes are triggered when we see or hear another individual display gender. She also argues that our stereotypes regarding male and female talk reveal our attitudes towards how we believe men and women should be. Some examples of such stereotypes are that men are said to be more aggressive and stronger than women and that women are more passive but at the same time more talkative than men. Romaine (1999, p. 4) also proposes that “[p]erceived gender differences are often results of these stereotypes about such differences, rather than the result of the actual existence of real differences”.

There is research which is specifically focused on male and female speech in same-sex groups and, according to Cameron (1998, p. 276), “[a]nalyses of men’s and women’s speech style are commonly organized around a series of global oppositions, e.g. men’s talk is ‘competitive’, whereas women’s is ‘cooperative’”. Coates (2004, p. 126-132) claims that there are a number of linguistic features that are said to be characteristic of women’s cooperative/collaborative style of speech. Such linguistic features are, for example, minimal responses, hedges and tag questions. She also claims that the conversational topic tends to be about people and feelings and that the one-at-a-time model of turn-taking does not apply. More information on men’s competitive speech style will be provided below.

2.2.1 Features of competitive speech style

Stereotypical conversations between men are said to be “competitive” or characterized by a sort of "adversarial style of talk" (Coates, 2004, p. 133). There are certain linguistic features that are considered to be characteristic of competitive talk (among men) and, according to Coates (2004, p.133), these include “topic choice; monologues and playing the expert; questions; verbal sparring; and turn-taking patterns”. Below, more information on each of these features will be provided.

Haas (1979, p. 623) argues that there are plenty of stereotypes about male and female talk and points out that an interesting range of research findings from different studies regarding male and female spoken language appeared in the early 1970's. Men are, for example, stereotypically said to “use more slang, profanity and obscenity and to talk more about sports, money, and business” (Haas, 1979, p. 623). However, stereotypes
Aside, it is very difficult to obtain empirical evidence regarding male and female spoken language since “studies can only sample limited populations in specific situations” (Haas, 1979, p. 623). Haas (1979, p. 623) also highlights the importance of remembering that no linguistic feature (in this case of spoken American English) is solely and exclusively used by men or by women. While there is some research which strongly supports the stereotype that men talk more about money and politics while women talk more about family and home, these studies were conducted during the 1920’s.

Coates (2004, p. 133) claims that the participants in all-male conversations are likely to avoid sharing personal information about themselves and generally prefer to have conversations about more impersonal topics such as “current affairs, modern technology, cars or sport”. On those occasions when conversations among men do contain personal topics, it is likely not about their feelings. Coates (2004, p. 133) claims that such conversations are then primarily about the speakers’ “drinking habits or personal achievements”.

Coates (2004, pp. 134-135) claims that questions occur on a somewhat regular basis in all-male conversations. However, while Coates (2004, p. 126, 133) maintains that stereotypical conversations between men are said to be characterized by a style of interaction that is based on power rather than solidarity (when compared to female speakers who are said to have a style based on support), she also claims that questions asked to request information can encourage the other participants to take on the role of expert regarding the current conversational topic (p. 136). In how far such encouragement can be considered competitive remains unclear, though. Coates (2004, p. 136) also proposes that questions in competitive talk among men “have the power to hand over the turn from one speaker to another”. However, this does not strike me as particularly competitive in nature either – on the contrary. More in line with claims concerning male competitiveness is a reference by Cheshire (2000, p. 248) to a study by Holmes from 1997, which revealed that “questions and comments that were challenging, undermining or disruptive occurred exclusively in the men’s stories”.

Coates (2004, pp. 136-137) claims that male speakers prefer conversations that follow a one-at-a-time model of turn-taking. Smith-Lovin & Brody (1989, p. 425) mention that violations of turn-taking norms occur in conversations in general and that interruptions are examples of such violations. With reference to Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, they argue that an “interruption occurs when one speaker disrupts the turn of another with a new utterance” (Smith-Lovin & Brody, p. 425). Furthermore:
Since interruptions represent a clear violation of turn-taking norms that give one conversant greater access to others' attention, we are not surprised that their occurrence is linked to dominance, power, and status. (Smith-Lovin & Brody, 1989, p. 425)

Smith-Lovin & Brody determined that there are different types of interruptions and that they can be divided into three categories: negative, supportive and neutral (1989, p. 431). They determined that an interruption was negative if “it expressed disagreement with the speaker, raised an objection to the speaker's idea, or introduced a complete change of topic” and that an interruption was supportive if “it expressed agreement with the speaker” and if it stimulated or even requested elaboration (1989, p. 428). They also conducted a study that examined how “the affective character of interruptions varies across speakers and groups” (1989, p. 424). They collected data in 31 groups and the subject pool comprised both male and female white students between the ages of 17 and 25. The group compositions varied, i.e. the study included all-male, all-female and mixed-sex groups. It revealed, among other things, that men interrupted women more than men interrupted other men (Smith-Lovin & Brody, 1989, p. 430). They also found the following:

In all-male groups we find that male-male interruptions are most likely to be supportive. Males interrupting other males in such groups often clarify and even encourage the ideas suggested by the interrupted speaker. Although the speech is disrupted, the group discussion of the topic is not. (1989, p. 433)

In other words, interruptions in all-male conversations do interfere with the one-at-a-time model of turn-taking, but they are not necessarily competitive. Smith-Lovin and Brody (1989, p. 430-433) argue that men are more likely to make negative interruptions in mixed-sex conversations.

Coates (2004, pp. 104, 136-137) claims that even though overlapping is usually associated with cooperative women’s talk and normally occurs in all-female conversations, there are exceptions when overlapping talk occurs in all-male conversations. Overlapping can happen, for example, when male speakers are excited or gossip with each other. With reference to Tannen, Smith-Lovin & Brody (1989, p.433) argue that in cases where the speakers do not share similar speech styles, overlapping may be perceived as competitive rather than supportive. They also argue that well-coordinated talk depends on whether or not the participants share similar speech styles, and that “when opposing styles are mixed in conversational groups, negative interpretations of others' actions are frequent” (Smith-Lovin & Brody, 1989, p. 433).
With reference to Sacks, Schegloff & Jefferson, Smith-Lovin & Brody (1989, p. 425) claim that “[n]ormally, conversation is organized so that one speaker talks at a time; speakers alternate in turns to prevent the conversation from becoming a monologue”. Coates (2004, p. 134) claims that impersonal topics can inspire or stimulate male speakers to engage in something called “playing the expert”, which in this context means that the speakers talk about subjects that they know a lot about (or as if they knew a lot about them). She also claims that a result of playing the expert is monologues, which means that participants dominate the conversation for a longer period of time.

Cheshire (2000, p. 240), referring to a study by Holmes from 1997, proposes that even though one speaker dominates the floor while speaking a monologue, monologues may still be co-constructed since “the listeners usually play an active supporting role, giving minimal responses or, if nothing else, withdrawing from the floor for the duration of the story-telling”. Cheshire’s (2000, p. 243) own study revealed that co-constructed narratives were characteristic of conversations in all-male (adolescent) friendship groups. Cheshire (2000, pp. 234, 236) recorded and analyzed conversations in single-sex friendship groups in the late 1970s, and the main focus was the narratives told between adolescent friends. Her study showed that even though monologues did occur on a somewhat regular basis, co-constructed narratives were more frequent than monologues in close-knit friendship groups.

Obviously, men do not only speak in monologues. All-male conversations can also take the form of verbal sparring, which is “an exchange of rapid-fire turns” (Coates, 2004, p. 135). She gives examples of verbal sparring and even though these contain both swear words and name-calling, they represent a kind of “friendly sparring, not a quarrel”, according to her (p. 136)

Hay (2000, p. 709) conducted a study on how New Zealand men and women use humor and on the functions of humor in conversations. She collected data in 18 friendship groups, including all-male, all-female and mixed-sex groups, and categorized functions of humor into three types: “solidarity-based, power-based and psychological functions” (p. 709). According to her, “[c]lustering of humor may occur within conversations. Sparring matches and banter, for example, encourage similar types of humor to occur in clusters within conversations” (p. 727). Her study also revealed that both men and women engage in teasing. A considerable amount of the teasing that occurred in the analyzed conversations took the form of jocular insults (p. 735). Hay (2000) also found the following:
It [teasing] tends to occur much more in single-sex interaction, perhaps also because these are the groups in which the most intimate friendships tend to be made. Teasing and *sparring* can develop a sense of 'comradeship' and joviality within groups. (p. 736, my emphasis)

According to Hay (2000, p. 739), the men in her study had a tendency to use power-based strategies of humor more often than the women, and such strategies occurred slightly more in single-sex groups than in mixed-sex groups. However, it can be said that both men and women may tease both to display power and as a means to create solidarity within the group.

As mentioned above, Cheshire (2000) conducted a study which examined the narratives told between adolescent friends in all-male and all-female groups and which revealed occurrences of verbal sparring in all-male conversations. Cheshire (2000, p. 248) describes this kind of interaction as a “quick-fire argument or exchange of insults” and characterizes her examples as follows:

> During these exchanges there was much laughter, some shouting, and a general atmosphere of enjoyment. There were no pauses; on the contrary, the pace of the conversation was very fast, with few interturn pauses. (p. 248)

In other words, the verbal sparring which occurred in Cheshire’s study was some sort of fun and entertaining verbal competition with quick exchanges of utterances.

**3 Material and method**

**3.1 Material**

*Supernatural* is an American drama/horror television series that debuted in 2005 on The WB Television Network. Its main characters are Sam and Dean Winchester, played by Jensen Ackles and Jared Padalecki. Sam and Dean are brothers who were raised by their single father to hunt evil creatures and demons. The series begins with the brothers' search for their missing father, but continues with new discoveries about their mother's murderer and the demons’ plans for Sam. Eventually, the two brothers also discover that the fate of the entire world is ultimately in their hands. Together they travel through the United States in their 1967 Chevy Impala and rescue innocent victims from vampires, shifters, angry spirits, pagan gods and even fairies, among other things.

Sam Winchester is in his late twenties and is the younger brother who, reluctantly at
first, lives life as a demon hunter, but ends up accepting his fate and dedicates his life to hunting evil. He has a strong capacity for empathy and means well, but often ends up in trouble. Dean Winchester is in his early thirties and is Sam’s older brother. Dean is a “bad boy” who drinks hard liquor and is somewhat of a ladies’ man, but secretly desires a family life despite numerous setbacks such as the death of both his parents as well as the death of several close friends, who were all killed by evil creatures and demons. However, he later realizes that life as a hunter takes its toll and that it is too late for a peaceful alternative in the suburbs. Family means everything to both Dean and Sam, which Dean proves, for example, by selling his own soul in order to bring Sam back to life after having been murdered in cold blood. In the course of the series, the two brothers mature and become the best two hunters there are, and not even Death himself will underestimate them.

A third main character is Robert ‘Bobby’ Singer (played by Jim Beaver), who is a scruffy-looking but very skilled older demon hunter with a big heart. Bobby became a hunter after being forced to kill his own wife because she was possessed by a demon. Bobby was a friend of Sam and Dean’s father John Winchester, who was also a hunter. He first made occasional appearances during the first few seasons, but his character evolved over time and eventually turned into a vital father figure for the two brothers and an essential character for the television series. Bobby is also the character who has the most screen time besides Sam and Dean.

Sam, Dean and Bobby are all working-class men with very limited finances and often find themselves in trouble with law enforcement. All three characters are also very intelligent, have astonishing intuitions and problem-solving capabilities, not to mention a strong sense of commitment, courage and a strong capacity for empathy.

*Supernatural* is produced by Warner Bros. Television and was created by Eric Kripke. New episodes are still being broadcasted at the time of writing, and the seventh season began in September 2011.

The material for this study consists of the entire third season of the series, which comprises 16 episodes that were originally broadcasted in 2007-2008. Seven different writers and eight different directors are behind the episodes in season 3, which are approximately 40 minutes in length each. The third season is the shortest of all, representing a compromise

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1 The scriptwriters of the episodes in the third season are Eric Kripke, Sera Gamble, Ben Edlund, Jeremy Carver, Cathryn Humphris, Laurence Andries and Emily McLaughlin.
2 The directors of the episodes in the third season are Kim Manners, Phil Sgriccia, Robert Singer, Charles Beeson, Mike Rohl, Cliff Bole, J. Miller Tobin and Steve Boyum.
regarding the limited time available for the study on the one hand and, on the other, the requirements concerning the quantity of material for an essay of this size.

3.1.1 Transcripts

For transcripts of the dialogues between the three main characters of *Supernatural*, the ImTOO DVD Subtitle Ripper was used. It is a tool that extracts subtitles from DVDs and turns them into PDF files that, if based on the *intralingual* subtitles, can be considered a rough transcript of the dialogue. Of course, all such transcripts based on the intralingual English subtitles were proofread to make sure that all dialogue was included. The words and utterances that the subtitles did not include were manually entered afterwards.

3.2 Method

As mentioned in the introduction, the purpose of this study is to determine if and to what extent some linguistic features that are said to be characteristic of competitive talk among men occur in dialogues between two or all three of the main characters of *Supernatural*.

Coates (2004, pp. 133-137) identifies six linguistic features that are said to be characteristic of competitive talk among men, namely: topic choice, monologues, playing the expert, verbal sparring, questions and turn-taking. These features are also discussed in other literature. For this reason, this study focuses on these six prominent linguistic features.

This is a both quantitative and qualitative study, and much of the analytical process consists in repeatedly looking at the video material, reading the transcripts and taking notes. *Quantitative study* “refers to research that is concerned with quantities and measurements” (Biggam, 2008, p. 86). The quantitative analysis in this study consists in counting the occurrences of the linguistic features investigated (in the dialogues between two or all three of the main characters considered) and in presenting the results in tables (see section 4). However, to make it quite clear, while this study will focus on dialogues in which the previously mentioned linguistic features occur, it will also take into account all the talk between the three characters that does not contain any of those features, so that a quantitative comparison can be made.

*Qualitative research* “is linked to in-depth exploratory studies” (Biggam, 2008, p. 86). The main task of qualitative studies is not to generalize but rather to characterize or portray something (Stukát, 2005, p. 31). The qualitative aspect of this study consists in identifying and interpreting the linguistic features in relation to the contexts in which they occur.
Transcripts of particularly interesting dialogue sequences are presented as part of the results (see section 4).

According to Biggam (2008, p. 86), the “reality is that it is rare that professional researchers, and dissertation students for that matter, stick to only collecting and analysing either quantitative or qualitative data”. In this study, a combined quantitative and qualitative approach is chosen, too, because the two methods complement each other. The former makes it possible to determine the number of occurrences of the linguistic features and to present these numbers in a concrete manner. The latter permits a more in-depth analysis of the occurrences found.

To be able to answer this study’s research question, it is necessary to first define the form of the previously mentioned linguistic features in order to then determine their function, i.e. whether they are used competitively or not. Some of the features that are said to be characteristic of competitive speech are defined in terms of grammatical structure. For example, structure is crucial when defining which utterances can be considered questions (for more information see 3.1.1). However, not all categories are defined in terms of grammatical structure. The length of utterances and the speed in which utterances were exchanged are significant when defining monologues, verbal sparring and turn-taking. In the analysis of conversational topics, the presence or absence of self-disclosure is crucial.

The function of the linguistic features that occur is then determined by interpreting the talk exchange in progress, not just taking into account what is said, but also to what purpose it is said, as suggested by e.g. facial expressions, tone of voice, posture and context. More information on how the linguistic features are defined in this study will follow below.

3.2.1 Questions

To be able to determine if questions are used in a competitive manner, it is necessary to determine which utterances can be considered questions to begin with. In this study, utterances with an interrogative grammatical structure are considered questions. Such structures include wh- questions, yes/no questions and tag questions. Other utterances, if they have a rising intonation at the end, are also considered to be questions, for example declaratives with a rising intonation. Cases of ellipsis are included in the same categories of questions that their unellipted counterparts would be assigned to, provided that these categories can be determined. Extreme cases of ellipsis, and those that are difficult to
categorize regarding the type of question they represent, are considered non clausal-structures with a rising intonation.

A question is regarded competitive if it in some way disputes, challenges or weakens/undermines another speaker’s claims. A question is also considered competitive if its purpose is to interrupt another speaker’s utterance (more about interruptions in 3.2.5). However, in this study, questions asked in order to invite someone else to play the expert are not considered competitive, since such questions are more about willingly letting someone else dominate the conversation, which is not competitive in nature (for a brief discussion, see 2.2.1.2) This study is also open to the possibility that a question can have more than one function, in which case it would represent a cross-category item.

3.2.2 Monologues and playing the expert

To analyze the function of monologues, it is, as with the questions, necessary to first determine which utterances should be considered monologues. In this study, a monologue is defined as anything longer than 25 words spoken by a character without interruptions from other speakers (more about interruptions in 3.1.5). Note that minimal responses are not considered interruptions.

In this study, monologues can have different functions, e.g. being competitive or being collaborative. According to Coates (2004, p. 133-134), monologues are said to be a result of playing the expert while playing the expert is said to be a competitive linguistic feature, but in this study I will keep an open mind regarding this. In other words, playing the expert is considered a possible function of monologues, but to play the expert does not have to be competitive and might in fact be cooperative. Playing the expert is here defined as information being provided on some topic in a manner that suggests that the other conversational participants do not have that information.

3.2.3 Topic choice

Impersonal conversational topics are a feature said to be characteristic of competitive speech. This study considers characters’ personal and private feelings, private thoughts and experiences personal conversational topics. A side effect of such topics is self-disclosure and such topics are thus not considered a feature of competitive speech. However, this study is open to the possibility that the characters can speak about sensitive topics without the conversation being private or personal, e.g. by joking about sex without revealing anything
private. Occurrences of emotionally charged words are considered to be possible clues in the process of determining if a conversational topic is personal or not. Note that, rather than counting utterances or turns, this study counts the number of instances where personal topics are discussed at all.

3.2.4 Verbal sparring

In this study, quick-fire exchanges are defined as four or more turns (at least two per participant), with a single short utterance (with a minimum of one word) per turn, spoken in rapid succession between at least two of the three main characters. If the purpose of such quick-fire exchanges is some sort of verbal competition, they are then considered verbal sparring.

3.2.5 Turn-taking

One linguistic feature that is said to be characteristic of competitive speech is the one-at-a-time model of turn-taking (Coates 2004, p. 136-137). To be able to investigate this linguistic feature, it is necessary to first define what can violate this principle of turn-taking. In other words, to be able to investigate the occurrences of the one-at-a-time model of turn-taking in the dialogues, the focus is put on the disturbances regarding this model. Much in line with Smith-Lovin & Brody (1989, p. 425), this study considers interruptions to be violations of the one-at-a-time model of turn-taking, and interruptions are defined as utterances that consist of at least one word, cut off another speaker’s utterance and lead to that speaker not being able to complete his utterance. Utterances that only temporarily interrupt a speaker and do not prevent the speaker from completing his utterance are considered attempted but unsuccessful interruptions. As previously mentioned (see 2.2.1.3), Smith-Lovin & Brody (1989, p. 428) determined that an interruption was negative if “it expressed disagreement with the speaker, raised an objection to the speaker’s idea, or introduced a complete change of topic” and that an interruption was supportive if “it expressed agreement with the speaker” and if it stimulated or even requested elaboration. This study defines the functions of interruptions more or less in accordance with Smith-Lovin & Brody’s definitions, except that what they call negative interruptions are called competitive interruptions here while supportive interruptions are called collaborative interruptions. An interruption is considered competitive if its content, manner and purpose combine to challenge or undermine the other speaker’s utterance. An interruption is considered collaborative if its content, manner and purpose combine to express
agreement or stimulate cooperation in some way even though one participant is being interrupted.

Overlapping speech is also considered a violation of the one-at-a-time model of turn-taking. Utterances that are spoken at the end of another speakers’ utterance, overlapping the last words, are considered overlapping utterances. As in connection with the monologues (see 3.1.2), minimal responses are not considered interruptions.

4 Research results and discussion

Before examining the dialogues in terms of the various linguistic features of competitive speech style, it is useful to first determine how much each of the main characters takes part in the dialogues. To do this, words and utterances spoken by each character are counted. In this study, the concept of *utterances* is used rather than that of *sentences*, since utterances also include sentence fragments and can consist of only one or two words. In this study, an utterance is considered a character’s line that ends with some type of punctuation, whether it is a full stop, exclamation mark, question mark etc. The utterances and words that are counted are only the ones spoken by and to Sam, Dean and Bobby. The words and utterances that these protagonists speak to other characters are not counted since this study only focuses on conversations between the main characters themselves. Dialogues between the characters that are spoken via telephone are also disregarded since the act of speaking on a telephone affects the speaker’s speech style. Note that the words are counted graphically and not syntactically, meaning that contractions such as *isn’t* and *it’s* count as one word only, as do hyphenated items such as *half-dead*, while e.g. *hex bag* counts as two.

The tables in this study provide information about the characters in the order of age, i.e. the youngest character first and the oldest character last. Table 1 shows the number of words and utterances spoken by each character in the dialogues that are included in this study, according to the principles described above. The analysis of the dialogues between two and all three of the main characters shows that the majority of the dialogues are between the two brothers Sam and Dean. Dean speaks 54.3% of the utterances, while Sam speaks 39.9% and Bobby 5.8% (see Table 1).
Table 1. Total number and share of the utterances and words spoken by the main characters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total number of spoken...</th>
<th>Sam</th>
<th>Dean</th>
<th>Bobby</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>…utterances</td>
<td>1281 (39.9%)</td>
<td>1744 (54.3%)</td>
<td>186 (5.8%)</td>
<td>3211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…words</td>
<td>8205 (42.8%)</td>
<td>9591 (50.1%)</td>
<td>1358 (7.1%)</td>
<td>19154</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The distribution of the utterances between the main characters may be due to the main plot in the third season, which is predominantly about Dean’s demon deal. This may explain why Dean is the one who has the largest share of utterances in comparison with the other two main characters. Sam stands for a larger share than Bobby because he appears in every episode, side by side with his brother Dean, while Bobby does not. Bobby also regularly has dialogues by telephone with Sam and Dean, and these are not included in this study (cf. above).

4.1 Questions

4.1.1 The frequency of questions

A total of 742 questions were found in the dialogues between the main characters. All characters speak utterances that contain wh-interrogatives, both in their traditional form, e.g. “What is happening to us?”, and ellipted wh-interrogatives, e.g. Last known location? which in its complete form would be What is the last known location? The analyzed dialogues also contain yes/no interrogatives, e.g. Do you even know what that is? and declaratives with a rising intonation, e.g. We’re just gonna let Ruby rot down there? The characters also produce non-clausal structures with a rising intonation, e.g. Blood? and Snow White? as well as utterances that contain traditional and more informal cases of tag questions, e.g. He’s sure evergreen stakes will kill this thing, right? and I just felt like pizza, you know?

Dean has the largest share of utterances containing questions falling into any formal category, except declaratives with a rising intonation, of which Sam and Dean have an equal share, i.e. 49.4% each (see Table 2). Aside from this, the general impression is that the characters’ shares of the different types of questions reflect their overall shares in the dialogues.
Table 2. Number of questions and the distribution of these questions among the main characters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Utterances with …</th>
<th>Sam</th>
<th>Dean</th>
<th>Bobby</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>… <em>wh</em>-interrogatives</td>
<td>144 (41.9%)</td>
<td>185 (53.8%)</td>
<td>15 (4.3%)</td>
<td>344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… yes/no interrogatives</td>
<td>57 (35.4%)</td>
<td>95 (59%)</td>
<td>9 (5.6%)</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… declaratives with a rising intonation</td>
<td>41 (49.4%)</td>
<td>41 (49.4%)</td>
<td>1 (1.2%)</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… non-clausal structures with a rising intonation</td>
<td>32 (40%)</td>
<td>45 (56.3%)</td>
<td>3 (3.7%)</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… tag questions</td>
<td>25 (33.8%)</td>
<td>47 (63.5%)</td>
<td>2 (2.7%)</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>413</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>742</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In other words, 742 utterances of a total of 3211 utterances contain some form of question.

4.1.2 The functions of the questions

Most questions are asked to seek information (475 occurrences) and include the majority of the *wh*- and yes/no interrogatives, e.g. *Where was this?* and *Do we know how to kill it?* Questions asked to get something confirmed, such as information or theories, also occur regularly and a majority of these are yes/no interrogatives and declaratives with a rising intonation, e.g. *Is it the serial killing chimney sweep?* and *The night the Devil’s gate opened?* Questions asked to get something confirmed also include non-clausal structures with a rising intonation, such as *Pagan lore?* and *Bon Jovi?*

As previously mentioned (see 3.2.1), this study is open to the possibility that a question can have more than one function. The third-most common type of question in terms of function is questions asked in a competitive spirit (a total of 114), and 112 of these are cross-category items. The purposes of the questions asked in a competitive spirit are to challenge, undermine or accuse another participant. The following excerpt from the transcript contains two cross-category items, namely a) one declarative with a rising intonation functioning as a question asked to confirm as well as challenge Dean’s utterance, and b) one question asked in a competitive spirit to seek information (these questions are in italics).

1 D: No, you’re not. Because I’m not letting you wander in the woods alone to track some organ-stealing freak.
2 S: *You’re not gonna let me?*
3 D: No / I'm not gonna let you.
4 S: *How are you gonna stop me?*

\* Very short pause
The fourth-most common function of questions is to seek agreement from the other participants, which is the case for the majority of utterances with tag questions, e.g. *Look, if we’re going down, we’re going down together, all right?* and *Cutting it a little close, don’t you think?* Table 3 provides information on the functions and distribution of the questions among the characters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions asked …</th>
<th>Sam</th>
<th>Dean</th>
<th>Bobby</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>… to seek information</td>
<td>185 (38.9%)</td>
<td>271 (57.1%)</td>
<td>19 (4%)</td>
<td>475</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… to get something confirmed</td>
<td>73 (41.3%)</td>
<td>99 (55.9%)</td>
<td>5 (2.8%)</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… in a competitive spirit</td>
<td>45 (39.5%)</td>
<td>65 (57%)</td>
<td>4 (3.5%)</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… to seek agreement</td>
<td>12 (30.8%)</td>
<td>27 (69.2%)</td>
<td>4 (0%)</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… for rhetorical effect</td>
<td>5 (31.2%)</td>
<td>9 (56.3%)</td>
<td>2 (12.5%)</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… whose functions cannot be determined</td>
<td>4 (36.4%)</td>
<td>5 (45.4%)</td>
<td>2 (18.2%)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… to soften a statement</td>
<td>4 (44.4%)</td>
<td>5 (55.6%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… to get someone’s attention</td>
<td>6 (75%)</td>
<td>2 (25%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… to make a request</td>
<td>2 (40%)</td>
<td>3 (60%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>486</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>854</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since there are 112 cross-category items, the total number of occurrences is higher in Table 3 than the total amount in Table 2. Also, in eleven cases the functions cannot be determined with confidence, and a majority of these are non-clausal structures with rising intonation.

### 4.1.3 Discussion

Coates (2004, p. 136) claims that questions asked to request information can encourage another participant to take on the role of expert regarding the current conversational topic. However, the general impression of the dialogues analyzed in this study is that questions do not stimulate others to play the expert to a great degree since the characters regularly play the expert on their own initiative (see 4.2 for more information on playing the expert). Coates (2004, p. 136) also proposes that questions in competitive talk among men “have the power to hand over the turn from one speaker to another”. However, the analysis in this study shows that that is the usual effect, or at least side effect, of all questions with the exception of questions asked for rhetorical effect. Cheshire (2000, p. 248) refers to a study by Holmes from 1997, which revealed that “questions and comments that were challenging, undermining or
disruptive occurred exclusively in the men’s stories”. Interestingly, this study shows that the questions in the dialogues between the (male) main characters in *Supernatural* have a number of different functions and that, of the 114 questions asked in a competitive spirit, 112 are cross-category items.

### 4.2 Monologues and playing the expert

#### 4.2.1 The frequency of monologues

This study found a total of 101 monologues. Dean has the largest share of utterances that are spoken in monologues, namely 55.4%, while Sam speaks 39% (see Table 4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sam</th>
<th>Dean</th>
<th>Bobby</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>181 (39%)</td>
<td>257 (55.4%)</td>
<td>26 (5.6%)</td>
<td>464</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The study shows that 464 utterances of a total of 3211 are spoken in monologues. The reason why Dean has the largest share of monologues might be the same as why he has the largest share of the total number of utterances (cf. Table 1), namely that the main plot of the third season is primarily about his deal with a crossroads demon (see 4.3 for more information on topic choice).

#### 4.2.2 The functions of the monologues

All three characters speak most of their utterances in monologues in a collaborative spirit: Dean with 73.5% collaborative utterances monologues, Sam with 80.1% and Bobby with 84.6% (see Table 5). However, both collaborative and competitive utterances occur in monologues in which the character plays the expert. See 4.2.2.1 for more information on playing the expert in monologues.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Utterances in monologues spoken...</th>
<th>Sam</th>
<th>Dean</th>
<th>Bobby</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>… in a collaborative spirit</td>
<td>145 (80.1%)</td>
<td>189 (73.5%)</td>
<td>22 (84.6%)</td>
<td>356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… in a competitive spirit</td>
<td>36 (19.9%)</td>
<td>68 (26.5%)</td>
<td>4 (15.4%)</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>464</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2.2.1 Playing the expert in monologues

As previously mentioned (see 3.2.2), this study considers playing the expert a possible function of monologues. The analysis shows that playing the expert is a function of 75.2% of the monologues spoken by the three main characters. However, it also reveals that all of the three main characters sometimes play the expert in a competitive and sometimes in a collaborative spirit. In fact, a total of 73.7% of the occurrences in which someone plays the expert are in a collaborative spirit i.e. these occurrences contain a majority of collaborative utterances. When the characters play the expert in a collaborative spirit, the purpose is mainly to work together to solve a case and so they share facts regarding it, e.g. information about the victim, the cause of death, the police report, lore and the theories they have regarding the case, as well as strategies for solving it. They also play the expert when providing strategies for getting out of dangerous situations. However, the characters sometimes also play the expert regarding such matters in a competitive spirit.

They also play the expert when providing each other with information regarding their own opinions, points of view and experiences, and they may do so both collaboratively and competitively, though in either case the characters presuppose that they know best and that their own point/opinion is the correct one and they thus present it to the other participants. When the characters play the expert regarding such matters in a competitive spirit, they argue for their point rather forcefully and often even aggressively. Sam, Dean and Bobby also have the tendency to play the expert regarding each other, in an either competitive or collaborative spirit, i.e. they tell each other what the other one is doing, what the other one should be doing, what the other one usually does and what motives lie behind what the other one is doing and what the other one is feeling. The following excerpt contains examples of monologues in which Dean expresses how Sam is different and how he is supposed to act.

1  D: Are you feeling okay?
2  S: Ugh. Why are you always asking me that?
3  D: Because you’re taking advice from a demon for starters. And by the way, you seem less
4  and less worried about offing people you know. It used to eat you up inside.
5  S: Yeah, what has that gotten me?
6  D: Nothing! But it’s what you’re supposed to do, ok. We’re supposed to drive in the frigging car
7  and argue about this stuff. You going on about the sanctity of life and all that crap.
8  S: Wait/ So, you’re mad because I’m starting to agree with you?

Even though the monologues identified are generally, but not strikingly, longer than the minimum decided on, there are a few monologues that are considerably longer than 25 words. One of the longest monologues has for example a total of 82 words.
4.2.3 Discussion

The three main characters regularly play the expert when working together on a case. In this study, information and facts regarding a case are considered impersonal topics (for more information about personal and impersonal topics, see 4.3). According to Coates (2004, p. 134), impersonal topics can stimulate male speakers to engage in playing the expert. In this study, however, it is unlikely that the characters playing the expert when working on a case is a result of the case representing an impersonal topic. The characters’ tendency to play the expert does not seem to be stimulated to a greater extent by impersonal topics than by personal topics, since they play the expert in connection with both. Coates (2004, p. 134) also claims that a result of playing the expert is monologues. This study considers playing the expert a function of monologues and monologues a means rather than a purpose. Somewhat in line with Coates (2004), however, this study does show that there is a strong connection between monologues and playing the expert.

Cheshire (2000, p. 240), referring to a study by Holmes from 1997, proposes that monologues may be co-constructed even though one speaker dominates the floor, as the listeners play a supportive role by giving minimal responses and/or withdrawing from the floor. In my material, the listeners rarely give minimal responses, though, but tend to listen quietly and withdraw from the floor during monologues. This may be because the monologues, like the rest of the dialogues, are scripted and because too many minimal responses from the other characters during a monologue might be perceived as disturbing to television viewers. What speaks against this is that the dialogues in general do contain features resembling natural speech, such as interruptions and overlapping utterances (see 4.5 for more information).

4.3 Topic choice

4.3.1 The frequency of personal topics

There are a total of 100 clear-cut instances of personal topics in the analyzed dialogues. Dean and Sam almost have an equal share of these instances: Sam with 43% and Dean with 45% while Bobby has a share of 12% of the instances (see Table 6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sam</th>
<th>Dean</th>
<th>Bobby</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>43 (43%)</td>
<td>45 (44%)</td>
<td>12 (12%)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3.2 The functions of topic choice

All three characters share their feelings, fears, private thoughts, beliefs and perceptions with each other, and all of this is considered personal conversational topics. Dean’s deal with the crossroads demon and his unavoidable death is regularly discussed among all three characters, though mainly between himself and Sam. While Sam expresses his thoughts about a life without Dean, his attempts to desperately save his brother and his anger with Dean for making the deal in the first place, Dean talks about his feelings about the deal, his fear of dying, as well as his fear of hell, and he also tries to reassure Sam that he will be fine without his big brother around. Sam and Dean also turn to Bobby when they need advice and when they need to talk to a third party, which leads to Bobby sharing his personal thoughts and perceptions.

A detailed quantitative analysis of the functions of topic choice provided too difficult to carry through since personal and impersonal topics are not discussed in a purely competitive or collaborative spirit. In other words, because personal and impersonal topics are discussed with competitive and collaborative utterances tightly intertwined, it was difficult to distinguish and define the functions of topic choice. However, the general impression is that all three characters discuss personal and impersonal topics in both a competitive and collaborative spirit. When personal topics are discussed collaboratively, the characters often do so in a calm manner to seek understanding, acceptance and agreement from the other participant. When personal topics are discussed competitively, the characters often do so rather forcefully in arguments with each other, though often with the purpose of seeking understanding and acceptance from the other participant.

A large proportion of the impersonal topics discussed consists of lore regarding supernatural beings such as monster, ghosts, demons and the hunting of such beings. This is a consequence of *Supernatural* falling into the horror genre. The impersonal topics discussed also include strategies, weapons, cars, food and music. In cases where impersonal topics are discussed in a collaborative spirit, the characters often do so calmly, mainly with the purpose of cooperating to solve a case. When discussing impersonal topics in a competitive spirit, the characters do so calmly at times and more agitatedly at others. When the characters discuss impersonal topics in a competitive manner, their feelings are often conveyed, e.g. when it comes to disagreements over how to approach a case. From time to time, the characters’ feelings are also conveyed when discussing impersonal topics in a collaborative spirit, but not to the same extent. However, such cases are still considered as being about impersonal topics, since this study focuses on the topics per se and not the absence or presence of feelings.
4.3.3 Discussion

Coates (2004, p. 133) claims that the participants in all-male conversations are likely to avoid sharing personal information about themselves and generally prefer to have conversations about more impersonal topics such as “current affairs, modern technology, cars or sport”. She also argues that when conversations among men do contain personal topics, they are most likely not about their feelings. Coates (2004, p. 133) claims that such conversations are then primarily about the speakers’ “drinking habits or personal achievements”. The analysis in this study found that even though impersonal topics are regularly discussed among the characters, personal topics also occur frequently and most talk exchanges contain some personal elements. Also, self-disclosure is a reoccurring purpose or side effect of conversations in which personal topics are discussed. However, this should not be surprising since the analyzed dialogues are between characters that are either related or very close acquaintances. Even though it was not the main focus of this study, the analysis shows that the characters’ feelings are conveyed to various degrees both when personal and impersonal topics are discussed.

4.4 Verbal sparring

4.4.1 The frequency of quick-fire exchanges

The analysis shows that there are only two quick-fire exchanges that fulfill the criteria outlined in 3.2.4, and these were between Sam and Dean only with a total of four turns each. In both cases, each turn contains a single short utterance of only one word, with the exception of one turn that consists of two short words.

4.4.2 The functions of the quick-fire exchanges

In neither of the two quick-fire exchanges is the purpose some sort of verbal competition. They are therefore not considered verbal sparring. The analysis shows that the two quick-fire exchanges have two similar but slightly different functions. The function of the first is to show agreement rapidly between the participants. The duration of the exchange in this case is a total of 3 seconds.

The function of the second quick-fire exchange is for the participants to come to the
same conclusion rapidly, which in this case means that they have to contact a disliked individual and ask for her help. The function is also to show agreement rapidly once they have come to the same conclusion. In the excerpt below, the quick-fire exchange is in italics.

In this case Dean comes to the conclusion that they have to contact Bela and shows his dislike by saying *crap*. Sam recognizes Dean’s utterance and immediately asks a question (an ellipted *wh-* question). By saying Bela’s name, Dean shares his conclusion, to which Sam repeats Bela’s name with a rising intonation at the end. He quickly reaches the same conclusion as Dean and shows his agreement with Dean’s dislike by saying *crap*, too. The duration of the quick-fire exchanges in this case is a total of 5 seconds.

### 4.4.3 Discussion

Cheshire’s (2000) study, which examined the narratives told between adolescent friends in same-sex groups, revealed occurrences of verbal sparring in all-male conversations. Cheshire (2000, p. 248) describes verbal sparring as “quick-fire argument or exchange of insults” and also mentions that these exchanges were made in a fun and entertaining manner. The analysis in this study shows that there are two occurrences of quick-fire exchanges. However, they do not represent verbal sparring since their function is not competition but collaboration. It is worth pointing out that the quick-fire exchanges might be perceived by viewers as humorous and entertaining, but that is not their function on the level of the story, nor the characters’ aim. It is most likely a consequence of the scriptwriters’ aim to entertain the viewers.

According to Hay (2000, p. 735), a considerable amount of the teasing that occurred in the conversations analyzed by her took the form of jocular insults. Although in this study there was no verbal sparring, there were occurrences of teasing and jocular insults, especially between Sam and Dean. Most of the time, it is Sam and Dean that initiate teasing, while Bobby rarely initiates teasing, though he may respond by teasing back.

---

4 Very short pause  
5 Longer pause
4.5 Turn-taking

The analysis shows that all three characters follow the one-at-a-time model of turn-taking for the majority of the dialogues. However, interruptions and overlapping utterances violating the one-at-a-time model of turn-taking do occur quite frequently.

4.5.1 Interruptions

4.5.1.1 The frequency of interruptions

As previously mentioned (see 3.2.5), “successful” interruptions are defined as utterances that consist of at least one word, cut off another speaker’s utterance and lead to that speaker not being able to complete his utterance. The analysis shows that both Sam’s and Dean’s utterances are interrupted from time to time and that they speak an equal share of successfully interrupted utterances. However, Bobby’s utterances are not successfully interrupted in the dialogues which were analyzed in this study. There is a total of 18 successfully interrupted utterances in dialogues between the main characters and there is a one-to-one relationship regarding interrupted and interrupting utterances (see 4.5.1.2 for more information).

The analysis also shows that all three characters produce utterances that must be considered attempted but ultimately unsuccessful interruptions, i.e. they do not prevent the other speaker from completing his utterance. Table 7 provides the numbers.

| Attempted interruptions by the main characters. |
|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
|                  | Sam             | Dean            | Bobby           |
|                  | 4 (33.3%)       | 7 (58.3%)       | 1 (8.4%)        |
| Total            | 12              |                 |                 |

As could be expected from their shares in the dialogues, Dean produces the largest share of the attempted interruptions while Sam has the second largest share.

4.5.1.2 The functions of the interruptions

The majority of successfully interrupting utterances by the main characters are spoken in a competitive spirit. While Dean speaks the largest share of competitive interruptions, Sam has the largest share of collaborative interrupting utterances. Bobby only produces one competitive interruption and no collaborative one (see Table 8).
Table 8. Collaborative and competitive interrupting utterances spoken by the main characters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interrupting utterances spoken …</th>
<th>Sam</th>
<th>Dean</th>
<th>Bobby</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>… in a competitive spirit</td>
<td>4 (36.4%)</td>
<td>6 (54.5%)</td>
<td>1 (9.1%)</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>… in a collaborative spirit</td>
<td>4 (57.1%)</td>
<td>3 (42.9%)</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of the competitively interrupting utterances serve to object to an idea and/or expresses disagreement with what the other speaker is saying. Another group of competitively interrupting utterances challenges the other speaker’s intentions or motives in some way, often by expressing distrust or suspicion.

The collaboratively interrupting utterances stimulate cooperation with the other speaker even though the other speaker is being interrupted, e.g. when helpful and important information regarding a case is provided. The other speaker is thus encouraged to continue cooperating to solve the case as shown by the transcript below:

1  D: All right, so this professor {…}⁶
2  S: {Dexter Hasselback, He was passing through town when he vanished}⁷
3  D: Last known location?
4  S: His daughter says he was on his way to visit the Broward County Mystery Spot.

4.5.2 Overlapping

4.5.2.1 The frequency of overlapping utterances

Dean has the largest share of overlapping utterances (50.6%), since his utterances overlap with both Sam’s and Bobby’s. Sam speaks 40.7% of the overlapping utterances, which is the second largest share, but his only overlap with Dean’s. Bobby only has two overlapping utterances, and like Sam’s, Bobby’s utterances only overlap with Dean’s.

Table 9. Overlapping utterances spoken by the main characters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sam</th>
<th>Dean</th>
<th>Bobby</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22 (40.7%)</td>
<td>30 (50.6%)</td>
<td>2 (3.7%)</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.5.2.2 The functions of the overlapping utterances

The analysis shows that 48.1% of the overlapping utterances are side effects of attempted but unsuccessful interruptions: if one speaker tries to interrupt, but the other speaker continues

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⁶ Utterance being interrupted
⁷ Utterance doing the interrupting
talking, overlapping utterances occur. Based on this, one can conclude that overlapping utterances between the main characters in *Supernatural* do not always occur in a collaborative spirit. The remaining 51.9% of the overlapping utterances occur because one of the speakers is eager to make a contribution or to emphasize a point while it is still relevant for the conversation. There are also two occurrences of one speaker’s overlapping utterance being a repetition of the other speaker’s utterance to reinforce/emphasize a point as shown in the following transcript.

1. D: Found the usual amount of violent childhood deaths for a town this size.
2. S: Okay.
3. D: Know how many were girls with black hair and pale skin?
4. S: [Zero] 8
5. D: [Ze]ro. Tell me you got something good because I’ve just totally wasted the last six hours.

Finally, there is a special case which occurs in a dialogue between Sam and Dean. In this case, several utterances are spoken by the two characters in perfect sync because Sam wants to prove his point, i.e. that he knows everything that is going to happen, including every utterance Dean will make.

4.5.3 Discussion

Coates (2004, pp. 136-137) claims that male speakers prefer conversations that follow a one-at-a-time model of turn-taking. In this study, the main characters do follow this model most of the time. However, the analysis also reveals several violations of this model of turn-taking. This study can be linked to Smith-Lovin & Brody (1989, p. 425), who also consider interruptions to be violations of turn-taking norms. According to them, interruptions in all-male conversations are not necessarily competitive, however (Smith-Lovin & Brody, 1989, p. 433). This study, too, shows that interruptions can have different functions, at least in the dialogues between the main characters in *Supernatural*. The majority of successfully interrupting utterances are spoken in a competitive spirit and usually object to an idea and/or express disagreement with another speaker, which is much in line with what Smith-Lovin & Brody (1989, p. 431) call negative interruptions. The majority of the collaboratively interrupting utterances that were found stimulate and/or request cooperation from the other speaker, which corresponds to what Smith-Lovin & Brody (1989, p. 431) call supportive interruptions.

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8 Overlapping utterances
As previously mentioned, overlapping utterances are fairly commonly occurring violations of the one-at-a-time model of turn-taking in the dialogues in this study. Coates (2004, pp. 104, 136-137) claims that overlapping talk can occur in all-male conversations, for example when male speakers are excited or gossip with each other. This study did not find any occurrences of gossiping between the characters and therefore no overlapping in connection with male gossip. However, this study does show overlapping in connection with some sort of excitement. Roughly half of the overlapping utterances occur because one of the speakers is eager to make a contribution or to emphasize something.

Since the dialogues are scripted material, it is possible that the characters follow the one-at-a-time model of turn-taking for a majority of the dialogues because too many overlapping utterances can be perceived as disturbing to television viewers. According to Smith-Lovin & Brody (1989, p. 425), it is common for violations of turn-taking norms to occur in conversations in general. One benefit of the dialogues in Supernatural including violations of the one-at-a-time model of turn-taking, such as interruptions and overlapping utterances, is that the dialogues are not perceived by the viewers as artificial but resemble natural speech.

5 Conclusions

This study shows that the dialogues between the three main characters in Supernatural do contain some features said to be characteristic of competitive speech among men. While there are no occurrences of verbal sparring, the other phenomena investigated (questions, impersonal topics, monologues and playing the expert) are common. Also, the characters follow the one-at-a-time model of turn-taking for a majority of the time. In that respect, the modern, scripted dialogues included in this study do correspond to the impression given in the literature, but at the same time, the results of this study and the literature are not in absolute agreement, since this study also reveals interesting aspects of the features in question that do not correspond to competitive speech style. For example, the results show that large portions of the dialogues are spoken in a cooperative spirit. Even though impersonal topics are regularly discussed among the characters, personal topics are also frequently taken up, and most talk exchanges contain some personal elements. Also, the characters’ tendency to play the expert does not seem to be stimulated to a great extent by impersonal topics than by personal topics, since they play the expert in connection with both. In addition, it is possible that the characters follow the one-at-a-time model of turn-taking for a majority of the
dialogues because too many overlapping utterances can be perceived as disturbing to television viewers. However, the results also show that violations of the one-at-a-time model of turn-taking, such as interruptions and overlapping utterances occur with some frequency in the analyzed dialogues.

Based on all this, one can conclude that the principal male characters’ spoken interaction in Supernatural cannot be considered competitive as a rule. Still, there are questions that remain to be answered and that may be relevant for future, larger studies, e.g.: do the dialogues in the Supernatural series affect the audience’s language use and linguistic development and can they shape the audience’s attitudes and values with respect to gender and what is/isn’t considered stereotypically male? Future studies could also compare male and female linguistic behavior, both in Supernatural and in other TV series.
References


