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Gender or Power?

Tag Questions in Patricia Cornwell's *Black Notice* and *The Last Precinct*

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TIIVISTELMÄ:

Tämän tutkielman aiheena ovat englannin kielen liitekysymykset (tag questions) ja niiden suhde puhujan sukupuoleen ja siihen asemaan, joka puhujalla on vuorovaikutustilanteessa. Materiaalina tutkimuksessa ovat Patricia Cornwellin rikosromaanit *Black Notice* ja *The Last Precinct*. Oletuksena on, että puhujan asema keskustelutilanteessa vaikuttaa liitekysymysten määrään ja niiden fuktioihin enemmän kuin hänen sukupuolensa ja että henkilöt, jotka ovat hallitsevassa asemassa keskustelutilanteessa käyttävät kysymyksiä enemmän kuin alemmassa asemassa olevat.

Liitekysymysten on alunperin oletettu osoittavan vain puhujan epävarmuutta sanomansa todenperäisyyttä kohtaan, jolloin niiden oletettiin olevan yleisiä naisten puheessa. Uusimmissa tutkimuksissa liitekysymyksillä on kuitenkin osoitettu olevan useita eri funktioita. Tutkielmassani jaoin liitekysymykset neljään eri kategoriaan sen mukaan pyrkiikö puhuja niiden avulla saamaan varmistuksen ajatukselleen, kutsumaan muita osallistumaan keskusteluun, lieventämään kritisoivia kommentteja tai käskyjä vai vahvistamaan negatiivisia kommentteja. Tältä pohjalta oli mahdollista analysoida, miten miehet ja naiset ja toisaalta valtaapitävät ja alemmassa asemassa olevat käyttävät liitekysymyksiä keskusteluissa.

Tutkimuksessa selvisi, että miesten ja naisten välillä ei liitekysymysten käytössä ollut suuria eroja, vaan miehet ja naiset käyttivät lähes kaikkia liitekysymysten funktioita yhtä paljon. Toisaalta ryhmät käyttivät liitekysymysten funktioita osittain eri tarkoituksiin. Erot olivat selvemmät valtaapitävien ja alemmassa asemassa olevien puhujien välillä. Hallitsevassa asemassa olevat keskustelijat käyttivät liitekysymyksiä selvästi alemmassa asemassa olevia enemmän keskustelun johtamiseen ja muiden puhujien johdatteluun sekä vahvistamaan kritisoivia tai loukkaavia kommentteja.

AVAINSANAT: Tag questions, gender, power, crime fiction

1 INTRODUCTION

Since the publishing of *Post Mortem* (1990), her first crime fiction novel, Patricia Cornwell has written altogether fifteen Kay Scarpetta novels, the latest of which, *Book of the Dead*, was published in 2007. Each of the novels has been a best-seller earning Cornwell a large fortune. By 2002 Patricia Cornwell's novels had been translated into 32 languages and published in 35 countries (Penguin Group 2006). Patricia Cornwell was also voted the third best crime writer ever in a poll held by *The Guardian* in Great Britain in 2004 (*The Guardian* 2004).

In addition to the popularity among readers, Patricia Cornwell's novels have also been in the center of academic attention. For example, Reetta Saine (1997) has studied the role of bodies, both dead and alive, and bodily descriptions in Cornwell's *Body Farm*. Maarit Piipponen (2000), on the other hand, studied the family and serial killers and how the two are intertwined in three Kay Scarpetta novels in her doctoral dissertation, just to name a few studies.

Realistic characters are an important element of Cornwell's novels. Kay Scarpetta, the protagonist, as well as all the other main characters are complex personalities who develop throughout the series. Scarpetta, as a medical examiner, is a woman in a traditionally masculine profession who performs her feminine gender according to her occupation. As the novels are told in the first person singular from Kay Scarpetta's point of view, the reader experiences the world of the novels through her eyes. As a part of the realistic characterization, the language Cornwell's characters speak also aims at realism. The characters occupy asymmetrical positions of power and asymmetrical discourse is, therefore, a prominent feature of Patricia Cornwell's crime fiction novels. They include a great deal of dialogue in which the power relations between the speakers are very clear, such as crime investigations in which the police are questioning crime suspects.

Research has shown that tag questions can be considered a feature of asymmetrical discourse. The use of tag questions has been considered to depend on the status, the

speaker holds in conversation and on the goals, he or she is trying to achieve by using tags. It is usually the more powerful participant of conversation who uses tags, reflecting the fact that in asymmetrical discourse the powerful participant directs the conversation. (Cameron, McAlinden and O'Leary 1989.)

The view of tag questions signalling power asymmetries has replaced the traditional view according to which tag questions are typical of women's speech as they weaken the force of an utterance and thus signal the speaker's lack of self-confidence. This claim was first made by Robin Lakoff who argued that the way women use language reflect their lower social status. She claimed that tag questions were used to indicate tentativeness, and that by using them, women seek confirmation for their opinions. (1973: 55.) Lakoff did not support her argument with any empirical evidence but since then, tag questions have been studied more widely (e.g. Dubois & Crouch 1995; Preisler 1986). However, the research on tag questions and gender has not been able to unambiguously confirm or reject Lakoff's original claim.

What the earlier research on tag questions has failed to notice is that, in conversation, tag questions can have many different functions. Janet Holmes was the first to study the different functions of tag questions, and she divided them into four different categories according to the functions: epistemic modal tag questions seek for confirmation, facilitative tags invite the addressee to participate in conversation, challenging tag questions enhance critical or negative utterances, and softening tags mitigate the force of critical statements or commands. (Holmes 1995: 79–82). This categorization made it possible to study the differences in the kinds of tag questions people of different gender or status use. Ideal, although fictional, material for this is provided, for example, by crime fiction whose world is hierarchically very divided.

In their study, Cameron et al. found that the use of tag questions correlates with the role a person has in conversation rather than with their gender. Although there were differences in the use of tag questions between men and women, the findings of the use of tags among powerful and powerless speakers were rather striking. Both powerless men and women used only modal tag questions, whereas powerful speakers used all

three functions of tags, but mainly facilitative and softening. In their study, Cameron et al. did not include the challenging function of tag questions. Cameron et al. found that whereas powerless speakers used tag questions for requesting information, powerful speakers used tags for directing the conversation and for mitigating criticism. (Cameron et al. 1989: 82–91.)

The purpose of the present thesis is to study the use of tag questions in Patricia Cornwell's novels *Black Notice* (1999[1]) and *The Last Precinct* (2000[2]) to find out how the gender and the position of the speaker affect their use of tags. I expect the difference to be greater between powerful and powerless speakers than between male and female speakers. The tags will be studied from two different points of view, namely those of the gender and power of the speaker. The tag questions will be divided into four different categories according to their functions, as outlined above. This is needed to be able to analyse the types of tag questions powerful and powerless men and women use in these two novels. My aim is, ultimately, to find out if the findings of the studies of authentic language use apply to the language of fictional characters, in the case of the present study, to the crime novels of Patricia Cornwell.

The material for this study, the two novels by Patricia Cornwell, are works of fiction. That is an important factor which cannot be ignored when analysing the material and comparing the findings of this study with findings of other studies that have had authentic conversations as their material. Whereas the conversations studied by, for example, Cameron et al. (1989) are authentic and have actually taken place between real people, the ones in the novels analysed for this study only attempt to imitate life. Moreover, they express only one person's, the author Patricia Cornwell's, view of life. Even though there are different characters participating in the conversations of the novels, all the characters are Cornwell's creations and all the utterances of the characters are ultimately Cornwell's utterances. The dialogues of the novels are thus fictional representations of authentic communication, and, despite the author's attempt

[1] Cornwell, Patricia (1999). *Black Notice*. London: Warner Books. In this thesis it will be referred to as BN.
[2] Cornwell, Patricia (2000). *The Last Precinct*. London: Time Warner Book Group. In this thesis it will be referred to as LP.

for realism, the language used by the fictional characters differs from authentic language use.

In what follows, the material and method used in this study will be presented in more detail, followed by a discussion of the crime fiction writer Patricia Cornwell and the concepts through which the readers form their perceptions of the fictional world created by her. Chapter 2 discusses the ways in which gender and power can be expressed through language, while chapter 3 focuses on tag questions and the different forms and functions they can have as well as their role in asymmetrical conversation. In chapter 4, the tag questions in Patricia Cornwell's two novels will be analysed to see if the categorization and findings from earlier studies are supported by the fictional use of tag questions in the novels. Finally, in the last chapter I will draw conclusions of my findings as well as present some ideas for further study.

1.1 Material

As the material for this thesis I will use two crime fiction novels, *Black Notice* (1999) and *The Last Precinct* (2000) by Patricia Cornwell. I will use the dialogue of the novels and study the tag questions in them from the points of view of gender and power. I will include both formal tag questions where the form of the main clause defines the form of the tag, and invariant tag questions which are independent on the main clause, in the material. Invariant tag questions are typical of colloquial rather than formal style, and it can thus be assumed that the two types of tag questions are used in different contexts. I will only include in the material such tag questions that occur in spoken conversation between the characters and exclude those that occur, for example, only in the thoughts of the characters or in written form, like in a letter. The reason for restricting the material to only spoken tag questions is that the addressees and their responses are important in analyzing the tags, and, naturally, no response is expected to tags that do not have an immediate addressee.

Black Notice and *The Last Precinct* are the tenth and eleventh books in Cornwell's Kay Scarpetta series. All the novels in the series are connected to each other but the connection between these two novels is very clear as *The Last Precinct* is a sequel to *Black Notice*; *The Last Precinct* begins from where *Black Notice* ends. The plots of the novels circle around the same crimes and almost all central characters feature in both novels.

Cornwell's novels contain a lot of dialogue; approximately 60-70% of the text is dialogue between the characters. For the study of tag questions, dialogue is essential since tag questions mainly appear in spoken conversation (Nässlin 1984: 93). In much of the dialogue the speakers are of unequal status: there are police officers questioning crime suspects and conversations between doctors and patients. Such asymmetrical encounters are important since this study examines the differences in the use of tag questions between powerful and powerless speakers. In the novels, it is usually easy to distinguish the powerful speakers from the powerless ones as the characters differ from each other because of their occupational statuses, expertise, and age, to name a few factors.

The novels are told in the first person, from the point of view of the Chief Medical Examiner of Virginia, Kay Scarpetta. She is a well-educated, middle-aged, upper middle class woman. In her job as the chief medical examiner of Virginia, Scarpetta is respected by both her employees and her colleagues. Profession affects both the gender and the status of Scarpetta greatly. Female forensic pathologists are rare, and Scarpetta often faces suspicions about her abilities to succeed in her job. In her job, she avoids any overt marks of her gender by dressing very formally and rarely wearing skirts. In work-related contexts she concentrates strictly on her job and does not show her feelings even though she often has to face shocking scenes. On the other hand, the extensive education required by the job and her position as the head of the Chief Medical Examiner's office give Scarpetta a high position in the society. She thus mainly appears in a powerful position. Scarpetta is in very little contact with her relatives except for her niece Lucy, who also features in a central role in the novels. The lack of family also affects Scarpetta's gender performance as she does not have children she

would have to take care of. However, Scarpetta does appear as a kind of mother figure to Lucy as she often worries about her niece and always helps her if she is in trouble. Therefore, because of her age Scarpetta usually appears as more powerful than Lucy, but when the two women work together investigating crimes they can be considered equal in status.

Lucy Farinelli, who is very close to Scarpetta, works as an agent with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, ATF. Her profession also affects her gender performance greatly as she is physically in very good condition and almost always carries a gun. Another factor affecting Lucy's gender performance is her sexuality: in *Black Notice* she is in a relationship with her colleague Jo but the relationship ends in *The Last Precinct*. As Lucy also has problems in expressing her emotions appropriately, which causes her problems both at work and in her private life, she can be considered to perform femininity in an untraditional way. Lucy's status is usually defined in relation to her aunt, and she appears as both in a subordinate position to her and in equal status, depending on whether their interaction is work-related or personal.

Scarpetta works together with Police Captain Pete Marino, and they are friends outside work as well even though Marino's clumsiness and rudeness often annoy Scarpetta. Marino is approximately in his fifties, divorced, overweight. In addition to his job, Marino also has other traditionally masculine characteristics. Like Lucy, he also has problems in expressing his emotions: "He had never been able to show affection in a normal way. The gruffer and more sarcastic he got, the happier he was to see [Lucy]" (BN 59). He is also "politically incorrect, slovenly and foul-mouthed" (BN 86). In the beginning of their professional relationship, Marino also had troubles in accepting a woman in a position as high as that of Scarpetta's. Marino's colleagues like him despite his poor social skills, and he is considered one of the best detectives in the police department. That also gives him a rather high professional status.

Kay Scarpetta's secretary Rose is in a powerless position in relation to her employer even though she is old enough to be Scarpetta's mother. In a way, she also appears as a mother figure to Scarpetta: she worries about Scarpetta, cooks for her, and urges her to

go shopping for clothes as she would not do it otherwise. Rose is thus probably the most traditional of the feminine characters who appear in the novels. Chuck Ruffin is also Scarpetta's employee. Not much is told about his background or personal life. He is married and his wife is expecting a child for them. He wants to become a police officer but he has not yet been approved to police academy. Their positions in the hierarchy of medical examiner's office put Ruffin below Scarpetta is status. Not even Ruffin's involvement in schemes against Scarpetta improve his status as Scarpetta finds out about those and confronts Ruffin about his recent behaviour.

Doctor Anna Zenner and the assistant district attorney Jaime Berger are also central characters who feature in *The Last Precinct*. Anna Zenner is a psychiatrist and a close friend to Kay Scarpetta. She is of Austrian origin but has lived in America almost her entire adult life. Her foreign background is still reflected in her speech: "Her German accent has not softened over the decades. She still talks in square meals, going to awkward angles to get a thought from her brain to her tongue and rarely using contractions." (Cornwell 2004: 37.) *The Last Precinct* is the first one of Scarpetta novels in which Zenner features in a central role, and it is also in this book where Scarpetta first learns more about the life of her friend. Assistant District Attorney Jaime Berger is a powerful woman because of her job, but even though she is of same social status as Kay Scarpetta, Berger often controls the conversation and situation, which irritates Scarpetta and Marino who are thus forced to a subordinate position.

The status a person holds in interaction is dependent on many factors. The powerful or powerless roles people hold in interaction with each other are always connected to other people present in a certain situation as well as the topic of discussion in that situation (Holmes & Stubbe 2003: 4, 9). Therefore, the status may vary between different contexts and same characters can appear in both powerful and powerless positions. Factors that can increase the power of a person include profession, special knowledge, social prestige, age, and sex, and it can be demonstrated in the control of the encounter (Holmes 1995: 17). It may manifest itself in the control of the topics of discussion but also as control of the overall language use of the others, such as asking questions and

interrupting, thus limiting the possible contributions of others. Powerful speakers are also allowed to criticise and command their subordinates.

1.2 Method

As the main theoretical framework for my thesis I will use the study of social and linguistic functions of tag questions by Deborah Cameron, Fiona McAlinden and Kathy O'Leary (1989), who have studied tag questions in both symmetrical and asymmetrical conversations. In their study, they identified differences in the number and type of tag questions people use according to their status in conversation. Even though there were differences in the use of tags by men and women, the greatest differences occurred between powerful and powerless speakers. Whereas the powerless used tag questions only for seeking information, the powerful used tag questions for directing the conversation and softening criticism. (Cameron et al. 1989: 85–91.) My aim is to explore whether the findings of that study apply to the fictional world of Patricia Cornwell's *Black Notice* and *The Last Precinct* as well. In particular, I am interested to see if the differences identified in the study of Cameron et al. are reflected in the tag questions used by the fictional characters of different gender and status.

I will divide the tag questions into four categories according to their functions in conversation. Of the four different categories of tag questions, epistemic modal tag questions seek confirmation for the statement of the main clause, the function of facilitative tags is to invite the addressee to participate in the conversation, challenging tag questions are used to force the addressee to speak, and softening tags are used to soften negative utterances, like criticism, for instance (Holmes 1995: 80-82). These categories are needed to study the differences in the kinds of tag questions male and female and powerful and powerless characters use and to be able to compare the groups.

However, the tag questions cannot be studied without taking the contexts in which they occur into consideration as the function of a tag question is always dependent on the main clause and context in which the tag is uttered. Tag questions should always be

analysed in relation to their contexts as in different contexts the same question can have different meanings and one tag question can perform several functions at the same time. For example:

> "Didn't lead to quite what you intended, **did it**?" (LP 85)

The tag question in the example could be analysed as challenging if it was used to criticize someone as then it would strengthen the critique However, the context in which it is uttered defines it here as softening since the speaker, Doctor Anna Zenner, is talking with her friend Kay Scarpetta and the aim is not to criticize Scarpetta, but to encourage her to talk about her past. Therefore, the tag question is used to soften the critical statement. Factors that should be taken into consideration in analysing tag questions in their contexts are, for instance, the characters present, their statuses in relation to each other, and the topic of discussion.

1.3 Patricia Cornwell and crime fiction

Even though there have been female writers of crime fiction since the 19th century, the sub-genre of feminist crime fiction has only existed for some decades: the first works of feminist crime fiction were written as late as in the 1960s and 70s (Hapuli & Matero 1997: 4; McCracken 1998: 53). Before feminist crime fiction, traditional gender roles were upheld in crime fiction novels. It was the responsibility of men to protect and restore the social order threatened by unstable and irrational women. (Kaplan 1997: 212; Wilson 2001.) In traditional crime fiction, women were victims or outsiders, while strong and independent female detective characters have become more common only with feminist crime fiction.

The gender of the author is not, however, enough to decide whether a novel is feminist or not. Since feminist crime fiction is a rather young genre, it still cannot be defined very precisely, although the novels are usually written by women and feature one or more of the following: a female detective, feminist ideas, and a feminist point of view (Hapuli and Matero 1997: 8; Wilson 2001; Dekkarisankarit 2006: 12). Consequently, there are clear features of feminist crime fiction in Patricia Cornwell's novels. In

addition to having a female protagonist, Kay Scarpetta, the novels also feature women who are in professions that have traditionally been considered masculine, trying to succeed in a professional world still dominated by men.

Inside the genre of feminist crime fiction Patricia Cornwell's Kay Scarpetta series can be placed in the subgenre of liberal feminist crime fiction (Saine 1997: 320). Sally Munt (1994: 30) considers the idea of equality between men and women as most central to liberal feminism. Both sexes should be guaranteed equal rights, opportunities and responsibilities in society. In liberal feminist crime fiction women should be equal to men in action but still maintain their feminine appearance; in them "masculine agency is married to heterosexual femininity" (Munt 1994: 41). The heroines are strong, independent, and rational women, whereas the villains are usually irrational, mentally unstable, and absolutely evil forming thus a contrast to the rationality of the heroines (Saine 1997: 320–321). The biological family of liberal feminist crime fiction heroines is often replaced with close friendships which emphasizes the liberal idea that independent "individuals can select and reject social roles at will" (Munt 1994: 49).

Patricia Cornwell's Kay Scarpetta novels are prime examples of liberal feminist crime fiction, and it is easy to distinguish all of the above features in them. Kay Scarpetta is an independent, well-educated woman. Indeed, femininity and masculinity are mixed in her as she herself describes: "I was a woman who was not a woman. I was the body and the sensibilities of a woman with the power and drive of a man" (Cornwell 1994: 341). She is divorced and rarely sees her mother or sister. Instead, the closest people in her life are her niece Lucy Farinelli and the Police Captain Pete Marino. The villains in Cornwell's novels are often serial killers "who increase in evil in each book" (Robinson 2006: 95).

In the liberal feminist world of Patricia Cornwell's writing, women are equal to men. The most notable example of this is obviously Kay Scarpetta who succeeds in a profession traditionally considered as masculine, but the novels also feature other relatively powerful women, for example Assistant District Attorney Jaime Berger and doctor Anna Zenner (Eriksson 2002: 52). It could be expected that both the gender and

the relatively high social status of these women is reflected in their behaviour, including their language use.

Patricia Cornwell is known for her ability to create realistic characters (Haasio 2000: 31). The main characters, their personalities and their relationships, develop throughout the novel series creating thus an impression of realistic personalities. Indeed, Shephard and Rennison (2006: 35) even claim that only a few other writers have been able "to create characters as complex and interesting as Scarpetta". In order for characters to be realistic they must use realistic language. It could thus be assumed that the language of Patricia Cornwell's characters is realistic, which gives good grounds for comparing it with findings concerning authentic language use.

The characters are part of a fictional world created by the writer. Texts are intended to be read, and each reader interprets the text and the world created in it in their own way. Thus, characters are inferred from the text, and they are what readers interpret them to be (Culpeper 2001: 9). The writer has the freedom to choose what s/he presents to the readers and what s/he leaves out, and from this the readers form their own interpretation of the text. Even though readers are aware that characters are fictional creations by the author, they use the same "structures and processes" to interpret the characters as they use to interpret and analyse their experiences of real people (Culpeper 2001: 10, 109). In a sense, readers thus consider fictional characters as real people.

Even though readers form their impressions of fictional characters with the same methods as they form their impressions of real people, there are obviously some differences between these processes. Whereas in everyday life, it is never possible to know somebody's personality well enough to be able to predict their behavior and reactions in all situations, the lives of fictional characters are complete in the novels in which they feature. Also, the behavior and actions of fictional characters are likely to have greater importance than all the actions of real people since "the conversation and actions that take place between characters are designed to be 'overheard' and 'overseen' by the" reader. (Culpeper 2001: 145–146.) In the context of a novel, the reader pays more attention to actions that in everyday life would seem insignificant since the reader

supposes that everything the author tells the readers about the characters has relevance for the interpretation of the story and the characters. For instance, in the beginning of The Last Precinct Scarpetta asks Marino what day it is (LP 2). In everyday life, that kind of a question would seem insignificant and even odd but for the reader of a novel it tells when the events of the novel occur making it therefore important.

In forming their perceptions of fictional characters, readers use their past experiences and knowledge about people in general. This background knowledge and the past experiences readers use may include, for example, the literary genre in question or language use in general (Culpeper 2001: 13–14, 30). A character using a certain regional dialect would lead the reader to form a certain perception of that character, whereas the background knowledge of crime fiction would lead the reader to expect to find certain kinds of characters in the novel or the plot to evolve in certain ways. In the case of crime fiction, the reader expects the plot to include one or several murders as well as the chase and finally the capture of the murderer.

An important part of background knowledge are also social schemata; "cognitive structures that contain links between social categories" (Culpeper 2001: 76). For example, the gender schema a person has, contains associations of men and women and when one thinks of someone as male or female the associations are also activated. Thus the notion of woman always activates other concepts in our minds than only the biological sex. Since the interpretation of characters is based both on the background knowledge each reader has and the text of the novel, readers may have a somewhat different perception of the characters. This is the reason why people often prefer the original novels to the films made of them: the way the film-makers have chosen to picture the characters may differ greatly from the picture the reader has formed in his/her mind.

Language plays an important role in the process of characterisation. In everyday life "we assume that the way people talk tells the truth about them" (Lakoff 1990: 257). We expect that people's personalities are somehow reflected in their language use. This applies to fictional characters too: the reader expects the language of the character to

reveal something about that particular character and his/her relations to other characters. This is so because "the norms, values and modes of conduct which regulate how 'real' people organize their linguistic behavior form the basis for interpreting the speech and action of the fictional characters" (Simpson quoted in Culpeper 2001: 164). The readers interpret the language of fictional characters in the same ways as they interpret the talk of other people. Thus, tag questions featured in Patricia Cornwell's novels are interpreted in the same way as tag questions in real life communication.

Also the writers often base the language of their fictional characters on the language of everyday life. Patricia Cornwell, too, attempts to imitate authentic language in her novels: the clearest example is Pete Marino whose speech is full of slang and swearwords which in part create his character. It could thus be assumed that the speech of Cornwell's female characters imitates her views of authentic feminine language and the language of power in the novels imitates Cornwell's perceptions of powerful language.

2 LANGUAGE, GENDER AND POWER

This study examines tag questions in relation to the gender of the speaker and the status the person has in relation to other people. It is therefore important to study both of these concepts in more detail to see what kind of effects they have been found to have on language use. The chapter begins with a discussion of gender as performance and moves on to examine language as a part of that performance. The chapter ends with a discussion of the concept of power and the ways in which it can be manifested through language.

2.1 Performing gender

Whereas sex is a biological concept, something that everybody is born with, gender, as a concept, is a cultural and social one. "Using 'gender' rather than 'sex' as a basic variable emphasises the fact that a person's gender is socially constructed from the roles, norms and expectations of the community in which they participate" (Holmes 1997: 203). As Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003: 10) state, "gender is the social elaboration of biological sex". Gender is the ways in which the sex of a body is communicated to the society surrounding the individual. The construction of gender begins in early childhood and continues throughout the life. In this construction of gender, the body is "a passive medium on which cultural meanings are inscribed" (Butler 1999: 12).

Gender is, thus, always a performance and this performance of gender consists of repeated activities (Butler 1999: xv, 33; McElhinny 1995: 219). The body is an instrument through which gender is performed. Thus, "*being a girl* or *being a boy* is [. . .] an ongoing accomplishment, something that is actively done by the individual so categorized" (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2003: 17, original italics). Gender cannot be possessed nor is it a stable state of being. It has to be created by each individual for themselves, and it has to be constantly maintained.

The activities through which gender is performed are present in everyday life. Gender affects, for instance, the way people dress, use language, and behave. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003: 17) note that "most of our interactions are coloured by our performance of our own gender, and by our attribution of gender to others". In addition to us performing our own gender we also assist other people performing their gender as our behaviour towards them is affected by their gender. Especially the gender performance of children is often assisted by adults as the parents dress their children according to their sex and guide their behaviour towards that expected of girls or boys (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2003: 16).

Although both masculine and feminine gender performances are available for both men and women, there are clear limitations as to which performances are accepted from the two sexes (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2003: 10). Women are expected to perform femininity, while masculinity is expected from men. Similarly, certain practices are considered feminine, while others are seen as masculine. Gendered practices do not have anything particularly masculine or feminine in them; the norms and expectations governing gender performance stem from the culture in which gender is performed. Even though "gender builds on biological sex", "it carries biological difference into domains in which it is completely irrelevant" (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2003: 10). For instance, there is nothing that would link high-heeled shoes to women, but in our culture, wearing high-heeled shoes is considered a performance of femininity.

The relationship between the two genders is dichotomous: female is the opposite of male, and feminine is the opposite of masculine (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2003: 35). Adjectives such as strong, brave, and rational are usually linked with masculinity, whereas women are traditionally described as weak, sensitive, and irrational. Showing emotion has traditionally been considered a feminine characteristic, while controlling one's emotions is considered masculine. This concerns especially feelings of grief and fear. Women are allowed to cry and show fear in public, while men should hold back their tears and avoid showing any kind of "emotional vulnerability". (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2003: 29–30.) Kay Scarpetta rarely shows her emotions in public. In fact, as her colleague from the police, Captain Pete Marino sees it, to people who do not

know her, she appears as someone who does not have feelings at all (Cornwell 1999: 258). In this respect, Kay Scarpetta is not performing her gender in a traditional way.

The dichotomy between masculine and feminine extends itself to the division of labour, which also reflects the traditional views of gender roles. Traditionally, men have occupied the public sphere, whereas the private sphere has been reserved for women. The activities considered masculine are those that require physical strength and special expertise, while feminine activities are the domestic ones: taking care of the family and home. Occupations considered appropriate for each gender also stem from these expectations. For example, being a nurse is considered suitable for a woman, while fire-fighters 'should' be men. The occupations typically held by men are often considered as having more prestige and power than those held by women. (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2003: 37–39.) Many of the central female characters of Patricia Cornwell's novels are in occupations that have been traditionally considered rather masculine. Kay Scarpetta as a medical examiner is one example; others include her niece Lucy Farinelli who works as an agent with the ATF and Assistant District Attorney Jaime Berger. In her job, Kay Scarpetta is expected to control the emotions caused by the violence and death she has to face, whereas Lucy Farinelli's job requires physical strength, both masculine characteristics. The fact that the occupations of Kay Scarpetta and Jaime Berger are considered masculine is also reflected in Scarpetta's thoughts when she thinks how people refer to her and Berger as "the most famous female forensic pathologist in the country and […] the most famous female prosecutor"(LP 94).

Since some occupations are traditionally considered as masculine or feminine, women in masculine jobs and men in feminine jobs may have to accommodate their gender performance to fit the performance expected of their occupation. For instance, female police officers, who are in a traditionally masculine occupation, accommodate their professional behaviour towards the role they think is traditionally expected of police officers and thus "perform gender so gender will be ignored" (McElhinny 1995: 220). Female police officers consider their "occupational persona" "a mask" which is demonstrated for example in their handling domestic violence without showing empathy and caring, both traditionally feminine emotions. (McElhinny 1995: 219–220,

226.) It could thus be expected that the traditionally masculine professions of some of Cornwell's characters also affect their behaviour, including their language use, at least in work-related contexts.

As the examples given in this section have shown, there are many different ways of performing gender. In fact, everybody performs their gender in their own personal way and the ways in which gender is performed differ from one situation to another. It is not gender that causes a person to behave in a certain way but people behave in certain ways to construct and perform their gender. An important tool in gender performance is language as it can be used to communicate, to convey ideas and opinions.

> Speech too is a 'repeated stylization of the body'; the 'masculine' and 'feminine' styles of talking identified by researchers might be thought of as the 'congealed' result of repeated acts by social actors who are striving to constitute themselves as 'proper' men and women (Cameron 1997: 49).

Certain ways of using language and communicating are considered masculine, while others are seen as feminine. The following section discusses the differences of language use and communicational style of men and women.

2.2 Gender differences in language use

The differences in the language use and conversational styles of men and women have interested many researchers, and several studies of the subject have been carried out (e.g. Woods 1989; Holmes 1992 & 1997; O'Barr & Atkins 1998; West 1998). This section will, however, only concentrate on those findings of language and gender research that are relevant for the purposes of this study.

Even though differences between the language use of men and women have indeed been found to exist, it is not possible to label some features of language as feminine and others masculine. It should be remembered that in addition to gender, other factors, such as the social status of the speaker, relations between people participating in the interaction, and the context in which the communication occurs all affect the ways in

which a person uses language. In the same way as gender is performed differently in different situations, the way a person uses language varies between different contexts as language use can be considered a part of gender performance (Coates 2004: 139). Therefore, instead of speaking of language of men and women the more appropriate terms would be masculine and feminine speaking styles which can be adopted by everyone regardless of their biological sex. The remaining of this section discusses the differences researchers have found between these speech styles.

There seems to be differences in the conversational styles depending on whether the conversation is taking place between a mixed-sex or single sex group (Coates 2004: 111, 126). In mixed-sex conversations the masculine conversational style tends to dominate the conversation. Men overlap the speech of female participants, and they interrupt women more often than women interrupt men. It should also be noted that in single sex conversations men rarely interrupt other men, whereas women do sometimes overlap other women in single sex conversations. In the single sex conversations, the participants control equally the discussion topics, but in mixed-sex conversations men dominate the choice of topics as well. (Coates 2004: 113–116.)

In mixed-sex communication, men dominate the overall talking time. This is the case especially in public contexts which have a high status. (Coates 2004: 117.) Speaking in these contexts signals, and possibly even enhances, the status of the speaker (Holmes 1992: 134). The dominance of men in floor-holding is so strong that it even overrides status; men in subordinate positions talk more than their female superiors although in general, holding the floor is considered a signal of power and a prerogative of the powerful (Woods 1989: 152).

The masculine conversational style is based on power, dominance, and competitiveness. This style concentrates on expressing the speaker's status in relation to the addressee, whereas the feminine style focuses more on creating and expressing solidarity between the participants of a conversation. (Holmes 1998: 468.) It also appears that the masculine talk is characterised by the referential, or informational, meaning of talk (Holmes 1998: 462–463.) The topics in masculine conversations are often rather

impersonal, and even the more personal topics deal with personal achievements and abilities rather than feelings, which are a common topic in feminine conversations. What further characterises masculine talk is that when a topic is introduced, the speaker holds the floor for a long time talking about the subject and showing his expertise in the matter. (Coates 2004: 133–134.)

In masculine conversation questions are used for seeking information and for inviting the addressee to show his expertise. Information-seeking questions are used to invite the addressee to speak and to hold the floor. Such questions can also be used to introduce a new topic in which the speaker is an expert. By asking a question, the speaker can imply that if the addressee does not know much about it, the speaker is able to explain the matter for him. (Coates 1997: 123–124.) Tag questions can also be used in this information-seeking way, and it has been found that men use tag questions especially for this purpose (Cameron et al. 1989: 89).

As opposed to the masculine style, the feminine conversational style can be seen as based on solidarity and support (Coates 2004: 126). Whereas the masculine style focuses on the referential meaning of talk, the focus in feminine speech is on the affective, or interpersonal, meaning of talk (Holmes 1998: 462). According to this feminine style, talk can be used to create solidarity in a group and to show concern for others participating in the communication. This cooperative conversational style is achieved by using, among other things, hedges, minimal responses, and questions. Also topic choice and the development of conversational topics play an important role in constructing solidarity. (Coates 2004: 126–127.)

Hedges are linguistic forms, such as modal verbs and pragmatic particles like *sort of*, that can be used "to weaken or reduce the force of an utterance" (Holmes 1995: 72, 74–75), which is also the purpose for which they are used in feminine speech. (For more discussion on hedges see chapter 3.) By using a hedge it is possible to discuss somewhat sensitive topics without losing face and also to respect the face of others. Hedges can also be used to encourage others to speak. (Coates 2004: 129.) Thus hedges can be used to signify a variety of other things than just the uncertainty of the speaker as Lakoff

(1973: 55) originally claimed. Tag questions can function as hedges, too, as chapter 3 will show. Therefore, since hedges are typical feature of feminine speech style, it could be expected that tag questions, too, could be found in feminine speech.

The views on the frequency of hedges in masculine speech are controversial. On one hand, Coates (2004: 90) claims that masculine speech contains fewer hedges than feminine because the topics in masculine conversations are often less personal than those in feminine conversations. Comments in masculine speech would thus not have to be softened in the fear of losing face or threatening that of the addressee. Holmes (1990: 201–202), on the other hand, emphasises the different functions of hedges and the fact that they should always be analysed in the context they occur. Hedges are used in both masculine and feminine speech but for different purposes. Whereas in the feminine speech style hedges are used to express solidarity and positive politeness, the hedges in masculine speech express uncertainty. These differing views seem to both defend and contradict the original claim by Lakoff (1973: 55) that since tag questions, functioning as hedges, signal only weakness and uncertainty, they are common in women's speech.

Whereas in masculine style questions are used to seek information, in feminine style the use of questions for this purpose is avoided since information-seeking questions can construct asymmetric relations in a group as the person who is expected to answer the question is seen as an 'expert'. Instead of purely seeking for information, "questions are used to invite others to participate, to introduce new topics, to hedge, to check the views of other participants, and to instigate stories". (Coates 2004: 130.) Indeed, questions do not always need answers at all when they are used for these feminine purposes; they are just produced "to confirm the shared world of the participants" (Coates 2004: 131). The kind of tag questions that invite others to participate are known as facilitative, and, indeed, the most common function of tag questions in feminine use has been found to be facilitative (Cameron et al. 1989: 89).

Although in general, questions are more common in feminine than masculine style, there are some contexts in which questions are more common in masculine than feminine style (Coates 2004: 94). For instance, Janet Holmes found that in public

contexts, where the function of speech is referential, men not only dominated the overall talking time but also asked the majority of all questions. In these kinds of contexts, talking serves the purpose of enhancing the status of the speaker and the person asking questions can show their expertise in the matters under discussion. (Holmes 1992: 132–134.) These findings further emphasise the importance of the context in which the talk occurs.

Traditionally, tag questions have been considered a part of women's language but at least in one, rather small, study men were found to use more tag questions than women (Dubois & Crouch 1975). Even though Robin Lakoff (1973: 55) originally claimed (although without empirical evidence) that tag questions were often used by women, there is some research that supports this view, such as the study by Bent Preisler in which he found that women use more tag questions than men (Preisler 1986: 164–167). In Lakoff's opinion, tag questions signalled weakness and uncertainty. However, as Chapter 3 will show, tag questions cannot be said to signal only one thing and their use can depend on other factors as well.

A more appropriate term for the features of language that Robin Lakoff originally labelled as "women's language" would be "powerless language". These features listed by Lakoff do not occur exclusively in the speech of people of same sex, but the common characteristic for people who use these features is rather the status they hold in interaction since all of these features signal weakness (O'Barr & Atkins 1998: 384–385). However, this view fails to notice the many different functions of the linguistic forms that constitute this "women's language" or "powerless language". Indeed, hedges and tag questions can signal insecurity but they can also function, for example, as politeness devices or conversation openers.

The masculine conversational strategies have many similarities with the communicational styles traditionally connected with power and dominance, as the following section on language and power will show. Women, on the other hand, tend to exercise same kinds of communicational strategies based on solidarity and support in mixed-sex communication as they do in same-sex communication. Not even a relatively

powerful position in interaction changes the conversational strategies of women considerably, while the relatively high status does make the conversational strategies of men more dominant. If tag questions are used more by powerful speakers, the powerful positions men adopt in mixed-sex communication indicate that men would also use tag questions, at least when they hold powerful positions in interaction.

2.3 Language and power

The concept of power includes the ability to control other people and the ability to achieve one's goals. From this point of view, language can be used as an important means of gaining power since, especially in controlling other people, the ability to use language well is extremely important. (Holmes & Stubbe 2003: 3; Lakoff 1990: 12.) Fairclough (1989: 3) even claims that language has become "the primary medium of social control and power".

The social roles the participants of conversation hold are very important in determining who has power in a certain situation (Andersen 1988: 42). It is obvious that judges hold the highest power in courtrooms, and teachers are in charge of their classes. Doctors have power over their patients who rely on the expertise of their physicians in matters concerning their health. The police have power in relation to criminals since they are able to arrest suspected criminals and interrogate them on the crimes they have committed. The role of the suspect in these situations is to answer the questions they are asked. The power thus derives from the profession of the more powerful participant of the interaction. It is the power brought by the professional status that gives these speakers the right to control the communication.

However, the powerful status in interaction can also derive from factors other than profession. Some of the factors that affect on the distribution of power are, for instance, money and fortune, knowledge, social prestige and status, age and sex (Holmes 1995: 17). Expertise or special knowledge in the area of discussion can increase the power of a person who has otherwise a lower status than the other participants. It increases the

influence a person has in that particular situation, his or her opinions are valued more, and s/he is also able to affect the decisions reached. This kind of power based on knowledge or expertise only applies to situations where that particular knowledge is relevant and can be applied. (Holmes & Stubbe 2003: 4.) Also age can bring respect from younger people and thus increase the power a person has. Moreover, especially in cultures where men are considered superior to women, sex is an important factor in determining power relations, and it is men who have more power in interactions between men and women.

The power the speakers hold in interaction always depends on the other participants of the interaction, and the roles of the participants are always related to the relationships they have with each other (Holmes & Stubbe 2003: 9). A person who holds a powerful position in one context may be relatively powerless in another situation among different people. Sometimes the roles only apply to a certain situation and are only occupied for a short period of time (Kiesling 1997: 67–68). Especially power based on knowledge is a good example of this: knowledge only increases power in situations where it is relevant. Similarly, age can be a source of power only when a person is older than the other participants in a conversation. Prestige that derives from the social status gives power only among those who are aware of that prestige. "[P]ower is not something that individuals may suddenly pull out and use. [. . .] [T]he people being acted on must believe in it." (Kiesling 1997: 67.) In order for somebody to use power in a certain situation, it must be clear to all the people present who has the power in that situation, what that power is based on and to what extent the persons holding the power are allowed to exercise it.

Language reflects power in various different ways as the powerful speakers have certain privileges in an encounter which they can manifest through the use of language. Most importantly, the more powerful participants of an interaction are in control of the encounter. They are able to constrain the contributions of the powerless speakers by choosing a specific type of discourse affecting thus also the ways the powerless speakers use language. (Fairclough 1989: 46–47.) Powerful speakers can define the degree of formality of the situation as they have the power to introduce informality if

they want to or keep the conversation strictly formal (Hornyak quoted in Tannen 1995: 223–224; Holmes & Stubbe 2003: 101). The control the powerful participants have in an interaction restricts not only the style and the topics that can be introduced in the conversation but also the language use of the powerless participants.

Even though address forms cannot be used to control conversations they still function as a means of both creating power asymmetries and emphasizing them. Non-reciprocal use of address terms shows power relations: the superior or more powerful person is addressed more formally and politely, usually with title and last name, whereas the subordinate person is addressed with the first name only (Holmes 1995: 17–18; Pschaid 1993: 50). It is the right of the more powerful person to suggest the use of more familiar terms of address and thus further emphasize their superior position (Eakins & Eakins 1978: 23). If a doctor is referred to as 'doctor' it clearly signifies the higher status of the doctor as opposed to the patient who is usually addressed by the first name only.

Many of the ways in which powerful participants can show their control of the interaction would be considered inappropriate or even rude if used in equal interaction or by a person in a powerless position (Fairclough 1989: 45). Powerful participants are allowed to ask questions and interrupt, and, indeed, persons in powerful positions have been found to ask large numbers of questions. The role of the less powerful participant is to answer the questions and agree with the more powerful. Even when the relatively powerless participant does ask a question, it is sometimes only answered with silence or the speaker is interrupted. Powerless participants also allow the more powerful participants to interrupt them. (Eakins and Eakins 1978: 23-25; Cameron et al. 1989: 87.) Both asking questions and interrupting are effective means of controlling conversation. By asking the right questions, the powerful participant can direct the conversation towards the direction s/he wishes as a question forces the addressee to produce an answer that is relevant for the question and for the conversation in general (Cameron et al. 1989: 87–88). Interruptions, on the other hand, can be used to prevent the powerless participants from introducing issues the powerful participant does not consider relevant or appropriate for the situation. However, interrupting would be considered inappropriate if it was done by the powerless participant.

Interaction can also be controlled by giving orders to the less powerful participants of the interaction. Powerful participants are allowed to give orders and commands, and they expect the less powerful ones to obey them (Fairclough 1989: 46). Direct orders clearly imply an imbalance of status between the speaker and the addressee, which is why they may be considered impolite (Fairclough 1989: 54–55). Indirect orders are more polite since they do not imply a lower status as clearly as the direct ones do. Lakoff (1990: 30) also claims that even though indirect orders may be more difficult to understand, they are often easier to obey since they make the addressee feel more cooperative towards the speaker. Indirect forms may be more polite but they are also more easily misunderstood than direct forms. Still, participants are willing to work harder to understand the indirect commands of the powerful ones than to understand other indirect speech acts, and, on the other hand, they avoid offending those of higher status (Lakoff 1990: 32-33; Holmes 1995: 17).

It is always the prerogative of the powerful to decide to what extent they want their power to be overtly expressed (Fairclough 1989: 72). They have the right to express their power very openly, for example, by being impolite, sometimes even rude towards their addressees, whereas the relatively powerless speakers are supposed to tolerate the impoliteness of their superiors. However, Holmes and Stubbe (2003: 100) suggest that nowadays, at least in workplace interactions, power is more hidden and expressed more indirectly; the emphasis is on solidarity between the participants of the interaction. By reducing the explicit expression of power, the superiors try to gain the cooperation of their subordinates. They may, for example, mitigate their orders to make them less offensive and show concern for the feelings of the subordinates to be more polite.

Politeness can be divided into positive and negative politeness (Brown and Levinson 1994: 70). Central to this definition of politeness is the concept of ‘face’ which is “the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself [sic.]” (Brown & Levinson 1994: 61). Face consists of negative and positive face. Negative face can be defined as the basic need that everybody has that their actions are not impeded by others, whereas positive face is the want of every member of a society to be admired,

liked and understood by at least some others. Positive face is also the wish to have one's goals and achievements, one's wants, considered as desirable. (Brown and Levinson 1994: 61–63.)

From the basis of the concept of face, politeness can be understood as taking the negative and positive faces of other people into consideration and showing concern for them (Holmes 1995: 4–5). However, every speech act can be a possible threat to either the positive or the negative face of the speaker or the addressee. (Holmes 1995: 5.) In order to avoid or minimize the face threat, different politeness strategies can be used (Brown 1998: 84). The concern for 'maintaining faces' is part of interaction as speakers show concern for the face of their addressees in order for these to show concern for the speaker's face in turn (Hatim & Mason 2000: 432.) However, the closer the relationship is between two people the less explicit are the expressions of politeness (Holmes 1995: 13). In other words, people act politely towards other people because they wish other people to act politely towards them, while they pay less attention to showing politeness to people who are close to them.

Ignoring the positive and negative faces can constitute a face-threatening act (FTA). FTAs can be divided into those that threaten the face of the addressee or that of the speaker. Furthermore, they can threaten both negative and positive face. (Brown and Levinson 1994: 65–68.) FTAs that threaten the positive face of the addressee indicate that the speaker ignores the feelings and wants of the addressee, whereas FTAs that threaten the negative face of the addressee put some pressure on the addressee by usually demanding something of him/her or expecting the addressee to accept or reject, for instance, offers and promises. FTAs can mostly be considered a prerogative of the powerful since they are allowed to be rude towards their addressees.

Tag questions can function as politeness devices, but they can also be seen as markers of power and control in asymmetrical interaction since they are more often used by the powerful participants of a conversation than the powerless ones (Cameron et al. 1989: 86, 88). Power relations between the speakers seem to affect more on the use of tag questions than the gender of the speakers in studies of authentic conversation.

Moreover, these studies suggest that there is no one-to-one relationship between gender and the use of tag questions as previously suggested. Tag questions are an effective means of conducting the conversation as they can be used to control the contributions of other participants of the conversation. Especially facilitative tag questions (which invite the addressee to speak) and softening tags (which are used to soften negative utterances) are typical of the speech of powerful participants in a conversation. With facilitative tags powerful speakers, who are often in charge of directing the conversation, can lead the discussion to a certain direction. Powerful speakers also have a right to criticize their subordinates and with softening tag questions they can reduce the negativity of critical statements. (Cameron et al. 1989: 89–90.)

While this chapter has discussed gender and power and the ways in which the two concepts can be seen to affect the use of language, the following chapter will concentrate on a certain feature of language, tag questions, and the ways in which they relate especially to the language of power as they can be used to both create and maintain power relations between the participants of a conversation.

3 TAG QUESTIONS

The use of tag questions has been claimed to relate to both the gender and the status the speaker has in conversation. However, in order to be able to understand the factors affecting the use of tag questions, their most important formal and functional characteristics need to be illustrated. This section will focus on tag questions and their relation to gender and status. The section begins with a general introduction of the form and structure of tag questions followed by a discussion of the four functions of tag questions as introduced by Janet Holmes (1995).

Structurally, a sentence containing a tag question usually consists of a statement and a tag, and the tag invites the addressee to respond to the assertion of the main clause (Greenbaum and Quirk 1998: 234). Indeed tag questions mainly function as questions since an answer to them is often expected and tags usually lead to some kind of reaction from the addressee (Nässlin 1984: 117).

Formal tag questions look like fragments of questions at the end of a declarative clause or statement. They "contain an inverted auxiliary form, determined by the auxiliary in the main clause, and a pronoun that agrees with the subject of the main clause" (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003: 167). Thus, if there is an auxiliary verb in the main clause, it will be repeated in the tag. If there is no auxiliary verb in the main clause, the auxiliary of the tag question is *do*. The subject of the main clause and the tag are always the same. Moreover, "the polarity of the main clause is reversed in the tag" (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003: 167): a positive main clause gets a negative tag question and a negative main clause a positive one. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003: 167) note that positive clauses can also have positive tag questions attached to them but the functions of such tags are somewhat different from the ones with reversed polarity. However, the present study focuses only on the functions of tag questions with reversed polarity, such as the following examples from *The Last Precinct*:

> You know what DNA is, **don't you**? (Cornwell 2000: 238)
> He can't come out and just tell you to your face, **can he**? (LP 500)

In the first example, the main clause is positive and thus the tag question following it must be negative. Because the main clause does not have any auxiliary verb, the tag question has the verb *do* as its auxiliary. In the second example, the negative main clause gets a positive tag question. The main clause in this example contains an auxiliary verb *can* which is repeated in the tag question.

The tag questions in the examples above are so called formal tags: their form is dependent on the form of their main clause. The tag and the main clause have the same subject and the auxiliary verb of the main clause becomes the verb of the tag.

In addition to formal tags, there are also informal, or invariant, tags in English. The two names, informal and invariant, emphasize different features of this kind of tag questions. Their form stays the same, as the name invariant tag suggests, regardless of the form of the main clause to which they are attached (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet 2003: 167), and at least some of them are more common in informal than formal speech, as the name informal suggests:

> Don't touch nothing, **all right**? (LP 325)
> Look, I've known for a while, **okay**? (LP 308)

As the examples show, the form of the main clause does not affect the form of the tag question at all. Since invariant tag questions do not have subjects or verbs that could affect their form, positive and negative main clauses can have the same kind of invariant tags attached to them. *All right*, *okay*, and other invariant tags could thus be attached to both positive and negative main clauses. Both of the tags in the examples above are typical of spoken rather than written language.

Some scholars (e.g. Greenbaum and Quirk 1998: 235) consider also tags such as *isn't that so?* and *don't you think?* invariant since their form is also regardless of the form of the main clause. These invariant tags can, however, be used even in more formal discourse. As the name informal tag question can in this sense be rather misleading, this kind of tag questions will be referred to as invariant tag questions in this study.

Tag questions are conducive question forms. They include "a completed proposition" and are therefore often agreed to. (Cameron et al. 1989: 87.) Because of this completed proposition it takes more interactional work to argue against this kind of question forms than it does to assent to them (Cameron et al. 1989: 87). This can be illustrated with an example from *The Last Precinct*:

> We can't talk about what we think is really going on, **now can we**? (367)

The completed proposition here is the main clause, and it would be odd to answer this by rejecting the idea suggested in the main clause (Cameron et al. 1989: 87). On the other hand, if the idea of the main clause was presented in the form of a question *Can we talk about what we think is really going on?*, it would be easier to reject it. As conducive questions can be considered very powerful interactional devices, it does not seem very likely that tag questions only express uncertainty.

Depending on the context in which they are uttered, tag questions can function as either hedges or boosters. Hedges are linguistic forms that can be used to "weaken or reduce the force of an utterance" (Holmes 1995: 72). Hedges can soften a critical utterance and they can signal the speaker's uncertainty about the correctness of an utterance. They can function as both positive and negative politeness devices (Holmes 1995: 77-78). Positive politeness is respecting and avoiding threats to the positive face, and it is typical of rather informal and intimate situations as it emphasises the solidarity between the speaker and the addressee (Brown & Levinson 1994: 70; Holmes 1995: 14, 20; Brown 1998: 85). Negative politeness, on the other hand, is avoidance-based as it wishes to respect other people's claims for their territories and avoids intruding. Acts of negative politeness are thus ways of showing others this respect for their freedom of action. (Brown & Levinson 1994: 70.)

In addition to tags, intonation, modal verbs, and words such as *perhaps* and *maybe*, for example, can be used as hedging devices (Holmes 1995: 74-75). The following is an example of a tag question as a hedging device. In the example, Kay Scarpetta is talking about Interpol with Detective Stanfield. Despite his profession, Stanfield knows less

about the subject than Scarpetta as he is new in his job, whereas Scarpetta has recently worked with Interpol.

> "Can't say I have, ma'am. They're sort of like spies, **aren't they**?" (LP 148)

With the tag question, Detective Stanfield expresses that he is uncertain about the correctness of his statement and that he would like Scarpetta, who knows more about the matter, to confirm his assumption.

As opposed to hedges, boosters "intensify or emphasise the force" of an utterance (Holmes 1995: 76). They can be used to strengthen both positive and negative utterances and thus, depending on the context are either polite or impolite. As politeness devices, boosters can express positive politeness, but they can also be used to intensify FTAs. For example, modal verbs, swear words, and modal adverbials like *absolutely* can be used as boosters. (Holmes 1995: 77.) In the example, Kay Scarpetta is accusing a man of the murder of her lover:

> "You killed Benton, **didn't you**, Jay." I state it as a fact. (LP 544)

In this example, the tag question is used as a booster in a negative statement. In this case, the tag thus functions to emphasise an FTA: accusing someone of murder is face-threatening, but demanding them to answer the accusations is a very strong threat to their negative face.

Whereas hedging and boosting are functions that can be performed in many different ways, tag questions have four distinct functions that are specific only for them. In this study, tag questions will be analyzed according to the functions outlined by Janet Holmes (1995: 80-82) who divides them into epistemic modal, challenging, facilitative and softening, depending on the function they perform in a certain context. These four categories are needed to study the differences in the tag questions used by people of different gender and status. The functions will be presented in more detail in the following sections.

3.1 Epistemic modal tag questions – seeking confirmation

Epistemic modal forms in general in linguistics are forms that the speaker uses to indicate his or her lack of confidence in an expression (Coates 1989: 113). Like epistemic modal forms in general, epistemic modal tags can also be used to express uncertainty. By using an epistemic modal tag, the speaker indicates that s/he is not certain of the correctness of the information given in the main clause and seeks for confirmation (Holmes 1995: 80). An answer is usually expected to an epistemic modal tag. An epistemic modal tag question is functionally somewhere between an ordinary yes/no question and a statement. The speaker has enough information about the subject so that s/he does not want to ask a question but is still not confident enough to make a statement.

Epistemic modal tags usually seek for information, which is closest to the kind of tags Lakoff (1973: 54-55) discussed in her article about the gendered use of tags. She argued that tag questions, in general, signal the speaker's weakness and uncertainty or unwillingness to take a stand on something or express his/her opinions. Epistemic modal tags are, indeed, used to seek for confirmation, but the reason for using them is not necessarily the weakness of the speaker. According to Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003: 169), they may be used because the speaker has not, for example, seen or heard something properly.

Epistemic modal tags are speaker-oriented because they serve the speaker's needs for gaining information (Holmes quoted in Cameron et al. 1989: 82) and not, for instance, to criticize or to elicit talk from others. They only function in the interest of the speaker. For example:

> "Trying to wash the formalin out of his eyes. It's rather oily, **isn't it**?
> Hard to wash out?" (LP 429)

In this example the speaker, assistant district attorney Jaime Berger, is talking about the man who assaulted Kay Scarpetta and tried to murder her. When Scarpetta was trying to escape him, she threw formalin on his face. Berger wants to know what exactly happened on the night Scarpetta was attacked and how the assaulter reacted on the

formalin. She does not know what formalin is like, whereas Scarpetta, who uses it in her work, is more familiar with it. Berger thinks that formalin is oily but because she is not sure of it, she adds an epistemic modal tag to her statement wishing Scarpetta, the expert, to confirm her idea. However, Berger does not expect Scarpetta to participate in the conversation, so in that sense her tag question is speaker-oriented: it only serves her own purposes.

As epistemic modal tag questions are used for seeking information or confirmation, it is not surprising that they have been found to be a common feature of powerless language (Cameron et al. 1989: 90). By using epistemic modal tag questions the powerless speakers also give the powerful speakers more power because those in powerful positions thus have the authority to approve or reject the ideas of their subordinates.

3.2 Facilitative tag questions – directing conversation

Facilitative tags indicate politeness because they take the needs of others into consideration by inviting them to talk. They make it thus easier for the addressee to join the conversation. (Cameron et al. 1989: 82.) Facilitative tags do also serve the purposes of the speaker, even though not to the extent that epistemic modal tags do, because they can be used in directing the conversation.

Facilitative tags function as positive politeness devices. If a speaker adds a facilitative tag question to the end of a statement, it becomes a question which invites the addressee to contribute to the conversation. Because facilitative tags can be used to elicit talk from others, they often serve as conversation openers. For these reasons they are uttered by, for example, teachers or talk show hosts who in their jobs are trying to make people talk. (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003: 168-169.) Facilitative tags do not only serve as conversation openers, but they can also be used to direct the conversation toward a certain goal (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003: 168-169). The speaker not only expects the addressee to produce an answer to the question but the answer should also be relevant for the conversation. Considering the characteristics of facilitative tag

questions, it is not surprising that they are a common feature of powerful language (Cameron et al. 1989: 89).

Inviting a person to speak by using a facilitative tag question shows the addressee that the speaker values his/her opinions, which is an expression of concern for the positive face of the addressee. In the following example Kay Scarpetta's niece, Lucy, is talking to her aunt in *The Last Precinct* and telling her about a private investigative business a friend of hers is starting.

> "The Last Precinct," she says, getting more animated by the moment.
> "Pretty cool name, **right**? Based in New York. (LP 88)

Lucy wants Kay Scarpetta to comment on the name of the new business and this shows that she values her aunt's opinions, which can be considered an act of positive politeness

As the above example shows, facilitative tag questions are addressee orientated; often the most important reason for uttering a facilitative tag question is to encourage other people to speak and to make them express their ideas (Holmes 1995: 82). However, the speaker does not only seek support for his or her statements, and facilitative tags do not express uncertainty in the way epistemic modal tags do. Even though facilitative tags can be used to invite others to speak, they do not always need an answer at all. They often occur in the middle of an utterance and the speaker does not seem to expect any answer from the addressee (Coates 1989: 116).

Facilitative tag questions do not necessarily have any informational function, whereas their interactional function is very important (Cameron et al. 1989: 83). A clause which is followed by a facilitative tag question does not always bring anything new to the conversation, but they are important because they can be used to promote interaction between people and to maintain conversation between them. For example:

> Oh sure. They'll go for insanity, if all else fails. And we don't want Mister Chandonne at Kirby, **now do we**? (LP 263)

Jaime Berger and Kay Scarpetta are again discussing Scarpetta's assaulter and his coming trial. The same man is suspected of at least three murders, and he has just hired

himself a new counsel. Jaime Berger is thinking about the effect of this on the whole case. She does bring some new aspects to the conversation (the forensic psychiatric hospital Kirby), but there is not a correct answer to her question that she would wish to have. She is using the tag question to direct the conversation and to invite the addressee, Scarpetta, to speak and to express her opinions about the matter.

3.3 Challenging tag questions – forcing the addressee to answer

Challenging tags are also used to receive an answer from the addressee but in a rather different way than facilitative tags. Whereas facilitative tags politely invite the addressee to speak, challenging tags aim to force the reluctant addressee to reply and, in this, they can often be considered face threatening acts (Holmes 1995: 80–81). Facilitative tag questions do not necessarily need an answer, whereas one is usually expected to challenging tags. In fact, they can be used to "force feedback when it is not forthcoming" (Thomas quoted in Holmes 1995: 81). Not only do challenging tags pressure the addressee to answer but, like all questions, the answer to a challenging tag should be relevant for the conversation. They are thus a means of conducting the conversation. (Harris quoted in Coates 2004: 93.) The use of challenging tags can be seen as a very powerful interactional device.

Challenging tags can also boost the strength of a negative speech act, and they are thus probably the least polite of the different kinds of tag questions (Holmes 1995: 80). A tag question attached to the end of a criticizing statement strengthens the negativity of the main clause and may make it sound even quite threatening.

> You raped her, **didn't you**, sir? (LP 237)

The speaker here is questioning a crime suspect. Even though she calls him formally and politely 'sir', she is very impolite to the suspect who is acting quite arrogantly and ignores her questions. The speaker uses a challenging tag question to force the suspect to answer. Using an ordinary yes/no question would make the speaker sound more polite because an ordinary question would imply that the speaker is, indeed, uncertain of the correct answer to the question, whereas the challenging tag also implies that the

speaker is certain that the suspect committed the crimes he is charged with. By adding a challenging tag question at the end of the statement, the speaker also reinforces the negativity of the main clause.

3.4 Softening tag questions – softening negative utterances

Softening tags are the opposite of challenging tags because they are used, as the name suggests, to soften negative speech utterances, such as directives or criticism, whereas challenging tags are used to boost negative utterances. As opposed to facilitative tags which serve as positive politeness devices, softening tags are negative politeness devices because they can make an otherwise negative utterance sound more positive and polite. (Holmes 1995: 82.) By adding a tag question at the end of a critical utterance, the speaker shows respect for the freedom of action of the addressee. In the following example, Pete Marino is talking to his colleagues on a crime scene in *Black Notice*. He knows the men know what they have to do and he does not want his colleagues to think he is giving them orders.

"You guys know to check the drains and pipes, **right**?" (BN 429)

By adding the tag question *right* at the end of his statement, Marino's comment becomes less rude. It shows respect for the other men's freedom of action and is thus an act of negative politeness. Pete Marino is more powerful than his colleagues who are present in the situation but with the mitigated order he is expressing his power indirectly. Whether a tag question is challenging or softening depends, of course, very much on the context in which the tag questions are uttered and on the intentions of the speaker, because a tag question following a negative statement is not, in itself, challenging or softening.

A softening tag following a directive reduces the face-threat to the addressee, meaning that it is easier for him or her to avoid cooperation with the speaker than it would be without the softening tag (Cameron et al. 1989: 83; Coates 1993: 129–130). For the same reasons softening tags are addressee-oriented: they soften the critique directed

towards the addressee and make it easier for him or her to refuse the propositions of the speaker.

‘Didn’t lead to quite what you intended, **did it**?’ Anna suggests. (LP 85)

The utterance here is quite negative and by adding a softening tag question to her statement, the speaker wishes to soften the originally negative statement and make it more positive. She is also trying to be more polite towards the addressee who is her friend. As powerful speakers often have the power to criticize their subordinates softening tags are a common feature of powerful language (Cameron et al. 1989: 90). Cameron et al. (1989: 88) argue that in situations like the one given in the example, the tag serves as a means of increasing the humiliation of the addressee instead of softening it. However, in their categorization of tag questions Cameron et al. do not include challenging tags which would serve the function of "humiliating" tag questions according to the categorization used here. In this case it is very important to take the context of the tag question into consideration when analyzing the function of the tag, as in different contexts the same tag question could be considered to have opposite functions.

All tag questions can have several functions at the same time, as Cameron, McAlinden and O’Leary (1989: 76-77) have pointed out, and this should be taken into consideration when analyzing their functions. In conversation, tag questions as well as other utterances perform different functions simultaneously, and it may thus be difficult to place a certain tag question into only one category. A tag question can, for example, be epistemic modal in that it seeks for information or confirmation but it can also perform the facilitative function if it, at the same time, tries to invite the addressee to participate in the conversation. This can be illustrated with the following example where Doctor Anna Zenner is talking about the murder of Kay Scarpetta’s lover in *The Last Precinct*:

“He had a gunshot wound to his head, too, **did he not**?” (LP 82)

Anna is not certain of all the details of the case. Her question is epistemic modal in that she wishes the addressee to confirm her assumption since she does not know if it is correct. At the same time the question is also facilitative because, by adding it to her statement, the speaker invites the addressee to participate in the conversation. The

foreign background of the Austrian-born Anna is emphasized with her using the long form *did he not* instead of the contraction *didn't he*.

The context in which a tag question occurs affects its function greatly and it should thus also always be taken into consideration when analyzing them. Depending on the context, the same tag question can have different meanings and functions. Tag questions can be used, on one hand, as positive politeness devices as they invite others to participate in the conversation, and, on the other hand, they can be used to criticize or challenge the addressee in which function they can be considered as face threatening acts (Holmes 1995: 31). A tag question does not perform any function on its own; it is always the context of the utterance that defines the function of the tag question. For example, the same tag question *don't you* has different functions when it occurs in different contexts in the following examples:

> "You always clean your guns after you go to the range, **don't you** doc." (LP 16)
> "I think the jurors need to fully appreciate the terror his victims felt, **don't you**?" (LP 196)

In the first example, the function of the tag question is epistemic modal. The speaker is talking to his friend. He is asking her about her habits. He thinks he knows how and when she usually cleans her guns but because he is not certain of the correctness of his thought, he uses the epistemic modal tag question and wishes the addressee to confirm it. In the second example the speaker is talking about a trial and the person accused in it. Her tag question is facilitative: there is no correct answer to it, she only wishes the addressee to comment on her thought and to express her own opinion of the matter.

4 TAG QUESTIONS USED IN *BLACK NOTICE* AND *THE LAST PRECINCT*

The purpose of this study is to examine the tag questions in Patricia Cornwell's novels *Black Notice* and *The Last Precinct* to find out how the gender and the position of the speaker affect their use of tag questions. To be able to study the tag questions from the points of view of gender and power, the tag questions have been divided into four groups according to their functions as outlined by Janet Holmes (1995). According to this categorisation, tag questions are either epistemic modal, facilitative, challenging or softening in function, and the main function of each tag has been deduced from the context in which they occur. The context of the tag question is important in their analysis since the characters present in the situation, their relations to each other and the topic of discussion all affect in determining the functions of the tags.

In this chapter, the tag questions of the two novels by Patricia Cornwell are analysed. The chapter is divided into two sections according to the gender of the speakers, and they are further divided into three sub-sections according to the status of the speaker. The first section concentrates on women, and men are analysed in the second section.

4.1 Tag questions used by women

The dialogue of the two novels consisted of altogether 86 tag questions uttered by female characters; 20 in *Black Notice* and 66 in *The Last Precinct*. The study only concentrates on tag questions that occur in spoken interaction between the characters, and that is why one of the tag questions was excluded from the analysis as it was not uttered in a conversation but only in the mind of the first person narrator, the protagonist Kay Scarpetta in thinking about her dead lover. The total number of tag questions used by women analysed for this study was, thus, 85.

As the status of the speakers may vary between different contexts, it is not possible to describe any single character as only powerful or powerless. All characters may have either a higher or lower status. For example, the protagonist Kay Scarpetta was in a

superior position in her conversations with her employees but in a subordinate position when Asssitant District Attorney Jaime Berger was questioning her about the man who assaulted Scarpetta in her own house.

4.1.1 Powerful women

In the material, there were altogether 43 tag questions uttered by female characters in positions of power. The power of all these female characters derived from their professions since the topic of discussion was often work-related. In cases where the addressee was of equal status with the speaker it was the type of discourse that determined the power relations: Psychiatrist Anna Zenner had more power than her friend Doctor Kay Scarpetta in the context in which their conversation took the form of a counselling session. All in all, 40 of these tags were from *The Last Precinct* and only three appeared in *Black Notice*. In this group, the tags were used to serve all four functions. The most common function of tag questions used by powerful female speakers was facilitative: 21 out of the total of 43 tag questions were facilitative in function. There were nine epistemic modal tag questions uttered by female speakers in powerful positions and eight challenging tag questions. The remaining five tags were softening in their function.

It was not always clear who was the most powerful in a certain context. For example, Jaime Berger and Kay Sacrpetta are both of a high social status, discussing the area of their expertise, since their conversation involve the crimes they are investigating. Before their first encounter Scarpetta herself describes them as follows: “although we have never met, we are often mentioned together. It is said that I am the most famous female forensic pathologist in the country and she [Berger] is the most famous female prosecutor” (LP 94). It would thus seem that they are equal in status. However, even though they are seemingly investigating the crimes together, Scarpetta does not know that at the same time Berger is examining if Scarpetta herself could be charged with murder. Implicitly this makes Berger the more powerful one of the two of them, but because Scarpetta does not know about Berger’s investigation, she considers them equal

in power. Berger, on the other hand, considers herself the more powerful of the two of them and constantly treats Scarpetta as her subordinate. An example of this is that Jaime Berger is the one who suggests the use of less formal terms of address between the two women: “Please call me Jaime” (LP 260) and that is something that is usually considered as the prerogative of the powerful.

Power relations were also unclear in two conversations between Psychiatrist Anna Zenner and Kay Scarpetta. The two women are good friends, but as Anna Zenner forces Kay Scarpetta to discuss the difficulties she has had in her life they clearly adopt the unequal roles of a doctor and a patient even though they are not having an official counseling session. This becomes clear with references such as that by Zenner: “I have always told my patients when they do not face their problems, they are headed for a day of reckoning. [. . .] This is your day of reckoning. [. . .] Now you will talk to me, Kay Scarpetta” (LP 75). Anna Zenner, as the doctor, is thus more powerful than her friend in these conversations. She is also the only one using tag questions in their ‘counseling’ conversations as will be illustrated later.

The conversations between Anna Zenner and Kay Scarpetta also show how power relations are dependent on the context and subject of the interaction. The two women are good friends, and Kay Scarpetta even stays in Anna Zenner’s house while she cannot live in her own house because of an ongoing crime investigation there. As friends, the relationship between them is thus equal. Still, during the sessions in which they discuss Scarpetta’s life and her attempts to overcome the death of her lover, there is an inequality in the power relations between them.

Most of the tag questions used by women in powerful positions served the facilitative function (21/43). As powerful speakers are often responsible for conducting the conversation it can be assumed that they use facilitative tag questions quite often. Therefore, it was expected that facilitative tag questions were common in the speech of powerful women. Such tag questions can be used as conversation openers, to invite the addressee to participate in the conversation and to make the addressee express his/her ideas or opinions (Holmes 1995: 81–82). As they take the needs of the addressee into

consideration they show concern for the positive face of the addressee and are addressee-orientated. Facilitative tag questions do not always need an answer.

The following example illustrates the addressee-orientated features of facilitative tag questions. Assistant District Attorney Jaime Berger is in the most powerful position in the situation and she is leading and controlling the conversation, but this facilitative tag question is clearly also uttered to invite the addressee to participate in the conversation. In the example, Jaime Berger and Kay Scarpetta are discussing the murder suspect Jean-Baptiste Chandonne who suffers from a medical condition that greatly affects his appearance. Berger does not want the jury of Chandonne's trial to be affected by his strange appearance.

> "But I also want them to see him now, before he's cleaned up and wearing a three-piece suit. I think the jurors need to fully appreciate the terror his victims felt, **don't you**?" (LP 196)

Berger is asking for Scarpetta's opinion on the subject and thus inviting her to participate in the conversation. It can be considered an act of positive politeness since it expresses an interest in the thoughts of the addressee and also seeks agreement between the speaker and the addressee. Furthermore, this tag question functions as a positive politeness device since it shows respect for the opinions of the addressee.

The next example is a rather uncommon facilitative tag question: the speaker needs the addressee's confirmation to the question. Furthermore, this facilitative tag question serves the purposes of the speaker since it is used to direct the conversation towards the direction the powerful speaker, Jaime Berger in this example, intends to lead it. Thus, this facilitative tag question is not addressee-orientated like facilitative tags often tend to be. In this example Assistant District Attorney Jaime Berger is questioning the man who is arrested and suspected of two murders and the murder attempt on Kay Scarpetta. The power relations between the two are clear: Jaime Berger has the power to interrogate the crime suspect, while he should only produce answers to Berger's questions. This is clearly shown when the crime suspect, Jean-Baptiste Chandonne, tries to ask Berger questions, but she ignores them all.

> "You know this is being videotaped, **don't you**, and you have no objection to that," Berger is saying on tape. (LP 200)

The tag question in the example is facilitative because the main reason for using it is to seek the addressee's confirmation, in other words, to make him talk, even though not at length. Berger knows that the suspect knows that they are videotaped, she only needs him to say it aloud and to confirm that he does not object to that.

The two characteristics of facilitative tag questions illustrated by the two examples – expressing interest in the thoughts of the addressee and seeking the addressee to confirm the suggestion of the speaker – are also the most common characteristics of the facilitative tag questions used by powerful women in the material of this study. Of the total of 21 facilitative tag questions used by powerful speakers, 13 seek for confirmation from the addressee and eight invite the addressee to express his/her ideas about the subject of conversation. Furthermore, the facilitative tag questions that seek confirmation appear in interactions where the speakers are of clearly unequal statuses, like in the case of the assistant district attorney and crime suspect, whereas the tags inviting the addressees to express their ideas are uttered in conversations where the power relations between the speakers are less obvious, as in conversations between Jaime Berger and Kay Scarpetta.

Epistemic modal tag questions were the second biggest category of tags among women in powerful positions. As many as nine tag questions performed the epistemic modal function in the context they were used. Considering that the total number of tag questions uttered by women in powerful positions was 43, epistemic modal tag questions make over 20% of it. This was rather surprising as epistemic modal tag questions can be used to express the speaker's uncertainty of the correctness of the preceding statement (Holmes 1995: 80). The uncertainty can be caused by the speaker's lack of knowledge in the matter or unwillingness to express his/her opinions. Because epistemic modal tag questions often signal uncertainty they are not very typical of the speech of persons in powerful positions.

In the following example Kay Scarpetta and Captain Pete Marino are questioning Detective Rene Anderson about the murder of Diane Bray who was deputy chief of Richmond Police Department. Anderson and Bray were good friends, and Scarpetta and Marino want to know what Anderson was doing the previous night as she visited Bray and was probably the last one who saw her alive. Scarpetta and Marino believe it was Jean-Baptiste Chandonne who murdered Diane Bray and do not suspect Anderson of the murder but they let her believe she is considered a suspect in order to make her talk. Again, the roles the characters hold in the situation are clear: Scarpetta and Marino as crime investigators have power, whereas Anderson as the crime suspect is in a powerless position.

> "But you didn't come back last night, **did you**?" [Scarpetta] said.
> (Cornwell 1999: 443)

With the epistemic modal tag question Scarpetta tries to gain information and expecting an answer to her question. Scarpetta does not ask an ordinary yes / no question *Did you come back last night?* because she suspects Anderson did not return to Bray's house. She has reason to believe so because all the evidence found in the crime scene points to the direction of Jean-Baptiste Chandonne and if Anderson had actually returned to Bray's house she would most likely be dead, too. The question in the example only serves the interest of the speaker, Scarpetta, like epistemic modal tags often do, because she is the one trying to gain information and the purpose of the tag question is not to invite Anderson to participate in the conversation other than providing an answer to the question.

Most of the epistemic modal tag questions used by powerful women were uttered by Jaime Berger in her conversations with Kay Scarpetta. Even though Berger is the more powerful of the two women in those situations, the subjects of the discussions often involve Scarpetta's area of expertise, such as substances and methods she uses in her work. It is therefore understandable that Berger wants Scarpetta, the expert, to clarify some things, and in order to get Scarpetta to answer, Berger has to ask her some questions. Since Berger herself already has some knowledge of the issues she asks for confirmation with epistemic modal tag questions instead of direct questions.

Eight out of 43 tag questions used by powerful female speakers in the material of this study were challenging in their function. Like facilitative tag questions, challenging tags also invite the addressee to talk. Whereas facilitative tags are usually polite, challenging tags are impolite, even rude as, they can be used to 'force' the addressee to reply. They can be used to boost the strength of a negative speech act like criticism, for instance and thus they often constitute a threat to the face of the addressee. (Holmes 1995: 80–81.) Since powerful rather than powerless speakers are allowed to be impolite it is probably more common for people with power to use challenging tag questions.

The following example illustrates how challenging tags can be considered stronger than facilitative tags: a facilitative tag does not always receive an answer, whereas a challenging tag usually does. Facilitative tag questions are often used to elicit talk from others and to make them express their ideas. Most of the tags Anna Zenner uses in her conversations with Kay Scarpetta are facilitative. Given the nature of facilitative tags, it is understandable. Zenner's job as a psychiatrist is to make her patient talk and she is encouraging Scarpetta to do that by adding facilitative tag questions to her statements. When Zenner asks Scarpetta direct questions, she does not always receive an answer, but when she uses tag questions, Scarpetta is 'forced' to answer. In the following example Zenner is trying to get Scarpetta to talk about the murder of her lover:

> 'Which do you think came first?'
> I stare mutely at her. I have not reconstructed what led up to his death. I have never been able to bring myself to do that.
> 'Envision it, Kay' Anna tells me. 'You *know*, **do you not**? You have worked too many deaths not to know what happened.'
> My mind is dark, as dark as the inside of that grocery store in Philadelphia.
> 'He did something, **didn't he**?' She pushes, leaning into me, on the very edge of the ottoman. 'He won, **didn't he**?'
> 'Won?' I clear my throat. 'Won!' I exclaim. 'They cut his face off and burned him up and you say he *won*?' (LP 82-83)

At the beginning of the example, Anna Zenner asks a question but receives no answer. Then she tries to encourage Scarpetta to speak by using a facilitative tag question, *do you not*. However; in this case the tag question does not serve its purpose. When Scarpetta still remains silent, Zenner changes the facilitative tag into the challenging tag question *didn't he*. Zenner's suggestion that Scarpetta's lover Benton Wesley was

somehow a winner in a situation that ended in his shooting is outrageous in itself, but the tag question at the end of it even boosts the effect of the main clause. Indeed, the challenging tag question works the way it is supposed to as it forces feedback from Kay Scarpetta. By using the challenging tag questions Anna Zenner is not even trying to be polite, but, instead, pressures her 'patient' to talk about a matter that is undoubtedly very painful to her and which she otherwise would easily refuse to discuss. Anna Zenner uses challenging tag questions in the previous example because that is the only way she is able to get her to speak. As the two women are friends, Zenner is not trying to insult Scarpetta with her comments on Benton's death but only to force Scarpetta to talk about matters Zenner thinks Scarpetta is trying to avoid.

Powerful women may also used challenging tag questions to insult their addressees. In the following example, Jaime Berger is again questioning the suspect Jean-Baptiste Chandonne who is acting arrogantly and ignoring Berger's questions. Despite Chandonne's behaviour, the power relations between the two are clear: Berger, as the interrogator, is the one in charge of directing the interrogation. The police have strong evidence against Chandonne, and Berger can be certain that he has committed the murders he is suspected of.

> "Good question," Berger says sharply. "Because you know what? I, for one, don't believe you, sir. You murdered Susan, **didn't you**, sir?" (LP 237)

With the challenging tag question Berger tries to force the arrogant suspect to agree with her. With the tag question she implies that she actually knows the answer to her question already; she is certain that Chandonne is guilty. If Jaime Berger asked Chandonne a normal yes / no question *Did you murder Susan?* the question would not include any indication of her assumptions about whether or not Chandonne actually did commit the murder in Berger's opinion. The statement *You murdered Susan* without the tag question would be a clear expression of Berger's opinion but it would also reduce the face threatening aspect of the comment because it would not need an answer from the addressee. The challenging tag thus strengthens the negativity of the statement of Jaime Berger.

Powerful female speakers use challenging tag questions very effectively since in most cases the addressees produce some kind of answers to challenging tags. In fact, there is only one challenging tag question in this category that is left completely without an answer. That tag question is uttered by Bev Kiffin, the owner of a motel in which a murder was committed and who also is involved in the murder. Scarpetta and her niece Lucy have come to the motel to investigate the murder when Kiffin's accomplice points a gun at them. Kiffin comments:

> "Well, well," she says. "Some folks just never get the message they aren't welcome, **isn't that right**?" (LP 534)

It appears that the main reason for uttering this tag is to threaten the addressees, not to force them to answer. Bev Kiffin does not expect Scarpetta or Lucy to comment her question in any way, it only functions to emphasise her point: the two women should have known that they should have kept away from the motel.

Most of the challenging tag questions by women in powerful positions are uttered by Jaime Berger when she is interrogating Jean-Baptiste Chandonne. With the challenging tags Jaime Berger manages to show Chandonne she believes he is guilty of the crimes he is suspected of. As opposed to Jaime Berger, Anna Zenner does not use challenging tags to communicate her own ideas but to provoke Kay Scarpetta to talk.

Softening tag questions was the smallest category of tag questions used by powerful women. There were only five softening tag questions found in the material and they were used to make otherwise negative speech utterances, like directives and criticisms, sound more polite and positive. Since powerful speakers are allowed to criticize and give orders it could be expected that softening tags are a common feature of powerful language (Cameron et al. 1989: 90). Therefore, it was rather surprising that the number of softening tag questions in this category was so small.

In the following example Kay Scarpetta is talking about the death of her lover with Anna Zenner. The example is from one of the discussions between the two women where they adopt the roles of doctor and patient. Anna Zenner, as the doctor, is thus the more powerful one of them. She uses softening tags to follow criticizing statements. She

does not want to sound rude to her friend, especially when it is Scarpetta's dead lover whom Zenner is criticizing. Softening tag at the end of her statement makes her sound more polite and reduces the threat to Scarpetta's face:

> 'Freedom from Benton't death, or perhaps from Benton? He was somewhat repressed, **wasn't he**? He was safe. He had a very powerful superego. Benton Wesley was a man who did things properly.' (LP 118)

The statement that Benton was repressed would sound much ruder than when Zenner ends her comment with a softening tag. The tag also shows that she takes the feelings of her friend into consideration. Zenner does not even expect an answer to her question since she continues speaking after uttering the tag question. Thus the main function of the tag question is indeed to soften the critical tone of Anna Zenner's comment, not to invite Scarpetta to express her opinion on the matter.

All of the softening tag questions appear in situations where the topic of discussion is stressful and likely to cause pain to either the speaker or the addressee or both of them. They are used, therefore, to reduce the possible face threat to either the speaker or the addressee. One of the softening tag questions is uttered by Kay Scarpetta when she is talking about the death of her lover with her secretary Rose. Two of the softening tag questions used by powerful women are uttered by Anna Zenner in her 'counseling' sessions with Kay Scarpetta. Jaime Berger utters two of them when she is discussing the murder attempt on Kay Scarpetta with Scarpetta herself. All of the softening tag questions are used to soften critical comments concerning either the addressee or someone close to her. It is also interesting that all of the softening tag questions powerful women used were uttered in conversations between two women. In other words, powerful women did not address any softening tag questions to men.

4.1.2 Powerless women

The most important factors determining the powerless positions of women were age and professional status. However, in the case of profession it was rather the profession of the addressee than the speaker that was the status-defining factor. For example, there were crime witnesses talking to crime investigators. In one occasion, the crime witness

is an FBI agent in which case the context is the determining factor: the crime investigating officers are above the crime witnessing agent in status.

Female speakers in powerless positions used tag questions altogether 21 times in *The Last Precinct* and *Black Notice*. The total number of tag questions is thus less than half of the total number of tag questions used by powerful women (43). The most common function of the tag questions powerless women used was facilitative and there were altogether ten facilitative tag questions in the material. The second largest group of tag questions in this category was epistemic modal tag questions with six occurrences. There were three softening tag questions, while the smallest group of tag questions used by powerless women was challenging tag questions of which there were only two. Only two challenging tag questions belonging to this category were found in the material.

It was surprising that the number of facilitative tag questions used by powerless women was so large (10) since they are considered a feature of powerful rather than powerless language as they can be used in directing the conversation. Facilitative tag questions invite the addressee to participate in the conversation or to comment on something (Holmes 1995: 81–82). However, facilitative tag questions do not always require an answer as they can occur in the middle of an utterance. It appears that in the material of this study, powerless female speakers used facilitative tag questions for the same reasons as powerful speakers but the powerless women did not always succeed in directing the conversation.

The following is an example of a powerless speaker trying to conduct the conversation. Scarpetta and Marino are investigating a crime scene in a motel. The owner of the motel, Bev Kiffin, follows them and watches carefully what they do. She is involved in the murder that was committed in the motel room Scarpetta and Marino are investigating and has thus a reason for wanting to know what the police have been able to find out about the crime so far. However, at this point of the investigation Scarpetta and Marino do not yet suspect Bev Kiffin of the crime even though they do not trust her. Scarpetta and Marino both are more powerful than Bev Kiffin who comments:

> ‘Looks like he [the murder victim who was staying in the motel] came in and unplugged the clock and the lamp, **now doesn’t it**? That’s kind of strange, unless maybe he was plugging something else in and needed the outlet. Some of these business types have those laptop computers.’ (335)

The tag question in the example is facilitative because the speaker uses it to elicit speak from Scarpetta or Marino. She does not expect her addressees to confirm her idea; she only wishes them to talk about the matter and to comment on what they think happened in the room before the murder was committed. She succeeds in her purposes as Marino starts asking her more questions about the murder victim.

The relatively big proportion of epistemic modal tag questions, six out of 21, used by powerless women in the material of this study is quite expected. Epistemic modal tag questions are often used for gaining information and seeking confirmation (Hlmes 1995: 80). It can thus be expected that they are quite commonly used by powerless speakers: they wish the more powerful people to confirm their ideas. Also, the use of epistemic modal tag questions by powerless speakers further increases the power of the powerful speakers because the epistemic modal tags uttered by the powerless gives the powerful an opportunity to approve or reject the ideas proposed by the powerless. Most of the epistemic modal tag questions powerless women used concerned an area in which the addressee was an expert like, for example, a police officer asking Kay Scarpetta about her job and Kay Scarpetta herself asking Jaime Berger about her job. The following example is from a special grand jury hearing. Jaime Berger is questioning Kay Scarpetta about the murder of Diane Bray and the series of crimes Scarpetta has been investigating lately. As the prosecutor, Jaime Berger is in charge of the hearing and she is thus the most powerful person in the situation. After hearing about the horrible details of the crimes the jurors are all shocked and one of them, an elderly lady, asks:

> ‘Can I ask a question. We can ask, **can’t we**?’ (LP 561)

She thinks that she is allowed to ask questions but is not sure and needs a confirmation from Jaime Berger. Because of her profession, the prosecutor is an expert in the matter, whereas for the juror, court proceedings are something she is unfamiliar with. That is

also the reason which makes this tag question epistemic modal: the speaker is not certain of the correctness of her utterance and seeks confirmation.

As expected, the number of softening tag questions used by women in powerless positions was rather small, only three out of the total of 21 tag questions used by powerless women were softening in function. Softening tag questions function to reduce the negativity of commands and criticizing utterances. (Cameron et al. 1989: 82.) Very often softening tag questions do not need an answer at all; they only mitigate the preceding utterance. Since it usually is the prerogative of powerful speakers to criticize and to give orders, softening tag questions are considered typical of the language of powerful rather than powerless. In the following example Kay Scarpetta and Pete Marino are talking with Rose, Scarpetta's secretary. Rose has just found out that when she stopped at a grocery store the previous day and found the store closed, the clerk of the store had just been murdered, and the murderer was most likely still inside the store when Rose was trying to get in. She is thus obviously very shocked and is contemplating on what could have happened if the murderer had come out of the store when Rose was outside of it. The professional roles of the characters participating in the conversation define the power relations between them. Rose as Kay Scarpetta's employee is in a subordinate position to Scarpetta and Marino.

> 'What about him?' [Rose] cried. 'What if he had still been inside that store and had come out just as I had pulled in? I'd be dead, too, **wouldn't I**? Shot and dumped somewhere like garbage. Or maybe he would have done awful things to me, too.' (BN 272)

Rose is not criticizing anyone or giving orders. In that sense this is thus a rather uncommon softening tag question. Still the function of the tag question is clearly softening since the idea in Rose's utterance is very negative in its tone. It needs a softening tag question to follow it to reduce the negativity of the idea that is clearly very shocking to Rose. Obviously Rose does not even expect Scarpetta or Marino to answer her which is also typical of softening tag questions.

Another softening tag question uttered by Rose occurs in a similar kind of situation. Scarpetta and Rose are having a conversation in the medical examiner's office.

Scarpetta expresses her concern over the 65-year-old Rose who lives alone, while there is a serial killer at loose in the city, and Rose's car has been followed. Again, Rose mitigates her comment about murderers with a softening tag question.

> "Dr. Scarpetta, if it's not him, it's always someone, **isn't it**? Always someone evil out there. I have to live my life. I can't be held hostage by fear and old age." (BN 447)

What these softening tag questions used by Rose have in common is that they both follow comments that Rose herself probably finds scary. The function of the tag questions is to make the comments sound less scary and threatening. These softening tag questions are not used to mitigate orders or criticizing statements which makes them rather unusual softening tag questions.

Only one of the softening tag questions uttered by powerless women is used to mitigate the force of an order, performing thus the typical function of softening tag questions. This tag is uttered by Kay Scarpetta's niece Lucy when Scarpetta worries about people's reactions when they hear about the special grand jury investigating her. Scarpetta is older than Lucy who admires and respects her greatly. Kay Scarpetta herself describes her relationship to Lucy as follows: "I am supposed to be strong. I am the one who has always rescued my niece from trouble [. . .]. I have always been the torchbearer who guided her along the right path. [. . .] I have stood up to anyone who tried to interfere with Lucy." (LP 304) Scarpetta can thus be considered more powerful of the two, and now she fears losing the respect of her niece. Lucy comments on Scarpetta's thoughts:

> 'That's total bullshit,' she says with feeling [. . .] 'This isn't about my not respecting you,' Lucy says. 'Jesus Christ. Nobody in the room has any less respect for you, Aunt Kay. But you need help. For once, you've got to let other people help you. You sure as hell can't deal with this all by yourself, and maybe you need to sit on your pride a little and let us help, **you know**?' (LP 304)

Lucy softens her order with an invariant tag question. Without the softening tag question, Lucy's comment could be considered quite impolite, and she does not wish to hurt her aunt's feelings. Even though there is a status difference between Kay Scarpetta and her niece, it could be argued that because of the close relationship between the two,

Lucy is allowed to criticize her aunt despite her lower status. If the criticizing person was someone who had a more distant relationship to Kay Scarpetta, the comment would be much more insulting and rude.

Only two of the total of 21 tag questions used by powerless women speakers performed the challenging function. The group of challenging tag questions was thus the smallest of different kinds of tag questions used by powerless women. It was expected that challenging tag questions rarely appear in the language of powerless speakers. That was also the case in the material of this study. Challenging tag questions function to increase the threat of an utterance or to emphasise the negativity of a criticizing statement. They are often used to force a reluctant addressee to speak. (Holmes 1995: 80–81.) Powerless speakers are usually not allowed to criticise their superiors, nor are they expected to direct the conversation.

Both of the two challenging tag questions in this category were uttered by Kay Scarpetta. Scarpetta is used to having power, and it is interesting that when her position has changed to a less powerful one she still retains the speaking style of a person who is in charge in an interactional situation. For example, when Jaime Berger is questioning Kay Scarpetta about a murder suspect who attacked Scarpetta in her own home, Scarpetta assumes that she is equal in power with Berger and is also asking her questions. However, whenever this happens, Berger redirects the discussion to another direction and constantly avoids answering Scarpetta's questions. After a while Scarpetta realizes she will not receive answers from Berger and states: "I give up. I am clearly not the one who is going to be asking the questions in this situation." (LP 254) Scarpetta now understands that Berger is the powerful participant in their conversation, but she still denies her own powerlessness. As an indication of power, Berger repeatedly asks Scarpetta to call her Jaime but Scarpetta insists on calling her Ms Berger. Berger states the fact that when the intruder knocked on Scarpetta's door, she opened the door for him. Scarpetta is appalled at Berger's insinuations and exclaims:

> 'You aren't asking me if he was an invited guest, **are you**?' I stare defiantly at her, the inside of my mouth sticky. My hands are trembling. I push back my chair when she doesn't answer me. 'I don't

> have to sit here and take this. It's gone from ridiculous to the sublimely ridiculous!' (LP 261)

The tag question at the end of Scarpetta's exclamation is challenging because it strengthens the negativity of her statement and makes it even sound somewhat threatening. Scarpetta's statement following the tag question and her physical reaction make it clear that she is angry and that she is not even trying to be polite. Scarpetta is probably also frustrated about her subordinate status to Jaime Berger and with the challenging tag question she tries to control the conversation that is dominated by Berger. By using a challenging tag Scarpetta is trying to force Berger to answer her and that is what Berger does but again with another question.

4.1.3 Women in equal encounters

Sometimes the power relations between the characters were not clear, but the characters could be considered equal in status. Altogether 17 this kind of contexts were found in the two novels and they included 21 tag questions, 10 of them were from *Black Notice* and 11 from *The Last Precinct*. In equal encounters, the conversations took place between friends or persons who were in same profession or otherwise equal in status in work-related contexts. For instance, Kay Scarpetta and Anna Zenner are equal in status in conversations where Zenner is not forcing Scarpetta to analyse her painful past. Even though Kay Scarpetta, as the older one, can in most cases be considered more powerful than her niece Lucy Farinelli, the women are equal in status in a context in which they are investigating an ominous crime scene together and at the same time defending each other. The tag questions used in these contexts represented all four different functions of tag questions: there were nine facilitative, six epistemic modal, five challenging, and one softening tag questions.

Facilitative tag questions, which invite the addressee to participate in communication, were the largest group of tag questions used by women in communications where the participants were equal in status. This is not surprising, as some studies (e.g. Coates 2004: 126) have shown that, the conversational style of women is based on solidarity and support. With facilitative tag questions that function as positive politeness devices

women are able to show concern for their addressees. The nine facilitative tag questions of the material appeared in both single sex and mixed-sex communication. Five of them were used by Kay Scarpetta and two by the chief medical examiner of France, Dr. Ruth Stvan, while Jo Sanders, Lucy Farinelli's girlfriend, and Teun McGovern, a friend of Lucy's both used a facilitative tag question once.

Like all facilitative tag questions, those used by women who had an equal status in the context did not always need an answer, and they sometimes also occurred in the middle of an utterance. In the following example Kay Scarpetta is talking with Dr. Ruth Stvan in Paris where she has met her to discuss the murderer Jean-Baptiste Chandonne. Chandonne also tried to attack Dr. Stvan by pretending he had been in a car accident. Because of their profession, the two women are equal in status:

> 'I think physicians have a savior complex, **you know**? We can take care of problems, no matter what they are, and that's the impulse he counted on, in retrospect, where I was concerned.' (BN 369–370)

Dr. Stvan does not seem to expect Kay Scarpetta to answer the question. Ruth Stvan continues to speak after the tag question and thus it could be expected that the only reaction she expects from her addressee is a minimal response. The tag question shows that Dr. Stvan expects Scarpetta, who is also a doctor, to understand her feelings, and it could thus be considered an act of positive politeness.

The fact that epistemic modal tag questions were so commonly used by women in equal communication was rather surprising since, according to Coates (2004: 130), women tend to avoid information-seeking questions, which epistemic modal tag questions are, as they can create power asymmetries. Five of the epistemic modal tag questions are uttered by Kay Scarpetta and one is uttered by Anna Zenner. The epistemic modal tag questions, too, occur in both same sex and mixed-sex conversations. In the following example Kay Scarpetta is talking with Pete Marino on the phone. Marino is calling from a low-rent housing project in Richmond, and Scarpetta is afraid that the reason why Marino is in that notorious neighborhood is that there has been a murder. She asks Marino:

> 'You're not bringing me more business, **are you**?' (LP 161)

Scarpetta's tag question is epistemic modal in function because the reason for uttering it is to receive an answer to her question. The first thing that comes to her mind when she hears where Marino is that he is there because of a crime that has been committed. She needs Marino, who obviously is better aware of the facts, to confirm or reject her thought. The statement followed by a tag question shows that Scarpetta hopes that the reason why Marino calls her is something else than another dead body, which a direct question would not have shown.

Women used challenging tag questions five times in equal encounters. Challenging tags, which strengthen the force of critical utterances, are the least polite of all tag questions. On one hand, it is surprising that women use so many of them in encounters with people who are often very close to them since challenging tags are very impolite. On the other hand, threatening the face of a relatively close person is not as big an offence as threatening the face of a total stranger, and as expressions of politeness are usually fewer between close friends (Holmes 1995: 13). In the following example Kay Scarpetta is angry at Pete Marino because Marino has suggested that maybe Scarpetta's murdered lover Benton Wesley is still alive and that his murder was staged so that he could disappear and join a witness protection program. Marino's thoughts bothered Scarpetta so much that she contacted the medical examiner who autopsied Benton and asked for the report of the autopsy. The report, which confirms that Benton was murdered, was very shocking.

> 'Because you just *had* to say it,' [Scarpetta] yelled at him. 'You just *had* to open your big, rude mouth and say he wasn't dead! So now we know, **right**? Read it your goddamn self, Marino.' (BN 362)

The tone of Scarpetta's words is very accusing and the challenging tag further strengthens the tone of Scarpetta's comment. Scarpetta is not trying to force Marino to answer her as is often the case with challenging tag questions. It appears that she only wants to hurt Marino in the same way that Marino's words hurt her.

In the material, only one softening tag question was uttered by women in an equal encounter. Softening tags are used to mitigate the force of critical comments and

commands, and they can be considered to function as hedges (Holmes 1995: 82). It is especially this softening function of hedges that allows the discussion about sensitive topics, and their use is considered typical of feminine language (Coates 2004: 129). Thus, it could have been expected that women would have used more softening tag questions in equal encounters. The only softening tag question was uttered by Kay Scarpetta. She is having a row with Pete Marino who has found that Scarpetta is having an affair. He is furious because he considers it an insult to Scarpetta's dead lover. Scarpetta brings Marino's ex-wife into the conversation and says:

> And there's no one good enough for you. No one as good as Doris. When she divorced you, that was hard, **wasn't it**? And I've never thought any woman you've been with since is even close to what she was. But we have to try, Marino. We have to live.' (BN 389–390)

The topic of this conversation is very sensitive as Scarpetta knows that the divorce was difficult for Marino and that he has not had any serious relationships since. Indeed, the topic is so sensitive that it could be considered insulting if it was introduced by someone else than a close friend. The softening tag question reduces the negative tone of Scarpetta's comment and thus also the threat to Marino's face.

4.2 Tag questions used by men

The traditional masculine conversational style is characterized with power and dominance. Tag questions, on the contrary, have been considered a feature of feminine language as tags signal weakness and women's powerless status in the society. However, in the material of this study, men used tag questions regardless of their status in conversation.

In this section, tag questions uttered by the male characters of *Black Notice* and *The Last Precinct* are analysed. Like the previous section on tag questions used by women, this section is also divided into three sub-sections according to the status of the speakers. Powerful male speakers will be analysed first followed by the analysis of powerless male speakers. Finally, men in equal encounters are analysed. Status of the speakers varies between different contexts and same characters appear thus as having

both higher and lower statuses. For example, Police Captain Pete Marino is in a powerful position when he is questioning crime suspects, in a powerless position when he visits Interpol headquarters, and in conversations with his friend Kay Scarpetta Marino is equal in status with Scarpetta.

Altogether 67 tag questions were used by male characters in the two novels that were used as material for this study: 33 of these appeared in the dialogue in *Black Notice* and 34 in *Last Precinct*. All of the tags occurred in spoken communication between the characters and are thus included in the analysis.

4.2.1 Powerful men

In the material, the Police Captain Pete Marino was the only man who appeared in a powerful position. His powerful position was always related to his work: he was either questioning crime suspects or witnesses or talking to police officers who were below him in rank. There were both single and mixed-sex conversations. When in powerful position, Marino used altogether 12 tag questions. Five of these tag questions were from *Black Notice* and six from The *Last Precinct*. The difference to powerful female speakers is thus quite remarkable since powerful women used tag questions 43 times, which almost four times as many as powerful men. Except for epistemic modal tag questions, which were not used at all by powerful men, all three other functions of tag questions were equally prominent in the language of powerful men: facilitative tag questions occurred five times and challenging tag questions four times in the material., whereas softening tag questions occurred three times.

Facilitative tags seem to be quite common in the speech of powerful men. Facilitative tag questions are often used to encourage the addressee to speak and to invite others to participate in the conversation (Cameron et al. 1989: 82). Since it is usually the duty of the most powerful participant of the conversation to direct it, it could be expected that powerful speakers use facilitative tag questions quite frequently. It appears that facilitative tag questions are an important part of the Police Captain Pete Marino's questioning technique since all five facilitative tag questions used by powerful men

were uttered when Marino was interrogating crime suspects or witnesses. In the following example, Pete Marino and Kay Scarpetta are interrogating Detective Rene Anderson after the murder of Diane Bray. Marino and Scarpetta do not suspect Anderson of the murder, but they let her believe so in order to get her to talk. The power relations in the situation are clear: Marino and Scarpetta as crime investigators are in charge of the situation, while Anderson as the crime suspect is in a powerless position. Marino opens the conversation with a facilitative tag question:

> 'You know we can get DNA off a beer bottle, **right**?' Marino was saying to her. 'We can get it off a cigarette butt, **right**? Hell, we can get it off a damn pizza crust.' (BN 434)

Marino knows that Rene Anderson knows how DNA can be used in crime investigation since she is a detective. Thus, his tag questions are not epistemic modal because he is not trying to gain information or wishing Anderson to confirm his idea. Although in a rather impolite way, these facilitative tag questions simply serve to open the conversation and to encourage Rene Anderson, who is rather scared, to talk. Indeed, Pete Marino succeeds in his purposes as Anderson start to tell him about the previous night when she was visiting Diane Bray.

It could be expected that powerful speakers would use challenging tag questions more often than powerless speakers. Challenging tag questions are often very impolite since they can act as boosters of negative statements, increasing thus their negativity. They can be used to force a reluctant addressee to speak. As opposed to facilitative tags, which invite the addressee to join the conversation, challenging tag questions are thus more impolite. (Holmes 1995: 80–81.) Since an answer is usually expected to a challenging tag, they are a powerful means of conducting the conversation. Four out of the total of twelve tag questions used by men in powerful positions were challenging in function. Together with facilitative tags, challenging tags were the biggest group of tag questions used by powerful men. In the material, all four challenging tags were uttered by Pete Marino. Marino is often rude to people, especially if he dislikes them, and it is thus not surprising that he uses impolite challenging tags rather often. He uses challenging tags efficiently when he is questioning crime suspects. The following example is from the same scene as the previous one. Marino is questioning Detective

Anderson about the murder of Diane Bray. He does not believe that Anderson is the murderer but he lets her believe so by implying that Anderson may have been jealous of Bray and would thus have had the motive to kill her.

> "And I bet she knew it made you jealous, made you really squirm, just fucking miserable and mad, **right**? Bray got off on it. She's the type who would. Wind you up and then take your battery out so what you want don't go nowhere." (BN 439)

Marino is insulting Anderson and strengthens his insults with the challenging tag. The reason for doing that is that he wants Anderson to talk about her relationship to Bray. Earlier, Marino has asked Anderson directly if she was jealous of Diane Bray, but Anderson did not answer that question. With the challenging tag question Marino succeeds. Anderson first answers another question she ignored earlier and after Marino produces one more challenging tag question concerning Anderson's relationship to Bray, she starts to talk about her feelings.

Softening tags can make otherwise negative or impolite statements sound more polite. For instance, the possible face threat caused by a directive can be reduced by adding a softening tag at the end of the directive. Powerful speakers are allowed to criticise and give orders, but they can also decide to what extent they want to express their power (Fairclough 1989: 46, 72). By showing concern for those in subordinate position, by mitigating orders, for example, powerful speakers can create solidarity and thus win the cooperation of the subordinate ones (Holmes & Stubbe 2003: 100). It could thus be assumed that those in positions of power would use softening tags for these purposes.

In the material, powerful men used softening tag questions three times. The number is rather small but in the total of twelve tag questions uttered by powerful men, three softening tag questions form a rather large proportion. All of the softening tag questions were uttered by Pete Marino. In two cases he uses softening tags to mitigate orders and in one case he tries to reduce the negativity of his words when he is talking to an FBI agent about the murder of her partner. The following is an example where Pete Marino is softening his directives. Police officers are working on the scene of Diane Bray's

murder and Marino is in charge of the scene. As the most powerful police officer present, he is giving orders to his subordinates who are working on the crime scene.

"You guys know to check the drains and pipes, right?" (BN 429-430)

By just saying: *check the drains and pipes* Marino would sound impolite. The softening tag question at the end of the directive makes it sound more polite. Also, Marino knows that the men know their job and that he does not have to tell them what to do; he is only reminding them of what to do. A softening tag question does not necessarily need to be answered, but this time the two crime scene technicians reply to him: "*We'll get there, boss*" (BN 430). This implies that they consider Marino's words a reminder rather than an order and, also, that they are aware of Marino's superior status at the crime scene.

It was not very surprising that powerful men were not found to use epistemic modal tag questions at all because they signal uncertainty and lack of knowledge and they are thus often considered a feature of powerless rather than powerful language (Holmes 1995: 80). The epistemic modal tag question signals that the speaker is not quite sure about something to express it in the form of a statement but needs the addressee to confirm or reject the proposal.

4.2.2 Powerless men

In the two novels, there were altogether seven male characters who appeared in powerless positions and they used tag questions in eight different contexts. Three of the men were Kay Scarpetta's employees and their subordinate status was thus based on their profession. In one occasion the powerless position was based on age and in two cases on lack of knowledge. In two contexts the subordinate position was based on the topic on conversation. The powerful speakers in those contexts were both men and women.

Men in powerless positions used tag questions in the material altogether 14 times. The total number of tag questions used by powerless male speakers was thus slightly larger than the total number of tag questions used by powerful men (12). Tag questions were

divided equally between the two novels: both had seven tag questions by powerless men. Facilitative tag questions were the biggest group of tags used by men in subordinate positions with five occurrences. The second largest group was challenging tag questions with four occurrences. Epistemic modal and softening tag questions were used three and two times respectively by powerless male speakers.

It is quite surprising that facilitative tags were the biggest group of tag questions among men in powerless positions. Facilitative tag questions can be used to invite others to participate in conversation and to direct the conversation in a certain direction (Holmes 1995: 81–82). On one hand, they can thus be considered a rather strong interactional device and therefore not typical of powerless language. On the other hand, facilitative tags can be considered a feature of feminine language since they can be used to create solidarity and to show concern for others (Coates 2004: 126–127). In the following example, a facilitative tag question is used to invite the addressee a comment from the addressee. Kay Scarpetta is talking with Neils Vander, the Chief Fingerprint Examiner, who works in the Chief Medical Examiner's office and is thus subordinate to Scarpetta. Scarpetta and Vander are discussing strange hair that was found all over a dead body. They are discussing the different possibilities of where the hair might have come from when Neils Vander comments:

'Too fine for dog hair, **don't you think**?' (BN 192)

This tag question is facilitative because it is only uttered to make Kay Scarpetta voice her thoughts about the origins of the hair and thus the aim of the tag question is to facilitate the discussion. It is not epistemic modal because Neils Vander knows that Kay Scarpetta does not have any more information of the hair than he does, and she is thus not able to simply confirm or reject Neils's thoughts. Even though Kay Scarpetta is above Neils Vander in the status hierarchy of medical examiner's office, the topic of their discussion is something that neither of them is really familiar with and it could thus be argued that the power relations between them are not as clear as their professions suggest. Even though in the status hierarchy of the Chief Medical Examiner's office Niels Vander is below Kay Scarpetta, their unfamiliar topic of discussion reduces the status difference between them.

Facilitative tag questions can also occur in the middle of an utterance which happened frequently in the contexts of unequal power relations. Facilitative tag questions occurred in the middle of stories or anecdotes and it was clear that no answer was expected to those tags. In the following example Pete Marino, Kay Scarpetta and Jaime Berger are present, and Berger is directing the conversation. She is in charge of the case they are investigating and thus the most powerful of the three people present. Marino does not want to admit that Berger, who has just arrived to town, is above him in status and he is trying to impress her. However, Berger directs almost all of her words to Scarpetta and ignores most of Marino's comments. They are discussing the murders Jean-Baptiste Chandonne is suspected of and watching a videotape, on which Berger is questioning Chandonne, when Marino starts to tell a story about Chandonne.

> 'Biggest bunch of fucking bullshit you ever heard,' Marino says in disgust. 'But then I knew that right off the bat. I go to [Chandonne's] room late last night, **right**? Tell him Ms. Berger wants to interview him and so he asks me what she looks like. I don't say a word, play the asshole along. I tell him, "Well, let's just put it this way, John. A lotta guys have a real hard time – no pun intended – concentrating when she's around, know what I mean"' (LP 196–197)

Marino's tag question clearly needs no answer. By telling this kind of stories Marino tries to have the women notice him. By sexually harassing the women with his comments, Marino tries to increase his own power in the situation so that he could also direct the conversation. It appears that he thinks that the more he talks the more power he has. He does not like the fact that somebody like Berger who has just come to town is in charge of the situation, especially when Marino has been investigating the cases longer than Berger. Marino still continues his story about Jaime Berger's body after this, but Kay Scarpetta and Jaime Berger ignore him until Scarpetta loses her temper and tells him to stop his sexist comments.

In *Black Notice* and *The Last Precinct*, men in powerless positions used challenging tag questions four times. Challenging tags can be used to boost the negativity of the preceding statement and to force the addressee to speak (Holmes 1995: 80–81). Since criticizing and directing the conversation are typically features of powerful language,

challenging tags are also a feature more typical of the language of powerful than powerless speakers. Therefore, it was expected that powerless men would not use challenging tag questions often. Again, most of the challenging tags were uttered by Pete Marino. Because of his profession, Marino often appears in a powerful position in the novels when he interrogates crime suspects and witnesses. However, when he is in a subordinate position he uses very rude and impolite language to defend himself. Therefore, it is not surprising that he also uses challenging tag questions.

However, there was also one challenging tag question that was uttered by Chuck Ruffin, the Morgue Supervisor at the Chief Medical Examiner's office. Someone has been leaking information from the medical examiner's office and Scarpetta suspects that it is Chuck Ruffin, who has been acting strange lately and has failed to attend to his duties. Also, Scarpetta knows that Chuck Ruffin is involved in actions that aim at Scarpetta losing her job. Chuck has applied for the police academy and has just received the news that he has been rejected. He thinks that Scarpetta, who is disappointed at him and does not like him, has convinced deputy chief Diane Bray to reject him. Kay Scarpetta, as Chuck Ruffin's superior, is naturally the one in a powerful position in the conversation between them. The power relations between them are also reflected in ways in which they behave in the situation: Scarpetta stays calm throughout the discussion, while Ruffin, who is aware of his powerless position, is anxious and irritated. Scarpetta confronts Ruffin with her suspicions about his actions when he says:

> "That's why I suddenly didn't make it into the academy, **isn't it**? You see [Bray] last night and this morning I get the news. You bad-mouthed me, told her not to hire me, then spread it everywhere to embarrass me." (BN 206)

Chuck is very angry and hurt. Not only was he rejected from the police academy but he is also at risk of losing his job because of his recent behaviour. He uses the challenging tag to defend himself as he considers Scarpetta's accusations as a threat to his face. Without the tag question, Chuck's comment would be just a statement that Scarpetta would not have to comment. However, with the tag question, Ruffin's comment sounds more accusing as the tag demands a confirmation. Indeed, Scarpetta does reply to Chuck, but by rejecting all his accusations.

In the two novels analysed for this study, men in powerless positions used epistemic modal tag questions three times. Epistemic modal tag questions usually seek for confirmation of the idea of the main clause (Holmes 1995: 80). Since epistemic modal tags signal uncertainty, it could be expected that powerless men use them quite often. All three epistemic modal tags were uttered by different characters. Deputy Chief Medical Examiner Jack Fielding, Morgue Supervisor Chuck Ruffin and Detective Stanfield used one epistemic modal tag question each. As is typical of epistemic modal tag questions, their questions also concern mostly topics in which their addressee is an expert. In the following example, Kay Scarpetta is doing an autopsy to a man who was found inside a container in a ship and who has not been identified. Scarpetta is assisted by her morgue supervisor Chuck Ruffin. Status differences between the two are clear: Scarpetta is the Chief Medical Examiner, whereas Ruffin works for her. Ruffin has come late to work, and he has also made a mistake by leaving a body unattended with a detective. Because of this Scarpetta is very angry at him, and she is demanding an explanation of him. Also present in the situation is Captain Pete Marino who has come to watch the autopsy as he is investigating the case. Ruffin is looking at the X-rays taken of the body when he comments:

> "The Container Man's got a busted jaw," Ruffin said. "That right there's enough to I.D. him, **isn't it**, Dr. Scarpetta?" (BN 93)

Chuck Ruffin's tag question indicates that he is unsure of the correctness of his statement, and the aim of his tag question is to have the idea of the main clause confirmed. Obviously, Scarpetta as a medical examiner is an expert on the matter and able to confirm Ruffin's thoughts. However, Chuck Ruffin is not only looking for an answer to his question, but he is also trying to change the subject of discussion as Scarpetta is demanding an answer from him about his recent behaviour. Ruffin probably thinks that with his comment he shows knowledge and expertise in matters concerning his job and would thus possibly improve Scarpetta's impression of him.

The group of softening tag questions was the smallest group of tag questions used by men in powerless positions. Only two out of the total of 14 tag questions used by powerless men were softening in function. Softening tag questions are used to reduce

the force of criticizing comments and orders (Holmes 1995: 82). Since powerless people are usually not allowed to criticize their superiors or to give them orders it could be expected that they would not use softening tag questions very often. One of the softening tags is uttered by Mr. White, the father of a teenage boy who has supposedly committed a suicide. The other is used by Chuck Ruffin. The following example contains a softening tag question uttered by Chuck Ruffin. In this situation Ruffin is talking to Kay Scarpetta which makes him the powerless person in their conversation, in particular as Scarpetta is talking to Ruffin about how disappointed she is at his performance at work. Again, Chuck tries to defend himself by directing the criticism to Scarpetta. He blaims Scarpetta for not having paid enough attention to the office since the death of her lover and for being unaware of many things happening there. According to Chuck, everybody else is aware of this, but he is the only one willing to tell Scarpetta about it. He only wishes that Scarpetta would not punish him for it. Scarpetta is appalled at the thought of punishing someone for telling the truth. Chuck explains to her:

> 'Maybe I used the wrong word,' he replied, moving back to the counter and leaning against it, arms crossed. 'I don't express myself as good as you do, that's for sure. I just don't want you to get upset with me for shooting straight with you. **Okay**?' (BN 115)

Chuck's comment is rather criticising and since it is directed to his boss he mitigates its force with a softening tag question. Furthermore, Chuck Ruffin knows that his boss dislikes him so by being polite and considerate he probably tries to improve Scarpetta's view of him.

4.2.3 Men in equal encounters

In addition to interactions where the participants are unequal in status, men also used tag questions in situations where there were no clear power asymmetries but the speakers were equal in status. Altogether seven men used tag questions in this kind of equal encounters. Their addressees were colleagues and friends, both men and women, and the conversations took place in both work-related and private contexts. Most of the tag questions, 41 out of 67, uttered by men occurred in such equal encounters. The vast majority of these tags were facilitative in function since as many as 31 of the tag

questions performed this function. The other three functions were all almost equal in frequency. Challenging tag questions occurred four times and epistemic modal and softening tag questions both occurred three times.

Most of the tag questions men used in equal encounters occurred in mixed-sex conversation. This is not surprising since Pete Marino is the only major male character that features in both novels and Kay Scarpetta is present in nearly all conversations as the narrator of the book. Considering the prominent role of Pete Marino in the novels, it is not surprising that most of the tag questions in this category were uttered by him.

It is rather surprising that men used facilitative tag questions so often (31 times) in equal encounters since, in general, in masculine conversations questions are often used to seek for information rather than to ask for participation of others or to create solidarity, which are common features of feminine communication (Coats 2004: 123–124; 126–127). Facilitative tag questions can be used to invite the addressee to speak, but they do not always need an answer, and they can occur in the middle of an utterance (Coates 1989: 116; Holmes 1995: 81–82). It is clear that no response other than probably a minimal one is expected to facilitative tags that occur mid-utterance. Indeed, this was very common since 17 out of the total of 31 facilitative tag questions uttered by equal men occurred in mid-utterance. Especially the facilitative tags occurred in mid-utterance when the masculine characters were telling stories or anecdotes. The remaining fourteen facilitative tags occurred at the end of statements and some kind of answer was expected to them although not always received.

The following is a typical example of a facilitative tag that is uttered in the middle of an anecdote. Even though women also used facilitative tags in mid-utterance, this kind of facilitative tags were only found in the speech of men in this study. In the example, police officers are investigating a murder scene and talking about what is it that causes the muscles of the body to become stiff after death. Scarpetta and Marino, who are above the officers in status, are also present in the situation but they do not participate in the conversation. One of the officers tells the following story:

> ‘It’s a long story. But this guy has a heart attack during sex. The girlfriend just thinks he’s gone to sleep, **right**? Wakes up the next morning and he’s deader than dirt. She doesn’t want it to look like he died in bed so she tries to put him in a chair. He was leaning against it like an ironing board.’ (BN 240–241)

It is obvious that the only reaction the officer expects to his tag question is probably a minimal response as he expects them to agree with him. The reason for uttering the tag question is probably just to ensure that his colleagues are listening to him.

Challenging tags were the second largest group of tag questions in the category of equal power relations, and they occurred four times in the material. Like in the category of women in equal encounters, the challenging tag questions by men were also uttered in conversations between close friends. Thus, the possible threat to face was again smaller since politeness is not expressed as explicitly in close relationships as it is in more distant ones (Holmes 1995: 13). All of the challenging tag questions are uttered by Pete Marino. One of them he addresses to Lucy Farinelli, Kay Scarpetta’s niece and the other three are addressed to Kay Scarpetta. The following example is from the conversation between Marino and Scarpetta when Marino considers an affair Scarpetta is having as an insult to her dead lover and thinks that the lover was not as important to Scarpetta as he has thought.

> ‘Well, poor Benton. A damn good thing he’s dead, **huh**? Shows how much you loved him, all right.’ (BN 387)

The idea Marino is implying, that Scarpetta is actually happy for Benton’s death, is very insulting and the challenging tag question further strengthens the insult.

Epistemic modal tag questions uttered by men in equal encounters were rather few in the material, only three. This is in contrast with the idea that men use questions mostly for seeking information since the precise function of epistemic modal tag questions is exactly that, seeking information (Coates 2004: 123–124). Therefore, it could have been expected that men would have used more epistemic modal tags than they did, but this finding also shows that there is no clear relation between gender and language use. Again, all three epistemic modal tag questions were uttered by Pete Marino and addressed to Kay Scarpetta. Scarpetta would need the DNA of Rocky, Marino’s son

with whom he is not in contact, for the investigation of a crime. She asks if Marino has something with Rocky's DNA on it, to which he replies:

> 'Well, I guess you're gonna have to get DNA from Doris and me 'cause I don't got anything of Rocky's. Not even hair. You could do that, **right**? If you got the DNA of the mother and the father then you could compare something like saliva?' (LP 480)

Even though Scarpetta and Marino are of equal status in the communication the DNA is something Scarpetta, as Medical Examiner, is an expert in. Marino thus asks Scarpetta an epistemic modal tag question to confirm his suggestion about getting the DNA from parents instead of the son.

Softening tag questions uttered by men in communications between equals occurred three times in the material, and they were all addressed to Kay Scarpetta. Two of the softening tags belonging to this category are uttered by Jay Talley who, in *Black Notice*, works for Interpol but who in *The Last Precinct* is revealed to be a member of a notorious criminal cartel. One softening tag question is uttered by Pete Marino. In the following example Kay Scapetta is at Interpol headquarters in Lyon with Jay Talley. They are talking about the crimes they are investigating and are thus equal in status. Talley wants her to go to meet a French medical examiner in order for them to get more evidence for the case against a crime cartel they are investigating. Scarpetta is reluctant because she considers the methods in which she should get the evidence as stealing. Talley suggests that Scarpetta should be very motivated in solving the case since the crime cartel has recently tried to kill her niece Lucy who works as an agent:

> 'It's fair, Kay. That's how bad these people are. They tried to blow you're niece's brains out. Then they tried to blow her up. It's not an abstraction for you, **now is it**?' (BN 353)

The topic of murder attempt on Lucy is very painful for Kay Scarpetta and that is why Jay Talley mitigates his comment with a softening tag. Also, Jay Talley wants to be very careful he does not hurt Scarpetta's feelings since he needs her help.

5 CONCLUSIONS

In this thesis, I have studied the use of tag questions in *Black Notice* and *The Last Precinct* by Patricia Cornwell. Tag questions were studied from two different points of view, namely from those of gender and status, and my aim was to find out whether it is the gender or the power relations in the interaction that affects more on the kind of tag questions that are used. As the basis of the study was the study of social and linguistic functions of tag questions in authentic situations by Cameron, McAlinden and O'Leary (1989) in which they concentrated on asymmetrical discourse. According to them (1989: 82–91) there were no considerable differences between the sexes in the use of tag questions but the clearest differences both in the number and type of tag questions occurred between the groups of powerful and powerless speakers. To be able to analyse tag questions more thoroughly, I used Janet Holmes's (1995) categorization of tag questions according to their functions. The four groups of tag questions were epistemic modal tags (often used for seeking confirmation), facilitative tags (function as conversation openers and conversation directors), challenging tags (boost the strength of negative speech acts), and softening tags (soften negative speech acts).

The idea of gender in this study was based on Judith Butler's (1999) idea of gender as performance and language use and communication styles were considered as part of that performance. No feature of language can be considered as a part of only men's or women's language, but there have been found differences between the masculine and feminine use of language. Like gender performance differs from one context to another so does also the use of language. The relationship between language and power was discussed from the basis of theories by Norman Fairclough (1989) and Janet Holmes and Maria Stubbe (2003). Power was considered as dependent on many factors. It could be based on profession, social status, age, and knowledge. However, the factors on which power is based vary between different contexts as the power relations are always defined in relation to other people present. Therefore same persons could appear as having both powerful and powerless positions.

The difference in the use of tag questions between masculine and feminine characters was rather small considering that the number of central male characters was remarkably smaller than female characters in the two novels. Women used tag questions altogether 85 times as opposed to the 67 tag questions used by men. The most common function of tag questions was facilitative for both men and women. However, men and women used facilitative tag questions for different purposes. Whereas women used facilitative tags mostly to invite their addressees to speak, men often used facilitative tags in mid-utterance when they were telling stories or anecdotes. It appeared as if the men used facilitative tags to ensure that their audience was listening to them. The story-telling of men is in line with Coates's idea (2004: 133–134) that in masculine communication one person holds the floor for a long time.

It was surprising that in general, women used epistemic modal tag questions much more than men. In their study, Cameron et al. (1989) found that men used more epistemic modal tags than women. Coates (1997: 123–124) suggested that men used questions for information seeking, which is the main function of epistemic modal tags, and women avoid information seeking questions because they can create asymmetric relations (Coates 2004: 130). Therefore it was expected that men would use more epistemic modal tag questions than women. As women and men used challenging and softening tag questions equally, there were differences between men and women only in the use of epistemic modal tag questions. This finding was in line with Butler's (1999: xv, 12) idea that gender can be considered a performance which each individual constructs for themselves, and therefore no unambiguous links between gender and language use can be made. This finding also suggests that it is, indeed, rather the context of the interaction and the roles held in that context than the gender of the speaker that affects the use of tag questions.

It was expected that powerful persons would use facilitative tag questions quite often since they are in charge of directing the conversation. Women in powerful positions used facilitative tag questions for two distinct purposes: expressing interest in their addressee's thoughts and to invite the addressee to confirm the speaker's suggestion. In particular, women showed interest in their addressee's thoughts when the status

difference between the speaker and the addressee was rather small. Asking for short confirmations was common also among men in powerful positions, and that kind of facilitative tag questions were usually asked from addressee's that were clearly below the speaker in status.

Powerful women used challenging tag questions, too, in a different way depending on the addressee. When addressing a crime suspect challenging tags were used to imply that the speaker knew the addressee was guilty of the crimes, whereas in asymmetrical communications where the relationship between the speaker and the addressee was closer, challenging tags were used to boost comments that would provoke the addressee to speak. Powerful men, too, used challenging tag questions mostly in interrogating crime suspects to insult the suspect in some way to provoke them to talk.

Women in powerful positions used softening tag questions only in all-female conversations. The small number of softening tag questions could probably partly be explained with the fact that a great deal of the interactional situations, where women held the most powerful position, were between crime investigators and criminals, and in those occasions the powerful ones did not show concern for the feelings of their addressees. All softening tags powerful women used were intended to soften critical or negative comments. This supports the fact that hedges are common in female speech because they can be used to soften the force of personal comments (Holmes 1990: 201–202). In this sense, the gender performance of Cornwell's feminine characters was thus rather similar. Whereas powerful women used softening tag questions to reduce the negativity of their critical utterances, men in powerful positions used softening tag questions mostly to mitigate orders they give to their subordinates.

For powerless speakers, the results turned out to be as expected. Powerless speakers used facilitative tag questions remarkably less than powerful speakers. This was expected since directing the conversation with facilitative tags is usually the duty of the powerful. However, powerless speakers also tried to use facilitative tags to direct the conversation but very often they failed to succeed in this. Again, powerless women used more epistemic modal tag questions than powerless men even though the opposite was

expected. It was also expected that powerless speakers would not use softening or challenging tag questions very often since they are both linked to criticising comments. The difference between powerful and powerless speakers was very clear in the group of challenging tag questions as powerless speakers used them 50% less often than powerful speakers. However, it was found that powerless speakers used softening and challenging tag questions for specific purposes. Women in powerless positions used softening tag questions to mitigate comments that the speaker herself found threatening, and men in powerless positions used challenging tag questions to defend themselves.

In equal conversations both men and women used mostly facilitative tag questions. For women, this finding supports the fact that women create solidarity by showing concern for their addressees by inviting them to participate in the conversation (Coates 2004: 126). For men, a great deal of the facilitative tag questions uttered in equal conversations featured in stories and anecdotes they told. This finding is in line with Coates's (2004: 133–134) idea that especially in all-male conversation one speaker holds the floor for a long period of time. All the epistemic modal tags uttered in equal conversations featured in communication between close friends or relatives. It could be argued that in such relationships people are able to show their ignorance without creating power asymmetries or losing face. That challenging tag questions were rather common in equal encounters can probably be explained with the fact that in close relationships, linguistic politeness is not as explicit as in more distant ones (Holmes 1995: 13).

The results of this study were to a great extent in line with the findings of the study of Cameron et al. (1989) as both in this study as well as theirs the greatest differences occurred between the speakers of different statuses, whereas the differences between speakers of different status were not that remarkable. Especially the use of facilitative tag questions was found to be similar since in both this study and the study of Cameron et al. powerful speakers were found to use remarkably more facilitative tags than powerless ones. Differences occurred in the use of epistemic modal tags: Cameron et al. found that men used more epistemic modal tags than women, whereas in this study epistemic modal tags were more common among female characters. However, all in all

it can be concluded that on the basis of this study, the language of Cornwell's fictional characters is close to authentic language.

The results of this study were most likely greatly affected by the fact that the two novels featured rather few central male characters and, consequently, only a few all-male conversations. All-male conversations were few also because the narrator of the books was a woman, Kay Scarpetta. Therefore, most of the dialogue occurred between the female characters. Even though in the material of this study the total number of tag questions used by women was bigger than tag questions used by men, specific comparisons in the use of tag questions between the sexes cannot be generalised into other novels by Patricia Cornwell, let alone to crime fiction in general.

This subject could be further studied by matching the material so that the amount of dialogue by feminine and masculine characters would be equal. In that way, more precise comparisons between masculine and feminine use of tag questions could be made. Also novels from other writers than Patricia Cornwell could be used as material to find out how the use of tag questions differs between different writers. As crime fiction often features clear power relations it provides ideal material for this kid of studies. In addition to tag questions, other features of language of power could also be included in the studies.

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