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Linguistic Representation in the Movie Script *Erin Brockovich*

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Abstract

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Abstract: Master suppression techniques (MSTs) were defined by Ås in the 1970s (Ås, 1992). There are seven MSTs; *making invisible, ridiculing, withholding information, double binding, heap blame or shame, force or threat of force and objectification*. A person uses these techniques against another person or group to gain or keep power in a social hierarchy as they are a form of emotional manipulation as well as discrimination. This study analyses master suppression techniques in the movie *Erin Brockovich* (Soderbergh, 2000), and the aim is to investigate how master suppression techniques are expressed linguistically in a film script. The method is primarily qualitative and partly quantitative. The theoretical basis is speech act theory, conversation analysis and discourse analytical strategies (Reisigl and Wodak, 2003). The main finding of the paper is that MSTs were often expressed through implicature, which means that the intended meaning of statements is not explicit and instead needs to be inferred. Some of the discursive strategies for detecting discrimination were of relevance (Reisigl and Wodak, 2003). The conclusion is that MSTs are expressed by breaking Gricean maxims while still fulfilling parts of the cooperative principle.

Keywords: linguistics, language, master suppression techniques, domination techniques, conversation analysis, discrimination, power, workplace

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1. Introduction

Feminist scholars have used the concept of master suppression techniques (MSTs) to describe how men treat women to maintain a gender hierarchy where they hold power over women, both on a societal level and an individual level. MSTs can be used both by men against men, by women against men and by women against women. In everyday speech, they are a kind of social manipulation used to gain or keep power or a position in a social hierarchy or ranking system (Ländin, 2014). In her work, Ås examined how individuals or groups spoke and interacted to exert control or power over others and came up with five types of MSTs (Ås, 1992), latter complemented by two others for a total of seven (Nationalencyklopedin: “härskarteknik”, no date). Based on this seminal research, this paper examines the presence of these MSTs in the movie script of *Erin Brockovich* (Soderbergh, 2000).

In this paper, the person who the MST is aimed towards is referred to as a target. It is more accurate than victim since it is more neutral and implies that one can change their situation. A few of the ways a target can react to these techniques is to feel ignored, embarrassed, pressured, or guilty (Ås, 1992:6-14).

1. 1. Background

The concept of MSTs originates from Nissen (1945), who wrote a book about how Nazis came to power in Germany. According to Nissen, the MSTs were the methods used by the Nazis to maintain and enforce the patriarchal order of society where masculinity was a mythological power and women were tasked with serving the powerful men. Nissen saw MSTs as a sociological phenomenon that decided how power was divided through society due to psychological means (Nationalencyklopedin: “härskarteknik”, no date). It was not until Ås (1992) redefined and popularised the MSTs that they came to mean concrete behaviours in interactions between individuals. In the 1970s, MSTs became a topic of significant interest in the debate about women’s subordinate position in a patriarchal society.

Nevertheless, MSTs remain greatly under researched, and few academic papers have tackled this topic. MSTs have mostly been studied from a feminist or gender point of view, or with a quantitative method where people answered questions on their experience of MSTs in the workplace. In-depth qualitative research needs to be done to gain a fuller understanding of MSTs. A study from a linguistic perspective to determine if there are common denominators

in discourse when MSTs are uttered would further the knowledge of MSTs, about how they are used and how they are expressed. This paper aims to fill this informational gap and further academic understanding of MSTs from a linguistic perspective.

1.2. Descriptions of master suppression techniques

Ås's (1992) definitions of the seven MSTs are the ones still used today. Ländin (2014) has built upon Ås's work and come up with more modern MSTs and definitions thereof, and also "counter techniques" for each MST. Ländin's book is used here to introduce the seven techniques, which are described in the following list:

1. *Making invisible/ ignoring* is to silence or marginalise people. It means that you treat a person or a group as if the person or group were not there. This technique, which can be enacted both verbally and non-verbally, deprives individuals of their identity and makes them feel insecure and as if they lack the influence to make a change (Ås 1992:6).
2. *Ridiculing* is to deliberately ridicule a person for who they are, what they sound like or for something they say or do. It is used when someone is made fun of, laughed down or is called names. Infantilising the target by insinuating they do not know what they are talking about is also applied in this category (Ländin, 2014:23).
3. *Withholding information* is to exclude someone from the decision-making process or to withhold information deliberately so that a person is unable to make an informed decision. Decisions can be made during informal gatherings which not all get access to so that once in the meeting at work, for example, a decision has already been agreed upon and there is no opportunity to make a rebuttal or suggest different approaches (Ländin, 2014:29).
4. *Double binding* is to find something negative about a person's actions and to criticise them no matter what they do. It means that someone is told nothing they do is good enough or done in the right way. For example, someone hears they work too slowly and get nothing done, so they start working faster. Then they are told that they are sloppy and need to be more attentive to their work because they work too fast. So, no matter what course of action the person takes, it will be criticised (Ländin, 2014:35).

5. *Heaping blame and putting to shame* can be combined with *ridiculing* or *double binding* and means that someone makes the target feel embarrassed for their inherent traits or as if something sad that has happened to them is their fault. (Ländin, 2014:39).
6. *Objectification* means that people comment on a person's look, the shape of their body or their way of dress, in a context where it is not relevant or wanted. A person is objectified, and anything they have said or done is seen as irrelevant. (Ländin, 2014:45, 48).
7. *Force or threat of force* is what it sounds like; a suppressor uses their physical strength to get what they want or make threats that force could be used to encourage the cooperation of others (Ländin, 2014:51).

1.3. Aim and research questions

The aim of this paper is to examine which linguistic strategies suggest the use of MSTs as they are represented in a movie, based on the frameworks in chapter three. These frameworks are applied to the conversations containing MSTs. The material is the screenplay from the movie *Erin Brockovich*, directed by Steven Soderbergh (2000). The following research questions are asked:

1. What happens to turn-taking and other features of conversational exchange, like the cooperative principle, when master suppression techniques are used in the movie?
2. How are the strategies for detecting discrimination in discourse applicable to utterances that contain MSTs?
3. When the MSTs are expressed in the movie, to what extent is there evidence of discord in the dialogue?

Many of these concepts build on theoretical insights from linguistic research, and they are explained in detail later in this paper, especially in chapter 3 (theoretical frameworks). First, this paper turns to previous research on MSTs.

2. Previous research

In this section, five papers, a book and a report are mentioned as previous research on this subject. These sources all refer to MSTs in some way, but only a few treat them as the central area of study. The available research that could be located is related to gender, sociology or behavioural studies, although two use conversation analysis in their methods. MSTs are an under-researched subject, as it is difficult to find any reliable or professional source material on the subject.

Harr et al. (2016) researched the online use of master suppression techniques on *Facebook*. Their study used a netnographic approach with qualitative content analysis. (Harr et al., 2016). Netnography is an online research method originating from ethnography (Wikipedia: “netnography”, no date), which examines how people use technology (Kozinets, 2015:4).

In the study, they found evidence of several MSTs. For example, a politician had made a post online where they made a follower feel *ignored* by not replying to their comments despite liking a latter comment. *Objectification* was only identified in one instance when a woman’s comment in a comment field was responded to by a stranger who said she had beautiful eyes, which diminished the woman’s opinion and the point she made. *Ridiculing* was the most commonly used MST. *Double punishment* could not be found on Facebook (Harr et al., 2016). The conclusion they reached was that master suppression techniques were not as usual on Facebook as they had expected. The comments were more likely representative of net hatred than “the subtle power play we call master suppression techniques” (Harr et al., 2016).

One essay conducted a quantitative study about the use of master suppression techniques from the perspectives of 20- to 30-year-olds, who were interviewed. Out of the six interviewees, three were men and three were women and they worked in offices, industries, restaurants, cafés, laboratories and nursing homes (Körnegård, 2018:11, 15). She analysed her data through a thematic analysis model made by Braun and Clarke (2006), and the four themes that could be identified from the data were master suppression techniques in the workplace, power in the workplace, the influence of gender and the influence of age (Körnegård, 2018:14). The analysis discussed the differences and similarities between men’s and women’s experiences of these four themes, as well as how the workplaces differed from each other regarding suppression techniques and power plays (Körnegård, 2018:15). She

argued that power and master suppression techniques go hand in hand because master suppression techniques are a kind of social manipulation that is used to gain or keep power or a social position, which makes them an exercise of power.

In the book *Talking from 9 to 5* (2001), Tannen wrote about how men and women use indirect speech differently. A man who spoke indirectly did so by embedding his directives, by telling his secretary what to do by making it sound as if she had already planned to do it (Tannen, 2001:83). A woman spoke indirectly to her subordinate by using a lot of hedges, not wanting to sound too controlling, and the subordinate did not understand what she tried to communicate (Tannen, 2001:80).

In a meeting she sat in on, a woman made a suggestion. No one acted as if they heard it, but then a male colleague presented the same idea soon after her, and the group accepted the man's idea eagerly. A lot of women and some men she interviewed said that this had happened to them (Tannen, 2001:278). What is described here is almost the exact definition of the master suppression technique called making invisible, as defined by Ås (1992) and Ländin (2014). In the book, we can see that a lot of the interviewed people have experienced this MST.

Ilie (2013) discovered that master suppression techniques were used when deviating from proper forms of address, while examining British and Swedish political discourse examples. Ilie examined the forms of parliamentary address in terms of three parameters: (in)directness, (non)reciprocity and (in)consistency. From her study, the author could see that strategic use of shifting between institutional and non-institutional forms of address or the second- and third-person pronoun relied on information concerning the MP's gender and hierarchical roles. For example, in the Swedish interpellation, the male ministers spoke to a fellow male with the institutionally endorsed form of first name + last name, or in the third person. This same minister addressed a female minister only with her first name or in the second person singular (*du* instead of *Ni* in Swedish¹) (Ilie, 2013:515). When he addressed the woman by her first name and in the second person, he tries to indirectly silence her by explicitly discarding the validity of her proposals and arguments, which is a prototypical manifestation of *making invisible* (Ilie, 2013:516).

Larsson (2016) wrote a paper analysing MSTs in one episode of a popular Swedish talk show. The interview is interpreted, where the conversations containing MST are described. Larsson was able to find and explain several instances of MSTs while referring to her

¹ *Du* is the second person singular in Swedish and means you. *ni* is the second person plural and also means you, but it can also be used to refer to a single person as a form of politeness, *Ni*.

material. The conclusion was that there is a connection to attitude and the use of MSTs; attitude could make the MST more pronounced.

Hegrad (2012) analysed how female gender is created and reproduced in American movies. Her material is the movie *The Devil Wears Prada*, and five other movies are secondary material to compare to *The Devil Wears Prada*. The master suppression techniques are only mentioned briefly, as a way to describe how the boss treats her secretaries, referring to Ås (1992) for further information.

Amundsson et al. (2018) authored a report about how gender is made and (re)created in the meeting culture at Malmö university. Despite an earlier report about the working climate, there remains a gender related structure and pattern which is made visible through master suppression techniques, disinterest, lack of transparency and patterns in which confirmation is handed out or withheld.

This brief introduction to previous research on MSTs have reinforced the need for more research on the topic, which this paper aims to provide. The next chapter is going to outline the main theoretical frameworks of this paper.

3. Theoretical frameworks

In this section, the theoretical frameworks that are relevant to this paper are presented. They are relevant because, in the analysis section, the conversations containing MSTs will be analysed. These three theories can be fruitfully combined to study MSTs. They explain various ways in which insights from linguistic research can identify, enable and reinforce MSTs.

3.1. Speech act theory

When a conversation is ongoing, there is an expectation for cooperation to allow for the conversation to proceed smoothly, without interruptions. This is defined as the cooperative principle (Grice 1975). The principle is broken down into four maxims. The maxim of *quantity* means you should make your contribution as informative as the conversation requires it to be, without being longwinded and losing focus. The maxim of *quality* means that you should not lie or spread information that you are not sure is true. The maxim of *relation* means to remain relevant as not to distract the conversation and stray from the topic of the conversation. The maxim of *manner* is to not express yourself with obscurity or ambiguity (Cameron, 2001:75).

There are, of course, occasions where not all four of Grice's maxims are observed. Then it is not immediately concluded that the cooperative principle is abandoned, but that the speaker's 'deviant' behaviour is, in itself, intended to be meaningful and that the speaker is trying to convey some unknown meaning to the listener by not saying something directly, but expects the listener to infer it. Grice called this unspoken meaning *implicature*. For example, in an interview with the leader of the UK national union of mineworkers during the 1980s, the leader was asked a question about violence between the picketing miners and the police.

Interviewer: Will you condemn the violence on the picket lines? Union leader: I condemn the violence of the police and the national coal board (Cameron, 2001:76). The union leader is asked a *yes/no* question but chooses not to answer either way as he does not want to condemn the members of his union by answering *yes* or by sounding like he is in favour of picket line violence by answering *no*. By deliberately flouting the maxims of quantity (it is insufficiently informative as an answer to the question) and manner (it is ambiguous), he alerts the listener

to the possibility that he intends to convey a meaning he does not wish to express directly through implicature. This concept is central to the paper because the conversations where MSTs are used are analysed to see if cooperation, breaking maxims or the use of implicature affects or is affected by MSTs.

3.2. Conversation analysis

Conversation analysis (CA) is used for the study of both everyday conversations, political speeches and media genres like call-in radio programmes. It is a form of discourse analysis that is very data centred which only looks to the information provided by the sample of data and does not appeal to any evidence that comes from outside the speech itself. The idea is that, if the speakers themselves did not include the information, it is not meant to be observed by the analyst. This is adhered to very strictly by the practitioners who stand by what the author calls the “pure version of the approach”. Other practitioners also include information in the analysis that the speakers themselves did not choose to share (Cameron, 2001:87-88).

3.2.1. Turn- taking

Turn- taking can be described as “one speaker speaks at a time, and speaker change occurs” (Cameron, 2001:91). To answer the question of how speaker change occurs, Sacks et al. (1974) wrote a book on the topic to explain it. This model contains two elements. The first element is based on the speaker’s knowledge that a turn is always at least one “turn constructional unit” long, which are complete clauses or sentences but can also be delineated by the use of intonation, stress and pausing instead of grammar (Sacks et al., 1974). This is valuable knowledge because it is at the end of a turn constructional unit that a “turn transition relevance place” potentially occurs, which is a place in the conversation where speaker change may happen (Cameron, 2001:91). To project the end of a turn involves a combination of different matters: the content of what is spoken, the prosodic and grammatical structure of the speech; the nonverbal signals that are sent out, such as where the speaker’s gaze travels, and if the speaker turns to another person (Cameron, 2001:91). The second element describes who should pick up the conversation after a turn transition relevance place has been reached. Ranked from most likely to least likely the first option is that the current speaker selects the next speaker, the second option is that the next speaker self-selects or lastly that the current

speaker may (but does not have to) continue. The next speaker can be selected by being directly addressed by the current speaker, or by being seen as the addressed person by the end of the speakers turn by aligning the body or gaze towards the selected speaker. If the next speaker is self-selected, there is a possibility of several people self-selecting at the same time, which can cause overlapping speech before the situation is resolved and only one self-selector continues onwards. Option three that the current speaker continues speaking is only applied if neither of the first two options has been chosen (Cameron, 2001: 92). This concept is central to MSTs because, in the analysis chapter, this framework will be utilised to see if the conversation follows proper turn- taking and that all characters get the chance to speak and are not talked over.

3.2.2. Adjacency pairs

Adjacency pairs is a term which describes an exchange in which the second utterance is functionally depending on the first one (Cameron, 2001:96). To hold a successful conversation, the speakers do not only need to know how to successfully have a speaker change at a turn transition relevance place but also to coordinate the content of their turns.

If a person is asked what their name is and they respond by saying that the sun is shining today, then that answer is irrelevant as a response to the previous contribution in the conversation. From the viewpoint of Grice's maxims, this would flout the maxim of relation. An analyst of CA would more likely say that it is "irrelevant [...] as a response to the immediately preceding contribution" (Cameron, 2001:94f).

Spoken interaction is often built around adjacent utterances, where the second utterance is not just based upon the first, but dependent on it. If the first utterance is a question, the second utterance will usually be an answer, or a reply has to be made so that the speaker can answer the question in their next turn. Greetings are also a common form of adjacency pairs. If someone says *hello, how are you*, they expect to hear *hello, I'm fine, thank you*. That is a polite greeting. If one does not answer it, it is strange, ranging from odd to rude (Cameron, 2001:96). Adjacency pairs mean to acknowledge the previous utterance, no matter if it is a question, a greeting, or in the middle of an ongoing conversation. This concept is central because conversations containing MSTs are analysed to see if there is a connection between the use of MSTs and adjacency pairs.

3.3. Discourse analytical strategies

Reisigl and Wodak identified five discursive strategies to detect discriminating utterances, where the self is presented as positive, and the other is presented as negative (2001:386).

The *nomination* strategy describes how one refers to people. The *predication* strategy indicates what attributes are placed on them. The *argumentation* strategy describes what arguments are used to justify exclusion/ racism/ bad behaviour. The *perspectivation* strategy describes from what perspective these referrals, attributes and arguments are expressed. The *intensification/ mitigation* strategy questions if the discriminating, suppressive, exclusive utterances are expressed overtly, or if they are intensified or mitigated (Reisigl and Wodak, 2003: 385).

Reisigl and Wodak (2003) initially used these strategies to analyse racist utterances. Racism is one form of discrimination, just as MSTs are. That is why these strategies will be applied to the analysis of MSTs in this paper. The next chapter will outline the methodology of the paper in more detail.

4. Material and methods

In this section, the data collection and data analysis are explained. The thesis was carried out using two methods to analyse the use of MSTs in conversations; it is primarily qualitative and partly quantitative.

4.1. Material

The chosen material is the movie script of *Erin Brockovich* by Soderbergh (2000). This movie has been selected because of the topics that it includes. There is sexism, inequality, misjudgement based on stereotypes and a struggle for a better community. Erin is an attractive woman and dresses in a way that enhances her body. Her way of dress does not align with how the other women at the company dress. Erin wants others to take her seriously because she is a businesswoman and a single mother who needs an income. Yet when people see what she looks like they do not take her seriously. Erin is also uneducated and comes from a low-income background and a lower social class than her colleagues, who had all afforded a higher education. She is misjudged because of the stereotype that paints a blond casually dressed woman as unreliable, and her opponents underestimate her because she has no formal education.

All the scenes where MSTs were used in the conversation between characters were selected for the present study. However, MSTs were used approximately twenty times, and there was no room to include an analysis of them all in this study. Six of seven MSTs were identified in the material and to be as representative as possible one example of each technique is analysed. Though in chapter five, there are five examples because in some of the conversations, more than one technique is used. That is why there are two examples representing the ridiculing technique.

4.2. Methods

The primary source material was studied to collect data. The script to the movie *Erin Brockovich* (Soderbergh, 2000) was found online², and a close reading was performed. The movie was watched at the same time as the script was read through. The movie script had

² https://sfy.ru/?script=erin_brockovich

scenes in it that the movie did not. It is common for a script to include scenes that do not end up in the finished movie, for various reasons. Only scenes that appeared in the movie were considered relevant to the data collection. The script was then read through thoroughly to be able to identify the use of MSTs in the conversations. Before the work commenced, I decided to count only MSTs that were used in the workplace or work-related contexts for the study. This was done to narrow down the topic.

The definitions by Ås (1992) were used to identify the MST when the data was analysed. To differentiate between an MST and a veiled remark can be complicated, so to have the script as a visual aid to focus on was helpful. As a way to identify the use of an MST, one has to look at what has been said, the meaning behind it and discern if there were manipulation or personal gain at another person's cost in the utterance. After the film and script had been reviewed, and all MSTs were identified, the number of uses in total and the number of each different kind of MST were counted and then registered for the results section. When the MST had been identified, the data was qualitatively analysed to see what happens to normative conversation exchange when MSTs are used; how the expectation of cooperation is exploited to convey the intended attitude, like aggression, animosity, disrespect or similarly; and what evidence there is of Reisigl and Wodak's discursive strategies for discrimination. Qualitative methods are particularly well suited to this type of in-depth analysis, as they provide a detailed perspective on the material (Creswell, 2014:5).

4.3. Restrictions of media form

This movie is a fictionalised version of real events and not a documentary. The dialogue in the movie is written by screenwriters, and the conversation is scripted, so the conversations cannot be seen as genuine, naturally occurring speech. As television is a human invention, it is not natural for it to represent reality the way it does; it is the result of human choice and cultural and social decisions. And yet, language and television are constructed to mediate reality (Fiske and Hartley, 2003:5). As television and language mediate reality and are human constructs, the fact that the dialogue in this movie is made up does not mean that the data is unreliable, because it needs to resemble naturally occurring dialogues, to be able to mediate reality convincingly. Johnson (2016) writes that when dealing with "based on a true story" narratives, a good story wins over being entirely truthful. If altering some facts makes a more compelling storyline, it should be changed. This is beginning to be questioned, as in later

years works that are “based on a true story” have been criticised for being too loose with facts, as one can never know how much, or what is the use of artistic license (Johnson, 2016).

A fictional movie is the form of interaction most closely resembling real conversations, apart from actual real conversations. The interaction in movies captures all the nuances, unlike documentaries, debates or talk shows. Documentaries are more often voice-overs or interviews and not a conversation. Debates are strictly controlled by moderators who choose what topics will be discussed and divide the speaking time between parties.

5. Analysis

In the movie script that is used as the material for this essay, six out of seven MSTs were detected. Those six techniques are qualitatively analysed here under five sections. The analysis is conducted from three different angles: MSTs, conversation analysis combined with speech act theory and discourse analytical strategies, in that order. This is for the purpose to examine if there is something in the conversation that reveal the usage of an MST, or a common denominator. For all detected MST conversations, see appendix.

5.1. Heaping blame/ putting to shame & ridiculing technique

In example 1, a sample of *heaping blame/ putting to shame* and *ridiculing* is analysed. The two lines are called line a) and b) and are marked as such in the example and in the following analysis.

Sample:

a) ERIN: Anna? With this real-estate stuff -- could you remind me, cause I'm a little confused about how exactly we do that. Why are there medical records and blood samples in real estate files?

b) ANNA: Erin, you've been here long enough. If you don't know how to do your job by now, I am not about to do it for you.

By master suppression techniques analysis, this exchange shows us that Anna is using the *heaping blame and putting to shame* technique in combination with the *ridiculing* technique. In b) Anna states that it is Erin's fault that she will not help Erin since she has worked there so long now that she should be able to do the work unassisted. At the same time, she also uses the *ridiculing* technique to criticise Erin's inability to do her job, to make Erin feel insecure.

From conversation analysis, one can see in turn a), that Erin uses the modal *could* instead of *will* when she asks for help. She frames the request as a question, which is the beginning of an adjacency pair. In response b), Anna does not complete the adjacency pair. Instead, she flouts the maxim of quantity, as the response is insufficiently informative, and the maxim of manner, the response is obscure, to implicate her unwillingness to help.

In terms of discourse analytical strategies, Anna uses the predicational strategy in b) to implicate that Erin is ignorant and incapable of doing her job. The argumentation strategy is also used in turn b), where Anna uses the first part of the turn to justify her refusal to help Erin. She means “you have been here for so long that you should know how to do your job”, and the second part of the turn, where she means “I will not help you”. The nomination strategy shows that the characters address each other politely.

5.2. Objectification

In example 2, the *objectification* technique is presented. The lines are marked as a), b), c) and d) in the example and in the following analysis.

Sample:

a) ERIN: Well, that was nice of him. Isn't it funny how some people go out of their way to help people and others just fire 'em.

b) ED: Look, I'm sorry. You were gone. I just assumed you were off having fun.

c) ERIN: Now, why in the hell would you assume that?

d) ED: I don't know. Maybe 'cause you look like someone who has a lot of fun.

From the angle of master suppression techniques, in turn d) Ed says that the reason he fired Erin was based on the way she looked, not her behaviour or work ethic. She looked like the kind of person *who has a lot of fun*, so his decision was founded on her appearance. To discriminate against a person based on their appearance is *objectification*.

In terms of conversation analysis, Erin makes a direct statement in turn a) that the man, a professor who helped their case by providing information, did a good thing. That is followed by an indirect comment that refers to Ed's behaviour when he fired her at a previous time. By placing them opposite each other, she is inferring her displeasure towards Ed's behaviour against her. Turn b) is direct. Turn c) is a direct question, the beginning of an adjacency pair. In d), Ed completes the adjacency pair by responding to the question. The cooperative principle is followed. The replies are informative, to the point, truthful, relevant, on topic, and unambiguous.

In terms of discourse analytical strategies, the predicational strategy is used twice in this sample, the first time in turn a) when Erin divides people into two groups as helpful and

unhelpful, and the second time in turn d) where Ed places the attribute of fun-loving and as an extension undependable on Erin. The argumentation strategy in turn a) is that we know that Ed had previously fired Erin without good reason. This placed her in financial instability, and she blamed Ed for it. The professor has, on the other hand, provided help on two occasions which makes her see him as helpful. The argumentation strategy for turn d) is based on the assumption that she is *off having fun*. The reason he thought so is that he considered her irresponsible and unreliable. The nomination strategy is not in effect here. The characters do not refer to each other by names or titles, we can only interpret the annoyance and contrition between the characters in their body language and tone of voice.

5.3. Making invisible & ridiculing

In example 3, the techniques *making invisible* and *ridiculing* are analysed. The lines are called lines a), b), c), d), e) and are marked as such in the example and in the following analysis.

Sample:

a) THERESA: You know what? Why don't I take Erin down the hall, so we can start on this stuff and I'll fill her in on the rest.

b) ERIN: Hey -- those are my files --

c) THERESA: Yeah, we had them couriered over. And listen, good work. They're a great start. We're just going to have to spend a little time filling in the holes in your research.

d) ERIN: Excuse me - Theresa, was it? There are no holes in my research.

e) THERESA: No offence. There are just some things we need that you probably didn't know to ask.

From the angle of master suppression techniques, Theresa attempts to remove Erin from the room in turn a) to insert herself as the group leader. By removing Erin, she could establish that Erin is no longer relevant to the case proceedings. This is the use of *the making invisible technique*. In turns c) and e), there are uses of the *ridiculing technique* by Theresa against Erin. In turn c) this is expressed by Theresa's condescending attitude towards Erin's achievement, and where her remark is the same as saying she did a poor job. In turn e) she is *ridiculing* Erin by questioning her professional knowledge about routines in general and what information is included in the case files. In both instances Theresa acts patronisingly towards Erin, not acknowledging that Erin handled the case from the very beginning.

From the angle of CA, turn a) opens with a rhetorical question, which is indirect because its illocutionary force is a statement, but it is formed as a question. The suggestion is the beginning of an adjacency pair but in turn b) it is not completed. Instead, Erin breaks the maxim of relation with her observation, as she changes the subject away from Teresa's previous utterance. Theresa follows up on Erin's observation in turn c). Theresa then continues with a compliment and an inferred statement where she does not consider the work to be up to standards or complete. In turn d), Erin uses a rhetorical question to confirm she got Theresa's name right, followed by a direct speech act. Theresa breaks the maxim of manner in turn e) as the inferred statement is ambiguous.

From the angle of discourse analytical strategies, Theresa uses the predicational strategy in turn c) and turn e) when she says *fill in the holes in your research* and *probably didn't know to ask*, respectively. The attribute she assigns Erin is incompetence. As for the argument strategy, Theresa justifies the attribute by implying that Erin's work is incomplete. In turn b) she says, *they're a great start* which means she considers them uncompleted and in turn d) that there is important information left out of the files which makes them insufficient. The nomination strategy shows that the characters address each other correctly with first names, but they do so in a negative tone of voice.

5.4. Force or threat of force

In example 4, the *threat of force* technique is analysed. The lines are marked as a), b), c), d), e), f), g) and h) in the example and in the following analysis.

Sample:

a) ED: Look at these readings for Christ's sake. PG&E's own technicians documented toxic levels of hexavalent chromium in those test wells on numerous occasions.

Ed shoves them across the table. Baum doesn't look at them.

b) ED: Everything the Irvings have had is proven reaction to exposure to hexavalent chromium. They've had...

He stalls a moment. Erin jumps in.

c) ERIN: -- breast cysts, uterine cancer, Hodgkin's disease, immune deficiencies, asthma, chronic nosebleeds.

d) BAUM: A million things could have caused those problems. Poor diet, bad genes, irresponsible lifestyle. Our offer is final and more than fair.

e) ED: Wait a minute – I thought we were negotiating here.

f) BAUM: 250,000 is all I'm authorised to offer.

g) ED: I will present your offer to my clients. I doubt they'll accept it.

h) BAUM: Mr Masry, before you go off on some crusade, you might want to remember who it is you're dealing with here. PG&E is a twenty-eight-billion-dollar corporation.

Mr Baum utilises the *force or threat of force master suppression technique* in turn h) where he makes a threat of force. It is done indirectly, because it is not an outright threat, more like a warning. What Mr Baum is inferring with his line could be that PG&E are very powerful and can make a lot of things happen. It could be a threat or a reminder that since they are wealthy, they have the finances to extend a court case for years. This indirect way of speech is what makes threats so difficult to pinpoint.

From a conversation analysis perspective, after Ed speaks line a), Baum ignores the documents that lie on the table, and he also passes over a turn-transition relevance place. He chooses not to respond to Ed's remark which leaves Ed, as the current speaker, to continue in the next turn. When Ed forgets the list of symptoms and stalls, Erin takes over the turn. It is not an interruption or an overlapping to decide the next turn, but rather friendly cooperation that leads her to self-select and continue the turn. Baum breaks the maxim of quality in turn d) as he knows that hexavalent chromium is poisonous and of its effects. He lies to protect his employers. The maxim of manner is broken in turn h) as the threat is ambiguous.

As for discourse analytical strategies, Baum uses the argumentation strategy in turn d), where he acts as if the evidence that connects PG&E to these diseases is circumstantial. When

he explains the symptoms away on other factors, he argues that his company is not responsible for these sick people but that the blame is their own. Although, this use of the argumentation strategy by Reisigl and Wodak (2003) is not connected to the use of the *threat of force* master suppression technique. The nomination strategy shows that the characters address each other politely.

5.5. Withholding information

In example 5, the *withholding information* technique is analysed. The lines are marked as a), b), c), d), e), f), and g) in the example and in the following analysis.

Sample:

a) ED: Thank you. I'm only sorry you didn't get to meet Erin.

She sees Ed shaking hands and taking a check from a snazzy lawyer type. Suspicious, she enters the conference room; Ed sees Erin and makes introductions;

b) ED: Erin! I was just talking about you. I want you to meet our new partner. Kurt Potter. He'll be handling Hinkley now.

c) ERIN: What?

d) POTTER

to Ed: Now I know what you meant by a secret weapon.

to Erin: Nice to meet you. Great work.

to Ed: See you tomorrow.

He leaves. Erin glares at Ed.

e) ED: What?

f) ERIN: Our new partner? You fuck! When was I gonna find out – in the monthly newsletter?

g) ED: Hey..just listen. Did I ever tell you about the airline case I had?

The MST *withholding information* is used by Ed in turn b), when he revealed that their law firm was going to partner with a different law firm. By that time the partnership was already official. Erin walked in on this meeting by accident, she was not supposed to be at work that

day. By keeping Erin out of the loop of information, she was unable to voice her opinions or to protest.

Based on conversation analysis, the reveal of the withheld information is expressed through a direct speech act, a declarative sentence. Erin reacts as one typically does when news is sprung on them and asks a question. The first thing Mr Potter does when he is introduced to Erin is to turn back to Ed. This does not give Erin an opening to enter the conversation, Potter keeps speaking, and the turn-exchange moment passes by, and Erin is left with her question unanswered. When Erin expresses her displeasure about being left out of the loop, Ed tries to change the subject to dispel her displeasure.

None of the five discourse analytical strategies by Reisigl and Wodak (2003) is used when expressing the MST *withholding information* in this dialogue. Although the predicational strategy is used by Potter against Erin in his remark to Ed “Now I know what you meant by a secret weapon.” Here he refers to her appearance (which is made obvious in the movie, by the way his eyes are skimming her person) and places the attribute of beauty on her. When Potter makes this reference, it could mean that opponents are so fixated on her appearance that they will be taken by surprise because of her sharp mind. Although this expresses Potter’s sexism, it is not an MST.

6. Results and discussion

In this part of the essay, the results are presented, separated in two parts. The quantitative analysis is presented through the following two tables, and the results of the qualitative analysis are summed up in the second part of this section.

6.1. Quantitative analysis

A quantitative methodology was used when examining the movie transcript. From a two-hour-long movie, thirteen conversations were found to contain the use of MSTs in the workplace from the transcript. These thirteen conversations included seventeen instances of MSTs. In some conversations, the MSTs were used two or three times, which accounts for the higher number of times that MSTs were used than there are numbers of conversations.

Table 1: How many times each master suppression technique was used

Technique	Number of uses
Ridiculing	7
Making invisible	1
Withholding information	3
Double binding	0
Heaping blame	3
Objectification	2
Force or threat of force	1
Total number of uses	17

There are seven MSTs, and six of them were used in the data. The most used one was *ridiculing*, and there was no use of *double binding* at all. All of the examples showed the same pattern of not being used in blatant discord but used to represent a negative feeling in a veiled way. They also showed the same pattern of implicating their intended meaning.

Table 2: How many times men and women used MSTs against men or women

Suppressor	Target	Number of uses
Woman	Woman	7
Woman	Man	1
Man	Man	1
Man	Woman	8
Total number of uses by women		8
Total number of uses by men		9

Out of seventeen instances, the MSTs were used by women against other women seven times and by men against women, eight times. The two most infrequent uses share a one-time occurrence, by a woman against a man and by a man against another man.

Anderson and Daniels (2016) made a study to find out how many words are spoken by male characters vs female characters, in nearly 2,000 films. According to their study, 62 % of the movie dialogue in *Erin Brockovich* is spoken by women. The other 38% is dialogue spoken by men. These numbers are divided between seven women and seven men. They have based this off of the movie's screenplay, where characters that speak more than 100 words are included in the data. The female characters have a larger part of the dialogue, but the male characters utter more than half of the detected MSTs.

6.2. Qualitative analysis

In this section, the results of the analysis are presented. The results show that in four out of five analysed samples, features of conversational exchange are not fulfilled. Adjacency pairs are uncompleted in examples one and three (see 5.1. and 5.3). In example four, a turn-transition relevance place is ignored and in example five, Erin was talked over and left unable to enter the conversation (see 5.4. and 5.5.). However, there are no interruptions, and turn-taking is mostly acknowledged and followed. Only one speaker speaks at a time, and speaker change does occur, except in the case of example four, where the selected next speaker chose to pass over his turn. While the adjacency pairs remain uncompleted, the response is not to the previous contribution. Still, it is about the same content, so it is not apparent that the adjacency pair goes unanswered. The deviating response indicates only partial speaker cooperation, but what happens is that the maxim of relation is not followed. However, the unfulfilled conversational exchanges do not always align with the same turn as the MST (see

examples two, three, four and five). So, while completion of adjacency pairs is important for a successful conversation, perhaps they are not indicative of MSTs.

Reisigl and Wodak's (2003) discursive strategies for detecting discrimination were partially successful. In this case, there was no need to use all five strategies, the perspectivation strategy and the mitigating/ intensifying strategy were not used at all. The nomination strategy was interesting because there was nothing in the way participants addressed each other in the discourse that was indicative of discrimination. It seemed to be the opposite, that their address of each other indicated closeness or respect for their positions. Although, when one hears the tone of voice in the conversations, it becomes obvious that there is dissent between characters. When the predicational- and argument- strategies were examined, there were signs of discrimination. The attributes from the predicational strategy and the reasons for the attributes, the argumentation strategy, are often implicated and need to be inferred by the listener.

6.3. Discussion

This section re-examines the research questions put forth by this paper concerning data presented and analysed in previous chapters. The first research question was successfully answered. Turn-taking was fulfilled in such a way that there were no interruptions and there was a turn-exchange. The cooperative principle felt functional, although the Gricean maxims were broken, which means that implicature was used (Cameron, 2001:76). However, broken maxims did not occur every time MSTs were detected. Out of five examples, the maxims were broken in three but not in the same turn as the MSTs were expressed or by the same speaker. This is a connection that requires further studies.

The second question was also successfully answered. What was noticed was that out of the five discourse analytical strategies for detecting discrimination, only two were ever used. The nominal strategy indicated that people only referred to each other in an appropriate manner, so while it was not used to express discrimination, it indicates civility between the speakers.

The answer to the third question was also positive. In most of the examples, there was evidence of discord. The characters were not happy with each other and often signalled their emotions through body language or tone of voice.

These results provide a new perspective on the use of master suppression techniques, but it does confirm that their use is not overt. This paper can hopefully expand the field of study on MSTs into linguistics, and hopefully the research can change focus from who, where and when the MSTs are expressed into how the MSTs are expressed, with a focus on the language itself.

The results in this paper can be connected to the results of the papers that were mentioned earlier (see previous research). Körnegård (2018) found that people in power use MSTs. The analysis shows that in the first example the MST was used by someone who held seniority, in the second it was used by a boss and in the last example, the MST was used by someone with more experience in the field. This corresponds with the conclusion drawn by Körnegård (2018), that people with power in the workplace are those who have worked at the company for a long time, are bosses, older, etc., and these are the groups who are most likely to use MSTs.

While Harr et al. (2016) found that MSTs were expressed more harshly on Facebook than they expected. I found that they could be used without detection and that they were able to be utilised without appearing rude or disrespectful.

No real connection can be made to Ilie (2013), as there was no shifting between the second-and third-person form of address, the address was consistently in the second person, and only first names were used.

As Larson (2016) wrote, attitude can make MSTs more pronounced. This paper also sees that MSTs can be uttered with a certain amount of attitude, even though the conversation is polite on the surface.

7. Conclusion

This essay aimed to examine which linguistic strategies suggested the use of MSTs as they were represented in a movie, based on the frameworks by Ås (1992). Several conversations that contained MSTs were examined for turn-taking, adjacency pairs, the cooperative principle and the discourse analytical strategies for detecting discrimination by Reisigl and Wodak (2003). The paper used a qualitative method when analysing the samples to exemplify the discovered patterns and a quantitative method for examining who used the MSTs and how often each technique was used.

To summarise, the results showed that in four out of five analysed samples, features of conversational exchange were not fulfilled. The Gricean maxims were broken, although not in the same turn as MSTs were expressed. Implicature was important to express MST, as the intended meaning was very often implied and not directly expressed. Ridiculing was found to be the most common MST. Also, while women held 67% of the dialogue according to the script, men expressed more than half the number of MSTs compared to women.

For future research, it could be interesting to look at MSTs through different perspectives. It could be interesting to look at how MSTs are used by different people, from different backgrounds and in different settings. Would MSTs be used more in a workplace vastly different from that of an office, for example in a factory? Or in a heavily male-dominated line of work, such as construction workers for example? When there are no women present to use them against, are men inclined to use MSTs against each other? A comparison between the use of MSTs in a workplace full of men versus a workplace full of women could be interesting.

The data in this essay was taken from a movie script. It would be fruitful to collect data from real conversations in any chosen setting: workplace, home life, or from any activity or club. Could it be so that the scripted dialogues are based on stereotypes of how men and women interact so that the quantitative results could be quite dissimilar? Or, as television is made to mediate reality (Fiske and Hartley, 2003:5), it might not provide much difference?

To conclude, this paper has offered new insights into the practice of master suppression techniques through linguistic analysis, drawing on previous contributions within the field of conversation and discourse analysis. Emerging concepts of note were those of implicature and the breaking of Grice's cooperative principle, used frequently to enable MSTs. By contributing to a more in-depth understanding of MSTs, this paper also proposed that such

insights could be used to better counter and challenge such discriminatory practices both in movies and in workplaces.

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Appendix: Scene transcriptions

This is a transcription of all scenes where master suppression techniques are expressed. The scenes will be found in chronological order, not organised according to master suppression technique. A lot of the scenes contain more than one master suppression technique which would either force the scene to be cut apart or to be repeated in many different places and since both options would cause confusion, this is the most logical solution.

The headline above each transcription says which master suppression technique it is, what the names of the characters are and approximately what time into the movie the scene can be watched.

Ridiculing technique, Defending Lawyer and Erin (5 min)

DEFENDING LAWYER: Seventeen thousand in debt. Whew. Is your ex-husband helping out?

ERIN: Which one?

DEFENDING LAWYER: There's more than one?

ERIN: Yeah. There's two. Why?

[Later]

ERIN: ...not like I had a career, 'cause I had my babies. But I woulda worked, for sure, if I didn't have this neck thing.

DEFENDING LAWYER: Right. No doubt.

DEFENDING LAWYER: So. You must've been feeling pretty desperate that afternoon.

ERIN: What's your point?

DEFENDING LAWYER: Broke, three kids, no job. A doctor in a Jaguar must've looked like a pretty good meal ticket.

ERIN: What? Hey -- he hit me.

DEFENDING LAWYER: So you say.

ERIN: He came tearing around the corner, out of control --

DEFENDING LAWYER: An ER doctor who spends his days saving lives was the one out of control --

ERIN: That asshole smashed in my fucking neck!

Objectification technique, Ed and Erin (19 min)

ED: Where is Anna?

ERIN: Out to lunch with the girls.

[...]

ED: You're a girl.

ERIN: Excuse me?

Ed: How come you're not at lunch with the girls? You're a girl.

ERIN: I guess I'm not the right kind.

ED: Look, you may want to – I mean, now that you're working here – you may want to rethink your...wardrobe a little.

ERIN: Why is that?

ED: Well...I think maybe...some of the girls are a little uncomfortable because of what you wear.

Heaping blame or putting to shame technique, Anna and Erin (20 min)

ERIN: Anna? With this real-estate stuff -- could you remind me, cause I'm a little confused about how exactly we do that. Why are there medical records and blood samples in real estate files?

ANNA: Erin, you've been here long enough. If you don't know how to do your job by now, I am not about to do it for you.

**Heaping blame x2 and withholding information techniques,
Anna, Erin, Jane and Ed (35 min)**

ERIN: Where's my stuff?

ANNA: Where've you been?

ERIN: What the fuck did you do with my stuff?

ANNA: Don't use language with me --
[Erin goes to talk to the receptionist, Jane. Anna follows]

ERIN: Someone stole my stuff.

JANE: Nice to see you, Erin. We've missed you.

ERIN: I had photos of my kids, plus a mug --

Jane reaches under her desk for a box, looks through it.

JANE: -- toothbrush, toothpaste, mousse and a pair of shoes. Here.

ERIN: What's going on?

JANE: There may be jobs where you can disappear for days at a time, but this isn't one of them. Here, if you don't do the work, you don't get to stay.

She hands her the box. Erin doesn't take it.

ERIN: I've been working. Shit, that's all I've been doing. Ask Mr Masry. He knows.

Ed's in his office, dialling the phone when Erin enters.

ERIN: You said to fire me?

He sets down the receiver.

ED: Erin, you've been gone for a week.

ERIN: I left a message. I've been dealing with that real estate thing. I was gonna write up a whole damn report and --

ED: That's not how we work here. You don't just leave a message and take off.

Jane follows her in, still carrying the box of stuff.

ERIN: What am I supposed to do, check in every two seconds?

JANE: Yes. It's called accountability.

Objectification technique, Erin and Ed (42 min)

ERIN: Well, that was nice of him. Isn't it funny how some people go out of their way to help people and others just fire 'em.

ED: Look, I'm sorry. You were gone. I just assumed you were off having fun.

ERIN: Now, why in the hell would you assume that?

ED: I don't know. Maybe 'cause you look like someone who has a lot of fun.

Threat of force technique, Ed, Erin and Baum (52 min)

ED: Look at these readings for Christ's sake. PG&E's own technicians documented toxic levels of hexavalent chromium in those test wells on numerous occasions.

Ed shoves them across the table. Baum doesn't look at them.

ED (CONT'D): Everything the Irvings have had is proven reaction to exposure to hexavalent chromium. They've had...

He stalls a moment. Erin jumps in.

ERIN: -- breast cysts, uterine cancer, Hodgkin's disease, immune deficiencies, asthma, chronic nosebleeds.

BAUM: A million things could have caused those problems. Poor diet, bad genes, irresponsible lifestyle. Our offer is final and more than fair.

ED: Wait a minute – I thought we were negotiating here.

BAUM: 250,000 is all I'm authorised to offer.

ED: I will present your offer to my clients. I doubt they'll accept it.

BAUM: Mr Masry, before you go off on some crusade, you might want to remember who it is you're dealing with here. PG&E is a twenty-eight-billion-dollar corporation.

Ridiculing technique, Sanchez, Erin and Ed (1h 20 min)

SANCHEZ: ... Let's be honest here. Twenty million dollars is more money than these people have ever dreamed of.

ERIN: Oh, see, now that pisses me off. First of all -- since the demur, we now have more than four hundred plaintiffs...and "let's be honest", we all know there's more out there. Now, they may not be the most sophisticated people, but they do know how to divide, and twenty million dollars isn't shit when it's split between them.

ED: Erin --

ERIN: And second of all -- these people don't dream about being rich. They dream about being able to watch their kids swim in a pool without worrying they'll have to have a hysterectomy at age 20, like Rosa Diaz -- a client of ours -- or have their spine deteriorate like Stan Bloom. Another client of ours.

ERIN (CONT'D): So before you come back here with another lame-ass offer, I want you to think real hard about what your spine is worth, Mr Buda -- or what you'd expect someone to pay you for your uterus, Miss Sanchez -- then you take out your calculator and multiply that number by a hundred. Anything less than that is a waste of our time.

Sanchez, throughout her speech, has been reacting in a patronising manner - as if Erin's words were of no import. By the end of Erin's speech, Sanchez has picked up a glass of water in front of her and is about to drink, when Erin says:

ERIN: We brought in that water real special for your folks. It's from Hinkley.

Withholding information, Ed, Erin and Potter (1h 28 min)

ED: Thank you. I'm only sorry you didn't get to meet Erin.

She sees Ed shaking hands and taking a check from a snazzy lawyer type. Suspicious, she enters the conference room;

Ed sees Erin and makes introductions;

ED: Erin! I was just talking about you. I want you to meet our new partner. Kurt Potter. He'll be handling Hinkley now.

ERIN: What?

POTTER (to Ed): Now I know what you meant by a secret weapon.

(to Erin): Nice to meet you. Great work.

(to Ed): See you tomorrow.

He blows out of the room. Erin glares at Ed.

ED: What?

ERIN: Our new partner? You fuck! When was I gonna find out – in the monthly newsletter?

ED: Hey..just listen. Did I ever tell you about the airline case I had?

Making invisible and Ridiculing technique x2, Theresa and Erin (1h32 min)

THERESA: You know what? Why don't I take Erin down the hall, so we can start on this stuff and I'll fill her in on the rest.

ERIN: Hey -- those are my files --

THERESA: Yeah, we had them couriered over. And listen, good work. They're a great start. We're just going to have to spend a little time filling in the holes in your research.

ERIN: Excuse me - Theresa, was it? There are no holes in my research.

THERESA: No offence. There are just some things we need that you probably didn't know to ask.

Ridiculing technique, Ed and Erin (1h 34 min)

ERIN: She insulted me!

ED: Bullshit. It was a misunderstanding. But instead of handling it politely, instead of treating her with respect --

Withholding information technique, Rosalind and Erin (1h 37 min)

ROSALIND: Hey, Erin, I thought you were taking a sick day.

ERIN: So did I.

She heads toward Ed's office, but stops when she sees a meeting in progress in the conference room. Ed is on the side of the table facing her, flanked by Potter and Theresa.

ERIN (CONT'D): What's going on in there?

ROSALIND: Meeting about the PG&E thing.

ERIN: PG—Are you sure?

Ridiculing technique, Erin and Potter (1h 53 min)

POTTER: Where did -- how did you do this?

ERIN: Well, what with me not having any brains or legal expertise, and Ed starting to lose his faith in the system and all...am I right?...

ED: Oh yes...completely... No faith...

ERIN: I just went on up there and performed sexual favours. 634 blow jobs in five days. Boy, am I ever tired.