

# **Is it at all possible to challenge gender stereotypes?**

**Lessons learnt from the early days of the RAVE project**

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# Two projects on awareness-raising activities

**RAVE** – Raising Awareness through Virtual Experiencing

**C-RAVE** – A Cross-cultural perspective on Raising Awareness through Virtual Experiencing

Both address primarily issues relating to language and stereotyping



# What are (social) stereotypes?

- A **reductive** cognitive phenomenon in the categorization of groups of people.
- **Reductive** because certain characteristics, whether real or not, are given too much weight and are applied to a whole category of people.
- **Power** is an important factor in the formation of stereotypes.  
Directed at subordinate groups
- **Good** stereotypes: sth to aim for
- **Bad** stereotypes: despicable examples.

# Instances of social stereotypes

*"Once I didn't talk to my wife for six months"*



*"I didn't want to interrupt"*





# Social stereotypes and language

- As a signal of identity and a tool for conceptualization – language is at the heart of social stereotyping.
- Collins and Clement suggest that “language can be conceptualised as a lens that directs and distorts cognition”. (2012:377)
- Folklinguistic beliefs about women’s language: talkative, verbose, gossipy.
- Early sociolinguistic research (Lakoff 1975) : women’s language as weak and uncertain
  - Use of tag questions (*isn’t it?*), questions, hedges (*kind of, like*), empty adjectives (*lovely, pretty, charming*), the intensifier *so*.



# Conversational styles

## **Collaborative**

*Sympathy*

*Rapport*

*Listening*

*Private*

*Intimacy*

*Connection*

*Supportive*

## **Competitive**

*Problem-solving*

*Report*

*Lecturing*

*Public*

*Independence*

*Status*

*Oppositional*



# Gender and language – a binary distinction?

Collaborative style  
Feminine

Competitive style  
Masculine

Collaborative style

Competitive style

Hegemonic femininity

← - - - - - →  
Challenging discourses

Hegemonic masculinity



# Stereotyping and language in learning situations

- Language is a tool for learning
- Gendered expectations in the classroom.
  - Boys are allowed to speak more
  - Boys take more of the teacher's attention
- But:
  - Girls perform better
  - There is a difference between quantity and quality
- AND: How homogeneous are these groups?



# The problem addressed in the RAVE project

- Most students know what is politically correct and have little awareness of their own preconceptions and prejudice
  - “I will have no stereotypical assumptions about my future students”
- The theoretical knowledge from courses remains just that – factual knowledge (if remembered ...)



# What we want to achieve

Raising students' awareness of **their own** linguistic stereotyping, biases and prejudice

In doing so, develop their factual knowledge into metacognitive knowledge

# Tools and method

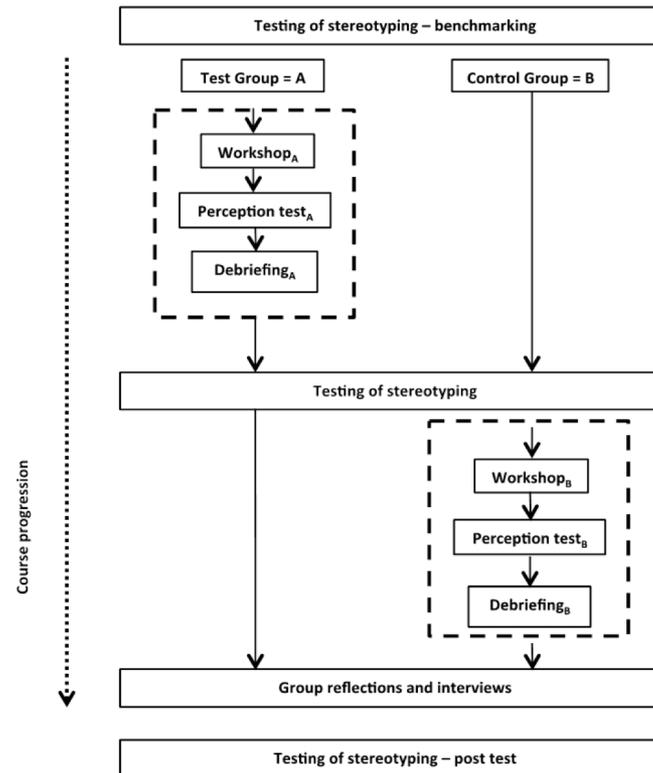
- **New digital media** is well suited for different types of so-called *match-guise experiments*.
- Prototype test in Second Life – a virtual world:



One person in the guise of two different teaching assistants: gender morphing and voice morphing

# Tools and method, cont'd.

- The new approach: rigour and KISS



Pre- and post-testing  
for implicit and  
explicit stereotypes

Voice-morphing  
followed by test and  
debriefing

Group reflections –  
for mature and higher  
level thinking



# **Pilot manipulation: Telephone discussion between two “researchers”: Robin Simpson and Terry Walker**

## Robin and Terry on Gender



Robin Simpson



Terry Walker



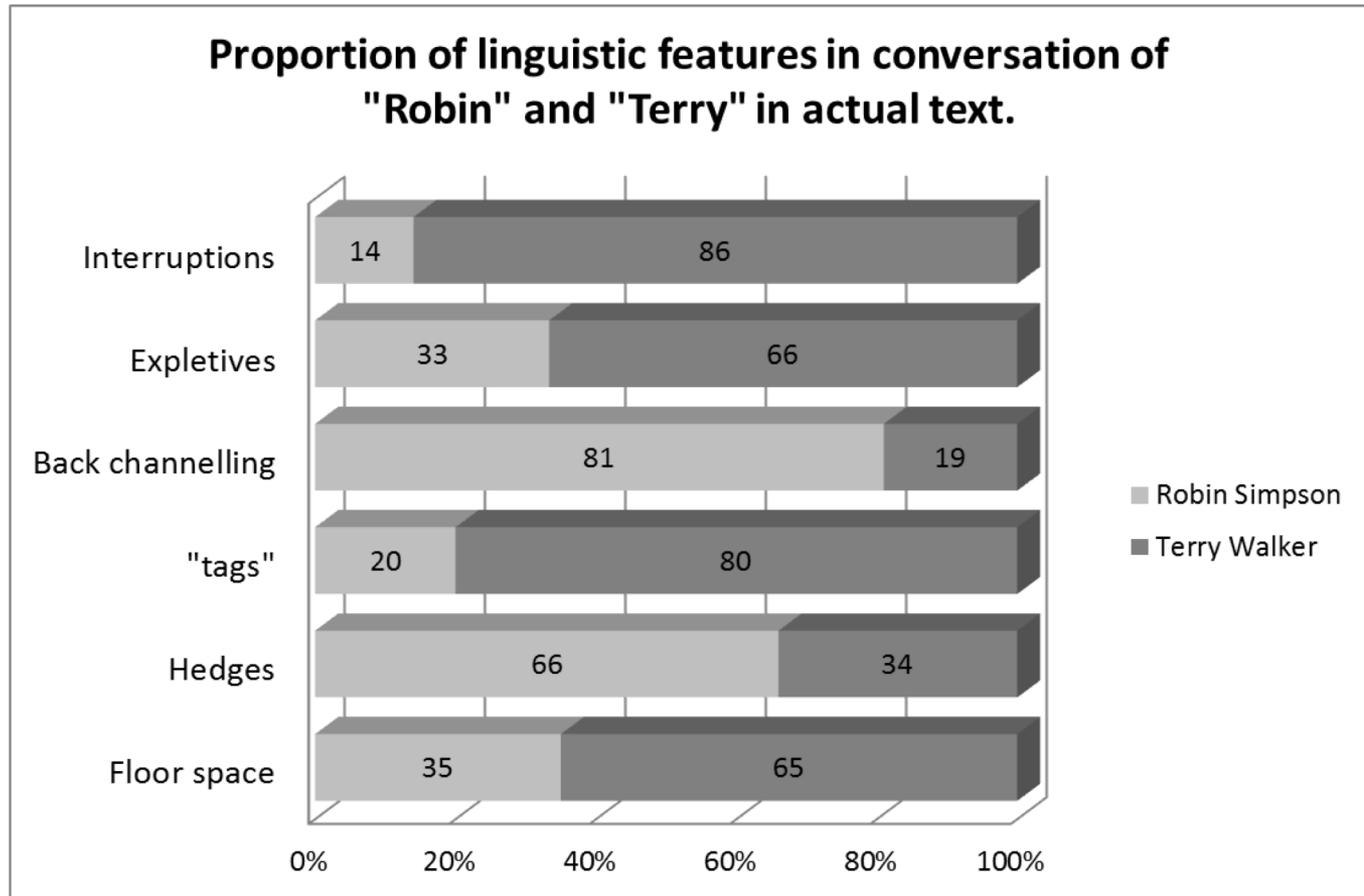
# The manipulation set-up

<b>Discussant</b>	<b>Robin</b>	<b>Terry</b>
<b>Perceived gender for group A</b>	Male	Female
<b>Perceived gender for group B</b>	Female	Male



# Real data

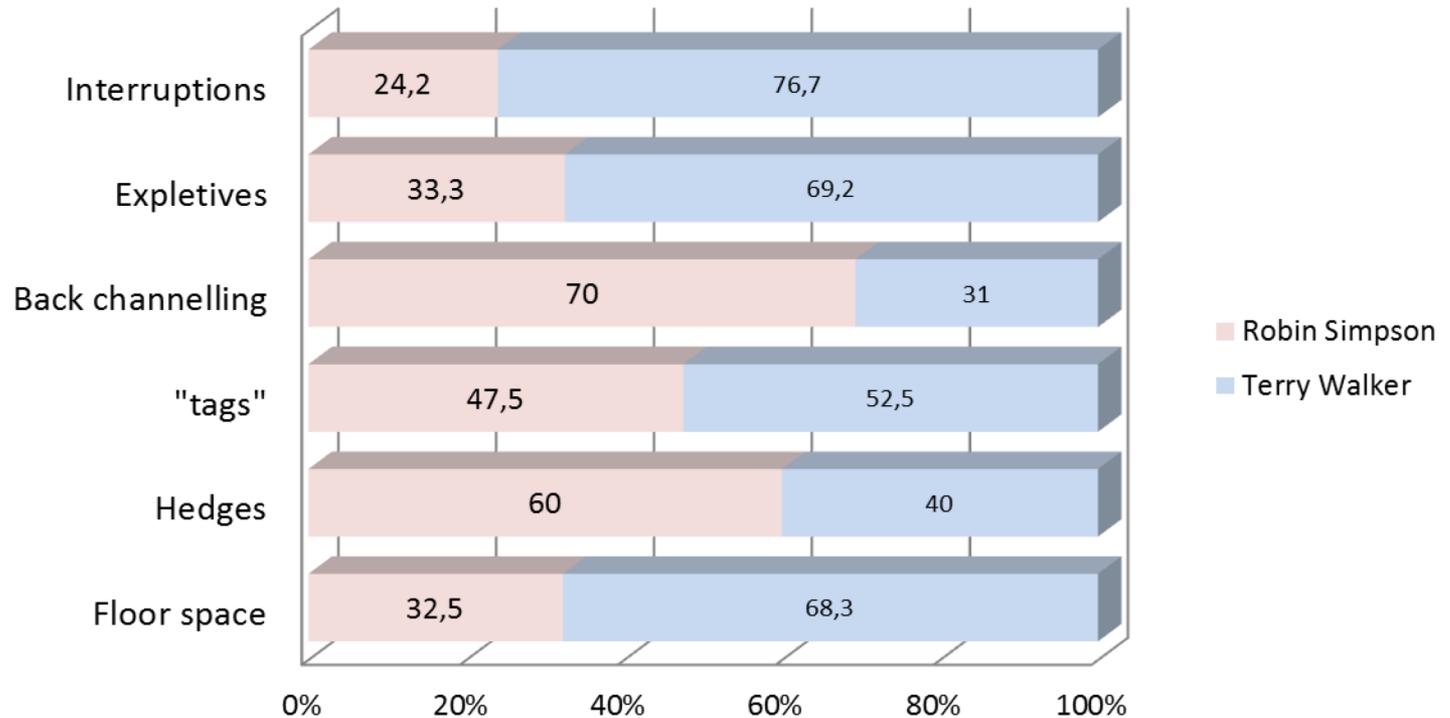
**Robin employed a more collaborative style  
Terry a more competitive style**





# Group A (Gender not correlating with expected conversational strategy)

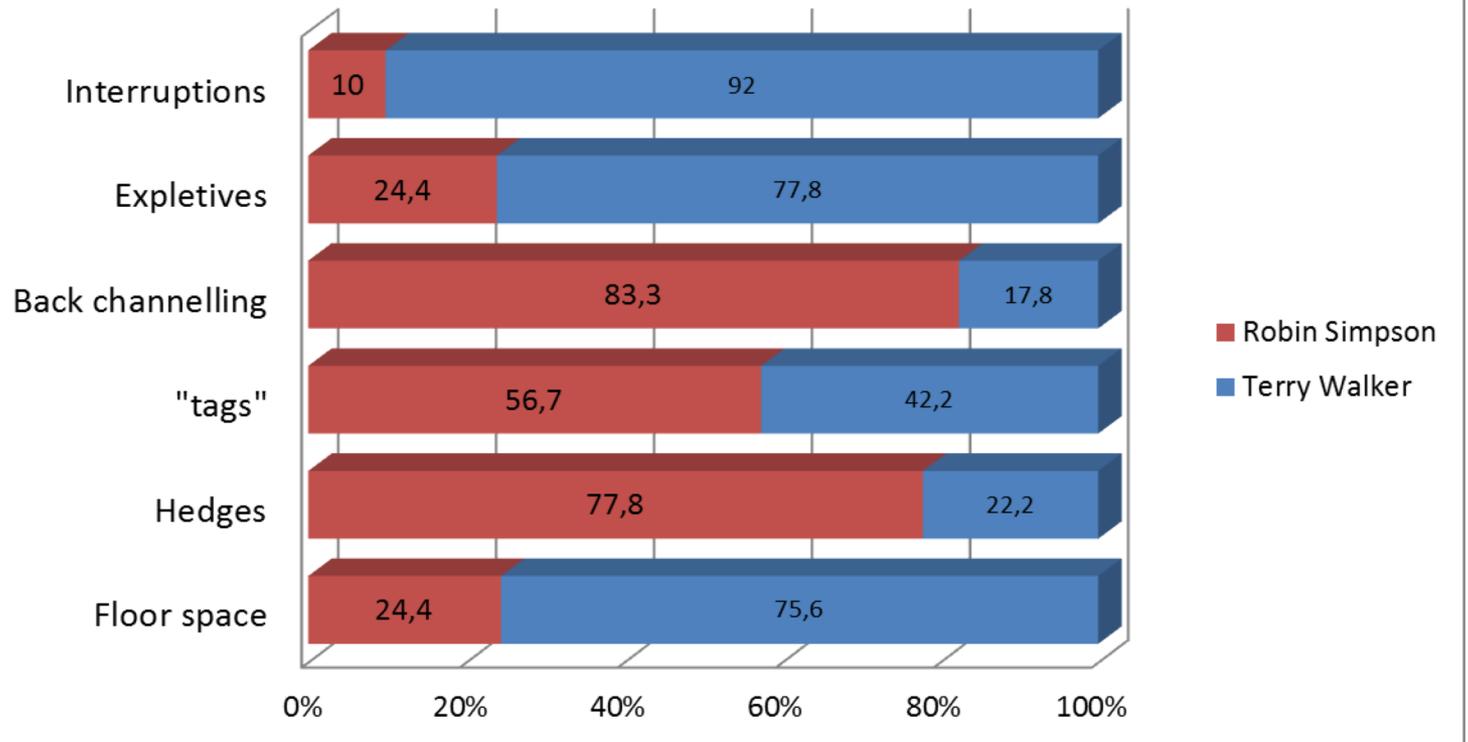
Group A's impressions of proportion of linguistic features in conversation of "Robin" and "Terry".





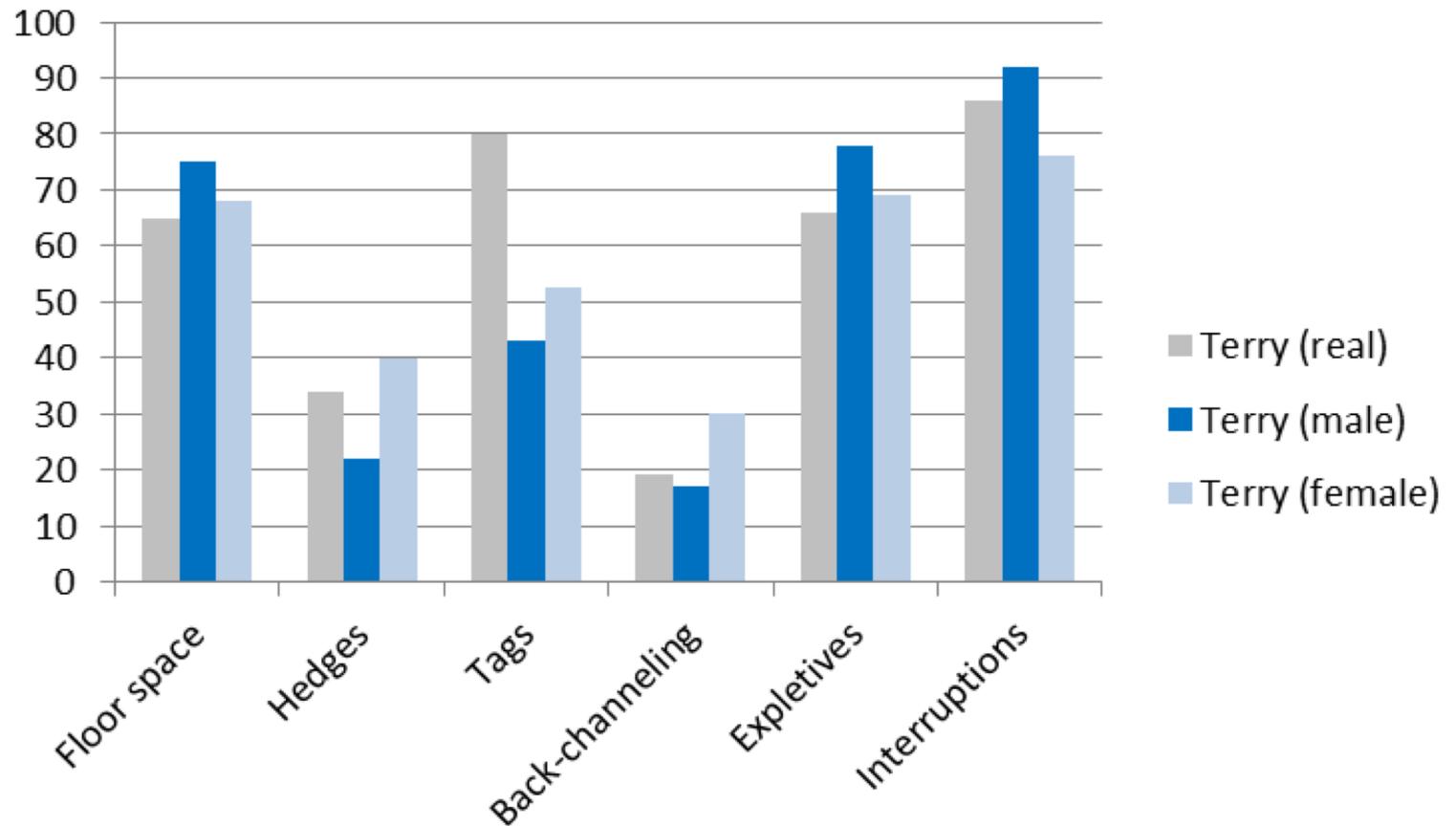
# Group B (Gender correlating with expected conversational strategy)

Group B's impressions of proportion of linguistic features in conversation of "Robin" and "Terry".



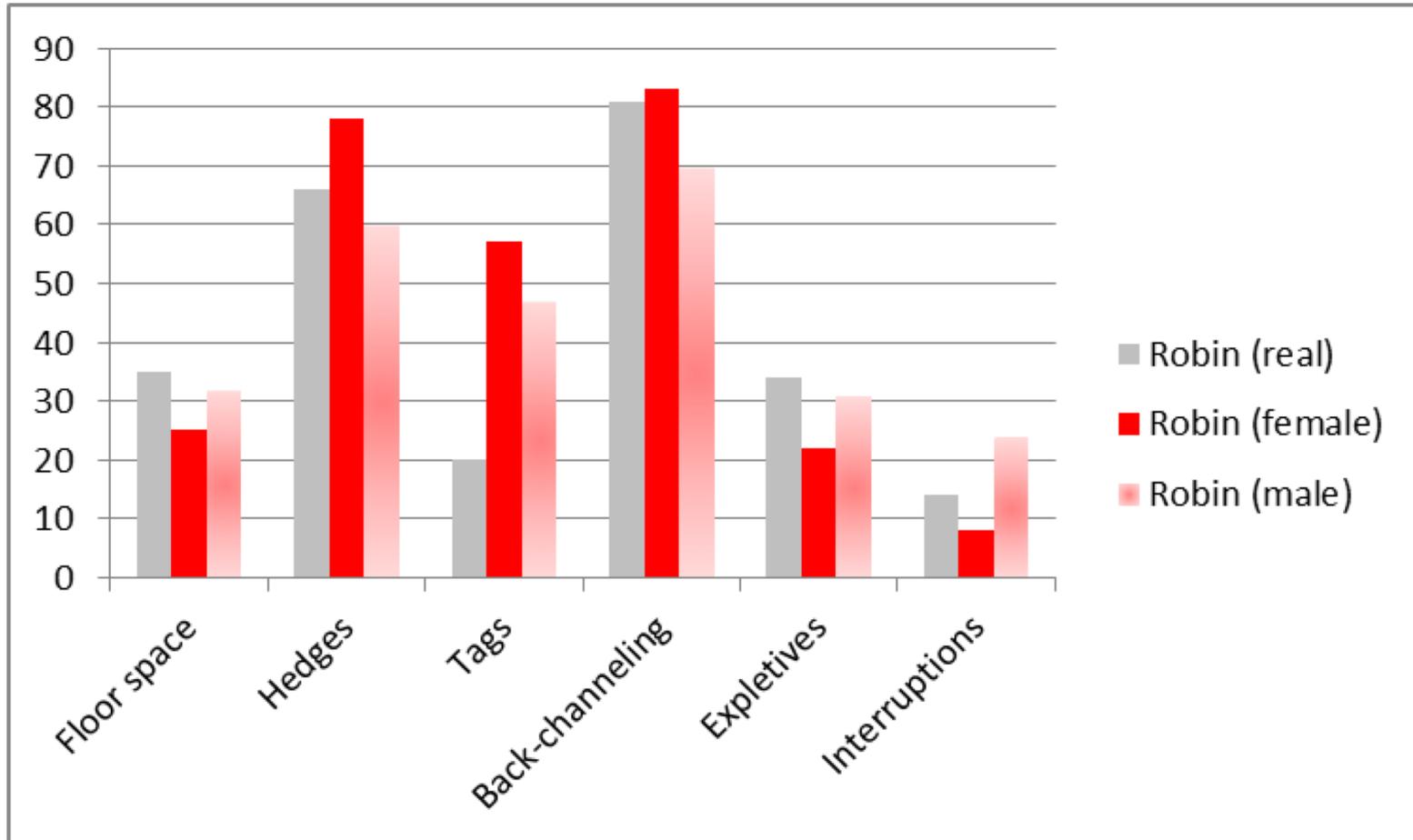


# Comparing "Terry" data (competitive strategy)



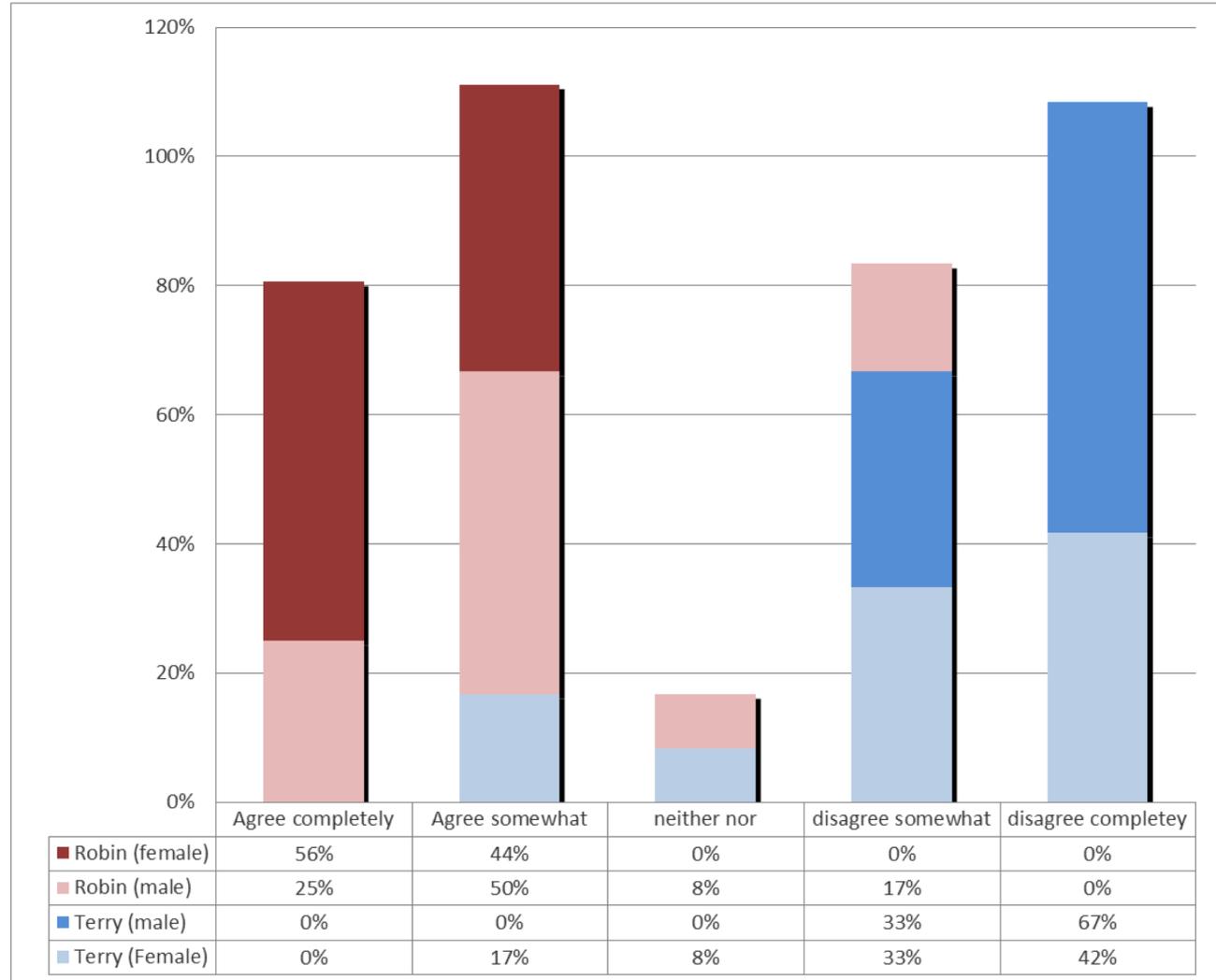


# Comparing "Robin" data (collaborative strategy)



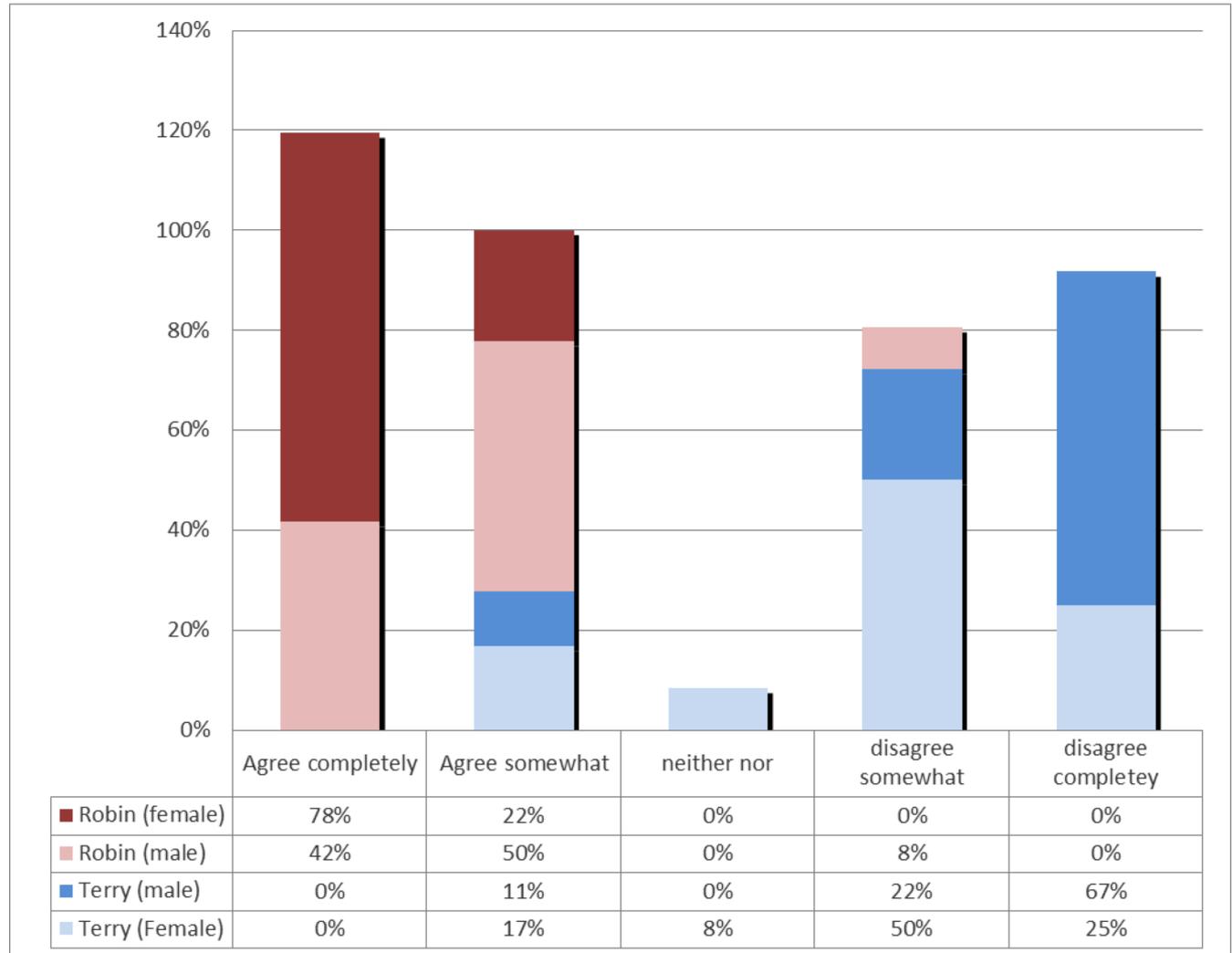


# Students' reactions to evaluative statements (I): The speaker's conversational style is very collaborative



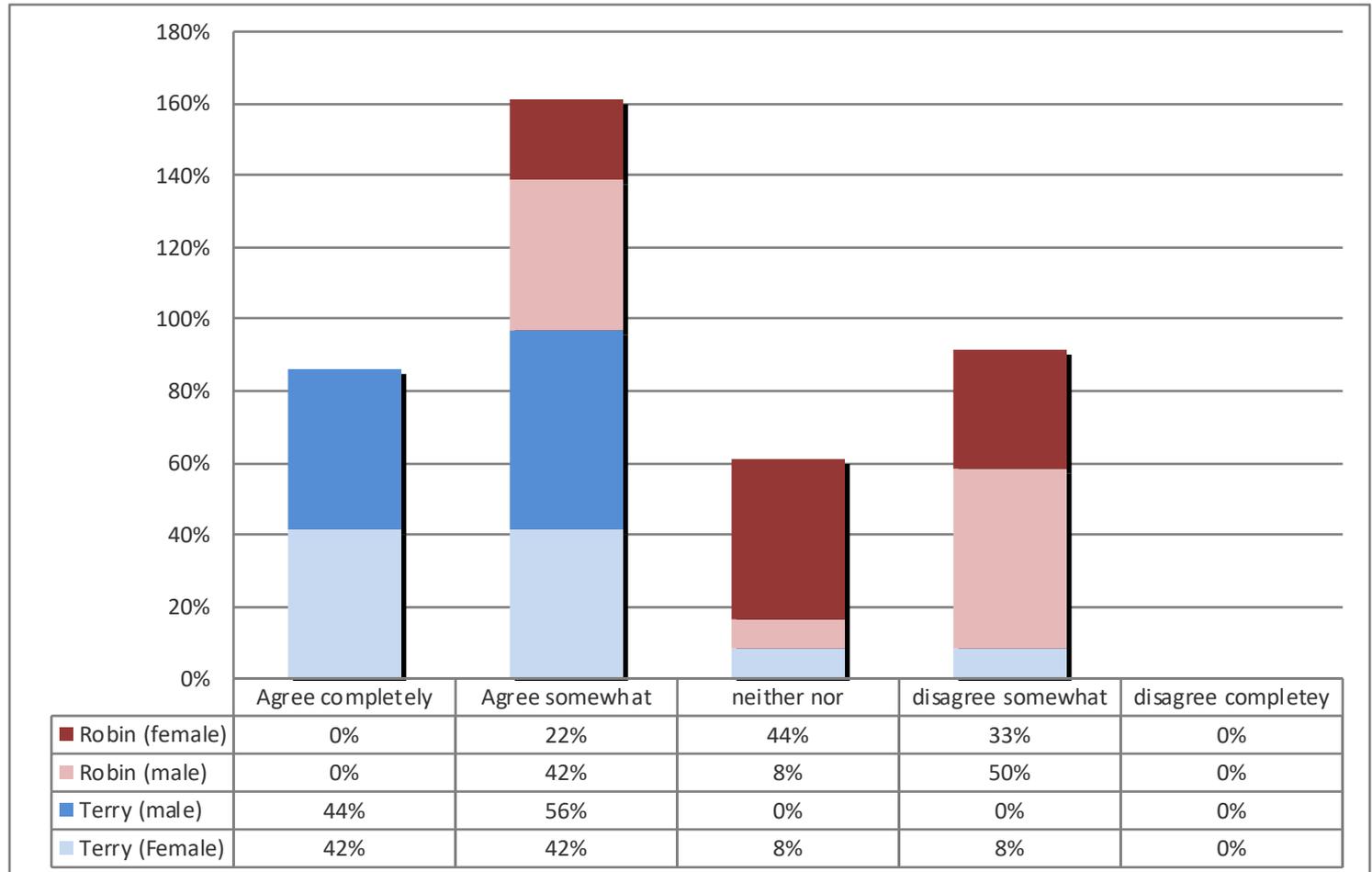


# Students' reactions to evaluative statements (II): The person in question is a good listener



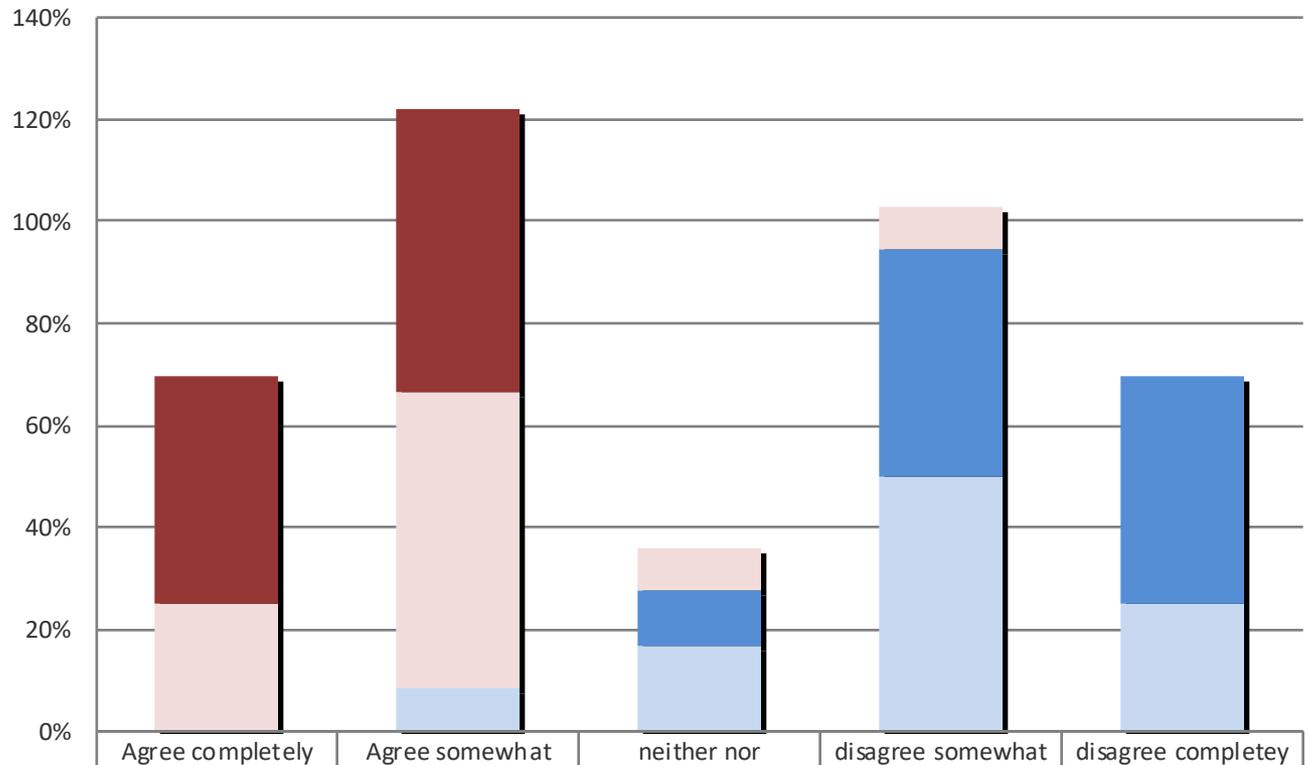


# Students' reactions to evaluative statements (III): The person in question is good at arguing his/her case





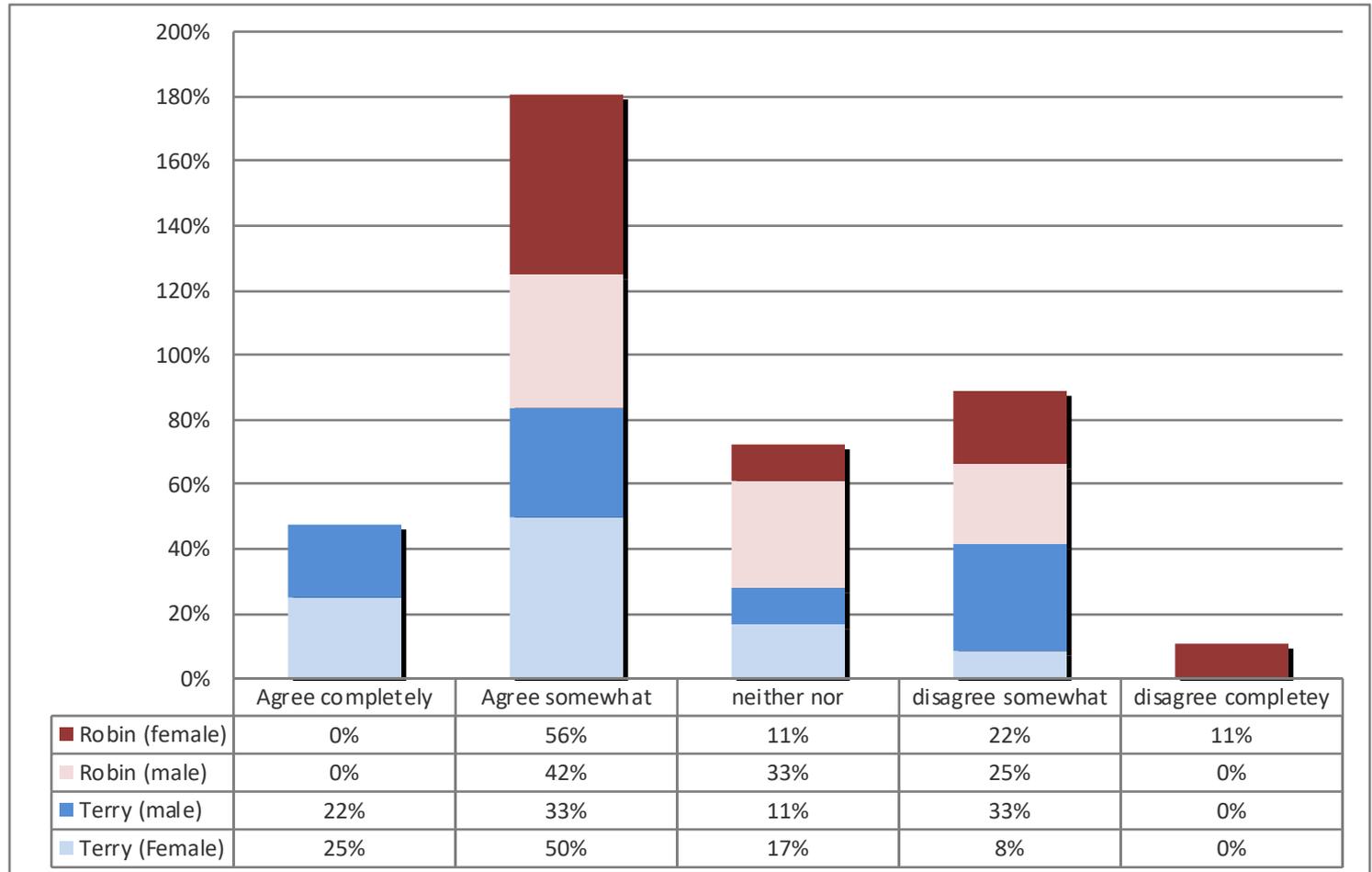
# Students' reactions to evaluative statements (IV): The person in question gives a very sympathetic impression



	Agree completely	Agree somewhat	neither nor	disagree somewhat	disagree completely
Robin (female)	44%	56%	0%	0%	0%
Robin (male)	25%	58%	8%	8%	0%
Terry (male)	0%	0%	11%	44%	44%
Terry (Female)	0%	8%	17%	50%	25%



# The person in question gives a very intelligent impression





## Some students' comments after the debriefing session

- “This made me so much more aware about it and the whole issue. Not only the experiment but the whole course and even though I do generalize and I have clear stereotypes I am now more aware of them and can use that knowledge in the classroom and even in life in general!”
- “I feel like I learned more when I was actively participating in the tests during the course.”
- “Good and interesting! I have gotten a deeper understanding of how I look at stereotypes and how that will affect me in my future work!”

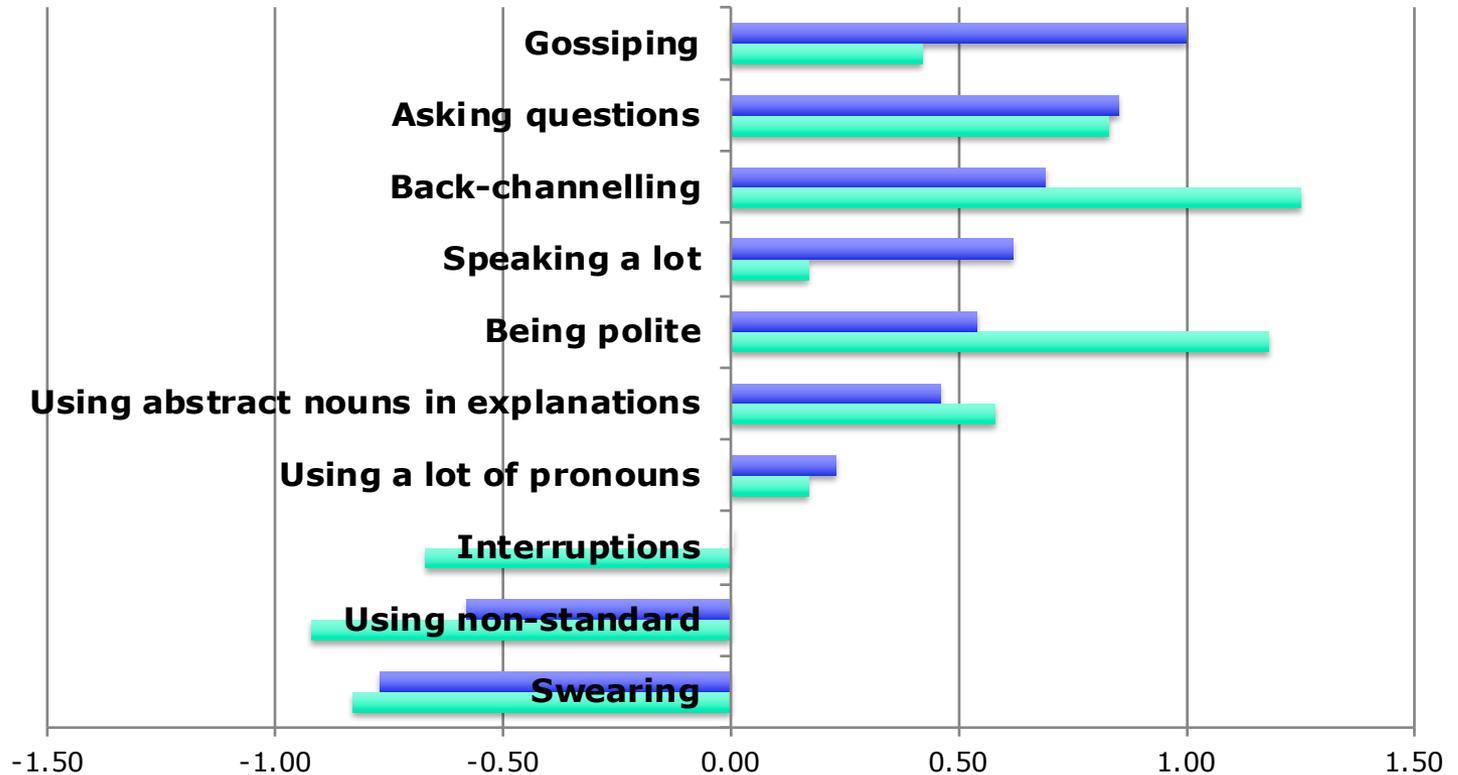


# A necessary complement?

- Could it be that courses create new stereotypes?



# Your stereotypes (explicit test): Group A before (dark blue) and after course (light blue)





## Conclusion from RAVE pilot

- Students were more inclined to agree with statements that fit stereotypes (i.e. when Robin was female and Terry male).
- On the whole, they had a slight tendency to equate competitive conversational behaviour with good arguing.
- Being sympathetic was clearly associated with collaborative conversational style.
- The debriefing session appears to have stimulated students into meta-cognitive reflection.



# Lessons learnt

- The model seems to work on the whole
- Our courses contribute to stereotyping
- It is difficult to fool the ear... working on this one
- It is difficult to measure changes in attitudes ... but.... Here we have some ideas
- Less complex scenarios may yield clearer results (balanced vs. unbalanced texts)



**Thank you!**