Teases on the silver screen:
A comparison of teases in movies to teases in real life

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This research investigates teasing in films to see whether and to what extent the teases in movies imitate teases in real life. Teasing is a non-serious speech interaction for which the person being teased is present, and the content of the tease could be interpreted as aggressive but due to playful framing is not. It has been shown that the use of teasing can build rapport between participants in the interaction, and teases are often used as a form of social or conversational control. Teases convey potentially aggressive messages in a playful and even humorous manner through the use of laughter, tone or emphasis.

In the past, studies of teasing have focused on naturally occurring teases in voice or video recorded conversations. My research investigates the possibility of studying teases from a different source, the media. Linguistic research of other speech acts in films has shown that some similarities such as structure, function frequency and even relationships between interlocutors exist between movie speech and real life speech. Similarities found between film and real life can be useful in linguistic research, or in second language classrooms to teach about norms, idiosyncrasies and other oddities that vary between languages.

For this study I collected examples of teases from movies that were no more than fifteen years old and portrayed present-day people in real life scenarios, which ensured that the interactions between characters were correct representations of real life. The teasing interactions were transcribed and coded for the various aspects that make up the structure of a naturally occurring tease such as content, relationship of participants, contextualization cues and the response to the tease.

Analysis showed that by and large teases in movies imitate teases in real life in regards to structure and purpose, but deviate from real life in regards to cross gender teases and ever so
slightly in the relationship between participants of a tease. Responses to teases also imitated naturally occurring responses from targets. The findings were similar to other studies of speech acts in film in regards to which aspects of the tease imitated and which aspects deviated from real life. The results imply that movies could be used for further research of teasing interactions and even in language classrooms as examples of teasing for students.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teasing</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction in Real life vs. in the Movies</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methods</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A: List of Movies</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B: Transcription Conventions</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Tables

Table 1: Frequency with which specific teases were utilized in regards to the relationship of interlocutors……………………… 24

Table 2: Frequency with which specific teases were utilized in regards to the content of the tease……………………………… 24

Table 3: Type of tease and the frequency of responses it receive………………29

Table 4: Frequency with which specific responses were utilized in regards to the relationship between interlocutors…………………30
Introduction

The temperamental nature of teases and their reliance on so many other factors such as content, relationship between interlocutors, purpose for the tease, and other sociolinguistic factors make them an intricate subject of study. An in depth understanding of the pragmatics behind the structures being analyzed is necessary in discourse analysis which is the system of analysis commonly used by linguists to study teases and other speech acts. In order to demonstrate the complexities of teasing I explain and provide examples of teasing in relation to all the different aspects involved in creating the tease and responsible for the function of teasing within conversations and social groups. Also, to help with understanding of this complex speech act, I provide a simplified definition of a tease that combines several definitions from other research on teasing (Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997; Drew, 1987; Dynel, 2008; Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 2006; Straehle, 1993; Schnurr & Chan, 2011; Tholander & Aronsson, 2002). A tease is a non-serious language interaction for which the target, the person being teased, is present. Teasing has an aggressive nature but due to playful framing is not seen as such by the target and other interlocutors.

A number of researchers have found that film provides an excellent source for examples of language pragmatics. Speech acts such as compliments and request modification devices have been studied in movies to see if they follow patterns found in natural conversation. Researchers have found that speech acts in movies frequently mimic speech acts in real life in regards to structure and function (Rose, 2001; Sherman, 2003; Martinez-Flor, 2007). My study of teases in movies adds to this research on the similarities of speech acts in film and in real life.
Teasing

As a form of humor or play teasing is a language ‘nip’ that can signal and enhance speaker enjoyment and rapport. At the same time, however, teasing is thought to be closely bound to real antagonism: the playful nip may easily be mistaken for a hostile bite. (Straehle, 1993, p. 211)

A tease is a playful interaction between two or more interlocutors in which one interlocutor comments on a social or conversational transgression or shortcoming of another. The content of the tease may be aggressive but due to playful framing it is seen as non-serious and even humorous. Teasing functions as a way to monitor the behavior of interlocutors, for instance if a participant in an interaction steps outside the boundaries of conversational or social norms, for example by excessively complaining, another interlocutor may tease them to point out their transgression in a less threatening manner (Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997; Drew, 1987; Straehle, 1993; Schnurr & Chan & Chan, 2011; Tholander & Aronsson, 2002). Straehle (1993) quotes Radcliffe-Brown when she notes that teasing is a type of “permitted disrespect” and “the behavior of teasing is one of friendliness and antagonism” and it is this opposing combination that creates a non-threatening outlet for social conflict (p. 211). Schnurr and Chan (2011) explain that “teasing allows speakers to convey serious and potentially face-threatening messages in an ambiguous manner” (p. 21), and Boxer and Cortés-Conde (1997) demonstrate importance of teasing in building rapport and displaying identity.

Contextualization Cues and teasing

The language interaction of teasing is seen as playful due to contextualization cues that set up the frame of the tease and mark the aggressive content as non-serious (Drew, 1987; Straehle, 1993; Tholander, 2002). Framing in speech is done by language speakers to convey
what they mean by what they say. It is the manner in which something is said and/or the physical cues that let interlocutors know how to interpret the message from the speaker and the type of speech activity going on (Gumperz, 1982). For instance, a mother can say, “Put your coat on” to her child and mean simply for her child to get his coat on. However, if the child does not put his coat on the mother may get impatient and say, “Put your coat on now.” The emphasis on “your” and the addition of “now” shows that the mom is impatient and the child will see the mother’s message as a command to obey what she is saying. According to Tannen (1993) “Conversational ‘meaning’ is not conveyed merely through the informational content or message of individual words, but through ‘meta-messages’ or the attitudes of participants toward one another and the talk in which they are engaged” (p. 213). Framing is not something that we think about when speaking, but it is something that is used almost habitually by speakers. For interlocutors to understand the message being conveyed by the framing, they must understand the cues being used by the speaker, and if all participants understand the framing goes unnoticed. However, if the contextualization cues are not picked up on by the speaker then most likely a misunderstanding will occur (Gumperz, 1982).

In teasing, interlocutors usually use contextualization cues such as exaggerated tone, lots of laughter, prosody and excessive pronoun usage to provide cues for other participants that the interaction is non-serious (Straehle, 1993). Laughter in teasing adds to the playful nature of the interaction, while exaggerated tones may be used to point out why the target is being teased (Drew, 1987). The following is an interaction I recently witnessed between my two cousins age 6 and 8:

Sarah: I love ice cream
Raegan: (sing-song voice) well if you love it then why don’t you marry it?!
Raegan’s comment is not meant to be taken literally as advice to Sarah to propose and legally marry ice cream. Her sing song voice and stress on the words “love” and “marry” marks that the comment is meant to mock Sarah for her hyperbole and miss use of “love.”

Contextualization cues allow us to play with language and its meaning, and they offer a wider expanse of possibilities for what and how we communicate (Tannen, 1993). Teasing is just one of the many options accessible to us through the use of contextualization cues.

**Functions of teasing**

Until recently most researchers focused on parent-child teasing and the socialization practice that is learned through this interaction (Tholander and Aronsson, 2002; Schnurr & Chan, 2011; Straehle, 1993). Parents use teasing as a device with which to teach their children social norms. By pointing out the wrongdoings of a child through a tease a parent is able to criticize their child’s behavior in a non-threatening manner (Miller, 1986). Therefore, parent-child teasing has the dual function of a tool for teaching social norms and as an example of teasing for the child to learn from and put to use in future interactions in their own social groups. Since teasing is a behavior that we are socialized for, much like manners and greetings, children learn the behavior by imitating what they have learned and observed of their parents. Teasing between children is a way for them to practice verbal defense skills and social devices such as hedging (Tholander & Aronsson, 2002).

More recent research has studied teasing among adults and found slight variations. Adults have developed and refined their socio-cultural knowledge and conversational skills so teasing for them is not practice. Teasing amongst adults functions to point out conversational transgressions and is used as a form of social control (Drew, 1987). In their study of conversational joking Boxer and Cortés-Conde (1997) describe teasing using a continuum that
ranges from bonding to nipping to biting. The labels on the continuum state the different functions of teases. For instance a tease with no trace of a bite is one that serves only to bond interlocutors. The following example taken from Boxer and Cortés-Conde’s study shows a bonding only teasing interaction that takes place between two close female friends on weekend ski retreat.

Carol: Ooh, my feet got cold, I don't know why my feet got cold all of a sudden.
Jane: You need a hot drink. You're drinking cold soda.
Carol: I know. I can't drink a hot drink.
Jane: You don't drink hot drinks, it's not part of your religion.
Carol: Right hhh

Jane’s tease about Carol not drinking hot drinks is a display of her knowledge about Carol, and bonds by showing that Jane remembers details very specific to Carol and her life (1997).

In the case of a nip, the tease may be to correct a conversational transgression, or even something like an annoying habit of an intimate (Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997). The following example of a nip takes place between two good friends talking about their past weekend.

Nicole: And I was so: totally plastered because I drank like ten beers and seven tequila shots
Erika: (disbelieving) wow. So you were either passed [out] by ten or in Mexico this weekend.
Nicole: [hhh ha ha we'll maybe not that much.

Erika points out Nicole’s transgression of exaggeration through teasing. Erika’s tone and emphasis on “wow” and “passed out” shows that the she does not believe the amount that Nicole says she drank. Nicole’s response with laughter and correcting her previous statement shows that she recognized and understood Erika’s tease.

A bite is a tease that is not meant in a playful manner, and is more for the purpose of correcting a transgression or pointing out a shortcoming (Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997). For
example a coworker may tease someone slacking off at work by saying, “so they pay you to pick your nose?” The coworker is clearly telling his fellow worker to quit goofing off and while the tease is an indirect way of conveying this message, the tease is also a bite because of the demeaning content that talks down to the worker as if they were a child.

However, because these labels are set up on a continuum and because teasing is a complex tool that has an intricate function within a social structure there is overlap. A nip may serve to bond and there are even instances of bites between intimates that serve to bond (Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997). The placement of a tease on the continuum is largely based off of relational identity between the interlocutors. What constitutes as a bite between two people may be merely a nip between others because of the nature of their relationship and their level of intimacy (1997). For instance the above example of the two good friends talking about their weekend could be taken for a bite if the interlocutors were simply acquaintances.

Setting teases up on a continuum based on functions shows the progression of teases from playful to less playful to hurtful. Tholander in his study of cross gender teasing notes that Boxer and Cortés-Conde’s continuum is useful in that it “avoids difficulties of discriminating between teases and insults which may be difficult even for the participants” (2002, p. 317). In their research on teasing between adolescents, Tholander and Aronsson (2002) made a distinction between malicious and playful teases. The reason for this distinction was that the politeness features normally used in conversations between adults are not always found in interactions between children (2002). Children will openly show disagreement and do not make efforts to mitigate their attacks of fellow participants. Therefore, their teases are often not playful and can in fact be intended to hurt. Malicious teases are marked as such based off the response from the target and his or her perception of the tease as malicious or playful. If a target teases back and/or
appears unperturbed then the tease is seen as playful whether or not it was intended as malicious by the speaker (2002).

Teasing also functions to signal alignment between interlocutors. Alignment is a way for interlocutors to show who they are siding with in the interaction. In order to display alignment interlocutors may smile, laugh, build upon at the attacker’s comment or even add a tease of their own in the interaction. Interlocutors may also show their alignment with the target by not laughing, ignoring the tease, mimicking the target’s response, or even through the use of spoken or paralanguage to show that they are not in agreement with the tease. The following is an example from Tholander and Aronsson’s study that shows alignment and collaborative teasing (2002).

Sune: Look, now I’m done with my paper here. Now I’m going to write- make a nicer copy of it.
Lotta: Why didn’t you write neatly e::h from the start so you don’t have to make a nicer copy of it?!! (Seriously)
Judith: Yeah, exactly! Sune Sune Sune, little little little Su:ne! (Taps Sune on the head)
Sune: I’m a blockhead!
Mats: (playfully fakes a punch with his fist on Sune’s head)
Sune: (smiles)

Lotta starts the tease interaction with her comment about Sune’s messy work and Judith joins in by tapping Sune on the head and treating him like a child. Through this action Judith shows her alignment with Lotta. Sune then plays along by calling himself a “blockhead” which Mats adds to by fake punching Sune’s head. Mats’ fake punch aligns him with Sune and the tease is therefore built by all four participants including the target (2002).

As shown above, the functions of teasing are determined by what takes place between the interlocutors or the outcome of the interaction. The following section investigates more on the relationship between participants in teases and how this relationship influences the interaction.
**Relationships and teasing**

Sociolinguistic studies have shown that teasing occurs mainly between intimates, people who have a previously standing relationship, and rarely between strangers (Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997; Straehle, 1993). The reason being is that the tie between the individuals indicates a safeness that reduces the fear of mistaking the tease for a malicious act. The aggressive nature of a tease increases the risk of interlocutors misunderstanding the intent of the comment (Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997). Therefore, interlocutors on a more intimate level are more likely to tease because they have a greater understanding of the subtle linguistic cues that mark teases, (Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997; Drew, 1987; Straehle, 1993).

Due to the risk involved, relationships are created and strengthened from teasing. Successful teasing between two interlocutors who are building a relationship provides a safe opportunity for conversational involvement and shows a growing intimacy between the participants (Straehle, 1993). According to Boxer & Cortés-Conde (1997) through “teasing we can display the intimacy of our identities as friends, family members, and members of an in-group” (p. 282), which is known as relational identity display/development. RID is “the negotiation of a relational identity with and through others,” (p. 282). By investigating the dialogic nature of teasing Tholander and Aronsson (2002) collected data on the co-construction of teases and explored the alignment that occurs between interlocutors in a teasing sequence, which is how relational identity is demonstrated in teasing.

In teasing situations between interlocutors in a hierarchical relationship, for example a boss and an employee, teasing can function to convey a potentially face threatening message disguised by humor. Teasing by a superior may threaten a subordinate’s quality face or identity face especially when teased in front of a group and the content of the tease deals with the targets
personal being. Quality face refers to an individual’s desire to be seen in a positive light by others based on his personality traits. Identity face refers to an individual’s desire for others to acknowledge his social identity (Schnurr & Chan, 2011). Teases directed down a hierarchy often position the target outside of the in-group and are often done to display superiority over the target or to reinforce the social identity role of the teaser and reinforce his identity face (2011). An example of teasing down a hierarchy would be a boss teasing an employee, a teacher teasing a student or even in the following example in which the interlocutors are from different regions of the country and the boy from Washington considers his speech to be correct and proper and the girl has poor “cowboy” speech.

    Girl: Can you grab my [beg] for me?
    Boy: ya sure I’ll grab your [beg]
          should I put it in the [ker] for you for the drive to Montana?
    Girl: haha I don’t say car like that too.

This example of hierarchical speech deals with proper pronunciation and the faux pas of incorrect speech. The boy teases down at the girl by imitating her pronunciation of the word “bag” and then further teases her by incorrectly using the pronunciation. His emphasis on Montana continues the tease and demonstrates that he thinks his speech is superior Montanan’s speech.

    Teasing is determined by relationships, and it helps build them. Relationships influence the function and structure of the tease. Teases signal alignment between interlocutors and function as a way to display RI. The relationship between interlocutors is an important factor in teasing because greater intimacy between interlocutors decreases the likelihood of misunderstanding the tease. However, if acquaintances do not take the risk to tease each other then rapport will not be built through teasing (Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997; Drew 1987; Schnurr & Chan, 2011; Straehle, 1993; Tholander & Aronsson, 2002).
Positioning of target in teasing

Teasing often positions the target as a lesser member of the conversation group. The positioning of the target serves to separate them from the group, which puts them in a vulnerable position that can lead to continued teasing by other interlocutors. It is common for targets to be positioned into the role of a child in the conversation, and they will be talked to and treated as one by interlocutors throughout the teasing sequence. However, positioning does not always place the target into the role of a child; it only has to separate them from the in-group (Straehle, 1993). The following is an example of positioning a target outside the group taken from Straehle’s study on conversational teasing (1993). The conversation takes place between three friends Samuel, Carolyn and Diana who are planning a day trip. Samuel and Carolyn tease Diana for being on the phone and not present for most of the interaction.

Diana: we don’t know what we’re doing yet anyway so we have to tell her (referring to who she was on the phone with)
Samuel: Oh [we know=
Carolyn: [yes we do.
Samuel: =we are going
Diana: we are going.
Samuel: 😊 you’re coming too? 😊

By asking the question “you’re coming too?” Samuel is jokingly implying that he and Carolyn assumed that Diana was not going to be part of their afternoon trip because she had not been present for most of their current interaction. His tease positions her outside of the group that is going on the afternoon trip.

Cross Gender teasing

Many sociolinguistic, anthropologic and behaviorist researchers agree that teasing among adolescent boys and girls works as a socialization tool to form children into their gender roles (as sited in Tholander, 2002). However, a study of cross gender teasing among adolescents in
heterogeneous groups done by Tholander (2002) shows that teasing among males and females does more than borderwork, which refers to the creation of boundaries and placement of children into their proper roles as decided by society. Teasing has more practical purposes amongst adolescents such as resistance to traditional gender roles, commenting on laziness, and pointing out overzealous work habits (2002). The following is an interaction between a boyfriend and girlfriend and gives an example of resistance to traditional gender roles

Boyfriend: Can you make me a sandwich please?
Girlfriend: (distracted) I’m busy. Make it yourself
Boyfriend: My mom makes my sandwiches for me. hhh😊
Girlfriend: I’m not your mother. (.) and I don’t think you would like it if I was hhh.

In the interaction the boyfriend tries to manipulate his girlfriend into making him a sandwich by comparing her caretaking abilities to his mother’s. The girlfriend responds seriously at first by stating that she is not his mother, and therefore not the woman who is going to make his sandwich for him. The second half of her response teases back at her boyfriend for making the comparison.

In Tholander’s study (2002) the amount of teases produced by boys and girls is about even and the majority of teases are directed at members of the opposite sex with 91% of girls’ teases being directed at boys and 74% of boys’ teases being directed at girls, which is an argument for gender playing a role in teasing. While gender norms and characteristics are not always the content of the tease, adolescents tend to orient their teases toward a specific gender. Tholander (2002) found that gender plays just as much of a role in teasing as does a conversational transgression, often it was a member of the opposite sex who would point out the transgression.

Cross gender teasing among adults differs from adolescents in respect to conversation group orientation (Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 2006). Males and females will modify their teasing
behaviors based on the group setting they are in. For instance in an all male group, men joke and tease more freely and frequently than if they were in a mixed gender group, where they will replace teasing with self directed joking. Teasing from females increases in mixed sex groups, especially teasing directed at males, and self denigrating humor decreases. Due to a higher possibility of misunderstanding of the tease within the mixed groups more contextualization cues were used by teasers to ensure that participants did not mistake the tease for an act of aggression (2006). The following is an example used in Lampert and Ervin-Tripp’s study of female teasing and male self directed humor in a mixed group interaction. The interaction takes place after a dinner that Barb hosted for Carl and Anna who are siblings.

Barb: Your shoes are neat.
Carl: Hm.
Barb: Your shoes are perfect for you. A philosopher’s foot.
Carl: Well, I have such tiny feet, and need such tiny little shoes.
Barb: Yeah. hhh ha
Carl: Do you like them?
Barb: They’re sort of- they’re sort of this marvelous combination of whatever I’d imagine an Oxford philosopher would wear and a hobbit.
Carl: HHH HAHA
Barb: A hobbit.
Anna: Really they are hobbit shoes.
Barb: Aren’t they hobbitty?
Anna: Really hobbit shoes.
Carl: I had them made by a man with a green moustache.

Carl shows male usage of self denigrating humor with his remark about his feet and further when he teases himself about having his shoes made by a man with a green moustache. Barb teases Carl about his shoes after he made the joke about his own feet being small, which marked that it was safe for Barb to tease Carl about the subject (Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 2006).
The differences between adolescent and adult cross gender teases demonstrates the importance of gender in teasing and how gender can influence the purpose for the tease as well as whom the tease will be targeted towards.

Responses to teasing

The targets response to teasing is often serious even when they recognize the tease as being humorous. Drew’s study “Po-faced receipts of teases” (1987) investigated responses to teasing and found that most people respond in a po-faced manner, that is most people respond seriously to the content of the tease. In Drew’s analysis he notes the importance of the tease environment and the role it plays in the target’s response. The majority of teases Drew analyzed are violations of the expected “next turn” (Drew, 1987, p. 233), which is when the target expects one response but the teaser gives another. The unexpected turn is usually the interlocutor commenting on a conversational or social transgression by the target and the violation of the next turn is often met with a serious response that corrects the tease (Drew, 1987).

In his research Drew (1987) documents a continuum of responses with the majority being po-faced, serious, non-playful response to teases and only a small amount of responses that show playing along. First on the continuum is the serious response by the target to the tease, and the following is an example Drew uses to show this.

(Family dinner being recorded for Drew’s research)
Daughter: do we have two forks ‘cause we’re on television?
Mom: no we-
Dad: (interrupts) huhuhuh
Daughter: hhuhuhuh
Mom: huh huh
Dad: probably the answer right there
Mom: hhh you have pie tonight
The mother’s initial response is to correct her daughters reasoning for having two forks on the table. The laughter from the dad and daughter gives the contextualization cues that the statement was a tease and the mom realizes the humorous nature and joins in. However, she still gives the correct reason for two forks at the end of the interaction when she tells them that there is pie for dessert. The mother responds in a po-faced manner because she gives the correct explanation, even though she clearly understands the daughter is teasing after being cued by the other interlocutors’ laughter (Drew, 1987).

Next, Drew (1987) notes that it is common for the recipient of the tease to respond seriously but show their understanding of the tease by marking the corrective response with laughter. For example, in the above interaction, if the mother had initially responded with “hhh you have pie tonight” then she would have shown recognition of the tease while correcting the statement.

Targets also often respond by laughing at the tease and then making the correction when the laughter is over (Drew, 1987). In the following interaction between sisters, Betty and Teresa tease Ellen about asking the waitress a bunch of questions before ordering her lunch and then having a complicated order.

Betty:  (addresses an imaginary waitress) oh and I’ll have *extra* bread crumbs sprinkled on top 😊
Teresa:  hhh we’ve got no sharing policy today because you won’t *like* the bagel sandwich I got hhh [hhh
Ellen:  = hhhhh=
Betty:  [hhhhh
Ellen:  = hhh yea but I *can’t* eat it cause of my Celiac

Ellen laughs at the teases from her sisters but then when they finish laughing she corrects the tease that she won’t “like” the food by reminding them that it is not a matter of taste, rather she “can’t” eat the food because of her disease.
Moving along on Drew’s continuum we come to the responses that show agreement with the tease and do not correct the statement nor play along with it. These types of responses are normally laughter or a smile from the target. Playing along with the tease is the end of Drew’s continuum (1987) and it occurs the least often of all the responses. The following example of playing along is from the same group of sisters this time making fun of Betty for her dancing. (Dancing to the radio at home)

Ellen: you dance like a [dork (imitates Sister A’s dancing)]
Betty: [hhh] [HHH (laughs louder at imitation)]
Teresa: (also imitating Betty’s dance)

[ HHH where did you learn to dance? hhh
Betty: hhh yea I dance like a fish out of water (imitates a fish flopping on land)

Betty shows understanding of the tease by laughing at Ellen’s comment and then plays along with the tease by furthering the teasing and comparing her dancing to a flopping fish.

Of the responses on Drew’s continuum all but playing along responses involve a po-faced remark in some aspect of the response that corrects or rejects the tease, and in all cases targets show understanding of the teases playful nature at some point throughout the interaction (Drew, 1987). Also in Drew’s study are overtly po-faced teases in which the target never acknowledges, through contextualization cues, the humorous aspect of the teasers remark but still corrects the content, and there are even instances when the target ignores the tease all together. In these instances of po-faced responses Drew (1987) states that the target does recognize the tease, they simply don’t respond to it or show understanding because the tease was an unexpected response to the prior turn and the lack of response from the target is a rejection of the tease by not acknowledging it (1987).

Tholander and Aronsson (2002) studied teases from a dialogic perspective instead of a monologic perspective as researchers in the past had done. This research method allows for the investigation of the collaborative aspect of teasing as well as a tease’s departure from the
relevant next turn. By looking at a tease in its respective environment, and not as an isolated speech act Tholander and Aronsson (2002) were able to better examine the function of responses to teasing. Responses in Tholander and Aronsson’s study were also set up on a continuum, but instead of looking at responses in terms of serious or non-serious Tholander and Aronsson look at the different strategies used by the target to respond to the tease. Their continuum for responses ranges from defensive strategies to offensive strategies of dealing with the tease. On the defensive end are accounts and denials, the po-faced responses, which according to Tholander and Aronsson (2002) function as a way for the target to resist the treatment being given to him by his fellow interlocutors while holding on to his original claim. On the offensive end of the continuum are retaliations and proactive responses, and placed in the middle of the continuum are minimal responses and playing along. This continuum offers a more in depth look at the function of the response as well as the structure and function of the tease sequence as a collaborative effort built by many interlocutors including the teaser, the target and all other co-participants (2002).

Accounts are excuses and justifications for the transgression about which the tease is formed. In accounts the target accepts responsibility but attempts to justify his transgression or habit. Accounts are similar to the above example of the three sisters eating lunch when Ellen accounts for being a difficult customer by reminding her sisters that she has Celiac disease and must be sure to follow a strict diet.

Denials are when the target simply denies being guilty of the transgression or action he is being teased about. This is a very simple response and is usually one of the first responses that young children utilize when faced with teasing (Tholander & Aronsson, 2002). For example a young child on the playground may tease his friend about liking a girl and most likely his
response will be “DO NOT!” A denial does not require socio-cultural knowledge or the acquisition of more complex language performance skills to utilize as a response (2002).

Minimal response is a lack of response from the target; they simply don’t acknowledge the tease and therefore do not claim responsibility for the transgression. This is the same type of response that Drew describes to be an overtly po-faced response because the target ignores the tease completely (1987). Tholander and Aronsson (2002) place minimal responses in the middle of the continuum because it is not clear whether or not the response is offensive or defensive in nature since there are no linguistic cues to indicate (2002).

Tholander and Aronsson (2002) place playing along in the middle of the continuum, moving towards responses that are offensive. By responding in a non-serious manner and even aggravating the tease of themselves, a target can turn a malicious tease into a humorous remark. Often times the target becomes the entertainer in the interaction taking the place of the teaser and is able to show that they are unperturbed by the attack. Playing along shares characteristics with offensive maneuvers because it does not overtly admit to the transgression and the target responds in a manner that does not allow for teasing to continue; however, playing along does not strike back at the attacker like a retaliation, the next and first overtly offensive move on the continuum (2002).

In a retaliation response the target shows that he is unaffected by the tease and may even tease back at the original teaser. The intent of retaliation is to stop the teasing and be the “winner” in the teasing sequence (Tholander & Aronsson, 2002). The following example of retaliation is an interaction between my three cousins, John, age nine, Chris, age nine, and Jennifer, age seven at a family dinner.

Jennifer: (to chris) Your feet are big. What size shoe do you even wear?
Chris: What size eyes do you wear?
Jennifer: (makes an angry face and walks away)

Jennifer starts out teasing John about his big feet and John retaliates by teasing Jennifer about her big eyes. Jennifer’s lack of verbal response and the mean face she makes at John as she walks away shows her defeat as a teaser and signals John’s triumph.

Retaliations do not always happen immediately after the tease like in the above example. A target may give a minimal response or account to the tease or the conversation may continue and later on the target will respond to a turn by the teaser with a retaliation. Offensively retaliations work for the target to deny that any transgression took place and also to get back at the attacker for their biting comment. A retaliation may even result in the target becoming the entertainer if the other interlocutors laugh at the remark, which further emphasizes the triumph of the target over the attacker (Tholander & Aronsson, 2002).

A proactive response to teasing is the final response on the spectrum and it has a purely offensive function. In a proactive response to teasing an interlocutor will foresee the potential for teasing in what they are about to say so they protect themselves by specifying certain conditions, giving reasoning in advance, or justifying what they are about to say. The interlocutor designs his speech in a manner that does not leave an opening for other interlocutors to tease him. According to Tholander and Aronsson (2002) proactive work demonstrates the “disciplining and socializing force of teasing” (p. 583). The following is an example of a proactive response, from Tholander and Aronsson’s study is an interaction that takes place between four school students working in a group.

Eric: I’ve got a summer job. (.) Have I told you that?
Stina: Yeaaaah.
(13 irrelevant turns omitted)
Lisa: Where, where are you gonna work then?
Eric: I hate small children and got a job at a daycare center (0.5) in [Grenhaga (x)].
Per: [Hehehe (.) [hehehe.
Lisa: [Why are you gonna work then?
Eric: Cause I want the money.

The target, Eric, was able to take on the mindset of a potential teaser and realized that what he was about to share with the group was likely to be remarked upon negatively. Rather than allow his fellow interlocutors a chance to tease him, Eric stated his dislike for children up front and that he only got the job for the money (Tholander & Aronsson, 2002).

Drew’s (1987) and Tholander and Aronsson’s (2002) spectrums provide a more complete understanding of responses to teases, especially within a dialogic setting. The combined spectrums provide a means for coding and for analyzing the complex social functions of the response similar to how Boxer and Cortés-Conde’s spectrum of bonding to biting works for the tease.

**Interaction in Real Life vs. in the Movies**

As seen above, teasing is a complex conversational tool that requires an intricate knowledge of cultural and social norms in order to be correctly delivered. On top of that a tease has various functions and equally as intricate purposes within a group of interlocutors. Without explicit socio-cultural knowledge as well as a firm grasp on the language of the communication it is extremely difficult and very risky to produce a tease because of the increased likelihood of misunderstanding (Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997; Drew, 1987; Straehle, 1993; Tholander & Aronsson 2002). In order to teach this language behavior to second language learners it would be helpful for teachers to have examples of teases to show students. Teases in films are a possible source for examples, but it is not yet known whether or not teases in movies imitate teases that occur in real life.
Rose’s study on compliments in film (2001) looks into the possibility of using film as a way of studying specific speech acts and language pragmatics. Scripted and written language follows stereotypical language norms and therefore, is a relevant example of language use in naturally occurring data despite the minimal research on the subject (Rose, 2001).

In his study of compliments in film, Rose (2001) compared the different aspects that form compliments to real life. The study found that compliments in films were very similar to compliments in real life interactions with few exceptions. The structure and function of the compliment imitated naturally-occurring data, while the differences lay in the distribution of compliments between genders and the responses to compliments (Rose, 2001).

Martínez-Flor (2007) conducted a similar study regarding the use of request modification devices in film, however, her purpose focused more on the possibility of using film as a teaching tool in the classroom. In second language classrooms the use of media and videos can offer students an opportunity to observe natural language interactions and gain a better understanding of language norms and idiosyncrasies. Martínez-Flor (2007) found that film did in fact imitate real life regarding request modification devices. Internally embedded request devices such as openers and downtoners are used the same in movies as we use them in our own conversations and interactions. External request devices, such as the use of “please,” were also found in films and imitated real life usage. In movies the socio-pragmatic and the pragmalinguistic aspects of request modification devices, as well as the social norms and linguistic structures, mimicked naturally occurring request modification devices (2007).

The above findings suggest that film may mirror real life with respect to structure and function and may differ with respect to the gender of interlocutors and responses to the speech act in question. The similarities between film and naturally occurring speech acts leave an
opening for the research into other speech acts in movies. Will other speech acts, namely teasing, follow this same pattern?

The speech act of teasing is most commonly studied and analyzed through conversational analysis of video or voice recordings of naturally occurring conversations (Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997; Drew, 1987; Dynel, 2008; Schnurr & Chan, 2011; Straehle, 1993; Tholander & Aronsson, 2002; Tholander, 2002). This gives linguists and other researchers an accurate collection of natural data. In my research I compare the various aspects of teases found in movies to teases found in real life in order to determine whether or not and to what extent the teasing seen in films mirrors naturally occurring teases as determined by the studies of the sociolinguists listed above.

**Methods**

As stated above for the purposes of my study I have defined teasing as a non-serious interaction, in which the target is present, and can be viewed as aggressive but due to playful framing is not seen as such by the target or other interlocutors. I used this simplified definition of a tease to identify teases in movies and collect examples from films for my data.

My criteria for selecting movies to use in my study followed Rose’s study of compliments (2001) and Martínez-Flor’s study of request acts in film (2007). In order to ensure that the interactions in movies were correct representations of real life interaction Rose (2001) set up criteria for choosing movies. First the movies could not be more than fifteen years old and must portray present-day people in real life scenarios. This was to rule out futuristic or fantastical movies, slap-stick comedy, animations and out dated period films that would have no relevance in research on present day speech (2001). Rose (2001) also only chose movies that were widely available and popular in the box office. Martínez-Flor (2007) looked at films from
the genres of drama, comedy and romance in her study of request modification devices but in order to avoid potential problems with overly scripted dialogue or unnatural speech I mainly looked at dramas but did not rule out comedies or romances if I found usable data in the film. Instead of choosing movies based off availability I selected films, which fit the same criteria listed above, from lists of Oscar nominees and most popular movies from the past fifteen years as listed on Internet Movie Database (IMDB). I also took any suggestions from my advisor and peers (see Appendix A for the complete list of movies).

While watching films, I wrote down all teasing interactions I recognized as such from the research of others. I took careful notes about each speech turn in the interaction, how it was said, marking if words were stressed, laughter, smiling, tone, and any physical cues such as funny faces or direction of gaze. For each teasing sequence I recorded the time in the movie, the interlocutors, the setting and any other information I thought may be helpful. In the end forty-four teases were collected from seven different movies and coded.

The teasing sequences collected from the films were then transcribed using modified conversational transcription conventions, which are used by linguist such as Professor Nancy Bell and other sociolinguistic researchers.

The data was then coded using a system that is based on both traditional sociolinguistic categories, such as age and gender, and on the findings of previous studies of teasing in real life interaction (positioning of target, relationship, content, etc.) When selecting what I was coding for I took various aspects of teasing from each of the studies above. If there were similar coding techniques or aspects of a tease talked about in various studies I was sure to utilize them in my own coding. For instance, nearly every author talked about the importance of the relationship between interlocutors and the contextualization cues that let us know a tease has occurred. When
coding for responses I used the labels from Tholander and Aronsson’s defensive to offensive continuum and marked the manner of the response. Each teasing sequence was coded for the following: relationship of interlocutors, gender, age, target’s position from the tease, content, contextualization cues, type of tease, response, type of response, placement of response on continuum, and reaction/involvement of other interlocutors.

After the teases were collected and the coding was completed, the data was grouped into the various categories coded for to look for patterns that occurred and charts were made to quantify and display the data. I set up a continuum of teasing that followed Boxer and Cortés-Conde’s (1997) continuum very closely with only a few minor changes based off of what I found while coding. My continuum started with nips that bonded because there were no teases that simply bonded in my data. Next it moved to nips and then bites that bonded, which were determined as such by the outcome of the tease between the attacker and the target. That was followed by nips/bites, which were interactions that fell somewhere between those two areas of the continuum, and last on the continuum were bites and malicious bites.

Responses to teases were coded on the continuum set up by Tholander and Aronsson (2002). Each response type from the continuum was found except for proactive responses. Also, there were three instances of fighting as a response to the tease, which I omitted because they fell outside the field of linguistic interaction and therefore could not be analyzed by my methods. This left me with forty-one responses to teases. I then specified if the response was po-faced or not and if the manner of the response was serious or playful. If the comment was a retaliation in the form of teasing back at the teaser, it was first marked as the response and then coded as a separate tease so that the response to the retaliation could be coded. The interaction was looked at separately and then again as an extended teasing sequence.
Results

Functions of teasing

The analysis of the data is broken up into the categories I coded for with some variations where I needed to combine data or eliminate it based on my findings. The following two tables show the type of tease in correlation with the relationship of interlocutors and the content of the tease. Each type of tease from the continuum that is on the charts is addressed in the subsections that follow.

Table 1: Frequency with which specific teases were utilized in regards to the relationship of interlocutors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bonding nip</th>
<th>Nip</th>
<th>Bonding bite</th>
<th>Nip/bite</th>
<th>Bite</th>
<th>Malicious bite</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquaintances</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strangers</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Frequency with which specific teases were utilized in regards to the content of the tease.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bonding nip</th>
<th>Nip</th>
<th>Bonding bite</th>
<th>Nip/bite</th>
<th>Bite</th>
<th>Malicious bite</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social/Conversational Transgressions</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rapport building</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retaliations</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Habits of Target</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shortcomings of Target</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nips

Nips were the most common type tease found in movies; sixteen of the forty-four teases belonged to this category. As seen in Table 1 the interlocutors involved in the interaction ranged from acquaintances to intimates (friends and family) with the large majority being friends who partook in nips. These findings are similar to the research on naturally occurring teases in that
intimates are more likely to produce teases than acquaintances or strangers (Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997; Drew, 1987; Straehle, 1993; Tholander & Aronsson 2002). Table 2 shows that eight of the nips were used to point out social or conversational transgressions, four point out habits of the target, two point out shortcomings of the target, such as the inability to get a job done, and one is a retaliation. This mirrors previous findings, which state that nips are most often used as a tool for controlling social situations (Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997; Drew, 1987; Straehle, 1993; Tholander & Aronsson 2002). The majority of nips were framed as such by the interlocutor with playful tones and lots of smiling as well as emphasis on words that indicated to the target what they were being teased about.

_Bonding nips_

Nips with the purpose of bonding were the second most common tease found in movies with eight interactions falling in the category. Five bonding nips were between acquaintances, and in each of the interactions they were romantically interested in the other interlocutor. The other three bonding nips took place between friends in two interactions and family in the other (Table 1). Similar to Boxer and Cortés-Conde’s findings, the nips in these situations served to build rapport and intimacy between interlocutors. Since the majority of the interactions are between acquaintances it follows that bonding nips and not bonding bites would be the tease used to build rapport as they are less likely to be mistaken for an aggressive comment due to misunderstanding of the contextualization cues used by the teaser (Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997). Most of the bonding nips were marked with contextualization cues of smiling and emphasis on certain words, similar to how nips were framed. The difference between the two categories was in the outcome of the interaction. In bonding nips the tease built rapport between the teaser and the target (Table 2) which was never the case with nips that did not bond.
Bonding nips were also used to point out social transgressions but did so in a way that pointed out intimate knowledge of a person or displayed comfort between the teaser and the target, which again demonstrates the rapport building aspect of the tease (Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997; Drew, 1987; Straehle, 1993; Tholander & Aronsson 2002).

**Bonding bites**

Seven bites that bonded were coded for. These interactions only took place between intimates, five between friends and two between family members (Table 1), which mirrors naturally occurring data. Table 2 shows that bonding bites were used to point out conversational transgressions, build rapport and as a form of retaliation. The risk involved in a bite is very high and the outcome is often unsuccessful, which is why usually only intimates partake in such risky conversational activities (Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997). Intimates have a better understanding of the “meta-messages” in each other’s speech and will therefore understand comment as non-serious (Straehle, 1993, p. 213). The contextualization cues used in bonding bites were much more pronounced than in other teases and more heavily marked with laughter and smiling. This could be added precaution from the teaser to ensure that the target understands the playful intentions.

**Nips/Bites**

There were only three instances of nips/bites, and these were framed with exaggerated tones and stress on certain words in the interaction and even mock politeness. All three pointed out social or conversational transgressions (Table 2) and two of the three took place between friends (Table 1). In these interactions the teaser meant for the tease to be a nip or to be a bond but the response from the target showed that they understood the tease to be the opposite of what the teaser intended. These teases are prime examples of what Boxer and Cortés-Conde (1997)
talk about when they say that “a misfire can occur and the playful nip can indeed become the bite” (p. 285). The target mistook the intent of the tease which accounts as much for the function of the tease as the actual intentions of the teaser (Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997; Drew, 1987; Straehle, 1993; Tholander & Aronsson 2002).

**Bites**

There were six bites collected, four of which were between acquaintances and only two between friends (Table 1). The large number of acquaintances and very few instances of intimates engaging in bites differs from the above studies (Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997; Drew, 1987; Straehle, 1993; Tholander & Aronsson, 2002). Half of the bites were for social or conversational transgressions and the other three were for shortcomings, habits and a failed attempt at rapport building (Table 2). The content of the bites mirrored the naturally occurring data by working as a social control tool in five of the six examples. The bite that failed as a way to build rapport was between friends who just recently reached that level of intimacy and the target misunderstood the tease and took it as an aggressive comment. Contextualization cues that marked the interactions as bites were emphasis, tone and mocking smiles. Laughter was found in a few examples, but far less frequently than the other teases.

**Malicious bites**

Four malicious bites were the last teases marked on the continuum and three of these interactions were between acquaintances and one between strangers (Table 1). Each interaction was a confrontation for a social transgression (Table 2), and even though the malicious teases were not all from children, the interactions all had a structure very similar to children fighting on a playground (Tholander & Aronsson, 2002). The interactions were marked by tone and emphasis and even laughter in one case; however, the intention of the laughter was not to mark
the playfulness, rather it was laughter directed at the target. All malicious bites had the intention of hurting the target, there was no possibility the target would mistake these interactions as playful or a way of building rapport. Each interaction was a way to point out a social transgression indirectly with the intent to cause humiliation or hurt by undermining the target.

**Positioning of target**

There were very few instances in which the positioning of the target was a part of the tease. Of the forty-four teases collected only seventeen of them functioned to position the target outside of the conversation. This differs from Straehle’s (1993) study in which positioning of the target was a big part of the tease interaction. She found that the target was often positioned outside of the in-group, and even more commonly as a child during a teasing sequence. While I found only a handful of instances of target positioning, the few I did find followed Straehle’s definition of positioning. The target was positioned as a child seven times in my data, six times outside of the in-group, and four times the target was positioned as something undesirable to them but not necessarily outside of an in-group, for instance as a “girl” or “weak.” Each of these instances of target positioning functioned to place the target outside of the norm and beneath the teaser.

**Contextualization Cues**

Three main categories of contextualization cues for framing teases were seen in my data. First was the category of stress, tone and exaggeration, in other words, how the speaker said the tease marked it as an unusual sentence. There were twenty-two instances of this type of framing and it was used for each type of tease on the continuum. Smiles and laughter also marked teasing and were found in eleven sequences to be the manner of framing. The teases framed by laughter and smiles were bonding nips, nips, bonding bites, and even one malicious bite. The
The final category of contextualization cue is a hybrid of smile/laugh and stress/tone/exaggeration. The teaser used the stress and tone to mark what the tease was about, while the smiles and laughter ensured that the target would understand the playful nature of the tease. Of the eleven sequences in the hybrid category four are nips, three are bonding nips, three are bonding bites, and one is a bite.

Just as in real life emphasis, tone, laughter and smiling play a big part in the framing of a tease. One contextualization cue, excessive pronoun usage (Straehle, 1993), was not observed in movies. This is possibly due to the very few instances of multiple party interactions that I found. Pronoun usage was found in Straehle’s data only when two of the three interlocutors were co-constructing teases and they were excluding the target from the in-group through the use of pronouns, which made it as though she wasn’t present (1993).

Overall teases in movies are framed just like teases in real life, and the contextualization cues used, barring excessive pronoun usage, mirror the cues used in real life.

**Responses to teasing**

The results of the responses to teasing were organized according to Tholander and Aronsson’s (2002) continuum. The following tables show the continuum of responses with regards to what type of tease it responded to and who the interaction took place between.

**Table 3: Type of tease and the frequency of responses it received**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bonding nip</th>
<th>Nip</th>
<th>Bonding bite</th>
<th>Nip/bite</th>
<th>Bite</th>
<th>Malicious bite</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accounts</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denials</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing Along</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retaliation</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4: Frequency with which specific responses were being utilized with regards to the relationship between interlocutors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Friends</th>
<th>Acquaintances</th>
<th>Strangers</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accounts</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denials</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playing Along</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retaliation</td>
<td>Ø</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Minimal responses**

The majority of responses, sixteen of the forty-four, were minimal po-faced responses just like the studies from Drew (1987) and Tholander and Aronsson (2002). The majority of minimal responses were from acquaintances (Table 4) which follows that less intimate interlocutors run a higher risk of misunderstanding the intentions of a tease (Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997; Drew, 1987; Straehle, 1993; Tholander & Aronsson, 2002). When intimates such as friends and family responded minimally to a tease three out of seven times the tease was a retaliation, which follows Tholander and Aronsson’s finding that a successful retaliation will be met with a po-faced minimal response (2002). Minimal responses were found as a reaction to every tease on the continuum, even malicious bites (Table 3). If the target made any indication of understanding of the tease in these interactions it was a smile or laugh and often times no indication was made and the target simply continued the conversation or whatever they were doing, just as in Drew’s findings of po-faced responses (1987).

**Retaliation**

The second most common response type in the data was retaliations with nine instances in which they were the response. Five of the nine interactions took place between friends, three between acquaintances and one between strangers (Table 4). Three of the retaliations between
friends were playful while two were serious, and between acquaintances and strangers all except one of the responses were serious. The importance of saving identity face in a group of friends (Schnurr & Chan, 2001) was seen in the playful retaliations between friends. When the target was successful with their retaliation they saved identity face by successfully becoming the performer in the interaction and offensively taking a stance to stop the teasing from continuing (Tholander & Aronsson, 2002). After the retaliation the original teaser gave only minimal responses to the retort, unless it was in an extended tease in which the teasing would go back and forth for a few turns and eventually end in a minimal response. Also in several instances at least one of the other interlocutors laughed or smiled to show alignment with the target after the retaliation. Both of these findings follow Tholander and Aronsson’s (2002) examples and analysis of retaliations. Most retaliations were in response to nips, but the distribution of retaliations in regards to the type of tease is fairly even, only bonding nips were never responded to with a retaliation (Table 3).

As seen in Tholander and Aronsson’s (2002) study retaliations do not always immediately follow the tease. In my data I collected two bonding bite retaliations that followed this pattern. Here is one of the examples taken from Finding Forrester in which the bonding bite retaliation is preceded by an account. Jamaal show’s up late to play basketball with his friends and after he is teased about being late he retaliates.

Friend A: hold up (.) hold up.=
(background talking from other friends on the court)
=what up J? where you been?
Jamaal: asleep yo.
😊 i was up late (2) wondering how i’d save your ass out here😊
Friend A: what’re you savin?! (they the resume playing basketball with Jamaal)
Jamaal first responds to the tease with an account of where he was, asleep because he was up late, which is quickly followed with a retaliation that is a bonding bite commenting on his friend’s basketball skills. One reason that retaliations do not always follow immediately after the tease is that it requires thought to utilize cultural knowledge and linguistic savvy to fashion teases and even more to develop a “qualified rejoinder” (Tholander and Aronsson, 2002, p. 561).

Accounts

Eight accounts made up the next most common response from the target. Acquaintances and family were the most likely to make accounts for the tease, each having done so in three different sequences, and twice friends gave accounts as a form of response (Table 4). Accounts were responses to all types of teases except for bonding and malicious bites (Table 3). As stated above, the accounts were in response to what was said by the teaser and not to the tease (Drew, 1987; Tholander & Aronsson, 2002). However, unlike in Drew’s study (1987) the target often never showed an understanding that the comment was a tease, they simply responded by correcting the content of the tease to make themselves more clear, or defend what they had previously said. The following example from Stranger than Fiction shows the target defending what they said, but never does the target show recognition that what the other interlocutor said was a tease. Harold teases his friend Dave about saying he would go to space camp if he knew he was going to die soon. Dave’s response is an account for picking space camp.

Harold: Dave can pose a somewhat abstract and purely hypothetical question?
Dave: sure. Go ahead
Harold: if you knew you were gonna die, possibly soon, what would you do?
(6 speech turns omitted)
Dave: (seriously) that’s easy, I’d go to space camp
Harold: space camp?
Dave: ya its in Alabama. It’s where kids go to become astronauts.
(2) I’ve always wanted to go since I was nine.
(2 speech turns omitted)
Harold: (incredulously) aren’t you too old to go to space camp?
Dave: tak (tongue click) you’re never too old to go to space camp dude.
(The two then finish dinner in silence)

Dave’s account that there is no age limit on space camp is defensive and po-faced and he is reacting to the content of Harold’s tease which mirrors naturally occurring data. The exception is that Dave never indicates that he understood Harold’s comment to be a tease through laughter, smiling or commenting about the tease.

Playing Along

Playing along responses to teasing were most common between friends. There were three cases in which friends played along with the tease and one instance of acquaintances (Table 4), who were romantically interested in each other, responding by playing along. Playing along with the tease allowed for the intimates to further develop rapport and acquaintances to start building their relationship (Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997; Straehle, 1993). Since the target built upon the tease in playing along responses they ran the risk of other interlocutors misunderstanding their intentions, which is likely the reason that mostly intimates responded by playing along (Tholander & Aronsson, 2002). Playing along was in response to two bonding nips, one nip and one nip/bite (Table 3). Targets who played along with the tease demonstrated that they were unperturbed and marked that it was acceptable for the other interlocutors to tease. In the cases with more than two interlocutors at least one displayed alignment with the target through laughter which follows the patterns of naturally occurring teases (Tholander & Aronsson, 2002).

Denials

Denials were the least common response with only three occurrences of them, and it is likely the least common form of response because a denial is seen as a childish response since it
does not require social or cultural knowledge or a greater understanding of teasing norms to deny a tease (Tholander & Aronsson, 2002). Denials were responses to bonding nips, nips and bonding bites (Table 3), and two times the denials were from friends and once from an acquaintance (Table 4). The structure of the denial followed Drew’s and Tholander and Aronsson’s examples in that the target did not take responsibility for the action they were being teased about (1987; 2002). There are no overt denials of “I did not” in my data, rather targets use paralanguage, such as exasperations or rolling their eyes, to convey their denial of the tease, but never further defend with an account or an offensive maneuver to try and stop the teasing. Denials from the target often preface another response or even invite another tease (Tholander & Aronsson, 2002), but in all of these interactions the teasing sequence stops after the denial which shows a dissimilarity to teases in movies and teases in real life. One possible reason for this is that due to poor reputation and social status of a denial as a form of response, film-makers veer away from using it and instead use responses that are more humorous and witty, more socially acceptable.

**Extended Teases**

After coding I found the need to include in my results a section on extended teases which demonstrate deviation from the relevant next turn (Drew, 1987; Tholander & Aronsson, 2002) and are similar to Tholander and Aronsson’s work on collaborative teasing (2002). My extended teases also follow with Dynel (2008) and her work on banter. Two types of extended teases were found in films. One in which the tease sequence continued because interlocutors were retaliating or playing along with the tease and a second was when interlocutors built upon the tease to show alignment with the teaser. First is an example of an extended tease from *Good Will Hunting* in
which Sean, who is at lunch with Gerald, and the bartender, who he is friends with, go back and forth teasing each other. It starts when the bartender asks Sean if he is ever going to pay his tab.

Sean: just put it on my tab. (as walks toward the table)
Bartender: you ever plan on paying your tab?
Sean: (stops walking and turns back to bartender) yea chief. got the winning lottery ticket right here. (holds up ticket)
Bartender: yea. What’s the jackpot?
Sean: twelve million.
Bartender: oh don’t think that’ll cover it.
Sean: 😊 yea: but it’ll cover your sex change operation. 😊
Bartender: [HA (waves a hand at Sean)

Sean first responds with an account that also works as a playing along response, “I’ve got the winning lottery ticket right here.” This functions as an account by marking that he does not have money and as playing along because he is poking fun at himself for investing his money into the lottery ticket. The bartender responds with a tease saying that the twelve million in the jackpot won’t be enough to cover Sean’s tab. However, Sean is quick to respond with a playfully framed bite, “but it’ll cover your sex change operation,” which the bartender dismisses with a laugh and the wave of his hand. This playful banter between friends works to build rapport and also to demonstrate their friendship and intimacy to Gerald who is the other participant in the interaction even though he remains silent throughout. This follows Dynel’s 2008 study on teasing and banter. Banter is characterized as a series of rapidly fired comments and retorts. A single tease may initiate a banter sequence, in which the interlocutors respond back and forth to the tease with teases of their own or building upon the original (2008). Banter works to build and display rapport between interlocutors according to Boxer and Cortés-Conde (1997) and Straehle (1993).

The next example of an extended tease comes from *The Kids are all Right*. Paul, who is meeting Nick and Jules (who are the mother’s of Laser) for the first time starts the sequence
when he teases Nick. Laser then builds upon the tease later in the interaction to show his alignment and build rapport between him and Paul.

Nick: so Paul (.) did you always know you wanted to be in the (1) food services industry?
(3 speech turns omitted)
Paul: i’m a doer. that’s how i learn. it’s just me (.) i’m weird that way i guess.
Nick: huh.
Paul: which is probably why i’m in the food services [industry. hhh
Nick: [HU [HHH
Jules: [HHH
Laser: 😊hhey mom you see what he did there right?
you said food services industry so then he said food services industry. 😊
Nick: (serious) yea:: i got that laser. thanks

Paul’s initial tease is commenting on Nick’s clear distaste with his choice of job, and it also functions to build rapport between him and the other interlocutors when they laugh at his response. Laser even goes so far as to build on Paul’s initial tease of Nick in order to show his alignment with Paul. This follows the findings from Tholander and Aronsson’s (2002) study when interlocutors join in the teasing they align themselves with the teaser.

**Relationships and Teases**

In regards to relationships and teasing, the above data deals with intimacy and its relation to the type tease and discusses the rapport building that takes place between intimates. In this section the RID aspects of teases will be discussed along with the hierarchical exchanges of teases. RID is seen in movies in the bonding nip, nip or bonding bite interactions between intimates. The following example from *The Blindside* shows a changing relationship between interlocutors and is an example of RID in action. The interaction takes place while the family is driving to dinner. S.J., the son, is telling Michael, the adopted son, about all the Taco Bell restaurants the family owns.

(Michael, S.J., Collins- daughter, Leanne- mom, and Sean- dad)
Michael: you own all of them?
S.J.: yea we own like a hundred.
Collins: (directed towards SJ) eighty-five (rolls eyes)
Michael: (to S.J.) is that why Mr. Tooey doesn’t have to go to work?
S.J: [HHH HAHA
Sean: [whoa whoa whoa 😊 i’m working even when i’m not working😊
Leanne: (raises eyebrows and smiles at Sean)
Sean: WHAT? 😊
Leanne: (smiles again and shakes her head)

The successful tease between Michael and Sean functions to build rapport between the two, and it is through teasing Sean that Michael displays that he is now comfortable enough around Sean to risk teasing him. This tease sequence is an indication that the RI between Michael and Sean has changed, and it functions in the same way RID does in naturally occurring data as seen in Boxer and Cortés-Conde’s study (1997).

Teasing along a hierarchy was another aspect of relationships in teasing (Schnurr & Chan, 2011); however, within my data there were almost no instances of teases between interlocutors of different hierarchical statuses. The one instance found in my data is from Good Will Hunting in which the teaser (Jerk) is from a privileged upper class family and presumably smarter than the target (Chucky). In the interaction Chucky pretends to have history class with Skylar to strike up a conversation with her in the bar, and the Jerk comes over and interrupts the conversation to tease Chucky.

Jerk: what’d you think of that course?
Chucky: ya know? frankly. i found the course rather uhhh elementary:.
Jerk: you know i don’t doubt that it [was.
Chucky: [yea:
Jerk: I’uh huhhh 😊 i remember that class.
it was hhh just between recess (.) and lunch 😊
Skylar: o:h why: don’t you just go away.
Jerk: I’m just uh hhh having fun with my new friend.
Chucky: (smiling now- to Jerk) whoa is there a problem here?
Jerk: no there’s no problem.
(he then rattles off a lot of big words and ideas and Will steps in to save Chucky)

Here the Jerk utilizes his status and intelligence to put down Chucky and threaten his quality and identity face. Chucky is unable to save face on his own because on an academic hierarchy the Jerk is higher up than Chucky which prohibits him from being able to respond in a manner equivalent to the tease. Interference from Will to save Chucky aligns him with Chucky and is a display of RI. This interaction mirrors naturally occurring teases in both the directing of teases down at someone on the hierarchy (Schnurr & Chan, 2011) and in regards to RID (Boxer & Cortes-Conde, 1997).

**Gender and Teasing**

One important aspect of teasing is the gender of interlocutors (Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 2006; Tholander, 2002). Nineteen of the forty-four teases were with all male interlocutors, which follows naturally occurring patterns of teasing in regards to gender. Males are more likely to tease in homogenous groups than in mixed gender groups (Lampert & Ervin-Tripp, 2006). Only four examples of teases between all female interlocutors were found in film which also holds true to real life because instances of women teasing decrease in homogenous settings and increase in heterogeneous settings, where they will likely tease a male and not a female (2006). However, a difference was found in regards to cross gender teasing. Twelve sequences of males teasing females were recorded and only nine sequences of females teasing males. The numbers are fairly close, which follows Tholander’s findings that cross gender teases are distributed almost evenly between females and males (2002); however, his findings are for cross gender teasing among adolescents, which the majority of interlocutors in my data are not. Lampert and Ervin-Tripp (2006) in their study of cross gender teasing in adults found that it is more common for women to tease men in a heterogeneous group and for men to resort to self-deprecating
humor in these instances. Therefore, in regards to teases across gender my data does not mirror real life occurrences, but when interlocutors are of the same gender movies appear to follow real life patterns.

Relationships of interlocutors in teasing sequences imitate real life teases in regards to intimacy playing a role in the understanding and success of teases as well as RID. Gender in teasing even has a few aspects that follow naturally occurring teases. However, within the overall tease sequence from movies the aspect of relationship is where the most deviation from teases in real life occurs.

**Conclusion**

Overall teasing in movies imitates naturally occurring teases. The content of the teases as well as the contextualization cues used to frame them as teases follow very closely to the teases seen in the studies by other linguists (Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997; Drew, 1987; Straehle, 1993; Tholander & Aronsson, 2002). Teases in film functioned to build rapport and to display RI just as teases do in real life interactions. Also, the use of a tease as a social control tool to convey potentially threatening messages in a non-aggressive manner (Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997; Drew, 1987; Schnurr & Chan, 2011; Straehle, 1993; Tholander & Aronsson, 2002) occurred in movies just as we use it in our own interactions.

Intimacy played a role in the types of teases interlocutors chose to use; however, in movies there was a higher occurrence of teasing between acquaintances than seen in the data of natural teases, especially in regards to the nip/bites and bites. While bites were common between acquaintances, intimates tended towards teasing that bonded, bonding nips and bonding bites. The difference here suggests the importance of intimacy in the understanding of teases (Boxer & Cortés-Conde, 1997; Drew, 1987; Straehle, 1993; Tholander & Aronsson, 2002).
Acquaintances in movies risked bites before a relationship and understanding was built between the interlocutors which lead to misunderstanding the tease as aggressive. This high risk of misunderstanding is why there are very few successful occurrences of bites between acquaintances in real life data and research. Reasons for the differences in the number of acquaintances who tease in movies are likely related to entertainment for the viewer and plot pacing. Filmmakers cannot wait for a relationship to develop to an appropriate level of intimacy before characters tease each other without running the risk of boring the viewers. The scripted dialogue in a movie allows for interlocutors to risk a bite between acquaintances because the response is known, and the script tells the actors they have to. However, in real life, without the assurance that what is being said is for purely entertainment value, acquaintances rarely risk bites.

While teases in movies rarely did so, positioning the target outside of the in-group functioned the same as in real life. The occurrence of this was very low, less than half of the teases dealt with the positioning of the target, however, when it did occur teases worked to place the target into an undesirable group and separate them from the conversation group, just as in the naturally occurring data from Straehle (1993). If more teasing sequences with more than two interlocutors were collected then the number of instances of target positioning would most likely increase to a significant number. However, the small number of positioning occurrences in my data makes any finite decisions about target positioning in movies difficult to conclude.

Responses to teases were mostly minimal responses that marked understanding of the tease through laughter or smiling, which follows the findings in *Po-faced receipts of teases* (Drew, 1987) as well as the study from Tholander & Aronsson (2002). Other responses to teases were structured and functioned very similarly to naturally occurring responses as well. The main
difference between responses in movies and naturally elicited responses was that the target did not display recognition of the tease when they gave accounts, which otherwise mirrored real life.

In regards to gender and teasing a variation occurs between film and real life. The distribution of teases in film varies from what is naturally seen in cross gender teasing. Same gender teasing however follows natural patterns of teasing in homogeneous groups. Reasons for this are unclear, however, it can be speculated that cross gender teasing in movies is following the borderwork hypothesis (as cited in Tholander, 2002). If this is the case, then movies are simply following society’s rules and portraying characters in their assigned gender roles. Another possibility is that script writers follow the adolescent model of cross gender teasing in which teasing of the opposite gender is common for both males and females. The gender aspect of teasing is something that could be investigated in future studies of film in comparison to real life since it seems to be the aspect that most commonly varies between the two.

The structure and function of teasing in movies generally mirrors the naturally occurring teases from the past research. The differences lie in distribution in cross gender teases as well as a few discrepancies in frequency with which certain levels of intimates partake in certain types of teases. Overall from my findings it can be concluded that teasing found in movies may be used in other studies of teasing as a means of collecting data. Also in a second language classroom teases in movies may prove useful examples of how interactions in the target language look and can be a useful tool for teaching the pragmatics of teases to the language learners.

This research adds to the other studies that compared different speech acts in movies to those in real life (Rose, 2001; Martínez-Flor, 2007) by building upon and strengthening the claims that speech acts in movies tend to imitate speech acts in real life. In both Rose’s and my research the structure and function of our respective speech acts studied corresponded to the
speech act in real life, and differences were found in gender distribution. Martínez-Flor (2007) found that request modification devices in film were structured and functioned the same in movies as in real life and were therefore useful in classrooms as a teaching tool, which a continuation of my study could investigate in regards to teases. My study demonstrates that teases just like compliments or request modification devices look and work the same in movies as in real life, which suggests that teases in film can be used for more than just audience entertainment purposes.
Appendix A: List of Films

*Goodwill Hunting* (1997)
*Miss Congeniality* (2000)
*Stranger than Fiction* (2007)
*The Hurt Locker* (2008)
*The Blindside* (2009)
*The Kids are all Right* (2010)

Appendix B: Transcription Conventions

- sentence final falling intonation
- clause-final intonation (“more to come”)
! animated tone
? rising intonation (not necessarily a question)
- glottal stop: sound abruptly cut off; self-interruption

*italics* emphatic stress
CAPS much louder
: after a vowel indicates elongated vowel sound
:: more elongation
wo[ords] overlapping speech
[words] latching
hhh aspiration
HHH aspiration/laughter while speaking
(quietly) description of voice quality or non-verbal action
(.) pause of ½ second or less
(7) pause of this many seconds
“words” speaker is quoting another person or adopting his/her voice
[φanəDIk] phonetic transcription
😊 great 😊 smiling voice quality
References


