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Women's Language Features In The *Lady Bird* Movie

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Abstract. This research analyzed women's language used in *Lady Bird* movie, focusing on Christine's utterances as the main character of the movie. The data was collected using documentation method and note-taking technique. The descriptive qualitative method was used to analyze the data based on Lakoff's theory on women's language features and Pearson's theory on language functions. The results were presented in sentences. The result showed that Christine uses lexical hedges or fillers, tag questions, rising intonation on declaratives, empty adjectives, intensifiers, hypercorrect grammar, super polite forms, avoidance of strong swear words, and emphatic stress. Precise color term is found in Marion's utterance. These features are used for expressing uncertainty, seeking responses, softening utterances, initiating discussion, and conveying emotion, according to Pearson's five language functions.

Keywords: Movie, Language And Gender, Women's Language Features, Women's Language Functions

INTRODUCTION

One of the important tools that human use to interact with other is language, as stated by Wardhaugh (2006). Sociolinguistics examines the relationship between language and society, focusing on how individuals within social groups use language to express social significance. It reveals that men use language more directly, while women use it more politely and expressively, expressing feeling and interpretations. Women's language possesses ten distinct features compared to men's, including lexical hedges, tag questions, rising intonations on declaratives, empty adjectives, precise color terms, intensifiers, hypercorrect grammar, super polite forms, avoidance of strong swear words, and emphatic stress (Lakoff, 1975). Pearson (1985) posits that women's language serves five communication functions, including expressing uncertainty, seeking responses, softening utterances, initiating discussions, and conveying emotions.

Research on women's language is crucial as it relates to gender differences in human language use. It can improve understanding of different communication styles, enhancing communication across genders and potentially reducing misunderstandings. The current research explores the use of women's language in the *Lady Bird* movie, focusing on the main character, Christine, a coming-of-age girl who has a disharmonious relationship with her mother. More over the current research examines how women's language features proposed by Lakoff's (1975) are applied to a character with defiant act.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature review is the examination of existing knowledge and diverse perspectives on the research subject, as defined by Lambert (2012). An undergraduate thesis, "Women's Language Features Analysis in Writing A Descriptive Text," written by Nadia (2022), focuses on analyzing women's language in writing a descriptive texts. The data was gathered from EFL learners at UIN Malang, majoring in English Literature. The Study used a descriptive qualitative approach to examine the women's language features. The result showed six types of women's language including lexical hedges or fillers, intensifiers, empty adjectives, emphatic stress, precious color terms, and tag questions. The current research uses a movie as a data source, unlike the previous research which use written text. Nevertheless, the research written by Nadia (2022) is relevant to the topic and could provide insight into women's language features using Lakoff's theory (1975).

Amalia's undergraduate thesis (2022), "An Analysis of Women's Language Features Used by Tina Fey in Her Book Bossypants," analyzed the use of strong swear words in Tina Fey's book Bossypants. Using Lakoff's theory (1975) and Trudgill's (1990) theory, the research identified seven women's language features including intensifiers, emphatic stress, lexical hedges and fillers, empty adjectives, hypercorrect grammar, avoidance of strong swear words, and precise color terms. Tina Fey utters twelve strong swear words, classified into four functions: humorous, auxiliary, expletives, and abusive. The research is relevant to the currents research as it uses Lakoff's theory to analyze women's language features.

Wulandari's (2023) undergraduate thesis explores "Women's Language Features in "Enola Holmes" Movie." The research uses data from the movie and transcript, based on Lakoff's theory (1975). The research identified nine types of women's language features namely super polite forms, intensifiers, lexical hedges or fillers, tag questions, hypercorrect grammar, rising intonations on declaratives, empty adjectives, avoidance of strong swear words, and emphatic stress. The most dominant feature is super polite forms. The research offers valuable insights for the current research and may help identify more example the application of women's language features in the movie.

Imorou and Salami's (2021) research on "Women's Language in Lorraine Hansberry's Raisin in The Sun: A Sociolinguistic Approach," found that women's language usage is not solely influenced by sex or status but also by factors like need, appropriateness, setting, literacy level, and social community. Although the research less detailed explanations, it offers a general understanding of women's language usage in society.

Dewi et al. (2023) analyzed “Women’s Language Features on Bridgerton Cast YouTube Interview by Netflix.” The research ¹ used Lakoff’s theory (1975) ⁵ to analyze the data from the YouTube video. Seven ⁵ women’s language features were identified: lexical hedges or fillers, tag questions, rising intonations on declaratives, empty adjectives, intensifiers, hypercorrect grammar, and avoidance of strong swear words. These features indicate uncertainty, preparation time, and decreased statement strength. Although some features are not found, the research is still relevant with the current research as it uses the same theory, namely ²³ Lakoff’s theory (1975).

Theory of Women’s Language Features

Lakoff (1975) cites ten key elements of female language that distinguish it from male language. Further details ² of the women’s language features by Lakoff (1975) were elaborated as follows:

¹⁰ 1. Lexical Hedges or fillers

Lakoff (1975) stated ² that the hedges are used when a speaker is uncertain or lack of self-confidence. Women use them more often due to socialization, believing asserting themselves strongly is not ladylike. Women often use lexical hedges or fillers expressions to mitigate uncertainty or self-doubt, such as phrase like I guess, I think, and I wonder (Lakoff, 1975).

2. Tag Questions

Tag questions are used in small talk situations when both ¹ the speaker and the addressee know the answer and don’t need confirmation (Lakoff, 1975). They are often used when the speaker is confident, and women express uncertainty or seek confirmation.

3. Rising Intonation on Declaratives

Lakoff (1975:66) explains that ² rising intonation on declaratives is commonly used by women to convey uncertainty and politeness, weaken utterances, and seek validation. This pattern, similar to tag questions, is exclusively used within declarative sentences.

4. Empty Adjectives

Empty adjectives express admiration for something, often perceived as feminine attributes by women. They are used to approbate one’s personal reaction, as per Lakoff (1975:13).

⁵ 5. Precise Color Terms

Lakoff (1975:53) states that women use precise color terms more than men due to their hobbies and activities, such as fashion, decorating, and sewing, while men may not use

these terms as much. Women tend to have broader vocabulary of color such as beige, mauve, aquamarine, etc.

6. ² **Intensifiers**

Lakoff (1975) reveals that women are more likely to use intensifiers and qualifiers, which conceal strong feelings. Women use expressions in speech to emphasize their intended meaning. Women are often using intensifiers to moderate the impact of their statements (Lakoff, 1975).

7. **Hypercorrect Grammar**

Lakoff's (1975) ¹⁴ found that women are more likely to use correct grammar and hypercorrect language, as they are more aware of it compared to men.

8. **Super Polite Forms**

Lakoff (1975) highlights that women have higher expectations for polite communication than men, often incorporating super polite expressions like please and thank you into their speech.

²⁸ 9. **Avoidance of Strong Swear Words**

Lakoff (1975) posits that societal expectations instill in women a "little lady" demeanor, leading them to use gentler swear words, which are considered part of the women's language, such as oh dear, oh fudge, etc. ⁴

10. **Emphatic Stress**

Emphatic stress is used to draw attention in conversation and compliment someone, rather than evaluate. Lakoff (1975) ¹⁴ found that feminine women are more likely to use emphatic speech. Women want other to understand the words they give stress.

Theory of Women's Language Functions

Pearson (1985:187) identified five functions linked to ² women's language. Further details of the women's language functions by Pearson (1985) were elaborated as follows:

1. **Expressing Uncertainty**

Women typically utilize words to show hesitancy and uncertainty, demonstrating an openness to new viewpoints.

2. **Seeking Responses**

Women often indirectly encourage other to respond and expect other to understand, unlike men who often directly express their desires (Pearson, 1985).

3. **Softening Utterances**

Pearson (1985) states that women often exhibit excessive politeness due to their social inferiority and the potential for men to overshadow them.

4. Initiating Discussions

Women commonly initiate conversations using language, employing vocabulary hedges ² such as, maybe, you know, in my opinion, I think, well, etc. to introduce subjects or start a discussion (Pearson, 1985).

5. Conveying Emotions

Pearson argues that women build trust and connection by discussing their feelings, relationship, and often incorporating emotional elements into their conversations.

METHOD AND THEORY

This research utilized data from the Lady Bird movie aired in 2017, directed by Greta Gerwig, which received 41 major nominations and 13 awards in 2018. The Lady Bird movie presents the coming-of-age story of Christine, who navigates a challenging mother-daughter dynamic in her final year of high school before starting university. The movie highlights how women express their thoughts and emotions through everyday language, aligning with the current research objectives, particularly in the section exploring the language used by women during acts of defiance. This research utilized a systematic documentation method and note-taking technique to gather data from audio-visual and script source. The process involved watching the Lady Bird movie, making ¹² detailed notes, compiling a list, and selecting words or phrases based on their alignment with women's language features and intended ¹² functions. The transcript was used ¹² to assist in ¹² the observation of the data.

⁷ Descriptive qualitative method was used to utilize the research, focusing on understanding human behavior, experience, and social context. The data analysis involved observing the Lady Bird movie twice, classifying the collected data using ¹ Lakoff's (1975) and ¹ Pearson's (1985) theories, verifying the data, and concluding the results. This qualitative research method aims to provide a comprehensive understanding ⁶ women's language features. ⁶ This research utilized the informal method of presenting analysis, a conversational approach that uses words, explanations, and descriptions to make findings more accessible. This method is particularly useful for qualitative research. The process involved compiling utterances illustrating ¹⁸ women's language features in the Lady Bird movie, providing explanations for each instance, and explaining the functions of these features are applied by the characters.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

²⁰ The results show that nine women's language features are used by Christine and one feature is used by Marion. The results are elaborated as follows:

1. Lexical Hedges or Fillers

Marion: "It's too bad I can't meet this Kyle before prom."

Christine : "Well, he is not my boyfriend anymore. **I mean**, maybe he never even was."

Marion: "Well, I'd still like to meet him." (01:07:10 – 01:07:18)

Christine and Marion, Christine's mother, are looking for a prom dress. In this conversation it can be seen that Marion wants to meet Kyle before Christine and him go to the prom together. Christine uses the hedge "well" to start her utterances that show she is **initiating a discussion** about her relationship with her mother. She begins her utterance using the hedge "well" to not asserting herself strongly in starting a discussion. Moreover, in her second utterance, she begins her statement used the hedge "**I mean**" which show that she is lack of self-confidence. In **expressing uncertainty**, the used of the hedge "**I mean**" weaken her statements and make it sounds less arrogant.

2. Tag Questions

Christine : "You know... you can touch my boobs, **right**?"

Danny : "I know. It's just that I respect you too much for that."

(24:11 – 24:18)

Christine ³ and Danny are lie on a blanket in the park looking at each other. When she utters her statements, she adds the tag question ² "**right**" which shows that she is not confident enough with her statements. Therefore, ¹⁰ the use of tag question in her utterance has a function **to seek responses** or to get a validation from Danny.

3. Rising Intonation on Declaratives

Christine : "Maybe we should try tanning."

Julie : "Yeah."

(11:29 – 11:31)

As seen in data above, Christine and Julie are sharing their opinions about Jenna. ³ Jenna Walton is very tan, identical tan girl descent on her. Julie is enchanted with Jenna's skin, so does Christine. The movie shows that Christine rises her intonation when she is saying "**maybe we should try tanning**" to express her hesitation on her suggestions to get a luminous skin as Jenna. Furthermore, Christine raises her intonation **to seek response** and she needs validation from Julie whether or not her suggestion is a good suggestion.

4. Empty Adjectives

Julie : “I love this neighborhood.”

Christine : “Yeah, it’s so **beautiful**.” (06:37– 06:40)

³ In data above, Christine and Julie stroll through a fancy neighborhood, stopping at a **three-stories blue house with white whitters and big American Flag**. Christine is amazed and show her admiration to the house using the adjective “**beautiful**”. The function of the usage of the adjective “**beautiful**” is **to convey emotions** when she sees her dream house.

5. Intensifiers

Christine : “You are **so** infuriating.”

Marion: “Please stop yelling.” (26:45 – 26: 46)

It can be seen that the used of intensifier by Christine is **to convey emotion** in data above. Christine uses the intensifier “**so**” to convince her mother that she really means what she says. The intensifier “**so**” is used to strengthen the meaning of “infruating” in Christine’s utterance. The function of intensifiers is to convey emotion that she is really annoyed when her mother argues that Christine is tired already.

6. Hypercorrect Grammar

Christine : “I hate California. **I want to go to the East Coast**.”

Marion: “Your dad and I will barely be able to afford in-state tuition.”

(02:27 – 02:31)

In Lady Bird movie, there are some parts which show Christine and Marion are arguing about something. In data above, Christine uses a hypercorrect grammar and consistent verb without abbreviations, demonstrating her need for her mother’s seriousness by using “**I want to go**” ¹² instead of “I wanna go”. It shows that the usage of **hypercorrect grammar** in her utterances is **to seek responses** from her mother as she needs her mother to notice and give response to her.

7. Super Polite Forms

Christine : “Can you take me to my friend Julie’s house, **please?**”

Kyle : “Sure.” (01:10:35–01:10:38)

Christine and Kyle are on their way to the prom when Kyle suddenly cancels their plans. Christine realizes she is not suitable for Kyle and Jenna and asks Kyle to take her to Julie’s house. ²² The use of the word “**please**” at the end of her utterances shows that she uses super polite form. The function of this feature in this conversation is to **soften her utterance**, even she feels really disappointed with him.

8. Avoidance of Strong Swear Words

Julie : "I take the showerhead" (*laughing*)

Christine : "oh, my God..." (11:53– 11:56)

Christine and Julie are sitting ³ with their legs up the wall, eating wafers. They are sharing their funny moments when they are children. In data above, it can be seen that Christine responses to Julie's story using the swear word "Oh my God" which show that she avoids to use strong swear words like "damn" or "shit". The function of the avoidance of string swear words by Christine is **to soften her utterance** as she is maintaining her feminine image by not swearing much.

9. Emphatic Stress

Christine : "Oh, it's perfect."

Marion: "Honey, do you love it?" (29:23 – 29:25)

In this conversation, Christine and Marion are looking for a Thanksgiving dress. When they found a dress that fits on Christine, Christine shows her admiration and expresses her personal opinion by stressing on the word "perfect". The usage of the emphatic stress in this conversation is **to convey emotion** and convince her mother that she loves the dress.

10. Precise Color Terms

Christine : "I love it."

Marion: "Is it too pink?" (01:07:43 – 01:07:47)

Christine and Marion are shopping ³ for a prom dress. Christine is in the dressing room trying on dresses and looks happy with a dress that fits her. Marion comments that the dress is "too pink". Precise color term is often used by women as it is commonly used for fashion. Marion tries **to convey emotions** or opinion through her fashion interest by utter the specific color of the dress. What Marion means by too pink is a bright or striking pink color.

CONCLUSIONS

The research found the language used by Christine ⁹ are lexical hedges or fillers, tag questions, rising intonation on declaratives, empty adjectives, intensifiers, hypercorrect grammar, super polite forms, avoidance of strong swear words, and emphatic stress. Precise color term is absent in Christine's utterances. However, it is found in Marion utterance. Despite the use of nine features, Christine is inconsistent in her use, using strong swear words and not using standard form when speaking with her mother and brother. However, she still places a significant concern for her language as Christine is a defiant character. Five functions ¹ of women's language based on the theory by Pearson are found in Christine's utterances, namely

expressing uncertainty, seeking responses, softening utterances, initiating discussion, and conveying emotions.

This research concludes that ²⁵ the use of women's language to indirectly express women's desires and intentions with the addressee without much verbal communication. The research showed that movie is a reflection of reality and highlighted the importance of understanding and utilizing ¹ women's language in a movie.

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