



WOMEN'S LANGUAGE FEATURES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON THREE MOVIES WITH DIFFERENT YEAR BACKGROUND

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ABSTRACT

This research aimed to find out women's language features that used by female characters in three movies with different year background such as: *On the Basis of Sex* (1950), *Nine to Five* (1980), *last Bombshell* (2010) and what feature differences are found among the three movies. This research focused on Lakoff's theory about women's language features and Irigaray's theory (1993) about feminism. This research uses descriptives qualitative method to explain the data. Note taking was one of the research methods used to gather data. The result of the research found that there were seven out of ten types of women's language features in *On the Basis of Sex*, eight out of ten types found in *Nine to Five*, and six out of ten types found in *Bombshell* movie. Based on the research, a significant reduction is seen in the types of rising intonation on declarative, empty adjective, and super polite forms. The total of all types found from each year also decreased, and the least was found in the 2010 movie.

Keywords: feature differences; feminism; women language features

INTRODUCTION

Women are often identified with the use of subtle words. They are expected to be graceful, polite and gentle. Society will oppose them when they step out of the social construct. Nice clothes, a well-groomed face, a nice body scent and a smile that they constantly show are the images that society wants women to have. Women are forbidden to shout, dissent or even funnier, they are not allowed to open their mouths too wide when laughing. Everything is very limited for women; everything is controlled but they want women to always look perfect without going past what society expects of them.

According to Lakoff (2004), as part of their socialization, women are forced to adopt a fragile, insignificant, and submissive style, which is essentially training a way to be

subordinate. Previous research uses the theory of women's language by Robin Lakoff (2004), who used the data from the movie. The research was conducted by Angelia (2023) entitled "Language by Gender in Audiovisual on *Bridgerton Series*". This research applied the descriptive-qualitative method and analyzed the utterances from 23 female characters in the movie using Lakoff's theory of women's language. This research also used Baker's theory for the semiotics found in the movie. The researcher found nine types of women's language features from 10 types. The data was taken from the *Bridgerton series*; the background of the series is in 1813, which is 162 years away from the background of the movie and the theory proposed by Lakoff. This theory is still relevant when compared to the background of the year taken in the movie.

Times have changed, and the movement for women's emancipation has been vocalized. Lakoff's theory might not be relevant to today's women's situations. The movement for women's liberation in choosing what they want and equal equality in gender resulted in three waves of movement called waves of feminism. Derived from the Latin word "Femina," which means "woman," the term "feminism" was initially applied to the women's rights movement and equality (Raina, 2017). In one of its movements, feminist figures fought for women's rights in politics, education, and economics. Not only in the fields mentioned above but also in a book entitled *je, tu, nous*, one of the feminist figures from France, Luce Irigaray, is said that women have a lower position than men in the field of linguistics. Irigaray concentrates on French since it is recognized that French has a grammatical genre in which every object is assigned a masculine and feminine gender. According to Irigaray, the masculine gender is always dominant in syntax, and items regarded as less powerful study are feminine. Differences between men's and women's discourses are thus the effects of language in society, society in language. You cannot change one without changing the other (Irigaray, 1993).

This research is trying to find if there is any possibility of the change of woman's language through the movie, in the article entitled *Lakoff and Women's Language: A Critical Overview of the Empirical Evidence for Lakoff's Thesis* by Svendsen (2019). In her research, Svendsen compared the theory that Lakoff explained in her book with other researchers such as

'Lakoff defines tag questions as being 'midway between an outright statement and a yes-no question: it is less assertive than the former, but more confident than the latter' while Holmes expressed his thoughts on the tag question, 'all tag questions function as devices for eliciting a response from the addressee by virtue of their interrogative form' (Holmes, 1984). Thus, tag questions are not necessarily expressions of insecurity or uncertainty (Svendsen, 2019).

Al-Duleimi (et al., 2016) stated on their research entitled *A Critical of Prominent Theories of Politeness*. This research highlights the strong and weakness of the theory between

three scholars namely Brown and Levinson's (1978), as well as its revised version (1987), Lakoff's (2004), and Leech's (1983, 2005) of their theory of politeness. The conclusion about Lakoff's theory of politeness is 'the paper has also showed that Lakoff's (1973, 1975) theory of politeness seems confusing and is not integral on the basis that it may not meet the demands of politeness as a universal phenomenon. This may be attributed to the use of the confusing terms and the limited number of rules in expressing politeness.'

Another research chooses the same theory as before for their research by Hibah (2022) entitled "Women's Language Features Used by Female Characters in *Paradise Hills* Movie". This research applied a descriptive qualitative approach to analyzing the data. This research just focuses on the female characters and the five characters selected by it. The researcher also applied the theory by Judy C. Pearson (1985) to find out the functions of women's language features. The researcher found eight types of women's language features from 10 types. This research suggests that relevant theories should be used today to support the language used by women in modern culture.

The previous research has argued that Lakoff's theory of women's language is too rigid because it is too dominant towards women and does not take into account other aspects, and that it may no longer be relevant to today's changing culture and social society, because language and culture are inseparable and even attached to each other. Culture can stand alone but language cannot stand without culture. In a book entitled *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* by Wardhaugh (2006) Sapir, an American linguist, argues that there is a close relationship between language and culture and the two are closely related, we cannot understand one without knowing the other. This is also expanded by the hypothesis of his own student, Whorf, who stated that the relationship between language and culture is not only a tendency but has a deterministic relationship. This is also the basis why Lakoff's theory cannot be applied thoroughly to cultures that are different from the country where she came from, United States. The changing times also affect the validity of the theory, cultural shifts and the development of the times as well as the

development of a very vocal feminism movement make there a shift or even the theory put forward by Lakoff is no longer relevant when viewed from the above factors.

METHOD

The method of research explains how to collect the data, analyze it, and explain the data to answer the problem. There are four points of method research that can be found to examine the object of the method in determining the data sources, collecting data, analyzing data, and presenting the data result of the analysis. This research used a descriptive qualitative method. According to Creswell (2014), the qualitative method is a technique for exploring, which means describing a human problem. The researcher found data from three movies with different years of backgrounds: *On the Basis of Sex* (2019), *Nine to Five* (1980) and *Bombshell* (2019). To find the data, the researcher used the Lakoff theory as a foundation or guideline for the data in the three movies.

Data collection was a process of collecting data from the data sources. The method used were observation (watching) and note taking. The data were collected by watching the movies and noting the conversations with the scripts. The dialogue and subtitles in the three movies were compared to make the data more accurate. The data that were considered to be a type of Lakoff's theory is bolded. The research data comprised linguistic units such as words, phrases, and sentences.

After the data were collected, then they were analyzed. They were analyzed according to the types of women's language features. This research has used a qualitative descriptive method. According to Lakoff's theory, the researcher analyzed the data collected from the three movies. The researcher compared the data from the three movies to see if there were any differences or shifts from Lakoff's theory from three different year background movies.

The last step is to present the result analysis. The result of the data was presented by using the table.

DISCUSSION

Lexical Hedge or Fillers

Hedge is a word or phrase used in a sentence to suggest ambiguity, likelihood,

caution, or indecision concerning the rest of the sentence, as opposed to full accuracy, assurance, confidence, or decisiveness. According to Lakoff (2004), kind a/ kind of is the express of lexical hedges or fillers the other example of lexical hedges is: *I think, it seems like, I guess, may, can, well, perhaps and believe*. Tamulis (2017) states that filler is a word or sound used by one person in a discussion to indicate to another that there is a pause, a hesitation, a transition, or even just a placeholder. Women are said often used a filler than a man, they used a filler with the flow and beat sound, for example: *uh, hm, and oh*.

Data 1 (scene 00:37:23-00:37:35) from *On the Basis of Sex* movie.

Jane : "**You know what**, Mom? If you want to sit around with your students and talk about how shitty it is to be a girl ..."

Martin : "Hey. Language."

Jane : "But don't pretend it's a movement, okay? It's not a movement if everyone's just sitting. That's a support group."

The conversation is between Ruth and Jane. Ruth had just finished teaching and took over cooking in the kitchen from Jane. Ruth chatted for a while and remembered that she had gotten a call from Jane's school. Ruth called Jane and told her about it. Ruth asked Jane why she faked her attendance in class when she was not at school. Jane admitted it and said that she was in town to see Gloria Steinem, an author and activist. Ruth was worried that Jane would get into trouble because of what she was watching and the risk of getting caught. Jane did not listen to her mother and started the class; she used the lexical hedge '*you know*' in her answer. The word is used by Jane to reinforce her opinion about what she is talking about. '*You know*' can be used in a variety of settings to appropriately highlight a sentence because it is a syntactically mobile word.

Tag Question

Tag questions are questions attached to an utterance. Tag questions are properly described as grammatical structures in which a declarative is followed by an attached interrogative clause, or 'tag'. According to Lakoff (2004), women

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have a tendency to transform a statement into a question in order to decrease its impact. The tag question is used when the speaker is unsure about the issue. The tag question includes: *do not you? have not we? did you?* and *is not it?*

Data 2 (scene 00:58:11-00:58:22) from *On the Basis of Sex* movie.

Ruth : "Protests are important, but changing the culture means nothing if the law doesn't change. As a lawyer, you must believe that"

Kenyon : "Let me guess, you're a professor, **aren't you?**"

The conversation between Ruth and Kenyon. Jane and Ruth are on their way to meet Kenyon, a renowned legal expert. Ruth wanted to ask him for an opinion on her case. They accidentally bumped into Kenyon in front of his office. With a straight face, Kenyon saw Jane and Ruth standing awkwardly before him. Kenyon asked Ruth straight to the point what she wanted. Ruth nervously replied that she wanted to see Kenyon. Kenyon quickly responded that he didn't have time to deal with Ruth. Ruth explained what case she was working on, exchanging thoughts. They had a bit of a debate. At the end of their discussion, Kenyon asked Ruth the tag question, '*aren't you?*' The form of the tag question itself is auxiliary + n't + subject. Kenyon used the tag question to confirm whether Ruth was a lecturer. Although, judging from the scene in the movie, Kenyon already knows Ruth is a lecturer.

Data 3 (scene 00:50:00-00:50:12) from *Bombshell* movie.

Sean : "Gretchen, you've been such an instrumental part of the Fox family."

Dean : "Absolutely"

Sean : "We just wanted to tell you that we appreciated the work..."

Gretchen : "He is firing me, **isn't he?**"

Lawyer : "Yes."

The data was obtained from the above conversation between Sean, Dean, and Gretchen. In the conversation above, the woman language feature is the tag question used by Gretchen. In the meeting room on the

second floor, Gretchen, Sean, and Dean sat opposite each other to discuss the continuation of Gretchen's career. Sean opened the conversation by saying that Gretchen was an important part of the Fox family, and then he continued his sentence by saying he appreciated Gretchen's work. He has not yet finished saying his sentence. Gretchen interrupted him by saying that Roger fired her. In this statement, Gretchen used the question tag '*isn't it?*'. In the question tag, the form used is auxiliary +n't + subject. In the sentence used by Gretchen, the question tag serves to reduce the pressure of the statement sentence she made earlier by slowing down and lowering her tone.

Rising Intonation on Declarative

Declarative refers to something that provides clarification, releases information, or represents an official declaration. Declarative sentence usually used to make an announcement or statement. Meanwhile, rising intonation is ascending voice at the end of the sentence. Lakoff (2004) argues that rising intonation in the declarative form is used to answer typical of a yes- no question, as well being hesitant. People employ rising intonation to confirm or ask a question. Another example of rising intonation is when someone expresses uncertainty or doubt, yet they have not.

Data 4 (scene 00:58:34-00:58:57) from *Bombshell* movie.

Gil : "Look, there is a reason certain woman can defend Roger."

Megyn : "If I report this and it leaks, it will follow me for the rest of my career. I don't wanna be defined by Roger's bullshit. **I refuse to be the fucking poster girl for sexual harassment. He can't still be doing that crap, right?** I mean man has a walker."

Gil : "Viagra?"

The data took on Megyn and Gil's utterances. The conversation took place when Gil and Megyn were talking alone in the auditor's room after hearing Gretchen's dismissal from Fox News. Megyn was so upset over all the comments directed at Gretchen. Gretchen, who was fired, then sued Roger for

sexual harassment. All the nasty comments on the internet made Megyn even more upset after finding out that those who wrote the comments had been paid by Roger. Gil wanted to talk to Megyn after seeing why she was so angry with Roger. Megyn told him that she had been harassed by Roger, but she was unable to tell him or report it because of her job. But she also could not stay silent about it in the line, *'I refuse to be the fucking poster girl for sexual harassment. He can't still be doing that crap, right?'* Megyn uses rising intonation on declarative to answer Gil's question. The reason for the rising intonation on declarative of Megyn's words is that she is still unsure or guessing what will happen next if she reports Roger. In addition, she also wanted to find an answer from Gil about the attitude of Roger, by using an interrogative sentence at the end of Megyn's sentence.

Empty Adjective

Adjectives are words used to characterize something or someone. They frequently appear immediately before what they are discussing. According to Lakoff (2004), empty adjectives communicate approval based on personal emotions rather than predicting a broad reaction. Instead of providing particular facts, women use empty adjectives to communicate their emotional reactions. Lakoff says that many adjectives used to express approbation or admiration are highly designated as feminine. Words such as: *great, terrific, cool, neat* defined as a neutral word in other hand *adorable, charming, sweet, lovely* defined as a women-only word. Women has a chance to choose between of them, but a man has not.

Data 5 (scene 00:15:38-00:15:43) From Nine to Five movie.

Missy : "Well, how are you?"

Doralee : "I'm fine, and you?"

Missy : "What a **lovely** scarf."

Doralee : "It's a present from your husband."

The utterance is found in Doralee and Missy's dialogue. The data found is one of the woman language features, namely empty adjectives. In the conversation, Missy came to Mr. Harts' office to meet him because she wanted to talk about their vacation on the yacht

for 4 months. Mr. Harts, who saw Missy coming to his office, was not happy and told her that he did not like it. Missy didn't answer Mr. Harts because she was distracted when she saw Doralee standing next to her. Doralee is holding the scarf that Mr. Harts gave her. Missy used the empty adjective as an expression of admiration; she also used the empty adjective for the second time, *'adorable'*, when she asked Doralee to wear the scarf around her neck. The empty adjective was used by Missy to express the beauty of the scarf and Doralee herself.

Intensifiers

Intensifiers are used by both women and men, but women more often used it Lakoff (1975). Intensifiers are used to either reduce or boost the intensity of a speaker's phrases. The usage of 'so' has since been considered as a boosting tactic, similar to 'very'. Intensifiers are effective at conveying a clear message. Intensifiers are words, particularly adverbs or adjectives, with little meaning in themselves. However, it is employed to force the employment of another adjective, verb, or adverb, such as: *so, very, extremely, absolutely, and completely*.

Data 6 (scene 00:36:03-00:36:14) From On the Basis of Sex movie.

Martin : "How's this year's class?"

Ruth : "Oh, these kids are **so** passionate. To them it's about more than precedents and dissents. They wanna forge a movement."

Martin : "That's great."

The utterance is found in Ruth and Martin dialogue. Intensifiers are one of the types found in this movie. The above conversation took place between Martin and Ruth. They are both chatting in the kitchen and talking about how Ruth's day at university went. Ruth sighed and turned to Martin and said *'Oh, these kids are so passionate. To them it's about more than precedents and dissents. They want to forge a movement'*. She smiled. In Ruth's words she uses

'so' intensifiers which are used to express her enthusiasm because the students in her class are passionate and even want to create a movement. Intensifiers in Ruth's sentence

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function as expressing emotion and feeling such as exaggeration.

Data 7 (scene 1:39:19-1:39:24) from *Nine to Five* movie.

Judy : “Sir, it’s working **very** nicely.”

Doralee : “Less absenteeism. People **really** like it.”

Mr. Harts : “Oh, do they? Well, I hate it, and what I say goes.”

The utterance is found in the Doralee, Mr. Harts, and Judy dialogue. The conversation takes place in the office when Mr. Harts returns to work. The three of them walked together to the main office, where Mr. Harts' absence made Doralee, Judy and Violet change all the rules that they considered burdensome. They also created a new program to make their work easier, changing the gloomy office atmosphere into a more colourful one, and a policy that made workers have equal rights and facilities for mothers to have a place to take care of their children while at work. Mr. Harts was, of course, not happy about it, but Doralee and Judy replied that the changed rules made the employees very happy. In their speech, Doralee and Judy use intensifiers '*very*' and '*really*'. The purpose of these types is to increase the intensity of the word and also to make the other person understand and get the point of what we are talking about.

Super Polite Forms

Lakoff (2004) emphasize super polite forms into three things following: avoidance of swearing words, extensive use of euphemism (when a word becomes associated with anything unpleasant or embarrassing, individuals may seek for euphemisms to avoid the discomfort) using more particles in a request sentence.

Data 8 (scene 01:28:12- 01:28:21) from *On the Basis of Sex* movie.

Jane : “So, **would you like** help taking apart your life’s work or is that something you’d rather do by yourself?”

The conversation was between Jane and Ruth. After talking to Martin Ruth went to her room and looked at her planning board which

had many letters and documents that she had studied later for the trial, but she pulled them out one by one reluctantly. Jane came into her mother's room and spoke softly '*So, **would you like help taking apart your life's work or is that something you'd rather do by yourself?***' the bolded text was one of the woman's language features, super polite forms. Ruth smiled at Jane who was standing by the door looking at her softly. The use of super polite forms used by Jane to soften her words, seeing Ruth who was in a bad state. Super polite forms are usually found in request sentences.

Data 9 (scene 1:35:55-1:36:24) from *Nine to Five* movie.

Missy : “Operator? Uh, good morning. Uh, **would you** find a number for me, **please?**”

Doralee : “Hello?”

Missy : “Doralee, this is Missy Harts. Frank told me never to call anybody at office, but I just it’s okay so I’m calling you at home. I just wanted to thank you.”

Super polite forms are found in Missy's dialog with the telephone operator. This conversation took place on the balcony of the hotel that Mr. Harts had booked for Missy after she returned from her cruise vacation. Missy is busy waiting for an answer from the company's staff. She was calling to ask for Doralee's phone number. During the conversation between the company staff and Missy, Missy uses super polite forms to ask if she can get Doralee's phone number. The use of super polite forms is to respect and soften words for the interlocutor. Missy and the company staff also do not know each other, so she uses super polite forms.

Avoidance Strong Swear Words

Women hardly use harsh words or swear words compared to men, this is based on society's assumption that women should be gentle and graceful and not be rude. When women are angry, they tend to control their emotion and think about what they want to say. They do not want to hurt the partner and maintain their image. Instead of saying 'shit' or 'damn' they prefer to use words 'oh dear',

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'goodness' and 'oh fudge' Lakoff (2004), for example:

- a. Oh dear, you have to put peanut butter in refrigerator.
- b. Shit, you have to put peanut butter in refrigerator.

Data 10 (scene 00:04:11-00:04:18) from Bombshell movie.

Rebekah : "Dump the B-roll."

Staff : "Dump it, dump it."

Rebekah : "Back to anchor. That's not Glenn Frey, that's Don fucking Henley!"

Kayla : "Oh, shoot."

The control room is where this conversation took place. In the conversation above, one of the woman's language features was found, namely the avoidance of strong swear words. Shoot is a pun on 'shit'. Shit is a frequently used colloquial term that can imply "poop," "crap," or it can be used as an expressive exclamation that roughly translates to "oh no." The use of the word 'shoot' itself is to soften the actual word so as not to sound too harsh to the interlocutor. During the news broadcast, Roger called to the first floor when he saw that the picture shown did not match the person mentioned. Rebekah immediately told her staff to change the photo and told the anchor to correct the mistake. Rebekah turned to Kayla, Kayla used the word 'shoot' to avoid strong swear words because she was working and she was talking to her seniors, and she also made a mistake because she put the wrong face picture to be displayed because she did not know the band in the 70s.

Data 11 (scene 00:49:30-00:49:57) from Nine to Five movie.

Mr. Harts : "Now, you listen to me. Ajax is my deal. So, you get your money when I give it to you and don't ever call me at this number again. Jerk. Doralee, Doralee!"

Doralee : "Oh, my **goodness**. Oh, no Mr. Harts."

The conversation is taken from Mr. Harts and Doralee's dialogue. Mr. Harts was on the phone with someone to confirm that Ajax was the deal. Mr. Harts, who was on the phone, felt

that something was wrong with the chair he was using, and moments later the chair collapsed and caused Mr. Harts to fall to the floor. Doralee, who was outside, heard Mr. Harts calling her. She rushed to Mr. Harts room and found that her boss had fallen to the floor. Doralee was shocked and said, 'Oh, my goodness. Oh, no Mr. Harts', as she was surprised to see Mr. Harts. Doralee uses avoidance strong swear words because she is still in the office environment and the words are directed at Mr. Harts who is her own boss, so she uses the word to soften her words.

Emphatic Stress

Lakoff (2004) states that Emphatic stress is a term to emphasize the most important word in a speaker's statement. Women use this trait to communicate their hesitation about how they express themselves. Women utilize this characteristic to accentuate and strengthen their speech, or to express more stress. It happens when a woman wants to make a stronger statement.

Data 12 (scene 1:26:39-1:26:48) from On the Basis of Sex movie.

Ruth : "We could have started a special project at the ACLU to go after those laws one by one, in the legislature, in the courts, until women and men were **genuinely equal under the law.**"

The woman's language feature found in the above conversation is emphatic stress. The above conversation took place between Ruth and Martin. Ruth's least favorite thing happened when she met with Melvin, she thought she would get important news but instead the news that Ruth could not be Mr. Moritz's lawyer later during the trial. She was upset and discussed this with Martin. While holding a glass of wine Ruth explains her thoughts that she really wanted this case to be taken by her in the sentence 'We could have started a special project at the ACLU to go after those laws one by one, in the legislature, in the courts, until women and men were **genuinely equal under the law**' The bolded text uses emphatic stress as a sign that Ruth is emphasizing the purpose of why she is so adamant about taking the case. It

also marks the rising pitch of the voice as a sign of the urgency or importance of Ruth's words.

Data 13 (scene 00:45:50-00:46:06) from Bombshell movie.

Gil : "Look. For the record ..."

Megyn : "No. you know what? It's been a shitty year! Really fucking shitty year, **and I'm allowed to want it over.**"

Gil : "You are."

Megyn : "Fuck."

The data above was obtained from a conversation between Gil and Megyn. Megyn uses one of the woman's language features, which is emphatic stress. It is found in the sentence, '*No. you know what? It's been a shitty year! Really fucking shitty year, and I'm allowed to want it over.*' Megyn used emphatic stress to express her feelings after talking to Doug. She was really upset with Doug's take on the interview that had just taken place and asked what Megyn had at stake for the interview. When Gil enters the room, Megyn expresses her anger by using emphatic stress in the sentence '*and I'm allowed to want it over*' because Megyn is angry and wants it all to end so much that she emphasizes the sentence to mark the important sentence in her speech.

CONCLUSION

This research found changes in women's language features over the years. The data shows a reduction in the number of types found. A significant reduction is seen in the types of rising intonation on declarative, empty adjective, and super polite forms. The total of all kinds found from each year also decreased, and the least was found in 2010. This shows that the features of women's language proposed by Lakoff have changed. Another finding that corroborates this is demonstrated when female characters in the two films show the use of swear words in specific contexts. In women's language features proposed by Lakoff, there is a type of avoidance of strong swear words where it is said that women are more careful in using swear words; they prefer to use words that

sound gentle and graceful. Another finding that corroborates this is when female characters in the two films use swear words in certain contexts, whether in daily conversation, self-defense, or expressing emotion. In women's language features proposed by Lakoff, there is a type of avoidance of strong swear words, where it is said that women are more careful in using swear words; they prefer to use words that sound gentle and graceful.

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