

The Use of Women's Language Features in March Family with References "Little Women" Movie

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Abstract--This study aimed to identify the types of women's language features used in Little Women Movie using the theory proposed by Lakoff (2004) and explain the reason of women characters used each women's language features based on the theory by Holmes (2022). The data source is a movie entitled Little Women, which was released on February 7, 2020. Documentation and note-taking method were applied in order to collect the data. The descriptive qualitative method was used in analyzing the data since the data were analyzed in the form of sentences and paragraphs. This study's analysis was conveyed formally and informally. An informal method presented the analysis in paragraph form. Whereas, the formal method presents the analysis through symbols and some figures of the movie scene. The results showed all women's language features based on Lakoff (2004) found in this movie. Those are fillers and hedges, tag questions, rising intonation, empty adjectives, intensifiers, hypercorrect grammar, 'superpolite' forms, avoidance of strong swear words, and emphatic stress. Meanwhile, the reasons women talk using women's language features mentioned by Holmes (2022) were also found in the women characters, including social conscious, woman's role as guardians of society's values, and subordinate group.

Keywords— *Language and Gender, Women's Language Features, Little Women.*

Abstrak--Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi fitur-fitur bahasa wanita yang digunakan dalam film Little Women dengan menggunakan teori yang dikemukakan oleh Lakoff (2004) dan untuk menjelaskan alasan karakter wanita menggunakan setiap fitur bahasa wanita berdasarkan teori dari Holmes (2022). Sumber data pada penelitian ini adalah film berjudul Little women yang dirilis pada tanggal 7 Februari 2020. Metode dokumentasi dan pencatatan diterapkan untuk mengumpulkan data. Metode deskripsi kualitatif digunakan dalam menganalisis data dimana data dianalisis dalam bentuk kalimat dan paragraf. Analisis penelitian ini disajikan dengan menggunakan metode formal dan informal. Metode informal menyajikan analisis dalam bentuk paragraf. Sedangkan, metode informal menyajikan analisis melalui simbol-simbol dan beberapa gambar adegan film. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa semua fitur bahasa wanita berdasarkan teori Lakoff (2004) ditemukan dalam film ini, yaitu fillers and hedges, tag questions, rising intonation, empty adjectives, intensifiers, hypercorrect grammar, 'superpolite' forms, avoidance of strong swear words, and emphatic stress. Sedangkan, alasan perempuan berbicara menggunakan fitur bahasa wanita seperti yang disebutkan oleh Homes (2022) juga ditemukan pada karakter wanita, diantaranya adalah social conscious, woman's role as guardian of society's values, and subordinate group.

Kata Kunci— *Bahasa dan Gender, Fitur Bahasa Wanita, Little Women.*

1. Introduction

Language is a system of common, spoken, or written signs that people use to communicate. It has a significant impact on human life due to its function as a communication tool. Sociolinguistics is the study of language in relation to social context. Holmes (2022) stated that sociolinguistics examines not only the relationship between language and society, but also language usage in multilingual communities. Gender is an important topic in sociolinguistics, which examines how language patterns, vocabulary, and usage influence men and women's social roles. The study of how men and women's linguistic preferences are intertwined known as "Language and Gender."

Since men and women use language in vastly different ways, women's language has become a crucial component. The social and cultural explanations for differing voice pitches result in major disparities in men's and women's language. Men prefer to speak in a low-pitched tone to convey confidence and authority. Women, on the other hand, utilize high-pitched voices to signify their feminine demeanor. Lakoff (2004) in his book *Language and Women's Place: Text and Commentaries* stated that men are described to speak more firmly, mature and on point. In contrast, women are taught to often use figurative language and refined, polite language frequently. Women are less powerful than man in society. Consequently, their existence within a particular culture must always adhere to the established rules and regulations. In order to emphasize the gender perspective, Lakoff proposed the term women's language features. Lakoff (2004) claims there are ten women's language features that women use to differ their speech from men's. Those features are lexical hedges or fillers, tag questions, rising intonation on declaratives, 'empty' adjectives, precise color terms, intensifiers, hypercorrect grammar, 'superpolite' forms, avoidance of strong swear words, and emphatic stress. On the other hand, there is an additional explanation for why women use language features when communicating with others. Holmes (2022: 232-

234) claims that there are three reasons women utilize the women's language features when speaking. Firstly, it appeals to social status. Secondly, it refers to women's role in society as guardian, and lastly its related to women as a subordinate group.

Most woman nowadays choose to speak rudely, which is affected by environmental and social factors. Instead of using polite language, they typically convey their emotions with harsh language. However, not all women communicate harshly. The environment influences women to adopt polite words rather than harsh language. Women also desire a strong personal identity to ensure they are not undervalued by society and are viewed as woman of high social status. A woman's status in society is occasionally determined by the way she speaks and the words she chooses. This occurrence provided evidence that women had made progress toward the gender equality they seek, granting them the same rights to positions of power and influence as men.

As it relates to gender variance, women's language is a particularly interesting issue to study. This topic was chosen because both men and women language phenomena are prevalent in daily life. One of the reflections can be illustrated by a movie. Through their situations and dialogues, movies are one of the media that communicate moral and social values to society. Since many movies are reflections of reality, the lives of individuals can also be reflected in them. Based on these phenomena, this study investigated the women's language features in Little Women Movie by employing Lakoff's (2004) theory and Holmes's (2022) theory to explain why the women characters use these language features.

In addition to this, several previous analysis done by Putra (2019) aimed to find out the female and male language features of female and male judges in America's Got Talent 2018. This descriptive qualitative study was used the main theory proposed by Lakoff (2004). The result shows the female judges only used six out of ten women's language features. Meanwhile, there are

three language features of men are found in this study. This undergraduate objective has the same relevance as the present undergraduate thesis, which analyses the features of women's language using the same theory proposed by Lakoff (2004). An undergraduate thesis was done by Karjo et.al., (2020) aimed to find out the language features and dissimilar features between men and women beauty influencers also the distinction of comments from their audience. This study used the theory proposed by Lakoff (2004) to analyse the language features between men and women beauty influencers. The finding reveals that even when talking about the same issue, men and women use language in distinctive ways. Furthermore, both male and female share similar language features. Although both genders are share some features but male and female beauty influencers highlighted specific features in their speech.

An international article conducted by Chandra et.al., (2018) purpose to examine how Nicki Minaj language in American Idol Season 12 relates to women's language features and the possible factors. The result reveals that only five features were found in Nicki Minaj's comments and there are four possible factors can account for the absence of these features. The article was done by Andriani et al., (2018) seeks to discover and explain women's linguistic features which found in Summer McKeen's vlogs. The main theory in this article was the theory proposed by Lakoff (1975). The result shows all of women's language features were found in Summer McKeen's vlogs. The study conducted by Wardhana et al., (2023) goals to find out the women's linguistic features in Crazy Rich Asians Movie. This qualitative study applied the theory of language and women's place developed by Lakoff's (2004) The result findings indicate that Crazy Rich Asians Movies includes all sorts of women's language features. The study was done by Sanjaya et al., (2018) aims to find out the types of women's language features which found in The Nanny Diaries Movie, also to analyze the function of each type of women language features. This study utilized Lakoff's (1973) primary theory as

well as Halliday's (1989) supporting theory. The result represents that there are six types from the six types of women's language feature found in the movie. Furthermore, some functions of women's language characteristics found in the data are closely related to the context in which they are used. An undergraduate thesis was done by Retiningrum (2020) aimed to analyze the features of women's language and also the functions of those features. The result showed only nine out of ten types are found in the movie. Meanwhile, the functions of those types are to weaken and strengthen. Using the same theory proposed by Lakoff, the previous study is relevant to the current study since it focuses on how to study the features of women's language. The final article under consideration was written by Susanti et al., (2018) focused on identify and analyze types of women's language features also the function which applied by women characters in the movie. The qualitative article concludes that there are nine characteristics of women's language found in 12 conversations. The functions of each feature are, to show women uncertain, to get a response from the addressee, seek for confirmation, to show the admiration for something, to show specific interest, to strengthen the statement, to show politeness, to show their gratitude, and to show women's feeling about something.

Even though some previous studies regarding this topic have been done previously, the current study is distinctive since the problem being explored is different. Lakoff (2004) argues that the difference in how men and women present the same conversational topic is a reflection on their respective social positions. In addition, she explains the primary causes why women employ women's language features in their speech. The reasons including in social class, woman's role as guardians of society, and subordinate group. Women are expected to act as role models in society, hence they tend to utilize standard forms. By using standard forms in communication, it indicates that women use polite language. Therefore, it is believed that this study is relevant

to the present because it enriches the linguistic knowledge of women's language.

2. Research Method

This section includes four points, those are data source, method and technique of collecting data, method and technique of analysing data, and method and technique of presenting analysis. The qualitative research method was used since all the data consisted of words and sentences rather than numbers. "Little Women" was the source of data for this study which directed by Greta Gerwig. The primary data was from the original source, which is a movie. Meanwhile, the secondary data was collected from a transcript of the movie. The movie can be viewed on the official Netflix website. This movie was selected because it is engaging and has a singular focus on the language perspective of women. The movie provides an overview of the lives of women who can do what men typically do, including being independent person and working consistently to support their families.

The data was collected using two methods, namely documentation and note-taking. The data was the utterances in the form of words, phrases, clauses, or sentences that includes women's linguistic features. There are several steps to collect the data. Firstly, download the movie and the transcript of Little Women on the website named Netflix. The second step was watch and listen the movie intensively. Thirdly, check the movie script to ensure it is appropriate for the utterance. Then underline the important information and make a note of the data. Lastly, identify and categorize the data that comprise the language features of women.

A qualitative descriptive method was used to analyze the data. Creswell (2018:148) states qualitative research is a method for investigating and comprehending the meaning that individuals or group give to social or human situations. Several steps were taken to analyse the data. The process began with a list of utterances that contained women's language features, followed by

categorizing using a checklist mark on the observation table. The last step consisted of identifying and explaining the chosen data in light of the relevant theory.

This study's analysis results were presented formally and informally. According to Sudaryanto (2015), in presenting the data analysis, there are two types of methods, which are informal and formal. According to him, the informal method emphasizes the presentation of data using words and sentences. In contrast, the formal method demonstrates the analysis through the use of diagrams, tables, and symbols. The analysis offered in paragraph format with descriptive explanation indicates that an informal method was applied in this part. In addition, formal methods are employed because the analysis is supported by a number of figures. The figures offered an image of a movie scene that included the women's characters utterances.

3. Result and Discussion

This section includes the findings and discussions of the data from Little Women Movie which has been analyzed using theory proposed by Lakoff and Holmes.

3.1 Result

In accordance with the theory proposed by Lakoff (2004), the results indicated that Little Women Movie contains all of women's language features. Those features are lexical hedges, tag questions, rising intonation, empty adjectives, precise color terms, intensifiers, hypercorrect grammar, superpolite forms, avoidance of strong swear words, and emphatic stress. In addition, all of the reasons stated by Holmes (2022) such as social conscious, woman's role as guardian of society's value, and subordinate group, were also presented by the women characters.

3.2. Discussion

1. Lexical Hedge or Fillers

Lakoff (2004) believed when women are unsure of how to respond to a remark,

inquiry, or even their own statement, they will utilize lexical hedges to signal their doubt. This feature also known as pauses, take the shape of phrases, or filler to show lack of confidence or incomplete information.



Amy : “I believe we have some power over who we love. It isn’t something that just happens to a person.”

Laurie : “I think the poets might disagree.”

Amy : “**Well.** I’m not a poet. I’m just a woman. And as a woman, there’s no way for me to make my own money.”

According to Lakoff (2004) the word “well” was identified as a filler which are meaningless particles that allows women a moment to consider their next words. Amy gives a pause in the form of words to indicate that the Laurie’s statement is not wholly accurate. It was demonstrated that hedges and fillers are pause-shaped words used in conversations to occupy pauses between breaths, indicating that incompletely precise information or uncertainty. Since the women character uses the standard form in conversation, her language feature reflects social consciousness.

2. Tag Questions

Lakoff (2004) believed that women have a tendency to rephrase a statement into a question in order to reduce the force of the statement. Tag questions are followed by an

interrogative tag such as “isn’t it?”, “don’t you”, “do you?”, “ all right?”, and so on.



Amy : “I have lots of wishes, but my favorite one is to be an artist in Paris and to do fine pictures and to be the best painter in the world.”

Beth : “That’s what you want too, **isn’t it, Jo?** Be a famous writer?”

Based on the preceding discussions, the word “isn’t it” can be identified as tag questions. Beth used the question tag “isn’t it” to ensure that her statement was correct. Tag question reflected by Beth can be categorized into subordinate group because she used the question tag that conforms to the standard form of communication. Furthermore, she asked the question politely and without using harsh words. In the sense that a woman must be polite and avoid offending the other person, the tag question feature belongs to the subordinate group.

3. Rising Intonation

Lakoff (2004) stated rising intonation on declarative is associated with this specific use of a grammatical rule, which causes a noticeable variation in women’s pattern. Women usually use rising intonation when making a statement to make sure the information is correct and to get a response from the others.



Amy : “No, no, she wants me to go. As her companion.”

Jo : “Europe, **with you?**”

Amy : “Yes, she wants me to work on my art and my French, of course.”

Based on the conversation above, Jo questioned Amy’s declaration and inquired about the accuracy of the earlier statement. The words “with you?” can be identified as a rising intonation since the woman character stated them with a rising intonation. Jo employs this language feature because she was uncertain about Amy’s statement and desired confirmation regarding the accuracy of the information. The use of rising intonation is included the social conscious because women who are more status conscious believe that their speech reflects their social class background. Jo used this women’s language feature to assert that she deserved to travel to Europe. Nonetheless, her sister will truly be attending, which she conceals by employing this feature of women’s language.

4. Empty Adjective

Empty adjectives express the admiration of the speaker for something (Lakoff, 2004: 25). This feature also illustrates the connection between an emotional expression and the addressee.



Amy : “Oh, Beth!”

Meg : “So **sweet**. ‘Your humble servant.’”
Mr. Laurence presented Beth with a piano containing a letter as a present. Her sisters were extremely fascinated of the letter’s romantic tone. Meg’s use of the adjective “sweet” is a feature of women’s language known as an empty adjective. Through this language feature, Meg expressed her emotional reaction to the contents of Mr. Laurence’s letter. The use of empty adjective is included in the subordinate group in which the woman character applies polite word adjectives. She speaks politely and without causing offense to others.

5. Precise Color Terms

Lakoff (2004) claimed that women discriminate more precisely in naming colors than men. This feature indicates that women have natural understanding of naming colors in their minds and have greater vocabularies.



Meg : “Yes.”

Amy : “It has **gold** that goes all the way around the back.”

Mr. Laurence surprised Beth with a piano gift. Amy was also impressed to see Mr. Laurence’s antique piano. The color on the back of the old piano made it shine even brighter, which stunned her. Amy’s use of the word “gold” can be identified as Precise Color Terms. Amy used this feature since women frequently provide color information while naming terms. In this case, the woman character used the word gold to describe color details in which gold is a bright yellow in general term of color.

Because society expects better behavior and attitudes from women, the precise color terms were incorporated in the woman as guardians of society. In addition, the women character's use of this feature reflects the fact that women possess nature knowledge in their minds. It has been demonstrated that women are role models for society and their descendants in the future.

6. Intensifiers

Lakoff (2004) similar to tag questions, using intensifiers appears to be a way of avoiding making strong commitment to a position. This feature has the function of strengthens words with diverse things or specialties to express or exaggerate.



Amy : "I am the most sorry for it now. I'm **so** sorry."

Amy apologized to Jo because she had already burned the book that contained Jo's narrative. The word "so" in Amy's statement indicates that she employed women's language feature namely intensifiers. Consequently, 'so' has acquired importance as a boosting word. The use of intensifiers so demonstrates her desire to emphasize the word sorry. Moreover, the woman character desired to convey an emotive message to Jo through this feature because she regretted burning the book containing Jo's story. Since the women character apologized politely, the intensifiers feature was included in the subordinate group. As subordinate group,

women are typically expected to behave and communicate politely and carefully.

7. Hypercorrect Grammar

Lakoff (2004) stated that Hypercorrect Grammar is the consistent use of standard verb forms since women are not supposed to talk rough. Women tend to use more grammatical standard form in every social class while men tend to use more vernacular form.



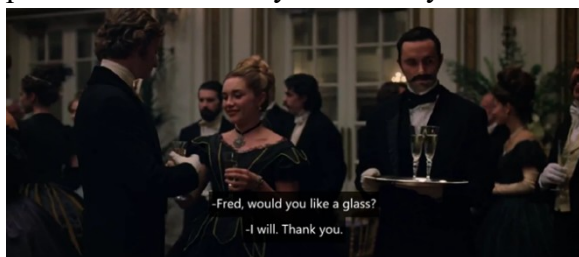
Meg : "Jo, we're **going to** be late."

Amy : "Where are you going?"

The conversation occurred as Meg prepared to go to the theatre. She appeared anxious and worried arriving late to the theatre. One of the features of women's language that is referred to as hypercorrect grammar is the use of the word "going to", which was mentioned in the preceding conversation. Lakoff (2004) stated that hypercorrect grammar involves avoidance of terms considered vulgar or coarse. Meg intends to be more polite by using the words "going to" instead of "gonna" in the statement. In this situation, the hypercorrect grammar feature is classified as a subordinate group because Meg avoids using harsh phrases to demonstrate politeness. Women in the subordinate group are supposed to talk politely, hence they tend to employ the standard version of the language.

8. Superpolite Forms

According to Lakoff (2004:77) claims that women's speech differs from men's in that women are more polite, which is precisely as it should be since women are the preservers of morality and civility.



Amy: **“Fred, would you like a glass?”**

Fred Vaughn : “I will. Thank you.”

At that moment, Amy offered Fred a drink, which he accepted the offer and then took it from Amy. The utterance which uttered by Amy can be identified as ‘Superpolite’ Forms. Women typically used this feature to demonstrate their gender by speaking politely to give the impression that they were more concerned with their behavior. The addition of “would” enhances the politeness of an offer. As the woman character used standard forms and spoke politely, the use of superpolite forms is classified as a subordinate group. Women are more likely to use polite language in order to preserve their “face”. This term refers to an individual's efforts to maintain a positive self-image during social interactions.

9. Avoidance of Strong Swear Words

Generally, swearing can be viewed as a symbol of extremely powerful emotions because it can convey extreme intensity. Lakoff (2004) believed women use expletives or avoidance of strong swear words to express the intensity of their emotions.



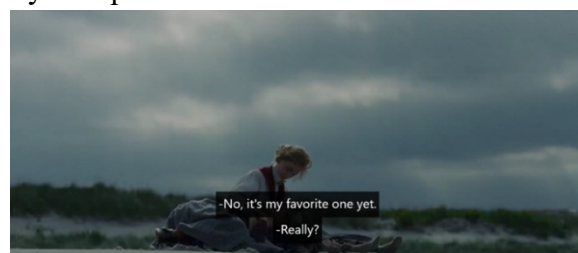
Laurie : “Here's another Christmas gift for the March family.”

Amy : **“Oh my god! Father!”**

Amy was very shocked to hear that her father had come home from the war after a long time. Everyone was very surprised and ran over to her father. Amy who was very surprised then woke up and said “Oh my god” which shows that she used avoidance of strong swear words feature. Using this feature, it indicates how intensely someone felt about something they liked or disliked. Lakoff (2004) stated women are not supposed to talk rough, they tend to avoid using swear words because they will consider as unladylike. In this case, the woman uses softer words such as God instead of harsher terms such as damn or shit because they are not supposed to speak harshly. Amy's polite demeanor and preference for using softer words than rough ones characterize a subordinate group.

10. Emphatic Stress

Lakoff (2004: 81) defines emphatic stress is a form of referrals to tell someone how to react because of what was said by the speaker is less convincing that it is better to use double the power to ensure that the listener can understand what is being said by the speaker.



Jo : “You think it's too boring?”

Beth : “No, it's my favorite one yet.”

Jo : **“Really?”**

After hearing Jo read her a story, Beth expresses her appreciation and requests that she write another one. However, Jo is concerned that the narrative she has created is boring. When Beth heard it, she refuted them, saying that the story was not boring. Jo remained uncertain of herself and responded to Beth's statement with "Really?" indicating that she used emphatic stress feature. Jo used this feature to clarify things which doubted. In addition, women use this feature to express uncertainty through their self-expression. Emphatic stress feature can be categorized into subordinate group in which the woman character clarifies the statement politely. Even though, the woman character clarifies by emphasizing her words, the stress does not make the conversation to be impolite or even objectionable to the listener.

4. Conclusion

On the basis of the result and findings, it is possible to draw the conclusion that the women characters in March Family consistently utilized all of the women's language features stated by Lakoff (2004) throughout the movie. They were fillers and hedges, tag questions, rising intonation, empty adjectives, precise color terms, intensifiers, hypercorrect grammar, 'superpolite' forms, avoidance of strong swear words, and emphatic stress.

Additionally, the female characters provided all the reasons why women converse utilizing women's language features, as stated by Holmes (2022). The social conscious is presented by the women characters in the lexical hedges or fillers, rising intonation, and intensifiers to assert their status. The woman's role as guardian of society's values was reflected in their use of lexical hedges or fillers, rising intonation, precise color terms, and 'superpolite' forms to expect better behaviour as role models for appropriate behaviour in society. The women's character utilized the subordinate group in the lexical hedges or fillers,

tag questions, empty adjectives, intensifiers, hypercorrect grammar, 'superpolite' forms, avoidance of strong swear words, and emphatic stress to speak carefully and politely. It is clear that women and men used different linguistic styles while interacting with one another. This study uses the movie adaptation of Little Women to illustrate how women's language differs from men's and how that difference might be better understood. It is hoped that this study will serve as a resource for future linguists interested in studying women's language features.

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