LINGUISTIC FEATURES USED BY FEMALE AND MALE CHARACTERS IN *BLACK WIDOW* MOVIE

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Abstract. The title of this study is Linguistic Features Used by the Female and Male Character in "Black Widow" Movie. The problems discussed in this study are the kinds of women's language features used by female and male characters in the "Black Widow" movie also the speech functions expressed. The study aims to identify the women's language features found in Natasha's and Alexei's utterances and to define the speech functions they expressed. The data were taken from the "Black Widow" movie and supported by the English subtitle, obtained from Disney+ Hotstar. The method used to collect the data is documentation and the technique used is note-taking. The descriptive qualitative method is used to analyze the data, the steps used to analyze the data are identifying the female and male characters by using the women's language theory which is proposed by Lakoff (2004), and describing its speech functions based on Holmes (2013) theory. The analysis was presented descriptively in the form of a paragraph. There are seven features of women's language found in the female and male utterances. Those are lexical hedges, tag questions, rising intonation on declaratives, empty adjectives, intensifiers, super polite forms, and emphatic stress. The functions of speech that were expressed in the features they used are expressive function, directive function, referential function, metalinguistic function, and phatic function.

Keywords: women's language features; speech functions; black widow.

INTRODUCTION

Language is a method by which humans communicate with each other. It enables us to convey our feelings and thoughts. There are two types of language employed in society: men's and women's language. It indicates that men's and women's languages differ in ways that are commonly used in everyday life. Lakoff (2004) identified 10 characteristics of women's language that distinguished it from men's language. She discovered that women frequently utilized the lexical hedges, tag questions, rising intonations on declarative, empty adjectives, specific color terms, intensifiers, hypercorrect grammar, super polite forms, avoidance of harsh swear words, and emphatic stress that she proposed in her hypothesis.

Women, on average, use more standard language than males, and they typically employ their language in the discussion. Women are more respectful to others, yet they lack self-confidence when engaging with others (Holmes, 2013). The preceding explanation of gender perspective in language use, as well as the theory proposed by Lakoff, made women's language appear to be extremely different from men's language.

Chandra and Yulia (2018), in their article entitled *Nicki Minaj's Comments in American Idol Season 12: An Analysis of Women's Language Features* shows that women's language features that appeared were intensifier, emphatic stress, filler, rising intonation, and lexical hedge. They also discovered that the absence of women's language traits could be due to a variety of circumstances. Their piece included some of Lakoff's suggestions for women's language (2004). Because it used Lakoff's most recent theory, the article is relevant as an example of examining women's language. Meanwhile, Hendar Zuraida; Heryono; and Lukitawati (2021), in their article entitled *Women Language Features in the Movie to All Boys I've Loved Before: Analysing Language Features in Different Geographical Locations* show that there are seven female language features used which are lexical hedges or filler, empty adjectives, intensifiers, super-polite form, emphatic stress, tag question, and rising intonation. They carried out Lakoff's theory (1975). They also discovered several social factors that influence women's use of linguistic features. The article is also useful as an example of analyzing women's linguistic characteristics.

However, in both previous articles, the theory of women's language features was mainly employed to evaluate female utterances. When we look at men in conversation, we can see that they use features of women's language as well. Actually, not only women who can be more expressive, but men either. Women were conscious of their status, which was shown in their employment of standard speech forms and the use of weaker or softer cursing by women (Lakoff, 2004). Although it all depends on their personalities, men can be more polite than women in some situations, and women might be less polite than men in others.

Women's speech tends to have more occurrences of terms that show the speaker's uncertainty about what they are expressing in general (Lakoff, 2004). She implied that when it comes to speaking, women lack confidence. In reality, our lack of self-confidence varies based on the situation and who we are speaking with. In certain instances, men can show a lack of self-confidence as well. Men can also use emotional words to express their feelings, thus how they use language is influenced by their personality and attitude.

These phenomena draw more attention to be analyzed. This study was conducted to counter Lakoff's theory by examining how women's language features are used in conversations by men as well. As a result, in addition to examining women's language features employed by females, this study also provided some men's language features. This study analyzed the women's language features in female and male characters in the "Black Widow" movie using the newest version of the theory proposed by Lakoff (2004). This study also includes the speech functions expressed in the features found by applying the theory proposed by Holmes (2013), they are expressive function, directive function, referential function, metalinguistic function, poetic function, and phatic function.

The data source for this study is a superhero film titled "Black Widow," which was obtained from the Disney+ Hotstar television network. Natasha, a female character in the film, was chosen for analysis because her utterances emphasize her fearlessness and authority in the way she expressed her courage through utterances. This character refuted the stereotype of women being weaker and less powerful than men. In this study, a male character named Alexei was also chosen to demonstrate that men can be less powerful than women. This male character was chosen for analysis to demonstrate that men have the same range in using women's language features as women.

The documentation method used to collect data for this study was direct observation of the movie, and the technique used to collect the data was note-taking. The following steps are: first, look for the Black Widow movie on Disney+ Hotstar. Second, watch the movie several times in order to understand the plot of the Black Widow movie, as this study also examined the speech functions. Third, focusing on Natasha's and Alexei's utterances and taking notes to classify their utterances into the features of women's language.

The descriptive qualitative method was used to analyze the data in this study. The following techniques can be used to analyze data: First, the features of women's language in Natasha and Alexei's utterances were examined using Lakoff's women's language theory (2004). Second, the speech functions expressed in Natasha's and Alexei's utterances were classified and described using Holmes' theory (2013).

The informal method was used in this study to describe the data in great detail. It was analyzed in the form of a description and uses words to help readers understand the topic better. To make the data clearer for the audience, the utterances of Natasha and Alexei that contain women's language features were typed in bold and italic font. The data analysis was presented in the form of a paragraph.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This part presents results and discussions in seven sections, namely: lexical hedges, tag questions, rising intonation on declaratives, empty adjectives, intensifiers, super polite forms, and emphatic stress. Each of the features and speech functions employed by female and male describe in the following sections.

1.   Lexical Hedges

Lexical hedges are used when the utterance is unclear or lacks confidence. It is a meaningless particle used as a pause-shaped word to take a breath gap when someone is unsure of something or has a doubt. According to Lakoff (2004:79), the use of hedges of various kinds of words that give the impression that the speaker is unsure about what they are saying cannot guarantee the assertion's accuracy.

1.1 Lexical Hedges in Natasha's utterance

(00.48.44 – 00.48.53)

Yelena   : Did you ever look for your parents? Your real ones?

Natasha   : *Well*, my mom abandoned me in the street like garbage. What about you?

When Yelena inquired about Natasha's real parents, Natasha stated that she was dumped on the street like garbage. She had no idea what her parents had done to her; all she knew was that she had been abandoned. As a result, she used the word "*Well*" because she did not provide a definitive answer. She used that meaningless particle to weaken her statement. She hesitantly provided information about what her parents did to her, which was considered a **referential function** of speech. She told Yelena about her biological parents throughout the conversation.

1.2 Lexical Hedges in Alexei's utterance

 (01.37.38 – 01.37.51)

Alexei : Come on, now. If we're just going to press buttons and hack computers…

Melina   : Yes.

Alexei : *I mean*, I don't know. There's nothing for me to do. I want to… I want to break something.

Melina   : Oh, you do? Oh, there is something you can break.

Alexei was unsure of the next step of his plan when he shared his idea about hacking the system. He expressed his doubts by saying, "*I mean*." He was just expressing his thoughts, but he was not sure what he needed to do. He ended up saying that he did not know what he needed to do and indirectly asked Melina if there

was anything he could do. He made use of the hedging feature, which included the *directive function* of speech.

2.   Tag Questions

A tag question is a question that is followed by a statement or declarative sentence, and it is occasionally used when someone is unsure about the statement he made. When a speaker makes a claim about which they are unsure, a tag question arises (Lakoff, 2004:48). It's a cross of an outright statement and a yes/no question. When the speaker already knows what the answer must be and just wants to confirm it, tag questions are used (Lakoff, 2004:49). It can be concluded that the tag question is asked to ensure something or to clarify something.

2.1 Tag Questions in Natasha's utterance

(00.56.40 – 00.57.01)

Natasha   : Go left. Just don't make a scene.

(inmates clamoring)

 Natasha   : You made a scene, *didn't you?*

Natasha attempted to help Alexei in escaping from the prison during this conversation. She gave Alexei a walkie-talkie earpiece so she could command him from outside, and she told him to go out quietly and without making a fuss. She then heard inmates yelling and asked Alexei, "You made a scene, *didn't you?*". Natasha used the tag question which comments on her own statement when she told Alexei not to make a scene, and it is considered a **metalinguistic function** of speech

2.2 Tag Questions in Alexei's utterance

(01.15.50 – 01.16.25)

Natasha   : Shut up! You are an idiot. And you're a coward. You're a coward. And our family was never real, so there's nothing to hold on to. We're moving on.

Alexei : Never family, huh? In my heart, I am simple man. And I think that for a couple deep undercover Russian agents I think we did pretty great as parents, *huh?*

Melina   : Yes, we had our orders, and we played our roles to perfection.

Alexei stated that he was just a simple man who did a great job raising his children, but he wasn't sure if their children thought he was good enough to play the role of parents. He used the word "*huh*?" as a tag question here. He used that word because he was making a statement but still questioned its validity at the end. The tag question feature he used included a *metalinguistic function* of speech.

3. Rising Intonation on Declarative

When women are nervous or doubtful, they tend to shift their tone to one that is increasing. Rising intonation on declarative is connected to this unique usage of a syntactic rule is a noticeable variation in women's international patterns (Lakoff, 2004:49). The intonation on declarative happens in declarative sentences but becomes a question since there is an intonation that increases at the terminus of the word.

3.1 Rising Intonation in Declaratives in Natasha's utterance

(00.34.39 – 00.35.04)

Yelena: I kept checking the news, expecting to see Captain America bringing down the Red Room.

Natasha   : What? Taking down the Red Room? What are you talking about? It's been gone for years. *Dreykov's dead* ↑. I killed him.

Natasha was confused when Yelena was saying she kept expecting Captain America would be bringing that place down. She persuaded Yelena that it had been gone for years, and she used rising intonation to say, "*Dreykov's dead*." She began to have doubts about herself and used the rising intonation in her statement to elicit information from Yelena. She indirectly sought information from Yelena that she had overlooked, and her utterance demonstrated the ***directive function*** of speech.

3.2 Rising Intonation in Declaratives in Alexei's utterance

(00.54.07 – 00.54.26)

Alexei : That guy think he going to beat me. Anyway, this shield, you know, that he carries with him like a precious baby blanket, you know? I use it to my advantage. I take it and I push him out the window. And I make my escape. Huh?

Prisoners   : What year was this?

Alexei   : I don't know. *Like, '83, '84.* ↑

When Alexei was reflecting on his spectacular fight with Captain America with other prisoners, someone asked him what year that happened. Alexei unconfidently made a statement "I don't know. *Like, '83, '84*". He claimed to have forgotten the year and responded with increasing intonation in order to reveal confirmation from others. He did not really know when he fought Captain America, this rising intonation feature he used included the directive function of speech since his statement was seeking information.

4. Empty Adjectives

Empty adjectives are adjectives that refer to the emotional reactions of the word to particular circumstances. There are many different sorts of empty adjectives, such as

"emotional." An empty adjective, according to Lakoff (2004:45), is a phrase that simply relates to emotional responses rather than specific facts. It indicates that the speaker seeks to demonstrate the speaker's emotional bond with the audience.

4.1 Empty Adjectives in Natasha's utterance

(01.28.18 – 01.28.25)

Dreykov   : My God. Look at you. So, uh, how was the family reunion?

Natasha   : Oh, it was *awful*. They were clingy, and too emotional, and needy.

When Dreykov inquired about the family reunion, she responded with an emotional outburst. She used the word "*awful*" to describe how bad the family reunion was. It is termed an empty adjective because she picked that term rather than saying it directly using the gender-neutral word "bad." Her utterance demonstrated the **referential function** of speech since she transmitted information about how the reunion was going.

4.2 Empty Adjective in Alexei's utterance

(01.03.39 – 01.04.00)

Alexei : General Dreykov, my friend, huh? Gives me glory… Soviet Union's first and only super soldier. I could have been more famous than Captain America. Then he buries me in Ohio on that stupid mission. Three years! So *tedious*, boring me to tears.

Alexei became emotional when Natasha mentioned that he was Drekov's friend. He used the word "*tedious*" to express how unpleasant it was to be imprisoned. He could have said "frustrating" in a gender-neutral word, but he selected a more emotional phrase to convey it. It is considered an **expressive function** of communication when someone reveals his feelings to others through their utterance.

5. **Intensifiers**

Intensifiers are used to add stress, strengthen intended meaning, and ensure that the message is understood. According to Lakoff (2004:48), the intensifiers applied where purists would insist on absolute superlatives, strongly stressed, appear more representative of women's language than men's language though it is present in the latter, notably in the speech of male academics. The goal of using intensifiers is to compel their listeners to take them seriously and to emphasize the importance of their statements.

5.1 Intensifiers in Natasha's utterance

(00.34.16 – 00.34.24)

Yelena: Why don't you take it to one of your super-scientist friends? They can explain it to you. Tony Stark, maybe?

Natasha : Oh, yeah. We're not *really* talking right now, so…

Natasha used the word *"really"* to strengthen her statement about her relationship with Tony Stark was not okay. She drew Yelena's attention to the fact that they weren't communicating with each other, which was why she couldn't ask Tony Stark to explain the serum. Natasha utilized intensifiers in this utterance, which included the **referential function** of speech. She revealed details about her friendship with Tony Stark at the time.

5.2 Intensifiers in Alexei's utterances

(01.12.08 – 01.12.20)

Alexei : You haven't aged a day, huh? You're *just* as beautiful and as supple as the day they staged our marriage.

Melina : You got fat. But still good.

Alexei compliments Melina's appearance by saying she looks like had not aged and she is still beautiful. While complimenting Melina, Alexei used the word "*just*" to emphasize the intended meaning of his compliment. He tried to start the conversation by catching her attention with compliments. He tried to establish communication with her wife after a long time they did not meet each other and it is considered a **phatic function** of speech.

6. Super Polite Forms

Women are more likely to pay attention to politeness and employ this feature to communicate properly without offending others. This relates to the idea that women should behave correctly and communicate with caution. According to Lakoff (2004:77), women's speech differs from men's in that women are more polite, which is exactly what women should be because they are the keepers of morals and civility.

6.1 Super Polite Forms in Natasha's utterance

(01.12.16 – 01.12.29)

Melina : You got fat. But still good.

Alexei : I just got out of prison. I, uh… I have a lot of energy.

Melina : Oh!

Natasha : *Please* don't do that.

Natasha used the word "*Please*" to stop her parents' conversation from becoming too personal in front of others. Natasha stopped them because she could not handle hearing that more and she politely stopped them because they were her parents. She used the feature of super polite form which included the **directive function** of speech. The directive expression was shown as she requested action from

their parents to stop being clingy to each other because she wanted them to not do that conversation in front of her and Yelena.

6.2 Super Polite Form in Alexei's utterance

(01.21.47 – 01.21.55)

Yelena : Please stop talking.

Alexei : *Please* wait. *Please* wait.

Yelena : Please, no. Please, I don't want to talk.

Alexei : *Please*. *Please*. There is a reason why I'm telling you this, okay? Trust me.

When Alexei tried to comfort Yelena by telling her a story, Yelena told him to stop because she did not want to talk with anybody. He begged Yelena two times with the phrase *"Please"*. He respectfully begged Yelena to wait and hear what he had to say because he had worked so hard to console Yelena as her father. His expression indicated the **directive function** because he begged her to wait and hear his story.

7.   Emphatic Stress

Women have a habit of phrasing things in ways that emphasize or enhance their significance. This is a form of extra emphasis placed by the speaker on a word in a phrase, usually to identify or clarify something. Speaking with emphatic stress, according to Lakoff (2004:81), is a type of reference that employs double the power to ensure that the listener understands what the speaker is saying.

7.1 Emphatic Stress in Natasha's utterance

(00.56.12 – 00.56.18)

Natasha : Today is your *lucky* day, Alexei. Move to the door on the south wall.

Natasha used the word "*lucky*" to describe the day Alexei could be able to escape from the prison. Her utterance is termed emphatic stress since she highlighted her reaction to Alexei. Her statement was reinforcing her remark that he was lucky that day compared to the other boring day when he was imprisoned. When she started the conversation, she sought to make a good first impression. This expression is classified as a **phatic function** of speech.

7.2 Emphatic Stress in Alexei's utterance

(01.06.39 – 01.06.56)

Alexei : I did my best to make sure you would succeed to achieve your fullest potential, and everything worked out.

Natasha : Everything worked out?

Alexi : Yes. For you, yes. We accomplished our mission in Ohio. Yelena, you went on to become the *greatest* child assassin the world has ever known.

Natasha became angry and demanded to know what he meant when he stated "everything worked out." He defended himself by demonstrating that he successfully raised them by sending them to the Red Room. In response to his daughter's success, he used the word "*greatest*.". He used that word to stress his reaction because he was proud of her. His statement while complimenting Yelena's ability conveyed his feelings and it is considered an **expressive function** of speech.

CONCLUSION

Based on the previous sections, this study demonstrated that there is a strong probability that men adopted features of women's language, which contradicts Lakoff's theory. Natasha and Alexei, the female and male characters in the film "Black Widow," offered seven characteristics of women's language. The seven features found in their utterance are lexical hedges, tag questions, rising intonation on declaratives, empty adjectives, intensifiers, super polite forms, and emphatic stress. The characteristics of women's language employed by Natasha and Alexei are linked to the speech function stated as well. In their utterances, they express five speech functions: expressive function, directive function, referential function, metalinguistic function, and phatic function.

There was no scene in which Natasha and Alexei discussed color, hence no speech was identified employing the feature of precise color terms. Natasha and Alexei are both characters that have always expressed their emotions with powerful swearing words, which is why they do not resist using strong language. They also never utilized conventional verb forms when speaking to others; instead, they employed vulgar and harsh vocabulary in their utterances, which is why they did not use hypercorrect grammar. They do not express the poetic function of speech since they are the typical person who does not highlight the aesthetic part of their utterances.

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