

# WOMEN'S LANGUAGE AS REFLECTED IN THE COMMUNICATION STYLES OF PRESENTERS IN THE RESEARCH SEMINAR

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## ABSTRACT

RESKI AYU LESTARI, 2018. *Women's Language as Reflected in the Communication Styles of Presenters in the Research Seminar* (Supervised by Murni Mahmud and Kisman Salija).

The study aims to investigate the usage of women's language and its reflection in the communication styles in research seminar. This research applied a case study approach to a group of female presenters consisting of five postgraduate students of English Education Department in Graduate Program of the State University of Makassar in 2018. A purposive sampling technique was used to obtain the data for this research. It utilized observation as the instrument of this research. The results of this research revealed that; (1) seven features out of ten features of Women's Language appeared in research seminar spoken by the presenters. They were lexical hedges, intensifier, empty adjective, emphatic stress, superpolite form, rising intonation on declarative and tag question where the most frequent feature is lexical hedges; (2) woman's language used by the female presenters had the five functions except one function. The five function are to express uncertainty, to emphasize an utterance, to express feelings, to start a discussion, and to get soften the utterances. Meanwhile, the function to get response did not appear in the five research seminars; (3) four out of nine communication styles were uttered in the research seminars. They were the dominant, attentive, animated and relaxed communication styles. Women's language was reflected mostly in dominant communication style while the lowest reflection was in relaxed communication styles. This reflection was due to three reasons; they are relation between the communicator or setting, personal styles and language competences.

**Keywords:** *women's language, communication styles, research seminar*

## INTRODUCTION

Language and gender are one of many significant research topics in sociolinguistics. It makes language and gender become a popular research in many fields, such as in psychology ( Hippel, Wiryakusuma, Bowden, & Shochet, 2011) and sociolinguistics (Gu, 2013; Suciu, 2013).

As previously mentioned, the study of gender has been actively conducted by different angles and methodologies. As a result, gender differences exist not only in the level of behavior but also in the level of communication, specifically gender speech and gender speech styles that is influenced by social judgment and stereotypes formed by the society.

Women, because of the social judgment and stereotype, frequently use some features that distinguish them from men. Robin Tolmach Lakoff (1975) was the first feminist who determined the features and well-known as women's language. She provides ten basic assumptions that are claimed as to be used more often by women than men in their communication including lexical hedges, tag question, rising intonation on declarative, 'empty' adjectives, precise color terms, intensifier, hypercorrect grammar, super polite forms, avoidance of strong swear words and emphatic stress.

Gender speech and gender speech styles are representative of the individual and it's a learned behavior which is governed by shared values and norms among individuals. However, in some cases, behavior might be a bit different from their style due to specific situation which influences (Waldherr & Muck, 2011), e.g., conflict, pressure, or nervousness. Pressure and nervousness can occur on public speaking and in academic settings such as in seminars.

The important thing lies on the multifunctionality of linguistic features and the multifunctionality relies on linguistics features surrounding the contexts. A particular one linguistic feature can often be judged only form the context in which it occurs (Macaulay, 2005 p. 9). By investigating women's language in particular context, this research attempts to explore women's language usage following with the function and their reflection on the communication styles in the very special context, research seminars.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

It is regarded generally that the issue of body language in language teaching is not remarkably very new. This issue has been observed and researched by a plethora of studies with different aspects and models for sure. Hence, many findings, which have coherent views with this study, have been already published and implemented in language practice. Ishikawa (2014) found that there were a few gender differences in the language use of each group (British male and female speakers of Asian learners of English). The research also found that both British and Asian women discuss other people more frequently. Furthermore, British female speakers tend to

use hesitators then males. In addition, female Filipino learners tend to use hedges than their male counterparts.

Other previous researchers also have done their studies related to women's language. Hanafiyeh and Afghari (2014) examined the difference made by man and woman in terms of the use of intensifiers, tag questions, adverbs, hedges and empty adjectives. The findings showed the significant differences between the groups in the use of hedges, tag question, intensifiers, and empty adjectives. The results showed that adverbs are not gendered specific which confirmed Lakoff's opinion on gender-bound language in four different areas.

Sweat (2017) analyzed the effects of societal gender roles on male and female language use and communication. The topics to be addressed were word choice variation, conversational styles, hypercorrect English, tag questions, disclaimers, and the entrapment of gender roles. The survey result matched with the research claim that women use more tag question and disclaimer and also prefer Standard English. In the same year, 2017, Itmeizeh and Ma'ayeh (2017) conduct a research investigating the representation of stereotypical female gender roles in Disney movies; the evolution of such roles from 1937 till 2012, and how values are reflected the features of women's language. The findings shows that after analyzing both of the movie scripts, it became clear that the female characters in Disney 70 years ago create a very feminine portrayal of women, starting with Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs in 1937. As time passed we begin to notice that in more recent movie, stereotypes and gender depiction are still visible yet have changed, women no longer portrayed as weak and powerless.

As a conclusion, diversity of researchers' findings above describes that the existence of women's language in different setting is really needed to gain awareness of the language function or communication function. Those four previous findings above are related to conduct this research as the references to analyze the features of women's language and its reflection in the communication styles.

## **METHOD**

The case study method was an appropriate match for the purposes of this study. This study provides both description and analysis over contemporary phenomena within the real-life context which made it possible to answer the investigator's research questions. Those questions relate to the features of women's language and its reflection in the communication styles. However, although the study conducted is qualitative in nature, quantification was also needed in order to support the qualitative findings in revealing the percentage of women's language used by presenter in the research seminars. Therefore, the researcher used the single-case study form in reporting the case which the description might be improved with table as well as with charts, graphics, or pictures (Yin, 2014).

Women's Language is set of basic assumptions about what marks out the language of women and it consists of ten language features by Lakoff (1973) which are lexical hedges, tag question, rising intonation on declarative, 'empty' adjectives, precise color terms, intensifier, hypercorrect grammar, super polite forms, avoidance of strong swear words and emphatic stress.

The participants of this study were EFL students of the postgraduate program at State University of Makassar at the English Education Department, Academic Year 2016/2017. The university is located in Bonto Langkasa street, Banta-Bantaeng, Rappocini District, City of Makassar, Province of Sulawesi Selatan, and Postal Code 90222. The total number of participants currently undertaken at the Research Seminar which was consisted of five participants.

The researcher was the key instrument in this study to collect the data by observation. There were several procedures that had been completed in order to collect the data of this study. This research was a participant observation or internal observation. Hence, the researcher interacted or participated in the research seminar as an audience when doing observation and recording. After that, the researcher transcribed, coded, and labeled the data before analyzing them.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS**

### **1. The features of women's language used by female presenters in the research seminar**

The data in this research were taken from utterances spoken by the female presenters in the research seminar. To support the findings in revealing the percentage of women's language, table is displaying. It sums up the occurrence of women's language observed in the five research seminars

Table 1.1 Frequency of Women's Language Features in Research Seminar

No	Women's Language Features	Functions of women's language						Frequency	Percentage (%)
		EU	GR	EF	SD	SU	EUM		
1.	Lexical Hedges	68	0	0	28	136	0	232	66.28
2.	Intensifier	0	0	12	0	0	53	65	19.07
3.	Rising intonation	20	0	0	0	0	0	20	5.87
4.	Emphatic Stress	0	0	0	0	0	16	16	4.70
5.	Super-Polite Form	0	0	0	0	8	0	8	2.35
6.	Empty Adjective	0	0	4	0		0	4	1.18
7.	Tag Question	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	0.59
8.	Hypercorrect Grammar	0	0	0	0	0	0		
9.	Avoidance of Strong Swear Words	0	0	0	0	0			
10.	Precise Color Terms	0	0		0	0	0		
<b>Total</b>		90	0	16	28	144	69	347	100

According to table 1.1, lexical hedges were spoken 231 times in five research seminar and become the most used feature. In this research lexical hedges as filler *well* and *I mean* and lexical hedges as adverb *actually* become the most frequent lexical hedges that are uttered by presenter. The main reason of the presenter use lexical hedges as a mean of time gaining was to show uncertainty and lacking of confidence

Furthermore, concerning the finding, the researcher can conclude that in delivering opinion particularly in research seminar, the presenters did not consider their uncertainty or their hesitancy but consider them as their behavior. Compared to universal time gaining, this cultural time gaining only appear three times during the research seminar and might be considered as the new finding of this research called cultural time gaining. The example of *what* occurs in research seminar is on extract 1 below:

**Extract 1**

*Presenter* : "...the results of my findings e: that e: there is no e:: **apa** there is no different result of my same question from the students,  
3<sup>rd</sup> presenter, May 11, 2018

On extract 1 above is a part of explanation related to audience's question. The presenter was about come to conclusion before she got lost in her mind. She pronounced *what* in question intonation before she finally continued her conclusion. This word sounds like an alert that she is lost in her own idea and it seems like she asks herself to find the lost idea. It also might indicate that she tried to spin out the time to think of her next utterance.

Intensifier holds the next most frequent features that was spoken 65 times. This finding is not in line with other studies conducted by Oktapiani (2017) who found intensifier as the most frequent features of women's language. Considering the finding, the researcher found that presenters emphasize their utterances in case to convince the audiences and in some cases the presenters use intensifier to give emotional influence where the emphatic stress and empty adjectives may do. But compared to emphatic stress and empty adjective, intensifier appear in research seminars more frequently. The researcher might assume that the situation involved the occurrence of intensifier. The employment is on the extract below:

***Extract 2***

*Participants 2* : "...Why not give some test?"

*Presenter* : "...Because my study here focus on the **just** to know the students readiness not to ...".

4<sup>th</sup> presenter, May 11, 2018

Extract 21 above displays intensifier *just* in discussion section. One of the audiences asked about measurement technique that the presenter used in analyzing the data. After thanking the questioner, she gave her answer with a slight emphasis on the main reason of her measurement technique by employing intensifier *just*. She put a stronger effect to her statement because she needed to convince the questioner that what she had done on her research was full of consideration in case to gain a better result.

Rising intonation on declarative was found twenty times in five research seminars. This finding is not congruent with Lakoff (1973) who stated that women tend to raise the tone of the voice at the end of a statement. Based on the findings, the presenters raised their voice because of their uncertainty. It is obviously implied to seek a confirmation or feedback. The researcher assumes that the presenters tended to avoid misinterpretation and miscommunication.

Superpolite form is lack of occurrences in such formal event where the presenter should imply more polite form and decrease rising intonation on declarative. This might be laid on the insufficient English proficiency which may affect the way presenter express their utterance. Because of insufficient English proficiency, the presenter should think over too many things such as the upcoming words and how they should pronounce it. It becomes one of considerations because their communication partner is the examiner. Besides the tension of circumstance under the label "examination" should affected them.

According to Lakoff (1973), hypercorrect grammar is defined as forms of standard verb used consistently. Hypercorrect grammar reaches the lowest frequency during the research seminar. The presenters who were observed hardly ever used any vulgar or course statement and speak in precise pronunciation. It supports the researcher to feel unnecessary counting the amount of standard verb forms.

In terms of tag questions, they only appeared five times during the research seminars. The researcher assumes that presenters tend to use rising intonation on declarative to confirm or to get respond rather than tag questions. In a similar vein, Nemati and Bayer (2007) found the same finding that tag questions are used with no significant differentiation between male and female.

## **2. Function of women's language features in research seminar**

It is important to note that Table 1.1 (page 4), which presents the functions of woman's language used by the presenters, is dominated by the fifth function, to soften the utterance. This finding confirms other studies conducted by Jia (2010) and Rubbyanti (2017). All of these studies had found that most of women's language is used to reduce the force of the statement. During the seminars, the presenters used three features of women's language they are; lexical hedges, superpolite form and hypercorrect grammar. With regard to lexical hedges which contain fillers as a part of it, it was used by the presenters as a mean of time gaining.

Besides, features of women's language like lexical hedges, hypercorrect grammar and superpolite form are also used to soften an utterance. Superpolite forms occurred eight times in five seminars and they were usually uttered in greeting section to show their praise to the Almighty Allah SWT. It is a must for being super polite in terms of praising the Almighty God. Contrary with superpolite forms, hypercorrect grammar is not counted because the presenters constantly applied hypercorrect grammar in every single utterance they said. It can be concluded that the presenters gave their best effort to show their politeness during the seminars.

One of the most frequent functions is to express uncertainty. This definitely implies that the woman's language occurring in the presenters' utterances was mostly due to their hesitation. It seems that this was influenced by atmosphere of the seminar, which was a tense moment to the presenters. Feeling nervous and under pressure, the presenters were unable to become confident speakers in front of the examiners. Hence, their utterances were often colored by woman's

language which reflected their uncertainty. When answering the examiners' questions, for instance, the presenters often used some typical fillers indicating hesitation such as *I think* and *I mean*.

The last function that gains high frequency of occurrence in the research seminars was to emphasize an utterance. This naturally implies that the presenter intended to highlight certain part of her statement due to the degree or quality of their statement. They used three features of women's language; intensifier, empty adjective and emphatic stress such as *very* and *just* for intensifier, *big* or *excellent* for emphatic stress and *nice* for empty adjective. These features also indicate to express feeling. It may indicate the degree of presenter's feeling.

The fourth function of women's language, to start a discussion, frequently occurred in the five research seminars because the presenters need an alert that the topic will be started or switched. In this function, the presenter often used multifunctional lexical hedges like *well* and *actually*.

The function to get response is skipped by the presenters in research seminar. According to Pearson (1985), women are likely to ask others to do things for them with more words than their male counterparts would use. In a research seminar, the only one who has authority to give a command is the examiner. Thus the presenter will not use this function in such a formal event especially research seminar.

### **3. Women's language as reflected in communication styles**

Dominant communication style seems to be possessed by the third and the fifth presenter. They actively reacted over the examiner and audiences comments with a strong and steady voice. Both of them had a great tendency to show that they keep listening during the discussion section through their reaction by saying yes frequently instead of nodding head or just staring at the speakers. At this point, this research seems to be in line with her due to the relation between the presenter and the examiner where the examiner is the superior and the presenter is inferior. Thus the presenters conveyed their ideas politely in order to show respect the the superior speaker, the examiners.

However, the analyzed data indicate that there are dissimilarities in terms of maintaining the politeness and it directly affects the occurrences of women's language. The first difference is the amount of women's language occurrence which the third presenter employed 28 words in four features of women's language while the fifth presenter uttered 191 words in six features of women's language. The second difference is the language that they use to express their



utterances where the third presenter used Indonesian language and the fifth presenter made it in English. The third difference is way they execute their desire to be dominant. And the last difference is effect of their expression towards the listener. All those differences help the research to conclude that there are three main points influencing the occurrences of women's language in research seminar as reflected in dominant communication styles, they are personal styles, the setting and language competences. The proofs are on the extract 3 & 4 below:

### **Extract 3**

*Examr 1 : "...tidak menjelaskan apa apa"*

*(it doesn't explain anything)*

*Presenter : **Excuse me sir, actually** all of these pictures are e:: requires some extract, I I just try to elaborate all of the extract in this picture..."*

5<sup>th</sup> Presenter, May 15, 2018

Extract 3 above is one of the examples of dominant communication styles reflected by presenter in the research seminar. As we can see, the presenter kept reacting to examiner's comments with a natural-strong voice. The most prominent reaction is when she wanted to interrupt the examiner by saying "excuse me sir!" in the right time so it didn't offend the examiner. After taking the turn politely, her utterance was followed by lexical hedges *actually* to soften her utterance. She was being dominant in very good manner. Despite she felt unsure about her utterance or perception which can obviously be seen based on on how many lexical hedges he had said, she kept trying to elaborate her previous statement which is implies that she likes to speak and to discuss. However, a contrastive finding is displayed on extract 45 below. The differences come from the way presenters react and express ideas which indicates a less degree of politeness.

### **Extract 4**

*Spvr 1 : Ya ya setiap, ini ini raw data ini harusnya itu persiswa*

*(Yes, yes every, this is the raw data should be in each students)*

*Presenter : Iye ini persiswa, ini kelas tujuh, ini siswa satu dua (laughing) ini, kesana ini*

*(Yes! It is per student, it's seventh class, it is student one, two (laughing) it is, to the left)*

*Examnr 1 : Apa tidak, apa tidak terbalek*

*(Isn't? It isn't in the wrong row?)*

*Presenter : **Ini kelas tujuh ini***

*(This is seventh class, this is)*

*Examnr 1 : Tidak ber, tidak terbalik?*

*(It isn't in the wrong row?)*

*Presenter : **Ini yang kelas delapan yang warna orengs***

(This is the eighth class which has orange color)

*Spvr 1 : Kalau saya buat di excel biasanya yang nama siswa itu kebawa*  
*(If I make it in excel, usually the name of students is down below)*

*Examnr 1 : Nah! Itu maksud saya apa tidak terbalek*  
*(Exactly! That's what I mean, It isn't in the wrong row?)*

*Presenter : Karena ini*  
*(Because this is)*

*Examnr 1 : tidak tidak, dengarki!*  
*(No! No! Listen up!)*

3<sup>rd</sup> presenter, May 11, 2018

Especially for personal style and language competences, they influence the occurrence of women's language as reflected in dominant communication styles which is displayed in extract 3 & 4 related to the way the presenter interrupt the examiner. The fifth presenter interrupted the examiner in really good manner by using lexical hedges to take turn softly and to reduce the force of her utterances while the third presenter just interrupted. As the consequences, the reaction was totally contrasted. Here, language competences play crucial roles that help the presenter express their ideas properly.

Both of animated and attentive communication styles reflect the use of women's language in equally amount of frequency. Animated communication style seems to be possessed by the second presenter which conveyed her though trough facial expression and body language and attentive communication styles which is possessed by the first presenter who is a good listener. Their uncertainty surely came from the atmosphere of the research seminar and the relation between the speaker where the presenter as the inferior and the examiner as the superior. They tended to be lack of self-confidences and became overthinking due to maintaining the politeness and respecting that reduce their desire to react pronouncedly. Once they give a spoken reaction, they use women's language features to convey their idea without saying too much. Thus, both of them use overage amount of women's language.

Diversely with the fourth presenter who has relaxed communication styles, she reveals the lowest amount of women's language. This lack of occurrences related to her styles in communication which is easygoing. It sounds like she had no tension facing the research seminar because she smiled a lot, spoke confident but slowly, and did not look nervous. It can be concluded from the way the research seminar went with some jokes from the examiners

interrupting during the discussion and the warm atmosphere. As a result, she used women's language in lowest frequency.

## **CONCLUSION**

Firstly, seven features out of ten features appeared in research seminar spoken by the presenters namely lexical hedges, intensifier, empty adjective, emphatic stress, superpolite form, rising intonation on declarative and tag question. Meanwhile, avoidance of strong swears words, hypercorrect grammar and precise color terms were skipped by the presenter. The most frequent feature in research seminar was lexical hedges that were uttered 232 times in five research seminars.

In terms of lexical hedges, the presenters did not consider them as their uncertainty or their hesitant but they considered them as their behavior. They preferred using these meaningless particles than their cultural time gaining such as e:: or what? and it becomes a new finding in lexical hedge that is used as filler or as a means of time gaining called cultural time gaining.

Secondly, functions of women's language that were used in research seminar was five out of six. These employed functions were to express uncertainty, to emphasize an utterance, to express feelings, to start a discussion, and to get soften the utterances. Function in relation to get respond was not expressed in research seminar. The five presenters frequently used woman's language as uncertainty expression, stressing utterance, response invitation, feeling expression and polite expression.

Lastly, after observing the five presenters in research seminar, the researcher found that only four out of nine communication styles were uttered in the research seminars including dominant, attentive, animated and relaxed communication styles. Women's language was reflected mostly in dominant communication style and lowest reflection in relaxed communication styles. This reflection was due to three things, they are relation between the communicator or setting, personal styles and language competences.

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