

Women's Language Features in the Podcast Stories of the Soul

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at determining the women's language features produced by Najwa Zebian in the podcast Stories of The Souls and its functions of women's language. This research utilized a descriptive qualitative method to analyze the data. Data were utterances produced by Najwa Zebian indicating women language's features. The findings of this research revealed that Najwa did not use all of the women's language features in the podcast Stories of The Soul. The study identified nine women's language features occurred, such as lexical hedges or fillers, tag questions, rising intonation, hypercorrect grammar, intensifiers as the most dominant used by Najwa in the podcasts, super polite forms, empty adjectives, avoidance of strong swear words, and emphatic stress. However, the result did not give the occurrence of precise color terms. This study also found several functions of women's language features. All of the functions are applied to the features in the podcast, including expressing uncertainty, starting a discussion, expressing feelings, and softening an utterance.

Keywords: sociolinguistics, women's language, language features, language function.

BACKGROUND

The existence of language is genuinely important to help humans communicate for express their feelings through speech. Humans, as social beings, need to socialize with each other in the name of society. In addition, the language encourages, inspires, and impacts how individuals act in daily life and also can reveal an individual's level of confidence, behavior, and other characteristics. One of the most notable language usages of the difference is gender, and gender has been an interesting topic to choose for many studies nowadays. It also deals with how the language often differs due to gender.

The term “gender” refers to society's cultural characteristics and actions toward men and women. Gender differences in language have always been complicated to examine, but now widely recognized as both a linguistic and a social phenomenon and it has become a popular topic in linguistics and sociolinguistics. Men and women have their styles to communicate since men and women are different individuals. Holmes (2013, p.162), states that gender distinguishes the use of language considered more pervasive linguistic in the society on social status and power differences. This also implied women’s power and social status whereas generally being subordinate in society.

In addition, Lakoff (2004) proposed that women who use language are assisted by their subordinate status; colluding in their subordination’ through the way they spoke. Women tend to choose the appropriate words to say to the listeners so they used polite words or almost superpolite to maintain their image as feminine, gentle, and compassionate creatures. The smooth, courteous, soft speech, linguistic, and social standards are aspects of the language aspects of women’s gender markers. Whereas men are more assertive and clear and also tend to show their masculinity. Concerning that points, Lakoff (2004.p.48) proposed a list of ten features in women’s language as follows: Lexical Hedges or Fillers, Tag Questions, Rising Intonation, Hypercorrect Grammar, Intensifiers, Superpolite Forms, Empty Adjectives, Precise Color Terms, Avoiding Strong Swear Words, and Emphatic Stress. Those typical functions can be used as a way to analyze women’s language features.

The study of women’s language features has been conducted by other several researchers. Oktapiani et al., (2017) analyzed the use of women’s language features and the function of the female characters using Lakoff’s theory and Jakobson’s theory. The findings revealed nine features occurrence, the empty adjective feature did not find in this study. Further, Apridaningrum (2018) analyzed the use of women’s language features in the talk show. The research was to figure out the women's language features of that Sarah Sechan as the main character in the talk show The findings revealed nine features that were discovered in the talk show, and the empty adjectives are the most commonly used while the precise color term feature did not occur. Another study was conducted by Retiningrum (2020) who analyzed the use of women’s language features in the movie. The result showed nine types of women’s language features, and the lexical hedges or fillers are the most frequently used. This study also applied the function of language proposed by Lakoff (1975) in which the weakening function is also the most commonly used, in line with the extensive use of lexical hedges because of the female character. Meanwhile, Setyadi (2020), examine the linguistic features and social factors in the movie by the lead female and male character. This study discovered both men's and women’s language features with Lakoff's theory (1973) for women’s language features and Xia's (2013) for men’s

language features as well as Holmes (2013) theory to identify the social factors of the language. This study showed that the female character mostly utilized superpolite forms in her utterances. Hence, several linguistics' approaches are applied to discover the function also used in the mentioned studies, such as Jakobson and Lakoff. However, this study is also using Pearson's theory (1985) because it is suitable for this study to examine the functions in detail. The previous studies have many kinds of subjects such as movies, shows, and others about to become the data source, but they rarely used podcasts as the data subject. Thus, podcasts are employed as the source of data for this research to characterize and distinguish it from past researches.

Additionally, according to Rubyanti (2017), the various pattern of conduct was what caused the various purposes of the linguistic features utilized by women. Judy Pearson (1985), in her book *Gender and Communication*, proposes five functions of each women's language features such as: a) expressing uncertainty, b) starting a discussion, c) getting a response, d) expressing feelings, and e) softening an utterance.

Women's language terms could be found on television programs, in magazines, and on any digital platform such as podcasts, which are popular enough nowadays. A podcast is an audio recording collected by episodes. It is quite similar to the radio but many listen to it many times and are accessed by electronic devices through the internet because it is available on demand. It showed that podcasts were severed by series with various topics. There are various podcasts with many topics usually discussed such as education, health, culture, lifestyle, music, news, etc.

Since multiple podcasts are now available on various digital platforms, the researcher intends to examine Najwa Zebian's podcast, entitled *Stories of the Soul*. It is a type of conversational podcast that focuses on mental health issues, such as self-love, emotional manipulation, grief, and etc. Najwa Zebian herself is a well-known author, poet, and public speaker who may have had prior linguistic experience, it described how Najwa communicates with her guests through the podcast.

METHODOLOGY

This research obtained a descriptive qualitative study because this research focused on the social phenomenon to be described in detail accurately. Creswell (2014) stated that qualitative research is an analytical process based on diverse methodological traditions of inquiry that examines a social or human phenomenon. Najwa Zebian. The data source of this research is the podcast *Stories of The Soul* by Najwa Zebian that consist of three podcasts: *How forgiveness and Emotional Transparency can Help You Build Healthy Relationship with your Parents*; *How Bridge Emotional Manipulation and Regained My Mental Well-being*; and *Why Forgiveness Will Set You Free* which is taken from the website www.listennotes.com/podcasts/.

As part of the research process, the author takes several steps to collect the data. First, the researcher downloaded all the selected podcasts from Listen to Notes website. Second, the Najwa's utterances were compiled into transcriptions, then organized in a simple way to interpret and analyze. After gathering the data, the researchers began to analyze the transcription to classify the utterance that conducts the women's language features by Lakoff (2004), and finally, the researcher could examine the functions of women's language features by Pearson (1985).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Women's Language Features

This research only focuses on Najwa's utterances, who is the host of the podcast, therefore, the guest's utterance is not included. Hence, the results show that merely about nine features have been found, such as lexical hedges or fillers, tag questions, rising intonation, hyper-correct grammar, intensifiers, empty adjectives, super polite forms, and the avoidance of strong swear words. Each episode of the podcast shows the difference in the usage of the feature, which can be seen in the table below:

Table 1. Total amount of the women's language features usage

Women's Language Features	Total	Percentage
Lexical Hedges/Fillers	46	24.3%
Tag Question	24	12.7%
Rising Intonation	5	2.7%
Hyper-Correct Grammar	24	12.7%
Precise Color Terms	0	0%
Intensifier	65	34.3%
Superpolite Forms	10	5.3%
Empty Adjectives	3	1.6%
Avoidance Strong Swear Words	2	1.1%
Emphatic Stress	10	5.3%
Total Amount	189	100%

Based on table (1) above, women's language features are realized in the talkshow conducted by Najwa. In this study the usage of intensifier is the most dominant (24,3%) than other features. Meanwhile, 24,3% is realized with Lexical hedge and 12,7% is indicated with Hyper Correct Grammar. In addition, other features are realized under 5 % of each in which 2,7 % of data shows the rising intonation, 5,3% superpolite form, 1,6 % empty adjectives, avoidance of strong swear words 1,1 %, and empathic stress 5,3 %. Therefore, this study identifies the women's language features except for precise color terms.

a) Lexical Hedges or Fillers

There are 24.4% of all data describes lexical hedges in this study. According to Lakoff (2004, p. 53), lexical hedges or fillers are utilized by women to reduce uncertainty or self- doubt through their utterances or statements. The result found five kinds of lexical hedges or fillers in Najwa's utterances, such as: maybe, like, you know, I think, well, and umm. The following is an example:

Data 1

N: *I think* anyone who knows me will tell you that about me *umm*... and I'd worked so hard over my life to continue being that person even though the world was putting me down because of it. (00:14:46)

In data 1, taken from episode 11, hedge *I think* is used to support her assumption that people who already knew her would speak about her. It indicates that she only assumes based on her opinion and is uncertain with her utterance but she wants to strengthen her arguments at the same time. However, the phrase *umm* is undefined, it is used because of her lack of confidence through her utterance as a way to show that she did not know people's perceptions of her and wanted to take time before going to the next sentence.

b) Tag Questions

According to Lakoff (2004, p. 48), a tag question is utilized when the speaker makes an assertion but lacks complete confidence in its authenticity. Based on the finding, there are 12,7% of data indicates that the Tag question is used by the speaker. Most of the data imply that the Tag Question is used to clarify the question and to encourage the speaker herself as in the example below;

Data 2

C: Yeah. And what she told me, like what she told herself was, when I turned 18, she would give me the decision.

N: *Did she?* (00:11:35)

In data 2, taken from episode 5, Corey told about his parents' divorce and how his mother asked him to decide where he would live at age 18. Then, Najwa asked for clarification that Corey's mother asked Corey to choose between his father and his mother. Based on the data, Najwa is hesitant about Corey's statement. She encouraged herself to ask Corey because she wanted to prove her doubts towards Corey, therefore, the tag question *did she* is used.

c) Rising Intonation

Rising intonation is to suggest a lack of assertiveness in expressing a viewpoint and demonstrating that the speaker leaves the decision to the addressee in a non-coercive manner (Lakoff, 2004, p. 50). There are 2.7 % data that deals with rising intonation. The speaker tries to show her surprise when she rising her intonation

Data 3

C: She's like, "I'm like why did it happen?" She didn't know why. Uhhh But when you're that young, you don't realize what being laid off means I found out uhh... about a year and a half later

N: *when you're laid off?* ↗ (00:15:15)

In data 3, taken from episode ten, Corey talked about his mother who was crying because she was dismissed from work. He said he did not know what laid-off means at that time and he only found out about the meaning of being laid off one and a half years later after he became a worker. Najwa was surprised and attempted humor by asking and rising her tone, "*when were you laid off?*" which is possible that Corey understood what it meant when he might be getting laid off.

d) Hypercorrect Grammar

Holmes (2013, p.55) argues that women prefer to employ grammatical standard forms than males, whereas men are more likely to use vernacular forms. This feature is often used by women to reflect their communication. This is also found in the study that 12.7% hypercorrect are used. Accordingly, this expression is used by the speaker as in the example below,

Data 4

N: I'm sure that *I will* be expanding on this topic in future episodes, but for now, here's what *I will* say to bring this back to our story with David **(00:12:12-00:12:14)**

Data 4, taken from episode 4, Najwa was opening her interview with David by promising a topic to be discussed afterward to the audience. Najwa preferred using *I will* in her utterance because she was talking to her audience, instead of using *I'll* to shorten her words. It shows that Najwa is respected her audiences.

e) Intensifier

Intensifiers as one of the women's language features are also identified in this research. There are 34,3 % of data indicates the intensifier that was used by Najwa. This correlates with Holmes (2013, p. 230), who stated that intensifiers are the inverse of lexical hedges, whereas lexical hedges are used to demonstrate uncertainty, intensifiers are employed to bolster the desired meaning, as in the following example:

Data 5

N: Because of the *very little* knowledge that I had, I often found that those who were *very much* into perfecting a certain image were highly obsessed with that image. **(00:4:17-00:4:19)**

Taken from episode four, in data 5, Najwa was talking about bodybuilding who has difficulties in expressing his emotions due to his masculine appearance. She humbled herself by saying that he had very little knowledge of bodybuilding. She also mentioned that many people maintain their image so as not to look weak with many efforts by using *very many phrases*. Accordingly, Najwa emphasizes her utterance by using an intensifier *very*.

Data 6

N: That's why I wanted to clarify it, that you are *super* close with them and they mean a lot to you... **(00:31:10)**

In another case, data 6, taken from episode four, the empty adjective is used. Najwa had an interview with David and she thought that David is close with his parents by using *super close*. The phrase *super* here means very good or excellent, it said that David is really close with his father. The word *super* itself is an adverb that means very which is used to show an excessive degree. She preferred to use *super* in her utterance to admire him instead of saying *very* to show her admiration toward David and his parent relationship. However, the utterance is still understandable even though she did not add the phrase *super*.

f) Superpolite Forms

It is one of the language features that is often used by women. There are 5,3% of data found dealing with superpolite forms that support Lakoff (2004, p. 56) who proposed that superpolite forms aimed to act and communicate politely, to allow the ability to receive the request up to the addressee without attempting to force what they want or emerge to be in their thoughts, and to leave the option up to the addressee. The following is an example,

Data 7

D: That relationship with my father, like I... so...

N: *you don't if you don't want to talk about it? It's fine...* (00:48:37-00:49:02)

In data 7, taken from episode four, Najwa had an interview with David about his personal life. David told about his relationship with his father, but he sounds a bit uncomfortable discussing it. Najwa responded by calming him down, she did not force him to talk considering the topic was quite sensitive for him by saying '*you don't want to talk about it? it's fine...*' instead of getting mad at him or demanding him to answer.

Data 8

N: *So begin wherever you're comfortable beginning* (00:03:46-00:03:48)

C: in terms of like my story?

N: Yes.

Another example, in data 8, taken from the episode ten, superpolite forms also occurred. Najwa had an interview with Corey for her podcast. She asked Corey to tell his personal story about forgiveness. Najwa started the interview by inviting Corey to talk about anything that made him comfortable or unburdened, as in '*so begin wherever you're comfortable beginning*', rather than directly saying "*tell me!*" or immediately bombarding him with inappropriate questions. Najwa requested him to tell the story as naturally as possible because she respected Corey.

g) Empty Adjective

It is one of the ways how women use language by using special language. There are 1,6 % of data indicating specific adjective that is considered features of women's language. According to Lakoff (2004, p. 25), empty adjectives are specific adjectives that women apply to distinguish themselves from men in the way they use language. Accordingly, in the conversation, Najwa also applies empty adjectives in her conversation as in the example:

Data 9

N: So but it's also at the same time, it's *fascinating* to me to see you openly feel your feelings (00:55:01)

Based on data 9, taken from episode four, Najwa was really glad to know David's feelings. The word *fascinating* is an adjective that means really exciting. Thus, Najwa wanted to show her pleasure towards David, who was willing to express what he felt without hesitation with a specific adjective *fascinating*.

h) Avoidance Strong Swear Words

Lakoff (2004), swearing is a type of utterance that can communicate the outright immediately. Swearing is an inappropriate expression of people's intense emotions. Therefore, women are more likely to convey their emotion in a softer way to maintain

their image. Based on the findings, avoidance of strong swear words is merely found twice from each podcast or only 1,1% from all data.

Data 10

N: *Oh my goodness!* I can't imagine the number of people listening to this right now or I thinking I did that too or I'm currently doing that. **(00:11:06)**

Data 10, taken from episode four, shows that Najwa shared her opinions regarding parental, and gender issues in society, and self-acceptance. It could be seen that Najwa talked about her personal experience of accepting herself and sharing the words that influenced her throughout the process. She used avoidance strong swear words feature like, '*Oh my Goodness!*', instead of using '*Oh fuck!*' or '*Oh shit!*'. She was shocked and could not imagine that she would say that to her audience. This also indicates that women use their own features to distinguish themselves from men.

i) Emphatic Stress

These features are typically used by women, (Holmes, 1992),. It is employed to highlight significant sentences. It is mostly for women who typically compare, correct or clarify something when they emphasize words. There are 5.3% of data that shows emphatic stress in Najwa conversation.

Data 11

N: That's not fair for me, that's giving them too much power. *Too much power*, right? **(00:20:33-00:20:37)**

Data 11 in episode 11 above shows that Najwa asserts that if she is weak toward herself or lacks confidence in herself, it will make people who have wronged him joyful and give them great strength. The emphasis on the phrase "*too much power*" suggests that Najwa felt hurt and that the situation was unfair. To show the audience how he feels, she stresses that it is not the right thing to do. The emphasis on certain words reveals Najwa's emotional state

B. Function of Women's Language Features

Based on the information gathered above, the function of women's language features is also shown through the utterances. All of the functions are examined in each feature, such as expressing uncertainty, starting a discussion, getting a response, expressing feelings, and softening the utterance. Each episode discovered the different usage of the functions, which could be seen in the table below:

Table. 2 Total amount of the function of women's language features usage

Function of Women Lang. Features	Total	Percentage
Expressing Uncertainty	48	23.9%
Start a Discussion	38	18.9%
Get a Response	25	12.4%
Expressing Feelings	71	35.3%
Soften an Utterance	19	9.5%
Total Amount	201	100%

Table 2 shows that women's language features also have function as their characteristics. Each function was identified as the fact that functions of women's language features by Pearson (1985) were identified in Najwa conversation. Expressing feeling (35,3%) is the most dominant function of women's language, which was followed by expressing uncertainty (23,9%). Start a discussion is also found (18,9%), other functions, get a response (25%), and soften an utterance (9,5%). Those functions are the expression of how women's language has its own characteristics.

1. Expressing Uncertainty

This function is mostly applied in lexical hedges or fillers and tag question features. Women are usually unsure of their own words, so certain words are employed to aid them in communication. Some examples of how women express uncertainty are as the following

Data 12

N: *maybe* it's true what they tell you that if you're kind people are going to take advantage of you, and no one's going to respect you. (00:15:03-00:15:11)

Based on data 12 in episode 11 above, the hedges *maybe* is used by Najwa because she only said based on her opinion. She is unsure about her statement about the fact that people will take advantage of kind people. That fact is not necessarily true, so Najwa used the word *maybe* only for assuming. Thus, the hedge *maybe* indicates the function of expressing uncertainty. The modality *maybe* shows the probability that indicates the uncertainty of speakers.

Data 13

N: But you were doing something good

D: I was trying to.

N: *right?* Yeah... (00:46:13)

D: I was trying to

In data 13, taken from episode four, David talked about his guilt toward his father that he said appropriate things that made his father sad. Najwa stated that David might be doing something to make his father happy. She sounded doubting her statement because she didn't know what David was doing exactly; hence, she used the tag question "*right?*" to ask for clarification. The question *right* is utilized to express uncertainty.

2. Start a Discussion

Features that are usually applied for this function are Lexical Hedges and Tag Questions. Women have a character for being talkative. They tend to feel interested in something and will ask about it or simply bring it up in conversation to fulfill their curiosity.

Data 14

N: And, and really what you're trying to save that his reactions have stemmed from pain from internal pain and struggle that he has about himself, *right?* (00:52:03-00:52:14)

In data 14 above, David talked about how he accidentally hurt his father. Najwa stated that maybe her father's pain came from his internal pain which ended with the use of a tag question. The tag *right?* is used to ask an opinion and started a new topic,

therefore the tag question is used to starting discussion. Indeed the addressee will be replied with a gesture or yes/no response, and the dialogue will continue if the speaker continues to discuss what occurred next.

3. Get a Response

The function to get a response in women's language features is proposed by Pearson (1985), who assigns that women prefer to request indirect assistance from others rather than men. Women desire a response from the presenter. This implies that women intend to be understood by their interlocutors. (Rubbyanti 2017, p. 47). Women's language feature that contains this feature is tag question. It can be seen below:

Data 15

N: ... and I'm not going to try to understand it because it will never make sense

C: hmm

N: *right?* lying about someone will never make sense (00:20:57-00:21:00)

Data 15, shows that Najwa stated that lying about a statement makes no sense, and her utterance was ended with a tag question. The tag question is used to ask for validation. She requires confirmation or agreement from the addressee that her statement is true. Women usually make implicit demands to the addressee in attempts to understand them and their intentions. Thus, the tag question is used to get a response from the addressee.

4. Expressing Feelings

According to Wardaugh (1992), women often express their feelings of affection when talking to others of the same sex or in public by using polite language and praises to strengthen their friendship with them. Women frequently use the phrase "feeling" to express admiration. Women use their emotions and interpersonal relationships more. The expression sensation occurred in a variety of conversational settings. This representation of emotion was a part of their speech suppression's emphasis on stress. The women's language features that contain this function is an intensifier, empty adjectives, emphatic stress, and avoidance of strong swear words.

Data 16

N: I was *so* angry with her. I'm so hurt by what she did, and it was only last year that I realized that I'd forgiven her. (00:09:43—00:09:49)

In data 16, taken from episode 11, Najwa describes the situation that brought her down. She has been hurt by somebody else, which has left her in a bad situation. The word "so" here indicates her anger and emotions towards the person's acts. Therefore, the intensifier "so" can be used to express feelings or women's emotions.

Data 17

N: Yeah. *Wow*... That is crazy! (00:54:29-00:54:30)

In data 17, taken from episode 4, Najwa showed her feelings toward David's routine. She was surprised, by saying the word "wow." This feature is utilized to show several intense emotions that could not be uttered by proper words without being rough or offensive. Thus, the avoidance of strong swear words feature aimed to express feelings.

5. Soften an Utterance

When women wish to be polite to others, they need to use linguistic features like superpolite forms and hypercorrect grammar. (Pearson, 1985, p. 47). Women are generally more polite in communication. Hence, women's speech is softened. Women's language features, such as superpolite terms, are used to maintain their conversational etiquette. In addition, the hypercorrect grammar feature has been utilized.

Data 18

N: *It's okay. Well, don't worry, they'll cut it in a way that it's fine. I always repeat myself, too* (01:04:12-01:04:18)

In data 18, taken from episode 4, David sounded a bit nervous; therefore, he kept saying the same thing and felt embarrassed of himself. Najwa did not mind, thus she responded soothingly instead of becoming enraged or demanding David by saying, "It's okay" to calm him down. She respected David as her guest and showed her gentle side of her by employing superpolite form. An utterance can sound softer or not offensive by using this feature, which is used to demonstrate politeness. Hence, superpolite form can be utilized to soften an utterance.

Data 19

N: Because when I look at you now even as you're telling the story, I still see that there's a lot of pain that I don't think *you are* giving yourself the right to feel. (00:15:18)

In data 19, taken from episode 10, Najwa used *you are* instead of *you're* because felt sympathetic to Corey. She utilized the word "you are" instead of "you're" to make her sentence clear for the addressee, and also soften her utterance that will show her modesty properly to her addressee. Women are required to speak softly and clearly. Thus, hypercorrect grammar aimed to soften an utterance during the conversation which shows the graceful politeness to the addressee.

CONCLUSION

This study also examined 201 utterances that included the function of women's language features, such as expressing uncertainty, starting a discussion, expressing feelings, and softening an utterance. All of the functions are well applied to the features. One feature could have two functions or more, like as, tag questions that could have three functions: expressing uncertainty, starting a discussion, and getting a response.

Accordingly, women's language features have their own characteristics in which the language features apply some features proposed by Lakof (2004) and its function as Pearson (1985) proposed. Women language's features can be identified from the use of features that indicate that women using the language tend to be feminist when women use language with women characters. The women's language features tend to be identified based on the place and time when the subject expresses her language including in podcasts as in Najwa podcast.

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