

Women's Language Features in *Turning Red* (2022): A Sociolinguistics Study

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Abstract

Women and men have different ways of using language, which makes women have their own features called women's language features. This study examines the use of women's language features in *Turning Red* (2022). The study aims to analyze women's language features used by the female lead character in *Turning Red* (2022) based on its types according to Lakoff (1975) and its functions according to Jakobson (1960). The study employed a qualitative method with a descriptive approach in interpreting the data. Among the 170 data analyzed, 9 out of 10 women's language features were identified. These include hypercorrect grammar (26.5%), lexical hedges or fillers (22%), emphatic stress (19%), intensifiers (16.5%), avoidance of strong swear words (4.7%), super polite forms (4%), tag question (3%), empty adjectives (2.4%), and rising intonation on declarative (1.9%). Notably, the presence of precise color terms features is absent from the data. Furthermore, the analysis uncovered 5 out of 6 language functions, namely referential (39.4%), expressive (38%), phatic (16%), directive (6%), and poetic function (0.6%). It is worth noting that no instances of the metalinguistic function were found within the analyzed data. This study is expected to enhance comprehension regarding women's language features, while also serving as a valuable resource for both educational purposes and further research in the field of linguistics, specifically within the realm of sociolinguistics.

Keywords: *sociolinguistics, language and gender, women's language features, language functions*

Introduction

Language is an essential tool of communication within society. The relationship between language and society is further explored in the field of sociolinguistics. According to Holmes (2001, p.1), sociolinguistics offers valuable insights into "*the way people signal aspects of their social identity through their language.*" One significant aspect of social identity is gender. Several studies have demonstrated that language usage varies between females and males. The complex interplay between language and gender remains an endlessly intriguing subject of discussion. Coulmas (2005, p.36), as cited by Harimansyah (2012), asserts that the differences in language use between men and women are natural phenomena in society. Consequently, women exhibit distinctive language features commonly known as women's language features. The various studies conducted, such as "Women's Language in *Tangled* Movie: A Sociolinguistic Study" (Safitri, 2017), "The Women's Language Features in *Moana* Movie" (Sanjaya, 2018), "The Features of Speech of Emma Watson in Interview(s)" (Ascalonicawati, 2020), "Women's Language Features of Eilis Lacey in the *Brooklyn* Movie Script" (Pamikat, 2020), and "Analysis of Women's Language Features in the Movie *Cruella*"

(Sovi Nur Asfia Rizki, 2022), have demonstrated the significance of women's language features, rendering them important and intriguing subjects for study. Therefore, the researcher is interested in examining the language used by a female character in *Turning Red* (2022) using Lakoff's theory (1975).

The object of this research is children's animated film entitled *Turning Red* (2022). Animated film is chosen as the research object due to its extensive popularity and ability to serve as valuable educational material for individuals of all age groups. What makes *Turning Red* (2022) particularly intriguing to be studied is the fact that it is directed and written by female director and writers, including Domee Shi, Julia Cho, and Sarah Streicher. This creative team's involvement contributes to the growing significance of the film, as it signifies a breakthrough in the animation industry's recognition of female characters as independent entities with their own right, rather than solely being portrayed as supporting or dependent characters. The film's central theme explores a woman's struggle in meeting society's expectations of a woman while striving to establish a sense of personal identity. This exploration of women's struggles underscores the film's relevance to contemporary society, also highlighting the language used by the female character as a reflection of the language commonly employed by women in present times.

In examining the use of the language of the female character, the research emphasizes the types and functions of the women's language features used. To be more focused, the study is limited to the dialogue of one main female character in *Turning Red* (2022), namely Meilin Lee. This research is expected to provide a better understanding of the relationship of language and gender as well as serve as a valuable reference for learning and research in the field of linguistics, particularly sociolinguistics. The study is established to answer the following questions:

- a. What are the types of women's language features used in *Turning Red* (2022)?
- b. What are the functions of women's language features used in *Turning Red* (2022)?

Sociolinguistics

As the name implies, which consists of the words socio and linguistics, sociolinguistics is a branch of linguistic study that focuses on the relationship between society and language. According to Holmes (2001), sociolinguistics provides knowledge of the language works in society. Additionally, Garnasih and Simatupang (2022, p.585) also argue that sociolinguistics is "*a study that arranges theories about the relationship between society and language.*" Furthermore, the Encyclopedia Britannica defines sociolinguistics as "*the study of the sociological aspects of language.*" All in all, sociolinguistics can be defined as the study of interpreting the language aspects and its relation with society.

Women's Language Features

The sociological aspects of language consist of the language use in maintaining the social roles in a community. One of the social roles that everyone carries out is gender. Research in sociolinguistics shows that there are significant differences in the language use between males and females which makes females have special language features. Lakoff (1975) identified women's language features in ten categories, namely:

1. Lexical Hedges or Fillers

Lexical hedges or fillers aim to weaken speech and to fill gaps in conversation with contextually meaningless words. The use of this feature indicates a lack of confidence or expresses uncertainty. Examples of lexical hedges or fillers are well, you know, I think, I mean, I guess, kinda, sort of, seems, like, uh, um, er.

2. Tag Question

The characteristics of a tag question are less assertive than a statement, but more confident than a yes-no question. Tag question is used when the speaker states something, but lacks confidence or when the speaker only needs justification for the statement. Examples of this feature marker are isn't it?, right?, don't we?.

3. Rising Intonation on Declarative

Women have special characteristics in making statements sound like questions by raising the intonation at the end of the sentence as in a typical yes-no question. Rising intonation on declarative is used when the speaker is seeking confirmation when in fact (s)he alone has the necessary information. The following is an example of rising intonation on declarative:

A: Why do you like this cafe?

B: Oh I like this cafe because... the food is tasty?

4. Empty Adjective

There are groups of words whose use are associated with women's language. The adjective group, that is besides its literal meaning, signals admiration or approbation of something, such as gorgeous, lovely, adorable, and charming largely belongs to women's features. Such adjectives are considered belong to women since men are more at risk of using those as *"it can damage their reputation or can embarrass a man who is considered masculine."* (Deby Rahmawati, 2019, p.190)

5. Precise Color Terms

Women have a more specific vocabulary in naming colors than men. According to Lakoff (1973), it happens because men tend to leave trivial matters, such as naming colors, to women as men are the ones expected to make decisions only on important matters. For example, when men say red, women identify the color with scarlet, crimson, rosewood, or maroon.

6. Intensifiers

The use of absolute superlative words that emphasize the following words is a characteristic of women's language. These words include very, totally, really, absolutely, definitely, incredibly, surely, utterly.

7. Hypercorrect Grammar

Hypercorrect grammar refers to the consistent use of standard verb forms or the use of precise pronunciation. Women are believed to use more -ing pronunciations and fewer -in pronunciations than men. For example, women tend to sound the g in a word such as

“moving” instead of the more informal “movin” and avoiding the more casual form such as “ain’t”.

8. Superpolite Forms

According to Lakoff, women's speech is associated with politeness, and one aspect of politeness is *"leaving a decision open, not imposing your mind, or views, or claims, on anyone else."* As a result, women tend to use polite requests rather than overt orders. Superpolite forms can be marked by the statements *can I please?*, *would you?*, and *I'd really appreciate if...*

9. Avoidance of Strong Swear Words

Avoidance of strong swear words involves weakening speech by avoiding using words that contain strong emotions. These features include avoiding using strong swear words, avoiding vulgar or taboo words, and changing swear words to be softer. For example, women use *oh God*, *oh dear*, and *oh gosh* to replace *shit*, *damn* and *fuck*.

10. Emphatic Stress

Emphatic stress is a typical stress that is given to some word in a sentence. This feature serves to strengthen the meaning of the utterance, correct, or clarify things.

Language Functions

As a means of communication, language also has a function. The functions provide information about the purpose of the language use. Jakobson (1960) classifies language functions into six categories, namely:

1. Expressive/Emotive Function

Expressive function or also known as emotive function focuses on the speaker and is used to express emotion, feelings, desires, and moods of the speaker. It has a tendency to create a perception of a particular emotion (Aningsih, 2022, p.18). For example, when someone says *“I’m glad you come!”*, the speaker expresses pleasure to the addressee.

2. Directive/Conative Function

Directive or also called conative function aims to get the reaction of the addressee. This function is intended to get the addressee to perform particular action related to the speaker’s utterances (Setyowati, 2020, p.86). The directive function can be found in a request or order, such as *“Can you bring that newspaper here?”*

3. Referential/Cognitive Function

Referential is a linguistic function in which language is used to convey information or ideas of the speakers (Kanaza, 2020, p.61). This function is oriented toward the object, situation, and context. The referential function is often associated with the transmission of factual information and the expression of objective knowledge.

4. Metalinguistic Function

This function is oriented toward the code. Metalinguistic function refers to the use of language about the language itself which consists of its features, structures, definitions, and meanings. It allows individuals to think and talk about language in a more sophisticated and analytical way.

5. Poetic Function

The poetic function of language refers to the use of language to create aesthetic, emotional, or imaginative effects. It involves using language in a way that goes beyond its referential or communicative function and creates an artistic or expressive impact on the reader or listener. The poetic function is often associated with the use of figurative language, such as metaphors, similes, and imagery, as well as the use of rhyme, rhythm, and alliteration.

6. Phatic Function

The phatic function is used to establish and maintain social interaction, rather than to convey meaningful information or ideas. It can be found in greetings and casual discussions, particularly with strangers. It also provides the keys to open, maintain, verify, or close the communication channel.

Method

Method refers to the systematic approach employed in conducting research. Qualitative with the elaboration of descriptive data is the method chosen in carrying out this research. According to Saryono (2010, p.1), qualitative research investigates and explains events that cannot be measured using a quantitative approach. This study uses a descriptive approach in interpreting the data. Descriptive approach aims to elucidate the object of study through the use of descriptive language (Salma, 2018). In this research, the object is the dialogue spoken by the female character regarding the types and functions of women's language features used in the film *Turning Red* (2022).

This research was conducted by going through the pre-research stage and the research stage. The pre-research stage involves (1) determining the topic, (2) conducting a literature review, and (3) determining the title of the film to be studied. After that, the researcher conducted the research phase which consists of (1) watching the movie, (2) downloading the subtitle of the film, (3) identifying women's language features contained in the dialogues of the main female character, (4) analyzing and classifying the data found based on types and functions of women's language features, and (5) drawing conclusion.

Results and Discussion

The researcher found 170 data containing women's language features in the film *Turning Red* (2022). There are nine out of ten women's language features proposed by Lakoff's theory (1975) found. Those features include lexical hedges or fillers, tag questions, rising intonation on declarative, empty adjectives, intensifiers, hypercorrect grammar, super polite forms, avoidance of strong swear words, and emphatic stress. Below is the analysis of each data found in each feature.

1. Lexical Hedges or Fillers

Meilin: *"Hmm. Kinda looks like Devon ... Okay, his shoulder's, like, kind of nice, I guess..."*
(00:10:52)

Meilin said the dialogue above while she suddenly drew Devon, an employee at a nearby convenience store who was admired by her friends. However, Meilin disagreed with her friends' attraction towards Devon, as she personally found him unappealing. While unconsciously sketching Devon's figure, Meilin uttered phrases such as "kinda," "like," "kind of," and "I guess," which serve as lexical hedges indicating hesitation and a lack of confidence in her statement. These linguistic devices demonstrate Meilin's uncertainty about her drawing. Furthermore, Meilin exhibited hesitation in acknowledging Devon's attractiveness by employing lexical hedges such as "like" and "I guess" when describing him.

Meilin made the above statement while describing her drawing, which resembled Devon's figure. The utterance provides information about Devon's physical description, indicating the presence of the referential function through the use of the words "kinda" and "kind of." Additionally, the inclusion of the words "like" and "I guess" signifies hesitancy, adding an expressive function to the sentence, reflecting Meilin's uncertainty in acknowledging Devon's attractiveness.

2. Tag Question

Meilin: *"I'm not going to regret this, am I?"* (01:26:25)

Meilin possessed a remarkable ability that causes her to transform into a red panda whenever she experiences intense emotions. Throughout the process of undergoing a ritual aimed at dispelling this peculiar curse, Meilin ultimately made a firm decision to retain her panda form. The dialogue mentioned above was addressed to Sun-Yee, her ancestral figure who had bestowed upon her this extraordinary ability. Despite her internal conviction and fondness for the memories she made when she turned into a panda, Meilin concluded her statement with the tag question "am I?" in an attempt to seek confirmation and validation from Sun-Yee, whom she firmly believed must share her support for Meilin's choice.

While the structure of the dialogue appears to pose a question, the tag question employed serves a different purpose. It functions not as a means to elicit a direct response, but rather as an expression through which Meilin articulates her resolute beliefs and seeks acknowledgment of her convictions. Consequently, the dialogue consists of expressive function, serving as a medium for Meilin to convey her unwavering confidence in her decision to not to let go of her panda.

3. Rising Intonation on Declarative

Meilin: *"Oh, and traffic's a nightmare. I can just take the streetcar? you stay and rest."* (00:48:57)

Meilin actively avoided involving her mother in her activities with friends, attempting to assert her independence by suggesting she could go alone using public transportation. However, she raised the intonation at the end of her sentence. Meilin uses rising intonation on declarative feature to seek confirmation since she did not want to assert her opinion carried to an extreme.

In the utterance, there is a referential function of language. Meilin employed language as a means to refer to her capability of going out by herself. Moreover, she provided specific information regarding her preferred mode of transportation, which was by utilizing the streetcar. Through her linguistic expression of her abilities and logistical choices, Meilin engages the referential function of language, conveying informative content regarding her independence and autonomy.

4. Empty Adjective

Meilin: *"So cute! (GASPS) No. So fuzzy."* (00:37:02)

When she saw the kittens her mother brought, Meilin's admiration for them overflowed, leading her to bestow upon them the accolade of "cute". This adjective choice does not offer specific or informative details regarding the kittens themselves. Rather, its purpose lies in enhancing the kittens' appeal, making them sound more impressive. Consequently, the adjective word "cute" in the dialogue showcases the utilization of an empty adjective.

In contrast to providing meaningful descriptions or characteristics of the kittens, the employment of the word "cute" serves as a linguistic expression of Meilin's profound admiration for these furry creatures. Therefore, the language employed in this dialogue assumes an expressive function, conveying Meilin's emotional response and allowing her to articulate her awe and affection towards the kittens.

5. Intensifiers

Meilin: *"Aaron T and Aaron Z are, like, really talented ... We are 4-Townies, remember? Ride or die!"* (00:04:22)

Meilin reminded her friends how much they idolized the boy band 4-Town, which consisted of Jesse, Tae Young, Robaire, Aaron T, and Aaron Z. The word "really" is used to emphasize the degree to which Aaron T and Aaron Z are talented. While the sentence would still convey information of their talent without the inclusion of "really", the addition of this intensifier serves to amplify the message, indicating that Meilin perceives Aaron T and Aaron Z as exceptionally gifted rather than simply talented. By employing the intensifier "really", Meilin effectively conveys a stronger emotional tone and accentuates the significance of her statement.

The utilization of the intensifier "really" in this context can be interpreted as an expression of enthusiasm and admiration for the extraordinary talents possessed by Aaron T and Aaron Z. Within the dialogue, the expressive function becomes apparent as Meilin employs language to communicate her subjective feelings and convey her positive evaluation of the talents displayed by these individuals. Thus, the expressive function in this dialogue serves as a means for Meilin to express her genuine admiration for her idols and effectively convey her positive assessment of their remarkable abilities.

6. Hypercorrect Grammar

Meilin: *"I'm Meilin Lee ... I've been doing my own thing, making my own moves ... and I will not hesitate to do a spontaneous cartwheel ..."* (00:01:29)

The dialogue was uttered by Meilin during her self-introduction. She employed the –ing pronunciation when uttering the words “doing” and “making”. Additionally, she consciously avoided the abbreviation “won't” and instead opted for the expanded form “will not”. These linguistic choices signify the utilization of hypercorrect grammar, wherein Meilin demonstrates a preference for precise -ing pronunciations and the usage of standard verb forms.

The dialogue presented above serves the purpose of describing Meilin herself. In this context, the language employed by Meilin contains the referential function, as she imparts information pertaining to her own identity denoted by the pronoun “I” in her utterance, thus referring to herself.

7. Super Polite Forms

Meilin: “No, it's not! Will you just get out?” (00:17:36)

The dialogue above is uttered by Meilin when her mother entered the bathroom upon hearing Meilin's scream. However, Meilin was unwilling to have her mother witness her transformation into a red panda. Instead of directly commanding her mother to leave by saying “Get out!”, she said “Will you just get out?”. In this scene, Meilin avoids showing strong emotions by weakening her utterance by saying “Will you..?”. The transformation of a direct imperative sentence into an indirect request showcases a manifestation of women's language features, namely super polite forms. The use of “Will you” instead of “Get out!” implies a subtle suggestion for the addressee to perform an action as a favor for the speaker, rather than explicitly demanding obedience. The super polite forms applied by adding the expression “Will you” employs a softened approach, exhibiting politeness and avoiding the display of strong emotions or desires.

Although the dialogue may appear as a question, it serves as an instruction. Meilin's intention is to request her mother to leave by stating, “Will you just get out?”. Meilin's speech is directed at persuading the addressee to act in accordance with her statement, which is to go out. Therefore, the directive function of language is encompassed within this utterance.

8. Avoidance of Strong Swear Words

Meilin: “Ah, fudgesicles! I gotta go.” (00:04:43)

Meilin's friends asked her to engage in karaoke, but she had to leave as the tram she used to take had arrived. In frustration, Meilin vented her emotions by exclaiming “fudgesicles”. Although “fudgesicles” refers to a chocolate frozen dessert and has no direct connection to profanity, the initial syllable bears a resemblance to the offensive word “fuck”. This suggests that Meilin consciously chooses to avoid strong swear words and instead substitutes them with a harmless term like “fudgesicles”. By employing “fudgesicles” as a substitute for a more explicit or vulgar exclamation, Meilin adds a humorous and light-heartedness tone into the sentence, while still conveying her sense of annoyance.

Meilin's utterance serves the purpose of vividly expressing her intense emotions of frustration and anger. By resorting to swearing, Meilin utilizes language as a powerful tool to convey her strong negative feelings in a heightened manner and communicate the depth of

her frustration. Hence, the utterance takes on an expressive function, as it goes beyond the mere conveyance of information and delves into the realm of personal expression.

9. Emphatic Stress

Meilin: "I didn't mean that. I'm a gross red monster!" (00:17:42)

The dialogue above is said by Meilin to describe herself to her mother. The use of adjective "gross" intensifies the noun "monster". Meilin employed this intensified word to emphasize the severity of her self-description and evoke strong emotions, possibly reflecting feelings of frustration and self-deprecation. She used the exaggerated expression of "gross red monster" to describe how terrible she feels about herself. Since she emphasizes a particular word which is "monster" by adding "gross", she applies women's language features, namely emphatic stress.

The phrase "gross red monster" is used to describe Meilin, suggesting that she perceives herself to possess certain physical and emotional attributes that make her feel akin to a monster. Consequently, the dialogue contains a referential function, as it is employed to communicate information regarding Meilin's self-description and her appearance to her mother.

Conclusion

From Meilin Lee's dialogue in the film *Turning Red* (2022), 170 data containing 9 women's language features proposed by Lakoff were found. These features were observed in varying percentages, with 26.5% for hypercorrect grammar, 22% for lexical hedges or fillers, 19% for emphatic stress, 16.5% for intensifiers, 4.7% for avoidance of strong swear words, 4% for super polite forms, 3% for tag question, 2.4% for empty adjective, and 1.9% for rising intonation on declarative. Notably, hypercorrect grammar emerged as the most prevalent feature, reflecting Meilin's character as a highly intelligent and obedient individual who adheres to linguistic norms and standards. Meanwhile, one feature was not found, which is precise color terms due to the absence of dialogues pertaining to color-related discussions.

The analysis also revealed that the women's language features used encompassed 5 out of 6 language functions proposed by Jakobson: referential (39.4%), expressive (38%), phatic (16%), directive (6%), and poetic (0.6%). The predominance of the referential function indicates that Meilin prioritizes conveying information to those around her. The expressive function emerged as the second most dominant feature, depicting Meilin as a teenager with intense emotions.

These research findings provide valuable insights into the role of language in character portrayal within the film as there is a connection between language and the social aspects typically discussed in sociolinguistics. The study contributes to the significance of linguistic choices in shaping characters and their interactions. Thus, this study is expected to be a valuable resource for educational purposes and further research, particularly in the field of sociolinguistics.

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