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Voice of Empowerment: Debunking Gendered Language in Emma Watson's Advocacy

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Abstract

For nearly five decades, Robin Lakoff's women's language features have been well examined. These features such as hedges, intensifiers, and rising intonation have traditionally positioned women as powerless language users due to their less-assertive nature. However, few have highlighted how these features can serve as rhetorical strategies that can effectively utilized to argue confidently without appearing overly assertive, in line with social expectations. This study examines women's language features used by Emma Watson at the HeForShe Campaign 2014. By using a descriptive qualitative method, we collected data from Emma's speech to identify the features of the women's language that she used to address gender equality issues. The study found six of Lakoff's (1975) women's language features, with lexical hedges being the most frequently used to represent politeness and caution in speaking as well as expressing respect for the interlocutor. Notably, tag questions, precise color terms, hypercorrect grammar, and avoiding strong swear words were not found, likely due to their irrelevance to the feminism-focused topic in the campaign. Instead of highlighting the perceived weaknesses of women's language, this study emphasizes that women's language can be a means to empower women's voices. Emma effectively and persuasively delivered her campaign by using her mastery of language, storytelling techniques, and rhetoric to engage the audience. Overall, Emma strategically utilized women's language to demonstrate her linguistic capability and even persuade the audience effectively rather than showing the weakness of women's language as commonly perceived by previous studies.

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Introduction

> "Both men and women should feel free to be sensitive. Both men and women should feel free to be strong." (Emma Watson, HeforShe Campaign 2024)

For nearly five decades, Robin Lakoff's women's language features have been well

examined. The discourse surrounding women's communication styles has been shaped by both support and criticism. Some scholars argue that gendered communication styles, particularly those of women, are "a set of ideologically saturated linguistic practices" that stem from societal power relations that "[constrain] women's ability to participate in male domains" (Bucholtz, 2014, p. 26). Others contend that these styles are primarily influenced by sociocultural norms that dictate how women are expected to speak and behave appropriately (Davis & Reynolds, 2018; Stone & Can, 2021). In other words, language can be considered a communication medium that indirectly reflects sociocultural identity. Individuals' unique backgrounds lead to diverse language use and communication styles (Holmes, 2013). Holmes and Wilson (2022) define sociolinguistics as the "study [of] the relationship between language and society [that aims to explain] why we speak differently in different social contexts" (p.1) The definition may apply to the discussion of language and gender, which can distinguish the appearance and behavioral characteristics of men and women in language use (Juwita et al., 2018). The language differences between men and women have long been observed since the seventeenth century, confounding literary anthropologists (Coates, 2013).

In 1975, Lakoff raised the topic of women's language features for the first time. Her observations led her to divide women's language features into ten types (Lakoff, 2004). Lexical hedges or fillers like *"I think"* and *"umm"* express uncertainty. Tag questions such as "right*?*" aims to seek hearer's validation. Rising intonation in statements can suggest seriousness or a lack of confidence. Empty adjectives like *"adorable"* and *"lovely"* are used to express amazement. Precise color terms demonstrate women's ability to categorize color more specifically, like distinguishing light pink and magenta. Intensifiers such as *"so"* and *"totally"* serve to emphasize statements. Hypercorrect grammar and super polite forms reflect women's politeness and standardized use of language. Women also avoid strong swear words and opt for milder expressions like *"Oh my God!"* and use of emphatic stress to convey enthusiasm as in, *"This book of yours is amazing! I love it."*

Studies have examined women's language in daily conversations. These conversations are taken from several situations, such as classrooms, clubs, and also informal conversations of adolescents (Chai, 2022). Despite the difference between men's and women's languages, the discussion results show three features of the most prominent of women's language: hedges, super polite form, and empty adjectives. Hedges result from a lack of commitment when conveying ideas so that the outcome of speech causes doubt. On the other hand, hedges aim to keep the situation between the speaker and the interlocutor so that both avoid coercion and conflict during the interactions (Supri et al., 2023)**.** The next point is super polite form. This language feature is also synonymous with women, as women often use this language feature to express gratitude and ask for something very polite. The last point is that empty adjective form. Women used this language feature to represent their feelings when responding to the interaction. Also, adjectives are relative, meaning they all have meaning or are meaningless depending on the context and situation (Supri et al., 2023).

Studies on women's language on several social media have also demonstrated that women use more tag questions, super polite forms, and rising intonation than the language used by men (Suciati et al., 2022). The study by Ginarti et al. (2022) found a difference between men and women in how they respond to hashtags. Women prefer to respond to personality, while men associate this hashtag with actions. This suggests that women judge with a more realistic point of view than men. A study on the language of blogs by Indanna et al. (2022) also found that women express their ideas with nearly all of Lakoff's women's language features, except for the use of precise color terms, probably because there was nothing relatable between the contents of the blogs. The use of hypercorrect grammar was found also to be emphasized. A study by Cantina and Alvarico (2022) demonstrated that women are more expressive, which is indicated by the number of emoticons they use. Because of this prevalence, women recognize negative and positive emotions better than men.

The investigation of women's language features in novels has been a valuable area of research, as evidenced by the literature that has surfaced in the past few (Kusuma et al., 2023; Nasution et al., 2021; Putri et al., 2020; Tahir et al., 2022; Tayefi, 2021). The researchers have identified approximately eight features of women's language: super polite forms, tag questions, empty adjectives, logical hedges, avoidance of words, price color terms, intensifiers, and emphatic stress. Most features of the female language communicate her emotions and insights. Tayefi (2021) found that "especially in a female character, mostly due to the author's spirits and his writing that he has wanted to display women paranormal against the domination of patriarchal society" (p. 231). In addition, female speakers tend to be softer than male speakers regarding intonation, structure, gestures, and expressions (Tahir et al., 2022). It can be concluded that women have their language characteristics as a social group in spoken and written language, such as in the form of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation.

Studies on women's language features in novels have also enriched our understanding of how gender influences language use in literature and highlight how language reflects and shapes social norms and identity. Kusuma et al. (2023) argue that the tendency for women to use super polite forms and tag questions in their speech may reflect societal expectations regarding gendered language. The prevalence of women's language features in the female characters' speech is assumed to be the authors' narrative strategies to develop characters and evoke empathy in readers. Tahir et al. (2022) add that women are often depicted as using softer speech, which may contribute to the perceptions of femininity and nurturance. However, Tayefi (2021) also found that using women's language features, such as intensifiers, swear words, and precise color terms in literature, can also be used to challenge male-dominated society and advocate for gender equality.

The studies above have informed us how women have been stereotyped as relatively disempowered language users and conforming to imposed social expectations. However, few have highlighted how these features can serve as rhetorical strategies that can effectively utilized to argue confidently without appearing overly assertive, in line with social expectations. This study explores the features of women's language used by Emma Watson and investigates how she used language to empower women. In her speech, she argues that women have a voice about the importance of men's involvement in achieving gender equality. This aligns with a broader discourse on women's empowerment as an essential aspect of achieving gender equality (D & Vighnarajah, 2021; Shaw, 2010). Lakoff's (1975) women's language features suggest that women often use specific linguistic features that differ from those used by men. However, it does not inherently diminish women's competence; it highlights language's potential to strengthen arguments (Mavisakalyan & Tarverdi, 2017).

By analyzing Emma Watson's use of women's language, this study aims to uncover how she challenges conventional gender stereotypes and societal expectations of women's language and how language can be utilized as a means of empowerment in pursuing gender equality. Emma Watson is famous actress and activist whose role as a UN Women Goodwill Ambassador adds credibility to the message of the "HeForShe" campaign. In 2014 she delivered a speech at the UN to raise awareness of gender equality and empower women through her campaign. Her influence extends beyond traditional feminist circles, reaching younger and international audiences who may not have previously engaged with these issues. By investigating Emma Watson's language in her campaign, our study seeks to reframe stereotypes associated with gendered language that have traditionally positioned women as powerless language users (Suhandoko et al., 2021). Instead, it demonstrates how language can empower women as confident and assertive language users.

Methodology

The present study adopted discourse analysis (DA) to explore the features of women's language used by Emma Watson as UN Women Goodwill Ambassador during the 2014 HeForShe Campaign. Employing DA not

only allows us to examine the linguistic features used by Emma in delivering information, but we can also reveal how her utterances may "have meaning, force and effect within a social context" (Mills, 1997, p. 6). Data sources were accessed online on the United Nations YouTube channel at https://youtu.be/gkjW9PZBRfk?si=sc5LQdvGo9X5V6O8. The speech was presented at the UN in July 2014 and lasted 13 minutes. We spent abundant time understanding the video's meaning as a first step to managing the data. We then copied the speech transcript provided by YouTube and verified its accuracy by reading it while watching the video. The next step required identifying one by one the words, phrases, or sentences represented by Emma Watson that fit Lakoff's women's language features. We coded the transcript following Lakoff's women's language features, including hedges or fillers (LHF), tag questions (TQ), rising intonations and declaratives (RID), empty adjectives (EADJ), precise color terms (PCT), intensifiers (ITF), hypercorrect grammar (HG), super polite forms (SPF), avoidance of strong swear words (ASSW), and emphatic stress (ESS). Once we coded the data, we consulted a sociolinguistics expert to verify its accuracy. We gave the expert the coded transcript and collaboratively discussed the data to ensure the coding was consistent with the established theories. After reaching an agreement, we proceeded with data analysis. We present the data along with the context of the utterances and presented our analysis in the form of narrative.

Results and Discussion

In this section, we present the answers to the research problem regarding the features of women's language used by Emma Watson in her speech at the HeForShe campaign 2014 and how she used the features to empower women. The findings are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Women's Language Features in Emma Watson's speech

Lakoff's Women's Language Features	*Frequency*	*(%)*
lexical hedges or fillers	7	39%
rising intonations and declarative	1	6%
empty adjectives	2	11%
intensifiers	3	17%
super polite forms	1	6%
emphatic stress	4	22%
Total	18	100%

Based on the data in the table, the most common women's language features used by Emma Watson are lexical hedges or fillers with seven occurrences (39%), intensifiers with three occurrences (17%), emphatic stress with four occurrences, empty adjectives with two occurrences (11%), then with 1 occurrence are rising intonations and declarative, also super polite forms. Notably, we found no features of tag questions, precise color terms, avoidance of strong swear words, and hypercorrect grammar in Emma's speech during this campaign.

1. Women's Language Features in Emma Watson's HeForShe Campaign Speech

The study identified 18 features of the women's language in Emma Watson's speech as shown in Table 1. It is clear that lexical hedges or fillers have a wide coverage, with a total of 39% representing 7 data, followed by emphatic stress with 4 data with 21% representation. A slight difference with the previous one, 3 data, is represented by intensifiers with 16%. Empty adjectives occupy the following position with 2 data, representing 11%. In the last position, there are rising action and declarative, and super polite forms, with only 1 data (5%). However, in this campaign, we could not find data for the types of tag questions, precise color terms, hypercorrect grammar, and avoiding swear words in Emma's speech. This might be due to the formal nature of the UN forum, where she said such features are irrelevant.

a. Lexical Hedges or Fillers

Lexical hedges are one of the linguistic features used when the speaker is less sure what she/he is talking about. It can be said that this language feature is characterized by lexical hedged phrases such as *I think, I consider, apparently.* Chai (2022) argues that "women use more hedges than men because women are uncertain of their utterance" (p. 32).

Datum 1

Context: Emma socialized the HeForShe campaign to fight for women's rights and eliminate gender inequality. She explained that women must be treated well like men, including being given freedom of speech. Also, women are free to make their own decisions about how they are and their physical form.

> ***I think*** *it is right that I should be able to make decision about my own body.*

As a UN Women Goodwill Ambassador, Emma Watson can voice her ideas in the United Nations. Emma spoke about the need for gender equality and the revival of women's long-lost rights. She begins her speech by using **"I think"** to represent her opinion on the significance of each individual respecting each other's choices in life. Hedges like "I think" may express one's uncertainty or tentativeness, which has been associated with women's language and contributed to the stereotype women are less confident linguistically. However, this linguistic feature can be seen as a rhetorical strategy designed to appear open to various perspectives and reduce the risk of provoking opposition (Tayefi, 2021). From the above case, we can say that Emma's use of *I think* as a woman's language means she is less committed to what she is talking about to mitigate disagreement among the audience.

Datum 2

Context: Emma realized that few countries still contribute to the success of gender equality. These countries treat women out of place, so Emma Watson believes that this case is one of the violations of human rights.

> *No country in the world can yet say that they have achieved gender equality. These rights, I* ***consider*** *to be human rights.*

Similar to *"think,"* the term *"consider"* is also an example of hedges that introduce judgment less assertively. In the context Emma's speech, realizing that only a few countries were concerned about gender equality, Emma argued that gender equality is a fundamental part of human rights. It means that women should be treated well, just like men. Therefore, "**I consider**" represents that it is only an assumption from her point of view. Emma's assumption is also based on the fact that there is no statement on why the country has not upheld gender equality. Being assertive is important; however, meticulous linguistic choice is no less important especially in diplomatic contexts, where varying cultural norms and beliefs might influence how messages are delivered (Kusuma et al., 2023). Therefore, the use of hedges in Emma's speech might serve as a rhetorical strategy in advocating for social change while at the same time maintaining a respectful and dialogic tone.

b. Rising Intonation and Declarative

This feature refers to the intonation used by the speaker. In this case, the function of rising intonation is to highlight statements politely so that women are not stuck on their opinions and give others room for discussion.

Datum 3

Context: Emma introduced the HeForShe campaign as her mission to end gender inequality in the world. Initially, she said this is not just about coming forward and socializing; the most critical point is a commitment that this campaign must genuinely realize.

> *And we don't just want to talk about it,* ***we want to make sure that its tangible***

As an introduction to this important topic in the United Nations, Emma shared her mission for starting HeForShe and mentioned gender equality and its implementation. Therefore, the use of **"we want to make sure that it's tangible"** represents the emphasis that Emma seriously invites audiences to contribute, realize, and build behaviors that

elevate the status of women, even if it starts from the smallest things. The rising intonation in the phrase "we want to make sure" functions as a mitigated declarative, where Emma expresses her strong commitment to advocating for gender equality. This is particularly significant given the sociocultural context in which women are expected to speak more politely and avoiding appearing aggressive and confrontational (Lakoff, 2004). The use of "we" instead of "I" and rising intonation in the phrase "want to make sure" becomes even more relevant considering that she is addressing a predominantly male forum. In such setting, this linguistic choice serves a rhetorical strategy to ensure her message is more widely accepted, both linguistically and socially (Suciati et al., 2022).

Datum 4

Context: Emma had the opportunity to present her HeForShe campaign at the United Nations. In the middle of her speech, she also realized that her background as an actress did not align with her mission to fight for women's rights. Because of this, Emma started to make a rising intonation.

> *You might be thinking,* ***'Who is this Harry Potter girl?' and 'What is she doing speaking at the UN?' and it is really good question.***

From the situation above, Emma used rising intonation to show her politeness. Emma used jokes in different ways because the people at the conference thought her speech was useless; however, Emma had told them and then complimented, **"it is really good question."** Similar to the previous utterance in data 3, the use rising intonation, particularly when delivering questions "Who is this Harry Potter girl?" and "What is she doing speaking at the UN?" serves as mitigated declarative. In this context, Emma softens the potential tension in the forum by making a joke. In a social setting that expects women to speak politely, using questions as a form of humor is a linguistic strategy that allows Emma to avoid appearing overly assertive in a male-dominated forum (Suhandoko et al., 2021). By addressing skepticism about her presence with a light-hearted joke, she effectively balances assertiveness with politeness, turning a potential criticism into an opportunity to connect with her audience. This approach increases the likelihood of her message to be heard and respected.

c. Empty Adjectives

This feature refers to hyperbolic adjectives used by women to express admiration or the beauty of what is seen. This feature can be characterized by adjectives such as too aggressive and beloved sports.

Datum 5

Context: Emma compared male and female roles during adolescence. In her fifteenth year, she began to realize gender inequality, and she took her friend's story as an example.

> *When at fifteen, my girlfriends started dropping out of their* ***beloved*** *sports teams because they did not want to appear muscle-y.*

In the example above, Emma uses empty adjectives to describe her feelings when she sees that her friend likes a sports club. By using **beloved** sport**,** the audience at the United Nations will understand that Emma's friend was obsessed with the sports team. In this context, Emma uses the empty adjective "beloved" to describe her deep connection with her sports activities. However, there is no substantive explanation of what made the sports team so cherished. This often leads to the stereotype that women are more emotional and less rational (Lakoff, 2004). Nevertheless, the use of empty adjectives does not indicate linguistic weakness; rather, it often allows women to convey their messages in a more personal and less confrontational manner, which can be particularly effective in certain contexts, such as talking about sports in front of a male-dominated forum.

Datum 6

Context: Emma stated that a woman does not ask to be labeled a feminist. Women want to be considered beings of free expression, and Emma, who considers herself different, experiences this. Emma is known to be independent, overly aggressive, and even anti-male dominations.

> ***Too aggressive,*** *isolating and anti-men,* ***unattractive*** *even.*

Emma considers herself a feminist but has her own way of expressing it. Feminists have indoctrinated women to follow the rules, but Emma looks stronger. Because of this difference, Emma is considered unattractive and "**too aggressive**," representing the perceived inappropriateness of Emma as a feminist woman. Empty adjectives are typically used to convey speaker's emotional response and subjective judgment (Supri et al., 2023). In this context, Emma uses terms like "aggressive," "anti-men," and "unattractive," which reflects societal criticism on feminist women. The use of non-substantive adjectives are closely associated with women who are socially expected to be pleasing and agreeable. However, the use of these empty adjectives does not imply that women are submissive. On the contrary, they can serve as a rhetorical strategy to build rapport with the audience, effectively making their messages accepted and respected.

d. Intensifiers

This language feature refers to a word that women use to emphasize the strength of the verb or adjective. It is usually characterized by the use of the words *so, just, totally, and such*.

Datum 7

Context: Emma explains the background and mission of the campaign. Emma emphasized that it takes commitment and not just talk to avoid failure to implement the campaign. The word "**just**" refers to the emphasis that Emma's campaign needs the cooperation of several parties, including the participants in the United Nations.

> *And we do not **just** want to talk about it, we want to try to make sure that it is tangible.*

In the context above, "And we do not **just** want to talk about it, we want to try to make sure that it is tangible" in Emma's speech at the 2014 HeForShe Campaign includes intensifiers. The word "**just**" in the sentence emphasizes a stronger desire and greater intensity in taking concrete action and ensuring that the goal being talked about can be realized concretely. Intensifiers are associated with women's language because they are socially expected to speak politely and less directly (Lakoff, 2004). Using intensifiers allows Emma to emphasize her message without appearing overly assertive. While the use of intensifiers may seem to compensate for a perceived lack of assertiveness, it can serve as an effective strategy to emotionally engage the audience and convey the urgency of the message being delivered.

Datum 8

Context: Emma conveys the purpose of HeForShe campaign and invites men to join the fight so that their daughters, sisters, and mothers can be free from gender prejudice and discrimination. This statement emphasizes the importance of men's involvement in building a more just and equal world where all individuals have equal opportunities to develop and live freely without gender restrictions.

> *But also so that their sons have permission to be vulnerable and human **too.***

The sentence above, "But also so that their sons have permission to be vulnerable and human **too**," includes intensifiers. The word "**too**" increases the intensity of the statement and emphasizes the importance of permitting boys to show their vulnerability and human nature. The use of this intensifier strengthens the speaker's argument about the importance of involving boys in the fight for gender equality and overcoming gender stereotypes that hinder their development. Emma's use of intensifiers like "too" emphasizes the urgency of her message to disentangle from gender stereotypes that suggest men should not show their vulnerability (Suhandoko et al., 2021). Everyone has the right to feel vulnerable and express their opinions assertively. By using this intensifier, Emma not only deliberately asserts her message but also balances it with a tone of politeness and respect.

e. Super polite Forms

This language feature refers to the use of very polite language that avoids confrontation or tension in communication. Super polite forms are often used in social interactions to show respect, politeness, and caution. For example, one may use expressions such as "I beg your pardon," "I'm terribly sorry," "please," and "I would like to."

Datum 9

Context: Emma exemplified when Hillary Clinton made a speech about women's rights in Beijing but was saddened that only men were prominent.

*Men, **I would like to** take this opportunity to extend your formal invitation.*

According to Lakoff's theory, the above situation includes the use of super polite forms, which are one of the features of female language. The phrases **"I would like to** take this opportunity to" and "extend your formal invitation" show a very polite and friendly attitude, emphasizing expressing a desire to extend an invitation to the listener. The use of such phrase demonstrates Emma's linguistic prowess of formality and respect in addressing her audience. Emma's super polite form is closely associated with societal expectation that women are preferred to speak politely and be less aggressive (Lakoff, 2004). However, using such a feature does not necessarily indicate her inability to voice her opinions. On the contrary, it may serve as a rhetorical strategy to allow her message to be more likely acceptable, particularly in a setting dominated by influential figures worldwide.

f. Emphatic Stress

Emphatic stress is a concept that describes the use of solid vowel emphasis in a sentence to show greater power, feeling, or intensity in a word or phrase. It can change the meaning or give a sharper emphasis to a chosen part of the sentence. It can be used to express emotion, highlight the importance of information, or make a statement more emphatic and precise.

Datum 10

Context: Emma revealed women's rights, one of which is that women have the right to make their own decisions. After that, Emma showed her concern that not all countries know gender equality.

*But **sadly**, I can say that there is no one country in the world where all women can expect to receive these rights.*

In the example above, Emma strategically uses word "sadly" to express her strong emotional response, specifically feelings of sadness or disappointment about the global sate of gender equality. Emphatic stress involves the use of words that express emotions such as "absolutely," "regrettably," or "unfortunately." The use of emphatic stress is culturally associated with the nature of women who are emphatic and caring. Emma's use of emphatic stress serves to humanize her message. By expressing her disappointment, Emma evokes the audience's emotions and invites them to share these emotions, saying that gender inequality is an issue that lies before humanity (Tahir et al., 2022).

Datum 11

Context: Emma shared that misconceptions about male success cause many men to feel fragile and insecure. Gender stereotypes also imprison them. However, if men are freed from these stereotypes, it will also bring positive changes for women as well. Men do not need to be aggressive or controlling, so women do not need to feel submissive or controlled either. In essence, her statement emphasizes the importance of overcoming gender stereotypes that can bring about positive change for both parties.

***Both** men and women should feel free to be sensitive*

The sentence above explains the emphatic stress in the sentence, "**Both** men and women should feel free to be sensitive." Vowel stress is placed on the word "**both**" to show that both men and women should feel free to be sensitive. The use of vowel stress on the word "**both**" helps highlight the importance of gender inclusion and equality in expressing emotions and traits often stereotypically associated with women (D & Vighnarajah, 2021).

2. Women's Language Features as a Voice of Empowerment

In this section, we present our analysis of how Emma used her women's language features to exercise her voice of empowerment. In our analysis, we found that Emma's use of women's language features in her speech do not indicate weakness, excessive emotion, hesitation, or exaggeration as claimed by scholars. Instead, these features

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effectively serve as rhetorical tools to make her speech more persuasive.

a. Not Linguistically Disempowered, but Exercising Logos

Women have been stigmatized as powerless language users as reflected in the use of linguistic features that may signify powerlessness, for example, the use of hedging and tag questions that diminish assertion and authority in communication (Ebrahimi et al., 2019), or in Lakoff's terms; they are not "fully legitimate" speakers (2004, p. 80). Women have also been subjected to utilize polite and cautious language to be accepted in socially male-dominated environments. While these linguistic features stem from historical constraints on women speaking assertively (Zhu, 2019), features can showcase their intellectual prowess. Using hedging can strengthen their image as wise and intellectual beings by carefully crafting their arguments before voicing them so that their speech is equally qualified and cooperative (to men). The following snippets show how Emma exhibits her *logos* (intellectual competence) through language.

> ***I think*** *it is right that I should be able to make decision about my own body*
>
> *These rights, I* ***consider*** *to be human rights*

In the snippets above, Emma has strategically used her language to show her inclusivity and confidence when advocating for gender equality issues. Instead of merely being assertive with her opinions, she strategically uses phrases like "I think" and "I consider," not as signs of hesitation or lacking confidence but as markers of thoughtful mind and respect for different perspectives. These linguistics hedges serve not only to organize her thoughts but also to showcase her agency in expressing her personal views (Schmauss & Kilian, 2023). Emma's choice of linguistic hedges highlights her ability to deal with the complexity of communication and the importance of linguistic nuance in expressing ideas effectively, as well as challenges common stereotypes about women's disempowering linguistic features in meaningful dialogue. Furthermore, hedges that are often associated with common societal norms that expect women to speak politely and also tag questions with rising intonations to indicate politeness are often interpreted as women's uncertainty, even about their statements (Holmes, 2013); however, this practice cannot be solely considered as a form of women's disempowerment but rather as a form of their awareness to emphasize social harmony and respect toward their interlocutors' face, "where hedges were used as shields, the women tended to shield their interlocutor only" (Schmauss & Kilian, 2023, p. 25). Emma has leveraged linguistic strategies to assert her agency and invite collaboration, challenging societal norms and empowering others, especially women, to join intellectually stimulating discussions about gender equality issues.

b. Not being Emotional, but Exhibiting Ethos

Women have been stigmatized as emotional and tend to prioritize feelings rather than logic. In response to a social phenomenon, Lubis and Bahri (2020) explain that using empty adjectives, or feminine adjectives, reflects that this women's language feature merely functions as an emotional reaction rather than the informational value inside. Paila (2020) adds that using rising intonation in Lakoff's theory represents women's distrust and hesitation in speaking. Because of this, women must be good at picking words and precise in their intonation to be considered unselfish. Instead of showing women's weaknesses, this feature is an effective way to build good interaction. Indanna et al. (2022) argue that empty adjectives are appropriate linguistic features to build relationships and engage the audience. The emphasis on empathy stress does not reflect women's emotionality but presents their empowerment (*ethos*). The following snippet shows how Emma utilizes women's linguistic features to persuade the audience through her storytelling abilities.

> *Men,* ***I would like to*** *take this opportunity to extend your formal invitation.*
>
> *You might be thinking,* ***"Who is this Harry Potter girl?" and "What is she doing***

speaking at the UN?" and it's really good question

Emma strategically uses linguistic features to demonstrate her ability to control the audience before demonstrating gender equality issues. Instead of being hesitant and apprehensive, Emma uses the phrase "I would like to," showing that the use of fillers in female language represents a woman's ability to engage the audience in discussion with her women's language (Rahadiyanti, 2020). Using the word 'men' at the beginning represents Emma's awareness of hooking the audience's attention, which aims to encourage male audiences to participate in gender equality actions. This is aligned with what Lunaeldira (2021) states that emphatic stress serves to gain attention from the interlocutor.

Emma's ability to engage with the audience is also reflected in the snippets of "Who is this Harry Potter girl?" and "What is she doing speaking at the UN?" and "it's really good question." Interestingly, Emma uses her storytelling technique by slipping the background like Harry Potter to break the ice during campaign. The rising intonation also signifies Emma's continuity and intention to voice that gender equality is crucial. Lubis and Bahri (2020) state, "Rising intonation usually used by [women] who wish to continue speaking, seek feedback or response" (p. 38). Emma managed to influence the audience with language and emotional resonance approaches by appropriately sorting out words, position, raise intonation, or empathic stress. Women, with all the stigma of being weak and emotional, are also capable of being pioneers of awareness of gender issues by playing on the emotions of the audience, one of which is through their storytelling skills and rhetorical instruments.

c. Not being Indirect but Utilizing Pathos

Lakoff (1975) states that women's language is more moderate or conventional. One of the things that underlies this is that women pay attention to the words that should be used and by existing norms. Simply put, it is a language that is generally accepted by society. However, not all women do this, such as Emma Watson. In her speech, Emma uses rhetorical communication. Women can create the illusion of softer communication from their word choice to evoke emotion (*pathos*), which can reinforce the meaning of what they want to say (Denbow, 2015; Roberti, 2021). In her speech, Emma applied the rhetorical function as a form of effort to attract the attention of her audience most effectively. The effectiveness in question is the delivery of persuasive sentences that hope "to be known, understood, and accepted by the audience" (Fasadena et al., 2022). Although it can be said that Emma deliberately does not speak directly to the point, this is not a problem in which Emma uses her own way to approach the audience.

> *But **sadly**, I can say that there is no one country in the world where all women can expect to receive these rights.*
>
> ***Both** men and women should feel free to be sensitive*

The use of sentences that are long-winded but still reasonably clear to the audience is applied by Emma in one of her dialogues, which reads, "But sadly, I can say that there is no one country in the world where all women can expect to receive these rights." From the dialogue, Emma's primary purpose is to express her disappointment with the situation in the world. Perhaps Emma could have directly expressed it with the phrase "I'm disappointed," but that sentence is inappropriate because of its negative connotation and could trigger controversy. To avoid controversy, Emma applies a rhetorical strategy whose key is in the word "Sadly." Once again, Emma uses rhetorical strategies to voice her thoughts without inviting the other party's anger.

In the dialogue "Both men and women should feel free to be sensitive," explains that Emma wants to convey that it should not only be one party that is considered to be sensitive; all parties can. Emma uses this expression to avoid the unacceptability of the other party, who is afraid that they will feel insinuated if they are mentioned frontally. Keywords like "both," "feel free," and "sensitive" unconsciously form an argument that is ambiguous but can make the community or society realize that being emotional is not hindered by gender stereotypes. This kind of framing also helps to underline what is really

being said. Rather than saying something that could offend one side, rhetorical strategies are used to convince the audience by transforming old, sensitive understandings into new understandings that do not offend the other side (Trumpy, 2014, p. 167).

d. Not being Hesitant, but Reinforcing Assertion and Fostering Connection

Despite being claimed as powerless and emotionally vulnerable, social conditions also lead to the perspective that women are users of dubious language. Prasetya et al. (2023, p. 2495) explain that "women's language is often evaluated against feminine standards and seen as less competent than men's." Additionally, several linguistic features, including tag questions, intensifiers, and hedging, suggest that women have lost confidence when interacting. Instead of further marginalizing women, linguistic features are essential to show women's agency in public discourse, especially for diplomacy to get affirmation from the audience. Sukma and Fitrawati (2023) assert that intensifiers strengthen the urgency of the message to be conveyed. The use of women's language, which is stigmatized as a source of hesitation, may uphold the existence of women as one of the drivers of gender equality, as Emma does in the following snippet.

> *And we do not just want to talk about it, we want to try to make sure that it is* ***tangible.***

The word "tangible" is a booster rather than showing her hesitancy in women's language. Purnata et al. (2021) state that "intensifiers are more used to influence the interlocutor and emphasize the intended meaning." The features of women's language described by Emma reflect women's agency in public discourse. The perspective of hedges is always recognized as a source of hesitation; however, Priska et al. (2020) reveal it may represent a woman's belief in the statement she is talking about. This perspective suggests that women can also effectively position themselves using linguistic features. These language features become essential to reinforce statements, increase women's agency, and even affect the audience in political situations such as those used in the 2014 HeForShe Campaign.

e. Not Linguistically Exaggerating but Demonstrating Attentiveness

Social demands on women have a significant impact on their communication style. Lakoff (1975) explains that women often use more expressive linguistic forms, such as super polite forms, empty adjectives, or qualifiers, which shows women's tendency to use hyperbole in communication. In contrast, women are often placed in a lower position by society. They are perceived as submissive, less powerful, and dependent on men (Ishak et al., 2022). This reflects how social norms influence how women speak and express themselves in everyday interactions. For example, men who use vocabulary choices commonly associated with women are often perceived as displaying feminine rather than masculine traits (Putri et al., 2020). However, this exaggerated language reflects women's awareness of maintaining harmony in social communication.

Women's language often prioritizes emotional expression and connection, contrasting with the language structures typically employed by men (Irwandi et al., 2024). In social contexts that emphasize the values of courtesy and politeness, women may use this linguistic strategy to gain approval, build harmonious relationships, or achieve understanding with interlocutors. The following excerpt shows how Emma focuses on emotional or evaluative expressions rather than providing concrete information.

> ***Too aggressive, isolating and anti-men, unattractive even****.*
>
> *When at fifteen, my girlfriends started dropping out of their beloved sports teams because they did not want to appear* ***muscle-y****.*

In the excerpt above, Emma uses dramatic and intensive language. As seen in the quotes, "too aggressive," "unattractive even," and "beloved sports teams" are not only to express themselves excessively, but also to align points of view, show unity in communication, and provide encouragement and support to others.

Oblanazarovna (2022) mentions that women favor harmonious communication to highlight shared viewpoints, demonstrate unity, and offer mutual encouragement. This is a response to norms that expect women to be more empathetic, cooperative, and supportive in everyday interactions. This is a response to norms that expect women to be more empathetic, cooperative, and supportive in everyday interactions. Moreover, Lakoff (1975) also states that empty adjectives serve to convey approval for something being discussed.

In this context, using firm words such as "aggressive," "isolating," "anti-men," and "unattractive" aims to highlight the negative stigma associated with feminism. Emma seeks to draw listeners' attention to gender injustice and how these negative labels can hinder the fight for gender equality. She also highlights the impact of social pressure on teenage girls, noting that they avoid getting involved in sports to avoid appearing "muscle-y". Ishak et al. (2022) mention that "they prefer to have friendly conversations when they are speaking among themselves as it might create a positive environment in their conversation" (p. 436). Thus, using women's language in social interactions is not merely excessive but reflects their understanding of social dynamics and gender roles in daily communication and the desire to maintain harmony in interactions with other people.

This study presents novel findings that challenge the conventional perception of women as powerless language users, typically characterized by lexical hedges, intensifiers, and emphatic stress. Traditionally, these features have been viewed as markers of emotionality, leading to the perception of women as less wise and intellectual. However, this study reveals that these linguistic elements can actually indicate a strategic adaptation and selective incorporation of gendered language, blending assertiveness with politeness strategies. The study suggests that linguistic choices are not fixed principles but adapt to situational demands and societal roles (Menard-Warwick, 2009). From the perspective of Emma Watson's speech, women in leadership positions may utilize a mix of linguistic strategies to assert their authority while maintaining relational harmony (Holmes & Meyerhoff, 2003). Emma's linguistic strategies can be viewed as a performance that challenges traditional gender roles, using linguistic elements associated with femininity to construct a powerful and persuasive public persona.

Conclusion

This study found that Emma Watson used Lakoff's (1975) women's language features, with lexical hedges being the most frequently used in the HeForShe campaign, as she wanted to convey her opinions and mission carefully. The direct use of intense lexical hedges is also a form of caution for a woman unsure of what she is talking about. Meanwhile, some features such as tag questions, precise color terms, hypercorrect grammar, and avoiding strong swear words are not found in this analysis likely due to its irrelevance to the topic being discussed.

Contrary to the common perception that stereotyped women's language as linguistically powerless, we found that Emma Watson's use of women's language, such as hedging, rising intonation, and other linguistic strategies, demonstrate their potential as rhetorical tools. These features can amplify women's voices and make their arguments more persuasive and acceptable, particularly in the context of a male-dominated forum. Emma Watson's strategic linguistic choice has transformed traditional [perceptions of women's language into a means of effective communication. Therefore, women's language that have historically been perceived as markers of powerlessness can instead be harnessed to empower women and engage audience on sensitive issues, such as gender equality. Future researches could explore further how these language feature may function across cultural and professional contexts. Such research would provide us a thorough perspective into the role of gendered language in communication and its potential to empower speakers across different settings.

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