

ANALYSING WOMEN'S LANGUAGE FEATURES IN ESHA CHHABRA'S TED TALK ON ENVIRONMENTAL BUSINESS

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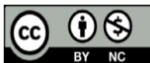
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Abstract:

This research, titled "Women's Language Features of Environmental Business Journalist Esha Chhabra Video on TED YouTube Channel," aims to identify the characteristics of women's language used by Esha Chhabra. The data was collected from her spoken words in the video. The study identified 41 instances of women's language features, including lexical hedges, tag questions, rising intonation, empty adjectives, intensifiers, hypercorrect grammar, super polite forms, and emphatic stress. The most frequently used feature was the intensifier, which the speaker employed to reinforce her statements and persuade the audience. While the least encountered features are tag question, hypercorrect grammar, and emphatic stress. Notably, two features—precise color terms and strong swear words—was absent. This absence is attributed to the video's business context, where strong swear words are inappropriate, and precise color terms are unnecessary. This research contributes to understanding how women's language features are utilized in professional and public speaking contexts.



Keywords: Women's language features; social media; Esha Chhabra; TED YouTube; professional language use

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INTRODUCTION

In today's digital age, social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, Twitter, Pinterest, Blogs, LinkedIn, Snapchat, and YouTube have become essential tools for information dissemination and entertainment. The evolution of information technology and communication formats has significantly altered the way people interact. Among these platforms, YouTube stands out due to its extensive range of content, making it a valuable resource for linguistic analysis. This study focuses on

examining women's language features in a YouTube video by environmental business journalist Esha Chhabra.

As a widely used platform, YouTube hosts a vast array of videos covering diverse topics, including education, entertainment, and social commentary (Trioktaviani & Degaf, 2023). This diversity makes YouTube an excellent subject for studying linguistic features in different contexts. Specifically, this research aims to analyze the nuances of women's language features in public and professional settings. By scrutinizing the speech patterns of prominent figures like Esha Chhabra, this study seeks to provide insights into how women communicate in these influential spaces. The focus on a TED talk video by Chhabra allows for a deeper understanding of linguistic characteristics within social media contexts. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (Hornby, 1989) defines a woman as an adult female human being. It is a common belief that women tend to be more talkative and enjoy gossiping. Women often discuss topics such as relationships, shopping, TV shows, and diets. Coates (2004) noted that women's conversations are typically lively and engaging.

Women and men exhibit distinct speaking styles. Women are generally more polite and careful in their language use, whereas men tend to be louder and more assertive. Lakoff (2004) identified ten features of women's language: lexical hedges or fillers, tag questions, rising intonation, hypercorrect grammar, intensifiers, super polite forms, empty adjectives, precise color terms, avoidance of strong swear words, and emphatic stress. These features serve as the foundation for this analysis.

Previous studies have explored linguistic features in various contexts, including social media. (Siagian, 2022) examined male and female language using theories by Lakoff, Holmes, and Meyerhoff, finding that women tend to avoid strong swear words and use more formal language. Suhesty (2023) analyzed language in "The Ellen Show," identifying both similarities and differences between male and female speech. Setyadi (2021) studied linguistic characteristics in films, using Lakoff's and Holmes' theories to examine language use and social factors.

Additional research by Tika and Annisa (Oktapiani et al., 2017; Pebrianti, 2013) focused on the most frequent features of women's language and their usage reasons. (Adi, Surya., 2022) analyzed Taylor Swift's language in video interviews, employing Lakoff's and Pierson's theories to understand the functions of women's language features. Rubbyanti (2017) explained that different behavioral patterns lead to various linguistic goals for women. Pearson (1985) identified five functions of women's language: expressing uncertainty, initiating discussion, eliciting responses, expressing feelings, and softening statements.

Building on previous research, this study analyzes women's language features in social media, specifically in a TED YouTube video featuring Esha Chhabra. By focusing on a TED talk, a respected platform for sharing ideas and knowledge, this research highlights how professional women use language in influential and educational settings. Esha Chhabra, as an environmental business journalist, offers a unique case for examining women's language features in discussions about business and sustainability. Using Lakoff (1975) framework, this study meticulously examines the characteristics of women's language, including lexical hedges, tag questions, rising intonation, hypercorrect grammar, intensifiers, super polite forms, empty adjectives, precise color terms, avoidance of strong swear words, and emphatic stress. By identifying the most frequently and infrequently used features by Chhabra, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of linguistic patterns in female speech and explores how these features enhance credibility, engage the audience, and convey complex ideas effectively in a professional context. This nuanced analysis aims to provide valuable insights into the intersection of gender, language, and media, enriching the fields of sociolinguistics and gender studies.

METHODS

This research aims to collect and analyze data from the speech in a TED talk video using qualitative analysis methods. Qualitative analysis focuses on reviewing the quality of relationships, activities, situations, or phenomena (Fraenkel, 2015). According to Creswell (2017), qualitative methods are suitable for this study because the data is obtained verbally rather than numerically. Data collection is a crucial step in this research. The data source is the TED talk titled "How Business Can Improve the World, Not Just the Bottom Line" by Esha Chhabra, posted on March 6, 2024. Esha Chhabra is a graduate of Georgetown University and the London School of Economics and Political Science. She has been a writer and journalist focusing on global development, the environment, and business for over a decade.

Research instruments are essential tools for obtaining accurate information (David Wilkinson & Peter Birmingham, 2003). In this study, documentation is used as the primary instrument. The documentation is derived from the transcript of Esha Chhabra's TED talk video on the TED Talks YouTube channel. To collect and analyze the data, the researchers followed several steps. First, they downloaded Esha Chhabra's TED talk video and watched it to identify keywords related to women's language features. They then wrote down these keywords and analyzed the transcripts of the TED talk. The identified keywords were grouped according to women's language features based on Lakoff's theory.

Finally, the researchers presented their findings in the conclusion. By meticulously examining the characteristics of women's language such as lexical hedges, tag questions, rising intonation, hypercorrect grammar, intensifiers, super polite forms, empty adjectives, precise color terms, avoidance of strong swear words, and emphatic stress, this study not only contributes to a deeper understanding of linguistic patterns in female speech but also explores how these features enhance credibility, engage the audience, and convey complex ideas effectively in a professional context. This comprehensive analysis aims to provide valuable insights into the intersection of gender, language, and media, further enriching the fields of sociolinguistics and gender studies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on Lakoff (1975) classification, women's language features are divided into ten categories such as lexical hedges or fillers, tag questions, rising intonation, empty adjectives, precise color terms, intensifiers, hypercorrect grammar, super polite forms, strong swear words, and emphatic stress. After analyzing the "How Business Can Improve the World, Not Just the Bottom Line" video by Environmental Business Journalist Esha Chhabra on the TED YouTube channel, the researchers successfully identified eight of ten women's language features. The identified features are lexical hedges, tag questions, rising intonation, empty adjectives, intensifiers, hypercorrect grammar, super polite forms, and emphatic stress.

Table 1. Language Features of Women

No.	Women's Language Features	Amount
1.	Lexical Hedges	11
2.	Tag Question	1
3.	Rising Intonation	6
4.	Empty Adjectives	3
5.	Precise Color Terms	-
6.	Intensifier	16

7.	Hypercorrect Grammar	1
8.	Super Polite Form	2
9.	Strong Swear Words	-
10.	Emphatic Stress	1
Total		41

Based on the table above, there are 41 utterances of women's language features found in the "How Business Can Improve the World, Not Just the Bottom Line" video, which the speaker is Environmental Business Journalist Esha Chhabra and posted on March 6, 2024, in the TED YouTube Channel. The most frequent type of women's language feature used are Intensifiers as many as 16 times. It was followed by Lexical Hedges in the second as many as 11 times. The least characteristic of women's language features used are Tag Questions, Hypercorrect Grammar, and Emphatic Stress as many as 1 time each of them.

Lexical Hedges

Lakoff (1973) stated that lexical hedges are expressions often used by women to indicate uncertainty or doubt in their statements. These expressions, such as "I mean," "I think," "I believe," "perhaps," and "maybe," serve to soften the impact of the statement and express tentativeness. Below are examples that illustrate the use of lexical hedges as a feature of women's language:

Example 1:

*EC: "but also **I think** people are fed up and seeking for more balance in their lives "*

In the example "*But also I think people are fed up and seeking more balance in their lives,*" the phrase "*I think*" serves as a lexical hedge. Lexical hedges, as identified by Lakoff (1973), are expressions that indicate uncertainty or tentativeness, commonly used in women's language to soften statements. By using "*I think*," the speaker, EC, frames her observation as a personal opinion rather than an absolute fact. This approach reduces the assertiveness of her statement, making it less confrontational and more open to discussion. The hedge allows her to express her viewpoint while acknowledging that it may not apply universally, thus inviting others to share their perspectives and engage in a more interactive dialogue.

The hedge "*I think*" fulfills several functions in this context. It softens the impact of the statement, making it less forceful and more polite, which can facilitate smoother social interactions. It also expresses uncertainty, indicating that the speaker is aware that her statement might not be entirely accurate or applicable to everyone. This use of hedging demonstrates politeness and consideration for the audience's potential differing views. In a conversation about people's emotional states and desires, which are inherently subjective, the hedge "*I think*" acknowledges the complexity and variability of human experiences, enhancing the credibility and relatability of the speaker's observation. Thus, lexical hedges like "*I think*" are crucial in balancing assertiveness with openness and respect in communication.

Example 2:

*EC: "The faster the growth, the better; the more money, the better, and yet that hasn't really worked. **I mean**, the planet has clearly taken a hit..."*

In the second data, the speaker employs one of the characteristics of female language, namely lexical hedging, through the use of the phrase "**I mean**". In the video, the speaker asserts that the faster a business grows, the faster money is made. This indicates that the speaker is merely assuming her opinion, but she is uncertain about

the veracity of her statement. To be precise, lexical hedges are linguistic features of female language that are employed due to a lack of confidence or to express doubt in a conversation. Examples of lexical hedges include "I think," "I mean," "well," "probably," "you know," "you see," and "by the way." The speaker's use of the phrase "**I mean**" also indicates a lack of confidence in the statement. Consequently, the speaker employs the phrase "I mean" to reinforce his assumption.

Tag Question

Tag question is one of women language features that is often used by women. Tag question is someone's way to convey a statement but there are still doubts in it. Lakoff (1973) stated that tag question is used for people-to-people, or speaker-to-interlocutor when the speaker is having doubts. In a sense, the speakers state that they don't have total conviction and need an answer to strengthen their conviction as soon as possible. Most women use this feature although they already know the answer, but they need confirmation for it.

Example 1

EC: "So it's lovely to talk about this in theory, but let's put it into context with some examples, **shall we?**"

Based on the data above, the speaker wants to explain business regenerative theory using an example of a company brand named Veja Shoes. The speaker uses a tag question to indicate that the speaker already knows the answer to the question, but she has doubts about it. Therefore, she wants to hear certainty from the audience by using the tag question "**Shall we?**" at the end of the sentence.

Rising Intonation

Women always use rising intonation while speaking, including in yes or no questions and when they are in doubt. According to Lakoff (1973), women use rising intonation when they convey a question or information, but there's doubt in it. For this reason, in this video, the speaker uses rising intonation to omit the doubt she faces. It is done to get confirmation although she already has the information that is required. This intonation is also used when giving orders or commanding others.

Example 1

EC: "They said, because what are we sustaining? A broken system, the status quo? I mean, that's what it suggests, right?"

Based on the data above, the speaker uses rising intonation. The speaker uses rising intonation when he asks questions to the audience. This is done because the speaker wants to get confirmation or a reaction from the audience. Even though the one who knows the answer to the question is the speaker herself. EC as the speaker raises his intonation when she says her last word. This is a sign that she wants to make sure that the statement he utters is accurate.

Example 2

EC: "What problem are we going to solve? What social and environmental problems are we going to solve?"

The preceding data indicates that Esha Chhabra employs a rising intonation to convey a question. The speaker's question pertains to the social and environmental problems that must be addressed. EC employs a continuous question format, raising her intonation to emphasize her question to the audience, despite the speaker's presumed awareness of the answer.

Empty Adjective

According to Lakoff (1973), empty adjectives are a group of adjectives that have meanings to indicate the speaker's agreement or amazement for something, in addition, they can also be called empty adjectives that the useful only related to emotional reactions to certain statements. The words that show empty adjectives are such as **great, lovely, cute, cool, charming, sweet, adorable, etc.**

Example 1

EC: "So it's **lovely** to talk about all this in theory..."

In the example "so it's *lovely* to talk about all this in theory...", the adjective "*lovely*" is presented as an empty adjective. According to Lakoff (1975), this part of the empty adjectives indicates that Esha Chhabra used it to express consent and admiration in conveying her emotional reaction instead of giving specific information to the audience. By using "*lovely*", Esha Chhabra as the speaker shows an implication that she is trying to convince the audience about the topic she will bring. She tells the audience that the topic is valuable to discuss. Lakoff (1975) confined the "*lovely*" adjectives to women's speech which is commonly called special adjectives along with other adjectives such as *divine, sweet, adorable, and charming*.

Example 2

EC: "Well, to make those **lovely** sandwiches"

In the second example, the speaker uses one of the women's language features namely empty adjectives by using "*lovely*" adjectives in her speech. The uses of this women's language features indicate the speaker wants to express her admiration through a sentence she speaks. This part indicates that Esha Chhabra as the speaker shows her amazement at how the British love sandwiches so much and will explain to the audience how a food waste entrepreneur and a social entrepreneur got together to make the end of slices would become a brilliant idea Toast Ale which available throughout the country in pubs, grocery, and restaurants currently.

Example 3

EC: "So it's **lovely** to talk about all this in theory, but let's put it into context with some examples, shall we?"

In the third example above, the keyword "*Lovely*" used by the speaker Esha Chhabra shows her stress in conveying the topic. It indicates the positive attitude of the speaker when conveying to the audience by using true examples that happening nowadays with positive words. This part is related to example 2 of intensifier about regenerative is very doable for small to medium-sized companies. Therefore, after the speaker uses an intensifier to strengthen her statement, the speaker uses this empty adjective as additional strengthening.

Intensifier

Intensifiers are used to indicate feelings and support the statement conveyed. It means that intensifiers describe women who tend to uninterruptedly while speaking. According to Holmes (2013), women use more intensifiers than men do. The keywords show intensifiers such as *so, just, really, like, such, very, quiet, awful, awfully, totally, definitely, etc.*

Example 1

EC: "So it's not about **just** selling you another great pair of jeans..."

In the example "So it's not about *just* selling you another great pair of jeans...", the keyword "*just*" used by Esha Chhabra as the speaker shows her emphasizing the

meaning of the question she asked before. Esha Chhabra as the speaker uses the “just” keyword to strengthen her statement after with a strong and undeniable statement where she tells the audience directly that she will bring up a serious topic about something that will impact a company.

Example 2

EC: *“It’s **very** doable.”*

In the second example, the speaker uses one of women’s language features namely intensifiers with the keyword “very” in her speech. The use of the keyword “very” in her speech indicates that she is trying to intensify her previous statement that regenerative is very doable for small to medium-sized companies instead of big companies. In this part, it shows the speaker knows much and has strong beliefs in her statement. In other words, there is no hesitation in her statement.

Example 3

EC: *“**So** I’ve been reporting for over 10 years on business, social issues, and the environment and how all of that overlaps”*

In the third example above, Esha Chhabra as the speaker uses one of women’s language features namely intensifiers. The keyword “So” indicates an emphasis and supports the statement she will convey. The use of “So” intended to strengthen her statement to persuade the audience by telling them she has been involved in business, social issues, and how all of that overlaps. It means the audience cannot disparage the statement she stated. Then, the use of “so” here shows that she does not want to be interrupted while speaking.

Example 4

EC: *“**So** it’s lovely to talk about all this in theory, but let’s put it into context with some examples, shall we?”*

In the third example above, the keyword “So” used by the speaker Esha Chhabra shows her self-confidence in conveying the topic. It indicates the speaker is confident in convincing the audience by using true examples that happening nowadays. This part is related to example 2 of intensifier about regenerative is very doable for small to medium-sized companies. Therefore, after the speaker uses an intensifier to strengthen her statement, the speaker uses this empty adjective as additional strengthening.

Hypercorrect Grammar

According to Lakoff (1975), Hypercorrect Grammar is the consistent use of standard verb form related to politeness in utterance while interacting with interlocutors such as pronouncing the final g in the going word. In general, one of the contrasts between men and women in utterance is that most men say *goin’* instead of *going* just like most women do.

Example 1

EC: *“I kept meeting entrepreneurs that were really **looking** beyond the crisis...”*

In the example above, the speaker uses one of the features commonly associated with women's language, namely hypercorrect grammar. The use of "looking" shows that Esha Chhabra, as the speaker in the video, consistently uses the standard verb-ing form. This choice implies an intentional avoidance of informal or slang language, which is often perceived as less polite or less professional. In contrast, many men tend to use the more relaxed form "lookin'" instead of the formal "looking." This distinction

highlights the tendency for women to adhere to stricter grammatical standards to conform to societal expectations of politeness and correctness in language use.

Super Polite Forms

According to Lakoff (1975), the super polite form is divided into 3 things, namely avoid swear words, use euphemisms with indirect expressions to say taboo words in conversation, and use more particles in request sentences. The following data below shows the shape of the super polite in the video:

Example 1

EC: “*But, **thanks** to Veja...*”

In the example above, the researchers identified the use of super polite forms through the keyword “thanks.” This indicates the speaker is showing politeness in her speech. The presence of the word “thanks” suggests the speaker’s tendency to frequently express gratitude, reflecting a preference for a demure demeanor often associated with women. This use of polite language demonstrates an awareness of ethical values in social interactions. While this is not always the case, compliments and polite attitudes are often closely related to social norms that are considered more feminine and are frequently observed in women’s language.

Example 2

EC: “***Thank you***”

From the example above, the presence of the phrase “thank you” shows that speakers often reveal compliments about the Veja brand. It shows a preference for politeness. Every gender certainly has nature, it is just that nature is often associated with women. Even on the lecture cover, many lecturers forgot to say thank you for the attention of the audience there.

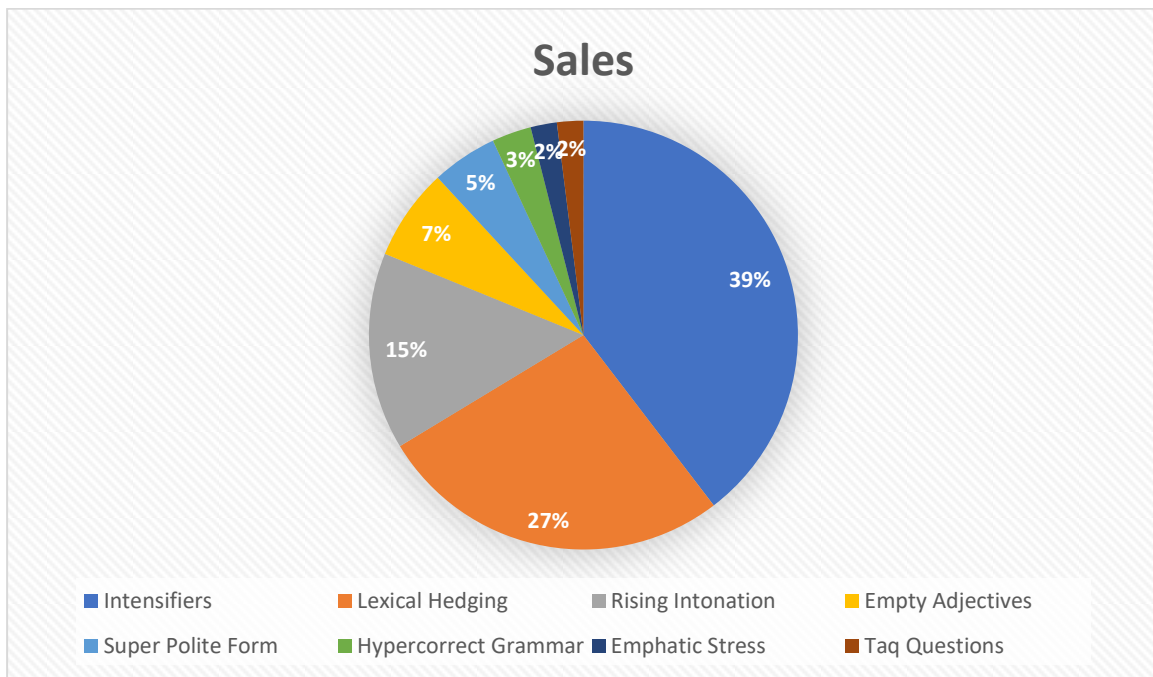
Emphatic Stress

According to Lakoff (1975), Emphatic Stress is a term used to emphasize the most important statement, and Holmes (2013) states that Emphatic Stress is used to strengthen the meaning of a sentence. Emphatic stress uses a word that gives support and power to all meanings to get a deal in convincing the public. Here is the data from the video:

Example 1

EC: “*We **need** dozens of Vejas*”

From the above sentence, Esha Chhabra emphatically indicates that they need “dozens of Vejas”. The sentence uses emphasis to convey the statement. Esha wanted to convey the urgent and important purpose of her message. The emphasis used describes a very urgent need. She emphasized that obtaining dozens of Vejas is very important in the context discussed. By using strong affirmations, Esha wants to ensure that her message is taken seriously and well-understood by the audience.



The results of the frequency data in the table above demonstrate that eight women's language features were successfully identified in the TED Talks video by Esha Chhabra, which discusses environmental business. The language features identified are as follows: intensifiers (40%), lexical hedging (27%), rising intonation (15%), empty adjectives (7%), super polite forms (5%), hypercorrect grammar (3%), emphatic stress (2%), and tag questions (2%).

The most frequently used women's language feature in the video is intensifiers, making up 40% of the observed features. This prevalence suggests that Esha Chhabra often emphasizes and amplifies her statements to convey her feelings more effectively. Intensifiers, as defined by Tagliamonte (2003), are adverbs that expand or enhance meaning, and their frequent use in the video indicates Chhabra's effort to make her points more compelling and forceful. For example, phrases like "very important" or "extremely challenging" serve to highlight the significance and difficulty of the topics she discusses, thereby engaging the audience more deeply.

Lexical hedging, identified in 27% of the instances, is another prominent feature. Hedging allows speakers to express uncertainty or soften statements, which can make them appear more approachable and considerate of differing viewpoints. For example, Chhabra might use phrases like "kind of" or "maybe" to introduce a degree of flexibility or open-mindedness in her statements, which is particularly useful in a formal and informative setting like a TED Talk.

Rising intonation, found in 15% of the instances, often indicates a question or a need for affirmation from the audience. This feature helps maintain engagement and encourages listeners to reflect on the points being made. Empty adjectives, such as "lovely" or "nice," accounted for 7% of the features. These adjectives add a layer of emotional expression to the speech, making it more relatable and engaging. Super polite forms (5%) and hypercorrect grammar (3%) reflect Chhabra's formal and respectful approach, aligning with the professional context of the TED Talk.

Emphatic stress and tag questions were each observed in 2% of the instances. Emphatic stress highlights important points, while tag questions, such as "isn't it?" or "don't you think?", invite the audience to participate in the conversation, fostering a sense of involvement and interaction.

Interestingly, two features—precise color terms and strong swear words—were entirely absent from Chhabra’s speech. The absence of precise color terms can be attributed to the nature of the discussion, which focused on business development rather than topics requiring detailed color descriptions. Similarly, the absence of strong swear words reflects the formal and professional tone of the TED Talk, where such language would be inappropriate and detract from the speaker's credibility.

In this study, Lakoff (1975) theory was employed to analyze women's language features, demonstrating the theory’s continued relevance in examining conversational language use, especially among women. Lakoff's framework divides women's language features into ten categories: lexical hedges, tag questions, rising intonation, empty adjectives, precise color terms, intensifiers, hypercorrect grammar, super polite forms, strong swear words, and emphatic stress. This comprehensive categorization was instrumental in identifying and analyzing the linguistic features in Chhabra’s speech.

Comparing these findings with previous research reveals notable similarities and differences. The frequent use of intensifiers aligns with studies by Surya Adi (2022), Oktapiani (2017), and Pebrianti (2013), all of which observed a high prevalence of intensifiers in women's speech. However, the data sources in these studies varied; while this research analyzed a YouTube video, previous studies focused on films.

In Oktapiani (2017) study, hypercorrect grammar was not observed, whereas Pebrianti (2013) did not find rising intonation in her analysis. These differences highlight the variability in linguistic features across different media and contexts. Conversely, both this study and Surya Adi (2022) research did not find precise color terms, suggesting a potential trend in the absence of this feature in certain formal or public speaking contexts.

Overall, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how women's language features manifest in professional and public speaking settings, particularly on platforms like YouTube. By using Lakoff's theory, the study not only validates the relevance of these linguistic features but also underscores the adaptability of women’s language in various contexts to enhance communication effectiveness, credibility, and audience engagement. These findings enrich the fields of sociolinguistics and gender studies by providing valuable insights into the nuanced ways in which gender influences language use in digital media.

CONCLUSION

Based on Lakoff (1975) theory, which identifies ten women's language features—lexical hedges, tag questions, rising intonation, empty adjectives, precise color terms, intensifiers, hypercorrect grammar, super polite forms, strong swear words, and emphatic stress—this study identified eight features in Esha Chhabra's TED talk video. Intensifiers were the most frequently used, indicating Chhabra's emphasis on reinforcing her statements to persuade the audience. In contrast, tag questions, hypercorrect grammar, and emphatic stress were the least frequently used. The absence of precise color terms and strong swear words is likely due to the formal context of the TED talk, where such features are unnecessary and inappropriate.

Overall, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how women's language features manifest in professional and public speaking settings, particularly on platforms like YouTube. By using Lakoff's theory, the study not only validates the relevance of these linguistic features but also underscores the adaptability of women’s language in various contexts to enhance communication effectiveness, credibility, and audience engagement. These findings enrich the fields of sociolinguistics and gender studies by providing valuable insights into the nuanced ways in which gender influences language use in digital media.

However, this study has its limitations. The data was sourced solely from Esha Chhabra's TED talk, narrowing the scope of the findings. Future research should consider a broader range of sources to provide more comprehensive data. Additionally, the qualitative approach used in this study means the findings cannot be generalized to all women. Future studies could benefit from mixed-methods approaches to capture a more holistic view of women's language features. Despite these limitations, the study offers valuable insights into how women's language features are used in professional and public speaking contexts, contributing to the fields of sociolinguistics and gender studies and suggesting areas for further exploration.

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