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WOMEN'S LANGUAGE FEATURES USED BY FEMALE CHARACTERS IN *GILMORE GIRLS* SERIES

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji penggunaan fitur bahasa perempuan dalam *Gilmore Girls* Musim 1 (Episode 1–3), dengan fokus pada jenis dan fungsi komunikatifnya. Serial ini dipilih karena dialognya yang cepat dan karakter perempuan yang kompleks, sehingga menyediakan materi linguistik yang kaya untuk analisis sosiolinguistik komunikasi gender. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan teknik observasi dan pencatatan. Data diambil dari dialog episode terpilih dan dianalisis menggunakan teori fitur bahasa perempuan dari Lakoff serta teori fungsi bahasa dari Pearson. Analisis dilakukan dengan mengkategorikan sepuluh fitur bahasa perempuan yang ditemukan dan menafsirkan fungsinya dalam interaksi sehari-hari. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa seluruh sepuluh fitur muncul, dengan intensifiers sebagai yang paling sering digunakan, diikuti oleh lexical hedges atau pengisi, dan bentuk super sopan. Istilah warna yang tepat serta tata bahasa hiperkoreksi menjadi yang paling jarang digunakan dan hanya muncul pada konteks tertentu. Secara fungsional, penggunaan terbanyak adalah untuk melembutkan ucapan, diikuti oleh mengekspresikan perasaan, mengekspresikan ketidakpastian, memunculkan respon, dan memulai diskusi. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa karakter perempuan dalam *Gilmore Girls* memanfaatkan fitur bahasa perempuan tidak hanya untuk kesopanan dan ekspresi emosional, tetapi juga secara strategis untuk mengelola hubungan sosial dan menjaga keharmonisan percakapan.

Kata kunci: fitur bahasa perempuan, fungsi bahasa, *Gilmore Girls*, sosiolinguistik.

Abstract

This study examines how women's language features are used in *Gilmore Girls* Season 1 (Episodes 1–3), focusing the types and communicative functions. The series was chosen for its fast-paced dialogue and complex female characters, providing rich linguistic data for sociolinguistic analysis of gendered communication. Using a qualitative method supported by observation and note-taking, data were collected from the dialogue and analyzed based on Lakoff's theory of women's language features and Pearson's theory of language functions. The analysis categorized ten identified features and interpreted their communicative roles within everyday interactions. The results show that all ten features occurred, with intensifiers

being the most frequent, followed by lexical hedges or fillers and super-polite forms. Precise color terms and hypercorrect grammar were the least frequent, appearing in specific contexts. Functionally, the most common use was to soften utterances, followed by expressing feelings, expressing uncertainty, eliciting a response, and initiating discussion. These findings indicate that the female characters use women's language features not only to convey politeness and emotional expressiveness, but also strategically to manage social relationships and sustain conversational harmony. This reflects a nuanced use of language that challenges narrow interpretations of women's speech as passive.

Keywords: women's language features, language functions, *Gilmore Girls*, sociolinguistics.

1. Introduction

Sociolinguistics explores the relationship between language and society, including how language both reflects and reinforces societal norms related to gender. A foundational contribution to this field comes from Lakoff (1975), who introduced the concept of women's language features linguistic traits commonly associated with female speech. These include hedging, tag questions, rising intonation on declaratives, empty adjectives, precise color terms, intensifiers, hypercorrect grammar, and super-polite forms. Lakoff argued that such features stem from gendered socialization, which encourages women to speak in ways that are deferential, emotionally expressive, and non-confrontational.

However, Lakoff's framework has sparked significant debate. Critics argue that labeling certain speech patterns as inherently feminine risks reinforcing stereotypes of women as weak or lacking authority. Scholars like Tannen (1990) and Holmes (1995) have advocated for a more nuanced interpretation, emphasizing the pragmatic and interpersonal functions of these features. Rather than signs of insecurity, elements such as hedging and tag questions can function as strategies for building rapport, softening disagreement, or inviting collaboration reflecting communicative competence rather than passivity.

While much sociolinguistic research has focused on real-world settings like workplaces or classrooms, fictional media is also a vital area of study. Television, in particular, not only mirrors societal norms but actively shapes cultural understandings of gender and communication. Characters on screen serve as cultural models, influencing how audiences perceive language and identity. Therefore, examining how female characters speak in television series is essential for understanding broader narratives about femininity and language use.

The TV series *Gilmore Girls* (2000-2007), created by Amy Sherman-Palladino, provides a compelling case for such analysis. Renowned for its fast-paced dialogue, sharp humor, and rich female characters, the show offers fertile ground for studying gendered language. Characters like Lorelai and Rory Gilmore exhibit witty and emotionally expressive speech, while Emily Gilmore's more formal and controlled style reflects traditional values and social hierarchy. These contrasting linguistic styles reveal generational differences, power dynamics, and identity constructions. Scholars such as Davis (2006) and Anderson (2011) have noted that the show's dialogue is not merely entertainment, but a lens through which gendered meaning is constructed. Previous studies often focus only on identifying linguistic features without examining their communicative purposes in interpersonal interaction. Therefore, this study contributes to sociolinguistic research by analyzing both the types and functions of women's language features used by female characters in the series. The research challenges the notion that women's language is inherently weak, emphasizing instead how such features can be powerful, strategic tools in communication.

2. Methodology

Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze women's language features used by female characters in *Gilmore Girls*. The data were interpreted using Lakoff's (1975) theory of women's language features and Pearson's (1985) theory of language functions. Creswell and Creswell (2023) state that qualitative research explores and seeks to understand meanings constructed by individuals or groups, helping researchers provide a comprehensive analysis of phenomena.

This research used *Gilmore Girls* Season 1, Episodes 1-3, as its data source, as these episodes introduce key characters and dynamics. The series, created by Amy Sherman-Palladino and aired from 2000 to 2007, centers on Lorelai and Rory Gilmore in the small town of Stars Hollow. Known for its sharp, fast-paced dialogue and complex female characters, the show provides rich material to analyze women's language features in context. It was chosen for its strong female leads and exploration of social themes like family, identity, and communication.

Data Collecting Technique

Data were collected using an observational method, supported by note-taking. The process involved watching the selected episodes, transcribing key dialogue, and focusing on interactions among female characters, particularly Lorelai and Rory. Subtitles were used to ensure accurate transcription. Instances of women's language features, as defined by Lakoff (1975), were identified and listed systematically. This approach ensures precise data capture while allowing for close analysis of the linguistic strategies employed by the female characters in natural conversational contexts.

Data Analyzing Technique

The analysis used a qualitative method focused on Lakoff's (1975) framework to identify and classify women's language features. These features were categorized by type (e.g., hedges, tag questions, etc.). Pearson's (1985) theory of language functions was then applied to interpret the communicative roles of these features such as expressing politeness, softening statements, or managing relationships. The goal was to reveal how female characters strategically use language in context. Conclusions were drawn to offer insights into gendered communication in the series.

3. Findings and Discussions

Women's Language Features

Lexical Hedges or Fillers

Lorelai: Okay, **well, I guess**, what I'm wondering is, if you couldn't take, **say**,
part of it now, just to get her going? (S1E1, 00:16:04 - 00:16:11)

In this scene, Lorelai negotiates Rory's tuition with a loan officer, using hedges like "well", "I guess", and "say" to soften her request. The word "well" introduces hesitation, signaling uncertainty and allowing her to frame her proposal tentatively. This strategic use of hedging reduces assertiveness, helping Lorelai avoid sounding demanding. It creates a pause that eases the conversation into a less confrontational tone. By speaking indirectly, Lorelai maintains politeness and navigates the sensitive situation carefully. This example illustrates how hedging functions as a communicative tool to manage social dynamics and preserve harmony in difficult interactions.

Tag Questions

Lorelai: Did Rory call?

Michel: No.

Lorelai: She's golfing all day with my father, and I'm half-expecting this big, "Save me!" call to come in. You don't care at all, **do you?**

Michel: To me you are the teacher in the Charlie Brown cartoon (**S1E3, 00:10:25 - 00:10:34**)

In this scene, Lorelai uses the tag question “do you?” after making an observation about Michel’s indifference toward her concerns. Rather than stating “You don’t care at all,” which would come across as a strong and possibly confrontational accusation, Lorelai adds the tag “do you?” to reduce the assertiveness of her remark. This strategy allows her to express her frustration in a more socially acceptable and less aggressive way. The tag creates a sense of tentativeness or openness, even if it is used sarcastically in this case. The tag also fits with Lorelai’s typical humorous and dramatic tone, turning a potentially serious comment into a light and teasing one.

Empty Adjectives

Lorelai: The dinner was so **wonderful**, Mira. (**S1E3, 00:02:05 - 00:02:09**)

This scene takes place during one of the regular Friday night dinners at Emily and Richard’s house, occasions that often heighten Lorelai’s sense of being under parental scrutiny. Here, Lorelai compliments the housekeeper, Mira, using the adjective wonderful. Lorelai’s praise is broad and non-specific, allowing her to fulfill the social expectation of showing gratitude without offering details that might invite further conversation or criticism from her parents. In this context, Lorelai uses wonderful to adhere to the polite social script, avoiding conflict and preserving a superficial sense of warmth despite underlying family tensions.

Super-Polite Forms

Lorelai : Hi Drella, I was just wondering, **could you be nicer to the guests?**
(**S1E1, 00:05:16 - 00:05:21**)

In Season 1, Episode 1, Lorelai gently addresses Drella’s rude behavior toward guests by saying, “Hi Drella, I was just wondering, could you be nicer to the guests?” As the

manager, Lorelai must correct Drella but chooses to do so using super-polite forms to reduce tension. The phrase “I was just wondering” serves as a deferential preface, introducing her request with humility and tentativeness. Meanwhile, the modal “could you” transforms what might be a command into a polite suggestion. Lorelai’s phrasing allows her to assert authority while avoiding confrontation, showing how politeness strategies can function as effective tools for leadership and conflict management in interpersonal communication.

Intensifiers

Rory : I can't believe tomorrow's my last day at Stars Hollow High.

Lorelai : I know.

Rory : Today I was so excited! I dressed for gym.

Lorelai : You're kidding!

Rory : and I played Volleyball.

(S1E1, 00:17:50 - 00:17:59)

This line is delivered by Rory while reflecting on her last days at Stars Hollow High. The context reveals that Rory is sharing a light-hearted moment with Lorelai about how she unusually looked forward to gym class an activity she normally avoids. By using the intensifier so before excited, Rory heightens the emotional impact of her statement, emphasizing just how strong her anticipation was that day. Without so, the sentence would read as a neutral expression of excitement. Rory’s use of so also reflects the closeness of her relationship with Lorelai, as the intensifier makes her statement sound more animated and engaging.

Hypercorrect Grammar

Sookie : where's my glaze?

Staff : In the counter.

Sookie : **On** the counter. **On, not in the counter**

(S1E1, 00:12:42 - 00:12:46)

In this scene from the inn’s kitchen, Sookie, he head chef, asks her staff about the location of her glaze. An employee replies that it is “in the counter,” prompting Sookie to immediately correct him with the precise preposition: “On the counter. On, not in the counter.” While the correction may seem minor, the way Sookie enunciates on demonstrates

her commitment to linguistic precision. The context of the scene also underscores the performative function of hypercorrect grammar. As a chef managing a busy kitchen, Sookie's correction is not simply about grammatical accuracy but about maintaining order and ensuring clear communication.

Avoidance of Strong Swear Words

Lorelai : You'll have to walk faster than that. You'll have to turn into a **freaking** flo jo to get away from me.

(S1E1, 00:30:11 - 00:30:16)

After Rory reveals that she wants to abandon Chilton because of a boy from her old school. Lorelai, frustrated and hurt, says, "You'll have to walk faster than that. You'll have to turn into a freaking Flo Jo to get away from me." The context highlights Lorelai's growing frustration, but even in her anger, she moderates her language by choosing the euphemistic "freaking" instead of a stronger expletive. Lorelai's use of "freaking" illustrates this point, as it enables her to convey urgency and disappointment without crossing into language that could be considered inappropriate.

Precise Color Terms

Bride 1 : I didn't want purple flowers. I wanted pink.

Bride 2 : And I wanted blue.

Lorelai : so I thought **violet** would be a nice compromise.

(S1E3, 00:08:24 - 00:08:28)

In Season 1, Episode 3, two brides bicker over floral choices, with one saying, "I didn't want purple flowers. I wanted pink," and the other responding, "And I wanted blue." Lorelai then diplomatically suggests, "So I thought violet would be a nice compromise." The conversation revolves around the use of precise color terms, with each bride expressing a desire for a specific hue. Lorelai's suggestion of "violet" exemplifies the use of precise color language, offering a carefully chosen middle ground between the brides' competing preferences. Lorelai's use of "violet" shows her sensitivity to both brides' desires while maintaining a diplomatic tone.

Emphatic Stress

Rory : I'm not sure I want to go to Chilton.

Lorelai : What?

Rory : The timing is just **really** bad.

(S1E1, 00:28:29 - 00:28:34)

Rory reveals her uncertainty about attending Chilton, saying “I’m not sure I want to go to Chilton.” Lorelai responds with a single “What?”, a direct reaction to Rory’s statement, indicating surprise. Rory then elaborates, “The timing is just really bad.” The use of the word “really” here, with emphatic stress, serves to emphasize the emotional weight of Rory’s statement. The intensifier “really” highlights the depth of Rory’s feeling and signals that the timing issue is not just an ordinary concern but one that is significantly affecting her decision. The word “really” in “just really bad” carries emphatic stress, which is used to increase the intensity of the adjective “bad”.

Rising Intonation in Declaratives

Rory : hi. Im looking for **miss james**. **(S1E2, 00:14:27)**

Rory nervously approaches the administrative desk at Chilton on her first day and says, “Hi. I’m looking for Miss James.” Although this is grammatically a declarative sentence, Rory delivers it with a distinct rising intonation, making it sound almost like a question. The rising intonation on “I’m looking for Miss James” is a key example of what Lakoff (1975) describes as a hallmark of women’s language. Rising intonation, which transforms a declarative sentence into something that sounds more like a question, often serves to reduce the assertiveness of a statement. In this case, Rory’s rising intonation softens the declarative sentence, signaling uncertainty and politeness.

Functions of Women’s Language Features

To Soften an Utterance

This was the most frequent function. Features like hedges, super-polite forms, and euphemisms were used to reduce directness and maintain politeness. Lorelai and others often softened requests or frustrations to avoid confrontation. These strategies reflect social expectations for women to promote harmony in conversations, using language to reduce tension and assertiveness.

To Express Uncertainty

Characters used hedges like maybe and I think to express doubt or emotional vulnerability, especially in personal or emotional conversations. These forms reduce assertiveness and invite empathy, allowing characters to remain open and relatable. This reflects women's communicative preference for collaboration over certainty, as noted by Pearson (1985), promoting connection rather than dominance.

To Elicit a Response

Features like tag questions and rising intonation turned statements into interactive prompts. Lorelai, Rory, and Emily used these to engage others, invite feedback, or confirm understanding. Such features foster cooperation and keep conversations flowing. This aligns with Pearson's (1985) view that women use language to build rapport and ensure mutual participation in dialogue.

To Express Feelings

Emotional expression was conveyed through intensifiers, empty adjectives, and emphatic stress. Words like so, really, and beautiful added warmth, enthusiasm, or frustration to speech. These features made communication more vivid and emotionally engaging, supporting empathy and relational bonding key components of women's language as identified by Pearson (1985).

To Start a Discussion

Women's language features were also used to initiate conversations gently. Indirect suggestions like "Why don't I..." encouraged participation without imposing. This polite strategy invites responses and fosters inclusive dialogue. As Pearson (1985) notes, such language positions women as facilitators of conversation, helping maintain relational harmony and ensuring others feel heard and involved.

4. Conclusion

This research analyzed women's language features in Gilmore Girls using Lakoff's (1975) framework, confirming the presence of all ten features. Intensifiers, lexical hedges, and super-polite forms were most common, especially in emotional or sensitive contexts. Guided by Pearson's (1985) framework, five main functions were identified softening utterances, expressing uncertainty, eliciting responses, expressing feelings, and starting

discussions. The most frequent function was softening, reflecting efforts to maintain politeness and harmony. The findings show that women's language features are not signs of weakness but strategic tools for managing interaction and power dynamics, highlighting their expressive and relational strength in communication.

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