

LEXICAL HEDGES USED BY THE FEMALE CHARACTERS IN *BIRDS OF PREY* MOVIE

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ABSTRACT

This study was entitled Lexical Hedges Used by The Female Characters in *Birds of Prey* Movie. This study aimed to figure out the lexicons used as lexical hedges and analyzed why those were used in *Birds of Prey* movie. The data was collected from the utterances of the female characters in the 2020 movie *Birds of Prey*, directed by Cathy Yan. The data was collected through documentation and note-taking method. In analyzing the data, descriptive qualitative method was applied based on Lakoff's (1975) theory of lexical hedges. The result of the analysis showed several examples of types of lexicons as lexical hedges used by the female characters, including "well," "you know," "I think," "I guess." For the used of lexical hedges in *Birds of Prey*, demonstrating their preference for employing these linguistic strategies to convey uncertainty, weaken assertions, and enhance politeness in their interactions.

Keywords: Sociolinguistics, Women's Language Features, Lexical Hedges

INTRODUCTION

People need a language to communicate with each other to send and receive messages. By using language, people can exchange information, emotions, and feelings. As a result, communication between people often relates to the connection between language and society. It involves various social factors, including the connection between language and gender. Since gender influences how people use language, this falls under sociolinguistics, which examines the relationship between language and society.

According to Hudson, as cited in Wardhaugh (2010: 15), sociolinguistics looks at how language interacts with society. It also includes the different ways that genders typically use language. Trudgill (1974: 32) describes sociolinguistics as a branch of linguistics that explores language as a social and cultural phenomenon. Gender can be defined as male and female roles gains existence through such social categories as language. The theory of women's language is one of the sociolinguistic paradigms proposed by Lakoff (1973). She proposed that there are ten linguistic features of women's language. In any community, men and women do not always communicate in

the same way. Holmes (1992:33) states that women tend to be more linguistically polite than men and focus on different speech functions. Women often use tag questions and fillers in their speech to soften their speech and avoid rough or assertive when communicating with others.

Women's language can be seen in everyday life and various media, including talk shows, novels, and miniseries. It is also present in literary works, such as films, which reflect real life social situations and utterances. This study uses *Birds of Prey* movie as the data source of the research. *Birds of Prey* movie is the first Hollywood superhero film written and directed by women, with a main female cast, no male love interests, and a theme about learning to live without a man. In this movie, many female characters are using lexical hedges. Therefore, this movie can be considered as a reliable and accurate source, telling a story about life women's life lessons.

Based on the foregoing introduction, this study aims to figure out the type of lexicons used as lexical hedges and analyze why the female characters in *Birds of Prey* movie use those lexical hedges. Moreover, analyzing lexical hedges in conversation shows a lot of variation between women and men speaking on one occasion. This movie indirectly affects how the female characters express their thoughts and feelings through women's language features.

DATA SOURCE

The data for this study was sourced from the American superhero movie titled *Birds of Prey*. The focus was on the utterances made by the female characters that included lexicons used as lexical hedges. Released in 2020, *Birds of Prey* is an action-comedy directed by Cathy Yan and written by Christina Hodson, based on the DC Comics team of the same name. The movie follows Harley Quinn's journey after her breakup with the Joker, as she teams up with other female characters to rescue a young girl from crime lord.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research method. In collecting data, this study used the note-taking technique and documentation method since the data are spoken data. The data were collected through the following steps: First, watched the movie intensively to the utterances spoken by the female characters in the *Birds of Prey* Movie. Second, read the subtitle to find the utterances that contain lexical hedges. Third, took some notes the utterances. Fourth, took a screen shoot containing the subtitle. Last, classified the data based on lexicon used as lexical hedges. The collected data organizes by using a qualitative method. First, classified the data into different categories, the data was analyzed using Lakoff (1975) theory for lexical hedges. Second, each data was presented based on the lexical hedges used by the female characters in the movie.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

1. Lexical Hedges

Lexical hedges are one of the features of women's language identified by Robin Lakoff (1975). Lakoff identified lexical hedges as linguistic forms used by women to express uncertainty, soften the

impact of statements, and maintain/show/convey politeness. Lakoff's claim that women used more hedging than men. She argued that women tend to use more hedges in their speech because they are taught to think that being assertive is not polite, ladylike, or feminine (as cited in Coates, 2004: 88).

Lakoff (1975: 54) notes that women's speech generally includes more instances of "well," "you know," "kinda," and similar expressions. Those words suggest that the speaker feels unsure about her statements or cannot guarantee their accuracy. For example, instead of saying, "it will rain this morning", speaker might say, "I guess it will rain this morning". Another valid reason for using a hedge is to soften the potential harshness of a statement, making it sound more polite (Lakoff, 1975: 54). For example, instead of saying, "John is short", speaker might say, "John is sorta short". The speaker is fully aware of how short he is, and it is indeed quite short. However, she uses the hedge to soften the impact of a rather painful statement. Even though when she is fully confident in her statement and there is no risk of offense, the tag is added as a way of apologizing for making an assertion at all (Lakoff, 1975: 54).

Another example of this phenomenon is the use of phrases like "I think" and "I guess" before making statements, or "I wonder" before posing questions. These phrases serve as hedges for the acts of speaking and asking (Lakoff, 1975: 54). These hedges can be useful when a speaker genuinely needs to protect themselves, as they may fear that making a particular statement could overstep their boundaries. However, overusing hedges, such as employing question intonation, it can give the impression that the speaker lacks authority or is uncertain about what they are talking about.

2. The Use of Lexical Hedges

According to Lakoff (1975), the use of lexical hedges in women's language features are:

- a) To convey the speaker's uncertainty about what they are saying or to indicate they cannot confirm the accuracy of the statement.
- b) To soften the potential harshness or unkindness of a statement, serving as a form of politeness.
- c) As an apology for making any assertion, as the speaker may not want to assert themselves too strongly. In other words, hedges are used to weaken or soften the statement.

The examples can be seen as follows:

- a) **I guess** it will rain this morning
- b) John is **sorta** short

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, lexical hedges were analyzed using the theory of women's language features proposed by Robin Lakoff (1975). The data were obtained from the utterances of female characters in the movie *Birds of Prey*.

Data 1

Munroe : I got 50 says it was turf war.

Renee Montoya : **Well**, as always, you're wrong, Munroe. There was only one shooter. Inside. This guy shot out the glass.



Figure 1. Data 1

The data above showed the spoken dialogue between male and female characters Munroe and Renee Montoya. The dialogue took place in a restaurant. The conversation discussed the murderer. In this scene, Munroe and Renee Montoya investigated a series of mob killings. They were detectives at the Gotham City Police Department (GCPD). Munroe told Montoya that these mob killings happened because of the turf war, but Montoya disagreed. She had another opinion about this incident.

Montoya uttered, “**Well**, as always, you’re wrong, Munroe.” In this context, the word or lexicon **well** is categorized as a lexical hedge. Montoya expressing her disagreement with Munroe’s assumption about the turf war. She uses the hedge **well** because she wants to soften her direct contradiction of Munroe’s statement before presenting her own evidence about the single shooter. The use of the hedge **well** in Montoya’s statement was to weaken her criticism while still maintaining her opinion about the single shooter theory. This shows that while Montoya isn’t trying to be especially polite, she still recognizes the need to soften her direct statement of a colleague’s opinion.

Data 2

Patrick Erickson : Drugs?

Renee Montoya : A diamond.

Munroe : Wow, Montoya. Should we call the Feds for backup?

Renee Montoya : Listen, I had a source at the club. His driver. He said that Roman couldn’t stop talking about this thing. And he said that he overheard something about laser-encoding. Now, I did some research. **I think** it's the Bertinelli diamond.



Figure 2. Data 2

The data above showed the spoken dialogue between male and female characters Patrick Erickson, Munroe, and Renee Montoya. The dialogue took place in Captain Patrick Room's Gotham City Police Station. The conversation discussed the Bertinelli diamond. In this scene, Montoya met Captain Patrick Erickson, Montoya's former partner, who took credit for her hard work and gets promoted. She tried to convince them that she was building a case against Sionis, who was looking for the Bertinelli diamond. However, she was unsure about what Sionis was looking for because she only got information from Sionis's driver.

Renee Montoya uses the hedge **I think** in the sentence, "**I think** it's the Bertinelli diamond." Montoya's use of this hedge to express her uncertainty about whether the thing Roman was looking for indeed was the Bertinelli diamond or not. The information she got is still speculative, based on reports from Roman's driver and her research. The hedge **I think** expresses her hesitation, suggesting that she's not entirely confident in her conclusion but rather making a speculation based on the information that she got. The hedge **I think** was used to convey uncertainty about her statement or to indicate that she cannot guarantee its accuracy. By using the hedge **I think**, she protects herself from making false claims while still sharing her findings as a detective.

Data 3

- Patrick Erickson : So basically, you have nothing. You are trying to go after one of the most litigious and wealthiest families in Gotham, and all you've got is rumors and a hunch?
- Renee Montoya : Well, **you know**, the DA's office is building a case against him, too. Isn't that right, Miss Yee?



Figure 3. Data 2

The data above showed the spoken dialogue between male and female characters Patrick Erickson and Renee Montoya. The dialogue took place in Captain Patrick Room's Gotham City Police Station. The topic discussed evidence of the case. Montoya took herself into a bad situation after explaining her case against Roman Sionis. She did not get much support from them in her research into the case. The insider who gave her information was no longer working with the Sionis. Therefore, Patrick concluded that Montoya had no evidence except rumors. However, Montoya tried to convince Patrick by diverting the conversation that the DA's office was also investigating the same case.

In her response, “*Well, you know, the DA’s office is building a case against him, too*”, Montoya use the hedge **you know** to mitigate unkindness or unfriendliness of her defensive statement. The situation was delicate as she needed to defend her investigation towards Patrick’s criticism. She wants to present her point in a way that still maintains respect for Patrick’s position as captain. Her position was particularly challenging as she had been criticized for only having “*rumors and a hunch*”, therefore it is important for her to respond in a way that is not offensive. Montoya uses this hedge to maintain a polite and respectful tone while still defending her case. By starting her statement about the DA's investigation with **you know**, she makes her counter argument appear less challenging.

Data 4

Cassandra Cain : I don’t know what the fuck is going on. But I know that this shit stick... just tried to gut me. And you. Thought you were different.

Harley Quinn : I’m sorry, kid. I’m just a terrible person, **I guess**.



Figure 4. Data 4

The data above showed the spoken dialogue between female characters Cassandra Cain and Harley Quinn. The dialogue took place in The Booby Trap at Amusement Mile. The dialogue discussed Cass’s disappointment with Harley. In this scene, Zsasz just died because Huntress killed him. They needed to find out who Huntress was. The women there were arguing with each other to save Cass. Cass was getting confused by the situation. She was afraid that she would be betrayed again. Cass tried to protect herself by telling everyone to stay away from her. Then, she expressed her disappointment to Harley.

Harley Quinn uses the hedge **I guess** in her statement, “*I’m just a terrible person I guess*” when responding to Cassandra’s expression of betrayal and disappointment. She uses this hedge at the end of her self-deprecating statement in a moment of Cassandra feels betrayed. The use of hedge **I guess** in Harley Quinn’s statement to express speaker’s uncertainty about what they are saying. Even though she’s responding to a direct accusation from Cassandra, Harley uses this hedge to indicate uncertainty about her own character assessment. By adding **I guess** to her statement “*I’m just a terrible person,*” she demonstrates that she cannot fully vouch for the accuracy of this harsh self-judgment. Without the hedge, stating “*I’m just a terrible person*” would be a definitive self-

condemnation, but by adding **I guess**, Harley shows she's uncertain about fully accepting this negative characterization of herself, even while acknowledging her problematic actions.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the analysis focused on examining the use of lexical hedges by female characters in the movie *Birds of Prey* based on the theory of lexical hedges proposed by Lakoff (1975). The study identified several examples the use of lexical hedges by the female characters, including "well," "you know," "I think" and "I guess. The findings indicate that these lexical hedges primarily expressed uncertainty in the statements made by the female characters. This pattern of usage was observed frequently throughout the movie. Overall, this analysis highlights the use of lexical hedges by the female characters in *Birds of Prey*, which shows that the use of the lexical hedges depends on the situation and context of the conversation. Each lexical hedge can serve different purposes in different contexts, highlighting the importance of examining these linguistic devices within their specific conversational situations.

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