Language Features of Transgenders as Their Gender Representation in Digital Culture

Denis Kelien[1*]*,* and *Clara Herlina* Karjo[1]

[1]English Department, Faculty of Humanities, Bina Nusantara University, Jakarta, Indonesia

Abstract. Huge number of researches suggest many differentiations between men and women' language features. Most studies proclaim men to be more aggressive, verbal, and have higher self-esteem while women tend to be milder and soft-spoken. However, how about the transgenders? This study aims to see what language features used by the transgenders and how the transgenders represented in the digital media which in this case, YouTube. The study will be conducted using the qualitative data analysis. Starting with collecting the data from four videos taken from Jimmy Kimmel, Allure, About Ethan, and Netflix's YouTube channels. These data then analyzed using the theory of women's language features by Robin Lakoff, men's language features by Jennifer Coates, and the theory of gender presentation in digital media by LaFrance and Vial. The result of this study shows that transgender women use six out of ten female language features, while maintaining two of men language features. Meanwhile, transmen maintain three women's language features, while using four men language features. The study's results implies that gender need to be considered as a multidimensional construct and more studies about language and gender must be expanded for multidimensional identity to be recognized in this vast digital world.

1 Introduction

Language and the society have always been holding an important role for one another. While language have been holding a particular role where it connects people in the society and helping them in building relationships. Society left a great impact to the language usage for every time it changes. Society which always separates the role in gender starts to shift into a new age where people start to find that there is more than just a birth assigned gender role. The society starts to learn and explore the diversity of gender, sex, sexuality, embodiment, and identity, which brought them to the fact that there is a choice in gender identity. Some people started to bodied their newly found gender identity by undergoing a sex-changing surgery in order to embrace their proclaimed true self.

Hunter Schafer, a 23 years old American actress and model known for her big and debut role in the up and coming series, Euphoria (2019). Born in Trenton, New Jersey, she was diagnosed with sexual dysphoria in ninth-grade and decided to go through a sex-changing surgery at the age of 18. She then became an LGBTQ rights activist, and pursuing her work as model and actress after making an appearance in Teen Vogue Magazine "21 Under 21".

Elliot Fletcher, similar to Schafer, found that he is uncomfortable with his previous gender role and decided to came out as a man when he was 17 years old. The American author known for his role in ABC Family

drama The Foster (2016), undergone his trans-sexual surgery when he was 18 years old. He then continuing his career as a trans-sexual actor with he/him pronouns.

Both Schafer and Fletcher showed that they have their own speaking characteristic or speech style that distinguish themselves from the people around them. This speech style mentioned is referred to as Language Features by Robin Lakoff [1]. While Lakoff [2, 3] stated that each gender has differences in their way of communicating because men and women have their own role that they hold in the society, there are also some people who stated that women can be dominant and men can be the cooperative one which work differently to the designated roles they hold. Lakoff [2] theorized that women have a distinct feature in their language which is believed to be the total opposite from men's standard language. Men are often seen as the dominant one in a conversation, while women took the role of a subordinate. While in contrast, according to Smith-Hefner [4] even polite speech which was considered to be a highly feminine way of speaking is not considered to be 'uniquely' feminine. Even Javanese women from Indonesia, tend to use a more polite speech within the family circles, while the men tend to use it more in public.

There have been many researches that discussed the language feature used by both men and women. Previous studies mainly put their focus in either the language feature used by women, men, or both. On the contrary, there are a dearth of research that examine

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* Corresponding author:clara2666@binus.ac.id

trans-people language features and how they were represented in front of the digital culture. Past research conducted by Karjo and Wijaya [3] has confirmed that that men and women differs in the language feature that they used. Even though they some share similar language feature, both genders still showed specific characteristics of their respective gender in their speech. In another study, Juwita [5] stated that men and women does not always uses all of the language feature and they also do not use them based on each gender consistently. Both research result indicates that the language used by both men and women are found to be different yet similar and sometimes each respective gender is found to be borrowing the opposite gender's language feature.

However, both of the previous researchers mainly studying the language feature used by men and women respectively, none of them mentions on how the change in physical sex affecting the language style used. Therefore, this fact become the foundation of this study where the writer will examine the language feature used by a trans-man and a trans-woman. Whether or not each of the gender will be using their language feature based on the gender they assigned at born sex or their self-proclaimed true identity? In addition to that, the writer will also be examining the impact on the representation of Schafer and Fletcher from the language feature that is shown to the digital public.

1.1 Objectives

This study has the objective to seek out the answer to these two questions;
1. What language features used by each of the trans-gender?
2. How do trans-gender people represent themselves in digital culture?

2 Literature Review

The base for this analysis is sociolinguistic and gender. Therefore, Therefore the writer will use the theory of 10 Language Features used by Women by Robin Lakoff [2] and Language Feature used by Men by Jennifer Coates [6] as the main theories used in this research.

2.1 Women's Language Feature

According to Lakoff [2, 7], men and women differs in the language style that they are using. Men are said to be more assertive and mature; they prefer to speak blatantly with their preferred vocabulary. In the other hand, women are more unassertive compared to men. Women often use figurative words rather than speaking directly, in addition to that women tend to be more careful in choosing the right word to present something, often using politer and gentler words. Lakoff stated that there are ten language feature that women often used in their speech, and those are:

Lexical hedges tend to be used to show a weakened strength of an assertion. In another way, lexical hedges are used to express their uncertainty, showing their lack of self-confidence. Jakobsson (2010) stated that women use hedges more often than men usually are. Women use I think, sort of, perhaps, and you know to express both their certainty and uncertainty about the discussed topic. Lexical hedges are giving off the impression that the speaker is lacking in authority or avoiding overstepping their speech boundary. In the meanwhile, fillers refer to the meaningless utterances that women usually add in their speech such as um, ah, umm. From here, we can see that lexical hedges and fillers are pause-shaped phrases that is used in a conversation to fill in the breath gap, lack of confidence, and also uncertainty [8]. Lakoff [9,10] stated that tag question is used when the speaker is stating a claim, but they are not confident in the truth that they have claimed. Lakoff also added that the usage and the syntax form of tag question is in between a definite statement and a yes-no question. Women are using question in a conversation and they will make a statement when they are confident in the information that they convey. It is stated by Lakoff, [8, 9] that rising intonation is related to the syntactic rules. Lakoff found that there is a vivid difference in women's intonation patterns. Women tend to use rising intonation to answer general question to express their affection and sounding gentler. In vocabulary, there are groups of adjective words. There are vocabularies that has a literal meaning and also adjectives that is indicating approval or speaker's admiration to something. these adjectives are what people calls empty adjectives. The adjectives only concern with the emotional reaction that is created from the word. Examples of empty adjectives include: sweet, charming, adorable, gorgeous, and cute. Women tend to be more sensitive in examining colors rather than men do. This results in women to be more precise in naming colors term.

Men tend to be more indifferent when talking about colors because most of them think that this kind of talk are trivial or irrelevant. Example, women use maroon, cherry, crimson, blush to define the range of the red color, while most men will just say that they were all red. Intensifiers are used to stress on what people need to express. just, so, quiet, and very are some of the identifiers that lean more towards the characteristic of women's language. Lakoff [8, 9] stated that so is used more by women, even though men are also use it on their speech. Lakoff [8, 9] stated that hypercorrect grammar is the consistency of the standard verb form usage. Hypercorrect grammars are related to the politeness inside conversations. Women tend to use hypercorrect grammar to avoid vulgar terms such as, ain't or goin'. Women tend to use politer expression in their speech more than men do. According to Women tend to think more before they speak rather than voicing out their mind like men do. For example, when mentioning "menstruation", women use "I fell of the roof" or "this is that time of the month", and they also use polite implication like "please", or "you are so kind". According to Eckert & Ginet [11] swear words and profanities are considered as a powerful expression

which are unsuitable for women and children. Swear words are often associated with men because women tend to avoid using it and replace them with gentler words such as oh dear, goodness gracious, or fudge. Emphatic is a typical term used to refer to the words that women use to show the highlighted word in their speech. Emphatic stress usually used to correct, compare clarify or strengthening the meaning of their speech. For example, "She is totally gorgeous!" and "That is a brilliant idea!". The word gorgeous and brilliant are some examples of an emphatic stress.

2.2 Men's Language Feature

There are 6 language features of men that are introduced by Coates [5,6]. The first one is backchannel or minimal response; it is said that men uses this language feature to assert their dominance. This consists of utterances such as yeah, right, hmm, and mhm. The second one is command and directives, it is often used by men when they were gathered with their fellow men, for example: gotta, gonna, and gimme. The third one is curse words or swearing, people believe that men use swear or curse words more often than women do, for example: fuck, shit, and damn. The fourth one is complements, men tend to give out complements to each other for their skill and possessions, for example: good boy, great job, nice, and cool. Next one is theme, men tend to talk about current affairs, business, sport, cartoon, and such with their fellow same-sex. Last one is direct question, different from the women, men tend to ask directly instead of using tag question.

2.3 Self-representation in Digital Culture

According to Goffman (1979), human behavior and gender are all cultural construction, he also stated that people of different gender are able to display themselves differently in different social situations, including inside the digital media [12]. LaFrance and Vial [13] shows that other than language, men and women also differs in some specific nonverbal behaviors. According to them, the nonverbal behaviors consist of smiling, gazing, touching, interpersonal distance, body orientation, gesture, posture, and vocal nonverbal behaviors (e.g. interruption). While men are presented in a position of higher masculine power and strength compared to women, transgenders have been placed in the middle of ambiguity. Rutten [14] said that Transgender people tend to exaggeratedly emphasize a certain masculine or feminine traits according to the societal gender norm in order to get affirmation of their gender and "pass" as a "natural" member of the gender binary, especially in digital society.

3 Methods

In order to find the answer to the two questions in the objectives, the writer uses qualitative data analysis. The writer decided to take the data from two of the up and coming, popular young adult transgenders: Hunter

Schafer and Elliot Fletcher. The data was collected from four YouTube videos of four different channels. The videos consist of two videos of Schafer and Elliot each while being interviewed and doing a monologue. The videos then downloaded and transcribed before being observed thoroughly. The transcript then analyzed using the theories of 10 Female Language Feature by Robin Lakoff [9], Language Features of Men by Jennifer Coates [6], and Gender and Nonverbal Behavior by LaFrance and Vial [13].

4 Data Collection

There is a total of four videos that were downloaded and transcribed: 1. "Hunter Schafer on Visiting Spider-Man Set with Zendaya, Drawing Comics & Euphoria" from Jimmy Kimmel Live, 2. "Euphoria's Hunter Schafer Draws Her Truck, Favorite Beauty Product, & More | Allure" from Allure, 3. "BEST FRIEND TAG w/ Elliot Fletcher!" from About Ethan, 4. "First Time I Saw Me: Trans Voices | Elliot Fletcher | Netflix + GLAAD" from Netflix. Each person is examined from two videos. Both Hunter Schafer and Elliot Fletcher was chosen as the object of analysis because both are the up and coming actors and also the icon for transgender young adult that are voiced about their life as a transgender. After choosing the object of analysis, the author gathered the data and found two videos for each person. Two videos were showing monologue and the other two shows the object of analysis being interviewed. The videos were downloaded via online website, then transcribed manually by the author.

5 Result and Discussion

The results are divided into two mains subsections, women's language features and men's language features as used by the two respondents, Hunter Schafer and Elliot Fletcher.

5.1 Women's Language Feature

Table 1. Women's Language Feature used by Each of the Transgender Actor/Actress

No.	Features	Schafer	Fletcher
1.	Lexical Hedges/ Fillers	✓	
2.	Tag Questions		
3.	Rising Intonation on Declaratives		
4.	Empty Adjectives	✓	
5.	Precise Color Terms	✓	✓
6.	Intensifiers	✓	✓
7.	Hypercorrect Grammar	✓	✓
8.	Superpolite Form	✓	
9.	Avoidance of Swear Words		
10.	Emphatic Stress		
Total used		6	3

5.1.1 Hunter Schafer

As Lakoff [2] said there are a total of ten distinctive language feature used by women. It consists of lexical

hedges or fillers, tag questions, empty adjectives, precise color terms, intensifiers, hypercorrect grammar, superpolite form, avoidance of swear words, and emphatic stress. It can be seen in Table 1 that out of the 10 language features used by women, Hunter Schafer seems to be using six of the features in her utterances.

• **Lexical hedges/fillers**

Hunter Schafer: Yeah, um, yeah, I think I drew that, I used to be a full-time runaway model during uh-

The utterances above was an answer from Schafer after she was asked whether she drew someone she knew or did she take someone as an inspiration while drawing. The situation seems to be informal, Jimmy Kimmel which was the host, seems to make a situation where he can make Schafer relax by using a relatable topic here. However, from Schafer's utterances above, she uses both the fillers and hedges as a response towards Kimmel's question. The hedge and filler here show the lack of Schafer's certainty, the filler phrase yeah, um, yeah is used as a gap where she can think about what to answer and the I think shows that she is uncertain about her skin and tried to back off and be less assertive.

• **Empty Adjective**

Hunter Schafer: lots of windmills, me being very over stimulated by the beautiful scenery in my sweet truck, Appa.

The above utterance was taken from a monologue Schafer done in Allure YouTube video where the situation is, she was asked to illustrate her cross-country road trip. Basing on the story that she told when she was drawing this, she looked like she had a pretty good time doing a cross-country trip. She described that the scenery was amazing and uses the empty adjective sweet to show her fondness to her truck which she called, Appa. As Lakoff's stated, empty adjective functions as an approbation towards something that is used by women. It enables women to show their thoughts or view towards something.

• **Precise Color Terms**

Hunter Schafer: I think with Euphoria, my favorite color is like chartreuse, yellow, like it has a little bit of green in it.

The sentence about was said by Schafer when she was describing the color that she used to color her shirt when she draws in the Allure video. In this situation, we can see that Schafer was using associative words in order to describe the color she used. Instead of just saying she uses yellow to color the drawing, she uses the term, chartreuse, which was a kind of liquor that has a distinct color to describe it. Lakoff stated that women tend to use detailed words to describe colors so that others can understand what they felt after looking at the color.

• **Intensifiers**

Hunter Schafer: I really love dancing

The declaration above took place when Schafer was in the middle of describing her drawing herself in the middle of quarantine. She uses the intensifiers really to describe her fondness of dancing. Lakoff stated that the intensifiers are actually used by both genders, but

women tend to use it more often than men do because women express their love or affection towards something more frequently than men.

• **Hypercorrect Grammar**

Hunter Schafer: Well, that is a great thing about it. It is like you will never have to plan a party, because there are already 15 things happening no matter where you are. LA is particularly nice for that because a lot of parties happen here.

The conversation above took place when Jimmy Kimmel asked Schafer about her birthday who fell on the new year eve. Lakoff claimed that women tend to use the hypercorrect grammar in order to keep people's expectation about their good image maintained. Here we can see that Schafer still use the hypercorrect grammar despite the informal situation while talking about her birthday where she can be excited and let loose, but she still used the hypercorrect grammar in order to maintain her status in front of the audience.

• **Superpolite Form**

Hunter Schafer: Since the last regular episode, I mean, we were cut off so yeah, March 2020, but like three days before we were supposed to start filming it was march of 2020. Yeah, it was a rude awakening.

Similar to the hypercorrect situation, the above utterance was also taken a place in Jimmy Kimmel's show. The situation happened after Schafer was asked by Kimmel about how it is been a long time after the last episode of the series that she was starred in last airing. Schafer uses the phrase rude awakening to express her disappointment for the sudden halt in filming the new season of her series the previous year because of the COVID 19. Lakoff stated that women used politer expression in order to show their audience that they are refined.

5.1.2 *Elliot Fletcher*

On the other hand, Fletcher had only used three out of ten language features used by women which only half of Schafer's number. The three features used are:

• **Precise Color Terms**

Elliot Fletcher: Hazel? Hazel Brown?

The situation happened when Fletcher was asked by about his friend's, Ethan Matthew, eye color. Similar to Schafer's situation, we can see that Fletcher was using associative words in order to describe the color. Instead of just saying brown he uses the color term, hazel.

• **Intensifiers**

Elliot Fletcher: I think she is so cute.

The utterance above took place when Fletcher was in the middle of uttering her fondness towards Brie Larson. He uses the intensifiers so to describe his fondness of her. Lakoff stated that the intensifiers are actually used by both genders, but women tend to use it more often than men do because women express their love or affection towards something more frequently than men

• **Hypercorrect Grammar**

Ethan Matthew: You have never mentioned Brie Larson to me so…

Elliot Fletcher: Have I not?

The situation happened in an informal conversation between friends, fletcher was asked by Matthew about his crush but Matthew cannot guess it, after it got revealed to be the actress Brie Larson, Matthew told Fletcher that he never mentioned her before, therefore Fletcher here answered have I not? Which actually sounded more like a joke instead of showing a refined way of talking used by a woman.

5.2 Men's Language Feature

Table 2. Men's Language Feature used by Each of the Transgender Actor/Actress

No.	Features	Schafer	Fletcher
1.	Backchannel/Minimal Response		✓
2.	Command and Directives		✓
3.	Swear Words	✓	✓
4.	Complements		
5.	Theme	✓	
6.	Direct Questions		✓
Total used		2	4

As claimed by Coates [6], there are a total of 6 language feature that is often used by men. It consists of: backchannel or minimal responses, commands and directives, swear words, complements, theme, and direct questions. From Table 2 we can see that out of six language features proposed by Coates, Schafer seems to use a total of two and Fletcher uses five of them.

5.2.1 Hunter Schafer

Starting with Schafer, out of six language features, she used two which was swear words and theme. In the conversation between Schafer and Kimmel, they are engaged in a focused cartoon and drawing themed conversation. Therefore, the writer decided to include the theme into the list of men language feature used by Schafer.

- **Swear Words**

Hunter Schafer: And because I love to color shit in, here we go, as you might be able to see, it's an eyebrow brush because I like shaping out my eyebrow when I feel like it.

Schafer rarely showcasing herself using swear words, but she still uses them. In the formal interview settings, she seemed to be avoiding using any swear words but then when she was doing a monologue with allure, she uses them more often.

- **Theme**

In the interview video, Schafer and the interviewer seemingly have the same interest which is drawing and cartoon. The topic soon escalated and change into the talk about the newest movie of Spiderman. From here, we can see that both Schafer and the Interviewer build up the conversation not only from the question throwed by the interviewer but also from the way they relate to each other's hobby. Which as stated by Coates that men tend to talk and build their conversation based on a theme.

5.2.2 Elliot Fletcher

Next is Fletcher, out of six language features he used 4 of them. The writer excluded theme because here, Fletcher and his friend Matthew was engaged in a conversation about their preferences, Coates [6], stated that men tend talk about current affairs or rather a focused topic instead of random topic. Therefore, Fletcher and Matthew random conversation cannot be considered as a topic usually used by men in a conversation.

- **Backchannel**

Ethan Matthew: We talked it yesterday?

Elliot Fletcher: Mhmm

This was happened in an informal situation where Fletcher and Matthew were in a casual conversation. Matthew tried to ask for a validation because Fletcher said that they talked about the topic yesterday, and Fletcher responded with a backchannel mhmm which is a positive respond to Matthew's question. Coates claimed that men uses this language feature to assert their dominance while giving only a bit of response towards question or such that came to them.

- **Commands and Directives**

Elliot Fletcher: gimme the final answer.

This was also happened in an informal situation between Fletcher and Matthew where Fletcher was giving Matthew a question but he was not really answering it and guessing it instead. Fletcher then told Matthew to give him the answer, which he uses a commanding language feature here. Coates stated that this language feature often used among men, where in this case Fletcher used it on his fellow transgender, to assert their dominance.

- **Swear Words**

Elliot Fletcher: Oh Shit! What the fuck y'all, I did it!

Fletcher seems to use swear words often when he was in an informal setting. However, in the middle of a more formal settings, he seemed to refrain himself from using harsh words.

- **Direct Questions**

Elliot Fletcher: Dude are they the one on the tree house? Fletcher requests information by using direct questioning instead of tag question. Coates believed that men tend to use 'strong' language' and assertive type of speech form, they used dominance approach in order to get the information they are searching for.

5.3 Gender Representation in Digital Culture

Table 3. Gender Differences in Nonverbal Behaviors used by Each of the Transgender Actor/Actress

No.	Features	Schafer	Fletcher
1.	Backchannel/Minimal Response		✓
2.	Command and Directives		✓
3.	Swear Words	✓	✓
4.	Complements		
5.	Theme	✓	
6.	Direct Questions		✓
Total used		2	4

As stated by Rutten [12]. Transgender people tend to exaggeratedly emphasize a certain masculine or feminine traits to get affirmation of their gender in digital media society. Using the theory by LaFrance and Vial [11], we can see the difference in nonverbal behaviors that Schafer and Fletcher tend to use.

5.3.1 Hunter Schafer

From table 5.3, we can see that Schafer, a trans-woman, dominantly using nonverbal behaviors that shows feminine traits. However, in her interview video, we can still see how she still use a dominant gaze and making eye-contact with the interviewer which is a masculine trait often used by men. Other than this, she mostly showcasing her feminine traits like: smiling all the time, self-touching and using hand gestures while talking, and having a limited posture. This shows how Schafer use feminine behaviors while still maintain her masculine behavior, this might be the result of her awareness and also her way to get affirmation of the societal gender norm in the digital society.

5.3.2 Elliot Fletcher

Fletcher mostly showcase his masculine behavior, for example like: holding a gaze and eye contact to assert his dominance which is always used by cisman, having an interpersonal distance, using and expansive gesture, and also showing vocal nonverbal behaviors like speaking louder than women do, making interruption to his speaking partner, and also using pauses like "ah" and "um," or incomplete sentences. But then, he also tends to smile more in a conversation often which is counted as a feminine behavior. Like Schafer, this is probably manifested from him wanting to get a pass as a normal man by the digital society.

6 Conclusion

Language has a significant function in society, and society plays a major role in language history. As society divided gender into roles, language became a unique characteristic that distinguished each of them. Many experts feel that women have a strong influence on language, and that women have a particular feature that is the polar opposite of men's standard language. However, in recent years, as people starting to explore more about gender, sex, and identity, many be of the opinion that gender identity and the gender role that is assigned at birth is different. Some people began to embrace their newly discovered gender identity by undergoing sex-changing surgery to embrace their self-proclaimed true self. Hunter Schafer and Elliot Fletcher are one of many thriving young celebrities who decided to undergo physical change in order to fit into their self-proclaimed gender role. Previous researches were mainly focusing on the differences between women and men language feature, which this becomes the foundation for the writer to conduct this study. This study is believed to be important by the writer seeing that there is too little study about the language feature used by trans people.

The writer used the qualitative data research application by conducting data research from a transcription of several videos. The transcribed data then analyzed using the theory of language feature by Lakoff for women and Coates for men. The result of the research shows that Hunter Schafer, a trans-woman (man to woman) uses more of the language feature used by woman and it includes: lexical hedge/filler, empty adjective, precise color terms, intensifiers, hypercorrect grammar, and superpolite form, while she still maintains two of men language feature which are: harsh words and theme. On the other hand, Elliot Fletcher, a trans-man (woman to man), uses only three out of ten language feature of women which are: precise color term, intensifier, and hypercorrect grammar, while using four out of six men language feature such as: backchannel, command and directives, harsh words, and direct questions. As seen on the Table 1, Schafer was dominating the use of female language feature, while Fletcher was seen from Table 2 to be dominating the use of the men language feature. They were doing this in order to blend themselves into the digital audience. In addition to that, the study also shows that Schafer and Fletcher used some nonverbal behavior which showcased the role of their new identity. Schafer, a trans woman, was found to be smiling more often than Fletcher, a trans men, do. Schafer using self-touch and hand gestures while talking and having a limited posture, then there is Fletcher who was always holding gaze, eye contact and an interpersonal distance in a conversation, and also using vocal nonverbal behaviors like interrupting and pauses. Both people also still maintain some of their previous gender trait, for example, Schafer was found to often hold a gaze and eye contact which is more of a masculine behavior, while Fletcher often smiled in a middle of conversation which is more of a feminine trait.

For the future researchers, there are several suggestions to go further and expand the range the research, for example: examining the language feature used by transgender people with no pronouns or known as non-binary trans people, or examine trans people who came from different age or settings.

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