A Study of Stylistic Features of Female Language in *Girls*

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Abstract

Based on linguist Lakoff's theories on the features of female language, this paper analyzes and studies the female language in the drama *Girls* in terms of stylistics, mainly including lexical and syntactic features. By analyzing the female language in the play and then comparing the research results with Lakoff's theory, the stylistic features of female language summarized in this paper are basically consistent with Lakoff's theory, while there are new findings. In terms of vocabulary, women are more likely to use color words, intensifiers, extravagant adjectives, and euphemisms. In terms of syntax, women are more likely to use hedges. In addition, the paper finds that women's use of expletives and tag questions differed from Lakoff's theory. After the study, it is found that women became more confident and bold when speaking. The change and development of women's status can be found through the change of women's use of expletives and tag questions, which helps us understand the relationship between language and society and also plays a role in our daily communication.

Keywords: *Girls*; Female language; Features of language; Stylistic analysis

1.Introduction

1.1 Background

The issue of gender differences in language was noted by linguists as early as the 1920s, but it was not until the 1960s and 1970s, with the rise of the feminist movement, that the issue was more widely studied and focused on. In this context, Lakoff published her book Language and Women's Place (1973), and language and gender differences have since become an important part of sociolinguistic research. Lakoff (1973) points out that in the picture of the world reflected in language, men are at the center, while the image of women is incomplete, and the gender difference reflected in the use of language by men and women is a reflection of the unequal status of men and women in society. Lakoff's hypothesis has generated a great deal of enthusiasm in the academic community, with proponents searching for more relevant evidence and opponents proposing different theoretical models, such as difference model, politeness model, constructivism model and so on. These studies have examined the differences in language use between men and women from different perspectives and using diverse methods, and a large number of papers and monographs have appeared.

By searching for domestic and international studies of female language in recent years, the author found that many research materials are from TV series or novels. In recent years, TV series and novels with female protagonists have emerged, such as *Desperate Housewives* and *2 Broken Girls*, and they have caused a huge craze around the world. *Girls*, a TV series released in the 2010s, was the most popular time for female character group dramas. *Girls* is an American TV series written and directed by Lena Dunham, which aired its first season on HBO on April 15, 2012. The series follows the urban life of four girls in New York City, Hannah, Marnie, Jessa and Shoshanna, who are good friends and also share an apartment together. *Girls* tells the somewhat complicated, failed lives of four ordinary girls, a drama that embodies women's examination of issues such as emotional life, sex, social survival, and relationships. Unlike other dramas, every character

in *Girls* is very real, and their words and phrases are very close to everyday life in America. In addition to the four female leads, there are male leads and other characters, providing a rich corpus for studying language and being able to draw contrasts.

1.2 Objectives of the study

This paper has both theoretical and practical objectives.

First, this paper examines the stylistic features of female language and validates or complements previous research. We can compare the results of this paper with previous theories to see if the results are consistent with them and attempt to improve and enrich the theories of feminine linguistic and gender and language. In previous studies, many theories are only results without data collection and proof. In this paper, the authors collect actual data for analysis and compare the results with previous studies.

Second, by studying the characteristics of women's language, we can identify the problems that women have in society. Despite the great development of the times, women are still in a disadvantaged position compared to men, and this phenomenon is reflected in language. In this paper, the authors intend to compare women's language with men's language and try to explore the reasons behind these differences and the social issues that reflect them.

Third, studying the features of female language can help us understand feminist ideas. By studying women's language, and the language people use with women, linguists have been able to discover the sexism behind these phenomena and draw attention to the status of women. The changes in women's language reflect the changes in women in society and the fact that language is closely related to society.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Gender and language

Before elaborating the features of female language, we need to understand that there are gender differences in language and hence male language and female language. The study of language and gender by linguists has been conducted in three areas: first, to analyse the features of female language from a structuralist perspective; second, to generalize the characteristics of the language used to describe women, taking into account social factors to reveal the sexism reflected in the language; and third, to study the conversation strategies used by people of different genders from the perspective of verbal communication, exploring the specific impact of gender factors on language use (Zhao Ronghui, 1999).

Li Jingwei (2001) summarized the 5 doctrines of gender and language. The first is defect theory, the representative figure of which is R. Lakoff. Lakoff argued that linguistic inequalities could not be eliminated as long as there were inequalities in social status and power. In a patriarchal society, the way a man speaks is seen as the norm, and the way a woman speaks is seen as a violation and deviation from that norm. This means that being a woman is a deficiency in itself, a deviation from the standards and norms. The second is the dominance theory, which is held by D. Zimmer-man, C. West and P. Fishman, among others. They thought that women are in a powerless social position, and therefore they are always passive and dominated in verbal communication. The third is the theory of difference, the main argument of which is that men and women, growing up in different subcultures and with different socialization processes, exhibit marked differences in the use of language. Fourthly, the politeness theory, New Zealand scholar Holmes (1995) borrowed Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness to analyze and explain the gender differences reflected in the English used by white New Zealanders. She argues that, on the whole, women are more polite than men. Fifthly, there is the constructivist theory, which is a new doctrine developed by some linguists in recent years. The constructivists are strongly opposed to the traditional dualism, in which men and women are diametrically opposed, and they even believe that gender is interchangeable.

2.2 Features of female's language

There are gender differences in language, and men and women each have their own style of speaking. As feminism developed in the 1970s and 1980s, linguistics and feminism combined, and linguists began to study the relationship between gender and language. Many scholars at home and abroad have researched female's language and have identified and summarized some of the features of female's language.

2.2.1 Study abroad

Linguists in the West who were first influenced by the feminist movement pioneered the study of female's language. The most famous of these is probably Lakooff's 1973 paper Language and Woman's Place. In this paper, Lakoff (1973) makes it clear that women have their own speech features and styles, and it appears from her analysis that the causes of these features are negative. Lakoff (1973) studied female corpora using intuitive hypothesis and empirical perceptual methods, and identified three main features of female corpora: lexical traits, phonological traits, and syntactic-pragmatic traits.

Coates (1988) analyzes the features of female language in terms of minimal responses, hedges, and tag questions. Minimal responses are the smallest responses given in a conversation, e.g. right, mhm, yeah. Such research focuses on female's use of such forms in mixed interaction, where they function to support men as speakers(Coates 1988,5). Women are often used to indicate the reaction of participants in a conversation to the topic establishment. Lakoff had mentioned that women use hedges more often than men, but Coates' research and data collection revealed that men and women each have their own common hedges. Coates (1988) found that men use *"you know"* more often than women, and women use *"I mean and I think"* much more often than men. Overall, females used hedges more than males, but not all hedges. Coates added to Lakoff's research on female's use of the tag questions. Research indicates that men use more modal (those which seek information), affective tags while women use more affective tags (those which indicate concern for the addressee) (Coates, 1988). Males often use modal tags where the speaker seeks confirmation and new information, while females often use affective tags to show the speaker's attitude and seek support.

2.2.2 Study at home

In China, linguists' research on gender and language emerged in the 1980s, and some linguists have summarized the results of research abroad, such as Dai Weidong (1983) and Xu Xiangwu (1986). From the 1990s to the present day, many Chinese linguists have begun to devote themselves to the study of gender and language, and they have drawn some conclusions about the features of female's language.

Zhang Ailing (1995)'s analysis focuses on three domains: semantics - the choice of lexical items and their frequency of occurrence, grammar - syntactic structure, and phonology. Firstly, in terms of semantics, Zhang's study mentions that women are more likely than men to use exaggerated adjectives such as divine, gorgeous, heavenly and so on. Females also use more adverbs of degree than males to strengthen the inflection, such as awfully, quite, so, terribly, etc. In terms of using exclamations and swear words, women avoid vulgar language such as shit and damn and instead use "Oh dear, My goodness" to express exclamation. Secondly, in terms of grammar, Zhang's study also mentions that women are more likely to use hedges and tag questions, and that women are more likely to use the pronouns "we" and "you"as subjects in conversation. Thirdly, in terms of phonology, the analysis of some recorded materials (especially informal conversations) shows that female pronunciation is much more standard than male pronunciation (Zhang Ailing, 1995).

Zhang Congjiang (2002) mentioned the following points about the grammar of the female language: First, euphemisms are more commonly used by women. A euphemism is an unspecified, amusing or ambiguous statement that replaces an expression with an unpleasant meaning or a lack of respect. Third, women are more likely to use embedded imperative sentences to ask someone to do something, such as "Will you please open the window?".

Zhang Ruolan (2003) analyzed the features of female language at the level of verbal communication.

First, women are more likely to choose topics that are close to their personal lives, such as family, their own feelings and aspirations. Second, women are more cooperative in conversations than men, which means that usually everyone gets a chance to talk, everyone takes turns, and few individuals have the sole right to speak. Women also react more positively when other people are talking, saying "mm, hmm, yeah, oh" to show that they are listening, nodding their heads or commenting on what is said, sighing or asking questions. If they want to disagree, they usually use more euphemistic language, hesitation, ambiguity is more obvious, such as sort of , maybe , I think , I suppose , I guess and other such hedges.

Domestic research on women's language characteristics is much the same as foreign research, with linguists generally agreeing that women's discourse is more polite and euphemistic. In addition to research on the stylistic features of women's language, linguists in China have also studied the topics that women talk about when they communicate.

2.3 Theoretical framework

In this paper, the author attempts to analyze the characteristics of women's language at the lexical and syntactic levels, so the main theoretical framework of this article is stylistic analysis. The inferences and results drawn from the stylistic analysis in the article will be mainly contrasted with the hypothesis given by Lakoff. This approach allows us to understand the linguistic characteristics of women today and how they are similar and different in *Girls* and in Lakoff's theory.

2.3.1 Stylistic analysis

Stylistics is the application of modern linguistic knowledge to the analysis and study of the language of literary works, in order to help readers understand more deeply, interpret rationally and fully appreciate works from the perspective of the relationship between linguistic skills and intellectual content. Enkvist (1973) wrote that we can think of stylistics as a subdivision of linguistics, a section devoted to the study of the characteristics of literary texts; we can also think of stylistics as a subdivision of literary studies that sometimes uses linguistic methods to conduct research; we can also think of stylistics as a separate sector, which can freely and eclectically borrow from both linguistics and literary studies.

Shen Dan (1994) summarized several styles of stylistic analysis. One can be called the "layer by layer method", that is, select a representative paragraph of the work, and then analyze it by different levels of vocabulary, grammar, rhetoric, inter-sentence illumination and context. The second model can be called the "sentence-by-sentence" method, in which you select a typical passage in a work and analyze it sentence by sentence. It follows the author's creative process and the reader's reading process, which is closer to reader response criticism. The third mode of analysis can be called "several-paragraph comparison", that is, selecting several different sections of the work for comparative analysis, and exploring the specific thematic significance of the different stylistic features in the different sections and their interrelationships. The fourth mode of analysis, which may be called "text-tracing," focuses on one or more persistent stylistic features in the context of the entire text, such as a certain syntactic structure, a certain rhetorical device, or a particular way of expressing a character's speech throughout the work.

2.3.2 Robin Lakoff 's hypothesis on women's language

During the seventies, many linguists published articles and opinions on the features of female language, the most famous of these publications being Lakoff's Language and woman's place (1973). Lakoff believes that there are significant linguistic differences between women and men, such as the choice and frequency of lexical items, the performance of syntactic rules, and differences in phonological intonation. Although Lakoff's theory was born in the 1970s, it is still very important today and has great reference value for linguists to study women's language. Since this paper mainly explores the features of female languages at the syntactic and lexical levels, the theory of these two aspects is explained here.

At the lexical level, Lakoff first notes that women are better at using words that describe colors, such as

beige, ecru, aquamarine and so on. As Lakoff says in Language and woman's place, "these words are unremarkable in a women's active vocabulary, but absent from that of most men." The second point Lakoff mentions is expletives, women use "weaker" words more often, such as oh dear, goodness, oh my god, while men use "stronger" words, such as shit, damn and fuck. The third point is about evaluative adjectives, Lakoff says that there are some neutral words that both men and women use, like great, terrific and cool, and some that are commonly used by women, such as adorable, charming, sweet and lovely.

At the syntactic level, Lakoff summarized several features, and here the author will present the main two points of Lakoff's view. One is the use of tag questions, which are abbreviated question sets placed at the end of declarative sentences. The use of tag questions has a strong connotation of solicitation, which can avoid being too direct and certain. Tag questions are used when a speaker is stating a statement but does not feel confident about the truth of the statement. For example, "Is Jack a doctor, isn't he?". Lakoff suggests that women use tag questioning more often than men because women lack confidence when asking questions, avoid fully assuring their words, and want to avoid conflict.

Another point is the use of hedges, which, according to linguist G. Lakoff's (1972) definition of hedges, are words that are intentionally used to make things ambiguous. According to this definition, words that do not give the listener exact information, such as kinda (kind of), sort of, etc., are hedges; and words that express speculation or uncertain meaning, such as "I guess, I think" are also considered hedges. Lakoff argues that hedges like "well, sort of, you know and I think" are more often found in women's speech.

To conclude, according to the above mentioned, many linguists in China and abroad have conducted research on the features of female languages. It is true that domestic and international research on female language has made a number of discoveries, and women have their own characteristics in various aspects of language, but these studies still have some shortcomings. Domestic studies are basically based on Lakoff's theory to make a description, relatively few specific research objects and examples. Foreign studies have research processes and objects, but they basically focus on the 70s to 80s, and the language context is very different compared to modern times.

3. Research Design

3.1 Purposes and questions of the study

At the very beginning of this paper, the authors have completely and carefully watched the series and researched the script for *Girls* (Season Ⅰ). Then browsing through the relevant literature and theories, the authors come up with the following questions for this paper:

①Are the stylistic features of female language in *Girls* (Season Ⅰ) consistent with Lakoff's hypothesis and previous studies?

② Are there any new features that were not found in previous studies? If so, what are the reasons for these new features?

3.2 Data collection and analysis

The material chosen for this paper is the script of *Girls*. *Girls* released its first season on HBO in 2012 and had six seasons until its final season in 2017, with 62 episodes in total and an average of 28 minutes per episode. To ensure the reliability and feasibility of the study, the authors choose only the first season as the material for analysis. For the statistical data, the authors make the data into several tables, including two female characters and two male characters. Due to the different conversation targets between the actors, which is not conducive to data reliability, the authors compare the data by collecting statistics mainly from conversations between these four analyzing objects. Other data that do not need to be compared and counted, the authors also choose other roles for analysis.

The authors take three steps to collect the data. The first step is to separate out the dialogue of the main

characters Hannah, Marnie, Adam and Charlie from the 30,000-word script. The second step is to create a table with statistical data based on the divided conversations to form a comparison of the data. The third step is for the authors to collect nearly 30 scenarios as a backup for examples relevant to the study.

This paper will use both qualitative analysis and quantitative analysis. The process of using qualitative research has these steps:

(1)Stating the phenomenon to be described.

(2)Using quantitative methods to collect data.

(3)Searching for patterns in the data.

(4)Validating initial conclusions by returning to the data or collecting more data.

(5)Recycling through the data processing.

The study of the TV series *Girls* in this dissertation is a case study, which is a type of qualitative research. The analysis of this paper has the following stages. First, the authors carefully select the subjects for the study, and the criteria for selection are that the subjects will reflect the features of women's language. Second, the research object is analyzed and studied at two levels, including the lexical level and the syntactic level. Third, the results of the study are compared with Lakoff's theories on female language features. Finally, the results of the study are summarized and suggestions are made for future research.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

In order to better study the features of female language in *Girls*, the authors will summarize the stylistic characteristics of female language and compare them with Lakoff's theory. From former linguistic studies, linguists have identified women's lexical characteristics, mainly in terms of color words, expletives, extravagant adjectives, intensifiers and euphemisms. At the syntactic level, feminine linguistic features are mainly reflected in hedges and tag questions.

4.1.1 Feminine linguistic features at lexical level

4.1.1.1 Color words

According to Lakoff's theory, women are better than men at using exact color words when describing colors. Women tend to use more complex color words to accurately describe and portray things, such as mauve, beige, aquamarine.

Lakoff mentions that when discussing topics such as color, men see it as a trivial issue that is not relevant to the real world. It is customary to think that such trivial matters as color identification are not the concern of men and should be left to women. Men are concerned with political, economic, religious, sports and other matters, while women are concerned with housekeeping, childcare, laundry and cooking. In addition, it is widely believed that women care more about fashion and appearance and are more sensitive to color and style perceptions than men. We will show you an example in *Girls*:

(1)Ray: What color's that, aquamarine?

Female customer: Eggshell blue.

Ray: Eggshell blue? I like the way it finely clashes with your mascara. It is just kind of aggressively clashes.

(Episode 5, Season Ⅰ)

The above conversation is between Ray, the male owner of the coffee shop, and the female customer, where Ray is asking about the color of the female customer's clothes. Although Ray says the word aquamarine, which is not commonly used by men, he still does not accurately describe the color eggshell blue. In modern society, the words aquamarine and beige may be recognized and used by more men, but they still cannot accurately say the correct color words when faced with those colors that are refined.

In addition to women having a larger vocabulary of color words and using color words more accurately, the authors find in *Girls* that women also prefer to use color as an adjective.

(2)Jessa: How could you even finish a book like that? That book is so idiotic, I couldn't even read it on a toilet.

Hannah: It might be pink and cheesy, but there's actually some very real wisdom in there about how to deal with men and--

(Episode 2, Season Ⅰ)

In this situation, Jessa and Hannah are discussing a book, and Hannah uses pink and cheesy to describe the book. Pink usually represents youth, love, and even childhood innocence, full of femininity. In this conversation, Jessa mentions that the book is idiotic, and according to the turn of phrase in Hannah's words, we can also know that pink and cheesy should mean negative. Here pink Hannah uses should mean that the book is childish, some of the content is immature. There is another example of women using pink to describe people:

(3)Hannah: I'm coming from work.

Marnie: And why do you look so pink and smiley?

(Episode 4, Season Ⅰ)

In this conversation, Marnie describes Hannah as pink and smiley. The scene in the play is that this conversation takes place after Hannah and her boyfriend Adam have gotten back together and Hannah gone to a party. According to the Collins dictionary, if you are in the pink, you are fit, healthy, and happy. Marnie says Hannah looks pink because she looks happy, and maybe she looks love-related.

4.1.1.2 Expletives

In the Oxford dictionary, the definition of expletive is a word, especially a rude word, that you use when you are angry, or in pain, which is synonymous with swear word. In Webster's dictionary, one of the meanings of expletive is an exclamatory word or phrase, especially the one that is obscene or profane. In the past, expletive was a social taboo, especially when words related to religion, sex, and body parts were used. However, in today's conversations and interpersonal interactions, expletive is a fairly common linguistic phenomenon and is very popular in everyday speech.

In Language and woman's place, Lakoff mentions that men and women use different expletives, with women using weaker words like "oh dear", "goodness" and men using stronger words, such as "shit", "damn", "hell". Lakoff believes the reason for this situation is that women are asked from an early age to be ladies and to be polite, while men are rarely asked to do so. Women are allowed to complain and fuss, but only men are allowed to be in rage.

However, through data collected in *Girls*, the authors found that the expletives used by women changed over time. As the feminist movement grew and women became more powerful and respected by society, they didn't have to be afraid to show their emotions, so women also used those stronger expletives. The weaker expletives mentioned by Lakoff, "oh dear" and "oh fudge", are not present in this season. Goodness appears only once, and it is a situation where a father expresses surprise at the implication of running into his two young daughters. Female characters will also use these stronger swear words to express their feelings, perhaps in anger, awe or pain. Here is an example:

(4)Marnie: You're such a fucking bitch! Fucking hell.

Hannah: That was awesome! I think I'm gonna puke.

(Episode 4, Season Ⅰ)

The scene is that Marnie's boyfriend Charlie has written a song about Hannah's diary with Marnie's complaints about Charlie, so Marnie is furious with Hannah and uses several swear words to express her anger.

The Table 1 shows the frequency of the choice of swear words for the two female characters and the two male characters:

Table 1 Expletive words

	Oh my god	bitch	shit	fucking	total
Hannah	6	0	2	4	12
Marnie	5	2	1	7	15
Adam	2	0	8	10	20
Charlie	3	0	0	8	11
total	16	2	11	29	58

From the table, female characters use "oh my god" more frequently than male characters, while men use shit and fucking more frequently than women. "Oh my god" is usually used at the beginning of a sentence, or as a separate response to express surprise. Sometimes it has no real meaning, but is used as a phrase to reinforce feelings, and it does not have such a strong negative connotation. The word bitch is only used by Marnie in these four characters, and in one instance she uses it to describe her own:

(5)Marnie: I know, I just-- And it makes me feel like such a bitch 'cause I can feel him being so nice to me. And yet it makes me so angry.

(Episode 1, Season Ⅰ)

4.1.1.3 Extravagant adjectives

Lakoff believes that some adjectives, like great, cool and terrific are neutral and used by both men and women, but some adjectives are preferred by women and are used not in a referential sense, but in an emotional sense, like adorable, charming, sweet, lovely and divine. Lakoff points out that these adjectives commonly used by women are empty with exaggerated meanings, which is a typical feature of female language. Here are two examples:

(6)Hannah: I told him everything. How he was torturing me. How sad I was, and he responded in such a lovely way. He kissed me and kissed me and kissed me and he said, "Be who you are." And he touched my face. And, like, we're basically together now.

(Episode 5, Season Ⅰ)

(7)Shoshanna: I hate today. I hate today so much that I might not even go to class.
Marnie: Why? It is so gorgeous outside.
Shoshanna: Yeah, I know. It, like, really gives me this uneasy feeling. It's like this certain kind of spring itch.

(Episode 10, Season Ⅰ)

In the above example, Hannah mentions "a lovely way" as a reference to how her boyfriend Adam treats her, and here "lovely" reflects her feelings about Adam's tender behavior. After Shoshanna says she doesn't like the day, Marnie describes the weather outside as gorgeous. "Gorgeous" is an exaggerated adjective here, showing Marnie's feelings about Shoshanna's words.

4.1.1.4 Intensifiers

Although Lakoff did not mention intensifiers in Language and woman's place, many linguists believe that women use intensifiers more often than men in order to reinforce their emotions. Intensifiers are a very important semantic subclass in the subordination of adverbs. The most basic semantic function is to aggravate the semantic meaning, highlight the information, and strengthen the nature, state, quantity, and other quantitative roles, which can be used to modify adjectives, verbs, prepositional phrases, noun phrases, etc. Trudgill (2000) believes that women lack the security of social status and therefore feel the need to

protect and show their social status verbally, so women prefer to use special words such as very much, extremely, very, so, to vent their emotions. The following examples are from *Girls*:

(8)Hannah: Think Jessa will really appreciate the welcome-home dinner. It's a very friendish thing of us to do.

Marnie: What? I just know she's going to show up late, wearing some fabulous blankety dress from a Grecian marketplace and be like... "Oh, I can't remember where I got this."

Hannah: I'm really glad that she's coming home.

(Episode 1, Season Ⅰ)

In this situation, Hannah and Marnie's friend Jessa is coming back to the US and they decide to prepare a dinner to welcome her. Marnie has little interest in the matter, and Hannah believes that Jessa would also be fond of their preparation, so Hannah uses "really" and "very" in her first sentence to emphasize the feelings. After Marnie refutes Hannah's words, Hannah uses "really" to express her happiness at Jessa's return, again emphasizing her attitude. From this conversation, we can see that women use intensifiers to emphasize their attitudes and feelings when someone's attitude is opposite to their own.

(9)Adam: It's a stupid play.

Hannah: Not a stupid play. It's really good. When I was watching it, I was so excited because it was so, so good.

(Episode 8, Season Ⅰ)

This conversation takes place between Hannah and her boyfriend, Adam, who is an actor. Here is Adam coming back from the audition unhappy with the play, and Hannah is comforting him. Hannah uses "really" and "so" to emphasize her emotions in order to express her like for Adam's play. Women use intensifiers to reinforce their feelings when comforting someone in order to uplift the feelings of others and have a soothing effect.

The Table 2 shows the frequency of intensifiers used by the four characters in *Girls*, where Hannah and Marnie are female and Adam and Charlie are male.

Table 2 Intensifiers

	so/such	very	really	pretty	too	total
Hannah	14	7	23	2	2	48
Marnie	9	0	20	0	1	30
Adam	3	3	6	2	0	14
Charlie	3	3	8	1	0	15
Total	29	13	57	5	3	107

As can be seen from this table, women use intensifiers to stress their words more frequently than men in these four roles. In collecting the data, the author found that women continuously use these words to enhance their tone and impress the listener, such as "really, really", "so, so good". In addition, the word "really" is used much more frequently than other intensifiers. According to Hongjie Guo's (2016) study on gender differences in intensifiers, "really" has developed into the most popular intensifier word between young women and young men, and "so" is an intensifier particularly favored by young women, ranking after "really" in frequency of use, which is consistent with the data in the table.

4.1.1.5 Euphemism

In the Oxford Dictionary, euphemism means an indirect word or phrase that people often use to refer to something embarrassing or unpleasant, sometimes to make it seem more acceptable than it really is. Differences in social roles lead to some differences in the way men and women speak and choose their

words. Women's discourse tends to be indirect, repetitive and euphemistic, while men's discourse is more direct, clear, concise and to the point. Lakoff believes that women use more euphemism in conversation and are more likely to use polite gestures such as "would you please and would you mind". The following conversations are from *Girls*.

(10)Hannah:I am so sorry I'm so late.

Marnie: Would you please come here and talk to us?

(Episode 1, Season Ⅰ)

At Jessa's welcome party, Hannah is late, but the party was suggested by Hannah, so here Marnie is unhappy with Hannah's behavior. As there are other people present, Marnie does not directly blame Hannah, but uses "would you please" to politely urge Hannah.

(11)Marnie: I'm just worried, you know? What if she's in a gutter or changed her mind?

Shoshanna: She seemed really excited about it this morning.

(Episode 2, Season Ⅰ)

This conversation takes place at the hospital, where Marnie helps Jessa make an appointment for an abortion, and Jessa is late, and Marnie is worried that Jessa has changed her mind. Shoshanna, in order to calm Marnie, mentions the state of Jessa before she left the house, instead of giving a completely positive or negative answer.

(12)Adam: Why do you look so surprised?

Hannah: No, it's just like -- you know, I just didn't think you were into that.

Adam: Into what? Love?

Hannah: No, I just -- you know, I just associate that with, like, Marnie and Charlie and people starting to talk a lot about there relationship, you know?

(Episode 10, Season Ⅰ)

The situation is that Adam expresses his love to Hannah, but Hannah is surprised and frightened by the situation. Hannah uses "just" and "you know" to blur her response, and in the first sentence she uses "that" without specifying what it is because she doesn't want to hurt Adam's feelings. Also in Hannah's second response, when Adam hits on the truth, she feels too scared to express it directly, but instead mentions Marnie and Charlie's relationship.

Through these examples, the author found that women are more likely to be considerate of others in conversation, but this situation is not absolute. The use of euphemisms is not only due to gender differences, but may also be influenced by other factors, such as age, personality, and other personal backgrounds.

4.1.2 Feminine linguistic features at syntactical level

4.1.2.1 Hedges

In 1972, G. Lakoff, a leading American generative semanticist, published the paper "Hedges: a study in meaning criteria and logical of fuzzy concepts", in which he first introduced the term "hedges" and defined them as words whose job is to make things fuzzier or less fussy. There are also different types of hedges, including variable, such as sort of, somewhat, approximately, essentially, and moderate, such as "I think, seem, I mean". The hedge is a rhetorical and communicative strategy. The use of hedges can avoid being too direct, abrupt and arbitrary, and it can be more polite, modest and appropriate, and the tone will not be too strong.

Shui Miao summarizes three reasons why women commonly use hedges. First, women are mostly in a subordinate social position, and women are traditionally taught to speak in soft tones, not to easily contradict others, and to avoid arbitrariness and overconfidence in verbal interactions. Second, it is the need for the topic itself. Women talk more often about sensitive topics, mostly about people or feelings, or self-disclosure, so they need to be polite, and hedges are an important tool to make such topics seem natural and less abrupt.

Third, due to traditional social etiquette, women are more sensitive to other people's feelings and personal dignity than men, and are more inclined to abide by the Politeness Principle and thus have a greater sense of cooperation.

In Language and woman's place, R. Lakoff argues that hedges are a distinctive feature of female language, and that women use them more often than men. She argues that words like "well, sort of, you know, I think" are more common in women's speech. The following examples are collected from *Girls*.

(13)Hannah: Oh, you know, for an STD test. I mean, since we're gonna be there anyway. And it's like, you know, I'm gonna be there, you're gonna be there. Maybe we both get them. Maybe we all get them.

(Episode 2, Season Ⅰ)

In this situation, Hannah calls Marnie to make an appointment for her to get tested for an STD, but she is a little ashamed to ask. She uses "you know" to try to normalize the tone and make the passage sound normal, "I mean" to change the subject, and "maybe" to cover up her emotions.

(14)Adam: I think your stomach is funny.

Hannah: Well, maybe I don't want my body to be funny. Has that ever occurred to you?

(Episode 3, Season Ⅰ)

The scene is that Adam is pinching the fat on Hannah's body and thinks it's funny, however Hannah doesn't think her fat is funny. Obesity is a sad thing for Hannah, but she doesn't want to directly contradict her boyfriend Adam and get mad at him, so she uses "well" to moderate her tone and "maybe" to blur her answer, which she actually doesn't find funny.

The author counted how often four characters, Hannah and Marnie, Adam and Charlie, uses hedges, and the data is shown in the Table 3.

Table 3 Hedges

	I think	I guess	Well	Maybe	You know	Kinda/ kind of	I mean	Total
Hannah	8	2	12	10	12	5	17	66
Marnie	5	0	11	6	6	2	11	41
Adam	2	5	7	1	4	3	5	27
Charlie	3	2	5	2	5	2	7	26
Total	18	9	35	19	27	12	40	160

From this table, the male characters Adam and Charlie use "I guess" more often than the female characters, and the female characters use "I mean" much more often than the male.

4.1.2.2 Tag questions

In the Oxford dictionary, the meaning of a tag question is a phrase such as isn't it? or don't you? that you add to the end of a statement in order to turn it into a question or check that the statement is correct. The use of tag questions has a stronger connotation of solicitation and can avoid being too direct and definitive.

Lakoff believes that the use of tag questions by women to indicate hesitation and lack of self-confidence in expressing their opinions needs to be carefully examined. However, some other linguists considered Lakoff's view too one-sided and conducted an empirical study on the functional and gender distribution of the tag question. Holmes(1984)' research shows that women use tag questions more than men, but women use tag questions for different purposes than men. Women place more emphasis on the polite or affective function of tag questions, using them as facilitative and positive politeness techniques, whereas men use tag questions as expressions of uncertainty more than women do. Here are some examples from *Girls*.

(15)Tako: I just assumed that everyone that knew him, like, I mean, really knew him, knew that. That's like the main defining thing about him, isn't it? Well, that and his love of books.

Hannah: Well, he's got, like, huge ears.

(Episode 7, Season Ⅰ)

Tako and Hannah are discussing Hannah's boyfriend Adam, Tako is a good friend of Adam's, here she is talking with Hannah and finds that Hannah doesn't know Adam that well, using a tag question to confirm with Hannah and cover up the awkward atmosphere.

(16)Hannah: Wait, so you actually bought Tally Schifrin's book?

Marnie: It was a book party, so I bought the book.

Hannah: Well, you don't like it, do you?

(Episode 9, Season Ⅰ)

In this case, Hannah finds out that Marnie bought her nemesis Tally's book, and that Marnie knows that Hannah doesn't like Tally. Hannah finds the book and feels betrayed by her friend, she hopes that Marnie wouldn't like it, but she isn't sure, so she uses a tag question to express her emotions.

(17)Man: I wanna be part of the group.

Jessa: That will never happen.

Marnie: Jessa.

Man: This isn't right, is it? This can't be the way that this goes.

(Episode 8, Season Ⅰ)

In this drama, in addition to women, there is a male using tag question. The scenario is that the man is asking for a date with both Jessa and Marnie, and Jessa turns him down. The man thinks that if Jessa and Marnie accept his drink treat, things will go as he wants, however, someone turns him down. He uses a tag question to express his uncertainty and disbelief.

However, the tag question is not used very often in this drama, and only appears above three times. Although women use tag question more frequently than men, it is impossible to make a fair comparison because the total number is small. Also, the male in the play uses tag question with emotional meaning because he is on the weaker side when he invites the two ladies.

4.2 Discussion

4.2.1 Stylistic features consistent with Lakoff's theory

First, in lexical level, the findings of this paper have the following similarities with Lakoff's theory. In terms of color words, women are indeed more perceptive than men and can distinguish colors more easily, especially in relation to clothing or fashion. In the use of extravagant adjectives, women use them more frequently and with a certain emotional meaning, while men tend to use them for the referential meaning of the word. Women use intensifiers to reinforce their emotions and tone of voice during conversations, which Lakoff believes is a result of women being more emotional. In addition, women use euphemisms more often in conversations because they want to be sensitive to the feelings of others, which is what Lakoff calls more polite.

Second, it is the syntactical level of similarity found. Through the statistics, women use hedges more often than men in this drama, such as "I think, I mean, maybe", which is in line with a feature of female language that Lakoff proposes.

4.2.1 New features and reasons

There are some language changes and new findings. A new finding related to color words that Lakoff did not mention is that in addition to being good at describing colors, women also use color as an adjective to describe people or objects, and not in the referential meanings of color words. Women will use the

metaphorical meaning of color words to describe, such as "you look pink". In lexical level, a variation from Lakoff's hypothesis emerges in the choice and use of swear words and expletives by women. According to Lakoff, women use weaker expletives, such as "goodness and oh dear", and the author's data collection and research revealed that no women in *Girls* use these weaker words, instead they use stronger ones, such as "oh my god, fuck, shit". The reasons for this change are related to the advancement of women and the development of the feminist movement. When women express surprise, anger, or other more extreme emotions, they no longer suppress their words, but use swear words to express their emotions like men do.

In syntactical level, there is a change in the use of tag questions. In Language and woman's place, Lakoff gives examples like "It is so hot, isn't it?". In her opinion, women often use tag questions to express their uncertainty. In *Girls*, the women use the tag question sparingly and with other emotional connotations than just uncertainty. Lakoff argues that women often use tag questions because of the lower status of women compared to men, while the author finds that in the play, women are confronted with the same sex when using tag questions, which is not related to the status of gender. Furthermore, a man uses a tag question when confronts with two women, not because of social status, but because men are on the weaker side compared to women in a specific social situation. Thus, Lakoff's claims about the phenomenon and causes of women's frequent use of tag questions are too one-sided.

In the 1970s, when Lakoff proposed these features of female language, the reasons were basically related to the social status of women, which was indeed lower at the time. In modern society, as the feminist movement continues to grow and the status of women continues to improve, women's language has changed as well. When one tries to study women's language, not only gender differences should be considered, but also other aspects should be included. In conclusion, female language does have stylistic features that are different from those of men, and these features are related to gender differences, to gender status, and to personal reasons.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Major findings

According to the results of the study, female language does have its own stylistic features, and most of the results are consistent with Lakoff's theory. Women are better at using color words, adjectives and intensifiers to express their emotions and feelings. Women are more sensitive to the feelings of others, as shown by the use of euphemisms and hedges. However, women have changed in their use of expletives and tag questions, and they are becoming bolder and more confident in their expressions and more sure of their words than in the past.

5.2 Implications of the study

This paper has many limitations and it does need to be improved. One limitation is that, due to the language data, this paper focuses only on the lexical and syntactic levels when studied from a stylistic perspective, without examining the phonological level. The second limitation is that the authors' research on lexical and syntactic aspects is also not comprehensive. As to the lexical features of women's language, in addition to the use of color words, swear words, extravagant adjectives, intensifiers and euphemisms, there are other aspects that can be studied, such as the use of diminutives, words that express emotions. In syntactical level, in addition to hedges and tag questions there are also minimal responses, which can also be studied for the features of female languages. Another limitation is that, for the reason of the length of the paper, all the data of the paper come from the first season of *Girls*, and *Girls* has six seasons, the first season is only a part of the show, the corpus is not rich enough. Also because the corpus is motivated by the TV series, the use of the characters' language is not only gender specific, but also influenced by the

characterization and the story.

Based on the limitations mentioned above, the authors make several suggestions for subsequent research. First, the study of the stylistic features of female language could be more comprehensive. Second, women's language is related to sociolinguistics, and further study of sociolinguistics can be of great help in this study. Finally, when collecting data, especially from film and television works, the influence of the context and characterization of the work should also be considered.

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