Women and Crime: A Sociolinguistic Study of the Use of Language in the Netflix Series' Unbelievable

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Profession, status, philosophy, economy and gender play a vital role in the use of language. Role and gender is reflected through language and the analyses of such relationship are the domain of sociolinguistics. Sociolinguistics tries to reveal the relationship and effects of these variable over language and vice versa. The current research tries to explore the relationship of gender and language by adopting Lakoff's (1973) model as theoretical framework. Lakoff's (1973) model is known as 'Women Language Features' which is further divided in 10 sections. For the current research, descriptive qualitative research methodology is used to achieve the objectives related to language and gender; to know the features of women language and to evaluate the change in language style of women when they discuss or talk about crime in Unbelievable. All the features of women' language suggested by Lakoff (1973) were found except the feature of hyper correct grammar, super-polite forms are use, but in the conversation of female police officers impolite and harsh vocabulary was used, which suggests that women in the profession, which generally associated with men as police, judge, chairman, batsman also effect language to great extent. *© 2023 The Authors, Published by iRASD. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License*

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1. Introduction

Language is a vital tool that individuals must possess in order to communicate effectively with each other. Communication through language can take various forms, including requesting information, providing information, entertaining, and more. Language enables people to socialize and interact with one another in various situations. Conversations facilitate the exchange of messages, resulting in communication and interaction. Sociolinguistics is the study of language in relation to society, comprising two words: "Socio" meaning social or related to society, and "Linguistics" meaning the science of language. Wardhaugh (2006) suggests that sociolinguistics should encompass everything from considering "who speaks (or writes) what language (or what language variety) to whom and when and to what end".

According to Meyerhoff (2006), language style also describes the personality, mindset, and condition of human. Human beings' language style is shaped by their circumstances. For instance, a very formal language is typically employed by a president when addressing citizens. This is because the context is formal and the message being conveyed serves a specific purpose. However, the situation is entirely different when a father converses with a mother. In such cases, the father typically uses intimate language that is easily understood by the mother. Intimate language is used when the participants have a close relationship, such as between spouses who often use terms like "honey," "baby," or other pet names exclusively in their personal environment. In films and literature, we often see a distinction between normal language and language used in different contexts, which can be observed from a language style perspective.

Language is a structured means of communication that enables humans to generate and comprehend direct messages without any external stimulus. In daily interactions, individuals utilize language to articulate their thoughts, feelings, opinions, desires, and more. Language finds application in all facets of human existence and is intimately linked to the cultural and social framework of the community that employs it. As a result of the diverse communities, regions, social strata, educational backgrounds, and forms of social interaction, language exhibits a range of variations. The choice of code or variety, whether it be language, dialect, or style, is contingent on the intended audience and context. Holmes (2013), language varies according to its uses and users, where it is used and to whom it is used and who utilizes it. Style, which refers to the manner of speaking, elucidates how speakers project distinct social personas and foster diverse social connections through their style preferences, and how speech-style intersects with social context. According to Joos (1962), language has five styles. He recognized five different language styles namely: frozen style, formal style, consultative style, casual style and intimate style.

1.1. Sex and Gender

Feminism's introduction of patriarchy and societal gender concepts has stimulated numerous discussions and formulated various definitions. The debate initially revolved around distinguishing gender from societal gender and centered on how masculine power and privileges are established and sustained by patriarchal institutions. Stoller (1984), who initially differentiated between sex and gender, identified gender as a psychological and cultural term that is separate from biology. He also distinguished between the feminine and masculine states that shape the social identity of individuals. In Similar way, Ann (1972) differentiated between "sex" as the biological distinctions between males and females, and "gender" as the societal categories that establish masculinity and femininity. Oakley emphasized the societal gap between masculinity and femininity and raised concerns about the development of societal gender roles.

Ann (1972) defines gender as a cultural construct and highlights the societal classification of individuals into "feminine" and "masculine" categories. Yoder (1999) builds on this by stating that different cultures have their own interpretations of what constitutes masculinity and femininity. Bılton et al. (2008) defines gender as the socially-defined and culturally-specific categories of masculinity and femininity, which impose certain expectations and behaviors on each gender. Despite these shared perspectives, İmamoğlu (1991) and Tayebjee, Lip, Blann, and MacFadyen (2005) argue that it's impossible to completely separate social gender from biological sex because cultural expectations of men and women are often intertwined with their physical bodies. Young (2009) on the other hand, asserts that the concepts of sex and gender are insufficient in defining the identity of women because they confine women to their biological bodies. Women are often defined by their physical weakness in comparison to men. This is due to the fact that the social identity of a woman is often constructed based on her biological makeup, specifically the chromosome structure she has by birth.

While being a woman or a man may be an inherent and biological trait, society is the one that determines how femininity and masculinity are experienced (Bayat & Herrera, 2010). An examination of societal structures in terms of interpersonal relationships can reveal how individuals are positioned within a society and how they develop their identities according to these categorizations. Typically, when society is divided into men and women, men are placed in a position of subjectivity, while women are treated as objects. Moreover, men are often considered to be the foundation of society, while women are marginalized. While different societies may have distinct cultural behaviors, their underlying perspectives on men and women tend to remain largely unchanged.

Societal gender roles are not uniform across cultures, and individuals are expected to conform to specific behaviors based on the society they are born into. These behaviors are learned and reinforced through familial and environmental influences, and gender identities are formed through the repetition of these societal practices. Butler (2009) argues that culture, not biology, determines gender. Beauvoır (1993) similarly claims that people are not born as women, but instead become women, highlighting the cultural construction of womanhood in societies. The characteristics assigned to women reflect societal expectations, and these expectations often lead to the formation of stereotypes. Therefore, all women acquire their female identity by learning and applying the behaviors imposed on them by their environment. Witting et al. (2009) further challenges this myth by stating that "woman" is an imaginary concept, and that "women" are a result of societal relations.

Butler (1990) in her work Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity, suggests that gender is not just a cultural overlay on a pre-existing sex, but it also refers to the very system that creates the sexes themselves. Furthermore, Butler emphasizes that this system is maintained through gender roles, and there is a hierarchy within societal gender categories. From this perspective, gender roles that are presented as unchangeable in patriarchal societies need to be questioned and reconstructed because such views have led to the formation of gender stereotypes. Aristotle's statement that "women are women because of the absence of certain qualities" is an example of such stereotypes, as is Saint Thomas's notion of a woman as a "half a man" or a "coincidental being".

1.2. Language and Gender

The differences in language behavior between men and women may be attributed to biological differences. It has been suggested that women are inherently more nurturing and less competitive, while men lack these qualities. However, there is no empirical evidence to support this view, and it can be considered a stereotypical portrayal. Alternatively, some scholars argue that male dominance is reflected in language, and men use language to assert their power over other men and women. Women who are subjected to male dominance may seek support from other women instead of challenging the dominant men. Nonetheless, some women may resort to using more prestigious forms of language to avoid being dominated by men. Lakoff (1975, cited in Wardhaugh 2006: 327) holds the view that women are powerless, while men are the dominant group in society, but Anthropologists have pointed out that women are never without power and effectively control some societies. Dominance clearly fails as a universal explanation of gendered language differences (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2021).

Another possible explanation for the linguistic differences between men and women is that these differences are largely learned behaviors that are shaped by societal expectations of gender roles. Men and women are socialized to act in accordance with their gender, and this can influence their linguistic behavior. In particular, women may adopt speech strategies that emphasize cooperation and equality when communicating with other women, with a greater emphasis on maintaining social relationships than on exchanging information. As Coates (1988) notes, "When women talk to each other as friends, their chief goal in conversation is not to exchange information, but to maintain good social relationships."

1.3. Research Questions

- Do women in *Unbelievable* use typical female language feature when they discuss or talk about crime?
- How women in *Unbelievable* change their style of language when they discuss or talk about crime?

1.4. Research Objectives

- To know the features of women language when they discuss or talk about crime *Unbelievable*
- To evaluate the change in language style of women when they discuss or talk about crime in *Unbelievable.*

1.5. Significance of the Study

The current research is significant in many ways as sociolinguistics study of conversation; plays and movies have done before but the current series and from the perspective of crime and women is to be explored in the current research. The current research will highlight the style of language used by women in relation to crime, and narration of crime. The current study will adopt the theory of Lakoff (1973), women's language features as framework.

1.6. Statement of the Problem

Ample research is available on the style of language of men and women, and it has been proved that men and women used language different, and that is the reason that they develop or adopt different identities. It is obvious that men and women have different approaches and language style, but when it comes to crime and narration of crime scene then the case is critical as compare to general use of language. The current research will explore the female language in the "Unbelievable" series when they discuss or narrate the crime scene to the police.

2.   Review of Literature

Language is a means of conveying information; it serves a much broader purpose as a critical tool for building and maintaining interpersonal relationships. As a human, non-natural means of expressing ideas, thoughts, and emotions through a deliberate arrangement of imagery, language is one of the most essential elements of human life. The first exposure to language for every person typically comes from their parents at birth, and as they grow and develop, they acquire additional languages, such as second or third languages, through a process known as language acquisition. Purba, Maulana, and Ningsi (2020) suggest that acquisition of language is heavily dependent on social and cognitive factors, as well as the learning environment.

The field of sociolinguistics aims to examine how language operates within society, including its structure, roles, and functions, as well as the various social factors that shape communication. As Holmes (2013) notes, sociolinguistics is concerned with understanding how language is used to convey social meaning and why individuals may use language differently depending on the social context in which they find themselves.

Previous researches show that women use language differently from men, which implies that not only in normal situations, but also in crime and narration of crime. Labov (1990) formulated principles of how gender interacts with language variation, whereby women not only preferred standard forms, but were often found to be more innovative in their language. The different in gender is not the only reason for using language differently. There are other reasons, and the most important one is socioeconomic status, as Eckert (2014) states that Social class, socioeconomic status, and educational background can all be said to contribute to the notion of social class as a possible linguistic constraint.

Milroy (1980) is of the view that apart from gender, socioeconomic status, education and age, there are other elements that contribute and influence to the use of language. She believed that how people organize themselves within social networks is equally important to consider along with other variants.

The literature shows that different variables affect and influence language; education, gender, socioeconomic status, social networks, but the most important one is gender. It is though gender that facilitates men and women differently to get education, to have economic status and the confidence in society. The literature shows that different studies are conducted on language and women, but women with reference to crime and narration of crime and crime scene is left untouched as far as the available literature is concerned.

3.   Research Methodology

3.1.   Nature of Research

The current research is qualitative in nature. Qualitative research is applied where data is interpreted qualitatively, further in qualitative research; descriptive qualitative research is used in the current study. Descriptive qualitative research aims to describe and interpret a phenomenon, event, or social context from the perspective of those involved or affected by it. Data is collected through various methods, such as interviews, document analysis, and observations and then analyzed through coding, categorization. Descriptive research method provides an in-depth understanding of a phenomena and is used in social sciences to gain insight into complex and sensitive issues; social norms, experiences, and attitudes.

3.2.   Data Source

The primary data for the current research is taken from Netflix series *unbelievable.* The reason behind the selection is that the selected series is based on true story of 18 years old girl from Washington named Marie, who was bound and raped in her apartment. Second reason is that the series is about rape, which is directly concerned with women.

3.3.   Theoretical Framework

Lakoff (1973) suggested that women language is different from the use of language by men, which he termed as women's language features. Women's language features are further divided into ten (10) sections; lexical hedges or filers, tag questions, rise of intonation on declaratives, 'Empty' adjectives, precise color terms, intensifiers, hyper correct grammar, super-polite forms, avoidance of strong swear words, and empathic stress.

3.4. Technique of Data Collection

dalam Sugiyono (2011) states that document and picture are the source of information, written by people and can be interpreted. Keeping in view the scope of the study, research objectives and theoretical framework of Lakoff (1973), the focus remained on female characters, specifically when female characters talk about or discuss crime. In this regard, the fowling steps were followed for data collection;

- The series was downloaded from internet.
- A subtitle of the series was downloaded from internet.
- The script of the selected series was downloaded from https://subslikescript.com
- The movie was watched multiple times and those scenes were marked where women talk or discusses crime.

3.5. Technique of Data Analysis

Data analysis in research is the most important step and need careful treatment. As discussed earlier, keeping in view Lakoff (1973) as the theoretical framework of the study, research questions and objectives, the following steps were followed;

- Watching movie and language styles of women characters was observed in general and specifically when they talk or discuss crime.
- Underlying and classification of language/ utterances with reference to the selected model.
- Analyzing, discussion and Interpretation on the basis of classification.
- Drawing conclusion and recommendation on the basis of analysis and discussion.

4. Result and Discussion

In this section, the language of female characters in the series "unbelievable" is analyzed through "women language features" by Lakoff (1973). All the ten features suggested by Lakoff were found in the talk and discussion of female characters while discussing crime, which is rape in the series. The detail is as under:

1st investigation

1:30-1:35: I'm Judith
I'm Marie's foster mom. Well, her former foster mom.
I'm Officer Curran.
Yes, thank you. Um….come in.

The first encounter with the police officer is of Judith, who is the foster mother of Marie, but the very first encounter shows the nervousness of Judith by using hedges/ filers, she gave in unnecessary details as compare to the police officer who just said his name.
Marie was interrogated and she gave very vague details by using hedges, which shows her nervousness and confusion.

Um… I was…. I was asleep
It was late
I didn't …..
I didn't go to sleep till four.

Throughout the conversation/ interrogation Marie used hedges which can be interpreted that she is shocked as well as confused and gave a clue that she may not be a victim or may change the narration.

2nd Investigation

Second investigation was done by detective parker and detective Pruitt, who asked different questions regarding the incident, but astonishing part is that Marie replied differently from the 1st investigation. She said that she was asleep and before that she was on phone. She said that she doesn't know and after rape he left, without mentioning the threat she discussed with Officer Curran. This is the first step where she is confusing the audience/ officers and start believing that she is narrating only the story and nothing happened in reality.

3ʳᵈ Investigation

Marie was investigated/ interrogated for the 3ʳᵈ time in hospital, where her physical checkup was done, but in investigation she just said that she was asleep. Such kind of different replies made her case dubious. The replies were compared with the physical realities; no force entry, no identifiable prints, and no response form the neighbors.

4ᵗʰ investigation

Marie was investigated for the 4ᵗʰ time by detective Parker. Marie narrated the incident, but with slight differences, she didn't mention previously that she was in bed. Apart, to a very straightforward question she used hedges in reply and made the case suspicious. Previously she said that she doesn't know how long he assaulted, but this time she mentioned five minutes.

Judith and Parker

Judith, the foster mother of Marie, discussed the incident with Parker and of the view that Marie was acting and the incident happened in reality. She is very much sure and that is why intensifiers are used many times in single conversation. Judith used "just" an intensifiers five times in conversation with parker, use of adjectives, and the rising intonation while narrating is worth mentioning.

e.g. angry, horrified, detached, little,

Her intonation was raised in negation, when she was asked that she has doubt over Marie, but again she accepted that she has and the things must be taken in context.
The effect of discussion, soon after the meeting with Judith, in the 5ᵗʰ investigation session, parker questioned the order of actions.

Calling Connor… then called Judith.. and then cut yourself free

The 6ᵗʰ interrogation sessions leads to a conclusion, where Marie is not sure of anything happened with her. She used "maybe" "it is confusing" which is certain for officers that it is nothing but a fabricated story to get attention and her final "No" affirms that despite of being raped. The rape didn't happen in real, but in dream and it was so real that she considered it a reality a filed a case. She insisted again by using intensifier " pretty positive", hedges " maybe" but all in vain because of inconsistencies in her story/ narration.

The next case is of Amber Stevenson who was raped in her apartment, somehow similar story to that of Marie. Unlike Marie, Amber is confident, vocal and has presence of mind and that is why she has observed all the minute details of the incident. Her use of language is different from Marie she used hedges just one time in her whole investigation.

The 3ʳᵈ case is of a fifty year old woman, who was raped in the same way in her apartment. The description she narrated is somehow similar to that of amber. She is confident and clear about her narration. The common thing in all these cases is the use of precise colors vocabulary, e.g blue, pink, black, black lycra etc.

The 4ᵗʰ case if of Doris Laird, an aged women, raped in the same way. Like previous mentioned cases, Doris Laird has the same incident, and her narration is full of hedges, like I guess, less, and I don't know etc.

Tag question is one of the features of women language, and is used by female characters in the series, episode 4 (27:35) when the two detectives were discussing the rape case.
… are you?

Did you?.. etc

There are numerous examples in the series, where tag question is used, but it must be noted here that tag question is used in a different way from its function/ general usage. In all the cases both the sender and receiver knew the answer or in other words do not require an answer/ reply.

Intonation while discussing the case.. Chief CBI, two female detectives, internee and old women

Use of proper or choosing polite/ formal words in conversation as compare to men is a prominent feature of women language. It is observed that female use specific and polite/formal vocabulary more than men, and they try to be cultural, sublime, polite and formal. It is suggested that their thoughts, grooming, social status and position is reflected in conversation, but the case is different in the series "Unbelievable". Female characters use very harsh and impolite words in conversation while discussing crime.

Words/ phrases like … fuck, fucked up, and un-fuck words are used by female officers, which can be interpreted in two ways; the first is that in series under discussion, women violated the general rule of using/choosing vocabulary, which is often associated with men, the second is the these female characters are police officers, spent most of the time with male officers, discuss and solve crime all the times as being part of their job; such masculine job description leads and effect their personalities to such extent that is even reflected in their speech.

5.   Conclusion

Marie is a young girl, who is raped in her house at night but an intruder and later proved as a serial rapist. The investigation team investigated Marie, but she narrated different stories, full of confusion and contradiction despite the fact that she was exploited and raped. The contradiction and loop holes in the narration of the event force investigation officers that the rape didn't happen in reality and even Marie is convinced that it was a dream and hallucination. Marie couldn't explain properly because the trauma she went through had a great effect on her language and arrangements of events. Features like avoidance of strong swear words, hedges and super-polite forms are prominent in her speech.

The next victim of serial rapist is Amber Stevenson, who is a young college girl. She is comparatively more vocal and clear than Marie about the event, and it is her persuasive, clear and vivid description of the event which helped and leads the investigators to take up the case seriously. Features like specific vocabulary, color specific words, words/ phrases of surety, less use of hedges, and intonation are prominent in her speech.

The series of rape continued in the manner of modus operandi, but the victimization and rape of women is not limited to just young girls, but also aged and bulky women. The shapeless, bulky and aged women even asked the rapist that what is there in me which attracted you. The investigation team (two female officers in the lead) was very series and their conversation is totally different from other women in the series, the reasons; that they were not exploited and raped and the second reason is their profession and that is why features like strong swear words, specific terms and color, impolite and harsh vocabulary is prominent in her speeches.

Lakoff's (1973) Women's language features; lexical hedges or filers, tag questions, rise of intonation on declaratives, 'Empty' adjectives, precise color terms, intensifiers, hyper correct grammar, super-polite forms, avoidance of strong swear words, and empathic stress are found the series " unbelievable" with the exception of hyper correct grammar. Instead of avoidance of strong swear words, strong words are used, super-polite forms are used by women who are being raped and exploited, but the conversation of police women was different as very impolite/ harsh vocabulary was used.

5.1.   Future Research

The current research is limited to women language and could not find a classification of men's language as complete as the one provided for women's language by Lakoff (1973). It would be interesting if a comparison is drawn between men and women language with reference to crime and narration of crime. Apart, the framework is applied to a fictional work and provides results which may be different if applied on/in a real life situation. The framework may be applied to different situation and the series *Unbelievable* can be approached and analyzed from other angles; forensic linguistics, feminist stylistics analysis and critical discourse analysis.

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