

**Interactional discourse of male and female motivational speech in TED Talks:
A corpus-based study**

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Abstract

TED talks are known for highlighting the speaker's affective responses to the topic and encouraging the audience to engage along that lead to a great number of interactive functions of discourse markers and features. Thus, the writer is interested in analyzing the interactional discourse markers used in motivational speech in TED talks by comparing the difference between male and female speakers. The data consists of two corpora of TED motivational speeches delivered by male and female speakers with the total of 43160 tokens of female speaker corpus and 51873 tokens of male speaker corpus. The data is analyzed by using Hyland's stance and engagement features to identify both speakers and audience point of view in the speech. The findings show that female speakers tend to use more of both stance and engagement features than male speakers. It is shown that female speakers tend to be more expressive in composing their speech in order to create an impressive and communicative presentation. Meanwhile, male speakers tend to use more explicit and direct markers in their speech to engage with the audience and focus on delivering the topic and material instead.

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INTRODUCTION

TED is known for its influential videos that spread ideas, usually in the form of short, powerful talks. In influencing the audience, according to Scotto di Carlo (2015), TED talks emphasize the uniqueness, rarity, or originality of their speech by the use of linguistic features that amplify the certainty of their claims, and indicate the speaker's affective responses to the research, pointing out what is important and encouraging the audience to engage with the topic. These features are used to indicate the speakers' affective attitude as well as motivate their audience action in order to achieve their communicative purposes.

This shows that most of the speech delivered in TED talks focus not only on the discourse conducted on the speakers' level but also the discourse conducted to engage the audience along, thus to examine further into the rhetorical structure of the speech. Motivation is one of the TED topics that encourages the involvement of interactive functions of discourse markers and features as it deals with how to motivate and influence the audience's personal growth. Discourse markers differences across genders has been discussed in several previous studies. Yeganeh and Ghoreyshi (2015) state that gender plays a significant role in applying rhetorical devices. Furthermore, women tend to use the discourse markers more frequently

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as the linguistic fillers than the men to show a more cooperative form of conversation. (Irfan et al., 2020; Matei, 2011). Thus, the writer is interested in analyzing the interactional discourse markers used in motivational speech in TED talks by comparing the difference between male and female speakers.

Interactive function of metadiscourse markers is introduced by Hyland (2005) to help writers or speakers to convey the intended message within a particular context of situation where the audience or reader's cognitive context is attracted towards a particular perception. Stance and engagement are the two features of discourse markers that take part in fulfilling the rhetorical strategies and communication in engaging both intrapersonal and interpersonal purposes. Both features are involved in several kinds of discourse such as written discourse (journal article and argumentative writing) and spoken discourse (presentation and public speech). Stance refers to the speakers or writers' attitude, perspective, point of view, or position towards what they are talking about (Thompson & Hunston, 2000). Stance features include the elements of hedges, boosters, attitude markers, and self-mentions. On the other hand, engagement refers to involving and positioning the audience or readers into a discourse and engaging them in an appropriate way (Hyland & Jiang, 2016). Engagement features include the elements of reader pronouns, appeals to shared knowledge, directives and questions. In other words, stance features are the discourse markers that emphasize the writers or speakers' involvement in utterances while engagement features are the discourse markers directed toward the audience or readers. By involving both the speakers' or writers' authority and the audience or readers' perspective, the model of stance and engagement features proposed by Hyland is able to create a balanced analysis of interactional purpose in discourse to support the analysis of this study.

There are several previous studies used to support and give insight to this study. The first previous study is from Sayah and Hashemi (2014) which focuses on exploring stance and engagement features in the discourse analysis papers from several fields. Another previous study is conducted

by Scotto di Carlo (2015) who analyzes stance features in TED talks, especially subjective adjectives to indicate online popularization. The last previous study is from Nasri, Biri, and Karimi (2018) who analyzes gender differences in the use of stance and engagement features in the argumentative written discourse. Apart from giving support by introducing a similar method or theory in analyzing the data, there are also several aspects that distinguish previous studies from this study. Therefore, this study would give a new insight and enrich the research in the area of the study. The gap of the study can be seen from the first and third previous studies which focus on analyzing the written discourse, while this study is analyzing spoken discourse which provides more context, such as intonation and gesture. In addition, the second previous studies focus on analyzing the adjectives of stance feature in TED talks, while this study is analyzing all of the features in stance and engagement and also considering comparing both features used by male and female speakers. Although there have been many previous studies conducted on the analysis of stance and engagement in a discourse, there are still few studies which conduct it on spoken discourse such as public speech. Furthermore, there are also still few studies that compare and analyze gender differences in applying these two strategies. Therefore, this study aims to identify the significant differences of stance and engagement features between male and female speakers in delivering motivational speech in TED talks using corpus-based study.

METHODS

This study uses a mixed method of both quantitative and qualitative approaches. According to Dornyei (2007), mixed method research involves the collection or analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data to integrate the two approaches at one or more stages of the research process. In order to have in-depth analysis, this study combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches in processing and analyzing the data. The quantitative approach is done by

corpus linguistics by using computer programs to calculate and process the frequency of the data. The numeric data produced by the corpus tool is then analyzed and interpreted by using a qualitative approach.

The data source of this study is motivational speech videos of TED talks conducted by both male and female speakers. There are several steps in collecting the data. First step is entering the website of TED.com. The next step is filtering the topics of the videos into motivation and personal growth. After that, the total of 49 transcripts of motivational videos are downloaded from the website. In the total data of 49 TED talks transcribed videos, 26 data are conducted by male speakers and 23 data are conducted by female speakers. In transforming the data in the form of video into a transcribed form, Rido (2010) suggests that the details of gestures, intonations, and postures during the video are also need to be noticed or noted. Then, the data is processed by using #Lancsbox 6.0, which is a software package for the analysis of language data and corpora developed by Lancaster University (Brezina, Weill-Tessier, & McEnery, 2021), into two corpora to be analyzed and compared further. #Lancsbox is used in this study because it allows users to conduct multiple analyses simultaneously by using more than one tab that can be open at the same time. It is also able to import more than one corpus at the same time. Rodrigues Gomide (2020, p. 47) adds that “the tab system is helpful for corpus comparison as the user can navigate through tabs with the same queries for different corpora”. Therefore, this feature offered by #Lanscbox is helpful to analyze the difference between male and female discourse markers utterances by comparing two different corpora at once. There are a total of 43160 tokens collected from the female speaker corpus and 51873 tokens collected from the male speaker corpus. Because of the tokens differences, it would be an imbalance to compare the raw frequency for further interpretation of the result data. Therefore, the writer uses the relative frequency which represents the occurrence per 10.000 words in order to have more effective comparison for both corpora.

To analyze the data, this study elaborates the differences in the use of interactional discourse markers between male and female speakers' speech. This study identifies the features of stance and engagement which were proposed by Hyland (2005). The keywords from both of the features are inputted into #Lancsbox to obtain the data such as numbers and context. Thus, the data are elaborated using a descriptive qualitative approach to support the interpretation of the data and draw the conclusion of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results indicate that both male and female speakers use more stance features (994.54) than the engagement ones (779.99). In the stance feature, both groups use a huge number of self-mention markers and frequently use hedges. Meanwhile, in the engagement feature, both groups are the heavy users of reader pronouns and questions. Furthermore, female speakers mostly used both of these features more than male speakers. This section elaborates the phenomena in details.

Table 1. Stance Features

Stance feature	MALE	FEMALE	Total
Hedges	18.89	25.49	44.38
Booster	30.46	38.69	69.15
Attitude markers	16.39	16.68	33.07
Self-mention	363.97	433.97	797.94
Total	429.71	514.83	944.54

Table 1 shows that both male and female speakers relatively use 944.54 stance features. Both groups have the tendency to use self-mention markers. Female speakers relatively used 433.97 markers of 797.94 self-mention markers found, while male speakers used 363.97 markers. The table also shows that the least used stance feature for both male and female speakers is attitude markers with only relatively 33.07 markers found in total.

Compared to the self-mention markers (70), followed by booster (8.23) and hedges (6.6), attitude markers (0.29) have less significant difference in use between male and female speakers. In other words, male and female speakers

do not have much difference when it comes to using attitude markers in delivering their speech, but it may differ in terms of using hedges, booster, and self-mention markers. Overall, the table implies that female speakers tend to use more stance features than male speakers as female speakers have higher relative frequencies in using hedges, booster, attitude markers and self-mention markers to deliver their speech.

Hedges

Hedges used in discourse, according to Hyland (2005), indicates the user's subjectivity so that the information is presented as an opinion rather than a fact. It also implies the degree of confidence and certainty. The variants of hedges found in the study are *might, possible, maybe, likely, tend, seem, somehow*, etc. In this study, it is found that the relative frequency of female speakers (25.49) is higher than male speakers (18.89) in using hedges in their speech. In other words, female speakers tend to use more hedges than male speakers when delivering their motivational speech in TED talks. The higher use of hedges markers by women compared to men in a discourse is in accordance with the previous study by Nasri, Biria and Karimi (2018) who reveals that female writers prefer to use hedging devices more frequently in comparison with the male writers. While the previous study is able to prove the higher frequency of hedges used by female writers, this study is able to enrich the use of hedges in spoken discourse by finding the higher frequency of hedges used by female speakers. This suggests that female speakers are more inclined to present a lower degree of assurance which is explained by O' Barr in Hosman (1989) that hedges used in speech are considered as a feature of "powerless" speech style.

Another point of view of hedges used is shared by Holmes (1990) regarding the different function of hedges conveyed by men and women. Women use hedges as an affective role that deals with expressing desire and emotional function. Meanwhile, men use hedges for epistemic roles that deal with degrees of hesitancy and uncertainty. There are several utterances that highlight the said function found in both the male

speakers' and female speakers' corpora. One of the utterances delivered by the male speaker is "Maybe procrastinating does not cause creativity". The hedge *maybe* emphasizes the vagueness of the sentence and shows the uncertainty delivered by the male speaker. On the other hand, one of the utterances delivered by the female speaker is "Even though you *might* want to do more and be more, remember that we humans ...". The hedge *might* is used by the female speakers to help her in expressing the emotional speech that she delivered by building characters and approach to the topic of the speech.

Booster

Unlike hedges, boosters highlight certainty. The use of boosters represents a confident voice and directness in assertion (Hyland, 2005; Carter & McCarthy, 2006). The variants of boosters found in this study are *definitely, certain, clearly, absolutely, sure, obviously*, etc. In this study, it is found that boosters tend to be more common in speeches delivered by female speakers (38.69) than male speakers (30.46). In other words, female speakers tend to use more boosters than male speakers when delivering their motivational speech in TED talks. However, this result contradicts the previous findings by Nasri, Biria and Karimi (2018) who find out that males tend to use more boosters.

There are two types of boosters found in this study. The first one is the modal expression and tense-aspect that consist of *will, must, and believed that*. The second one is the adverbial and prepositional constructions that consist of common boosting expressions such as *certainly, clearly, definitely, without doubt, of course, for sure*, etc. The modal expression and tense-aspect boosters have relatively higher frequency found in the speech of both male and female speakers than the adverbial and prepositional constructions boosters. Furthermore, it is found that both the modal expression and tense-aspect boosters as well as the adverbial and prepositional constructions boosters tend to be used more by female speakers than male speakers. It is in accordance to Holmes (1995) who states that women are more inclined to use boosters

than men because women are more interactive and engage in the topic during conversation than men.

One of the utterances delivered by the male speaker is “And one of the things we need for success, *obviously*, is performance”. The use of the booster *obviously* here is treated as an additional marker as it does not influence the sentence much. It is indicated by how the male speakers utter the word *obviously* with a rather lower tone than the rest of the sentence. On the other hand, one of the utterances delivered by the female speaker is “For me to succeed, you *must* fail”. Unlike the male speaker, the female speaker utter the booster markers *must* with a clearer and more assertive tone which implies how the booster is used to make the utterance more powerful and deliver more impact.

Attitude markers

The speakers’ engagement with the speech and the topics is also shown through the use of attitude markers. According to Hyland (2005), it is used to project and express writers’ affective attitude in showing their idea of the topics. It shows in the form of verbs, adjectives, and adverbs which contain affective messages. The attitude markers found in the essays are: *agree, prefer, important, unexpected, interesting, unfortunately, hopefully, appropriate, remarkable*, etc. In this study, it is found that the relative frequency of female speakers (16.68) is slightly higher than male speakers (16.39) in using attitude markers in their speech. In TED talks speech, Scotto di Carlo (2014) states that the speakers will elaborate attitude markers and emotive devices in telling stories or anecdotes to present their emotion involvement in the things they talk about and provoke audiences’ emotional reaction. These markers are not only used to indicate the speakers’ affective attitude in their speech, but also for their high motivating power in influencing the audience.

Self-mention

Self-mention markers are used to emphasize the authors’ presence that occurs in personal narratives or experience (Hyland, 2005). The presence of the speakers in this study is reflected by the use of first-person pronouns such as *I, my, me,*

and *myself*. In this study, it is found that the relative frequency of female speakers (433.97) is higher than male speakers (363.97) in using self-mention markers in their speech. In other words, female speakers are more inclined to personalize their ideas when delivering their speech than male speakers. It is supported by Goodwin in D’angelo (2008) who states that personalized writing style is often conducted by women. Thus, it suggests a new argument that women tend to use personalized style in both written and spoken discourse than men. Self-mention markers in TED talks are mentioned by Scotto di Carlo (2014) who explains the use of the personal pronouns *we* and *us* in order to gain speakers’ credibility that allows the audience to look up to the speakers and be more receptive.

One of the utterances delivered by the male speaker is “And despite hardship and pain and worries and wanting to get through it and “How do I do this?””. The use of booster *obviously* here is uttered along with the hand gesture of bringing himself to the outside which implies that he represents himself and his narrative to the audience. On the other hand, one of the utterances delivered by the female speaker is “Many of us, including *myself*, watched from afar”. Unlike the male speaker, the female speaker utters the self-mention marker *myself* with the gesture of pointing herself to emphasize the word *myself*. Furthermore, the female speaker starts the self-mention markers with *us* to involve the audience and then include herself in as a part of the audience with *myself*.

Table 2. Engagement Features

Stance feature	MALE	FEMALE	Total
Reader pronoun	319.82	320.90	640.72
Appeals to share knowledge	1.74	1.62	3.36
Directives	10.99	15.29	26.28
Question	53.79	55.84	109.63
Total	386.34	393.65	779.99

Table 2 shows that both male and female speakers relatively use 799.99 engagement features. Both groups have the tendency to use reader pronoun markers or in this case is personal pronoun referred to the audience. Female speakers relatively use 320.90 markers of 640.72 reader

pronoun markers found, while male speakers use 319.82 markers. The table also shows that the least used engagement feature for both male and female speakers is appeals to share knowledge markers with only relatively 3.36 markers found in total.

Based on the table, directives (4.3) followed by question (2.05) and reader pronoun (1.08) markers have more significant differences compared to appeals to share knowledge (0.12) markers between male and female speakers. In other words, male and female speakers do not have much difference when it comes to using appeals to share knowledge markers in delivering their speech, but it may differ in terms of using hedges, booster, and self-mention markers. The table also implies that female speakers tend to use more engagement features than male speakers as female speakers have higher relative frequencies in using reader pronouns, directives, and question markers to deliver their speech.

Reader pronoun

To acknowledge the readers, speakers use pronouns indicating first person plural (*we, our, us*) or second person pronoun (*you, your*). Furthermore, it is also used for claiming solidarity and bringing readers' point of view into the discourse (Hyland, 2005). In this study, it is found that the relative frequency of female speakers (320.90) is slightly higher than male speakers (319.82) in using reader pronouns in their speech. In TED talks speech, according to Scotto di Carlo (2014), personal pronoun such as *you* is mainly used to achieve engagement with the audience. It is mostly found in the form of asking questions directly to the audience or creating curiosity and empathy. By increasing the bond between the audience and the speaker, both parties are able to be involved in the part of the event.

Appeals to share knowledge

Appeals to share knowledge markers are explicit signals asking the audience to recognize something as familiar or accepted (Hyland, 2005). It is known to be less imposing than questions and less directly personal than reader pronouns. The appeals to share knowledge markers found in this

study are *recognized, known, considered, viewed, etc.* In this study, it is found that the relative frequency of male speakers (1.74) is slightly higher than female speakers (1.62) in using appeals to share knowledge markers in their speech. It suggests that male speakers tend to be concerned with logical reasoning behind the arguments and talks that they presented.

Directives

According to Hyland (2005), directives instruct and direct the reader to perform an action or to see things in a way determined by the writer. Directives are indicated by several forms of markers such as imperative (*consider, note, and imagine*); modal of obligation (*must, should, and ought*); and predicative adjective to express judgement of necessity (*It is important to understand*). In this study, it is found that the relative frequency of female speakers (15.29) is higher than male speakers (10.99) in using directives in their speech. In other words, female speakers tend to use more directives than male speakers when delivering their motivational speech in TED talks. It suggests that female speakers tend to engage the audience by using greater authority markers so that the audience can act or see things in their way.

Question

The last strategy to engage the reader or audience through interactional discourse is question. According to Hyland (2005), questions are the strategy of dialogic involvement in inviting engagement and bringing another person into the discourse led by the writers or speakers' point of view. Questions found in this study as well as previous studies are mostly rhetorical questions. In this study, it is found that the relative frequency of female speakers (320.90) is higher than male speakers (319.82) in using questions in their speech. In other words, female speakers tend to use more questions than male speakers when delivering their motivational speech in TED talks. The higher use of questions by women compared to men in a discourse is in line with Nasri, Biria & Karimi (2018) who find out that female writers

engage the readers in writing by using questions more than males. Thus, it suggests a new argument that women tend to use conversational or dialogic style of rhetorical strategies in involving the audiences' point of view in spoken discourse than men, especially as they deliver motivational speech that aims to communicate with their audience.

One of the utterances delivered by the male speaker is "Can I correct my boss when they make a mistake?". *Can I correct my boss* is uttered by the male speaker with rising tone, but then *when they make a mistake* is said with flat tone like a statement instead of the continuation of the question. On the other hand, one of the utterances delivered by the female speaker is "How should we work? How should we live?". To present this question, the female speaker shows a gesture of shaking shoulder as if she does not know the answer of her own question and influences the audience to think about the answer as well which shows a greater way in delivering a question.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that there are several differences in the stance and engagement features occurred between male and female speakers when they deliver their speech, especially in motivational speech of TED talks. It is found that female speakers tend to use more of both stance and engagement features than male speakers. Instead, male speakers tend to use more appeals of share knowledge markers of engagement features than female speakers. It is shown that female speakers tend to be more expressive and combine several markers in composing their speech in order to create an impressive and communicative presentation that not only present their identity as speakers (hedges, booster, attitude markers, self-mention) but also able to engage their audience with the topics they delivered (reader pronoun, directives, question). Meanwhile, it implies that male speakers tend to use more explicit and direct markers in their speech to engage with the audience and focus on delivering the topic and material instead.

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