

Gender-Based Language Variations In *The Last Of Us 2* Video Game

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Abstract: *The discussion of linguistic features and its relations to gender has been taken into various scientific studies as it further portrayed how men and women implement their language. This study especially aimed to determine the linguistic variations and the differences between men and women language represented through the characters in The Last of Us 2 video game. This study applied qualitative research method to present the data. Moreover, the guiding theory of women and men language by Coates (2013) was used in this study. The result of this study consisted of several points. The first result showed that the linguistic variations in terms of conversational strategies used by the male and female characters in the game are minimal responses, hedges, tag questions, questions, commands and directives, swearing and taboo language, and compliments. Meanwhile, the second result discovered the differences from the use of conversational strategies between women and men. The differences laid on the purposes and impressions aimed separately as women tend to soften their utterances while men tend to come off stronger. Therefore, men and women do not differ in terms of the conversational strategies, but the purposes and impressions of both parties contrast significantly.*

INTRODUCTION

Language refers to the linguistic communication system used by certain members of society (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2021). The field of study that focuses on the relation between language and society is called sociolinguistics. This means through sociolinguistics, the relationship between language and society is examined to determine the way people construct their social identity through language. Moreover, the linguistic variations provide social information affected by many aspects. One of these aspects is gender.

The social identity includes gender as an aspect that affects how someone uses the language. This leads to differences between men and women language that can be identified through social contexts (Holmes, 2013). Our speech gives people insights into who we are, where we came from, and even what social interactions we have had (Holmes, 2013). This explains that language comes

not only as a means of communication but also as identity. Therefore, gender identity is performed through language in the form of a different set of categories implemented by each gender. Women and men do not speak exactly in the same way within any community (Holmes, 2013). The linguistic features used by women stress their positions that are established in society and men who are assigned to different roles than women.

Moreover, Coates (2013) proposed that gender differences in the competence of communicative skills are a part of folk knowledge. This means that people grow up with the idea to believe certain qualities are assigned separately to men and women. For example, people believe that women tend to talk more than men and men tend to swear more than women (Coates, 2004). These qualities are considered overgeneralized stereotypes, yet the existence plays a significant role in how women and men use the language. Coates (2013) concentrated on the following aspects, minimal response, hedges, tag questions, questions, commands and directives, swearing and taboo language, and compliments. The tendencies of language strategies between women and men are discovered through the collectively arranged aspects. Thus, the differences created linguistic clusters that characterized men and women through the language choice they performed in communication.

The phenomenon related to gender and language can be seen through various media in recent times. As one of the forms of media that provides interactivity and virtual experience, the linguistic forms used in video games were possible to be investigated further. Virtual worlds in video games use language to enrich the experience (Losavio, Polyakova, Hayden, & Losavio, 2014). The characters in video games often reflect the reality that enables the players to be fully immersed and engaged in the experience where language is utilized. *The Last of Us 2* is an action-adventure-themed video game with a horror survival story plot developed by Naughty Dog and released by Sony Interactive Entertainment. The game plot includes the male and female characters; Joel and Ellie, who returned five years after the first game. As the video game consisted of male and female characters, the analysis of their language use was conducted to determine the differences. This study has the significance of providing evidence and in-depth analysis of the linguistic variations used by the characters of different genders. This phenomenon is essential to examine as it shows the portrayal of language in popular media that reflects the different sets of language in certain aspects used by men and women. Based on this sense, this study aims to analyze the differences in language used by men and women portrayed through the main characters of a video game entitled *The Last of Us 2*.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Linguistic Variation

Linguistic variation is the term that refers to how the language is used based on the existing factors. Heidary and Barzan (2019) explained that linguistic variation is used to describe the language differences caused by regional, social, and contextual aspects. This means that people used language according to their identity, which further determined the social settings, context, and the identity of the speakers. Heidary and Barzan (2019) defined linguistic variation as language differences based on its use, including all aspects of language. Thus, any kind of language structure, features, and language strategies are considered a linguistic variation.

Despite its function, which is considered dynamic with the variations, language has limits that need to be followed by the speakers. Wardhaugh and Fuller (2021) further explained that

language variation is bound to a certain limit in order to be considered as coherent. Linguistic variation is further determined through several aspects. Heidary and Barzan (2019) explained that linguistic variation includes phonemes, morphemes, syntactic structures, meaning, and purposes, as well as the language used between the speakers, including word choices, accent, and preferences. This means that linguistic variation appears not only in the linguistic structures of the language but also in how certain individuals use the language. Thus, linguistic variation can be pointed out between people that implemented different strategies or features in language based on their social and identity backgrounds.

Men and Women Language

Language variation does not only refer to the grammar and phonological structures but also includes the phenomenon of language use that is determined based on gender differences. Coates (2013) proposed that the discussion of linguistic variation needs to involve further investigation of real language data gathered from various social situations. This has the purpose of correlating how culture and identity affect the use of language within society. Thus, the linguistic variation based on gender differences becomes apparent and leads to the discussion on how women and men talk differently. Holmes (2013) further demonstrated the difference between men and women language, where women are linguistically polite while men are more identical with the use of swearing words. This explained that women and men essentially have different language preferences and functions.

Minimal Responses

Minimal response refers to the short responses given by the participants in a conversation. Coates (2013) explained that minimal response is also called *back-channels* with common forms consisting of “yeah”, “mhm”, and “right”. The use of minimal response is commonly found in female speakers, which function to support what the latter said. Meanwhile, the minimal response by male speakers includes the tactic that reinforces male dominance.

Hedges

Hedges refers to the tentative linguistic forms such as “I think”, “you know”, “perhaps”, “sort of”, and “like” (Coates, 2013). Hedges use is seen as a sign of weakness; it appears as an apology for making an assertion. This particular linguistic feature is commonly used in women’s conversational strategies to express uncertainty. Meanwhile, men use hedges to show certainty or confidence.

Tag Questions

Tag question is commonly associated with tentativeness. A tag question is a short clause at the end of a statement that converts the statement into a question. Coates (2013) explained that women more commonly used tag questions with addressee-oriented (depending on the addressee) that expressed the speaker’s uncertainty, while men typically used tag questions with speaker-oriented that expressed certainty. The examples of tag-questions are the use of “isn’t it?”, “wasn’t it?”, “isn’t she?” and other tag questions that require other parties to agree on the context.

Questions

Similar to tag questions, questions are also considered to be used more often by women than men. This is explained by Coates (2013) that women recognize that questions are a natural element of discussion, they do not hesitate to ask any related questions. The questions can also be used to maintain the flow of a conversation. Men, on the other hand, will ask questions in order to retain their standing, challenging the addressee twice often as women.

Commands and directives

Directives refer to the speech that is uttered to get the other person into doing something (Coates, 2013). Women and men use different commands as women barely use forceful directives while men express demands explicitly. Men use commands and directives that are more aggravated than the commands and directives used by women. Examples of commands and directives are the use of “I want”, “let’s”, and “get off”.

Swearing and taboo language

Many scientific studies concluded that men swear more than women (Coates, 2013). This is shown through how women tend to use softer expletives than men, such as “oh dear” and “goodness”, while men use “damn!” and “shit!”. Swearing does not necessarily only belongs to men for the use but is commonly related to them. “So the stereotypes of the tough-talking male and the pure, never-swearing female are false. However, it does seem to be true that swearing is an integral part of contemporary masculinity” (Coates, 2013). This explains that swearing is used by both women and men, but the existence is closely related to men as it stands for the masculinity they wanted to reflect through their conversations. This becomes another evidence of how gender truly affects how people use the language as it expresses a part of their identity in it.

Compliments

Women give and receive more compliments than men (Coates, 2013). This leads to the different ways of them complimenting others, where women tend to compliment each other in terms of appearance while men tend to compliment each other on possessions or skill. Herbert (as cited in Coates, 2013) proposed that there is a power relation between how men give a compliment to women. It suggests that when two people are not status-equal, the higher status would give compliments while the lower status receives it. Thus, the tendency of men to give compliments to only women and not to another man implies that they have different statuses in power.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study used a qualitative method to present the data analysis. The data collected from the object of this research was in the form of text categorized based on the characteristics of men and women’s linguistic features before being analyzed by interpreting the purposes and functions.

Data Source

The data taken as the main focus of the analysis was from a video game called *The Last of Us 2*, released by Sony Interactive Entertainment. The video game consisted of a story plot that

involved an interaction between male and female characters. As this study focused on observing men and women linguistic features, the utterances and dialogue between the main characters were collected to be analyzed and developed based on the perception of language and gender by (Coates, 2013).

Method and Technique of Collecting Data

There are some steps done in order to collect the data from the object taken as the main concern in this study. The first step was to start the game and follow the story plot as the game began. This particular step was considered important to understand the concept and the interaction that occurred within the game plot. Next, the second step included rerunning the game and selecting the data by recording the gameplay of the conversation uttered by the main characters. The selected data was then taken into the following step of classifying the data into the language features categories that were made to narrow down the amount and specify it into categorization. The perception of language and gender by Coates (2013) was the last step in analyzing and developing the data.

The data were collected by gathering the samples in the form of text. More specifically, the samples are in the form of dialogues and utterances of the male and female characters in *The Last of Us 2*.

Method and Technique of Analysing Data

The data collected were analyzed based on the characteristics of men and women linguistic features taken from the utterances and the dialogues. The data were analyzed through what kind of strategies were used between men and women in using the language. Thus, linguistic clusters that characterized men and women created the differences through the language choice they performed in communication. By referring to the men and women's linguistic features based on Coates (2013) theory, the sample taken from the cutscenes of the video games was then analyzed by implementing the characteristics and facts found during the analysis.

As this study used qualitative, the process of data collection includes collecting the data in the form of text such as dialogues and utterances taken from the cutscenes of the video game *The Last of Us 2*.

Method and Technique of Presenting Data Analysis

As this study applied qualitative method, the analysis in this study was presented in the form of paragraphs that included of how a certain meaning or interpretation is achieved.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the data were analyzed based on the theory of linguistic features proposed by (Coates, 2013). The male and female main characters, namely Joel Miller and Ellie Williams, were used as the data in this study. The data found in this study were taken from the dialogue and utterances between the main characters of *The Last of Us 2* video game cutscenes. Each of the features and utterances that occurred in the dialogue were analyzed by interpreting the purposes and functions of what based on the context of the situation where the dialogue takes place.

Minimal Responses

The use of minimal response on women is related to their sensitivity during the interaction and their tendency not to interrupt or oppose the ongoing conversation. On the other hand, men

employed minimal response to confirm or validate certain matters. The use of minimal responses in the main male and female character of the video game *The Last of Us 2* can be seen as follows:

Data 1

Ellie : Yeah... I just... I don't think I can ever forgive you for that. But I would like to try.
Joel : I'd like that.
Ellie : Okay. I'll see you around.
Joel : **Yep.**

In this conversation, Joel and Ellie discussed an incident that happened far in the past when Joel forcefully brought Ellie back from the hospital. Joel's minimal response, as presented from the quoted dialogue, shows the act of confirmation from him towards Ellie's utterance that has the purpose of asking for confirmation. The type of minimal response given by Joel asserted the power of validating or reassuring the things that were initially spoken by the other person. In other words, the power in the conversation is still under the control of the male speaker. This is related to Coates (2013) explanation that the use of minimal responses in men tends to utilize the domination of power and place the other person below the control with the characteristics of delayed tactics. Delayed tactic refers to how men put a slight pause within the occurrence of minimal response used by men in order to assert dominance in terms of control of the interaction. This is reflected by Joel's minimal response that is followed by an ending pause which also acts as a sign that he is closing the interaction with his final answer.

Data 2

Tommy : To have the guys that we would need... to do this smart... we'd be leaving Jackson vulnerable.
Ellie : So they just get to get away with this?
Tommy : Nobody wants that.
Ellie : **Yeah**, but that's what's happening.

In this conversation, Ellie and Tommy chatted after some time had passed after Ellie was saved from kidnapping by some people from the opposition group. Tommy wanted to make sure that Ellie was okay during her recovery. After making small talk for a while, Tommy finally brought up the previous incident. He lamented what had happened, and at first, Ellie responded with disbelief at the reality. However, upon hearing that Tommy also regretted the same thing as herself, Ellie began accepting the fact. Ellie's response in this mixed-sex dialogue displays the discourse marker "yeah". Ellie's use of minimal responses indicates her agreement with Tommy's opinion. It shows in Ellie's remark, which did not interfere with Tommy's idea. Both Ellie and Tommy were sunk in their regrets, but they had no other choice but to accept reality and move on. This finding is consistent with Coates (2013) statement that women frequently use minimal responses to show that they listen and agree with what was being said. In other words, women's use of minimal responses, even the most basic ones such as "yeah", generally serves to express attentiveness.

Hedges

Hedges refers to one of the conversational strategies that are most commonly used by women though men also use it in their language practices. Coates (2013) mentioned that the use of hedges in men and women differs from the impression and purpose aimed by the speaker in which

women use hedges to tone down their assertiveness while men use it to show their confidence and certainty. The further representation and use of hedges found in *The Last of Us 2* were in the following:

Data 3

- Joel : Hey.
 Ellie : What's up, Joel?
 Joel : Just checking in. Folks are... **you know**, talking about how impressed they are with you and how well, you're helping out.
 Ellie : That's good.

The dialogue above shows a time when Joel checked on Ellie in her room. Here, Joel used a discourse marker "you know". The particular "you know" that Joel used is a sign of confidence in which he is sure that Ellie knows what he is talking about. Unlike the use of hedges on women, men use hedges when they are reassured that the other person will agree or react positively and in line with their expectations. Joel's utterance and the use of hedges demonstrated how men tend to be in control of where the conversation is going. It further shows the difference from usual hedges of expressing uncertainty. The particular way of using hedges while also expressing a certain impression of masculinity becomes the identifier of how women and men still aim for different purposes based on their roles in society despite using the same strategy. Moreover, the context shows that Joel was unsure about whether it was a good decision to start a conversation with Ellie or not, but he continues to aim for something to which he knows Ellie would react positively.

Data 4

- Ellie : Hey, Joel.
 Joel : Huh?
 Ellie : **I think** it's them. The couple that ran away last year.
 Joel : I think you're right.

Ellie and Joel discovered a long-dried body laid on the floor when a dead guy crept up to Ellie from behind the boxes. They watched the two bodies after Joel had slain him. The two were 'a couple that went away last year,' Ellie deduced. A note on the table confirmed her suspicions. Here, Ellie used "I think" as a preface of her utterance to express her opinion. She also used it to mitigate the force of what she said to respect Joel's face needs. In this case, "I think" is not used as a sign of hesitancy because Ellie seemed confident in her opinion. Lakoff (1975) believed that women's usage of hedges was related to their lack of assertiveness. This refers to the uncertainty that was still implied in Ellie's utterance. Even though she was almost sure she recognized the body, her expression was softened by using hedges. This leaves a space for the other person to give their own opinion that might differ from hers. The impression was expressed by using hedges aside from uncertainty is softened opinion. However, the dialogue above shows this mixed-gender conversation demonstrates that hedges are not always an indication of feminine weakness but rather an indication of how men and women use conversational strategies. Context is crucial in establishing the function of the hedges themselves.

Tag Questions

Coates (2013) describes tag questions that expressed certainty is considered as speaker-oriented, while the tag questions that expressed the speaker's attitude to the addressee are

addressee-oriented. The tag questions used by women are often addressee-oriented or facilitative compared to the ones used by men that are affective tag questions. The dialogue containing the use of tag questions found in *The Last of Us 2* was in the following:

Data 5

Joel : That was y'all shootin' out there, **right**?

Tommy : Oh, just some stragglers. Ellie got to try out my scope.

The data above shows a time when Joel was alone in his forest cabin, sitting in a chair with a guitar in his hand. He greeted Tommy and Ellie upon their return from the woods, confirming that the gunshots he heard belonged to them. In this mixed-gender conversation, Joel was noted to say "right", which is a variation of tag question. Joel aimed to find out the source of the shooting he heard out the hut, whether they were the work of Tommy and Ellie. Joel was compelled to seek uncertain information. Thus, he employed the modal tag "right". The tag question performed by Joel has the purpose of asking for confirmation regarding the proposition. This was seen from the impression implied from the tag question used by Joel where he indirectly demands a confirmation or answer regarding his assumption. Coates (2013) explained that tag questions include the purpose of confirmative or affirmative. This is related to Joe's attempt to get the other person to reply to him and give him the confirmation he needs. The tag question used by Joel is speaker-oriented as the position of demanding an answer is still positioned on Joel as a male speaker.

Data 6

Jesse : She uh... say something to you?

Ellie : Make it one week.

Dina : Ellie! Hey! What took you so long?

Ellie : Well, I'm here, **aren't I**?

This dialogue recounts Ellie, who advised Jesse to make up with Dina in two weeks. However, Jesse seemed reluctant to Ellie's idea, which only prompted Ellie to urge Jesse to do it quickly. Before Jesse could say anything, Dina appeared and questioned what had taken Ellie so long. During the conversation, Ellie uttered a tag question that read, "aren't I" as shown above. Ellie used a tag with an affective meaning in this conversation, one that was addressee-oriented. Ellie attempted to both calm and reassure Dina that she was not going far, or that she was at least there. It demonstrated Ellie's concern for her girlfriend. Simultaneously, this tag question functions as a softener, reducing the power of what would otherwise be a rude exasperation. Ellie might not have wanted Dina to be affected as much by the way she spoke if she had removed "aren't I" from her speech by softening her influence. It supports the findings of Lakoff (2013) study, which found that women are more likely to use affective tags.

Questions

According to Coates (2013) questions used by women is related to their relative vulnerability in a social scenario, while men employ questions when they demand confirmation regarding certain matter towards the other person. Therefore, the difference lies in how women use questions only for the sake of keeping the conversation going while men position themselves above the other participant to demand an answer to their concerns. Below is how the main male and female character in *The Last of Us 2* uses questions:

Data 7

- Joel : **What are y'all doing out this way?**
 Man : Oh, just passing through. You two live nearby?

In this conversation, Joel and Tommy briefly stopped by Abby's camp after making their way through the hordes of the dead. There, they saw several new faces who were members of the camp. Not knowing who and what they were doing, Joel broke the ice. That was when Joel asked, "What are y'all doing out of this way?" which implies for demand an answer of why the people gathered at the certain place. This is related to questions as the linguistic strategy used by men where they use questions to ask for a confirmation or clarification from the addressee. Coates (2013) explained that the question used by men differ from the ones that tend to be used by women as the men often situated themselves above the addressee in the terms that they are the ones demanding an answer. In other words, the question in the dialogue was utilized to collect new information instead of utterances made to entertain the audience or for prolonging the situation. Joel was genuinely curious about what his interlocutors were doing instead of attempting to intimidate them using his power.

Data 8

- Ellie : **You want to tell me what's going on with you?**
 Dina : What's going on with me? I just saw you breathe spores.

The dialogue shows details of Ellie's and Dina's struggle to save themselves from the swarm of the dead. Dina was shocked to witness Ellie, who seemed fine after inhaling the spores. Apparently, Dina was unaware of the fact that Ellie was immune, and Ellie thought Dina was having a hard time processing what was happening to her. That was when she asked, "You want to tell me what's going on with you?" In fact, Dina wanted to know how Ellie was doing well after breathing the spores instead of getting infected. Here, Ellie seemed to be using her question to keep the discussion continued, a linguistic trait that women are thought to employ the most in interactive circumstances since they are weak (Coates, 2013). Ellie inquired about a topic that was not being discussed; she proposed a new topic with the help of her question. It was possible that Ellie tried to divert Dina's attention away from what had just happened. It is also possible that Ellie was simply inquisitive about Dina's condition. In any case, Ellie's question may not have been intended to elicit a response but rather to initiate a dialogue or enhance her bond with Dina.

Commands and directives

In Coates (2013) opinion, men are more likely to employ clear directives like "gotta", "gonna", and "gimme" when they are in same-sex groups. However, in men's speech, the usage of the word "let's" is uncommon. Meanwhile, the form of directive is frequently softened in women's utterances by adding a modal, e.g., can or could. The use of commands and directives of the main male and female character of *The Last of Us 2* is described as follows:

Data 9

- Joel : That ain't gonna hold. **We gotta go back.**
 Tommy : We ain't gonna outrun them all the way to Jackson. We need to barricade that door.

In this conversation, Joel, Tommy, and Abby struggled to avoid the attacks of the dead. They set up a barricade to block the infected people. Unfortunately, they knew that their defense would not last long in the midst of the onslaught of the dead. Joel suggested that they should return therefore, he said, “We gotta go back.” There, Joel used an aggravated directive in the form of “gotta”. It was more typically employed by men than women, and it belongs to an explicit command (Coates, 2013). The idea is to convince someone to do something that necessitates a quick response in the form of quick action. Joel expected that Tommy and Abby would adhere to his advice and not continue their voyage to Jackson by declaring, “We gotta go back.” Joel’s statement has a stronger feeling of urgency. With the use of an aggravating directive that implicated both himself and his audience in the prescribed action, it also enhanced his standing as leader of the pack.

Data 10

Ellie : **Don’t scream. Put that shit down.** You remember me? Yeah. You remember me.
 Nora : What do you want?

The utterance above unfolds a time when Ellie caught a black girl named Nora. After pointing her gun at the girl, Ellie investigated Abby’s whereabouts. She ordered her to behave by saying “don’t scream” and “put that shit down”. The relative “politeness” of women’s speech is commonly thought to be one feature of their reflection. In the public sphere, women’s “polite” attitude is frequently connected with their social weakness. As a result, women have their own method of mitigating the commands (Coates, 2013). On the other hand, Ellie has been observed using the version of the command that was supposed to be more prevalent among men in the dialogue above. Ellie did not hesitate to be assertive rather than being courteous in expressing her objectives. Ellie was determined to ensure Nora’s compliance, even if it meant being tough. Ellie may seek to urge the listener to accomplish what she was requested to do by utilizing the unmitigated directive, which was strongly similar to the masculine technique. Nonetheless, when women converse with their male counterparts, another type of command may emerge.

Swearing and taboo language

Women tend to devote more attention to making their utterances in the most courteous way possible when it comes to profanity and prohibited words. As a result, swearing and taboo languages are rarely used. On the other hand, men use more swear words than women, such as “crap” and “fuck” (Lakoff, 2004). These are the characteristics that most separate men’s and women’s speech. Below is how swearing and taboo language was used by main and female character, the conversation was performed on the following:

Data 11

Owen : Don’t you fuckin’ move.
 Joel : **God damn it!**

The conversation took place when Abby suddenly attacked Joel by shooting him in the leg. Joel was not alone. Tommy was with him, but a black girl struck him in the head with a handle of the gun. He fell to the floor. Meanwhile, Abby still would not leave Joel alone. Joel wondered why she had done that to him. Joel cursed by saying “God damn” it to express his frustration with both the attack he received and Abby’s suspicious behavior. Men cuss because it is an element of modern masculinity (Lakoff, 2004). The usage of taboo languages is thereby linked to masculinity, where

men are expected to have a more dominating presence. Men commonly use cuss words as they tend to appear as individuals who are tough and far from the impression of being soft-hearted. The use of taboo language as an element of masculinity further affects men using their language more explicitly and expressing their feelings strongly. These qualities cannot be found in women as they aim to be more softened, although they also cuss in reality.

Data 12

Man : The fuck you say?
Ellie : **What a little bitch.**

This conversation was set at a time when several men released Ellie after hanging her upside down for hours. A verbal altercation erupted after Ellie taunted one of the men to pee his pants, leading to her offending him. When a man harshly asked what she had just said, Ellie responded by calling him “a little bitch”. Using rude words, Ellie expressed her anger and frustration about how she felt after being hung by a bunch of strangers for a long time. In this dialogue, Ellie said “a little bitch” as name-calling. These taboo words used by Ellie, rather than aggression, express her dislike towards the man. The emotion that was expressed through her utterance that contains cuss words further recognized as a negative feeling towards the addressee. The dialogue also shows the difference between the cuss word used by man, which appears to be more explicit and strongly expressed. In contrast, the taboo word used by Ellie toned down with the fact that she did not intend aggression but solely expressed her annoyance towards the man.

Compliments

Coates (2013) stated that women get and are commended more than men. Men and women both utilize praise in the same way. While women are more likely to expound on their praises, males prefer to stick to basic patterns. Compliments from female speakers are rarely acknowledged (Coates, 2013). On the contrary, the opposite is true for the compliments by male speakers. In other words, when two individuals’ statuses are uneven, the person with the greater standing is expected to give the compliments. Low-status speakers, on the other hand, get the praises. The findings of the main male and female character of *The Last of Us 2* compliments the other characters from the video game were shown below:

Data 13

Joel : **That’s starting to sound like something.**
Ellie : Ugh, I suck.
Joel : Nah... Just need to build up your calluses, that’s all.

The previous dialogue occurs when Joel observes Ellie learning to play the guitar on a log in the forest. Upon a quick glance, Joel probably did not sound like he was praising Ellie’s performance. However, considering his next response to Ellie’s reply, it was clear that he was subtly complimenting her. To Ellie’s self-deprecation, Joel calmed her down by saying that she just “needed to build up her calluses”. Had Joel not meant the compliment, he might have said some bad things about Ellie’s play. Joel’s choice was another example of an indirect compliment. Rather than openly expressing his positive evaluation, Joel chose to do so ambiguously. This was because males perceive overtly admiring someone or something as a humiliating gesture that may threaten their faces (Chairani & Subiyantoro, 2022). Even when they sense the urgency to do so,

their praise will mostly focus on the performance of their interlocutor, as shown in the utterance above. Joel's assessment of Ellie's play, which appeared out of thin air, can serve as a conversation starter. It also reinforces their close friendship, hinting that their relationship has gone a long way back.

Data 14

Dina : Hey. How hot do I look right now?

Ellie : **Pretty hot.** How'd you fix it?

Dina : It was a loose connection... Antenna. They found our mess at the school.

The data above illustrates a same-sex conversation. Normally, sick people do not look good. For instance, they may appear pale and have heavy eyelids, among other signs of sickness. Instead, Ellie commented on how hot she was by saying "pretty hot". Here, Ellie compliments Dina in third- person focus. She did not directly involve Dina, as indicated by the missing pronoun you, which would clarify the subject of her praise. It was an example of an indirect compliment, which refers to utterances that the listener would interpret as compliments despite the absence of the positive semantic component often linked with praising at the linguistic level (Yu, 2005). Given their intimate relationship, it was puzzling to understand why Ellie would implicitly laud Dina. In fact, in same-sex interactions, women are more prone to explicitly compliment their audiences (Miranda & Hamzah, 2018). Ellie probably did not want to make Dina feel any worse than she had to, especially after Ellie might have found out about her condition.

CONCLUSIONS

After analyzing the men and women language used by the characters in the video game *The Last of Us 2*, several conclusions are drawn. The analysis referred to the guiding theory of men and women linguistic features by Coates (2013). This study discovered that there are a total of seven conversational strategies used by the characters consisting minimal responses, hedges, tag questions, questions, commands and directives, swearing and taboo language, and compliments. Based on the analysis, it is found that both men and women character in the video games use the conversation strategies through their linguistic features equally. The use of conversational strategies by both men and women depends on the certain impression and purposes they aimed differently in language interactions.

The second result of this study includes the differences of the seven conversational strategies used by the male and female characters in the video game. The first difference is seen from minimal responses used by the male character in the video game which has the purpose of confirming certain matter meanwhile the minimal responses used by the female character have the purpose of agreement and the impression of attentiveness. The second difference lies in the use of hedges in which the male character used hedges to express uncertainty while the female character used hedges to express scepticism and softened opinion. The third difference identified from the tag question used by the male character is speaker-oriented, while the female character aimed for the addressee-oriented which implies to their tendency to soften their utterances. Fourth, questions as conversational strategy also differ in how the male character used them with the aim of demanding for information while the female character used them to keep a conversation going. The

fifth difference is seen from the use of commands. The male character used demands with dominating impressions while the female character settled with softened and polite impressions. The sixth difference is identified from how the male character used explicit swearing words not only to express an emotional reaction but also to imply masculinity while the female character used swearing words to express negative emotions. The last difference is identified from how male character used compliments as he is being at a higher level than the addressee while the female character often used compliments as an act of being courteous. In conclusion, despite using the similar conversational strategies, the male and female characters in the game aimed for different purposes and impressions which related to their roles in society regarding the theory of men and women's linguistic features by Coates (2013).

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