Article

Gendered Discourse in *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes (2023)*: A Comparative Analysis of Male and Female Language Features

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Abstract

This study explores gendered communication patterns through the analysis of language features used by male and female characters in The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes movie. Employing Jennifer Coates's (2015) framework, seven language features—minimal responses, hedges, tag questions, questions, commands and directives, swearing and taboo language, and compliments—were examined to identify distinctions in male and female speech. The study adopted a qualitative method with a case study design. A total of 143 male and 85 female utterances were analyzed. Findings indicate that male characters predominantly used questions (52.54%) and commands/directives (17.48%), reflecting a more assertive and directive communication style. In contrast, female characters employed more hedges (25.88%) and compliments (5.88%), suggesting a more cooperative and supportive style of interaction. These findings support Coates's claim that male speech often emphasizes control and competitiveness, while female language tends to prioritize relational maintenance. This analysis not only illustrates how gendered language reinforces traditional gender ideologies but also demonstrates how dystopian media narratives can mirror broader societal power structures. By adopting a consistent theoretical lens, this research provides analytical rigor and enhances comparability between male and female speech. The study contributes to sociolinguistic scholarship by offering insights into the representation of gender in cinematic discourse and may inform future investigations into language, media, and identity construction.

Keywords

Male and female, Sociolinguistics, Language Features, The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes.

Introduction

The study of language and gender has long been central in sociolinguistics, as differences in male and female communication styles reveal not only individual variation but also broader cultural ideologies (Coates, 2015). Language is not simply a neutral tool of communication but a site where power, identity, and social norms are continually constructed and negotiated (Beisembayeva & Issina, 2022; Yuzar et al., 2023; Zulia & Rahman, 2024). As Coates (2015) observes, men's speech is often competitive, assertive, and hierarchical,

while women's speech is more cooperative, supportive, and oriented toward relational maintenance. These differences highlight the embeddedness of linguistic practices within societal expectations of masculinity and femininity.

In contemporary society, media including film serves as a powerful site for reproducing or contesting gender ideologies. Beyond entertainment, films function as cultural texts that reflect, normalize, or challenge social roles and values (Rahman et al., 2025). Representations of gendered discourse in film therefore provide valuable insights into how audiences are invited to understand masculinity and femininity (Sutherland & Feltey, 2017; Gürkan, 2022).

Previous studies highlight variations in theories, objects, and contexts regarding language and gender. Maulidya et al., (2024) examined *Reason This Place or Mine* (2023), finding that women used tag questions more frequently when talking. Further, Wulandari & Sari (2024) analyzed Enola Holmes 2 using Lakoff and Pearson's theoretical framework, identifying eight women's language features, with lexical hedges/fillers as the most dominant. Furthermore, Amar & Wulandari (2024) applied Coates's theory to *Redeeming Love* (2022) and found the female character used all women's language features; while Khoirummuthmainnah et al., (2024) investigated Erin Gruwell (character) in *Freedom Writers* (2007) using Lakoff's theory, identifying eight features with "hypercorrect grammar" as the most dominant. Moreover, Ding & Li (2023) studied tv series *How I Met Your Mother* (2005-2014) and found significant gender differences in adjectives, hedges, and interrogatives, while Dewati & Wulandari (2023) analyzed *The Prince & M*e (2004) and reported that male and female characters used similar features.

In addition, Salman et al., (2023) explored North Country with Lakoff's framework, showing women used more hedges and intensifiers. Zansabil (2023) applied Tannen's theory in TV series called *The End of the F**ing World* (2017-2019) and found language style varied with social context, while Ningrum et al., (2023) studied TikTok influencers and revealed men used more direct language, while women used rapport talk. Hidayati (2022) examined Tekotok YouTube videos with Lakoff's theory, finding several features absent, while Yulita et al., (2022) analyzed *Raya and the Last Dragon* (2021) movie with Lakoff and Tannen's analysis tool, identifying six women's features dominated by lexical hedges/fillers. Further, Suciati et al., (2022) investigated ELE students' WhatsApp group using Lakoff's theory, finding five women's features. Ginarti et al. (2022) studied #SaveJohnnyDepp on Instagram/Twitter using theories from Lakoff, Coates, Zimmerman, and West, finding men and women used similar features with slightly different frequencies.

Furthermore, Pade and Nto (2022) analyzed *A Haunted House 2* (2014) movie with theory of Karlsson and Lakoff, identifying gender-based differences, while Nuringtyas & Navila (2022) studied *Charlie's Angels* with Lakoff and found intensifiers is the most dominant. In addition to that, Setyadi & Ekawati (2021) explored *A Star Is Born* (2018) movie, revealing differences in adjectives, adverbs, swear words, and politeness forms, whereas Husain et al., (2022) investigated *Hidden Figures* (2016) film, finding eight women's and six men's language features. Finally, Putri et al., (2021) analyzed *Emily in Paris* (2020-2025) television series, identifying ten women's language features.

The aforementioned previous studies consistently explored gender differences in language using qualitative methods but varied in theoretical framework (such as Lakoff, Coates, Tannen, Karlsson, etc.), contexts (films, TV series, social media, online chats), and scope (focusing on women, men, or both). The current research differs by combining male and female language analysis through Coates's theory, employing a case study approach, and focusing on The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes. Building on this scholarship, Coates (2015) emphasized the distinction between men's competitive discourse and women's cooperative discourse. She identified seven language features particularly relevant to gender analysis: minimal responses, hedges, tag questions, questions, commands and directives, swearing and taboo language, and compliments. By applying this framework to both male and female speakers, researchers can compare gendered language use systematically.

Film, as a cultural text, often reproduces stereotypes of men as authoritative, rational, and dominant, and women as emotional, nurturing, and supportive. Previous studies on gender and media, such as Yuzar et al., (2023) and Ginarti et al., (2022) on social media discourse as well as Wulandari & Sari (2024) on *Enola Holmes 2* film, have demonstrated how fictional dialogues parallel real-world communication norms. Dystopian films in particular highlight language as a tool of power and survival. In authoritarian settings, speech often reflects strategies of dominance, resistance, or compliance. Analyzing language in such films reveals not only gendered tendencies but also how discourse interacts with political ideologies. Several recent studies are worth noting. For instance, Ding & Li (2023) found significant differences in male and female speech, noting men's preference for interrogatives and women's preference for hedges. Meanwhile, Khoirummuthmainnah et al., (2024) examined Lakoff's features in film, identifying frequent use of hypercorrect grammar and politeness forms. In contrast, studies like Pade & Nto (2022) on *A Haunted House 2* (2014) movie, applied different theoretical lenses to male and female language separately, potentially limiting comparability.

Collectively, these studies demonstrate the persistence of gendered discourse patterns across genres, yet the specific dynamics of dystopian films remain underexplored. *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* (2023) film, a prequel to *The Hunger Games* series, offers a compelling context for such analysis. Set in a society defined by surveillance, violence, and rigid hierarchy, the film foregrounds characters whose language reflects both gendered identities and strategies of survival.

The significance of this study lies in its application of Coates's (2015) unified framework to both male and female speech, ensuring analytical consistency. By comparing male and female characters within the same theoretical lens, this study deepens the understanding of how language both reflects and constructs gender in cinematic narratives. Further, this research aims 1) to identify the frequency and types of language features used by male and female characters in *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* (2023), 2) to analyze how these features reflect broader gendered communication patterns, and 3) to interpret how gendered discourse in the film reproduces or challenges social ideologies within a dystopian narrative.

Method

In analyzing the characteristics of male and female language in *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* (2023) using Coates's theory, this study employed a qualitative research method with a case study design. This approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of the film as a specific case, enabling a detailed examination of how male and female characters use language in their interactions. According to Creswell & Creswell (2018), qualitative research seeks to explore and understand the meaning that individuals or groups attribute to a social or human issue. The film's dialog and interactions were analyzed within this framework, focusing on gendered communication styles.

The primary data sources consisted of the film script and spoken dialog, retrieved from https://scrapsfromtheloft.com/movies/hunger-games-ballad-of-songbirds-snakes-transcript/ under the title *The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes* (2023) film. Supplementary materials such as the transcript and notes taken during viewing helped capture tone, intonation, and conversational dynamics relevant to gendered communication. The data collection process involved watching the movie via Prime Video, obtaining the transcript, and categorizing dialog according to Coates's seven language features: Minimal Responses, Hedges, Tag Questions, Questions, Commands and Directives, Swearing and Taboo Language, and Compliments.

Data analysis followed Creswell & Creswell's (2018) six-step process, starting with organizing and preparing materials, followed by thoroughly reading the transcripts to gain a holistic understanding of the narrative. The next step involved thematic coding, focusing on the main characters, Coriolanus Snow and Lucy Gray, with their lines categorized in a coding table based on the identified features. From there, the researchers generated descriptions and grouped utterances according to Coates's categories, which were

presented in two analysis tables one for male and one for female language features showing totals and percentages. Finally, these results were described and interpreted to reveal how the film reflects gender identity and social roles through linguistic behavior, offering insights into the portrayal of gendered communication within a dystopian context.

Findings & Discussion

This study analyzed the language features used by male and female characters in *The Ballad Songbirds and Snakes*'s Transcript" (2023), using Coates's (2015) framework. A total of 228 utterances were identified, consisting of 143 from male characters and 85 from female characters. These utterances were categorized into seven language features: minimal responses, hedges, tag questions, questions, commands and directives, swearing and taboo language, and compliments. The findings and their implications are discussed in this section.

Table 1. Frequency Male and Female Language Features

Language Features	Male Frequency	Male Percentage	Female Frequency	Female Percentage
Minimal Response	17	11.89%	11	12.94%
Hedges	10	7.00%	22	25.88%
Tag Questions	11	7.69%	7	8.24%
Questions	75	52.54%	34	40.00%
Commands & Directives	25	17.48%	6	7.06%
Swearing & Taboo Language	1	0,70%	0	0%
Compliments	4	2,80%	5	5.88%
TOTAL	**143**	**100%**	**85**	**100%**

The table shows that male characters overwhelmingly relied on questions (52.54%) and commands/directives (17.48%), reflecting an assertive and dominant communication style. In contrast, female characters used hedges (25.88%), tag questions (8.24%), and compliments (5.88%) more frequently, reflecting a cooperative and supportive style of interaction. These quantitative tendencies illustrate how gendered discourse manifests in cinematic dialogue.

This section compares how male and female characters The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes use language features differently based on (Coates, 2015). Based on the data from Table 4.1 the comparison covers seven language features: minimal responses, hedges, tag questions, questions, command and directives, swearing, and compliments. This detailed analysis of the frequency and percentages of each feature will help highlight the distinct speech patterns associated with each gender in the film.

The frequency of minimal responses is slightly higher in males, with 17 instances (11.89%) compared to 11 instances (12.94%) for females. Although the percentage difference is marginal, males slightly dominate in the use of minimal responses, which often serve to indicate active listening or

acknowledgement in conversations. This suggests that male characters may be slightly more engage in such conversational cues, while female characters also use them, but at a slightly lower rate.

The most notable difference appears in the use of hedges, where females significantly outnumber males. Females used hedges 22 times, accounting for 25.88% of their dialogues, while males used them only 10 times (7.00%). This substantial difference suggests that female characters in the film tend to employ hedges more frequently, which aligns with Coates's (2015) theory that women tend to use more hedging devices to express uncertainty or to mitigate the impact of their statements. In contrast, males use hedges less, potentially reflecting a more direct and confident communication style.

When it comes to tag questions, the figures show a smaller difference. Males used tag questions 11 times (7.69%), while females used them 7 times (8.24%). The difference in frequency is not substantial, indicating that both male and female characters use tag questions in a similar manner, likely to seek confirmation or clarification in their interactions. However, males use them slightly more often, although the gap is narrow.

The analysis of questions reveals a more pronounced disparity. Males used questions 75 times, which constitutes 52.45% of their dialogues, while females asked 34 questions, accounting for 40.00% of their dialogues. This substantial difference indicates that male characters are more likely to initiate questions, suggesting a more dominant conversational role or a greater desire for information. The higher frequency of questions in male speech supports the idea that they are more actively engaged in shaping the direction of conversations, while females, though still asking a considerable number of questions, do so less frequently.

Command and directives are used more frequently by males, with 25 instances (17.48%) compared to only 6 instances (7.06%) by females. This further reinforces the notion that males in the film take a more authoritative and directive role in conversations, often giving commands or making requests in a direct manner. In contrast, females seem to engage less in such authoritative speech acts, aligning with common stereotypes about female communication being more passive or less assertive.

The use of swearing is minimal overall, but males use it slightly more than females. Males swore once, accounting for 0.70% of their dialogues, while females did not use swearing at all (0%). This finding supports the theory that swearing is more frequently associated with male speech, especially in contexts where assertiveness or emotional intensity is involved. In this film, swearing appears to be a feature more closely linked to male characters' expressions of frustration or aggression.

Compliments are used more frequently by females, with 5 instances (5.88%) compared to 4 instances (2.80%) for males. This suggests that female characters may engage in more supportive and nurturing communication, using compliments as a way to build rapport or express approval. Males, while still offering compliments, do so less frequently, which might indicate a more reserved approach to positive feedback in their conversations.

The differences in communication between male and female language features in *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* reveal several key distinctions in speech patterns. Male characters tend to ask more questions, give more commands, and use swearing albeit minimally indicating a more dominant and direct conversational style. These forms of expression often reflect a desire to assert control or authority during interactions. In contrast, female characters are found to use more hedges, compliments, and tag questions, reflecting a more indirect, supportive, and nurturing communication style. These patterns align with Coates's theory, which posits that women's language prioritizes empathy and relational harmony, while men's language tends to emphasize independence and assertiveness. The data, as presented in Table 1, demonstrates how these language features manifest in the dialogues, offering insights into how gender roles are constructed and communicated through cinematic discourse. This supports the broader claim that societal expectations significantly influence the way male and female characters are portray in terms of language use.

Male character language features

This section discussed the types and frequency of language features used by male characters in the Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes based on Coates's Framework. Out of 143 male utterance that obtained gendered language features, the most dominant were questions, command and directives, minimal response and tag question. The following is a breakdown of each language feature identified in male dialogues:

1. Minimal Response

Minimal response such as "yeah", "uh-huh", and "hmmh" are uses by male characters to signal listening or acknowledgment. According to Coates (2015), men tend to use minimal responses less frequently and often delay them, which may reflect a more competitive conversational style. Male characters used minimal responses 17 times (11.89%). These are short, supportive responses used to show attentiveness or acknowledgment.

> Lucy : "Oh, hey… Get some us food, please. Jessup and I haven't eaten since the reaping".
>
> #106 (00:53:42) Snow : "Yeah".

This short reply by Snow shows agreement without emotional elaboration. According to Coates (2015), male often use minimal response like "yeah" to acknowledge without encouraging further discussion, reflecting a more reserved communication style.

> Lucy : "is that for us?"
>
> #134 (01:06:27) Snow : "hmhh"

Snow's non-verbal sound here is a minimal acknowledgement. Rather than giving a clear answer, his response maintains emotional distance. Coates (2015) notes that male may use such minimal vocal cues instead of engaging in detailed conversation.

> Lucy : "What if this was our life, Coriolanus? Waking up whenever, catching our own food, living out by lake. I mean, would you still feel a need for the capitol even then?"
>
> #489 (03:27:21) Snow : "Uh.."

Snow's hesitation signals discomfort or avoidance. Based on Coates's (2015) theory, minimal responses from male often reflect a reluctance to engage in emotional or hypothetical dialogue, especially when it challenges their identity or worldview.

2. Hedges

Hedges were used 10 times (6.99%) in male speech. According to Coates (2015), male generally hedge less often, using direct statements to assert certainty.

> #4 (00:02:44) Snow : "Perhaps I a little sharp today"

The word "perhaps" function as a hedge, softening his statement and reducing its assertiveness. According to (Coates, 2015) hedges are used to express uncertainty or politeness. While more common in female speech, male also use them occasionally to ease tension or appeared confrontational.

> #117 (00:59:13) Snow : "I mean, you saw those kids in the zoo, they just wanted to get to know Lucy Gray"

The phrase "I mean" acts as discourse marker or softener, helping Snow manage the conversation. It introduces his opinion gently and reflects a cautious appoarch.in male speech such phrases may be using to clarify intent while still maintaining authority.

> #64 (00:34:56) Snow: "You know, one time, during the war, I ate a whole jar of paste just stop the pain in my stomach".

Here "you know" is use to seek shared understanding or connection with the listener. In Coates's view, this hedge invites acknowledgement without demanding it. For male speakers, this type of hedging can make a statement seem more relatable.

3. Tag Questions

There were 11 occurrences of tag questions (7.69%) used by male characters. This suggests a balanced use of confirmation seeking expressions, not strictly associated with female speech.

> #272 (02:06:39) Snow : "Look, I have seen what war does to people, okay?"

The use of "okay?" here functions like a tag question, not for confirmation but to push the listener toward agreement. According to (Coates, 2016), while female often use tag questions to build rapport, male may use them rhetorically or to reinforce their opinion with subtle pressure.

> #318 (02:23:32) Snow : "You're the only one who stood up to *gaul* class, right?"

This is another tag question, with "right?" used at the end to confirm a statement, in male speech, such usage often seeks validation or subtly asserts knowledge, fitting Coates's theory that assert male use language to maintain control while still seeking some degree of agreement.

4. Questions

The most frequently used feature among male characters is questions, with a total 75 instances (52.54%). This indicates that male characters often initiated or directed conversations through interrogative forms, reflecting a tendency to control the flow of dialogue.

> #144 (01:10:18) Snow : "Are you gonna share everything that I give you with Jessup?"

This question shows Snow's suspicion and need for control. Instead of seeking information, he uses it to confront and challenge the listener subtly. According to Coates (2015), male speakers often use questions to assert dominance and protect their position in interaction.

> #18 (00:11:21) Snow : "What's the first thing you'll spend the prize money on?"

Although it seems casual, this question is strategic. Snow uses it to understand the priorities of the other person. In line with Coatess (2015) theory, male often ask questions to gain information that helps maintain control in the conversation.

> #52 (00:29:07) Snow : "How am I supposed to get her to trust me?"

This rhetorical question expresses frustration rather than a real inquiry. It reflects internal conflict and possibly a calculated attempt to gain sympathy. Coates (2015) explains that male speech often includes rhetorical questions to express emotion indirectly.

5.   Commands and Directives

There were 25 instances of commands and directives (17.48%), showing that male characters frequently used language to give orders, assert dominance, or instruct others.

> #324 (02:25:48) Snow : "Can you trust me?"

While structured as a question, this line carries the tone of a directive, prompting the listener to make a choice aligned with Snow's intentions. In this context, it subtly directs the other character toward cooperation. According to Coates (2015), male speakers often use language to influence actions or decisions, and even questions can function as indirect commands when delivered assertively.

> #368 (02:43:19) Snow : "It's over, let her out!"

This is a clear example of a direct command, expressing urgency and authority. Snow uses imperative language to control the situation and protect Lucy Gray. According to Coates (2015), male frequently use directives to assert power and take charge of interactions, especially in high stress or action driven moments.

> #406 (02:58:06) Snow : "Don't touch her!"

This sharp imperative command reinforces Snow's protective stance. It leaves no room for negotiation and shows dominance over the situation. As Coates (2015) explains, male speech often includes unambiguous commands when establishing boundaries or asserting control, which is evident in this emotionally charged moment.

6.   Swearing and Taboo Language

Swearing appeared only once (0.70%) in male dialogue.

> #214 (01:42:52) Snow : "Oh, Shit!"

This outburst is a direct example of swearing, used to express sudden emotion likely frustration, fear, or shock. According to Coates (2015), swearing and the use of taboo language are more commonly associated with male speech. Such language reflects emotional intensity, assertiveness, and sometimes a desire to display toughness or react instinctively in stressful situations.

7.   Compliments

Compliments were used only 4 times (2.80%) by male characters, indicating that this feature is not dominant in male speech in the film.

> #3 (00:02:13) Snow : "That's beautiful, Grandma'am"

Snow offers a direct compliment, likely aimed at showing appreciation or respect. According to Coates (2015), male use compliments less frequently than women, but when they do, it is often to serve a strategic purpose such as gaining favour or diffusing tension.

> #7 (00:04:03) Snow : "it's beautiful, best cousin ever, tell me everything from
>
> the bathroom tiles. Brilliant"

This enthusiastic string of compliments shows Snow using positive language to flatter someone. This could reflect an attempt to strengthen social bonds or manipulate a situation for his benefit common motivations when male use compliments, as Coates notes.

> #316 Snow : "You're rich, Smart. You care"

This line addressed to Sejanus is a more subtle compliment, listing traits with admiration. It reflects a male style of complimenting that focuses on status or capability, aligning with Coates's observation that men's compliments often emphasize achievement or practicality rather than emotion.

Female character language features

This section presents findings relating to the language features frequently used by female characters in The Ballad of the Songbird and the Snake. From a total of 85 female dialogues containing Coates's language features, several trends emerge that highlight a more expressive and supportive communication style. The most dominant were question and hedges.

1. Minimal Response

Female characters used 11 minimal responses (12.94%). According to Coates (2015), women frequently use minimal responses as supportive feedback. This aligns with a collaborative and empathetic communication style.

> Snow : "Hey. Your not a killer, Lucy gray.
>
> #432 (03:08:59) Lucy : "Yes, I am"

This is a short direct minimal response that doesn't elaborate emotionally. In this context, Lucy affirms Snow's statement with a firm, self-contained reply. According to Coates (2015), while minimal responses in women's speech can function to encourage others to continue, they can also serve as emotionally guarded affirmations, especially in tense situations.

> Snow : "I brought you something. It was my mother's, I'd like for you to have it."
>
> #466 (03:21:16) Lucy : "mmm"

A non-verbal vocalization like this shows passive acknowledgment. Coates (2015) explains that such minimal responses often reflect attentiveness or emotional restraint. Lucy's "mmm" could indicate agreement, discomfort, or hesitation leaving space for interpretation without taking control of the dialogue.

> Snow : "Your gonna sing like nothing is wrong, and I'm gonna find us a way out of this, okay?"
>
> #564 (03:58:20) Lucy : "Okay. Okay."

This minimal response emphasizes agreement and compliance, likely signalling emotional pressure or urgency. Repetition here adds a softer, more cooperative tone. Coates (2015) identifies such responses as typical of female conversational style, where affirmation often comes with emotional nuance.

2. Hedges

Hedges were the most dominant feature in female speech, appearing 22 times (25.88%). Coates (2015) states that female use hedges to avoid being too assertive and to maintain politeness.

> #81 (00:40:22) Lucy : "Well, I think four is very smart age to be"

The word "I think" indicates tentativeness, which according to Coates (2015), is often used by female to avoid sounding overly assertive, promoting cooperation in conversation.

#94 (00:44:09) Lucy : "Well, the covey love color, me more so than most"

The hedge "well" at the beginning acts as a discourse softener, preparing the listener and introducing a personal reflection. Coates (2015) notes that hedges like this help female speakers manage politeness and interpersonal rapport.

#400 (02:55:14) Lucy : "You know, I gave up drinking when I was 12."

The phrase "you know" seeks shared understanding or sympathy from the listener. Coates (2015) identifies this kind of hedge as a relational strategy, where the speaker tries to involve others emotionally or signal shared experience.

3. Questions

Questions were also common in female speech, found 34 times (40.00%). Female used questions to involve others and express curiosity. Coates (2015) explains that female's use of questions tends to create connection rather than control. The example:

#60 (00:32:15) Lucy : "What does my mentor do besides bring me roses?"

This is a genuine question that subtly challenges Snow's role while maintaining a polite tone. According to Coates (2015), female often ask questions not only to gain information but also to maintain interaction and express curiosity in a cooperative manner.

#197 (01:34:56) Lucy : "Both your parents gone?"

This short, emotionally loaded question demonstrates Lucy's attempt to connect on a personal level. While it seeks information, it's also an invitation for emotional openness, reflecting Coates's idea that female speakers often use questions to build intimacy and emotional rapport.

#296 (02:15:04) Lucy : "you want some water?"

This simple offer in the form of a question reflects care and concern. Coates (2015) suggests that female tend to use questions in nurturing contexts, showing attentiveness to the needs of others and reinforcing social bonds through interaction.

4. Tag questions

Female characters used 7 tag questions (8.24%), often in a supportive tone. Coates (2015) highlights that female use tag questions to encourage agreement and confirm shared understanding.

#352 (02:36:28) Lucy : "I am not going anywhere, okay?"

This is a tag question where Lucy is stating her intention (not going anywhere) but seeks confirmation or agreement from the listener with the use of "okay?" Coates (2015) explains that female often use tag questions to ensure agreement or soften a statement, making it more interactive and less confrontational. By ending with "okay?" Lucy is inviting Snow to agree with her and reinforce the statement, rather than imposing it outright.

#498 (03:33:28) Lucy : "But I think katnis has much nicer ring, don't you?"

This is a tag question used to invite Snow's opinion or agreement. The phrase "don't you?" softens the statement, making it more conversational rather than confrontational. According to Coates (2015),

female often use tag questions to create inclusivity and engagement with the listener, ensuring the interaction is less hierarchical and more collaborative.

> #78 (02:09:15) Lucy : "Sure will be nice not to have to kill anyone else up north, though, huh?"

This tag question also invites Snow's response, but it's more rhetorical. It indicates expectation or implied agreement from Snow without directly demanding an answer. It reflects Lucy's conversational style, where tag questions are used to keep the dialogue flowing and gently lead the conversation toward shared perspectives.

5. Command and Directives

Commands appeared 6 times (7.06%) in female dialogue. Coates (2015) notes that while female can use directives they tend to soften them with politeness or hedges.

> #212 (01:41:33) Lucy : "Coriolanus, please don't let me die in here tomorrow."

Although phrased as a please, this line functions as a directive, urging Snow to take action to protect her. The inclusion of "please" softens the request, aligning with Coates's (2015) observation that female speakers often frame directives politely to maintain relational harmony while still expressing urgency or need.

> #664 (04:41:06) Lucy : "Let's catch some fish while we're here."

This is a suggestive directive using the inclusive "let's" form, which is common in female speech to encourage group action rather than impose authority. Coates (2015) notes that female often use this kind of inclusive language to promote collaboration and maintain social connection. Lucy is suggesting an activity while subtly guiding the listener's actions in a way that feels shared and cooperative rather than commanding.

> #444 (03:14:42) Lucy : "Maude ivory, you got my guitar?"

Though phrased as a question, the context suggests it functions as a gentle directives she is likely prompting Maude to retrieve or confirm the presence of her guitar. According to Coates (2015), female may use indirect or softened forms of directives, especially when speaking to others within close relationships or younger individuals, making this a subtle but clear example.

6. Swearing and Taboo Language

There were no occurrences (0%) of swearing in female dialogue. This supports Coates's claim that female are more likely to avoid taboo language, maintaining a polite and refined conversational tone.

7. Compliments

Female characters gave 5 compliments (5.88%), often used to build rapport. According to (Coates, 2015), female frequently use compliments to create solidarity.

> #81 (00:40:22) Lucy : "Four is a very smart age to be."

This is a playful and affirming compliment, likely directed at a child. It shows Lucy's use of positive language to uplift and encourage, which aligns with Coates's view that female frequently use compliments to affirm others and promote harmony in conversation.

#85 (00:41:07) Lucy : "I like your dress too."

This phrase often used by female as a solidarity strategy, as Coates (2015) highlights that such compliments especially about clothing or looks are common in female speech and often function as social lubricants, fostering friendly interactions.

#460 (03:19:33) Lucy : "She's a survivor. But it's a mystery, sweetheart."

Calling someone a "survivor" is a form of empowering compliment, especially in a context of adversity. The use of "sweetheart" adds emotional warmth, emphasizing empathy and connection. Coates (2015) points out that such emotionally rich language reflects female's tendency to use speech for connection and care.

In the context of The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes, Coates's theory is especially relevant, as the character Lucy Gray often uses cooperative and supportive speech strategies as a response to her social environment, which is dominated by male power structures. This indicates that the differences in language features are not merely biological, but are socially constructed and influenced by the character's position and role in the narrative.

Conclusion

This research aimed to analyze the gendered language features used by male and female characters in The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes, using Jennifer Coates's theory as the primary framework. Through a qualitative method with a case study design, the study examined seven specific language features: minimal responses, hedges, tag questions, questions, commands and directives, swearing and taboo language, and compliments. The findings revealed that male characters tended to use more direct and assertive forms of language, such as giving commands, asking questions, and using swearing (although minimally). These forms often reflected a desire to assert control or dominance in interactions. On the other hand, female characters were found to use more hedges, compliments, and tag questions indicating a more cooperative and supportive communication style. This supports Coates's claim that female's language tends to prioritize empathy and relational harmony, whereas men's language often reflects independence and authority.

The comparison between male and female language features in the movie highlighted the persistence of traditional gender roles in fictional narratives. Male characters appeared more dominant in initiating and leading conversations, while female characters displayed more caution and emotional sensitivity in their speech. Although set in a dystopian world, the film still reflects conventional patterns of gendered communication. These results suggest that language in film not only reflects character traits but also reinforces broader societal expectations related to gender. Thus, this study contributes to the growing body of research in sociolinguistics and gender studies by offering insight into how language shapes and mirrors social identity within popular culture.

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