Gender Similarities and Differences in the Usage of Stance Markers: A Study Based on Twenty TED Speeches

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ABSTRACT

The past few decades have witnessed the hot discussion concerning language and gender from various aspects, with the use of stance markers as one of the most vital angles. To find out the gender similarities and differences in the use of stance markers under the classification by Hyland, figure out the gender features and summarize the behind reasons, this article combines the qualitative and quantitative analysis together, conducts a detailed analysis on twenty TED speeches delivered by ten male and ten female lecturers, respectively. Finally, the study finds that firstly, there are no distinctive differences in the use of stance markers in the primary class proposed by Hyland named hedges, boosters, attitude markers and self-mention. But the female lecturers use stance makers more frequently on the whole. Secondly, in terms of secondary class which complemented by other scholars, still no obvious differences are found in terms of hedges and attitude markers. Then, for the use of boosters, the males prefer fact-asserting while the females tend to use certainty-indicating. As for the employment of self-mention markers, words indicating authority such as I are more frequently used by males and those contributing to solidarity between the speaker and audience such as we are more commonly applied by females. The discovery of gender similarities and differences involves various reasons, and it provides important implications for the study of oral English.

Keywords: gender, stance markers, similarities, differences, TED speeches

1. Introduction: Gender, Language and Stance

For a long time, the difference in language use between females and males has been a hot-button topic that sparks heated discussions in various fields. In daily life, people pay attention to and summarize the most direct and obvious differences between male and female language, trying to provide reasonable explanations from the perspective of life experience. Similarly, scholars in the academic world are interested in this issue as well. They focus on specific topics, select appropriate research data and conduct studies under the guidance of corresponding theories to offer solid evidence and conclusions for the differences of language use between female and male. With their efforts, the existing studies worldwide on this topic have already covered a multitude of angles, for instance, the early gender differences in language use (Cook et al., 1985), the impact of gender on language from the perspective of education (De Gaer, 2007; Davis & Reynolds, 2018; Widodo & Elyas. 2020).

Based on those previous studies, the differences of language use between female and male from various aspects is explored and summarized. In addition to those apparent distinctions including style, diction and so on, some implicit aspects such as stance can be figured out by analysing the language of male and female as well. Stance is "the lexical and grammatical expression of attitudes,

feelings, judgments, or commitments concerning the propositional content of a message" (Biber & Finegan, 1989, p.92) and its lexical expression is called stance markers. Over the past years, studies on this topic abound in the academic world such as the comparison study of stance markers in different registers (Biber & Edward, 1989), comparison study of stance marker sin different ages (Reilly et al., 2005), comparison research of stance markers in people on different language level (Berman, 2005), application of stance markers in authorial comments on various events (Marín-Arrese, 2021) and so on.   Additionally, different use of stance markers triggered by gender is also a frequently talked-about topic while the existing studies about it mainly center on the stance markers such as quantifiers (Coates, 2003; Hosman & Siltanen, 2006) and evidentials (Voss & Dyke, 2001). Besides, a number of gender studies on the use of stance markers are conducted based on spoken or informal English and aim to find out the differences (Precht, 2008; Zhang & Xia, 2015). Therefore, this article plans to figure out the gender similarities and differences in the usage of stance markers by collecting and analysing twenty formal TED speeches from ten male and female lecturers respectively under Hyland's classification of stance markers.

To figure out the specific similarities and differences between the language of male and female in terms of stance markers, the following questions need to be answered:

1) What is the lexical realizations and the frequency of use of stance makers (both primary and secondary classification) in the male and female speeches?

2) What are the similarities and differences of the lexical realization and frequency of stance markers in different types? And what kinds of features are reflected?

3) Why do male and female languages exhibit these similarities and differences? What are the reasons?

This article has both theoretical and practical significance. In terms of theoretical significance, firstly, this article can fill the research gap that few studies have applied the framework of stance markers proposed by Hyland into the gender study. Secondly, this research extends the range of application of Hyland's classification of stance markers, which is proposed and summarized based on the study of academic papers. In this article, however, this framework is utilized for the discussion of the similarities and differences between male and female's language. Thirdly, this study can enrich the research about gender from a new angle, helping figure out more differences of language use between male and female. Besides, the similarities of language use of different genders are considered as well, which is not paid much attention to in existing studies.

Then, from the perspective of the practical significance, it is educationally important. To begin with, the results of the study help English learners have a better and clearer understanding of the spoken English of native speakers so that they can practice oral English in a more effective way. The second one is to help English learners find a new way to interpret the implicit attitude hidden in discourses and learn more vocabulary that can assist them express their opinions clearly and properly.

2. A Brief Literature Review

The past decades have witnessed a multitude of research from various angles concerning language and gender. Lakoff (1975) once wrote a masterpiece named *Language and Woman's Place* to discuss the language that makes women as ladies and the place of women in society. This book is considered as the starting point of the study of language and gender. In 1985, scholars including Cook, Fritz, McCornack and Visperas conducted experiments to explore the differences of language use in children in both genders with the help of FIS-P scoring instrument. In this study, the gender differences are highly focused. Then, in 1990, Carli extended the study of language and gender into the mutual influences between them. Later, research on this topic is narrowed down to the gender stereotype or bias in specific contexts or occasions. For instance, Holmes and Schnur (2006) studied the people's management and interpretation of the concept "femininity" in the discourses happening in the workplace. The study found that notions such as "femininity" can be understood or interpreted positively, with a useful approach to weaken the previous condition that those notions usually involve negative understandings and reactions. Later, in 2022, some scholars discussed the influences of gender stereotypes on language production in written discourses instead of oral language (Goodhew et al., 2022). Among the various studies with different focuses, Coates published a book entitled *Women, Men and Language: A Sociolinguistic Account of Gender Differences in Language* in 2015, in which the author provided a systematic introduction to the background of language and gender, the sociolinguistic evidence, causes and consequences and the prospects for further research. Similarly, Meyerhoff and Ehrlich (2019) summarized the relative previous research on language and gender to depict a comprehensive picture of the study history of this topic. In 2020, the scope of study on language and gender will be extended further into the field of language education. Widodo and Elyas (2020) stressed the important role of gender in language education and explained the reasons behind it.

In addition to the discussion of the relation between language and gender, there are a number of scholars who pay attention to the gender nature of language itself. For example, some scholars paid attention to the use of Gender Fair Language (GFL henceforth). Sczesny and other scholars (2016) discussed the important role of GFL in reducing gender stereotypes and the relative discrimination and gave introduction to two GFL strategies named neutralization and feminization. Similarly, some other researchers also paid attention to the GFL strategies and explored three approaches named paired forms, traditional neutral words and actively created gender-neutral third-person pronouns to reduce the male bias in language (Lindqvist et al., 2019). Besides, the gender differences in the attainment of education influence the degree of speaking gendered language (Davis & Reynolds, 2018).

As for the existing studies of stance marker, as introduced before, most of the previous studies of stance center on affect, quantifiers and evidentials with few of them taking the classification of Hyland as framework. Additionally, those papers focus on subjects such as age, register, English learners at different levels and so on. In other words, there are not many academic papers that

explore the similarities and differences in the use of stance markers by men and women. After the literature search, Bilaniuk (2003) discussed the significance of gender on the establishment of stance and attitudes. In 2008, Precht, based on a corpus of informal conversation in various contexts such as society and workplace, figured out the gender similarities and differences in terms of stance makers including affect, evidentials and quantifiers. Chinese scholars have also made contributions to the discussion of gender differences of the use of stance markers in daily conversations, based on the framework proposed by Hyland (Zhang & Xia, 2005).

In conclusion, few studies have discussed both the gender similarities and differences in the use of stance makers in formal oral English such as speeches within the framework of Hyland. In this case, this article, taking Hyland's classification of stance makers as the major framework and complementing it with subdivisions by other scholars, explores the gender similarities and differences in the context of formal oral English such as TED speeches.

3. The Analytical Framework Rooting in Hyland's Stance Markers

Stance markers refer to the vocabulary or the combination of words that help to express the language users' attitude and stance (Zhang & Xia, 2015) and there are different types of stance markers proposed and applied by different scholars. In this article, the classification of stance markers by Hyland is adopted as the main framework of analysis, in which some types of stance markers are further divided by other scholars including Biber, Leech, He Ziran and Wu Qige to form a more detailed analytical framework, which is illustrated in Table 1.

In 2005, based on the changes of writing styles of academic papers from "objective, faceless and impersonal" to the "endeavour involving interaction between writers and readers" (Hyland, 2005, p.173), Hyland proposed a comprehensive framework for the analysis of language to explore the hidden attitude of writers. As Table 1 indicates, such a framework contains four aspects, namely, hedges, boosters, attitude markers and self-mention. Hedges refers to the stance markers such as *probably, maybe, might* and so on that writers use to avoid complete commitment to their statements, which make the information much more like opinions instead of facts (Hyland, 2005). In terms of hedges, He (1985) once proposed much more detailed classification, that is, approximators and shields. Approximaors are devices such as possible, probably, kind of and so on that belong to the scope of semantics and make revision to the true degree of the topic under discussion according to the reality. While shields, for example, *I think, might, maybe* and so on, belong to the scope of pragmatics, are utilized to clarify the writers' personal opinions on the statements.

Contrarily, boosters are words like *clearly, obviously and demonstrate*, which allow writers to convey their conviction in what they say as well as their commitment to the subject and audience unity (Hyland, 2005). Similarly, boosters have further classifications. Chinese scholar Wu Geqi (2010) divides it into fact-asserting stance markers and certainty-indicating stance makers. The former one, as Wu introduces, accentuates that the statements are facts, while the latter one centers on the writers' agreements on certain opinions. For instance, *fact, evidence* and *show* belong to fact-

asserting stance markers and words such as *obviously, certainly* and *absolutely* are certainty-indicating stance markers.

As for the attitude markers, the use of them, which express importance, surprise, agreement, annoyance and other emotions other than commitment, reveals the writer's affective rather than epistemological attitude toward claims (Hyland, 2005). For the attitude markers, Biber and Leech (1999) divide it into markers indicating judgment and attitude as well as those conveying feelings and emotions. Self-mention concerns the presentation of interpersonal, propositional and emotional information by the usage of first person pronouns such as *I, me, we, us* and possessive adjectives including *my* and *our* (Hyland, 2001).

In summary, the analysis for this paper is based on Hyland's classification of stance makers and the subdivision of the first three stance markers by other four scholars including Biber, Leech, He Ziran and Wu Geqi. In this case, a relatively comprehensive and detailed framework with both primary and secondary classification generates.

4. Methods

4.1 Research Data and the Collection

In this article, twenty TED speeches with 38,143 words in total discovered on its official website are selected as the research data. The twenty speeches cover ten female and ten male lecturers of different occupations, age, race and so on. Within the twenty speeches, those delivered by female lecturers have 18,337 words while the number of words in male speeches is 19,806 and all the twenty speeches center on the topic of personal growth, in which the lecturers narrate stories, answer confusion and provide life advice.

The collection of data follows strict standards and steps. Firstly, the videos of TED speeches are classified according to their topics, and the twenty speeches for this article are all selected from the topic of personal growth. Then, all the videos about this topic are reordered from the most viewed to the least under the requirement that the chosen speeches should be popular and influential. The third step concerns the time and topic limit. In terms of time limit, only speeches delivered from January 2016 to January 2021 are considered and during the process of selection, the amount of video in each year should be balanced. Besides, the selected video should last between twelve and fifteen minutes to make sure they have similar words. In terms of topic limit, even though all videos are related to personal growth, the specific content is variable. In this case, only speeches answering life confusion and offering life advice are considered. Therefore, based on the three steps above, videos about personal growth are checked one by one under the requirement of time and topic from the most viewed until twenty videos are collected.

4.2 Data Analysis

Based on the collected data, this study is conducted in three steps. Firstly, mark out all stance markers in the twenty speeches according to the classification mentioned above. In this step, the

transcription of each speech is read closely, and each stance maker is highlighted and labelled by the secondary classification. Secondly, conduct analysis on the data. This step involves the statistics, analysis and comparison of the data in terms of both primary and secondary classification. To be more specific, this article will firstly study the similarities and differences of the use of four primary stance markers between the male and female lecturers from the perspective of the number of types, total number, frequency of use and lexical realizations. And then, the secondary classification of stance markers will be analyzed one by one and the same way. Lastly, based on the results of analysis, the features of male and female's use of stance markers will be summarized and reasons why they present such features will be explored at the same time.

5. Analysis of the twenty TED speeches

5.1 The Lexical Realizations and the Number of Stance Markers in the Twenty Speeches

Based on the analytical framework introduced above, there are four kinds of primary stance markers and seven secondary stance markers. Those stance markers have different lexical realizations in between male and female's speeches, and all those stance markers which have occurred in those speeches are illustrated in Table 2.

According to Table 2, it is obvious that the proportion of the four primary stance markers and the seven secondary stance markers is quite imbalanced. The specific number of the seven stance markers are illustrated in Table 3, in which it can be found that the attitude markers occupy the largest proportion with 90 words, with the two subtypes sharing a similar number. The types of hedges and boosters are quite similar, with hedges having 43 words and boosters 41 words. What's more, the subtypes of both stance markers are imbalanced? For instance, in hedges, the number of approximators is about twice that of shields. And in boosters, the situation of imbalance is worse, with only 7 lexical realizations of the fact-asserting stance markers but 34 ones of the certainty-indicating stance markers. In addition to the three types of stance makers, the last one, self-mention, only has 8 types of realizations including the singular and plural first person pronouns and their reflexive pronouns as well as possessive adjectives. This table demonstrates that the members of attitude markers are the most abundant, while that of hedges and boosters are relatively rich and the self-mention has the least lexical realizations.

5.2 The Similarities and Differences between the Use of Stance Markers

Table 3 offers an introduction to the use of stance markers in the twenty speeches from a general perspective, while the similarities and differences between male and female language require further and more detailed comparison. Table 4 and Table 5 summarize the lexical realizations, the number of types of stance markers in secondary as well as the sum of each stance markers. Based on the statistics in Table 4 and Table 5, the number of type of stance marker in the primary class, the sum of stance markers in primary as well as the average frequency of each type can be put into a same table for comparison (as shown in Table 6). Among the three indicators, the

first two can be found directly in Table 4 and 5, while for the density, the formula that the frequency of use of stance markers equals to the sum of all words of the ten speeches delivered by the male or female lecturers divided by the total number of the stance marker in the primary or secondary class is adopted.

According to Table 6, it can be found that in terms of the type of stance markers in the primary class used among the twenty speeches, only that of hedges presents a certain kind of difference with males having 32 types while females having 39 types. As for the rest three stance markers in the primary class, no significant differences are indicated and the types of attitude markers between male and female is even the same. Then, from the perspective of the sum of each type of stance marker in the primary class, all the gaps between the number of stance markers used by male and females are not huge, with the largest gap being 38 in the stance marker of self-mention and the smallest being only 2 in the stance of hedges. As for the frequency of use of stance markers, which indicates the density of each type of stance marker. For instance, when the frequency of use of hedges is 88.027, it refers to that there is a hedge for every 88.027. In this case, there is a relation that the higher the number of the frequency of use, the lower the density is. In Table 6, it is self-evident that no matter what kind of stance marker, the frequency of use of stance marker in male speeches is always higher than that of female's speeches. In other words, female lecturers apply stance markers more frequently than the male ones.

After comparing the use of stance markers in the primary class, Table 7 provides the information on stance markers in the secondary class in the same way as Table 6 does. Foremost, the number of types of stance markers in the secondary class used by males and females is quite similar, apart from the stance markers including attitude and feeling. In terms of the sum of stance markers applied in the speeches, female lecturers utilize more stance markers in their speeches compared with the male lecturers, but the gap is not that big. As for the frequency of use of stance markers in the secondary class, firstly, the gap between the male and female lecturers is widened. And then, different from about stance markers in the primary class that female lecturers always use stance markers more frequently than male lecturers, there is an exception to stance markers in the secondary class, which refers to the use of fact-asserting stance markers by female lecturers is less frequently that of male ones.

Based on the simple interpretations of the two tables above, it can be found that the gender similarities and differences in the use of stance markers are embodied in both primary and secondary classes. Additionally, the gender similarities and differences of the specific lexical realizations of the stance markers are not analyzed yet so that more detailed discussion on the stance markers is of necessity.

1) Similarities and differences in terms of hedges

According to Table 4 and Table 5, the most frequently used ten hedges by males are, *I think, might, even, just, could, almost, probably, sometimes, would (not)* and *may*. As for the ten hedges used by

female lecturers, they consist of *maybe, just, might, sometimes, even, could, most likely, could, would, most of* and the structure*, I think.* Obviously, both the male and female lecturers prefer using shields, but the specific lexical realizations as well as their frequency are not the same (as shown in Table 8).

In terms of the similarities, it involves two aspects. Firstly, both male and female lecturers tend to utilize shields. In the ten most frequently used hedges of the male lecturers, six out of them are shields, so do the females. The second aspect concerns the lexical realizations of the stance makers. According to the table above, it is not difficult to find that the rate of overlap of the specific stance markers is rather high.

While in terms of the differences in the use of hedges, it is not huge between the male and female lecturers. To be more specific, from the perspective of approximators, it can be found that the male lecturers apply *almost* frequently while the female lecturers choose *most of.* Search the word *almost* with the help of AntConc in the ten speeches delivered by the male lecturers, and it can be found that this word usually appears with nouns or verbs to show the speakers' estimate of the degree. However, though the female lecturers apply the phrase *most of* more frequently than the males, it works similarly and for the same purpose.

For example:

Example 1

*What adult spends **almost** a year getting over a one-year relationship?(Male)*

Example 2

*He **almost** lost his job as a result. (Male)*

Example 3

*As you'd expect, **most of** our content is pretty serious?(Female)*

While in terms of the use of shields, there are also no obvious differences. As Table 8 indicates, among the six shields utilized by male and female lecturers, five out of them are the same. As for the only one exception, the table shows that male lecturers prefer using the stance marker *may,* while female lecturers prefer*, maybe.* However, though the two words are two stance markers, they share similar functions to indicate the speakers' uncertainty towards something so that proper spaces are saved for their statements.

For example:

Example 4

*It **may** be delayed, it **may** be inaccurate, and work next year **may** not look like work next year. (Male)*

Example 5

*And **maybe** a toothbrush helmet isn't the answer. (Female)*

In summary, combining the type, sum and frequency of use of hedges, the female lecturers

always apply hedges more frequently and various than the male lecturers. Nonetheless, the use of hedges in terms of the specific lexical realizations does not present huge differences but share great similarities. Both male and female lecturers prefer using shields, and they usually use literally the same stance markers.

2) Similarities and differences in terms of boosters

Observing from Table 9, the male lecturers prefer using *really, all, never, will (not), always, can (not), be going to, pretty, must, turn out* and *in fact.* There are eleven most frequently used stance markers, since the last four ones share the same frequency. Among the eleven stance markers, only two out of them are fact-asserting stance markers, and they take the proportion of about 18.18%. As for female lecturers, they often use stance markers including *really, all, never, in fact, will (not), always, can (not), sure, so* and *should.* Among the ten most frequently used boosters, there is only one fact-asserting stance marker, and it takes the percentage of 10%. Therefore, both male and female lecturers prefer using the certainty-indicating stance markers.

Different from hedges, the differences between male and female's use of the boosters are relatively obvious. Firstly, generally speaking, female speakers are more likely than male speakers to use boosters. Secondly, the male lecturers are more likely to use fact-asserting stance markers than the female ones, which indicates that the males are prone to use certain statements in their speeches. Thirdly, in terms of the use of certainty-indicating stance makers, the majority of them used by male and female lecturers are the same. As for the different ones, according to Table 9, the male lecturers use *be going to, pretty* and *must* while the females use *sure, so* and *should.* On the whole, the males are prone to use adverbs such as *really, never* and *all* as booster stance markers while the types of stance markers used by females are much more various, such as adverbs *really*, verbs *should, can, be going to*, adjective *sure* and so on.

In conclusion, generally speaking, female lecturers are more likely to use boosters in their speeches and the types are more varied. But to be more specific, the males utilize more fact-asserting stance markers and the females use more certainty-indicating stance markers. The difference lies in the lexical realizations of the stance markers that the male speakers usually apply adverbs to express their stance, while the word class of stance markers used by female speakers are more various, including adverbs, verbs, modal verbs, adjectives and so on. Apart from the differences, the male and female lecturers are similar in the aspect that they all use certainty-indicating stance markers more frequently than fact-asserting stance markers, and the reason may lie in that there are very few words that can be taken as fact-asserting stance markers.

3) Similarities and differences in terms of attitude markers

According to Table 10, due to the overlap of three attitude stance markers, namely, *beautiful, completely* and *need to*, there are twelve most frequently used markers of male speakers, and they are *actually, want to, (not) have to, great, simply, would like to, better, excited, love, beautiful, completely* and

need to. However, the most frequently used attitude markers of females have ten words, which are *actually, want to, important, (not) have to, completely, want to, true, need to, perfect* and *amazing*. It is obvious that both male and female speakers are prone to use more attitude stance markers instead of the stance markers indicating feeling. At the same time, those stance markers centre on adverbs and adjectives to express their judgments and emotions.

However, the specific lexical realizations of attitude markers vary hugely from males to females. Firstly, for attitude stance markers, Table 10 demonstrates that there are only four attitude stance markers including *actually, completely, (not) have to* and *need to be* used by both male and female lecturers with the rest four attitude stance markers are not frequently or even never used by lecturers of another gender. For instance, *great, simply, better* and *beautiful* are used frequently by male speakers, but they are not common attitude stance markers used by females, especially *great* and *simply*, which are not used by females at all. Similarly, there are another four attitude stance markers, namely, *important, perfect, amazing* and *true*, which are listed as the most frequently used stance markers of female lecturers but infrequently applied in males' speeches. Comparing the attitude stance markers used by both genders, the stance markers used by females seem to express a stronger sense of judgment towards events and things.

Then, as for the stance markers conveying the speakers' feelings, the number and proportion of them in the most frequently used stance markers of males is higher than that of females. According to the table, we can know that the most commonly used stance markers expressing emotions by males are *wants to, would like to, excited* and *love*, while the female speakers only use verbs containing *want to* and *want*, which play similar roles. Stance markers such as *want to, want* and *would like* to convey a sense of desire and purpose, while words like *excited* and *love* purely present a sense of positive emotion.

For instance:

Example 6

*Second, we must **want to** improve at that particular skill. (Male)*

Example 7

*I'm super **excited** about that. (Male)*

Example 8

*I **want to** give two strategies for thinking about this. (Female)*

In a word, judging from the perspective of primary class, attitude markers are the least frequently used stance markers among the four types in both male and female lecturers. In terms of secondary class, the use of attitude stance markers is much more common than that of stance markers conveying feelings in both genders. And as for differences, firstly, females use both attitude stance markers and feeling stance marker more frequently and various than males. And secondly, in terms of the most frequently used markers, those used by female lecturers present a

more strong sense of both personal judgement and feelings of desire and purpose.

4) Similarities and differences in terms of self-mention

Foremost, from the perspective of similarities, to begin with, the order of the frequency of use of those self-mention stance markers is quite similar between the male and female lecturers except for the use of *ourselves* and *myself* as Table 11 demonstrates. Additionally, the internal differences in the frequency of self-mention stance markers are large in both genders. For example, the frequency of the first-person singular pronoun *I* in males' speeches is 429, while the frequency of *ourselves* is only 3. Similarly, *I* is used 390 times in female lecturers' speeches but the least frequently used self-mention stance marker *myself* is only used 9 times. The reasons may lie in that all the speeches are related to the topic "personal growth" so that the pronoun I is used much more frequently. Besides, the pronoun *I* is more common than words such as *myself, ourselves* and so on in spoken English.

Then, in terms of the differences, based on Table 11, it can be found that female lecturers employ most of the self-mention stance markers more frequently than male lecturers. However, within the eight stance markers, two out of them are employed more frequently by males, and they are first-person singular pronoun *I* and plural pronoun *us*. Such a distribution of *I* illustrate that males are more likely to express their own opinions and feelings and set authority for their statements. For instance, in Example 9, the speaker expresses his emotion directly and in Example 10, the speaker indicates his ability in doing the task named fear-setting.

Example 9
I am very lonely. (Male)
Example 10
And I can trace all of my biggest wins and all of my biggest disasters averted back to doing fear-setting at least once a quarter. (Male)

As for the use of other self-mention stance markers, it is apparent that the employment of first-person plural pronoun we differ hugely from the males to the females. The female lecturers prefer using the word *we* to establish solidarity between the speaker herself and the audiences so that the emotional resonance can be created. For instance, in Example 11, the speaker aligns the audience and herself so that the distance between them is shortened, and the emotional resonance is strengthened.

Example 11
*You see, **we** all come to this world in a body. (female)*

5.3 The Features of the Use of Stance Markers by both Genders

According to the analysis above, the use of stance markers by both genders presents several personal features. For female lecturers, the stance markers used by them are characterized by a large variety of types, huge numbers and high frequency. At the same time, in terms of the four types of stance markers in primary class, all of them are more commonly employed by female lecturers. Besides, in terms of those in the secondary class, apart from the fact-asserting stance markers, the rest are more frequently used by females, especially the frequent use of self-mention stance marker *we*, which implies that the female speakers are more gentle in tone, and they are more willing to shorten the distance with the audience to establish solidarity.

Compared with the female lecturers, the use of stance markers by male lecturers, no matter the type variety, the usage quantity and frequency, are less various and frequent than the female lecturers. However, in some more detailed aspects, such as the fact-asserting stance markers in the secondary class and the first-person singular pronoun *I*, the frequency of use of them by males is relatively higher, which demonstrates that men are more likely to assert their authority in the speeches and their tone are endowed with more certainty.

6. Discussion

6.1 The Differences and Similarities with Previous Studies

According to the analysis, it is obvious that the male and female lecturers share more similarities in the use of stance markers and the differences are not quite distinctive. For instance, in the use of hedges and attitude markers, both genders have similar number of types and frequency, some small differences can be found only through rather detailed comparison and analysis. While in a previous study based on the same analytical framework, the researchers found apparent differences. For instance, in daily oral English, when using hedges, the males prefer shields while the females are more likely to use approximators. Besides, in the employment of attitude markers, the males use more expletives so that their tone is tough and rude, but the tone of females is gentle (Zhang & Xia, 2015).

Apart from the difference from the previous studies, there are some functions of stance markers are commonly summarized, which are confirmed in this article as well. One of the examples is the functions of self-mention stance marker. Thuube and Ekanjume-Ilongo (2017) once discussed the role of some personal pronouns in a public speech delivered by a principal. In the article, they summarized the functions of pronouns such as *I, we, you* and so on and the results are confirmed in this article as well.

6.2 The Reasons for the Similarities and Differences between both Genders

The differences and similarities found in this study involve various reasons and factors. For the reasons of differences between the male and female speakers, they centre on factors including speech topics, jobs, inner purposes of the speakers to construct themselves and so on. To be more

specific, firstly, the specific theme and content of the speeches delivered by male and female lecturers have differences so that the number and types of stance makers may vary. Though the twenty speeches are all under the topic "personal growth", the majority of speeches given by males are related to themes such as mindset to failure, grief, loss and so on, the importance of goals and the skills for improvements. Only one of ten concerns the theme of emotion control. While browsing the titles of females' speeches, it can be discovered that most of them involve themes including personal charisma such as bravery and confidence, skills to self cultivation and ways to treat emotions. Besides, the speeches by females are characterized with the features that they are rather detailed and specific. The difference between the specific themes determines that the females are more likely to express personal opinions and attitudes, while the rate for males is relatively low. Secondly, the job of male and female lecturers presents different patterns, which are summarized in Table 12.

As Table 12 indicates, the occupations of female lecturers are relatively concentrated on humanity. On the contrary, the male lecturers come from various fields, from science to economy to humanity. Such a difference exerts influence that the language by males can be much more objective and full of authority, facts and confidence, while the concentration of females' occupations makes their speaking style and manner more approachable. The last reason concerns the inner goal of the male and female speakers to construct what kind of image on the stage. Combining with the themes introduced above, male speakers are more likely to construct personal images of maturity, confidence and persuasiveness. But the female lecturers tend to build a gentle and intellectual, approachable image.

As the analysis above indicates, there are not only differences but similarities in the use of stance makers by both genders. No matter whether male or female lecturers show high-frequency use of the stance markers, and the gap between them is not that huge. In other words, the difference in type, number and frequency are relatively small instead of being distinctive. The reasons for such results may lie in the following three ways. Firstly, the particular topic of the selected speeches results in that both genders use stance marker frequently in a large number. As mentioned before, all the twenty speeches are selected from the same section named "personal growth" so that the main purposes for the lecturers are to express their attitudes and emotions as well as to persuade the audience instead of stating facts as academic papers do. In this way, it is unavoidable that the speakers use a large amount of stance makers in their speeches. Secondly, the nature of some stance markers make it inevitable that certain stance markers are used in a high frequency while some are used in a rather low number by both genders. For instance, the number of words that can serve to be the fact-asserting stance markers is limited, which only contain vocabulary such as proof, fact, evidence, turn out and so on. Similarly, self-mention stance markers such as *I, we, my* and so on are quite common and inescapable in spoken English. Therefore, it is not surprising that the number of fact-asserting stance makers takes the least proposition while some self-mention words are extremely frequently used, which results in the similar distribution of stance marker resources in

speeches delivered by both genders. The last reason for the similarities between male and female lecturers lies in the special context for the delivery of speeches. A previous study based on the oral English corpus of the British National Corpus found that, in terms of attitude stance markers, males prefer speaking expletives such as shit, damn, fuck and so on while those words are rarely seen in females' speaking (Zhang & Xia, 2015). This finding, however, is not discovered in this study. In this article, in addition to the number of types and the frequency of use, there are no quite obvious differences, especially those on the features of speaking, can be found since all data are rather normal speeches given on an international and open stage, which requires the speakers to arrange their diction normally and politely first. In this case, no stance markers such as expletives can be found and the differences are weakened with no doubt.

7. Conclusion

This article, taking the classification of stance markers proposed by Hyland as the main framework and complementing it with the further division come up with by Biber, Leech, He Zhiran and Wu Geqi, explores the gender similarities and differences in the use of stance markers based on the comparative analysis of twenty TED speeches delivered by ten male and ten female lecturers, respectively. After the analysis, this study finds that in terms of the four primary stance markers, generally speaking, the similarities between the use of stance makers by male and female lecturers are greater than differences. No matter in the number of types of stance markers, the total number of them or the frequency of use, female speakers employ stance markers more frequently than male ones.

Then, in terms of the eight secondary stance markers, firstly, there are no distinctive differences in the use of hedges between male and female lecturers. In other words, the male and female lecturers share great similarities in the use of hedges. Secondly, from the perspective of the boosters, the male lecturers use fact-asserting stance makers more frequently and various than the female lecturers. On the contrary, female speakers prefer using certainty-indicating stance markers. Besides, adverbs are commonly used by male lecturers as boosters, while the lexical realizations of boosters used by females are more diverse. The third finding is that, in addition to that the attitude stance markers are more diverse in males' speeches and the type of feeling stance markers are more abundant in females' speeches, the females employ stance markers more frequently on the whole. In addition, the lexical realizations of the most frequently applied attitude markers present relatively huge differences, which demonstrate that female speakers tend to make a more strong sense of judgement. Lastly, in terms of the self-mention, the male lecturers employ stance marker *I* and *us* in a higher frequency, with the rest, especially the marker *we*, being more commonly employed. Such a difference illustrates that the male speakers are more likely to establish a personal image of authority and confidence, but the female lecturers, conversely, prefer shortening the distance and building solidarity between them and the audience.

During the process of analysis, various limitations exist in this study. Firstly, the research data for this research is not abundant enough. As introduced before, twenty TED speeches from ten male lecturers and female lecturers are selected from the research data and the total number of them are 19, 806 and 18, 337, respectively. Even though the total number is not small, they only occupy a small part of all speeches under the same topic. In this case, the results of the study may be only suitable for the twenty speeches or speeches on the same topic. Secondly, as stated in the discussion part, all the research data of this article are selected from the section named "personal growth" on the official website of TED. Therefore, it is inevitable that all the lecturers will employ various vocabulary to express their opinions, attitudes and emotions, so that the statistics of the stance markers used by male and female lecturers might have a high rate of overlap. The last limitation concerns the lack of instruments in the process of analysis. In the analysis above, the most frequently used stance markers are chosen as equal to the first ten most frequently employed words. However, the number "ten" lacks research support so that such a standard is relatively subjective.

This article starts from the topic of gender, explores the similarities and differences in the use of stance markers by English native speakers. According to this study, a relatively comprehensive description of the features in the use of stance markers by both genders is provided so that the readers, especially the English learners, can have a better understanding of the spoken English and pay more attention to the use of stance markers. In further studies, more factors including context, age, job, region and so on should be considered to explore the gender similarities and differences in language use in much comprehensive way.

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Table 1 The classification of stance markers

Stance Markers	Hedges	Approximators
		Shields
	Boosters	Fact-asserting markers
		Certainty-indicating markers
	Attitude markers	Attitude
		Feeling
	Self-mention	

Table 2 Stance markers in the twenty speeches

Stance Markers	Hedges	Approximators	likely; usually; a little; often; just; sometimes; generally; only; some; bits of; most of; most; often; many; many of; kind of; much; almost; nearly; tend to; probably; sort of; at least; to some extent; mostly; possible; close to; some;
		Shields	......says; ......calls; ......finds; I think... ; we....think; would ; would like; maybe; could; even ; might ; seem; may; perhaps; such a
	Boosters	Fact-asserting	turn out; show; in fact; truth; evidence; real; prove;
		Certainty -indicting	really; be (not) going to; truly; will (not); (not) at all; can (not); never; always; all; totally; so; ever; of course; pretty; certainly; anyway; whole; real; exactly; must; be able to; should ; be supposed to; definitely; obviously; indeed; promise; absolutely; perfectly; definitely; a lot of; utterly; sure; entirely;
	Attitude Markers	Attitude	great; incredible; good; better;best;wonderful; radical; (not) have to; actually; wrong; hard; interesting; unfortunately; way too; well; bad; beautiful; new; powerful; better; crazy; different; important; importance; particular; right; perfect; imperfect; need to; need; unnecessarily; lovely; simply; incredibly; significantly; especially; true; completely; amazing;essentially;worst;difficult;seriously; rather; extremely; true; complicated; easy; successful; helpfully;

| | | Feeling | want; want to; swear; humiliating; worry; fear; love; comfortable; be interested in; intrigued; believe; fulfilled; anxious; hopeless; depressed; alone; hurt; unmoored; painful; excited; determined; lucky; hopeful; thankfully; upset; seriously; surprised; proud; hope; cheer; grateful; favourite;would like to; miserably; happy; regret; like; afraid; lonely; curious |
| | | Self-mention | I; me; my; myself; we; us; our; ourselves |

Table 3 The number of stance markers

Primary stance markers	Number	Secondary stance markers	Number	sum	Proportion
Hedges	43	Approximators	28		23.63%
		Shields	15		
Boosters	41	Fact-asserting	7	182	22.53%
		Certainty-indicating	34		
Attitude markers	90	Attitude	50		49.45%
		Feeling	40		
Self-mention	8				4.40%

Table 4 Stance markers in male speeches

Stance markers		Lexical realization	Type	Sum
Hedges	Approximators	just14;almost12;probably12;sometimes 12 ;many8; most 6; often 6; at least5; much5;likely4; a little 4;many of4; kind of 4; most of2;some2; possible;close to; only; usually; sort of ;	20	105
	Shields	I think..... 24 ;might 18; even 14; could 13; would (not) 12 ; may 11; seem 9; maybe 8;.....finds 3 ;perhaps; Such a; .... says;	12	115
Boosters	Fact-asserting	turn out 7in fact, 7;show 5;evidence; real; truth; prove;	7	23
	Certainty-indicating	really 39 ; all 34 ;never 13 ; wil1(not) 11; always11; can (not) 10; be going to 10; pretty 7;must 7;(not) at all 5; so4;truly 4; should4 ; sure 4;promise3; certainly 3; a lot of2; absolute2; exactly2;whole 2;of	26	183

		course; be supposed to; totally; utterly; be able to; entirely;		
Attitude Markers	Attitude	actually 16 ; (not) have to 10; great6;simply6;better5;beautiful4; completely4;needto4;perfect3;important3; good3;radical3;crazy3;significantly3;especially 3; hard2; new 2; powerful2; different2; true2; incredible; wonderful; wrong; interesting; unfortunately; way too; well; bad; particular; right; best; especially; need; unnecessarily; lovely; incredibly; difficult;amazing; essentially;	39	105
	Feeling	want to 13; would like to 6;excited 5;love5; hope3; want 3; grateful 2; believe2;cheer; favorite; worry; miserably; happy; regret; like; be interested in; worried; afraid; lonely; curious;	20	51
Self-mention		I 429; me 73; my 136; myself 8; we 198; us 40; our 118; ourselves 3	8	1005

Table 5 Stance markers in female speeches

Stance markers		Lexical realization	Type	Sum
Hedges	Approximators	just 17; sometimes 14; probably 10 ; most of 9; kind of 6; some6; likely4; many4;many of4; sort of4; tend to4;most4;a little3;often3; almost2; nearly3; at least 2; mostly2;usually;often; generally; only; bits of; ; much; to some extent;	25	108
	Shields	maybe 27; might 16; even 13 ;could 12; would 10; I think….8; may7; perhaps 6;seem5; ……says4; ……finds4;; ……calls; we….think; would like	14	115
Boosters	Fact-asserting	in fact8; show5;turn out4; evidence2; truth2;	5	21
	Certainty-indicating	Really 40;all 36; will (not) 20; can(not)11;never9;always9;sure8;	30	208

		(not) going to8;pretty5; should 6; so6;ofcourse5;absolutely5;exactly4;truly3 ;obviously3;very3;certainly3; perfectly3anyway3;whole3;real2; totally2;indeed2;definitely2 promise2;be able to2; :at all; must; be supposed to;		
Attitude Markers	Attitude	actually 28 ;important12; (not) have to9;completely7;true6; need to5;perfect4;amazing4;worst3; better3;beautiful3;especially3;right3;diffi cult2;hard2; good2; easy2; imperfect2; extremely2;rather; importance;seriously;incredible; helpfully; complicated; essential; powerful;successful;great; crazy;	30	113
	Feeling	want to10;want6; love3; swear3; believe3;be interest in3;worry about2; pround2; hurt2; depressed2; painful2;hopeless; humiliating;fear; comfortable; intrigued; fulfilled; anxious; lucky; alone; unmoored; determined; surprised; hopeful; hope; thankfully; upset; seriously; excited;	29	56
Self-mention		I 390; me 73; my 150; myself 9;we 246; us 55; our 109; ourselves 11	8	1043

Table 6 The similarities and differences in the use of stance markers between male and female in the primary class

	Number of type		Sum		Frequency of use	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Hedges	32	39	225	223	88.027	82.229
Boosters	33	35	206	229	96.146	80.074
Attitude markers	59	59	156	169	126.961	108.502
Self-mention	8	8	1005	1043	19.707	17.581

Table 7 The similarities and differences in the use of stance markers between male and female in the secondary class

	Number of type		Sum		Frequency of use	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Approximators	20	25	105	108	188.629	169.787
Shields	12	14	115	115	172.226	159.452
Fact-asserting	7	5	23	21	861.130	873.190
Certainty-indicating	26	30	183	208	108.230	88.159
Attitude	39	30	105	113	188.629	162.274
Feeling	20	29	51	56	388.353	327.446
Self-mention	8	8	1005	1043	19.707	17.581

Table 8 The most frequently used hedges by male and female lecturers

	Lexical realizations	Male	Female
Approximators	Just	14	17
	Almost	12	(2)
	Probably	12	10
	Sometimes	12	14
	Most of	(2)	9
Shields	**Maybe**	(8)	27
	Might	18	16
	Even	14	13
	Could	13	12
	Would (not)	12	10
	I think	24	8
	May	11	(7)

(The bold words refer to the stance markers only used by male or female)

Table 9 The most frequently used boosters by male and female lecturers

	Lexical realizations	Male	Female
Fact-asserting stance markers	**Turn out**	7	(4)
	In fact	7	8
	Really	39	40
	All	34	36
	Never	13	9
	Will (not)	11	20
	Always	11	9

Certainty-indicating stance markers	Can (not)	10	11
	Be going to	10	(8)
	Pretty	7	(5)
	Must	7	(1)
	Sure	(4)	8
	So	(4)	6
	Should	(4)	6

Table 10 The most frequently used attitude markers by male and female lecturers

	Lexical realizations	Male	Female
Attitude	Actually	16	28
	(not) have to	10	9
	Great	6	(0)
	Simply	6	(0)
	Better	5	(3)
	Beautiful	4	(3)
	Completely	4	7
	Need to	4	5
	Important	(3)	12
	Perfect	(3)	4
	Amazing	(1)	4
	True	(2)	6
Feeling	Want to	13	10
	Want	(3)	6
	Would like to	6	(0)
	Excited	5	(0)
	Love	5	(3)

Table 11 The most frequently used self-mention by male and female lecturers

	Lexical realizations	Male	Female
Self-mention	I	429	390
	We	198	246
	My	136	150
	Us	118	109
	Me	73	73
	Our	40	55
	Ourselves	3	11
	Myself	8	9

Table 12 The distribution of male and female lecturers' occupations

Gender	Occupation	Type
Female	Activist (3); author(3); journalist(2); inventor;robotics enthusiast; social psychologist(2);educator; writer; relationship revolutionary; accountant	10
Male	Entrepreneur; inventor; author(4); learning expert; psychologist; investor(2); human guinea pig; advocate; artist; engineer; writer; screen writer; wheelchair athlete; science and investigation reporter	14