

A Study on the Features of Female Language of Emma Watson's Speeches about Gender Equality from the Perspective of Feminist Stylistics

Fangyuan Wang¹, Yu Sun² and Tong Zhang³

^{1,2,3}Northwestern Polytechnical University

Corresponding Author

Fangyuan Wang

Northwestern Polytechnical University

710129, Northwestern Polytechnical University Chang'an Campus,

Xi'an city, Shaanxi Province, China

E-mail: 13201760150@163.com

Published: 17 July 2019

Copyright © Wang et al.

This work was sponsored by the Seed Foundation of Innovation and Creation for Graduate Students in Northwestern Polytechnical University under Grant ZZ2019284.

Cite this article: Wang, F., Sun, Y. & Zhang, T. (2019). A Study on the Features of Female Language of Emma Watson's Speeches about Gender Equality from the Perspective of Feminist Stylistics. *International Journal of Liberal Arts and Social Science*, 7(6), 1-12.

Abstract

With the development of society these years, the status of females is improving a lot. This paper makes a feminist stylistic study on Emma Watson's speeches about gender equality to find out the features of female language used in these speeches.

The paper takes three speeches of gender equality given by Emma Watson as research subjects and analyzes all kinds of words she uses to study the feelings and voice of females. It is found that in the three speeches, females are more active and dominant than males, which implies Emma Watson emphasizes on the voice of females and females are confident and active. In the level of discourse, it is found that the images constructed in the three speeches of Emma Watson are complete rather than fragmented, which shows the emphasis on gender equality and respect for females.

Key Words: Female language; Speeches about gender equality; Emma Watson; Feminist Stylistics

1. Introduction

With the development of society these years, the status of females is improving a lot. More and more females are voicing their requirements for gender equality. The most representative group is feminists. They present their opinions to the public on various ways. Among these ways, giving a public speech is regarded as an efficient way. Therefore, this paper makes a feminist stylistic study on the speeches about gender equality to find out the features of the female language in, and this paper chooses the speeches given by Emma Watson who is a well-known feminist. Meanwhile, she is an English actress, model, and activist. She appeared in all eight Harry Potter films from 2001 to 2011, earning worldwide fame and critical accolades. In 2014, she was appointed as a UN Women Goodwill ambassador and helped launch the UN Women campaign HeForShe, which calls for men to advocate gender equality.

2. Methodology

This paper studies three speeches of gender equality given by Emma Watson. The first one is given at UN Headquarters in New York City to launch the UN Women campaign HeForShe, which calls for men to advocate for gender equality in 2014. In 2016, under the U.N. Women campaign HeForShe that invites men and boys to fight for gender equality, U.N. Women released the first-ever HeForShe IMPACT 10x10x10 University Parity Report at the 71st U.N. General Assembly, and Emma Watson delivered the second speech advocating for equality at universities around the world. In 2016, Emma Watson delivered the third speech about gender equality at the One Young World Summit. All these three speeches are related to gender equality.

This paper tries to answer two questions. First, is there any feature of female language used in three speeches about gender equality delivered by Emma Watson? Second, What are the features of the female language used in the three speeches?

3. Analysis of Emma Watson's Speeches about Gender Equality from Three Levels

3.1 level of the word

In this part, the pronouns and male-oriented words in the three speeches of Emma Watson will be analyzed.

3.1.1 Pronouns

"The person system is indeed the roles projected by the addresser to himself or herself or other people"(Thompson, 2000: 50). The person system is a composite reference system, and mainly includes person pronouns, possessives and reflexives. A pronoun is a word that you use to refer to someone or something when you do not need to use a noun, often because the person or thing has been mentioned (John, 2006). In speeches, according to different contexts, the choice of pronouns made by the speaker has various meanings or implications related to identities, status, attitudes, motivations and the relationship between speaker and audience. Pronouns can refer to different target audience, so the person pronouns are regarded as an important element to study speaker's attitudes toward target audience. Furthermore, scholars also use the pronouns of the person system to explore how the gender roles are implied through analyzing the reference used by an addresser. Through analyzing pronouns in Emma Watson's speeches, this part tries to find out the target audience and the implied information related to gender roles of both men and women. Pronouns are divided into three categories: the first person pronoun, the second person pronoun and the third person pronoun.

3.1.1.1 The First Person Pronoun

In public speeches, the first person pronouns are always used to address the speaker or the speaker and the audience. In the three chosen speeches of Emma Watson about gender equality, the frequency of the usage of the first person pronouns is revealed in the chart below.

Table 1: The First Person Pronouns in Three Speeches

The First Person Pronouns	Speech 1		Speech 2		Speech 3	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
We	15	20%	7	23%	5	7%
I	35	46%	10	33%	42	59%
Us	0	0	3	10%	2	3%
Me	5	7%	0	0%	4	6%
Our	1	1%	2	7%	0	0%
My	17	22%	8	27%	14	20%
Ours	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Mine	0	0%	0	0%	1	1%
Ourselves	1	1%	0	0%	0	0%
Myself	2	3%	0	0%	3	4%
Total	76	100%	30	100%	71	100%

In the three charts above, it is obvious that the first pronoun “I” is most frequently used in the three speeches of Emma Watson. In Speech 1, the times of the usage of “I” accounts for 48%, 33% in Speech 2 and 63% in Speech 3. Generally, in speeches the speaker tends to use the first pronoun “we” or “our” more frequently to narrow the distance between the speaker and the audience. However, in these three speeches, Emma Watson uses “I” more frequently. From the context of these three speeches, it can be revealed that the frequent usage of “I” is related to Emma Watson’s emphasizing the independent status as a female and a feminist. There are specific examples as follows.

Example 1

I started questioning gender-based assumptions when at eight I was confused at being called “bossy,” because I wanted to direct the plays we would put on for our parents—but the boys were not(Speech 1).

In this sentence, Emma Watson describes her confusion about the discrimination against female she encountered. In this sentence, three “I” are used. Among these three “I”, two of them are used to express the emotional information of Emma Watson. The second “I” is used in “*I was confused*” to express her confusion about the fact that she was treated unequally because of gender bias. And the third “I” is used in “*I wanted to direct*” to express Emma Watson’s independent will and leadership when she was a child. These two “I” indicate that Emma Watson wants the audience to know about her opinion which is Emma Watson’s disagreement on the gender bias and her support for the leadership of female. Besides, the first “I” is used in “*I started questioning*” to indicate that Emma Watson wants the audience to know that she realized the gender inequality and began to think it about when she was even a little girl. The usage of these three “I” indicates that Emma Watson wants to declare her personal feelings and actions towards gender bias, which helps to emphasize her independent status and the voice of females.

Example 2

I feel gender equality is as important as any of the other goals that we are here to discuss(Speech 3).

In this sentence, there is only one “I” used. And this pronoun helps Emma Watson express her own opinion about the importance of gender equality. As we know, although gender bias is being focused by more and more people around the world, it is the fact that the importance of gender equality is still being underestimated as a result of traditional values about the status of female. In this situation, although it is in an international conference, Emma Watson is still courageous to express her opinion about the importance of gender equality. Therefore, the “I” in this sentence greatly indicates Emma Watson’s independent spirit and status as a feminist and supporter for gender equality.

Also, in the chart above, it can be found that the frequency of “My” is second only to “I”. “My” is used by the person who is speaking to show that something belongs to or is connected with himself or herself (John, 2006). This second frequency of “My” in the three speeches of Emma Watson also indicates her independent spirit as a female and feminist. There are some examples as follows.

Example

I think it is right that I should be able to make decisions about my own body. I think it is right that women be involved in the policies and decision-making of my life (Speech 1).

In this sentence, two “My” are used. The first one is used in “my own body”. This pronoun is used to stress Emma Watson’s opinion that the decisions about female body should be made by female rather than male. The second “My” is used in “my life”, which indicates Emma Watson stresses female should have the right to decide their own life.

Therefore, it can be concluded that for the first person pronouns, Emma Watson uses “I” and “my” more frequently, which indicates her independent spirit as a female and feminist and emphasis on the feelings and voice of females.

3.1.1.2 The Second Person Pronoun

In speeches, the second person pronouns always refer to the target groups who are targeted by the speaker. Therefore, through analyzing the different target groups to which the second pronouns refer, the attitudes of the speaker can be revealed. According to the content and context of these three speeches, there are three target groups: all the audience, antifeminist and male. In this part, three different target groups referred by second person pronouns in the three speeches of Emma Watson are calculated and the results are presented in the charts as follows.

Table 2: The Second Person Pronouns in Three Speeches

Target groups	Speech 1	Speech 2	Speech 3
	You, Your, Yourself and Yourselves	You, Your, Yourself and Yourselves	You, Your, Yourself and Yourselves
All the audience	7	4	5
Antifeminists	1	0	0
Male	2	0	0
Total Number	10	4	5

In this chart above, it can be found that in the three speeches of Emma Watson the second person pronouns referring to all the audience are used most frequently. This reveals that Emma Watson tends to use a cooperative way to deliver her speeches. Also, as all the audience include both male and female, this result indicates Emma Watson believes in gender equality and she hopes both male and female to fix the problem of gender inequality together. Here is an example:

Example

I am reaching out to you because I need your help. We want to end gender inequality—and to do that we need everyone to be involved(Speech 1).

In this sentence, from the word “everyone”, it can be implied that “you” and “your” refer to all the audience, which shows that Emma Watson wants both male and female to work together to end gender inequality. And this result indicates her pursuit for gender equality around the world. Meanwhile, in this chart above, it can be noticed that in Speech 1, there are second person pronouns referring to antifeminists and male. These two situations are analyzed in the examples as follows.

Example 1

And if you still hate the word—it is not the word that is important but the idea and the ambition behind it(Speech 1).

In this sentence, as “the word” refers to feminism, “you” refers to antifeminists. With this sentence, Emma Watson explains the essence of antifeminists’ hatred for the word feminism. What they hate is the idea and ambition behind the word rather than only the word. This shows Emma Watson, as a feminist, is also courageous to correct wrong values about gender equality.

Example 2

Men—I would like to take this opportunity to extend your formal invitation. Gender equality is your issue too(Speech 1).

In this sentence, from the word “men”, it can be implied that two “your” refer to male. With this sentence, Emma Watson wants male to be involved in the work of achieving gender equality, which shows her belief in gender equality. Therefore, it can be concluded that Emma Watson uses a cooperative way to appeal to both male and female to fix the problem of gender inequality together. Meanwhile, she use second pronouns to refer to antifeminists and male, which shows her courage to correct wrong values about genders.

3.1.1.3 The Third Person Pronoun

In this part, the frequency of the third person pronouns used in the three speeches of Emma Watson is calculated and analyzed. And the results are presented in the chart below.

Table 3: The Third Person Pronouns in Three Speeches

The Third Person Pronouns	Speech 1		Speech 2		Speech 3	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
She	2	6%	0	0%	0	0%
Her	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Hers	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
He	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Him	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
His	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
It	17	52%	4	27%	1	9%
Its	1	3%	0	0%	0	0%
They	6	18%	4	27%	5	46%
Them	1	3%	1	7%	3	27%
Their	4	12%	5	32%	2	18%
Theirs	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Himself	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Herself	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
Itself	0	0%	1	7%	0	0%
Themselves	2	6%	0	0%	0	0%
Total	33	100%	15	100%	11	100%

From the chart above, it can be found that “It” is used most frequently in Speech 1, “Their” in Speech 2 and “They” in Speech 3. In the Speech 1, the third person pronoun “It” is used most frequently, which indicates in this speech Emma Watson uses her language in an objective way to make her words more persuasive. There is an example as follows.

Example

Because the reality is that if we do nothing it will take 75 years, or for me to be nearly a hundred before women can expect to be paid the same as men for the same work. 15.5 million girls will be married in the next 16 years as children. And at current rates it won't be until 2086 before all rural African girls will be able to receive a secondary education(Speech 1).

In these three sentence, Emma Watson explains how the situation of gender inequality will be if measures are not taken. And two “It” are used. The first “It” is used in “*it will take 75 years*” and the second in “*it won't be until 2086 before*”. These two “It” is used to make the estimation of time of gender equality more objective. Therefore, the importance of fixing gender inequality will be more persuasive.

Meanwhile, in the Speech 2 and Speech 3, “Their” and “They” are used most frequently respectively. By using these two pronouns, Emma Watson can refer to more people to make her speech be accepted more easily. And this also shows she wants her speeches conducted in a more cooperative way. Here are two examples.

Example 1

These men from all over the world have decided to make gender equality a priority in their lives and in their universities(Speech 2).

In this example, two “Their” are used and refer to “These men”. With these two pronouns, this sentence implies that these men who have decided to make gender equality a priority set good examples for us, so we should follow them. As a result, it can easier for audience to accept this sentence.

Example 2

It's in that spirit that I am delighted to introduce nine activists who are the first recipients of a One Young World scholarship that I am very honored to have in my name. They are working to secure real progress towards a gender-equal world, and I hope that their stories inspire you as much as they have inspired me (Speech 3).

In this example, two “they” are used to refer to the first recipients of a One Young World scholarship. By addressing these people, Emma Watson wants audience be inspired by these people and so her words can be accepted more easily.

Therefore, it can be concluded that In Speech 1 Emma Watson uses “It” most frequently, which indicates in this speech Emma Watson uses her language in an objective way to make her words more persuasive, and in Speech 2 and 3 she uses “Their” and “They” most frequently respectively to make her speech be accepted more easily.

3.1.2 Male-oriented Words

“Generic words are often used in gender-specific way and constitute a male-as-norm view of society by trivializing, insulting or rendering women invisible” (Mills, 1995). When used in these ways,

those generic words are the male-oriented. Nowadays although gender inequality is being focused by more and more people, there are still some male-oriented words being used in our daily life. Many words are not loaded with gender bias in the dictionaries but in the society. For example, according to the Collins Dictionary, the definition of the word fighter is that if you describe someone as a fighter, you approve of them because they continue trying to achieve things in spite of great difficulties or opposition (John, 2006). However, in practice, the word is always used to refer to men. And these words also appear in the three speeches of Emma Watson. Therefore, in this part, the male-oriented words in the three chosen speeches will be analyzed and this part is to find out how and why these male-oriented words are used in the speeches of Emma Watson who is a feminist. The analysis of this part will be conducted with specific examples.

Example 1

*When at 14 I started being sexualized by certain elements of the press. When at 15 my girlfriends started dropping out of their sports teams because they didn't want to appear "**muscly**"(Speech 1).*

In this example, Emma Watson use one example to explain the fact that female tends to sexualized by others and even themselves. Emma Watson's girlfriends started giving up doing sports because it will make them look muscly. From this point, it seems it has been recognized by female that being muscly is bad for them. But why is it regarded as bad by female? There are two points. Firstly, in the traditional view, female is materialized, which means females are always regarded as inferior to males. Females should try to make themselves more beautiful to looks attractive to males. Secondly, the example stated by Emma Watson reveals females' view of the word "muscly". This word is used to describe a kind of appearance of body which belongs to both males and females. This word is not gender-biased but it is regarded by people as a word for males. In reality, some female athletes are muscly, but also look as good as those females who are not muscly. Therefore, this word is a male-oriented word. And in this example, Emma Watson uses it to describe an example of gender inequality.

Example 2

*I decided I was a feminist and this seemed uncomplicated to me. But my recent research has shown me that feminism has become an unpopular word. Apparently I am among the ranks of women whose expressions are seen as too **strong**, too **aggressive**, isolating, anti-men and, unattractive (Speech 1).*

In this example, there are two male-oriented words which are strong and aggressive. In this example, Emma Watson states she is seen as a member of those females who are too strong, too aggressive, isolating, anti-men and, unattractive, which implies an opinion that those females are not welcomed by males because males does not like strong and aggressive females. However, in dictionary, these two words are not gender-biased. It is gender inequality that makes these two words male-oriented. It is always thought that females should be gentle and follow males so they cannot be strong and aggressive. In this example, Emma Watson uses these two words to describe the unfairness which feminists suffer because of gender inequality.

Example 3

*But what if our experience in university shows us that women don't belong in **leadership**? What if it shows us that, yes, women can study, but they shouldn't **lead** a seminar(Speech 2)?*

In this example, the male-oriented words are leadership and lead. Emma Watson uses these two words to describe some phenomena of gender inequality which are related to leadership. Leadership is always regarded as a word belonging to males. But it is for certain that females can have leadership as what males do. For example, the prime minister of UK is an excellent female. And in the dictionaries, leadership and lead are not gender-biased. It is gender inequality that makes these two words male-oriented.

In the three speeches, Emma Watson uses these male-oriented words to state or describe some examples and phenomena of gender inequality, to show her attitude towards gender inequality.

3.2 Level of the Phrase or Sentence

As there is no metaphor used in the three speeches of Emma Watson, this part will focus on the analysis of transitivity choices.

According to Halliday, transitivity is "the set of options whereby the speaker encodes his experience of the process of the external world of his consciousness, together with the participants in these processes and their attendant circumstances; and it embodies a very basic distinction of process into two types, those that are required as due to an external cause, an agency other than the person or object involved, and those that are not" (Halliday, 1971). Therefore, it is the part of grammar that encodes the speaker or writer's view of reality in the form of different types of process which determine how the participants are represented and literally it is concerned with who acts and who is acted upon.

"The study of transitivity is concerned with how actions are represented: what kind of actions appear in a text, who does them and to whom they are done. When we make choices between different types of process and different participants, between the different roles participants might take, these decisions are shown syntactically through transitivity choices. This system of analyzing linguistic options in texts is primarily concerned with the roles of human participants" (Mills 1995). And Mills further states that "the extent to which a character is the passive "victim" of circumstance, or is actively in control of the environment, making decisions and taking action, is one of the concerns of feminist stylistics" (Mills, 1995). Therefore, this part will only focus on the human participants and this part divides the human participants into groups according to genders. And as in material process the actor refers to the participant who is in control of decisions and actions, the actors in the material processes in the three speeches of Emma Watson will be analyzed.

Meanwhile, Mills indicates "If a character is very active in a text, in control of their own decisions and actions, an analysis of text describing them might be expected to show a relatively high number of material process"(Mills 1995). Thus, the material processes in the three speeches of Emma Watson will be calculated and analyzed.

Table 4: The Material Processes in Three Speeches

	Speech 1		Speech 2		Speech 3	
	Number of material processes	Percentage	Number of material processes	Percentage	Number of material processes	Percentage
Female	9	53%	3	43%	9	53%
Male	2	12%	1	14%	0	0%
Female and Male	6	35%	3	43%	8	47%
Total	17	100%	7	100%	17	100%

From the chart above, it can be found that in Speech 1 and 3, the actors of most material processes are females. In Speech 2 the female actors and male and female actors share the same number of material processes. This indicates that in the three speeches, females are more active and dominant than males, which implies Emma Watson is confident and active when facing the problem of gender inequality and emphasis on the voice of females. While, it also can be found that in the three speeches, the number of the material processes of which the actors are males is the least. This indicates males are not active in the three speeches and shows Emma Watson's attitude that males should not be attached with more importance than females. There is an example as follows.

Example

Hilary Clinton made a famous speech in Beijing about women's rights. (Speech 1).

In this example, the actor is Hilary Clinton, the well-known female politician. And the goal is a famous speech about women's rights. In this context, female actor is in control of the goal which a famous speech, which shows the leading role of females. In the speech 1, Emma Watson takes this sentence as an example. There are many speeches about women's rights which were delivered by men and women. But Emma Watson chooses this speech which was delivered by a famous female politician, which also implies Emma Watson is confident about the position of females.

3.3 Level of the Discourse

In this part, the situation of the fragmentation of female images will be analyzed.

The technique of fragmenting the female body in pornographic literature has been widely noted. This has two primary effects. First, the body is depersonalized, objectified, reduced to its parts. Second, since the female protagonist is not represented as a unified conscious physical being, the scene cannot be focalized from her perspective effectively; her experience is written out of the text. Fragmentation of the female is therefore associated with male focalization—the female represented as an object, a collection of objects, for the male gaze (Mills, 1995). Therefore, in the description of women, their images are always cut into body parts. For example, in female cosmetic advertisements, sexy female body parts are usually presented such as lips, breasts or legs. Differently, in male cosmetic advertisements, only the cosmetics are showed. Even though a male image shows up, the image must be complete and he must be

doing some vigorous and energetic activities like sports. Thus, in this part, the female images constructed in the three speeches of Emma Watson will be analyzed. And in the three speeches, the parts showing the image of females are collected. There are two parts presenting the female images. And then these two parts will be analyzed separately.

Part 1

Apparently I am among the ranks of women whose expressions are seen as too strong, too aggressive, isolating, anti-men and, unattractive(Speech 1).

In the latter part of this sentence there are five adjectives to describe women. Although this description seems negative from the perspective of men, it objectively describes a complete image of women. It describes a group of women who are independent and challenge the authority of men. This description does not focus on the unconscious fragments of female body but a conscious women image with their own thoughts.

Part 2

I am from Britain and think it is right that as a woman I am paid the same as my male counterparts. I think it is right that I should be able to make decisions about my own body. I think it is right that women be involved on my behalf in the policies and decision-making of my life. I think it is right that socially I am afforded the same respect as men(Speech 1).

This part presents a women image that is equal to men and can make decisions about themselves, by talking about the payment and own rights of women. This image is also complete rather than fragmented. It doesn't focus on the body of women but presents a woman who supports gender equality and refused to be under the control of men or inferior to men.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the images constructed in the three speeches of Emma Watson are complete rather than fragmented, which shows the emphasis on the independency of females and gender equality.

4. Conclusion

After analysis on the three Emma Watson's speeches about gender equality, this paper finds that there are features of female language in the speeches. In the level of the word, for the first person pronouns, Emma Watson uses "I" and "my" more frequently, which indicates her independent spirit as a female and feminist and emphasis on the feelings and voice of females. For the second person pronouns, Emma Watson refers to all the audience most frequently which shows she uses a cooperative way to appeal to both male and female to fix the problem of gender inequality together. Meanwhile, she uses second pronouns to refer to antifeminists and male, which shows her courage to correct wrong values about genders. For the third person, in Speech 1 Emma Watson uses "It" most frequently, which indicates in this speech Emma Watson uses her language in an objective way to make her words more persuasive, and in Speech 2 and 3 she uses "Their" and "They" most frequently respectively to refer to more people in order to make her speeches be accepted more easily. For the male-oriented, Emma Watson uses these male-oriented words to show her disagreement on gender inequality.

In the level of phrase or sentence, transitivity choices are analyzed. It is found that in the three speeches, females are more active and dominant than males, which implies Emma Watson emphasizes on the voice of females and is confident and active when facing the problem of gender inequality.

In the level of discourse, it is found that the images constructed in the three speeches of Emma Watson are complete rather than fragmented, which shows the emphasis on gender equality and respect for females.

Bibliography

- [1] Cameron, D (1990). *The Feminist Critique of Language: A Reader*. London: Routledge.
- [2] Halliday, M. A. K. (1971). *Linguistic function and literary style: An inquiry into the language of William Golding's The Inheritors*. London: Continuum.
- [3] Leech, G. & Short, M. (2003). *Style in Fiction: A linguistic introduction to English fictional prose*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.
- [4] Mills, S. (1995). *Feminist Stylistics*. London and New York: Routledge.
- [5] Thompson, G. (2000). *Introducing Functional Grammar*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.
- [6] Thornborrow, J & Blair, Shan. (2000). *Patterns in Language: Stylistics for Students of Language Literature*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.
- [7] Weber, J.J. (1996). *The Stylistic Reader*. London: University Center Luxembourg.
- [8] John Sinclair. (2006). *Collins COBUILD Advanced Learner's English Dictionary, 5th edition*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.