HEDGES, BOOSTERS, AND TAG QUESTIONS
USED BY BANJARESE MEN AND WOMEN

Ninuk Krismanti
STKIP PGRI Banjarmasin
Email: ninukkrismanti@gmail.com

Abstract
The main focus of this study is to investigate how Banjarese men and women use hedges, boosters, and tag questions in their conversations. By analyzing how language features used by different genders in Banjarmasin, it is hoped that gender-based social segmentation in the given society can be revealed. The data of this study are taken from three conversations with all-men participants, all-women participants, and cross-gender participants. The conversations investigated are transcribed before analyzed using interactional sociolinguistics approach. From this study, it is found that Banjarese women use more hedges than its men. Moreover, the frequency of boosters and tag questions used by both genders is not significantly different. However, Banjarese men commonly use tag questions for politeness purpose, while women mostly use them for showing uncertainty. As the conclusion, based on their frequencies and purposes of using hedges, boosters, and tag questions, women and men’s position in Banjarese society are still unequal. Banjarese women tend to be more aware of their roles in the society that it affects their language choices.

Keywords: hedges, boosters, tag questions, gender, Banjarese society

INTRODUCTION
Do men and women speak differently? This question may easily get a ‘yes’ answer as long as people – especially feminists – still believe that the world that we live in is patriarchal. However, in what way they speak differently and to what degree they are different may not be as easy to address. When you go questioning further about the difference between men and women’s linguistic behaviors, a serious investigation needs to be conducted. My curiosity as a researcher and my interest to gender study drove me to investigate conversations in Banjarese language – my mother tongue – to reveal whether or not men and women talk differently in this society. Because there are too many linguistic aspects of the two genders that can be studied, I limit my research on three features of language: hedges, boosters, and tag questions.

Hedges, boosters, and tag questions are common devices used as intensifiers in any language. Hedges and tag questions are functioned to mitigate possible threats for the interlocutors as well as to show doubts. In contrast, boosters are used for showing certainty. In other words, hedges, boosters, and tag questions are tools used by language users to modify their degree of assertions, to give tone to the intended meanings behind their utterances.

Research findings regarding differentiation between men and women’s use of hedges, boosters, and tag questions vary from one researcher to another. Those who believe that men use more boosters while women use more hedges and tag questions include Lakoff (1975) and Holmes (1990). Meanwhile, the findings of Granqvist (2013) and Pellby (2013) show otherwise. The variations in previous researchers’ findings are most likely caused by the fact that they investigated people coming from different cultural and social backgrounds. Thus, it is only wise not to claim anything about men and women’s frequency of hedges, boosters, and tag questions in a certain socio-cultural background before analyzing the occurrences of the three in the utterances produced by the speakers of that given society.

METHODS
In this study, I investigated three conversations taken places in different domains.
All conversations recorded were done in casual situation so that the language used by the participants was natural. The participants of the conversations becoming the data were all-men participants, all-women participants, and cross-gendered participants.

There were 306 utterances analyzed to reveal whether or not men and women in Banjarese society talk differently in terms of their use of hedges, boosters, and tag questions. These utterances were transcribed orthographically because the focus of the study did not fall on the phonetic analysis. Moreover, silence and other paralinguistic findings were neglected in the study.

I applied a simple mathematical formulation to calculate the percentage of hedges, boosters, and tag questions found in each gender to ease my contrast. To relate my findings to social and cultural situation underlying the conversations investigated, I based my discussion on Holmes’ claims on women’s linguistic behavior (Holmes, 2013).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study are summarized in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GENDER</th>
<th>HEDGES</th>
<th>BOOSTERS</th>
<th>TAG QUESTIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MEN</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WOMEN</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 result of analysis

From what I analyzed, only in terms of hedges do women outnumber men significantly. The results of two other features of language do not show significant difference between men and women’s use of boosters and tag questions. More detailed explanations on each language feature becoming my focus of study will be discussed in the following parts of the paper.

Hedges

Based on the result of study, of 30 hedges found in the data, 63% of them were uttered by women. This is in line with Holmes’ arguments about the roles of women in society (2013). According to Holmes (2013), women are social value keepers. Their behaviors are models reflecting desired values of the community. Women also have the burden of passing these values to their children. That is why when a kid misbehaves, normally people will put blames on his/her mother instead of father. This role of women makes them aware of their language choice better than men. Thus, they tend to hedge more than men to mitigate the effects of their utterances when talking. The following excerpt is the example of how a Banjarese woman uses hedges in the conversation:

Excerpt 1

W1: *Aku kam kadanya pang handak meugai buruknya kawanlah… tapi inya tu kada tapi kawa dias pandirannya.*

I don’t actually have any intention to reveal my friend’s flaws, but what comes from her mouth is not always the truth.

W2: *Iyalah? Mun bepander pina iya aja pang sidin tuh.*

Really? She sounds convincing when talking

Hedges in women’s speech might be uttered for two reasons: showing politeness and showing hesitation. The two are still related to women’s subordinate status. The ones with lower status need to be more polite than those in higher status. Women are easily labeled bad when using ‘impolite’ language. On the other hand, ‘impolite’ language can show masculinity for men and is often considered acceptable and normal. This fact makes women use hedges as one way to make their utterance sound more polite.

Hedges are also used to show hesitation. This reason of hedging is found both in men and women’s utterances. Hedging when in doubt is an effective tool to give information without taking full responsibility of it. Moreover, hedging when in doubt also shows that the speakers do not want to put themselves in knowing-it-all position. Please observe this following excerpt for a better understanding on how to hedge to show uncertainty:

Excerpt 2

Woman 1: *Mun kada salah dangar semalam tuh ada pang si anu… bini Rahmat tu betakun soal rumah. Handak nukar rumah pinanya. Tawari ei ampun ikam.*

If I heard it right, Rahman’s wife asked information about house. She may want to
buy one. Try offering her your house then.

Woman 2: Bini Rahmat yang mana? Yang semalam kita tadapat di undangan tuh kah?
Whom are you talking about? Is she the one whom we met in the party?

In the excerpt 2, “mun kada salah dangar (If I heard it right)” is the hedge employed by the speaker to show her hesitation on the information she was intending to convey. By using hedges, speakers try to lessen their guilt when they utter false information. In short, hedging can save speakers’ face when the information is found invalid or wrong.

Furthermore, the results of this study show that when the intimacy among speakers increases through jokes, women tend to hedge less than they did when talking about serious topics. In other words, women feel safer of being frontal with words when joking. The hedges that they use to mitigate the force of assertions are forgotten for a while when jokingly teasing or mocking other speakers from both genders. On the contrary, men hedge more when joking. It shows that actually men try to lessen the impact of their jokes when talking with women. They more hesitate in using straight words when joking with women. It shows their attempt of being gentlemen who are not harsh with words when dealing with women.

Boosters

In terms of boosters, I found that the frequency of booster occurrences in men and women’s utterances are not significantly different. However, men tend to boost when talking about serious topics while women tend to boost when talking about casual topics. The examples of how a man and a woman use boosters in conversations are displayed in the following excerpts:

Excerpt 3

Woman 1: Uma ngerinya banjir sampai kaitu lah…
What a terrific flood…

Man 2: Pasti sudah kena pemerintah pulang yang disalahkan… padahal dasar warganya jua buang sampah sembarangan.
The government will indeed be the one to blame again…
It is actually the people who threw their garbage as they wished.

Excerpt 4

Woman 1: Aku handak mencobai ngegym di parak pasar tu ih. Jarnya bagus di sana
I want to try the gym near the market. People said it is a good place there.

Woman 2: Ih kenapa di situ? Mun aku nalai hakun wadah Rei tuh. Inya pelatihnya tuh sabar mun.. mun di situ tuh
Why going there? If I were you, I would go to Rei’s. The trainer is patient there.

Men’s boosters commonly indicate their certainty. When talking about serious topics such as the cause of flood, men boost more. They want to show they know what they are talking about without any doubt. In this sense, I conclude that men’s speech is their channel of showing their identity as someone trustworthy and responsible. This conclusion is based on the fact that men increase their degree of certainty for serious conversation because they try to convince their speaking opponents to believe in what they utter. This also indicates that they are responsible of any information they utter as they don’t use hedges to mitigate the possibility of being blame for uttering misinformation.

On the other hand, women boost more when talking about casual topics such as gym location in town with other women as displayed in excerpt 4. They boost because they want to show they know better than other women. Women use more boosters when the conversation is set in all-women-participant setting. However, when talking with men, usually they boost less and hedge more. This indicates that women’s boosters are not intended to show responsibility; they are used as status symbols. Women are more aware of social status than men (Holmes, 2013). For this reason, women tend to use language as the channel to show their social status. Therefore, when talking with other women, women boost more to show their level of education, level of richness, and so on.

Tag questions

Similar to boosters, the frequency of occurrences of tag questions uttered by Banjarese men and women does not show significant difference. However, the two genders commonly use tag questions for different
purposes. Men tend to use tag questions to show politeness while women use tag questions to show uncertainty. In this study, men use tag questions more than women when talking to older people as seen in the following excerpt:

Excerpt 5

| Young Man: | Politikus ni kadada yang kawa dipercaya lo, Pak? |
| None of the politicians can be trusted, can't they Sir? |

| Old Man: | (Ketawa) ya... namanya mereka sudah tau nyamannya jadi wakil ini... wakil rakyat... jadi ya janji terus supaya dipilih lagi. |
| (Laugh) it is because they already know how good it is to be people's representative. They keep on making promises to be voted again. |

By using tag questions such as “lo” in Banjarese, men try to appreciate older people’s opinions. Tag questions are linguistic tools that enable our speaking opponents to feel invited to chip in their ideas, comments, or opinions to respond to our utterances. Thus, tag questions uttered by men are usually their way to show their respect toward their speaking opponents.

Meanwhile, women use tag questions more frequently when talking about serious topics. This shows that the purpose of their tag questions is to show uncertainty. The example of tag question used by a Banjarese woman to show uncertainty is displayed in the following excerpt:

Excerpt 6

| Woman 1: | Penelitian ampun sidin ni harusnya pakai metode tri.. triangulasi lo? |
| His research should apply triangulation method, shouldn’t it? |

| Woman 2: | Hmmm... kada harus jua pang. Perasaku kadapapa jua kaya itu aja |
| Hmmm... It is not necessary. I think it’s okay to leave his research as it is. |

Tag question “lo” in the excerpt 6 above serves a different function from the one used in excerpt 5. In excerpt 6, tag question “lo” was uttered because the speaker was not sure about her own opinion. Women tend to use tag questions more often when talking about serious topics. They seek for agreement from their speaking opponents by inserting tag questions in their utterances when they are unsure on something. Also, tag questions uttered by women are often their way to share responsibility. When they do not wish to take a full responsibility of their utterances, women can opt to use tag questions to seek for support.

CONCLUSION

The conclusions that can be drawn based on the results of the study include:

1. Women use more hedges than men. However, when the intimacy among speakers increases, women tend to drop their hedges and speak straightly.
2. The frequency of boosters and tag questions used by men and women is not dramatically different, yet the purposes are often not similar.
3. The results of the study show social segmentation where Banjarese women are still inferior compared to men. It affects their way of using language.

REFERENCES


