A Study of Gender Differences on Food Reviewing: A Systemic Functional Grammar Approach

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Abstract— **There are numerous previous studies that have investigated gender differences on both spoken and written discourses. However, little attention has been given on gender differences within social media, particularly YouTube. As vlogging has risen to popularity, there is a particular group of YouTubers worldwide that focus on a specific area, which is food review, hence the well-known title 'Food Reviewers'. In Indonesia, the popularity of food reviewing through YouTube has influenced both male and female content creators to dedicate their YouTube channels solely for reviewing food. This study then aims to observe the differences of language use between male and female food vlogger through their videos on YouTube. To obtain meticulous analysis, systemic functional grammar approach was applied to observe language differences and variations between both genders and relate the results with the gender difference theories proposed by Lakoff, Tannen, Maltz and Borker. The data was gathered from two popular food reviewers in Indonesia, Ria SW and Nex Carlos, whose subscribers have reached more than 2 million subscribers each. From these two subjects, the researchers chose two of the most popular videos of them, so there are four videos in total. The analysis shows that there are indeed differences in the way male and female food vloggers speak, from their unique remarks to the way they describe the food. Even though female vlogger tends to use more variations of language features, there are some traces of male vlogger being more friendly and intimate if compared to the female one.**

Keywords—gender differences, food reviewing, language variations, systemic functional grammar, YouTube

I. INTRODUCTION

For decades, the claim surrounding the differences in language use between men and women has become an interesting issue to study. With the blooming effect of technology and several gender-related movements such as feminism and equal rights, language has developed in a way that often the differences between men's and women's language are pretty thin, unlike what Lakoff mentioned earlier in 1973 about deficit model and Tannen's so-called genderlects in 1990. Reference [1] gives us a very detailed framework about the differences between the way women and men speak that lies within cross-sex communication and various social interaction patterns, and that specific types of interaction will lead to different ways of speaking. This is in conjunction with [2] where they reveal that the way male and female Iranian learners are heavily influenced by gender-specific interaction style. Where it was previously well-known that men assert their dominance prearranged, the result of their study suggests that male dominance is mutually built by both male and female when they are involved in a conversation.

There is a reason why there are countless studies and research dedicated solely to see how language develops between men and women, as they are always never-ending, proving that society and their perceptions towards men and women keep on changing through decades. Conversation analysis and corpus linguistics have been everyone's favorite approach to start the study, but little to no attention is given to the language differences between men and women when they carry out specific interactions in social media, moreover through their YouTube channels. Now it is more convenient to address these people to content creators, who are then divided into other professional terms according to their specialties. For instance, when they make contents about foods, they are often called food reviewers or food vloggers, and their main job is to share their personal experiences to give information or suggestion to others that watch their videos about the food that they eat. Reference [3] conducted a study on Facebook where it gives us a whole new perception towards women's language—that it is slightly more assertive than men's, but their study relied on Facebook messages rather than spoken conversations or one-man interaction. Our study however focuses on the language differences between one male and one female food reviewers/vloggers through their videos on YouTube, where food reviewing has been seen as a stable job and a popular one, especially in Indonesia. Using systemic functional grammar approach by Halliday, the analysis is conducted by finding out the themes underlying their descriptions of foods and how it differs cross-gender.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Gender and Language Variations

A number of linguists have continually conducted studies on how men's and women's language are different. As [2]

puts it, gender studies mainly deal with various linguistic features as well as strategies employed by people in conversations, and how the gender of the speaker may influence it. Reference [4] initially asserted that gender-based differences on language variations can be investigated through the use of certain lexicon and syntactic devices. As an instance, Lakoff stated that it is more likely for women to employ 'empty adjectives' such as *lovely* and *divine* in a conversation. As for men, they prefer to use basic adjectives, namely *good, bad, different*, and so on. Furthermore, it is also claimed that frequent use of tag questions represents women's language, since women have a greater tendency to express their uncertainty.

In addition, [1] listed some more characteristics of women's speech. For example, it is not a rare event that women frequently ask questions and use positive minimal responses (e.g. *"mm-hmm"*) when they engage in a conversation. This might be due to how women find joy in maintaining and increasing solidarity of an interaction, unlike men who oftentimes use language to show their status or power [5]. Consequently, women are more likely to acknowledge their fellow interlocutor, as shown by their frequency of using the pronouns "you" and "we" in exchanging information [1]. In contrast, men state facts or give their opinions in a direct and explicit way [1]. These differences are in line with Tannen's "difference theory" which shows that women use language to seek connection and intimacy, while men use it to expose their independence and superiority [6].

B. YouTube Content Creator

With Web 2.0 development, almost everything from sharing personal texts to sharing their personal experiences can be done using any social media platforms, and what was once personal is now for public consumption. Creative individuals—or are famously known as content creators—make use of this phenomenon and turn to social media to either want to just share their artwork or monetize it and make it into public goods, because they realize that online platforms suit them and give them the freedom to do so. The definition of content creator somewhat overlaps with social media influencers as they are often being treated as one entity, because both of them have the power of persuading social media users to "do" something such as buying a product that they endorse for [7]. Although generalizing all content creators to be endorsers of corporates seems unfair, there are plenty who cooperate with brands to engage closer to users and market the brand's products as their endorsers [8]. Thus, the line between social media influencers and content creators are pretty thin to even differentiate them as they overlap with one another.

Social media platform such as YouTube provides never-ending freedom for many content creators to present their artworks online. As stated in their 'About' page, YouTube gives "freedom of expression, freedom of information, freedom of opportunity, and freedom to belong" for anyone who are creative enough to entertain others (YouTube, 2019). Using videos as a method of expressing themselves, content creators have their own content preferences to share and they belong to communities that differ them from one creator to another. Two of the most popular contents to create are food

reviewing and beauty-related activities. Those who specialize in these fields are professionally called food reviewers or vloggers for the former and beauty influencers or beauty gurus for the latter. Although they belong to different communities, they share one important feature that is significant: they both share their personal impression of something in the form of informing, suggesting, or re-telling their past experiences to entertain others.

C. Systemic Functional Grammar

Halliday developed Systemic Functional Grammar during the 1960s, which has been applied to analyze the use of language in various contexts [9]. This approach includes the analysis of Theme and Rheme within a clause. Theme, which is categorized into three types, plays an essential role in determining what a clause is about. The first type, topical theme, deals with the element (participant/ circumstance) that is put at the beginning of the clause. For instance, in the clause 'M*y brother has been assigned that task by the teacher'*, the topical theme is 'my brother' [10]. Secondly, there is textual theme, which is usually indicated by the use of conjunctions in linking clauses. Moreover, Kang (2016) stated that continuatives (e.g. *well, oh, now*) can also be categorized as textual theme, since they are discourse markers [10]. Similar to topical theme, these are placed at the beginning of a clause. Thirdly, interpersonal theme refers to the speaker's or writer's judgement towards the experiential meaning of the clause. This type of theme is identified by looking at the use of mood adjuncts. For instance, in '*Perhaps we can wait until next week*', the interpersonal theme used is '*perhaps*' [11]. Some other examples of interpersonal theme include *usually, apparently, certainly,* and so on.

III. MATERIALS AND METHOD

This study uses descriptive qualitative method, since the researchers intend to investigate the language features used by Indonesian food reviewers. The researchers selected Nex Carlos and Ria SW, as both of which have 2 million subscribers on YouTube. In addition, two of the most-watched videos from each food vlogger were chosen as the data, namely '*Harganya Cuma Rp. 3000, Tapi Nasinya Dibanting!!!*' and '*Warung Lesehan Bu Anny Yang Viral!!! Berapa Ya Harganya Sekarang???*' by Nex Carlos, as well as '*Top 3 Nasi Goreng Favorit Ia*' and 'Bali Night Market #04' by Ria SW. The data was collected through watching and transcribing the selected videos. In addition to that, the researchers only focused on the utterances of the food reviews and the language variations between the two vloggers. The utterances were later identified and analyzed based on the genderlect theories by Lakoff, Maltz and Borker, and Tannen, and systemic functional grammar approach by Halliday. Last but not least, the researchers were able to draw the conclusions of the research.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Our findings revealed that there are three main types of utterances spoken by both of the food vloggers; important remarks, unique remarks, and food describing remarks. Important remarks and unique remarks were included in the analysis of language variations, whilst food describing

remarks were analyzed using SFL and were connected with gender differences theories.

A. Language Variations: From Gender Perspective

Even though Ria SW and Nex Carlos belong to the same community, which is food reviewer/vlogger community, they have their own language variations that differ them from one another. They have unique remarks which become their own identity and are inseparable from their public images. Ria SW's unique remarks are more girly and cuter, such as '*can*', which can be interpreted as '*let's enjoy the food*' but in a more child-like way. She also says '*Super super yummy*' and '*Hmmm I like it*' to elaborate the way she enjoys the food she eats throughout the video. This is in conjunction with Lakoff theory on how women like to exaggerate things--here, we clearly see that Ria SW tends to repeatedly utter her fondness of the food by saying '*Super super yummy*' and it occurs several times in both of the video that we analyzed. Even when she is in the middle of eating a food, she also exaggerates the deliciousness of the food by combining empty adjectives like '*Aduh aduh aduh aduh bahaya bahaya. Oh my God*!' and '*Super super yummy*' as well as '*Hmmm I like it*' in one scene.

On the other hand, Nex Carlos' unique remarks are more masculine. He tries to address his audience by saying '*mamen*' or the shorter version '*men*' as a way to show his brotherhood with his audience. He also says '*the power of mamen*' to other people he occasionally meets when he is in the middle of shooting. This means that he wants to maintain friendship with whoever he meets in real life. This is in contrast with Tannen's and Maltz and Borker's theories which state that men seek for assertion and dominance rather than building intimacy and relationship like women do. Here, with Nex trying to get intimate by saying '*the power of mamen*' to a person he accidentally meets and '*men*' or '*mamen*' to his audience, he wants to be part of the community that he builds throughout his channel and his videos instead of dominating the space to himself.

One similarity that can be drawn from both Ria SW and Nex Carlos is that they engage with their audience when they start eating by saying '*selamat makan*' and '*makan cuy*' respectively, although there is a different sense to the way they say it. Ria SW keeps her image modest and formal by uttering '*selamat makan*', referring to Lakoff's statement about how women are considered as more polite than men. On the opposite, Nex Carlos stays casual and shows his essence of brotherhood with the word '*cuy*'. This shows that Nex Carlos wants to remove the line that separates him with his audience unlike the theories surrounding the claim of gender differences where men associate with ranks and dominance among themselves, as stated by Maltz and Borker in their study.

B. SFG Analysis

In this section, the utterances of the food vloggers are analyzed based on three types of theme proposed by Halliday, which are topical theme, textual theme, and interpersonal theme. First of all, the results show that the topical theme of food description utterances is oftentimes present in the form of participant.

Datum 1
"*Iga-nya* tuh empuk, manis, lebih dominan rasa manisnya, tapi manisnya nggak yang sampe berlebihan," [M41]

In this utterance, the topical theme is "*iga-nya*" (the smoked ribs). Thus, the rest of the utterance describes the topical theme. Similarly, the utterance of the female vlogger also contains a topical theme when it comes to food description, as in:

Datum 2
"*Woah, telornya.. Telornya* sedikit asin dan manis, nyampur," [F12]

Nevertheless, there is a fine line between the male and female one, which is the exaggeration shown by the repetition of the topical theme "*telornya*' (the fried egg) and the addition of the word "woah" at the beginning of the utterance. However, the presence of the topical theme in the utterances of both vloggers shows that they state their arguments about the food in an organized way.

The second theme to be analyzed is textual theme, which serves as a tool to create meaning coherence of a text or a discourse. The findings of this research also revealed that conjunctions such as "*dan*" (and), "*tapi*" (but), and "*jadi*" (so) are three of the most frequently-used textual themes in the utterances related to food review. The use of the conjunction "*jadi*" (so) is reflected through one of Nex Carlos' utterances.

Datum 3
"*Nah terus* dia waktu dipresto itu udah dibumbuin, *jadi* waktu bakarnya itu cuma kasi kecap katanya," [M40]

Moreover, the male vlogger also makes use of the conjunction "*nah terus*" (and then) at the beginning of his utterance, showing that he keeps his arguments as coherent as possible. Likewise, Ria SW often employs the conjunction "*tapi*" (but) when she is in the middle of reviewing the food. An instance can be found in her video entitled 'Bali Night Market #04', where she gives a review on "*roti bakar rasa cokelat kacang*" (local chocolate-peanut toast).

Datum 4
"*Ini pada dasarnya roti yang dipanggang sih, tapi aromanya wangi banget, plus harganya juga gak mahal*," [F54]

Here, she also added another conjunction "plus" which has the same meaning as "*dan*" or "and". In other utterances of food description, the synonym of conjunction "*dan*", namely "*sama*" is employed by the female vlogger. This may indicate that female food vloggers use more variations of conjunction than the male ones.

When it comes to interpersonal theme, both male and female vloggers frequently use the adverb "*kayak*" (like), as shown in the following examples:

Datum 5
"Kayak nasi kucing sebenernya, ukurannya tuh kecil banget," [M20]

Datum 6
"Ini kayak nasi goreng tek-tek," [F33]

In this case, they attempt to compare the food with another that has similar taste or appearance. The former one compares *nasi jinggo* (Balinese rice dish) with *nasi kucing* (Javanese rice dish), while the latter one makes connection of the fried rice being reviewed, with the appearance of typical fried rice in Indonesia, namely "*nasi goreng tek-tek*". Mood adjuncts such as "*kayak*" (like) and "*sebenernya*" (actually) reflect the food reviewers' personal opinions towards the topic. Furthermore, the characteristic of this interpersonal theme is rather tentative, meaning that it highly depends on the speaker. Hence, it may change as the mood of the speaker changes.

Based on the results from the systemic functional grammar perspective, it turns out that both male and female vloggers use topical, interpersonal, and textual theme when reviewing food in their respective videos. Nonetheless, some differences can still be addressed, one of which is that the female one uses more variations of conjunction (e.g. '*dan*', '*plus*', '*sama*') if compared to the male one who uses the basic ones. Another difference is that the female vlogger employs repetition of topical theme as a means of exaggeration (e.g. '*telornya, telornya*'). This is in line with Lakoff's deficit theory that women have a greater tendency of using various language features rather than men.

V. CONCLUSION

There are certainly differences between the way male and female vloggers speak, from their unique remarks to their descriptions of food. The female vlogger uses more language variations when describing the food, one of which is empty adjectives (e.g. '*super super yummy*' and '*aduh aduh aduh bahaya bahaya*'). On the other hand, it is also evident that the male vlogger is more friendly than the female one, as shown in his unique remarks '*mamen*' and '*cuy*' to address his brotherhood with his audience. It is suggested that future researchers try various media to broaden the horizon of gender and language studies.

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