

Cultural Shock and its Recovery as Seen through Language Features in *Emily in Paris*

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to find out the language features used by Emily Cooper in the series *Emily in Paris* during the culture shock and recovery stages. In conducting this study, I used the theory of cross-cultural transition and adaptation stages by Oberg (1960), as cited in Marx (2001), and the theory of language features by Lakoff (2004) and Coates (2004). This study was done using a qualitative approach in which I transcribed and analyzed Emily Cooper's utterances that occurred in all office scenes in Paris. Emily used adjectives, hedges, intensifiers, grammar, politeness, swear words, commands and directives, minimal responses, and questions language features during the culture shock stage. Emily used color terms, adjectives, hedges, intensifiers, grammar, politeness, swear words, minimal responses, and questions language features during the recovery stage. Emily's personality, conversation context, and culture were variables that might influence Emily's use of language features.

Keywords: language features, cultural adaptation, culture shock, recovery

INTRODUCTION

This study discusses the language features used by Emily Cooper in the *Netflix* series *Emily in Paris* during the culture shock and recovery stages. I chose this theme because I was intrigued by two important issues. First, in this global era, it is common to experience cultural changes due to one's changes in his/her surroundings or environment. Brown (1994) states that language and culture are intertwined; thus, it is clear that adaptation to culture plays a role in an individual's language. Second, many scholars believe that men and women have their own way to communicate. Although men and women may differ in their use of language features in expressing their thoughts, it does not mean that men cannot use women's language features or vice versa (Coates, 2004).

I chose to observe the *Netflix* series *Emily in Paris* for this study because the series got a few nominations for awards such as *Golden Globe Award for Best Television Series – Musical or Comedy*, *Golden Globe Award for Best Performance by an Actress in a Television Series - Musical or Comedy*, and *MTV Movie Award for Best Breakthrough Performance MTV Movie & TV Awards for Best Show all in the year 2021* (*Emily in Paris*, 2020). *Emily in Paris* also attracted 58 million views on *Netflix* in the first 28 days after release, according to VanHoose (2021). This series depicts Emily Cooper moving to Paris for work which turned out to be full of hardships in adapting to the French culture (*Emily in Paris (Netflix) -: Movie synopsis and plot*, n.d.).

METHODS

I used a qualitative approach in conducting this research. The data or utterances were taken from the *Netflix* series, *Emily in Paris*. The data was analyzed using Lakoff's (2004) and Coates' (2004) language feature theory, as well as Oberg (1960) as cited in Marx's (2001) cross-cultural transition and adaptation theory.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the language features used by Emily Cooper during the culture shock and recovery stages in office scenes in Paris.

Culture Shock Language Features

The following language features were used by Emily during the culture shock stage: adjectives, hedges, intensifiers, grammar, politeness, swear words, commands and directives, minimal responses, and questions.

- **Adjectives**

- **Adjectives as Women's Language Feature**

Sample: Data 1.50

"But Americans invented it, which is why I hope to become a valuable member of your team by adding an American point of view to your fabulous French clients."

Data 1.50 contains the word "*fabulous*," a woman's adjective. According to Lakoff (2004), women's adjectives reflect their personality and tend to be more expressive. "*Fabulous*" is a more expressive adjective and may also reflect Emily's cheerful personality.

- **Adjectives as Men's Language Feature**

Sample: Data 1.90

"It was a great idea."

In data 1.90 Emily said "*great*" in her speech. According to Lakoff (2004), the word "*great*" is included as a neutral adjective.

- **Hedges**

Sample: Data 1.3

"Uh, bonjour."

("Uh, hello.")

Women's hedges, says Lakoff (2004), show doubt. Emily may have said "*Uh*" because she was unsure of her language choice due to her inability to choose a language.

- **Intensifiers**

Sample: Data 1.11

"And I am so excited to be here."

In data 1.11, Emily used intensifiers by saying the word "*so*." According to Lakoff (2004), women use intensifiers to emphasize a point. Emily emphasized the word "*excited*" by adding "*so*".

- **Grammar**

- **Grammar as Women's Language Feature**

Sample: Data 1.6

"I'm going to be working in this office."

The formal grammar form "*going*" was used by Emily instead of the informal grammar form "*goin*". Lakoff (2004) claims that formal grammar specifies women's language features.

- **Grammar as Men's Language Feature**

Sample: Data 1.56

"Do you wanna have lunch?"

Data 1.56 shows Emily using an informal grammar by using "*wanna*" instead of "*want to*".

The usage of informal grammar is a sign of men's language feature, according to Lakoff (2004).

- **Politeness**

Sample: Data 1.174

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“Monsieur Cadault, please allow me...”

In data 1.174, Emily used *“please”* to be polite before explaining. According to Lakoff (2004), *“please”* is often considered as the feature of women’s language as women tend to be more polite.

- **Swear Words**

Sample: Data 1.78

“Oh, God.”

According to Lakoff (2004), *“Oh, God”* is a women's swear word since this swear word is gentler than swear words like *“Oh, Fuck”* or *“Oh, Shit”* used by men.

- **Commands and Directives**

Sample: Data 1.78

“Let's just keep it to container.”

Commands and directives as women's language feature are indicated by Emily's word *“let's”* (data 1.78). Coates (2004) explains that woman’s commands and directives tend to include the interlocutor in the conversation. Emily may have said *“let's”* to include the interlocutor in the conversation.

- **Minimal Responses**

Sample: Data 1.31

“Mm-hmm.”

Data 1.31 shows minimal responses as a women's language feature. According to Coates (2004), minimal responses as a women’s language feature are usually used to show agreement. Data 1.31 shows Emily agreeing with the interlocutor.

- **Questions**

Sample: Data 1.142

“But can I just go back to the cosmetics question?”

Data 1.142 shows the use of questions as a women’s language feature. According to Coates (2004), questions as a women’s feature are used to prolong a conversation. In this case, Emily asked a question to keep the conversation going even though the conversation was about to end.

- **Miscellaneous**

- **Hedges and Grammar**

Sample: Data 1.13

“Well, I'm going to take a class, but (pause) je parle un peu français already.”

(Well, I'm going to take a class, but (pause) I speak a little French already.)

As shown in data 1.13, Emily used the formal grammar form *“going”* instead of the informal *“goin”*. According to Lakoff (2004), formal grammar indicates a women’s language features. Data 1.13 also shows Emily pausing during her utterance. This may be due to the change in language. Emily was probably unsure of how to say *“I speak a little French”* in French. In this context, Emily's utterance suggests the use of hedges, as explained by Lakoff (2004).

- **Hedges and Minimal Responses**

Sample: Data 1.49

“True (pause).”

According to Coates (2004), women's minimal responses tend to show agreement. Emily understood and confirmed a statement by responding *“True”* (data 1.49). Data 1.49 also shows Emily pausing before finishing her sentence. Hedges, according to Lakoff (2004), indicate uncertainty. Emily's pause could be used to think of what to say next.

Language Features Found in Recovery Stage

The following language features were used by Emily during the recovery stage: color terms, adjectives, hedges, intensifiers, grammar, politeness, swear words, minimal responses, and questions.

- **Color Terms**

Sample: Data 2.88

"I wore all black."

According to Lakoff (2004), men tend to use more primary color terms because they are less specific. Emily chose *"black"* as a generic term for the color rather than a more precise term like *"jet-black."* This shows her using color terms as a men's language feature.

- **Adjectives**

- **Adjectives as Women's Language Feature**

Sample: Data 2.28

"Wonderful."

Emily said *"wonderful,"* a woman's adjective as it is more expressive. As Lakoff (2004) explains, women's adjectives tend to be more expressive. *"Wonderful"* is more expressive than *"great"* and may reflect Emily's upbeat personality.

- **Adjectives as Men's Language Feature**

Sample: Data 2.32

"(Sighs) That's great."

Emily used the word *"great"* as an adjective as a reaction. According to Lakoff (2004), the word *"great"* is an example of neutral adjectives which are often used by men.

- **Hedges**

Sample: Data 2.92

"Well, that's... that's good, right?"

Data 2.92 shows women's language features of hedges. According to Lakoff (2004), women use hedges to express doubt in a conversation. In this case, Emily said *"well"* and paused during the conversation, which might be because she was unsure how to respond.

- **Intensifiers**

Sample: Data 2.15

"Very little social engagement."

Emily used intensifiers as a women's language feature to emphasize her statement (data 2.15). As Lakoff (2004) explains, women's intensifiers are used to emphasize a statement. Emily probably would like to emphasize the marketing plan's main flaw by using *"very little"*.

- **Grammar**

Sample: Data 2.56

"Get a conversation going."

This is grammatically correct because Emily kept the last letter *"g"* instead of discarding it as in the word *"goin"*. Lakoff (2004) explains that women tend to use formal grammar.

- **Politeness**

Sample: Data 2.140

"Thank you, guys."

Data 2.140 demonstrates politeness as a woman's language feature. The expression *"thank you"* indicates Emily's effort to show that she valued her co-workers' support. Lakoff (2004) explains that women are expected to be more polite in conversations.

- **Swear Words**

Swear Words as Women's Language Feature

Sample: Data 2.128

"(Grunts) Oh, God."

Data 2.140 is a milder swear word commonly used by women (Lakoff, 2004). Emily might have been in a panic, causing her to curse, but she chose a mild swear word.

Swear Words as Men's Language Feature

Sample: Data 2.1

"Go fuck yourself."

In data 2.1, Emily used strong swear word as a men's language feature. Lakoff (2004) includes the swear word "fuck" as a harsh swear word that tends to be used by men.

- **Minimal Responses**

Sample: Data 2.5

"Okay. (Pause and sighs)."

Minimal responses as a women's language feature are used to show agreement (Coates, 2004). Emily said "okay" to show her agreement with the interlocutor's statement.

- **Questions**

Sample: Data 2.63

"(Walks away) Can I just ask why?"

The women's language feature is shown in 2.63. Emily was about to leave the office due to Sylvie avoiding Emily. Then Emily asked, "Can I just ask why?", extending the conversation. Questions are often used by women to extend a conversation (Lakoff, 2004)

- **Miscellaneous: Hedges and Minimal Responses**

Sample: Data 2.5

"Okay. (Pause and sighs)."

According to Lakoff (2004), women's hedges show agreement to the interlocutor. In data 2.5, Emily agreed with Sylvie's criticism. Emily continued to speak after saying "Okay" (data 2.5), but paused before saying "Okay". Emily might use this pause to show uncertainty. This appears to confirm Lakoff's (2004) claim that women use hedges to convey doubt.

INTERPRETATION

Emily did not use any color terms during the culture shock stage, possibly due to the lack of color terms in the conversation. During the recovery stage, Emily did use color terms as a men's language features. I think there are two reasons for this. First, Emily and the interlocutors did not discuss color in a conversation. Second, during the recovery stage, Emily perhaps focused on major business issues, so she did not pay much attention to the color detail. Men tend to overlook detailed names for color because they think it is unimportant, according to Lakoff (2004).

Emily used more women's adjectives during culture shock. The use of women's adjectives may be due to Emily's cheerful personality. This is in line with Lakoff's (2004) belief that women's adjectives would be more expressive. During the culture shock, Emily used men's adjectives because men's adjectives tend to be neutral and might be more acceptable to French culture.

I noticed Emily's frequent use of hedges, especially during her culture shock phase. There are plausible explanations for this. It could be due to Emily's stress and anxiety. Emily was probably extra cautious and needed extra time to think before she said or did anything because she was still learning the French culture. This supports Lakoff's (2004) claim that women use hedges when uncertain. Emily's conflict situations, as shown in the series, occurred more

frequently during the culture shock stage, causing her to be warier in her conversations. According to Oberg (1960), cited in Marx (2001), people in the culture shock stage are stressed and irritable, which Emily may have felt due to these conflicts. When Emily ran into a problem, she probably needed extra time to think. Using hedges gives her more time to think before continuing her utterances. Meanwhile, in the recovery stage, Emily was still using many hedges, even though she had fewer hedges than in the culture shock stage. Emily gained knowledge of French culture during her recovery. She also lived in a less conflicted state. These two variables may reduce her stress and anxiety, reducing her use of hedges.

No tag questions were found during Emily's culture shock and recovery. Lakoff (2004) and Coates (2004) claim that women use tag questions to show doubt, while men use tag questions to show assertiveness. Emily's straightforward personality might cause the tag questions to not appear because Emily was quite upfront in stating her thoughts. Emily's work authority was also limited, so she did not want to undermine others.

The analysis revealed that neither culture shock nor recovery included intonations as a language feature. According to Lakoff (2004), the intonational language feature arises when a person is unsure. Emily's personality is contradicted by Lakoff's (2004) statement. Emily always expressed herself, even when she was still adjusting to the (new) French culture. This personality type may explain the lack of intonations in both culture shock and recovery.

Emily used intensifiers much more frequently during culture shock than during recovery. It may occur for the following reasons. When Emily first started working in Paris, she probably used intensifiers to express her joy. According to Lakoff (2004), women use intensifiers to emphasize or strengthen their statements. However, Emily's French coworkers and boss seemed unimpressed. This might cause her to reduce the use of this feature. Oberg (1960), cited in Marx (2001), agrees that during the recovery stage, an individual learns about the target culture. Emily seemed to learn to please her French coworkers and bosses.

According to Lakoff (2004), women tend to use formal grammar while men use informal. Throughout the culture shock and recovery phases, Emily's formal and informal grammar appeared. This could be due to the context of Emily's conversation. Emily used formal grammar, a women's language feature, more often in business conversations. She used informal grammar, which is a male language feature, more often in non-business conversations with her coworkers.

Emily's extensive use of politeness during her cultural shock period was revealed during the analysis. Emily, a newcomer to French culture, faced numerous criticisms and pressures. The issues were addressed by Emily showing more respect and courtesy. Pribadi (2018) discovered that people use politeness to avoid conflict or criticism, which Emily did. During the recovery stage, the politeness language features seem to reduce. Perhaps Emily was gradually adjusting to her new surroundings and learning more about French culture which made her feel more comfortable, affecting the use of politeness feature.

During the culture shock stage, the swear words language feature appears. As Lakoff (2004) explains, women tend to use milder swear words. Emily used mild swear words during this stage might be because she was not familiar with French culture yet, so she might not be brave enough to swear. Emily also used female swear words to emphasize or react to something. During the recovery stage, women's swear words appear during recovery as a reaction and emphasis. During the recovery stage, Emily learned about the new culture and used harsh swear words as a joke, indicating the cultural change.

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Emily only used the commands and directives as a woman's language feature during the culture shock stage. This might be because she had not learned French culture yet and she wanted to let others know about her personal boundaries. Meanwhile, during the recovery stage, Emily did not use any commands and directives, perhaps due to Emily being adapted to the culture and her position as an employee gave her no right to command others.

Emily used more minimal responses during the culture shock stage. Emily used minimal responses to express her agreement. The minimal response is in line with Coates' (2004) claim that women use minimal responses to show agreement. I think that minimal responses were used to minimize conflicts and prevent new ones. While Emily might not be familiar with French culture, she clearly tried to understand others' viewpoints. During the recovery stage, Emily used less minimal responses. This might be due to Emily having a better grasp of French culture. Emily was able to openly discuss her ideas with her French coworkers with less conflict.

The compliment was absent during both the culture shock and recovery phases. I think the context may have caused this. During the culture shock stage, Emily was shunned by her coworkers due to her lack of French knowledge making her unable to compliment others. During her recovery stage, Emily focused on improving her personal and professional knowledge, which might limit her ability to compliment others.

During the culture shock stage, Emily used questions as a woman's language feature to ask business-related questions. Meanwhile, during the recovery stage, Emily used questions as a women's language feature to learn more about French culture. This is in line with Oberg's statement (1960), cited in Marx (2001), that people learn new cultural information during the recovery stage.

Some utterances had more than one language feature at the same time: hedges and grammar, and hedges and minimal responses. I think this is due to the conversation's context. Hedges appeared when Emily was confused or unsure of what to say next in a conversation. Meanwhile, grammar and minimal responses were used to respond to a statement. Hedges appeared alongside grammar or minimal response language features because they were easily integrated into a statement.

CONCLUSION

In the *Netflix* series *Emily in Paris*, Emily's individual's personality, conversational context, and culture might influence the use of language features during the culture shock and recovery stages. Emily used both women's and men's language features, so gender might not be a crucial factor. This finding supports Coates' (2004) claim that language features are not used exclusively by speakers of different genders. I recommend more research on the series *Emily in Paris*, focusing on other characters and cultural adaptation stages. Other TV shows or movies with female and male characters would also be interesting object to study. Despite its limitations, I hope the findings of the present study would contribute to the growing body of research on the women's and men's language features.

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