Conversational Strategies Used by Kim Kardashian and Kris Jenner at the *New York Times DealBook* Conference

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed the conversational strategies of Kim Kardashian and Kris Jenner at *The New York Times* conference, focusing on their business-related discussions and exploring similarities and differences based on age and status. Following Coates' (2013) theory, seven strategy aspects were examined: minimal responses, hedges, tag questions, questions, commands and directives, swearing and taboo languages, and compliments. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, the study identified the strategies employed by each speaker. Kim Kardashian used five strategies, while Kris Jenner used six. Overall, the findings indicated more similarity than difference in their conversational strategies, suggesting there are influences from context, status, and age.

Keywords: age, conference gender, conversational strategies, status

INTRODUCTION

Coates (2013) summarizes studies by sociolinguists on language and gender, highlighting differences between men and women in physical characteristics, social roles, and linguistic usage. Regarding conversational strategies, Coates (2013) identifies seven elements: minimal responses, hedges, tag questions, questions, commands and directives, swearing and taboo languages, and compliments.

The first strategy is minimal responses. Minimal responses, typically consisting of a single word, are more frequently used by women speakers than men (Coates, 2013). Coates (2013, p.87) notes that these responses, such as "mhm," "right," and "yeah," serve as discourse markers and are often employed by women to demonstrate their supportive listening behavior. The second strategy introduced by Coates (2013) is hedges. According to Coates (2013), hedges are closely associated with the perception of women's speech as tentative. Hedges include phrases like "you know," "I think," "sort of," "I'm sure," and "perhaps" (Coates, 2013, p.88). Coates (2013) cites Lakoff (1975) who suggests that women use hedges to express unassertiveness. However, Coates (2013) also references Holmes (1984) who argues that hedges serve multiple functions, including conveying confidence and certainty and avoiding boasting.

Aside from hedges, tag questions is the third strategy proposed by Coates (2013). According to Lakoff (1975) as cited in Coates (2013), tag question is one of the linguistic forms associated with tentativeness. Lakoff (1975) as cited in Coates (2013) elaborates that women mostly use sentences with tag questions frequently. Similar to tag questions, Coates (2013) introduced questions as the fourth strategy. Coates (2013) explains that women use more interrogative forms to exploit questions and tag questions to keep the conversation going.

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The fifth strategy proposed by Coates (2013) is commands and directives, which is a speech act that tries to get someone to do something. Goodwin (1998) as cited in Coates (2013) explains that women tend to include the addressee into the action they are suggesting and often soften their demand into a suggestion. "Let's ask her 'do you have any bottles?'" is the example proposed by Goodwin (1998) as cited in Coates (2013, p.95).

In Coates' (2013) further elaboration about conversational strategies, swearing and taboo language is the sixth strategy. Lakoff (1975) as cited in Coates (2013, p.97) explains that women use softer words such as "oh dear," and "goodness." to swear. Women tend to avoid employing violent curses while men often choose more vulgar words to swear. Last but not least, Coates (2013) states compliments as the seventh strategy. Coates (2013, p.98) claims that "women give and receive more compliments compared to men." Therefore, compliments given by women are often more personal and based on appearance, as in the sentence, "You've got such lovely eyes" (Coates, 2013).

In this study, the focus was not on gender differences. The aim was to explore other factors influencing the use of conversational strategies. To compare strategies, two subjects of the same gender but different age and status were analyzed. According to Holmes (2013), status and age are determining factors in linguistic choices. This study analyzed a conference titled *Kim Kardashian and Kris Jenner Discuss Their Family's Legacy, the Dangers of Social Media, and More* (New York Times Events, 2019).

The conference featured guest stars Kim Kardashian and Kris Jenner, along with a host and an audience. It focused on their experiences and challenges in the business world, as well as their success as mother and daughter. The conference lasted for 36 minutes and 59 seconds. Kris Jenner is a successful businesswoman, author, and creator of the reality show Keeping Up with the Kardashians (The Business of Fashion, 2022b). She is the CEO of Jenner Communications and has played a crucial role in the growth of their family companies (The Business of Fashion, 2022b). Kim Kardashian, Kris Jenner's second child, is a celebrity and entrepreneur involved in multiple business ventures (Tikkanen, 2022).

This study examines the conversational strategies used by Kim Kardashian and Kris Jenner when talking about business topics at the conference. The writers also aimed to discover the similarities and differences in the conversational strategies used.

METHODS

In this study, the writers used a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze the conversational strategies used by Kim Kardasian and Kris Jenner at the conference. The source of data was a conference video entitled *Kim Kardashian and Kris Jenner Discuss Their Family's Legacy, the Dangers of Social Media, and More* that was uploaded on *DealBook Summit's YouTube* channel.

The data was the utterances of Kim Kardashian and Kris Jenner at the conference when they talked about business topics, which contain conversational strategies. There were steps in collecting the data. The writers watched the conference video, then transcribed the utterances spoken by Kim Kardashian and Kris Jenner at the conference with the help of *YouTube* captions.

This study analyzed gender and conversational strategies using Coates' (2013) theory. The data was organized and analyzed using Tables 3.1 and 3.2. The writers used a two-digit numbering

system. The first digit is to represent the speaker. Number 1 is for Kim Kardashian and number 2 is for Kris Jenner. Meanwhile, the second digit represents the order of the occurrence of each utterance when they talked about business topics.The findings and discussion are further explained in the next section.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After conducting this study, the writers found some interesting findings that will be discussed in this section. The table below shows the summarized findings of the conversational strategies used by Kim Kardashian and Kris Jenner when talking about business topics and personal topics at the conference.

Table 1: Table of Findings

No.	Conversational Strategies	KK	Notes	KJ	Notes
1.	Minimal Responses	✓	To show agreement and to support other people's statement	✓	To show agreement and to support other people's statement
2.	Hedges	✓	To show certainty and uncertainty, to reduce the power in her speech, to avoid boasting, and to add a filler in her utterance	✓	To show certainty, to reduce the power in her speech, to avoid boasting, and to add a filler in her utterance
3.	Tag Questions	-		-	
4.	Questions	✓	To criticize other people's opinion	✓	To show uncertainty about something
5.	Commands and Directives	-		✓	To tell people to do something
6.	Swearing and Taboo Languages	✓	Used explicit swear words	✓	Used softer swear words
7.	Compliments	✓	To appreciate other people or something	✓	To appreciate other people or something

Abbreviations:
KK   : Kim Kardashian   KJ   : Kris Jenner
The tick (✓) indicated the use of each conversational strategy. Meanwhile, the notes refer to the functions of the conversational strategies they employed.

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Conversational Strategies Used by Kim Kardashian and Kris Jenner when Talking About Business topics at the Conference

The following section covers the writers' elaboration regarding the conversational strategies used by Kim Kardashian and Kris Jenner when talking about business topics at the conference. The analysis is based on Coates' (2013) theory of gender and conversational strategies. Some examples of Kim Kardashian and Kris Jenner's utterances which contain conversational strategies will be included below.

Minimal Responses
Minimal responses are utterances that mostly consist of one word only (Coates, 2013). In the conference, the writers found that both Kim Kardashian and Kris Jenner employed minimal responses to express agreement when talking about business topics.

- Kim Kardashian: "**Yeah,**" (1.8)

At the conference, the host made an assumption about companies approaching the Kardashian-Jenner family for Instagram posts and asked how they manage it. Kim Kardashian simply agreed with a **"Yeah"** response. The host's multiple questions may have made it difficult for Kim Kardashian to provide individual answers, leading to her minimal response of **"Yeah"** to show support and allow the host to continue speaking.

- Kris Jenner: "**Mhmm,**" (2.2)

A similar case is also shown in Kris Jenner's utterance. The host raised a topic about fragmented media, and Kris Jenner responded with a simple **"Mhmm"** to align with the host's statements. Despite not being asked a direct question, Kris Jenner acknowledged and supported the host by using this brief response. Her **"Mhmm"** implied her awareness of the fragmented media issue mentioned by the host.

Hedges
Hedges are multifunctional linguistic forms that help the speaker express various messages (Coates, 2013). The examples of hedges are, "you know," "I think, "sort of," "I'm sure," "like," and "perhaps." At the conference, Kim Kardashian used hedges to show her certainty, uncertainty, to avoid boasting, to reduce the power in her speech, and to utilize it as a filler. Meanwhile, Kris Jenner's use of hedges differed slightly because she did not use hedges to show uncertainty. The way Kim Kardashian utilized hedges to show her certainty is as follows.
- Kim Kardashian: "We have different, **you know**, skin, age, demographic – exactly what she was talking about, so we use our products so differently that there has not been any competition even in sales-wise" (1.7)

Kim Kardashian mentioned that each family member has a distinct target audience, resulting in no overlap between her brand and her sisters'. As a businesswoman managing her own cosmetic brand, she used hedges like **"you know"** to convey her confidence in the uniqueness of her beauty products. Kim Kardashian may have wanted to highlight the factors that set them apart, such as skin, age, and demographics, to emphasize their differences to the host.

Similar to Kim Kardashian, one of Kris Jenner's use of hedges was to show certainty. Below is the example of how she expressed assertiveness especially when talking about business topics.

- Kris Jenner: "Well, they're all separate businesses for sure, and **I think** everybody has their own completely different demographic and even if you think about Kim and Kylie, for example, they're, what, 16 years apart and **you know,** that's two, seventeen, that's two different generations basically" (2.5)

As the manager of the family, Kris Jenner explained that her daughters have different businesses and demographics due to the difference in their age gap by using "**I think**" and "**you know**".

Tag Questions

Lakoff (1975) as cited in Coates (2013) elaborates that tag question is one of the linguistic forms associated with tentativeness, which then leads to a conclusion that women tend to use tag questions more frequently than men. According to Coates (2013), women usually employ tag questions when seeking for agreement or asking for validation. During the conference, however, the writers found that both Kim Kardashian and Kris Jenner did not use tag questions when discussing business topics. According to Xu (2009), women's language often reflects their social ideology. As experienced businesswomen, Kim Kardashian and Kris Jenner's confidence in their statements may be evident at the conference, leading them to omit the use of tag questions when discussing business matters.

Questions

Coates (2013) described questions as a feature that is inseparable from answers. In order for an answer to exist, there should be a question that triggers its occurrence. Coates (2013, p. 94) added that the form of questions may be categorized into several categories, such as supportive, critical, and antagonistic. In this case, both Kim Kardashian and Kris Jenner used questions differently. Below is the utterance of Kim Kardashian which employed questions to criticize other people's opinion.

- Kim Kardashian: "...'cause I was like, a life, if someone can get out of, you know, prison and get their life back versus my reputation of going to the White House where there is only one person on this planet that can make the decision, and that would be the president, **and that was even a question? Of you know, the media?"** (1.20)

Kim Kardashian was furious due to the lack of humanity which the media had shown through their opinion. Therefore, by asking "**and that was even a question? Of you know, the media?**" Kim Kardashian was possibly promoting critical thinking, questioning the public's belief that implied the life of someone in prison is not any more important than the reputation of a celebrity.

On the other hand, the example use of questions to seek clarification can be taken from Kris Jenner's utterance below.

- Kris Jenner : "**Remember *QuickTrim*?** And at the end of the day, you really just wanted to be curvy. Exactly." (2.13)

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The way Kris Jenner asked "**Remember *QuickTrim?***" showed that she was attempting to evoke a specific memory from her daughter, Kim Kardashian. Considering that the advertisement they did for *QuickTrim* occurred back in 2009, Kris Jenner aimed to clarify whether Kim Kardashian also remembered their past involvement with the brand. Therefore, she utilized questions to seek for her daughter's clarification.

Commands and Directives

According to Coates (2013), directive is a powerful speech act because the speaker is able to get someone to do something. Women, explained by Goodwin (1998) as cited in Coates (2013), ought to employ softer directives and turn their demand into a suggestion. At the conference, however, Kim Kardashian did not employ this strategy. The reason might be because she found it inappropriate to order Kris Jenner who was older than her and was technically her superior. In many social contexts, it is believed for someone with lower status or younger age to show their respect towards those with higher status or older age (Holmes, 2013). Therefore, Kim Kardashian may be refraining herself from employing commands and directives in order not to be considered as impolite.

On the contrary, the writers found that Kris Jenner employed several commands and directives when talking about business topics at the conference. One of Kris Jenner's utterances which showed how she utilized them indirectly is as follows.

- Kris Jenner : "... **I tell everybody that I speak to, is to really have something to hang your hat on and create something for yourself that is sustainable and a business that can grow.**" (2.20)

Kris Jenner expressed her concern about the behavior of young people in her utterance, implying an observation. She attempted to provide a solutive order, but softened it by offering advice and suggestions based on her opinion and personal experiences. While not strictly commanding or directing, Kris Jenner used her utterance as guiding principles or recommendations.

Swearing and Taboo Languages

Women are said by Lakoff (1975) as cited in Coates (2013, p.97) to use softer words such as "oh dear," and "goodness," when they swear. However, Kim Kardashian's utterance when talking about business contexts at the conference showed that she employed an explicit word to swear. Further elaboration is as follows.
- Kim Kardashian: "..."**Holy shit,** they're asking me to be in a clemency meeting?" Like, I'm just gonna, you know, and I definitely raised my hand and asked questions, and was as involved as I could have been." (1.21)

Kim Kardashian was conveying her excitement upon visiting the White House to discuss prison reform. With Kim Kardashian being invited to the clemency meeting, it provided her with the opportunity to contribute to what she was passionately working on. Therefore, she expressed her disbelief with swearing and taboo language "**holy shit**".

The way Kim Kardashian employed an explicit way of swearing is different from Kim Kardashian, who used softer words to swear. This statement was proven by Kris Jenner's utterances at the conference when talking about business topics.

- Kris Jenner : "**Oh my God..**" (2.18)

During the conference, Kris Jenner shared the family's journey towards success, frequently referring to their show *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* as the catalyst. As a result, her daughter, Kim Kardashian playfully teased her for her repetitive mentions. Kris Jenner then expressed her frustration with an exclamation of "**Oh my God..**".

Compliments

Coates (2013) claims that the compliments given by women are often more personal and based on appearance. Nevertheless, it was shown at the conference that both Kim Kardashian and Kris Jenner complimented someone for their skill instead of appearance. Below is the example of Kim Kardashian who complimented her husband for what he did.

- Kim Kardashian: "... **it's amazing to have someone that you really respect and value their creative opinion.**" (1.19)

While discussing her husband, Kanye West, Kim Kardashian expressed gratitude for his significant contribution to her product development. After highlighting his support, Kim Kardashian concluded her statement by giving him a compliment for his contribution and creativity.

- Kris Jenner : "I know. **It's fabulous.**" (2.22)

The writers found that Kris Jenner also expressed her appreciation for her daughter's achievements by saying "**It's fabulous.**" This was in response to the host asking for Kim Kardashian's opinion, considering that Kris Jenner, as the manager, would receive a 10% commission for Kim Kardashian's accomplishments. Kris Jenner's statement conveyed her admiration for Kim Kardashian's dreams.

The Conversational Strategies Used by Kim Kardashian and Kris Jenner that are Similar

When Kim Kardashian and Kris Jenner were talking about business topics at the conference, the writers found several similarities in their conversational strategies that might be caused by their status as businesswomen. First, both of them used minimal responses to show agreement. According to Ilgaz (2022), businesswomen are generally good at listening to others and giving their attention in an occurring conversation. Second, both of them used hedges to show certainty, to reduce power, to avoid boasting, and as fillers. According to HRnews (2022), women in leadership positions ought to feel pressured to communicate assertively in order not to sound bossy. Therefore, Kim Kardashian and Kris Jenner may be using hedges to indicate that they do not claim absolute authority on the matter. Instead, they are open to alternative viewpoints and are showing a considerate manner.Third, they similarly did not employ any tag questions. This may be caused by their confidence as businesswomen who talked about their goals and achievements. Last but not least, both Kim Kardashian and Kris Jenner tend to give compliments to appreciate someone's skill, which may indicate that as women who do business, Kim Kardashian and Kris Jenner believe that someone's ability is more important than their mere appearance.

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The Conversational Strategies Used by Kim Kardashian and Kris Jenner that are Similar but Functionally Different

The writers found that Kim Kardashian and Kris Jenner have similarities in employing some of the conversational strategies, yet used them differently. The first one is how Kim Kardashian used hedges to show uncertainty, while Kris Jenner did not. This might be caused by the difference in their status at work, considering that Kris Jenner works as the CEO and manager who possesses a greater knowledge about the company than Kim Kardashian. Next, Kim Kardashian used questions to criticize other people's opinion, while Kris Jenner used them to seek for clarification. This may be because as someone who is younger, Kim Kardashian may develop a more emotional behavior than Kris Jenner.This factor also affects the way they employ swearing and taboo language. At the conference, Kim Kardashian used explicit swearing words while Kris Jenner used the softer ones. The possible reason for this is because as the CEO and someone who is older, Kris Jenner may feel more careful about the way she talks in public.

The Conversational Strategies Used by Kim Kardashian and Kris Jenner that are Different

There was a notable difference in the conversational strategies between Kim Kardashian and Kris Jenner regarding commands and directives. At the conference, Kim Kardashian refrained herself from using commands and directives, whereas Kris Jenner frequently employed them. However, Kris Jenner's commands and directives were often perceived as suggestions and advice. Being older and holding more authority as the CEO and manager, Kris Jenner may have felt justified in giving commands and directives. On the other hand, Kim Kardashian, who is 25 years younger and works under her mother's supervision, likely chose to avoid using commands and directives to show respect and avoid appearing disrespectful towards her superior.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study suggested that Kim Kardashian employed five conversational strategies as proposed by Coates (2013), such as: minimal responses, hedges, questions, swearing and taboo languages, and compliment. Meanwhile, Kris Jenner employed six conversational strategies: minimal responses, hedges, questions, commands and directives, swearing and taboo languages, and compliment. However, some of the similarities from their employed conversational strategies such as hedges, questions, and swearing and taboo languages differed in function. The only difference between Kim Kardashian and Kris Jenner's employed conversational strategies was commands and directives.

The study suggests that Kim Kardashian and Kris Jenner's different conversational strategies are influenced by age and context. On the other hand, as successful businesswomen, they share a commonality in their professional backgrounds which may explain their similar conversational strategies when discussing business matters. The study also found that women's language is not limited by societal expectations. Regardless of gender, both Kim Kardashian and Kris Jenner employed different conversational strategies. This indicates that conversational style is not solely determined by gender. As women's status and image evolve in society, their language will continue to change.

Future researchers are advised to explore similar topics using longer videos, such as documentary films. It is also recommended to conduct studies comparing conversational strategies

between two generations with a wider age gap. Despite its limitations, this study aims to provide readers with a better understanding of how women of different ages and status apply conversational strategies.

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