

## Women's Language Features Used in *Dove U.S.'s* YouTube Campaign Videos Targeted at Women

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines how women's language features, based on Lakoff's (2004) theory, are used in *Dove U.S.* YouTube campaigns, "My Beauty My Say." Using a qualitative method, the study analyzes spoken utterances from five monologue-style campaign videos. Four language features were found in the campaign: lexical hedges or fillers, "empty" adjectives, intensifiers, and emphatic stress. These features are used in two main ways. In terms of function, women use these features to indicate hesitation or uncertainty, to highlight personal experiences and feelings, and to express strong emotions in a soft and polite manner. In terms of context, these features are used to describe the speakers themselves. In conclusion, *Dove U.S.'s* YouTube campaign videos demonstrate the use of language features that align with women's language. Future research should include additional campaigns to provide a broader and clearer understanding of how women's language features are used in campaign videos.

**Keywords:** *Dove* campaigns, gender, Lakoff, sociolinguistics, women's language features

### INTRODUCTION

Marketing is a powerful tool for boosting product awareness and shaping a company's reputation as reliable and trustworthy (Snyder, 2024). Today, nearly 92% of businesses use social media as their go-to marketing channel (Snyder, 2024), which shows how essential it is for building a strong brand presence. One of the most impactful forms of social media marketing is the campaign video. Unlike short product ads, campaign videos often carry compelling and emotional stories that resonate with audiences (IDEOWORKS, 2022). Because of this narrative approach, campaign videos usually run longer than standard advertisements. This makes campaign video an ideal and popular marketing strategy for brands to share meaningful, story driven content that they can tailor to different audience groups, such as men and women. Therefore, the use of language is a crucial element to observe, as the choice of words determines how effectively the message resonates.

This study looks at *Dove's* YouTube campaign videos, as *Dove* is widely recognized not only for its products but also for its groundbreaking approach to advertising. Dan (2017), a former Forbes writer, says that *Dove* is one of the first brands to use femvertising, which means using messages that focus on women in advertising. From the beginning, women are *Dove's* main inspiration, and the brand consistently shows a commitment to celebrating diverse forms of beauty in its campaigns (Unilever, 2025). This vision becomes most visible in the 2004 Real Beauty campaign, which plays an important role in changing how people around the world talk about beauty. Since these campaigns are directed at women, the language used is often carefully tailored to them, which makes women's language features a key point of interest.

Despite *Dove's* global recognition, research on the language features used in its campaign videos remains limited, as most previous studies have focused on semiotic (Daulay, 2019) or multimodal perspectives (Oey, 2019) rather than language features itself. These language features are especially important given that *Dove* is considered a pioneer in

femvertising, where empowering women through language representation play a central role in the brand's identity. To address this gap, the present study analyzes how women's language features are used in *Dove U.S.*'s YouTube campaign videos.

This study examines the features of women's language used in *Dove U.S.*'s YouTube campaign videos targeted at women, specifically from the "My Beauty, My Say" campaign. These campaigns were chosen because they are presented in a monologue format based on a prepared script. Monologues are typically more structured and carefully planned, allowing the speaker to have full control over the flow of the conversation (Kumparan, 2025). This format makes them particularly effective for delivering messages clearly and impactfully (Kumparan, 2025), enabling *Dove* to convey its narratives with strong focus and direction. To analyze the language used, this study applies Lakoff's (2004) theory of women's language features, which identifies ten characteristics of women's language as cited in Holmes (2013, pp. 302–303).

According to Lakoff (2004), "women's speech differs from men's speech" (p. 42), and women's language is characterized by a set of linguistic features often referred to as women's language features. These features written by Lakoff (2004) as cited in Holmes (2013, pp. 302–303) include lexical hedges or fillers, which indicate uncertainty, politeness, or a lack of confidence; tag questions, which are used when a speaker makes a statement but lacks full confidence in its truth; and rising intonation on declaratives, where a declarative statement is given with a rising intonation typical of a yes-no question. Lakoff (2004) also identifies 'empty' adjectives such as "adorable," "charming," and "lovely," precise colour terms like "beige," "ecru," and "lavender," and intensifiers such as just and so, which are used to express strong emotions while avoiding overt assertiveness. In addition, women tend to use 'hypercorrect' grammar, showing a consistent use of standard verb forms, as well as 'superpolite' forms, including indirect requests and polite expressions. Women are also socialized to avoid strong swear words and instead use milder expressions such as "oh dear" or "goodness." The final feature is emphatic stress, where women place emphasis on certain words to add weight to their message, though it may also signal a desire for validation (Lakoff, 2004).

## METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach to analyze monologue-style campaign videos, namely "My Beauty My Say," from *Dove's* official YouTube channel, with the five longest videos from each campaign selected. The data consisted of spoken utterances containing women's language features, while written text or subtitles were excluded. After copying and checking the automatically generated transcripts, the writer analyzed the data using Lakoff's (2004) theory of women's language features. The transcripts were written using the Jefferson Transcription System, with capital letters indicating emphasis and an up arrow showing rising intonation (University Transcriptions, 2022). The spoken utterances were labeled using a numbering system and analyzed in tables by identifying the presence of women's language features with checkmarks and supporting notes.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

No	Women's Language Features	<i>Dove U.S.</i> 's YouTube Campaign Videos Targeted at Women
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**Setiawati; Wijaya: Women’s Language Features Used in  
Dove U.S.’s YouTube Campaign Videos Targeted at Women**

A.	Lexical Hedges or Fillers	✓
B.	Tag Questions	
C.	Rising Intonation on Declaratives	
D.	‘Empty’ Adjectives	✓
E.	Precise Colour Terms	
F.	Intensifiers	✓
G.	‘Hypercorrect’ Grammar	
H.	‘Superpolite’ Forms	
I.	Avoidance of Strong Swear Words	
J.	Emphatic Stress	✓

From *Dove U.S.’s* YouTube campaign video targeted at women and men, the writer identified four women’s language features based on Lakoff’s (2004) theory: lexical hedges or fillers, empty adjectives, intensifiers, and emphatic stress. Out of the ten features proposed by Lakoff, only these four appeared in the data.

The other features such as tag questions, rising intonation on declaratives, precise colour terms, hypercorrect grammar, superpolite forms, and avoidance of strong swear words did not appear in the video. Tag questions and rising intonation on declaratives were not evident because the video is a monologue. Each speaker shares her personal story rather than engaging in a conversation that would naturally trigger such features.

Precise colour terms were not used because the speakers did not describe objects or physical appearances that required mentioning specific colours. Similarly, hypercorrect grammar, superpolite forms, and avoidance of strong swear words were not evident, likely because the video is a commercial campaign used to build brand image. The content had been scripted and filtered to maintain *Dove* appropriate tone, avoiding language that might seem overly formal, impolite, or unprofessional

**Lexical Hedges or Fillers used in *Dove U.S.* campaign video targeting women - “My Beauty My Say”**

The data analysis from this study shows that the speakers in *Dove U.S.’s* “My Beauty, My Say” campaign used hedges or fillers in their utterances. In total, there were five Lexical Hedges or Fillers identified in the dataset. Below are two examples taken from the data.

- Example 1

“TWO CHOICES, I can say one, I’m really sorry there’s been a huge mistake, **uh** I’m a woman...” (Data A.1.6)

Data A.1.6 shows the use of fillers as part of women’s language features. The speaker Rain, who has been mistakenly cast as a man due to her short hair and masculine clothing, responds with the utterance “uh, I’m a woman.” The filler “uh” signals hesitation and shows her awareness of how her statement might be received. By using this filler, she softens the correction, making it sound less confrontational.

- Example 2

“I took about sixty photographs, so I'm **pretty much** reversing the power dynamic.” (Data A.2.7)

In Data A.2.7, the speaker, Hannah, describes her experience of being catcalled in the city and how she responded by taking photographs of the men who catcalled her. The phrase “pretty much” is a hedge, which means almost or more or less, which reduces the certainty of her statement. The speaker is not saying she completely reversed the power dynamic, but only that she kind of did. This shows she wants to sound careful and not too confident. It makes her words sound more humble and less forceful.

### ‘Empty’ Adjectives used in Dove U.S. campaign video targeting women - “My Beauty My Say”

The data analysis from this study shows that the speakers in *Dove U.S.*'s “My Beauty, My Say” campaign used ‘Empty’ Adjectives. In total, there were six ‘Empty’ Adjectives identified in the dataset. Below are two examples taken from the data.

- Example 3

“I may not be the conventional girl but it doesn't mean that I'm not a **pretty** girl.” (Data A.1.11)

In this example, the speaker uses the adjective pretty to describe herself. The word pretty generally means pleasant to look at, especially when referring to girls or women (Cambridge University Press, n.d.). The speaker's choice of the word pretty shows how women tend to use feminine related adjectives in personal situations. It reflects a softer and more expressive way of speaking.

- Example 4

“I can still be **beautiful** with my black eye.” (Data A.3.10)

In this sentence, the speaker uses beautiful to talk about her appearance. The word beautiful is mostly used to describe women or things related to female physical beauty (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). The speaker's use of beautiful in a personal context shows how women often use feminine adjectives to express herself.

### Intensifiers used in *Dove U.S.* campaign video targeting women - “My Beauty My Say”

The data analysis from this study shows that the speakers in *Dove U.S.*'s “My Beauty, My Say” campaign used intensifiers in their utterances. In total, intensifiers appeared four times in the dataset. Below are two examples taken from the data.

- Example 5

“I was **so** embarrassed” (Data A.4.4)

Data A.4.4 shows the use of intensifiers as part of women's language features. In this context, the speaker talks about being teased for having a “big nose” and feeling humiliated after her first kiss. The word “so” functions as an intensifier, highlighting how deeply embarrassed she felt. Instead of saying “I was extremely embarrassed” or “I was very embarrassed,” which would sound more direct and absolute, she uses “so” to express strong emotion in a softer and more natural way.

- Example 6

“I definitely feel made for burlesque because it's **such** a freeing artform in a way there's no real rules” (A.4.6)

In Data A.4.6, the speaker, Grace, talks about her confidence and comfort in performing burlesque, which she describes as a free and expressive art form with no strict rules. The word “such” is used as an intensifier to show how freeing burlesque feels to her. Instead of saying “a very freeing art form,” she says “such a freeing art form.” This makes her words sound more emotional and expressive, but still natural and not too strong.

### Emphatic Stress used in *Dove U.S.* campaign video targeting women - “My Beauty My Say”

The data analysis from this study shows that the speakers in *Dove U.S.'s* “My Beauty, My Say” campaign used emphatic stress in their utterances. In total, emphatic stress appeared 15 times in the dataset. Below are two examples taken from the data.

- Example 7

“It’s something that comes **OUT OF YOU**” (Data A.3.8)

In this line, the speaker, Heather, who is a boxer, places strong emphasis on “OUT OF YOU” to express her belief that beauty comes from within rather than from physical appearance. The emphasis adds emotional weight to her words, showing her belief that strength and femininity can coexist. Since she mentions having a black eye earlier, the stress may also reveal feelings of reassurance and vulnerability, as she appears to be reassuring herself and others that she can still be beautiful despite the marks of her sport. In this way, the emphasis also reflects a subtle desire for affirmation that being injured doesn’t make her any less beautiful.

- Example 8

“I always had this attitude of they don’t **GET TO TELL ME** how I live my life.” (Data A.1.7)

Here, the speaker emphasizes “GET TO TELL ME” to defend her personal choices. The stress reflects her determination to live freely and resist judgment from others. However, it also hints at a defensive and frustrated feeling, possibly shaped by people’s reactions to her more masculine appearance. Through this emphasis, she also seeks acknowledgment and respect for her identity that she has the right to be herself regardless of how she looks.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, *Dove U.S.'s* YouTube campaign videos show the use of features that align with women’s language, such as the frequent use of hedges or fillers, “empty” adjectives, intensifiers, and emphatic stress. The analysis reveals that, in terms of function, women use hedges or fillers to show hesitation or uncertainty as they talk about themselves. Emphatic stress is used to highlight personal experiences and feelings, often showing that they are defending their choices or seeking acknowledgment. Women tend to use intensifiers to show strong feelings in a soft and polite way. This helps them express emotions clearly without sounding too strong. The choice of intensifiers is one that heightens expression while still keeping it soft. In terms of context, empty adjectives are used to describe the speakers themselves in a personal way. Future research is encouraged to include more campaigns to provide a broader and clearer understanding of how women’s language features appear in campaign videos.

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