



**WOMEN UNDERREPRESENTATION IN THE MUSIC INDUSTRY
REFLECTED FROM TAYLOR SWIFT'S BILLBOARD
"WOMAN OF THE DECADE" SPEECH**

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ABSTRACT

Studies on women underrepresentation within various fields have been widely conducted, indicating that people are well-aware of the issue. Nonetheless, little attention has been paid to women underrepresentation in the music industry. Thus, this research focuses on examining the issue through Taylor Swift's Billboard "Woman of the Decade" speech. Critical Discourse Analysis approach was applied in this research. The data were taken from Taylor Swift's speech transcript, which was accessible in Billboard's official website (www.billboard.com). It can be concluded that Taylor Swift's speech reflects issue of women underrepresentation in the music industry through at least two linguistic features, namely pronouns and assertive speech act. The use of inclusive pronouns "we" and "us" in her speech supports that women tend to seek intimacy and build strong relationship with their peers, while the exclusive pronoun "they" was employed to refer to people who criticized women in the music industry. Furthermore, Taylor Swift used assertive speech act to be vocal about the issue of unfair treatment received by women in the industry, as well as to empower them to keep on making music under any circumstances, breaking society's stereotype that women are not likely to be assertive.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis; music industry; women underrepresentation

INTRODUCTION

It is undeniable that our society is constructed with patriarchal structure, meaning that women are considered as subordinate to men. Moreover, society's point of view believes and accepts that women are incapable of holding such power because of the nature of their behaviors (Lakoff, 1973). As a result, issues on gender have become an ongoing debate for ages, especially in relation to language. One of the examples is how language has the ability to reflect the issue of women underrepresentation, either in the form of written or spoken discourse. The discursive formation is based on gender stereotypes that are already ingrained in society's perspective, and most of the times the ones who receive the judgments are women—for instance, labelling

them as invisible or 'problematically' visible, and so on (Convertino, 2019).

This led previous researchers to delve into the issue of women underrepresentation in various fields. Based on their investigations, women are not usually linked with certain traits, namely working outside home, being clever, expressing their opinions or fighting for their own rights (Steffen & Krob, 2015). As an instance, in computing fields, Main and Schimpf (2017) revealed that women are perceived as unable to acquire skills as fast as men. Piatek-Jemenez et al. (2018) also conducted a study related to college students' perceptions about women underrepresentation in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields. Later in the same year, Dolan and Hasen (2018) pointed out how women are treated unfairly in elected office,

based on public's perceptions. This issue was as well discussed by Rubio (2018), as the research results carried out that some British TV commercials portrayed the stereotypes of women and men at work. Furthermore, Swari (2022) also portrayed different adjectives used in describing male and female celebrities in fashion articles. The same thing applies to women in the music industry, even though little attention has been paid to the issue. Sanchez et al. (2017) revealed that women are being visualized as "sad, lonely, and desperate" in Latina music videos, unlike men. Despite the fact that music often becomes a self-expression tool for people around the world (Steffen & Krob, 2015), the unfair treatment received by women in the music industry needs to be discussed.

Speaking of music industry, Taylor Swift has recently been awarded as "Woman of the Decade" by Billboard in 2019 due to her impeccable success. Moreover, she delivered her speech on Billboard's Women in Music 2019 event, where she received the award. Through her speech, Taylor Swift discussed about the struggles of women in the music industry. Hence, the researcher aimed to delve into the use of two linguistic features in Taylor Swift's Billboard "Woman of the Decade" speech, namely pronouns and assertive speech act.

Women Underrepresentation

Studies on women underrepresentation within various fields have been widely conducted, indicating that people are well-aware of this issue. As an instance, Zulkifli (2015) investigated on how women encountered some issues in their workplaces, one of which is being considered as unable to acquire certain skills quickly. Rubio (2018) also examined how women, through British TV commercials, are portrayed as more likely to possess good interpersonal skills rather than being experts in the workplace.

Dolan and Hasen (2018) strengthened the point by discussing the ways women are treated unfairly in elected office. Likewise, Main and Schimpf (2017) observed why women in computing fields received unfair treatment, which is in line with a study by Convertino (2019). Similarly, Piatek-Jemenez et al. (2018)

also conducted a study related to college students' perceptions about women underrepresentation in STEM fields. Last but not least, it turns out that women's bodies are also discursively constructed as the bearer of national identity in Iran, based on Rahbari et al.'s research results (2019). In other words, women are underrepresented in different aspects, namely traits, physical appearances, and so on.

Gender and Language

In general, gender is considered as a social elaboration, meaning that it is influenced by various sources from one's socialization process, and thus it differs from biological sex (Rubio, 2018). When it comes to gender studies, it is often linked with language use. Lakoff (1973) defined that there is such thing as 'women's language' in her article entitled *Language and Woman's Place*, based on her personal observations. According to Lakoff (1973, p.45), there are certain language features that are more likely to be employed by women, such as lexical hedges, tag questions, empty adjectives, and so on. Moreover, she also highlighted that women's language is influenced by society's perceptions of how they should speak, because they are perceived as less powerful than men. Later in 1990, Tannen proposed the difference theory, which discusses about the differences of men and women in terms of communication. She pointed out that women have a greater tendency to seek support and sympathy when it comes to using language, in order to build intimate relationships with their peers. On the other hand, she claimed that men generally communicate to build their status, state information, and confront their opinions. As of why, men are seen as more powerful than women, because women are more likely to favor their feelings or emotions. Similarly, Park et al., (2016) argued that when it comes to using language, women are considered as being "warm" rather than "assertive".

Three-Dimensional Approach

Three-Dimensional Approach is a Critical Discourse Analysis framework proposed by Fairclough in 1995, and it is chosen by the researcher as a tool to analyze the

data of this present study. There are three main points of this framework that should be highlighted, which are: a) text analysis, b) discourse practice, and c) social practice. The first step of the analysis is examining the text or the discourse itself. This is associated with finding certain linguistic features, namely lexical choices, grammatical features, and others (Fairclough, 1995) that are used in either written or spoken discourse. In this study, the researcher examined the use of pronouns and assertive speech act in Taylor Swift's speech. The second point is the analysis of discourse practice, or in other words, investigating the ways texts are produced and consumed (Fairclough, 1995). Last but not least, the third point is associated with the analysis of social practice, where the linguistic findings are analyzed further using other theories (e.g. sociology, gender, etc.) in order to figure out the social problems implied in the choice of discourse.

METHOD

This study aimed to delve into the underrepresentation of women in the music industry through Taylor Swift's Billboard "Woman of the Decade" speech at the Women in Music event, held on December 13, 2019. Thus, the researcher applied descriptive qualitative method in this study. The data was collected from Billboard's official website (www.billboard.com), where the transcription of Taylor Swift's full speech on the event is available. Furthermore, the data was analyzed using Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Approach (1995), which consists of three steps. First of all, the researcher did the text analysis, focusing on the use of pronouns and assertive speech act employed by Taylor Swift on her speech. The researcher examined the discourse practice, namely the production and the consumption of the speech. After that, the analysis of the social practice was conducted by relating the linguistic findings to gender theories by Lakoff (1973) and Tannen (1990) in order to achieve more profound understanding on the issue of women underrepresentation in the music industry. Last but not least, the researcher was able to draw the conclusion.

DISCUSSION

There are three repeated pronouns used by Taylor Swift in her "Woman of the Decade" speech, which are subjective pronoun "we", objective pronoun "us", and subjective pronoun "they". The first one is shown in datum (1).

- (1) "...**We** have to work this hard, **we** have to prove that **we** deserve this, and **we** have to top our last achievements. Women in music, on stage or behind the scenes, are not allowed to coast. **We** are held at a higher, sometimes impossible-feeling standard..."

In datum (1), the pronoun "we" is repeated five times, indicating that the speaker intended to emphasize her point. Looking at the context, the speaker was talking about how women in the music industry should continue to work hard, because people already have high expectations on them. In this case, the subjective pronoun "we" refers to the speaker (Taylor Swift) and the audience which were all women that belong to the music industry. Additionally, objective pronoun "us" is also present in her speech, as shown in datum (2).

- (2) "...It seems like the pressure that could have crushed **us** made **us** into diamonds instead, and what didn't kill **us** actually did make **us** stronger..."

It is evident that the objective pronoun "us" represents the speaker and the audience as women in the music industry. This strengthens the point that the speaker intended to remind her fellow female singers that they should keep on fighting despite the struggles that they are facing. Moreover, Taylor Swift employed the exclusive pronoun "they" several times, as displayed in datum (3).

- (3) "...Whatever **they** decided I couldn't do is exactly what I did, whatever **they** criticized about me became material for musical satires or inspirational anthems..."

Deictically speaking, the exclusive pronoun "they" refers to people outside the room. This may also refer to the society in general. Delving into the context, these people continually judged and criticized every move Taylor Swift has made, as a female artist in the music industry, as indicated by datum (3).

Furthermore, it shows that these criticisms led her to work even harder to prove them wrong. This serves as an empowerment for the audience that it took countless struggles for Taylor Swift to achieve her success.

Besides the repeated use of pronouns “we” and “they”, Taylor Swift’s speech mainly consisted of assertive speech act. According to Searle (1969), assertive speech act functions to state or inform something that is based on facts. Additionally, there are two kinds of assertive speech act found in Taylor Swift’s speech, namely act of stating, and act of arguing. First of all, the act of stating is represented by datum (4).

- (4) “...When Fearless did win Album of the Year at the Grammys and I did become the youngest solo artist to ever win the award, with that win came criticism and backlash in 2010 that I'd never experienced before as a young new artist...”

In this case, Taylor Swift employed assertive speech act to state the fact that her Grammy win in 2010 received several criticisms, as indicated by the verb “did win” and “did become”. In addition to that, it is comprehensible that the auxiliary verb “did” indicates that she stated these facts based on the event that happened in the past. Moreover, she also addressed the issue of unfair treatment received by women in the music industry using assertive speech act, particularly as an act of stating, as in datum (5)

- (5) “...And now I realize that this is just what happens to a woman in music if she achieves success or power beyond people's comfort level.”

The act of stating, additionally, is related to describing the current situation as it is. Datum (5) shows the common sentence structure of stating something, i.e. beginning the sentence with “this is”, as in “This is just what happens to a woman in music.” In order to support this statement, the speaker made some elaborations in order to give the audience a clearer picture of what is really happening in the music industry. Datum (6) shows how she employed assertive speech act in the form of arguing.

- (6) “...In the last 10 years I have watched as women in this industry are criticized and measured up to each other and

picked at for their bodies, their romantic lives, their fashion, or have you ever heard someone say about a male artist, I really like his songs but I don't know what it is, there's just something about him I don't like? No! That criticism is reserved for us!”

Unlike the act of stating, the act of arguing is most of the times used for proving one’s point. From datum (6), it can be perceived that the speaker is arguing about the ways women in the music industry are criticized from various aspects, namely physical appearance, personal lives, and so on, as in “I have watched as women in this industry are criticized and measured up to each other.” In addition to that, Taylor Swift concluded her previous points using assertive speech act as well, i.e. “That criticism is reserved for us!” The following excerpt also depicts the use of assertive speech act as a means of arguing.

- (7) “...And I saw that as a female in this industry, some people will always have slight reservations about you. Whether you deserve to be there, whether your male producer or co-writer is the reason for your success, or whether it was a savvy record label...”

The speaker’s arguments continue as she asserted, “Some people will always have slight reservations about you,” which is the aftermath of realizing the issue of women underrepresentation in the music industry. This statement is preceded by elaborations, which makes it similar to the previous data. Besides honoring her fellow female musicians, Taylor Swift also gave credits to women who have also worked hard behind the scene in the music industry, and it is depicted by datum (8).

- (8) “...Because rather than fighting to be taken seriously in their fields, these women are still struggling to even have a chance to be in the room...”

Based on the findings, it is evident that Taylor Swift used two types of pronouns repeatedly in her speech, which are inclusive pronoun “we” and exclusive pronoun “they”. She used the inclusive pronoun “we” to address herself and the audience, while the exclusive pronoun “they” refers to people outside the room who criticized women in the music industry. Besides the use of these two pronouns,

she also employed assertive speech act as a means of stating and arguing. Additionally, in this case, assertive speech act is used in stating about criticism that she received during her career, and how it led her to realize the issue of women underrepresentation in the music industry. Furthermore, as an act of arguing, she used assertive speech act to elaborate her argument that such judgments are only directed to women in the industry, particularly the female singers. Likewise, she addressed about the struggles of women who worked behind the scenes as well.

In order to dig deep about the issue of women underrepresentation in the music industry as reflected from Taylor Swift's speech, it is essential to discuss where the discourse practice took place, which was at Billboard Women in Music 2019. This event is held by Billboard annually since 2007, and it aims to honor the contributions and success of women in the industry, as well as to inspire new generations to keep on making music. Taylor Swift is the first artist who received "Woman of the Decade" award at the end of 2010s decade, specifically on December 13, 2019. Previously, she has been awarded as "Woman of the Year" twice, namely in 2011 and 2014.

On the 2019 event, she gave a candid 15-minute speech about both personal and general struggles of being a woman in the music industry, which caught many people's attention. Her speech was recorded and uploaded on Billboard's official YouTube channel, and the video currently has 1.8 million views. The transcription of her speech is also available on Billboard's official website (www.billboard.com). This indicates that Taylor Swift has such power as a woman in the industry. Besides, since her speech became widely discussed in various social media platforms, it proves that her opinions matter. In addition, the event was attended by mostly female singers, as well as other women in the industry, which is the possible reason why Taylor Swift was able to speak up more freely about the issue of women underrepresentation through her speech.

Speaking of Taylor Swift's speech, it has been highlighted that the use of pronouns "we" and "they", as well as assertive speech act indicates the social problem, i.e. women

underrepresentation in the music industry. First of all, one of the probable reasons why Taylor Swift used the pronoun "we" repeatedly is because she wanted to exaggerate that she has gone through the same struggles as every woman in the room. The pronoun "we" created a sense of solidarity or togetherness between Taylor Swift and her fellow female artists, because it contains interpersonal meaning. She employed this inclusive pronoun because she wanted to motivate other women in the industry to do the same thing—keep going and making music under any circumstances. This finding is in line with Tannen's difference theory (1990) that states women have a great tendency to seek for intimacy and build strong relationship with their peers through their language. While she had the opportunity and power to deliver her speech on stage after receiving her award, she chose to empower all women in the music industry, especially who were present at the event.

Meanwhile, the findings related to the use of pronoun "they" and assertive speech act might not support Lakoff's (1973) and Tannen's theory (1990), as they claimed that it is considered as uncommon if women use language to confront their opinions or be assertive. Based on the findings, Taylor Swift used the pronoun "they" to refer to people who criticized women in the music industry, and to increase the awareness of the audience regarding this issue. This use of exclusive pronoun proves that as a woman, Taylor Swift was eager to be vocal about the unfair treatment that she and her fellow female musicians received in the industry. Likewise, she used assertive speech act to state and argue about the issue of women underrepresentation in the music industry. The fact that she employed assertive speech act in her speech many times breaks the gender stereotype that women are not capable of being assertive.

This use of inclusive and exclusive pronouns, as well as assertive speech act reflect Taylor Swift's ideology that women and men in the music industry should be treated fairly. As the recipient of Billboard's first-ever "Woman of the Decade" award, she has the authority to speak for all women in the music industry, and address the issue of underrepresentation that they have experienced through the years. This

may also be perceived as an act of breaking the gender stereotype, particularly those that are related to women.

CONCLUSION

All in all, it can be concluded that Taylor Swift's speech reflects the issue of women underrepresentation in the music industry through at least two linguistic features, namely pronouns and assertive speech act. The use of inclusive pronouns "we" and "us" in her speech supports Tannen's theory (1990) that women tend to seek intimacy and build strong relationship with their peers, while the exclusive pronoun "they" was employed to refer to people who criticized women in the music industry. Furthermore, Taylor Swift used assertive speech act to be vocal about the issue of unfair treatment received by women in the industry, as well as to empower them to keep on making music under any circumstances, breaking society's stereotype that women are not likely to be assertive.

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