

AMBIVALENT DECONSTRUCTIONS OF GENDERED USE OF HEDGES IN CONVERSATIONAL TEXT INCLUDED IN ENGLISH TEXTBOOK FOR JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL IN INDONESIA

Jesica Vanessa Hutapea¹, Ni Komang Arie Suwastini^{2*}, Gede Wisma Krisna Ari Aditya Blangsinga³,
Ni Luh Putu Sri Adnyani⁴, I Nyoman Pasek Hadisaputra⁵, I Gusti Agung Sri Rwa Jayantini⁶

^{1,2,3,4}English Language Education Post-Graduate Program, Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha, Bali, Indonesia

⁵English Language Education, Language and Arts Faculty, Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha, Bali, Indonesia

⁶English Literature, Universitas Mahasaraswati Denpasar, Bali, Indonesia

(arie.suwastini@undiksha.ac.id)

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ABSTRACT

Hedges have been considered stereotypical women's language, marking them as indirect, doubtful, and sensitive communicators. This study traces the effort to deconstruct this gendered use of hedges in conversational texts included in the ninth grade Junior High School EFL textbook. Following the model of interactive qualitative data analysis by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) with Coates's perspective on women and language, the study reveals that the book has shown deconstructive efforts in the stereotypical use of hedges as women's language by assigning male characters uttered hedges in the conversational texts. However, this effort is weakened by the significantly higher use of hedges by female characters as compared to those by male characters. Besides, the assigning of masculine topics for male speakers and feminine topics for female speakers casts ambivalence over this deconstructive effort. These results call for more persistent efforts to include more consistent deconstructions of marginalizing gendered language in future English textbooks.

Keywords: hedges; gender; english textbook; conversational text

ABSTRAK

Penggunaan ekspresi pagar sering dianggap sebagai Bahasa perempuan yang mewakili perempuan sebagai pembicara yang tidak langsung, ragu-ragu, dan lebih sensitif dibandingkan dengan laki-laki. Penelitian ini menganalisa usaha dekonstruksi pada penggunaan ekspresi pagar dalam buku teks Bahasa Inggris Kelas IX SMP. Dengan menerapkan model analisis data kualitatif interaktif dari Miles, Huberman, dan Saldana (2014), diperkaya dengan perspektif dari Coates tentang bahasa dan gender, penelitian ini menemukan bahwa teks percakapan dalam buku ini sudah mencakup dekonstruksi pada penggunaan ekspresi pagar sebagai setreotipe bahasa perempuan. Namun usaha ini dilemahkan oleh tingginya penggunaan ekspresi pagar oleh pembicara perempuan dibandingkan oleh pembicara laki-laki. Lebih jauh, pemilihan topik maskulin untuk pembicara laki-laki dan topik feminine untuk pembicara perempuan juga membuat dekonstruksi ini lebih ambivalen. Penelitian ini menyarankan agar buku Bahasa Inggris dibuat dengan usaha yang lebih kuat untuk mendekonstruksi bahasa bergender yang memarginalkan perempuan.

Kata Kunci: ekspresi pagar; gender; buku teks bahasa Inggris; teks percakapan

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INTRODUCTION

The discrepancy between the rights of women and men because of patriarchy has been a persistent concern for feminists and proponents of gender equality awareness (Friedan, 1963; Gamble, 2004). Men's domination over women constitutes an expectation of how women should behave (Lee, 2018; Millet, 2000; Suwastini, 2013). De Beauvoir (1956) argues that women are required to maintain their identity to fit the expectations of society. According to Lakoff (1973), the way women speak also reflects women's marginal position in the society, where women should speak in a certain way to be deemed acceptable by the patriarchal society in which they live. Thus, the gendered language that often emphasizes women as more polite and indecisive is a form of social construct heavily influenced by patriarchal cultures (Ariyanto, 2018; Emilia et al., 2017; Islam & Asadullah, 2018; Phillips, 2005; Setyono, 2018; Suwastini et al., 2023). Patriarchy, as an ideology that privileges men above women, has a major influence on shaping how men and women use their language (Coates, 2013; Blangsinga et al., 2021; Kostas, 2021; Millet, 2000). Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (2003) further argue that gender systems in society form and are articulated through the different expectations in how men and women speak.

The gendered construction of women as dependent, sensitive, and soft is both reflected and rearticulated in how women communicate (Coates, 2013; Lakoff, 1973). The use of hedges has been closely associated with women's strategy when stating their arguments (Lakoff, 1973). As a strategy of indirectness, the stereotypical use of hedges by women confirmed women's weakness as indirect, doubtful, and indecisive (Coates, 2013). Although at times the very same use of hedges also marks women to be considerate of others' feelings, their use of hedges, such as perhaps, somewhat, sort of, or might, is also considered a strategy to shield themselves from rejection should their argument yield undesired responses (Adnyani & Suwastini, 2023; Tajik & Ramezani, 2018). In her book *Women, Men, and Everyday Talks*, Coates (2013) argues that women's use of hedges may be triggered by the domination of men over women in a patriarchal society, supporting Lakoff's (1973) belief that the use of hedges by women represents their inferiority resulted from their "lack of justification and power" within a society that privileges men over women.

Such sexist use of language can be found not only in daily life. It is also perpetuated in the textbooks (Mihira et al., 2021). Because textbooks represent the beliefs and values of a certain culture (Lee, 2019; Phillipson, 1992), textbooks may include the articulations of gendered language befitting the norms of speaking in the society (Gebregeorgis, 2016; Kostas, 2021; Setyono, 2018). English textbooks have been especially susceptible to this patriarchal subconsciousness. Previous studies on English textbooks show not only perpetuation of women's marginalization through the assignments of traditionally feminine gender roles for women, such as cooking, cleaning, and taking care of her family (Agha et al., 2018; Ariyanto, 2018; Artini et al., 2024; Asadullah et al., 2018; Curaming & Curaming, 2020; Damayanti, 2014; Gebregeorgis, 2016; Islam & Asadullah, 2018; Lestariyana et al., 2020; Ozer et al., 2019; Setyono, 2018; Sittika et al., 2021; Wiraningsih et al., 2025; Yonata et al., 2017), many studies also revealed that women tend to use the stereotypical women's language (Emilia et al., 2017; Mineshima, 2008; Suwastini et al., 2023; Yasamahadewi et al., 2023).

However, analysis of hedges in English textbooks is still sparse. Among previous studies on gendered language in English textbooks, Yasamahadewi et al. (2023) may have tapped into how gender imbalance is still reproduced through unequal turn-taking in conversations and the choice of topics in conversational texts included in English textbooks. Suwastini et al. (2023) have touched on occurrences of stereotypical women's language in an English textbook, yet spared only a scanty portion on the analysis of hedges by male and female characters in textbooks. Thomson (2018), Nur Kholisoh & Setiawan (2018), and Bacang et al. (2019) did focus on the use of hedges in academic settings both in spoken and written English. While Bacang et al. (2019), Nur Kholisoh & Setiawan (2018), and Thomson (2018) investigated the use of hedges among male and female users, they did so in the contexts of students' real usage of the language, both in their written and spoken language.

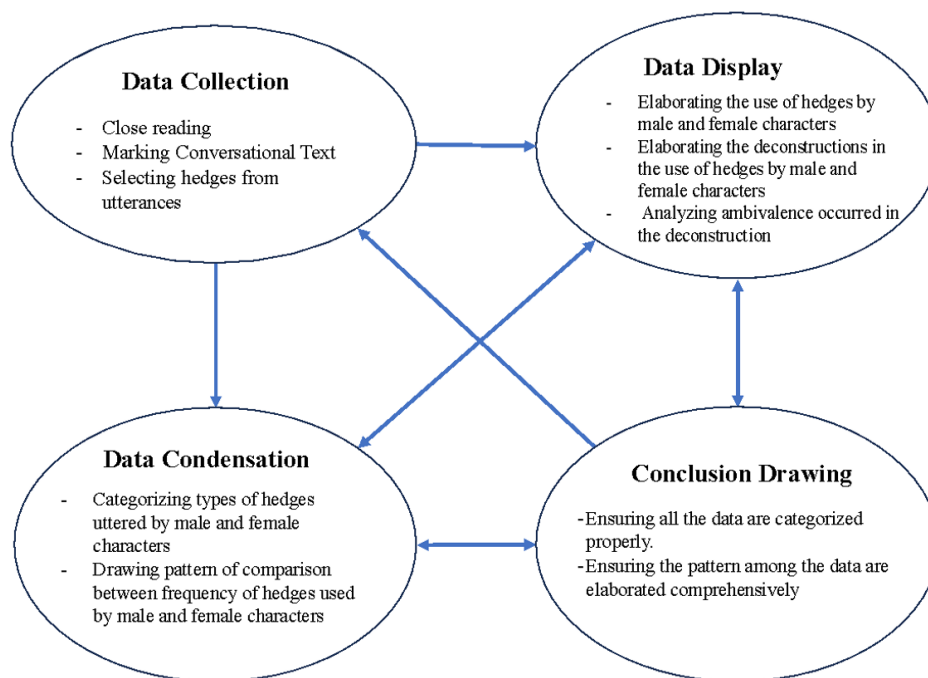
The present study aims to fill the gap by focusing on the use of hedges in an English textbook widely used in Indonesia for teaching the ninth grade in Junior High School. However, instead of focusing on how a textbook rearticulated negative stereotypes of women through their language use, the present study follows the step from Yasamahadewi et al. (2023), the study delves into the possibility of deconstruction of gendered language by investigating how hedges are by male and female characters in conversational texts. This study is expected to enrich the repertoire of research in the employment of textbooks for deconstructing patriarchal gendered binary oppositions and raising gender awareness through the language used in textbooks.

METHODS

Research design

The present study was designed as an interactive qualitative data analysis following the model from Miles et al. (2014) as shown in Figure 1, enriched the critical perspective of gendered language by Lakoff (1973) and Coates (2013).

Figure 1. Research Procedure adapted from Miles, Huberman, and Saldana's (2014) Model of Interactive Qualitative Data Analysis



According to Lakoff (1973) and Coates (2013), differences are found in men's and women's language which can be seen in their way of using hedges, compliments, swearing, and directives. In addition, women are said to use more polite language, resulting in "powerless language," rearticulating women's inferior position in society. It is also stated that women's awareness toward the sensitivity of others' faces results in different linguistic use. On the other hand, men tend to speak frankly, without conscious consideration to make their speech sound more polite by involving as many hedges and compliments. The distinctions between the conversational styles between men and women are recognized as 'feminine' and 'masculine' styles.

Research site and participants

The study focused on the English textbook for Junior High School grade nine, which was published by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture in 2018. The book was the

recommended textbook for English lessons in Junior High School in Indonesia. The object of this study was the use of hedges by male and female characters in the textbook. There were fifteen dialogue sections included in 14 Chapters. The hedges were contained in the dialogues in the forms of reading text, short conversations, and questions which were conveyed by male and female characters. These uses of hedges in the observed conversational texts were analyzed to see whether the female characters still maintained the stigmas that hedges are stereotypically women’s language and to explore whether or not the textbooks already deconstruct these stereotypes.

Data collection and analysis

Figure 1 above shows that once the data were collected, the data analysis in this study was conducted in a simultaneous process of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing, with the conclusion drawn simultaneously confirmed with the data collection. The simultaneous process might be conducted repeatedly to ensure the process of data collection, and its analysis would lead to a trustworthy conclusion.

The data collection was initiated by closely reading the whole book to gain a comprehensive understanding of its content and presentations. This process also allowed the identification of conversational texts included in the book. The data were collected by identifying hedges in these conversational texts. The data collected were then simultaneously categorized and elaborated in data condensation and data display. In the data condensation, the hedges were categorized into the matrix of the type of hedges and the gender of the speakers, allowing the identification of the occurrence frequency between hedges uttered by male and female speakers in each of the types of hedges. Meanwhile, the data display stage focused on the presentation and elaboration of the categorized data to provide analysis of whether the hedges used by male and female characters in the observed conversational texts maintained the stereotypes of women's language or deconstructed the stereotypes, and if the deconstruction still contained ambivalences. Both the data categorization and data display processes led to the conclusion drawing stage. The conclusion drawn was s interactively compared with the data condensation, data display, and data collection until the data collection and the analysis were saturated and the conclusion was consistent and trustworthy.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This study aims to discuss the deconstructions of gendered language use in the English textbook used for junior high school in Indonesia. The analysis is guided by the theory of language and gender by Lakoff (1973) and Coates (2013). This section discusses the hedges found in the conversational texts included in the ninth-grade junior high school textbook. The data collected and categorized are displayed in the following table.

Table 1. Hedges in The Conversational Text

Hedges	Male (f)	Female (f)	Subtotal	Pages
I think	4	8	12	13, 29, 30, 81, 97, 111, 123
I hope	4	7	11	2, 3, 8, 11, 13, 19, 95
maybe	1	1	2	19, 83
actually	0	1	1	19
well	0	1	1	111
just	2	2	4	19, 89
should	1	3	4	19, 23, 30
would	0	1	1	89
Subtotal	12	24		

Table 1 above displays that there are a total of 36 hedges that appear in the conversational texts included in the English textbook analyzed. Among these 36 hedges, the majority of the hedges are expressed by female characters, covering a total of 24 expressions as opposed to the twelve expressed by their male counterparts. The expression 'I think' is expressed by both men and women with a total of twelve occurrences, with four of them expressed by men and eight of them expressed by women. The expression "I hope" is uttered eleven times: four times by male characters and seven times by female characters. The expression 'maybe' is uttered twice, once by a male character and another by a female character. 'Actually' only appears once, uttered by a female character, while 'just' is expressed twice by male characters and twice by female characters. 'Should' is expressed once by a male speaker and three times by a female character, while 'would' is expressed once by a female character. The following section will discuss how these categorizations and their frequency of appearance in the English textbook for ninth grade of junior high school are interpreted.

Discussion

The striking difference between the frequency of hedges expressed by female interlocutors as compared to their male counterparts confirms the stereotype of language between men and women as conceptualized by Lakoff (1973) and Coates (2013): among the 36 hedges included in the conversational texts, 24 five of them were expressed by female characters. This notably higher frequency conforms to the stereotype that women use more hedges in their speech, marking them as the gullible sex whose opinions are prone to doubt and irrationality. Indeed, among these uses of hedges by male and female characters in the book, most of them are used following the stereotypical uses of hedges. There are two main ways the stereotypical use of hedges appears to maintain the assumption of gendered language in women's speech: by having most hedges uttered by female characters and by having female characters utter hedges in male-female conversational text.

However, it is important to notice that the English book under investigation shows deconstructive efforts of stereotypical use of hedges in women's language by having male speakers employ hedges in their utterances. Table 1 shows that there are twelve occurrences of hedges uttered by male speakers in the conversational texts included in the English textbook. Although this number is decidedly lower than those uttered by female characters, it highlights a significant effort to deconstruct the stereotypical use of hedges as a typical of women's language by assigning hedges to male speakers. However, some of these deconstructive uses of hedges are clouded by ambivalence that weakens the deconstructive efforts. The following sections will elaborate on ambivalence in the deconstructive use of hedges in the conversational texts included in the English textbooks for ninth-grade students in Indonesia.

Excerpt 1 below provides an example of a deconstructive use of hedges in conversational text included in the English textbook.

Excerpt 1

- Udin : Siti, let's visit our friend at the orphanage again. Before we left, I (tell) them we would visit them again soon. I want to keep my promise.
- Siti : Let's go this weekend. I (never, hear) from them since Dayu's birthday last month. I'm sure Dayu, Lina, Beni, and Edo would like to go with us.
- Udin : I think so. Let's find them and ask them to go with us.

Excerpt 1 is taken from Chapter 6, page 125, in the "Associating" activity. This conversation depicts a situation where Udin and Siti planned to go to an orphanage. Udin invited Siti to go

along and Siti agreed, and in turn, she decided to invite the other friends. It is crucial to note that in this conversation, the male character initiated the idea to visit the orphanage and called one of the wards there "our friend." Both the assigning of a male character for this topic and the diction "our friend" show an emotionally engaged character, deconstructing the traditional assumption that emotion and attentiveness are feminine traits inherently persistent among women (Millet, 2000; Anggawati et al., 2018; Barton & Sakwa, 2012; Dabbagh, 2016; Riskayani et al., 2021). Moreover, a male character used a hedge to express agreement, when Edo expressed his agreement to Siti. In this case, Udin said "I think so. Let's find them and ask them to go with us." The hedge 'I think' here is used to express uncertainty, indicating Udin's uncertainty whether their friend wanted to go with them or not. Besides, this hedge can also be seen as a polite way to respond to someone, which is a characteristic of women's language (Almusaway et al., 2019; Azizah, 2021; Lakoff, 1973). Thus, this book has included a deconstructive use of hedges by having a male character employ a hedge in his speech (Suwastini et al., 2023).

However, this following conversational text taken from Chapter 2, page 19, in the "Observing and Asking Question" shows a more conflicting deconstructions of stereotypical women's language and the use of hedges.

Excerpt 2

- Siti : Hi Dayu, have you taken any medicine, yet?
- Dayu : Yes, I have. But it only helps a little.
- Siti : Maybe you just have to take some rest in order to get well soon.
- Dayu : You are right. In fact, I have been to the toilet many times today.
- Edo : Poor you. You need to drink a lot of water so that you will not get dehydrated.
- Dayu : This is a good lesson for me. I never care about what I eat.
- Udin : Right. Guys, don't forget to wash your fruits and vegetables before you eat them so you will not take any germs into your tummy.
- Dayu : Yes, Boss. You are right. We should always clean our food well. I should be more careful now.
- Lina : Dayu, you look very pale. I think you need to see the doctor soon in order to get help. Don't take diarrhea lightly.
- Dayu : No, of course not. Actually, my mom is on her way from the office to take me to the hospital.
- Siti : Good. We'll help you to get ready now.

In Excerpt 2, it was portrayed that Dayu got diarrhea. Udin, Edo, Siti, and Lina wanted to help Dayu by giving her advice. There are several hedges employed by female and male characters. The first hedge found in this Excerpt is 'maybe,' expressed by Siti. Siti, a female character, took the initiative to give suggestions, which can be considered a deconstructive act against the traditional pattern in a patriarchal society where women do not pose opinions, let alone initiate one. However, the use of a hedge to start the suggestion undermines this effort. Although the hedge 'maybe' could be meant to make her suggestion for Dayu sound more polite, this effort undermines her assertiveness in taking the initiative to give a suggestion because it sets her back to the stereotypical women's language where hedges are intensely used to soften the possible retaliation received by women when they become assertive in a male-dominated world (Coates, 2013), reverting women back to the essentialist opinion that they should by 'nature' speak more carefully by being less assertive (Gharbavi & Mousavi, 2012).

The second ambivalent deconstruction of hedging found in this conversation is the use of the phrase 'I think' by Lina. The hedge 'I think' is used to express an opinion that Dayu had to see the doctor. Although the phrase 'I think' is also related to someone's prior knowledge concerning her/his opinion, the hedge is often perceived as a sign of bias and unreliability because the phrase is used to show hesitation (Krismanti, 2019). The function of this hedge is similar to the previous uses: avoiding directness, which is a strategy of adding politeness in communication (Citrawati et al., 2021), but it also signals doubt and indecisiveness (Muziatun et al., 2021; Suwastini et al., 2023). These two studies support the interpretation of the use of hedge 'I think' by Lina in this conversation destabilizes the deconstructive effort posed by having Lina, as a female character, express an opinion in the presence of male characters (i.e., Udin and Edo), because the effect of the hedge is softening Lina's argument by placing her as an indirect, doubtful, and conflict-avoiding character (Coates, 2013; Albaqami, 2017; Hyland, 1998).

The third hedge identified in the conversation was employed by Dayu when she wanted to disagree with Lina's suggestion about going to see a doctor. When Dayu stated her opinion, she said, "No, of course not. Actually, my mom is on her way from the office to take me to the hospital." This statement poses a conflicting deconstructive effort. By starting her opinion with "No, of course not," Dayu assertively agreed to Lina's opinion not to take diarrhea lightly. However, she also indirectly disagreed with Lina's implication that Dayu might take diarrhea lightly, thus, she emphasized her thesis by adding that her mother was on her way to take her to the hospital. However, she stated her opinion with the hedge 'actually,' which generally acts as an indirect way to negotiate a negation, which in itself signifies an effort to soften the argument (Coates, 2013; Lakoff, 1973). Thus, while Dayu's refusal is very direct, "No, of course not," which could play a deconstructive tone to the conversation, her use of the hedge "actually" undermines this tone.

Another important point needs to be highlighted in this conversation. In the exchanges between Dayu, Siti, Edo, and Udin, hedges are consistently embedded only in the female characters' statements. None of the male characters are identified using hedges. Moreover, male characters in this conversation are found using different expressions, like 'poor you' and 'right guys. When Edo was giving Dayu advice, he said, "[p]oor you. You need to drink a lot of water so that you will not get dehydrated." First, the statement 'poor you' is patronizing, placing Dayu as a subordinate. And then he went on with a suggestion about staying hydrated very assertively without any hedges. Similarly, Beni also posed a suggestion, "Should we go to the drugstore and buy some for her, Siti?" This suggestion is stated directly without hedges. Although the choice of modal "should" to initiate his suggestion marks a degree of politeness, the absence of hedges emphasizes the assertiveness of the suggestion typical of men's language in a world where men are favored (Suwastini et al., 2023). Besides, it is found in the dialogue that Udin, a male character, tried to dominate the discussion by saying "Right guys, don't forget to wash your fruits and vegetables before you eat them, so...". Here, Udin tried to stop and conclude the discussion by saying "Right. It also showed that Udin shared his knowledge and ordered someone to do something. In addition, it was also supported when Dayu agreed with Udin's opinion She said "Yes, Boss. You are right. We should always clean our food well. I should be more careful now". She also used 'Yes boss,' which refers to Udin. It may imply that women cannot stand by their opinions and must follow what men say. In other words, this characterization confirms the presence of a patriarchal binary opposing, where men seek domination.

Further ambivalence in the use of hedges in the conversational texts contained in the English textbook is reflected in the juxtaposition of hedges with the topics of the conversation, as shown in the following excerpt taken from Chapter 1, page 8, in the "Collecting Information" section.

Excerpt 3

Lina : Thank God, I've got an A for my Math test. But, I don't know the result of my English test, yet.

Dayu : Congratulations on the result of your Math test! I hope you get an A for the English test, too.

Excerpt 3 shows the conversation between Dayu and Lina discussing the results of their tests. Dayu congratulated Lina for getting an A for the Math test. As a response, Dayu wished Lina the best for the English test. Dayu used a hedge when she congratulated Lina, "I hope you get an A for the English test, too." In this conversation, the use of hedge "I hope" by Lina underscores the stereotypical use of hedges in women's language. However, the conversation also reveals that Lina got an A for her Math test, a subject often associated with reason and intelligence, which are attributed to masculine traits (Riskayani et al., 2021; Suwastini, 2013; Suwastini & Wahyudiputra, 2021). As a female character, Lina is described to be attributed with these masculine traits, showing that the content of this conversational text deconstructs the traditional assumption that Math is mostly considered a masculine subject (Anggraini et al., 2019). Besides, this conversation also portrays an ambitious female character, where Lina aimed to get an A for both Math and English tests. The juxtaposition between the feminine use of hedges and the topic of this conversational text softens the persistent stereotypical use of hedges in women's speech.

Another example of such an ambivalent effect from a contradicting use of hedge and the choice of topic in conversational text in the English textbook appears in Chapter 1, page 11, in the "Observing and Asking Question" section. This excerpt highlights two male characters, Edo and Beni, who were talking after they ran.

Excerpt 4

Edo : Amazing! You run like a panther. I'm sure you will win the race.

Beni : I hope so. Thanks

Edo was impressed because Beni could run fast. Edo expressed his opinion that Beni would win the race. Beni responded to this compliment and opinion by saying, "I hope so. Thanks." The use of the hedge "I hope so" in Beni's response marks another departure from the stereotype that hedges are part of women's language because it is a male character who used the hedge. However, the topic of this conversational text points in another direction when the conversation's topic is taken into account. In this conversation, the topic is an outdoor sport, the speakers are males, with one of them complimented the other to be as fast as a panther. A relationship of men with wild animals has been pointed out by Lohani (2010). Panther is associated with strength, endurance, tactics, and speed. Thus, the comparison between Beni and a panther characterizes Beni as an alpha male, who would win the race due to his physical strength.

The ambivalence resulted from the discrepancy in the use of hedges and the topic of the conversation in Excerpt 3 becomes more apparent when compared to the conversational text in Excerpt 4. While Lina did appear ambitious and intelligent, she was assigned a typical indoor activity of studying, where female students have been associated with diligent characters (Anggraini et al., 2019; Rifai & Musta'an, 2019). In these conversations, the deconstructive uses of hedges happened by assigning hedges to both male and female characters. By assigning hedges to both genders, the texts blur the line between men's and women's language in relation to the use of hedges. However, the conversational texts assign contrasting topics to the opposite gender; and as it happens, the masculine topic is given to the conversational text of the male characters, while the more feminine topic is given to the conversational of the female characters. The assignment

of a masculine topic to male characters' conversation and a feminine topic to female characters' conversation reverts the effort to blur the line between men's and women's language by returning the characters to their traditional choice of topics as limited to the traditional divisions of their spheres and characters: the men belong to the outdoors with masculine activities such as running like a panther and the women belongs indoors with more feminine activities such as diligently studying to ace all subjects.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This study aims to trace the possibility of deconstructive use of hedges as stereotypically women's language in the conversational texts included in an English textbook widely used in Indonesia for teaching the ninth grade in Junior High School. It is revealed that the textbook has shown an effort to blur the barrier that marks hedges as stereotypical women's language by assigning male characters to speak using hedges. However, this deconstructive effort is clouded by ambivalence through the significantly higher frequency of hedges used by female speakers compared to those uttered by male speakers. Moreover, many of these hedges by female speakers appear when the conversational texts include male and female characters, with only the female characters employing hedges in their utterances. Such conversational texts avert the deconstructive effort through the use of hedges by male characters back to the traditional assumption that women indeed are hesitant, doubtful, and anxious speakers who had to use hedges to give them more time to compose their argument, soften their opinions, and to sound more polite. Considering that these are the types of speech expected of women in a patriarchal society, the use of hedges by female characters in mixed-gender conversational texts undo the deconstructive steps that already appear in the textbook. Besides, the choice of masculine subjects in conversational texts of male speakers and feminine subjects in conversational texts of female speakers places the line of male and female speeches back into binary oppositions of the traditional gender matrix. Thus, while this study admits that the textbook has included efforts to deconstruct gendered and stereotypical use of hedges as women's more feminine language, the efforts are still weak. Hence, this study calls for more persistent efforts that consciously keep the fight against male/female binary dichotomies in language use more decidedly away from ambivalence. This study focuses only on one English textbook used for Indonesian ninth-grade students, therefore, the results may not represent English educational materials across different grades and regions. The study does not consider the cultural and contextual factors of the authors, which may affect the construction and representation of gender roles in language.

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*Corresponding author

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