

Gender Differences in the Communication Styles of Vice-Chancellors: A Case Study of Professor (Mrs.) Rita Akosua Dickson and Professor Kwasi Obiri-Danso



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ABSTRACT

This study explored gender differences in the communication styles of Vice-Chancellors in their investiture speeches. Adopting the Deficit Theory model, we compared the speeches of Professor (Mrs.) Rita Akosua Dickson (RAD), the current Vice-Chancellor (VC), and Professor Kwasi Obiri-Danso (KOD), a former VC of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST). The analysis reveals partial support for Lakoff's (1975) gender-sensitive linguistic items. RAD's exclusive use of rhetorical questions aligns with the linguistic item's association with women's language for persuasion. However, both Vice-Chancellors used adjectives and intensifiers, with RAD potentially employing them more frequently. Similarly, RAD used a higher number of adverbial clauses, particularly purpose clauses, suggesting a focus on relational aspects of communication. Interestingly, both VCs preferred postposed adverbial clauses, highlighting the need for caution in generalising the position of adverbial clauses as a gendered marker. Additionally, RAD's language-mixing (English and Akan) emphasises the influence of factors beyond gender in communication. This study highlights the complexity of gendered language use, urging future research to consider broader speaker samples, specific language element functions, and social contexts in analysing gender differences in English syntax.

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INTRODUCTION

Gender concerns have been linked to language use since the 1970s, owing in part to the women's movement that arose at the time.¹ Gender studies and language studies are multidisciplinary academic fields. The study of gender is critical to the study of language. One aim of such a study is to investigate the distinctive characteristics of speeches or addresses given by men and women. There are obvious distinctions between men and women in a variety of disciplines. Gender differences represent not only the

¹ Robin Lakoff, "Language and Woman's Place," *Language in Society* 2, no. 1 (April 18, 1973): 45–79, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404500000051>; Faye Crosby and Linda Nyquist, "The Female Register: An Empirical Study of Lakoff's Hypotheses1," *Language in Society* 6, no. 3 (1977): 313–22; Cheris Kramer, "Women's Speech: Separate but Unequal?," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 60, no. 1 (1974): 14–24; Anthony Mulac and Torborg Louisa Lundell, "Linguistic Contributors to the Gender-Linked Language Effect," *Journal of Language and Social Psychology* 5, no. 2 (1986): 81–101.

voices of men and women, but also their varied lifestyles and attitudes. According to Lakoff, the differences in language between men and women reflect their respective responsibilities in society.²

In the literature, men and women have been found to communicate differently.³ Research suggests that men and women use linguistic structures differently to achieve specific communicative goals. Mandorf, for instance, illustrates a significant difference in the use of adverbial clauses (with respect to their semantic types and positioning) between men and women.⁴ Other gender-sensitive linguistic structures have been found in the use of hedges, intensifiers and tag questions,⁵ modal verbs⁶ and subordinate clauses.⁷ These gender-differentiated language uses have been explained along the male-female dominance dichotomy. Proponents of the Deficit and Dominance Theories contend that men's language is neutral as compared to women's language which has been described as deficient.⁸ Clearly, sex differences in the use of linguistic items have been explored in the past decades. The present study seeks to validate the conversational differences claimed by the Deficit Theory within a formal context of language use. The choice of a formal context is to understand whether factors such as formality, power dynamics, and audience play roles in shaping speech patterns and linguistic choices. Accordingly, the study sought to find variations in the communication styles of two VCs of KNUST, Professor (Mrs.) Rita Akosua Dickson and Professor Kwasi Obiri-Danso. The objective of this study was to examine gender differences in the communication styles of the two VCs. The sections that follow present the theoretical framework, a review of related studies, the methodology, and the findings.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Deficit Theory

Researchers in language and gender ascribe the differences in the use of language between men and women to three main models: The Deficit Model, the Dominance Model and the Difference Model. The Deficit Model is based on the work of Lakoff in her *Language and Woman's Place* in which she argued that there are two styles of speech: "neutral language" and "women's language" (WL).⁹ According to her, WL is weak and unassertive. In other words, it is deficient in comparison to the neutral or male language. This deficiency, according to Lakoff, is characterised by linguistic forms such as hedges, 'empty' adjectives and exaggerated intonation contours. The Dominance Model considers women as an oppressed group and therefore, interprets linguistic differences in women's and men's speeches in terms of male dominance and women's subordination. The Difference Model holds that women and men belong to different subcultures.

For the purposes of this study, the Deficit Model was adopted to examine the differences in the communication styles, particularly in the linguistic choices of the two Vice-Chancellors. Lakoff identified several linguistic features which are more typical of feminine speech and that which indicate women's tentativeness and uncertainty.¹⁰ She suggested the following ten (10) features (cited in Holmes) as characteristic of women's speech:¹¹

- A. Use of lexical hedges and fillers, e.g. you know, sort of, well, you see.
- B. Tag questions: e. g. she is very nice, isn't she?
- C. Rising intonation on declaratives: e.g. it's really good?
- D. Using 'empty' adjectives like charming, cute, divine.
- E. Using precise colour terms, like magenta, and aquamarine.

² Robin Lakoff, *Language and Women's Place* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1975).

³ George Lakoff, "Linguistics and Natural Logic," *Synthese* 22, no. 1 (1970): 151–271; Deborah Tannen, *Gender and Discourse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Deborah Tannen, "You Just Don't Understand, Women and Men in Conversation," *New York: William Morrow*, 1990.

⁴ Britta Mondorf, "Gender Differences in English Syntax," *Journal of English Linguistics* 30, no. 2 (2002): 158–80.

⁵ Janet Holmes, "Functions of You Know in Women's and Men's Speech," *Language in Society* 15, no. 1 (1986): 1–21; Janet Holmes, "Hedges and Boosters in Women's and Men's Speech," *Language & Communication* 10, no. 3 (1990): 185–205; Lakoff, *Language and Women's Place*; Lakoff, "Language and Woman's Place."

⁶ Jennifer Coates, "Epistemic Modality and Spoken Discourse," *Transactions of the Philological Society* 85, no. 1 (1987): 110–31; Bent Preisler, *Linguistic Sex Roles in Conversation* (De Gruyter Mouton., 1986).

⁷ Jespersen Otto, *Language: Its Nature, Development, and Origin* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1922).

⁸ Lakoff, *Language and Women's Place*.

⁹ Lakoff, *Language and Women's Place*.

¹⁰ Lakoff, *Language and Women's Place*.

¹¹ Janet Holmes and Nick Wilson, *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*, vol. 2 (Routledge, 2022).

- F. Use of intensifiers, like very, so, extremely
- G. Hypercorrect grammar: consistency in using standard verb forms.
- H. Super polite forms by making indirect requests and euphemism
- I. Avoidance of strong swear words, like fudge, my goodness.
- J. Emphatic stress, e.g. it was a BRILLANT performance.

Due to these particular communication styles of women, they are believed to “say more” than men. The present study investigated the major linguistic differences in the two addresses by examining the validity of the conversational differences claimed by the Deficit model. The data for the study were gathered from formal addresses, not from conversations. Therefore, the researchers concentrated on their use of questions, adjectives, intensifiers and adverbial clauses.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender Differences in Language Use

Xia points out explicit differences between the use of language among men and women.¹² With respect to vocabulary, WL is considered to favour colour words, adjectives, adverbs, diminutives, first-person plural pronouns and little use of swear words and expletives. In regards to syntax, WL is characterised by modulation, imperative mood, and correctness of grammar. According to Lakoff, women like to employ tag questions because they can defuse stressful situations, and they are more likely than males to utilise interrogatives to convey their ideas.¹³ Fishman gathered conversation recordings from many couples and discovered that women used three times as many tag questions as males.¹⁴ According to Lakoff, women may respond to a question with a rising tone, but males choose to employ a falling tone to convey a solid declaration.¹⁵ Lakoff asserts that women tend to act in this way because they are less confident than males in their views and in themselves.¹⁶ The distinct use of language also indicates that women are more susceptible to lack of confidence.

In contrast, Holmes holds that women’s use of tag questions is not an indication of insecurity and uncertainty as “all tag questions function as devices for eliciting a response from the addressee by virtue of their interrogative form.”¹⁷ From another perspective, Xia attributes this to the fact that women are more courteous and thoughtful than males.¹⁸ When it comes to asking questions, Shazu notes that although a question from the male is typically a sincere request for information, a question from a woman is frequently a rhetorical device to engage the other person in a discussion or to get attention from other participants.¹⁹ As a result, women tend to ask more questions. In writing, both genders employ rhetorical questions as stylistic strategies.²⁰ Tag questions are commonly used to verify or confirm facts, but in women’s language, they can also be used to avoid making forceful assertions.²¹ Holmes takes an anthropological approach to explaining WL, developing a set of sociolinguistic universals.²² She observes that women tend to place greater importance on the emotive aspects of interaction, employ language strategies that emphasise cooperation, engage in ways that sustain and develop solidarity, and are stylistically more adaptable than males.

Women, according to Wenjing, always use words that have exaggerated meanings, including words like gorgeous, wonderful, cute, heavenly, adorable, darling, precious, sweet, and charming.²³ Men, on the other hand, use simple adjectives. Men and women employ adverbs differently, too. He further notes that women tend to use adjectives like horribly, fairly, terribly, immensely, quite, and so on, but males use utterly, very, and really. Furthermore, Lakoff discovered that women use more intensifiers than

¹² Xiufang Xia, “Gender Differences in Using Language.,” *Theory & Practice in Language Studies (TPLS)* 3, no. 8 (2013).

¹³ Lakoff, *Language and Women’s Place*.

¹⁴ Pamela M. Fishman, *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 1980).

¹⁵ Lakoff, *Language and Women’s Place*.

¹⁶ Lakoff, *Language and Women’s Place*.

¹⁷ Holmes, “Hedges and Boosters in Women’s and Men’s Speech.”

¹⁸ Xia, “Gender Differences in Using Language.”

¹⁹ Rafiul I Shazu, “Relationship between Gender and Language,” *Journal of Education and Practice* 5,no.14 (2014):93–100.

²⁰ Shazu, “Relationship between Gender and Language.”

²¹ Lakoff, *Language and Women’s Place*.

²² Janet Holmes, *Women, Men and Politeness* (Routledge, 2013).

²³ Xia Wenjing, “Study on Gender Differences in English,” *Lecture Notes in Information Technology* 16 (2012): 218.

men. These include the intensifiers extremely, fairly, terribly and quite.²⁴ Lakoff further argues that women using more adjectives to describe objects and feelings is an indication that they are more sensitive to their surroundings and more willing to communicate their emotions through language. Wenjing holds that there is a distinct feminine lexicon in English that males may not, dare not, or will not use.²⁵ Tannen also maintains that the use of imperative phrases distinguish men and women. While men are thought to use many imperatives,²⁶ women rather use adjectives such as maybe, perhaps, definitely, or “let’s patterns” to decrease the urgency tone.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the qualitative approach. A textual analysis and description of the data was done to enable the researchers to provide an in-depth report of the differences between the linguistic choices of the two VCs. The investiture address of Prof. Kwasi Obiri-Danso (a Former VC of KNUST), which was delivered on August 1, 2016 and that of Prof. (Mrs.) Rita Akosua Dickson (current VC of KNUST), which was delivered on August 1, 2020 served as data for the study. The speeches were downloaded from the university’s website. The clauses in the speeches were parsed manually to aid in the textual analysis. The Deficit Model, specifically Lakoff’s ten features of women’s language guided the analysis.²⁷ Mondorf’s characterisation of women’s and men’s language in regards to using adverbial clauses also informed the analysis.²⁸ After parsing the clauses, the researchers agreed to concentrate on the VCs’ use of questions, empty adjectives, intensifiers and adverbial clauses. This decision was taken mainly because the researchers considered the fact that the addresses, being formal and not mere conversations, may not include all the features outlined by Lakoff.²⁹ In the presentation, extracts from the addresses were labelled for easy reference. Extracts from Professor Kwasi Obiri-Danso were labelled KOD and those from Rita Akosua Dickson’s were labelled RAD. The sentences in each of the addresses were also numbered. RAD – S63, for example, stands for sentence sixty-three (63) in RAD’s address. The total number of sentences in RAD’s address is one hundred and seventy-nine (179) while those in KOD’s are eighty-one (81).

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

This section presents findings of the differences in the communication styles of both Vice Chancellors as far as their uses of questions, empty adjectives, intensifiers, adverbial clauses and language mixing are concerned.

Questions

The use of tag questions has been identified in the literature as a gender-sensitive linguistic item. Lakoff contends that WL is often characterised by the use of tag questions.³⁰ The analysis revealed that RAD did not use tag questions in her address. Instead, she used rhetorical questions. Interestingly, KOD did not use any questions at all in his address. RAD, on the other hand, used two (2) questions in hers. Based on this, it is concluded that the use of questions is a feature in women’s speech. The questions identified here are not tag questions; they are rhetorical questions. Rhetorical questions are questions used to make a point, not to solicit an answer. They are considered a useful persuasive device since they speak directly to readers or listeners so they pause and think about those questions. The questions identified in RAD’s speech have been provided below.

- (1) *Your Excellency, Nana Chancellor, I will like to use this opportunity to focus a bit on the main pillars of my vision and I want to reiterate that our collective desire as a community to continuously seek the growth, prosperity, and excellence for our university should drive all of us to this common goal. **How do we begin?** We need to start by developing a culture of ‘growth mindedness’ where growth of the University permeates our thinking and actions on a daily basis...*
[RAD – S63 - 65]

²⁴ Lakoff, “Language and Woman’s Place.”

²⁵ Wenjing, “Study on Gender Differences in English.”

²⁶ Tannen, “You Just Don’t Understand, Women and Men in Conversation.”

²⁷ Lakoff, *Language and Women’s Place*.

²⁸ Mondorf, “Gender Differences in English Syntax.”

²⁹ Lakoff, *Language and Women’s Place*.

³⁰ Lakoff, *Language and Women’s Place*.

- (2) *We will therefore need smarter strategies to generate and to improve the quantum of our internally generated funds (IGF). **How are we going to do this?** Institute structures that will help us earn more from our patented technologies and intellectual properties...* [RAD –S136 - 138]

From the extracts, it is learnt that RAD provides the basis for posing the questions, poses the questions and since they are rhetorical questions, provides answers to them. RAD must have used the questions for persuasive effect.

Adjectives

Lakoff identifies empty adjectives as a feature of WL.³¹ In Lakoff’s assertion, empty adjectives are “adjectives that seem devoid of all but a vague positive emotive sense.” In other words, they are meaningless adjectives. To know whether the VCs used empty adjectives in the addresses or not, the researchers examined their use of all adjective phrases (AdjPs) in the speeches. It must be pointed out that in the search for the adjective phrases, titles of dignitaries and the name of the university *Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology* were left out in the analysis. Again, adjective phrases in direct quotations from other sources were all left out. The analysis revealed that the adjective phrase was mainly used for two main syntactic functions in the speeches. They were used attributively and predicatively. As attributive phrases, they were used as pre-modifiers of nouns (Pm1s). Those that were used predicatively function as complements of verbs. In other words, they were subject complements in clauses (SVCs) in which they occurred. Since the notion of an *empty adjective* corresponds to an adjective that is meaningless and subjective, our position is that if there were any empty adjectives at all, they would be among the ones used attributively or as pre-modifiers, not the ones that were used as complements of verbs. Complements of verbs are obligatory items that are required in clauses. They can therefore not be empty adjectives.

Adjectives as Pre-modifiers

Table 1 below presents the frequencies of all the adjective phrases that were used as pre-modifiers in the speeches.

Table 1: Number of Adjective Phrases used as Pre-modifiers (Pm1) by RAD and KOD

Adjective Phrases as Pm1s	RAD		KOD	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
1 Pm1	263	80.4	125	82.2
2 AdjPs as Pm1s	38	11.6	8	5.35
2 AdjPs joined by ‘and’ as Pm1s	20	6.1	16	10.5
3 AdjPs as Pm1s	3	.91	2	1.3
3 AdjPs joined by ‘and’ as Pm1s	2	.61	1	.65
5 AdjPs as Pm1s	1	.38	-	-
TOTAL	327	100.00	152	100.00

As shown in Table 1, RAD used more adjective phrases than KOD did. RAD used a total of three hundred and twenty-seven (327) adjective phrases while KOD used one hundred and fifty-two (152). This is not surprising because the number of sentences in RAD’s speech is more than the number in KOD’s. However, it is interesting to note how the two genders used the adjective phrases as pre-modifiers. While RAD used two hundred and sixty-three (263) single adjective phrases as pre-modifiers of nouns in her entire address, KOD used one hundred and twenty-five (125). Moreover, thirty-eight (38) instances of a combination of two (2) adjective phrases were identified in RAD’s speech, while eight (8) instances were identified in KOD’s. As shown in Table 1, while RAD piled up to five adjective phrases as pre-modifiers of a noun head, the highest for KOD is three. Extracts (3a-3e) below are instances of the use of single adjective phrases by both VCs as modifiers of noun heads or as pre-modifiers. The adjective phrases have been italicised and bolded.

³¹ Lakoff, *Language and Women’s Place*.

- (3) a. *It is with a **deep** sense of gratitude, appreciation and humility that I stand before you today as the **new** Vice-Chancellor of no less an institution than the **prestigious** Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), Kumasi. [RAD – S1]*
- b. *I humbly express my **deepest** appreciation and gratitude to His Royal Majesty, Otumfuo Osei-Tutu II, the Asantehene and the Chancellor of our **noble** University... [RAD – S5]*
- c. *... it is because I am standing on the shoulders of **great** men who have provided **excellent** leadership to this **great** institution of KNUST. [KOD – S1]*
- d. *I wish to express my **utmost** gratitude to His Royal Majesty Otumfuo Osei-Tutu II, the Asantehene and Chancellor of KNUST, the Chairman of Council, Dr. Kwame Saarah-Mensah and my **immediate** predecessor, Prof W.O. Ellis for their **immense** support. [KOD – S4]*
- e. *To my Mum and Dad of **blessed** memory, my **extended** family, I say thanks to you. [KOD – S7]*

As shown in Table 1, RAD and KOD used two independent adjective phrases as premodifiers in their addresses. Extracts (4a-4d) are instances of RAD's use of two independent adjectives to pre-modify noun heads.

- (4) a. *... and the many more who have joined us via **various virtual** platforms, as the Vice-Chancellor of this University. [RAD -S2]*
- b. *I humbly express my deepest appreciation and gratitude to His Royal Majesty, Otumfuo Osei-Tutu II, the Asantehene and the Chancellor of our noble University for his **invaluable fatherly** love and wise counsel. [RAD – S5]*
- c. *Consequently, the **global higher** education community including our own KNUST is required to pursue new strategies to deliver on their mandates. [RAD – S44]*
- d. *As we seek to provide **high-quality all-inclusive** education that produces globally competitive graduates in terms of knowledge, skills and information technology, we will also work to improve our teaching and learning environments by enhancing curricula, pedagogy, culture, infrastructure and digital technologies. [RAD – S74]*

Extracts (5a-5c) are also instances of KOD's use of two independent adjectives to pre-modify noun heads.

- (5) a. *However, I hold no insular mentality; I build bridges rather than walls and therefore my administration shall welcome **fresh progressive** ideas. [KOD – S13]*
- b. *Available records show that, at the **pre-tertiary education** level, almost equal numbers of girls and boys take mathematics and science subjects and perform almost equally. [KOD – S25]*
- c. *In the days ahead, a special “STEM for Girls Unit” will be set up under the Vice-Chancellor's Office to design and implement a **Special Mentorship** programme at the pre-tertiary levels nationwide to shore up girls' interests in STEM education and careers. [KOD – S31]*

Furthermore, the analysis, as shown in Table 1, revealed that the VCs used two adjective phrases joined by the conjunction 'and' as pre-modifiers in their addresses. Some examples include those in extract (6) below. The examples in (6a) – (6c) are from RAD's while those in (6d) – (6f) are from KOD's.

- (6) a. *... for advancement in science and technology for **industrial and social** uptake [RAD – S62]*
- b. *... we will also work to improve our **teaching and learning** environments [RAD – S74]*
- c. *As a **science and technology** university, we must be seen to be setting the pace [RAD – S80]*
- d. *If I am standing here this **august and historic** day ... [KOD – S1]*
- e. *... for their immense support and for their **painstaking and meticulous** guidance during the period of transition. [KOD – S4]*
- f. *...highlighting the university's **critical and outstanding** work in fulfilment of its vision and mission. [KOD – S19]*

Instances where the VCs used three adjective phrases as pre-modifiers in their addresses were also identified. The three instances in RAD's address have been provided in (7a) – (7c). Those from KOD'S have been provided in (7d) and (7e) below. The adjectives have been boldened.

- (7) a. *Consequently, the **global higher education** community including our own KNUST*

is required to pursue new strategies to deliver on their mandates. [RAD S44]

b. My vision is “to position KNUST as a **competitive global research-intensive institution for advancement in science and technology**... [RAD – S62]

c. We will maintain our focus as Leaders in Change in the training of highly **skilled 21st century entrepreneurial graduates for social, economic and technological advancements**.

d. The Colleges, in collaboration with relevant institutions, will be encouraged to run **skills training, demand-driven certificate** courses, including defensive driving and transport management, pharmaceutical logistics and fashion. [KOD – S48]

e. Under the Triple Helix model is a physical place that supports university-industry and government collaboration with the intent of creating **high technology economic development and advancement of knowledge**. [KOD –S56]

Adjectives as Verb Complements (SVC Patterns)

The analysis revealed that the VCs used adjective phrases as complements of verbs. These adjective phrases occurred in SVC sentence patterns. Table 2 shows the frequencies and percentages of adjectives in SVC sentence patterns.

Table 2: Adjectives in SVC Sentence Pattern

Types of SVC Patterns	RAD		KOD	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
SVC WITH 1 AdjP	5	18.51	9	60.1
SVC WITH 2 AdjPs	2	7.40	2	13.3
2 SVC WITH AdvPs	20	74.09	4	26.6
TOTAL	27	100.00	15	100.00

As shown in Table 2, RAD used more SVC patterns than KOD. While she used twenty-seven (27), KOD used a total of fifteen (15). The SVCs were of three main types - those that occurred with a single adjective phrase, those that occurred with two adjective phrases and those that had the adjective(s) pre-modified with adverb phrases (AdvPs). It was found that RAD had five (5) of hers occurring with single adjective phrases and two (2) with two (2) adjective phrases. KOD, on the other hand, had nine (9) of his occurring with single adjective phrases and two (2) with two (2) adjective phrases. While RAD had twenty (20) of hers pre-modified with adverb phrases (AdvPs), KOD had four (4) of such instances. The examples in (8) below are instances of the VCs' use of single adjective phrases as complements to verbs. The adjectives have been underlined.

- (8). a. *Indeed, your enduring selflessness is evident for all to see.* [RAD – S34]
 b. *I am aware of several initiatives in this direction ...* [RAD – S151]
 c. In fact, *the number of congratulatory messages I have, and continue to receive ... are enough* [RAD – S156]
 d. *It is however instructive to note that, ...* [KOD – S28]
 e. *The quality of both teaching and non-teaching staff is therefore vital ...* [KOD – S35]

The examples in (9) are instances of the VCs' use of two adjectives as complements. Interestingly, it was noted that in all those cases, the adjectives were joined with the conjunction ‘and’.

- (9). a. *I am happy and proud to be working under his tutelage and guidance.* [RAD –S 6]
 b. *... our work is important and essential to the success and advancement of our students, their families, and our society.* [RAD – S167]
 c. *I feel grateful and privileged to have such partners charting KNUST’s future with me.* [KOD-S83]

Lakoff has identified intensifiers as a feature in women’s language.³² Interestingly, twenty (20) of RAD’s twenty-seven (27) SVCs sentence patterns are those that have their complement adjectives pre-modified with adverb phrases (AdvPs) or intensifiers. This is strong evidence that RAD, as a woman, used more intensifiers than KOD. All the twenty instances from RAD’s speech have been provided in extract (10) below. The adjective phrases and the pre-modifier adverbs or intensifiers are in bold. The intensifiers have been underlined.

- (10). a. *It is, **indeed, very true** that with God, all things are possible. [RAD – S3]*
 b. *It is **indeed, true** that “wonna panin a, due!” [RAD – S8]*
 c. *... I am **extremely overwhelmed** by the confidence you have reposed in me by this unique opportunity to serve my alma mater. [RAD – S11]*
 d. *There is **no doubt** that ... [RAD - S13]*
 e. *... and I am **indeed grateful**. [RAD – S25]*
 f. *I am **truly grateful** to you all. [RAD – S41]*
 g. *... we are all **fully aware** of the challenges ... [RAD – S43]*
 h. *If there was ever a time that our mandate as a university was **more relevant**, then it is now. [RAD – S48]*
 i. *We are **not only content** with being an academic powerhouse in Ghana and West Africa ... [RAD – S75]*
 j. *... the lessons under the COVID-19 experience is **abundantly clear** to all of us. [RAD – S76]*
 k. *... it has become **imperatively clear**... [RAD – S90]*
 l. *It is **very possible**. [RAD – S110]*
 m. *... it is **very obvious** that... [RAD – S135]*
 n. *...that funding from the central government sources to us, is **severely constrained**... [RAD – S135]*
 o. *I have **no doubt** about the future of our University ... [RAD –S 155]*
 p. *I am **deeply grateful** ... [RAD – S158]*
 q. *... we are **absolutely poised** and **well able** to take this University to its next stage... [RAD – 159]*
 r. *I am **very excited** that the focus of all our activities will be towards our students... [RAD – S162]*
 s. *Words fail me in trying to adequately express how **deeply humbled, honoured and inordinately privileged** I am in being given this great opportunity. [RAD – 165]*
 t. *.. I am **very positive** ... [RAD – S167]*

The four instances of SVCs pre-modified with adverb phrases (AdvPs) in KOD’s speech have also been provided in extract (11) below. The adjective phrases and the adverb pre-modifiers are in bold. The intensifiers have been underlined.

- (11) a. *The under representation of women in STEM education is **indeed worrying** ... [KOD – S29]*
 b. *Nana Chancellor, I am **fully committed** to these virtues [KOD – S46]*
 c. *In today’s globalized world, interactions at home, at the workplace and among peers are being **increasingly conditioned and modified** by Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). [KOD – S59]*
 d. *We will need to be **discerningly conservative** in spending and **alert** to [KOD – S68]*

Intensifiers

As indicated already, both VCs used intensifiers. The analysis revealed that the intensifiers were used for four main purposes – to modify adjectives, to modify verb phrases, to modify other adverbs and to modify the whole clauses or sentences. Table 3 below presents the frequencies and the percentages of the intensifiers used in both speeches.

³² Lakoff, *Language and Women’s Place*.

Table 3: Intensifiers in the Speeches

Types of Intensifiers	RAD		KOD	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Modifier of an Adjective	20	32.25	4	26.67
Modifier of a Verb	33	53.22	10	66.66
Modifier of another Adverb	2	3.24	0	-
Modifier of the whole clause	7	11.29	1	6.67
TOTAL	62	100.00	15	100.00

As shown in Table 3, RAD used more intensifiers than KOD. Whereas we identified sixty-two (62) intensifiers in RAD’s speech, we identified fifteen (15) in KOD’s. Thirty-three (33) of RAD’s intensifiers were used to modify verbs, twenty (20) to modify adjectives, seven (7) to modify whole sentences and two (2) to modify other adverbs. In KOD’s, ten (10) were used to modify verbs, four (4) to modify adjectives and one (1) to modify the whole clause. KOD did not use an intensifier to modify another adverb. These findings support the view that women use more intensifiers than men. What makes it interesting is the fact that the addresses are formal. Extracts (12a-12d) are illustrative examples of intensifiers from both addresses used as modifiers of adjectives. The intensifiers are in bold.

- (12) a. *If there was ever a time that our mandate as a university was **more** relevant, then it is now.* [RAD – S48]
- b. *... the lessons under the COVID-19 experience is **abundantly** clear to all of us.* [RAD – S76]
- c. *We will need to be **discerningly** conservative in spending and alert to* [KOD – S68]
- d. *The under representation of women in STEM education is **indeed** worrying* [KOD – S29]

Extracts (13) are also illustrative examples of intensifiers used as modifiers of verbs. The intensifiers are in bold.

- (13) a. *But as our motto **clearly** says, “Nyansapo wosane no badwemma”, ...* [RAD – S46]
- b. *I **particularly admire** the courage and the tenacity of purpose with which you have discharged your duties these past 4 years; **tirelessly putting** your shoulders to the wheel to bring us to where we are today.* [RAD – S20]
- c. *Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) are **widely regarded** as critical to the socio-economic development of nations...* [KOD – S22]
- d. *We shall continue to retool our laboratories and studios, resource research units and provide opportunity for each student **to personally own** a computer to facilitate learning.* [KOD – 24]

Extracts (14a) and (14b) are illustrative examples of intensifiers used as modifiers of another adverb.

- (14) a. *It is, **indeed, very** true that with God, all things are possible.* [RAD – S3]
- b. *I thank the Good Lord who has ordered my steps in this journey and has brought me **thus far**.* [RAD- S4]

Intensifiers, as pointed out, are used as modifiers of the entire sentence. Extracts (15) exemplify this:

- (15) a. ***Indeed**, your enduring selflessness is evident for all to see.* [RAD – 35]
- b. ***Thankfully**, as an institution, we are blessed with many such constructive partnerships both locally and internationally...* [RAD – 130]
- c. ***Indeed**, continual success cannot be achieved without discipline.* [KOD – 42]

Adverbial Clauses

Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik have indicated that adverbial clauses operate as adjuncts or disjuncts and that, they are like adverbs, and are often commutable with prepositional phrases.³³ These clauses modify verbs, adjectives or other adverbs in a sentence, providing more detail about how, when, where, why or to what extent something happens. Mondorf reckons that women’s speech favours adverbial clauses.³⁴ She argues that in semantic dimension and positioning, adverbial clauses are gender sensitive. The differences in adverbial clauses with regard to their semantic types and positioning were analysed.

Semantic Clause Type

A variety of adverbial clauses were found in the data. Five different semantic types of adverbial clauses were identified. The frequency of occurrence for each clause type has been provided in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Semantic clause types

Adverbial Clause Types	RAD		KOD	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Reason clauses	3	2.22	12	22.22
Time clauses	25	18.52	-	-
Purpose clauses	101	74.82	38	70.38
Conditional clauses	4	2.96	2	3.70
Circumstance clauses	2	1.48	2	3.70
TOTAL	135	100.00	54	100.00

As shown in Table 4, one hundred and thirty-five (135) adverbial clauses were found in RAD’s speech and fifty-four (54) in KOD’s. Thus, RAD employed more adverbial clauses. This finding affirms Mondorf’s assertion that women tend to use more adverbial clauses.³⁵ Mondorf indicates that women often use purpose and causal clauses in their speeches.³⁶ These clauses, according to her assertion, are extensively used by women to signal their lowest commitment to the truth of their proposition. In the data, one hundred and one (101) purpose clauses were found in RAD’s speech and thirty-eight (38) in KOD’s. This observation validates Mondorf’s assertion that purpose clauses are used more extensively in women’s speech than in men’s.³⁷ No causal clause was found in either of the VC’s speeches. Extracts (16a-16d) are illustrative examples of purpose clauses in the data. The purpose clauses are in bold.

- (16) a. *Very soon, we will celebrate our finalists via virtual congregation and also warm up **to receive the first batch of the Free SHS graduands.*** [RAD – S73]
 b. *The KNUST Counselling Centre will therefore be strengthened with expanded support services including e-counselling **to enable staff and students cope with the new normal.*** [RAD – S101]
 c. *Trust me **to have enough filters in place to keep the wheels of KNUST on track and moving.*** [KOD – S14]
 d. *These should serve me well **to face the challenges ahead.*** [KOD – S18]

It is also significant to note that while time clauses were found in RAD’s speech, none was found in KOD’s. Twenty-five (25) time clauses were found in RAD’s speech. Time clauses offer a temporal context to the proposition stated in the speech. These clauses add details and specificity to the speaker’s assertion. This aids speakers in presenting a more concrete picture of their assertions. The researchers are of the view that the use of time clauses by RAD suggests her forethought about her propositions and her increased specificity and clarity. This affirms women’s high organisational skills and of being detail-oriented. Consider the following examples. The time clauses are in bold.

- (17) a. ***Whilst being guided by that fact,** it will not be lost on us that a well-trained, well-motivated, happy and professionally led teaching and non-teaching staff will ensure that a globally competitive graduate is produced.* [RAD – S151]

³³ Randolph Quirk et al., *A University Grammar of English* (London: Longman Group Ltd, 1973).

³⁴ Mondorf, “Gender Differences in English Syntax.”

³⁵ Mondorf, “Gender Differences in English Syntax.”

³⁶ Mondorf, “Gender Differences in English Syntax.”

³⁷ Mondorf, “Gender Differences in English Syntax.”

- b. *Your Excellency, the President, Nana Chancellor, Ladies and Gentlemen, **as I announce my vision today**, I earnestly pray that it becomes our collective vision as an institution so that together, we can work towards its realization. [RAD – S60]*
- c. *There is no better time than now for this conversation, **as the University works to complete the timescale of our Strategic Plan -PLAN2K25**, that has guided our operations over the recent past, **as we commence a mid-term review of this Plan**. [RAD – S70]*

Other adverbial clauses – reason, condition and circumstance clauses – are in little proportion in the data. The extracts in (18) are illustrative examples of reason clauses in the VCs' speeches. The reason clauses are in bold.

- (18) a. *Keep working and striving hard, **for the future belongs to you**. [RAD – S36]*
- b. *Your Excellency, Nana Chancellor, I will like to use this opportunity to focus a bit on the main pillars of my vision and I want to reiterate that our collective desire as a community to continuously seek the growth, prosperity, and excellence **for our university should drive all of us to this common goal**. [RAD – S63]*
- c. *Discipline is mandatory **for us as leaders to achieve our aims and goals**. [KOD – S48]*
- d. ***As a community made-up of management, faculty, administrative and supporting staff and students**, we shall work together to identify opportunities to increase our income. [KOD – S73]*

Extracts (19a-19d) are also illustrative examples of condition clauses in the VCs' speeches.

- (19) a. ***If there was ever a time that our mandate as a university was more relevant**, then it is now. [RAD – S48]*
- b. *I look forward to realizing a University where **if Ghana, Africa or the world questions, KNUST WILL BE READY WITH THE ANSWERS!** [RAD - S68]*
- c. *We can only train our students to solve problems **if we have faculty and staff with the expertise to tackle such problems**. [KOD – S35]*
- d. *“Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – **if anything is excellent or praiseworthy** – think about such things” for our dear university. [KOD – S85]*

Extracts (20a & 20b) are illustrative examples of circumstance clauses in the speeches.

- (20) a. ***Although KNUST has received significant accolades as a foremost research institution**, I believe there is still a great opportunity for us to improve our research capacity and culture. [RAD – S113]*
- b. *I commit myself to a “no-one-left-behind” administration **as we all pull and move up together** to make KNUST better. [KOD – S3]*

Positioning of the Clause Types

Mondorf argues that women's and men's speeches differ with respect to the positioning of adverbial clauses.³⁸ She holds that women prefer postposed clauses while men prefer preposed clauses. However, in the data, a similar positioning of adverbial clauses was found in RAD and KOD's speeches (See Figure 1).

³⁸ Mondorf, “Gender Differences in English Syntax.”

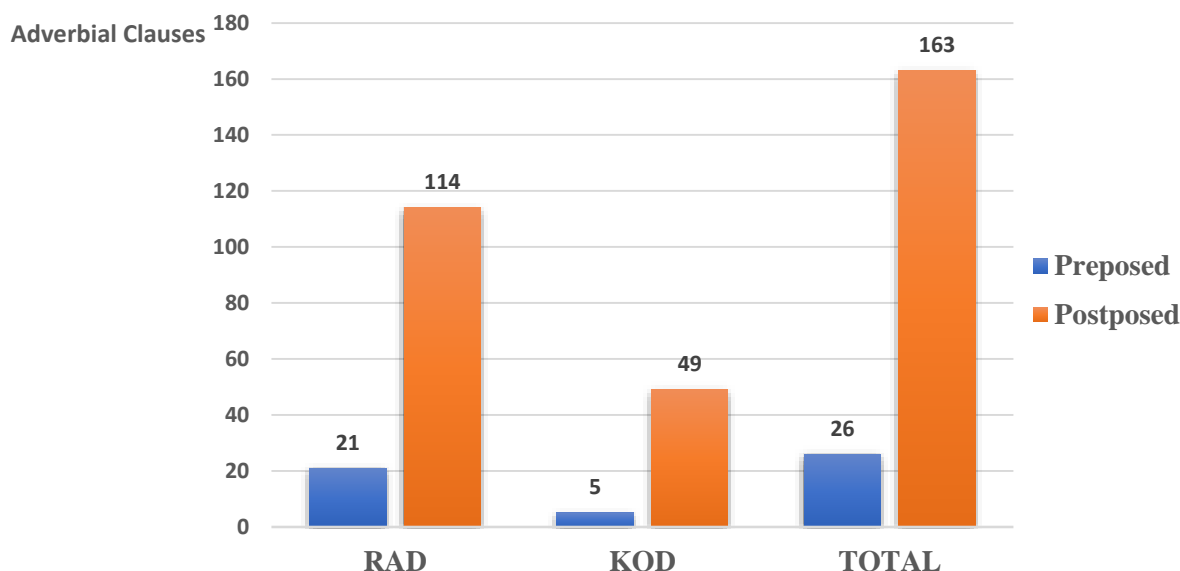


Figure 1: Positioning of adverbial clauses in the VCs' speeches

It is observed from Figure 1 above that postposed adverbial clauses dominated the VCs' speeches. Though Mondorf asserts that women prefer postposed clauses and that men prefer preposed clauses, the analysis shows otherwise.³⁹ Based on the data, it is inferred that both VCs prefer postposed clauses. It is concluded, therefore, that the difference in the VCs' use of adverbial clauses is not reflected in the positioning of the clauses. In Mondorf's view, postposed adverbial clauses communicate asserted views rather than presupposed assertions.⁴⁰ Postposed clauses are considered to express lower commitment than presupposed information. Postposition is considered a default location that signals a lower commitment to the truth of the proposition as expressed in the main clause.⁴¹ The following extracts are given to illustrate postposed adverbial clauses across the speeches of the VCs. Adverbial clauses are in bold.

- (21) a. *There is no better time than now for this conversation, **as the University works to complete the timescale of our Strategic Plan -PLAN2K25, that has guided our operations over the recent past, as we commence a mid-term review of this Plan.*** [RAD – S70]
- b. *Let us remember that we can achieve almost any goal we set for ourselves **if we have the discipline to pay the price to do what we need to do, and never give up.*** [RAD – S171]
- c. *We can only train our students **[to solve problems] [if we have faculty and staff with the expertise to tackle such problems].*** [KOD – S35]
- d. *In the coming days, we shall work collectively with all the interest groups – UTAG, GAUA, FUSAG, TEWU – and other stakeholders **[to review promotion and motivation systems] [to provide an environment that supports faculty and staff] [to give out their best].*** [KOD – S39]

In extract (21a), the adverbial clause is placed at the end of the main clause. The focus of the speaker shifts to the main clause. This de-emphasises the university's work on the strategic plan. This could suggest the lower commitment of the VC to the timely completion of the university plan. Postposing the adverbial clause presents it as supplementary information which inherently lowers the emphasis on the information it conveys. Additionally, the choice of the verb *works* in the adverbial clause implies some effort being involved, downplaying the VC's degree of certainty about the success of the plan. In extract (21b), the postposed clause, a conditional clause, weakens the certainty of the main clause. The adverbial clause introduces a contingency, creating a scenario where the initial assertion in the main clause might not hold. This presents a lower degree of certainty on the part of the VC in relation to her assertion. The same is observed in extract (21c). In extract (21d), the three postposed adverbial clauses, though expressing an intended outcome of the main action, are grammatically de-emphasised. Their positioning

³⁹ Mondorf, "Gender Differences in English Syntax."

⁴⁰ Mondorf, "Gender Differences in English Syntax."

⁴¹ Mondorf, "Gender Differences in English Syntax."

weakens their individual emphasis and focus. This postpositioning of adverbial clauses is observed predominantly in the VCs’ speeches.

Examples of preposed adverbial clauses in the VCs’ speeches are given in (22) below. The adverbial clauses are in bold.

- (22) a. **As we envision KNUST to become a preeminent research-intensive institution on the globe,** we also see KNUST as a destination for research innovations and inventions to solve societal problems. [RAD – S67]
- b. **If there was ever a time that our mandate as a university was more relevant,** then it is now. [RAD – S48]
- c. **To ensure access and quality education for students and available resources for both faculty and students’ research,** we will explore alternative means of funding beyond government subversion. [KOD – S68]
- d. **To further deepen our relationship with industry,** we intend to bring our research findings to their doorsteps. [KOD – S55]

Extracts (22a-22d) show preposed adverbial clauses that communicate presupposed information. In extract (22a), the preposed adverbial clause suggests that KNUST becoming a preeminent research institution is common ground between the speaker and listeners. It does not introduce or argue this idea but assumes that it is already accepted. The positioning of the clause conveys a strong sense of commitment of the speaker to the truth of her proposition. In extracts (22c & 22d), the urgency of ensuring the aspects implied in the preposed clauses is explicit. Though they do not present presupposed information as suggested by Mandorf about preposed adverbial clauses, they hold significant weight by explicitly clarifying the motivations for the proposition stated in the main clause.⁴² Placing these clauses at the beginning, gives the clauses a strong emphasis and highlights their importance. Grammatically, the preposed clauses suggest the VCs’ strong commitment to the truth of their proposition. Nevertheless, as the analysis has shown, both VCs show little preference for preposed adverbial clauses in their speeches. In Table 5 below, the positioning of each semantic adverbial clause type is provided.

Table 5: Positioning of adverbial clause types

Clause Type	RAD			KOD		
	Preposed	Postposed	Total	Preposed	Postposed	Total
Reason clause	1	2	3	1	11	12
Time clause	11	14	25	-	-	-
Purpose clause	7	94	101	3	35	38
Condition clause	1	3	4	-	2	2
Circumstance clause	1	1	2	1	1	2
TOTAL	21	114	135	5	49	54

The data in Table 5 above further show that all adverbial clauses in the VCs’ speeches were mostly postposed. Irrespective of their gender differences, both VCs postposed their propositions in adverbial clauses. As stated earlier, this finding refutes earlier assertions made by Mondorf that the positioning of the adverbial clause is gender-sensitive.⁴³

Language Mixing

One communication style identified in RAD’s speech is language mixing. This is believed to be a ubiquitous phenomenon among bilingual speakers. Muysken has defined language mixing as mixing

⁴² Mondorf, “Gender Differences in English Syntax.”

⁴³ Pieter Muysken, *Bilingual Speech: A Typology of Code-Mixing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Pieter Muysken, “Language Contact Outcomes as the Result of Bilingual Optimization Strategies,” *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* 16, no. 4 (2013): 709–30.

lexical items or grammatical features from two or more languages in a sentence.⁴⁴ Three instances where RAD mixed English and Asante Twi were identified. Although not all the audience were natives of Akan or Akan speakers, she must have used these to identify herself with the audience who understood her. This communication style was not found in KOD's. Extracts (23a-23c) are illustrative examples of RAD's use of language mixing. Interestingly, in (23a), the expression in Akan, a that-clause, is a complement to the adjective *true*. In (23b), it is the object of the verb *say* and an appositive to *Akan saying* in (23c).

- (23) a. It is **indeed**, true that “*wonni panin a, due!*” [RAD – S8]
 b. But as our motto **clearly** says, “*Nyansapo wosane no badwemma*”, as an institution, we share the responsibility of thinking deep to provide innovative solutions and to harness the opportunities inherent in the pandemic. [RAD – S46]
 c. As the Akan saying goes, “*nkwankyen adee eye fe a, yede sika na eye*”, ... [RAD – S133]

CONCLUSION

This study explored potential gender differences in syntactic choices made within investiture speeches. The compelling evidence supporting gender-sensitive syntax came from the use of rhetorical questions. RAD used these questions in her speech, potentially to soften her statements and encourage audience agreement, aligning with Lakoff's characterisation of (rhetorical) questions as a persuasive strategy associated with WL.⁴⁵ However, the analysis revealed a more nuanced picture when examining adjectives and intensifiers. Both RAD and KOD used these elements, albeit with RAD demonstrating a potentially higher frequency. This suggests a possible gendered preference. The use of adverbial clauses presented a more complex picture. RAD used a higher overall number of adverbial clauses compared to KOD.

Interestingly, RAD displayed a preference for purpose clauses, which could be interpreted as a focus on the intended outcomes of her actions. This aligns with the Deficit Theory's suggestion that WL might emphasise relational aspects of communication. However, both speakers overwhelmingly favored postposing adverbial clauses, regardless of gender. This finding suggests caution in generalising the position of adverbial clauses as a definitive marker of gendered language use. RAD's language-mixing, incorporating elements of Akan alongside English, demonstrates the role of social context and cultural identity in shaping syntactic choices. This finding underscores the need to consider the specific situations surrounding speeches when analysing gender-sensitive language.

Implications of Findings

The findings of this study offer both support and challenges to current understandings of gender and syntax in English, with implications for both gender studies and research on gender differences in language use. The findings contribute to ongoing discussions on how women might navigate traditionally male-dominated domains like leadership by employing specific linguistic strategies, such as using rhetorical questions for persuasive effect. RAD's preference for purpose clauses could be interpreted as a focus on relational aspects of communication, potentially aligning with the Deficit Theory. However, the shared positioning preference (postposing) across genders highlights the need to move beyond simplistic gender binaries and consider other factors influencing syntactic choices.

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⁴⁴ Muysken, Pieter. *Bilingual speech: a typology of code-mixing*. Xvi-306 (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 2000).; Muysken, Pieter. “Language contact outcomes as the result of bilingual optimization strategies” *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 16, no. 4 (2013): 709-730.

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