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The Role of Interactional Metadiscourse Markers in Portraying Female Identity: A Corpus-Based Study of Fantasy TV Characters

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ABSTRACT

Human identity is constructed and expressed through language. This can be seen in the television industry through observations of female characters. Dialogue of female characters is crafted carefully to express their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, providing a glimpse into their psyche. This study analyzed interactional metadiscourse (hedges, boosters, attitude markers, self-mentions, engagement markers) utilized by five female characters in Sci-Fi and fantasy television: Wednesday Addams, Wanda Maximoff, Lyra Belacqua, Ellie, and Eleven. This study employed Hyland's (2005) metadiscourse model and took a corpus-based approach, using AntConc to analyze a data set of 43 television episodes, totaling 69,908 tokens, and employing a sequential mixed-method research approach. Frequency data were compared and reported per 1,000 tokens for each of the female characters. The results showed that self-mentions were the most frequent metadiscourse marker for three of the five female television characters, with engagement markers ranking first for the remaining two. The results further showed the television character's emotional histories and personality traits by the presence or absence of hedges and boosters. This study posited that different and psychologically elaborate female characters were portrayed through interactional metadiscourse; this study advanced the field of metadiscourse by applying the concept to television dialogue and offered insights into the representation of female identity in contemporary popular culture.

Keywords: *Spoken Interactional Metadiscourse; Female Identity; Corpus-Based Analysis; Fantasy Television; Scripted Speech*

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the study

Language facilitates more than communication. Language helps construct identity. It helps convey emotions, attitudes, and express stances. In linguistics, the facet of language that corresponds with this is referred to as metadiscourse. Metadiscourse refers to the language used by the speaker/writer to maintain their relationship with the audience while expressing their stances and personality (Hyland, 2005). When it comes to metadiscourse, the interactional dimension is the most pertinent to identity because it refers to the elements that enable the speaker to express uncertainty, confidence, and emotions, and to identify with the audience (Hyland & Tse, 2004).

One of the most salient findings of research has established that gender significantly influences the use of interactional metadiscourse. Analysis of a range of personal essays (Puspita & Suhandano, 2023), EFL student's argumentative writing (Al-Otaibi & Hussain, 2024), and motivational speeches (Azlia, 2022) revealed that language employed by females is richer in interactional metadiscourse than language used by males. These findings indicate that female speakers/writers are more attentive to emotional and personal elements in their discourse.

Television is also a medium through which female identities are constructed and transmitted to audiences worldwide (Wu & Fakhruddin, 2023; Montasseri et al, 2020). The dialogue printed in television shows is written. The response of a television character is ascribed to the configuration of that character's background, personality, and emotional configuration. This is even true for the Sci-Fi and fantasy genres. In these genres, female characters are often represented as multifaceted social beings who are ultra- empowered, socially isolated, and highly traumatized. The response of these characters, and even the features of the response, is indicative of the representation of female identities in the popular media. To the researcher's knowledge, the utilization of interactional metadiscourse in the analysis of scripted dialogues of female characters in fantasy television shows is novel. In this context, the analysis of this study focuses on the dialogues of five female characters in fantasy television series sketching the basic framework of the model proposed by Hyland (2005) and employing the corpus software, AntConc (Anthony, 2022).

1.2. Research Problem

Metadiscourse has been examined in a variety of genres. These include academic essays, TED talks, research articles, and television talk shows. However, there seems to be a dearth of studies that have utilized metadiscourse in the analysis of the scripted dialogues of fictional television characters (Mensah et al., 2025; Lasagabaster & Bier, 2025). Many of the studies on metadiscourse and gender have concentrated on real-world language users in formal contexts. Al-Otaibi and Hussain (2024) studied the argumentative essays of EFL students. Azlia (2022) studied speeches in TED Talks. Puspita and Suhandano (2023) examined personal essays. Wu and Fakhruddin (2023) show that Netflix TV dialogues reveal female identity ideologies but did not adopt a metadiscourse framework or corpus analysis.

This is a clear gap in their analysis. No one has studied metadiscourse in TV series dialogues and used corpus tools to identify these patterns across different TV series characters.

1.3.Research Gap

There are gaps in the literature which are contextual and methodological. Contextually, TV series dialogues are very different from the language of essays or speeches. They are scripted in a way that makes a character appear real, emotionally and psychologically consistent. Particularly in the Sci-Fi and fantasy genres, the female characters are emotionally complex, and the linguistic patterns reflect this. Although literature has a notable absence of studying these patterns, the absence of studying interactional metadiscourse is even more profound. Methodologically, TV series dialogues have not been studied using a corpus to do a cross-character analysis of metadiscourse. The speaking and writing pattern of discourse has been studied using a corpus and AntConc with Hyland's (2005) metadiscourse framework (Puspita & Suhandano, 2023; Azlia, 2022; Al-Otaibi & Hussain, 2024). Chou et al. (2023) revealed that different genres of discourse lead to different patterns of interactional metadiscourse and therefore illustrate the importance of context. The need for studying fictional dialogues as a distinct genre cannot be overstated. The current study aims to address these gaps in the literature.

1.4.Research Objectives

1. To identify the interactional metadiscourse features used in the dialogue of five selected female characters from Sci-Fi and fantasy TV series.
2. To compare the metadiscourse patterns used by five female characters across their respective series.

1.5.Research Questions

1. What interactional metadiscourse features appear in the dialogue of the five selected female characters?
2. How do the metadiscourse patterns differ or converge across the five characters?

1.6.Significance of the Study

This study makes an important contribution to metadiscourse research. Hyland (as cited in Mensah et al., 2025) indicated that metadiscourse analysis constricts research to a small variety of textual constructs and has not fully expanded research within different genres and contexts. Based on Hyland's (2005) model, this study will continue expanding existing research on fictional TV dialogues as a framework and show that metadiscourse analysis can derive results beyond academic research and formal spoken genres. Within media and gender studies, the results will justify the existence of female characters and the linguistic construction of female characters within fantasy TV. For language researchers, the study provides a new construction and methodology that can be used to study different characters and linguistic constructions in different genres and cultural contexts (Chou et al., 2023).

2. Literature Review

Language has the potential to construct identities and relationships, and to express feelings or attitudes beyond the verbal messages and the informational functions that may be encoded within the world. Metadiscourse (Hyland, 2005) is one of the linguistic tools that can

perform this task. At the core of metadiscourse analysis is the identification of linguistic resources that facilitate the management of discourse, expressions of attitudes towards the discourse, and audience engagement. The interactional aspects of discourse are most relevant to identity construction. These include the resources (linguistic and otherwise) that allow articulation of self and others in a given discourse context. This review explores research on interactional metadiscourse and gender, the construction of female identity in media, and the methodological approaches used in closely related studies, in order to frame the present study within the existing literature.

2.1.Hyland's (2005) Interactional Metadiscourse Framework

The main theory in this research is Hyland's (2005) model of metadiscourse and interpersonal relationships. Hyland splits metadiscourse into two; the first is interactive metadiscourse which organizes the text for the reader/listener. The second is interactional metadiscourse which organizes the personal and social aspects of communication. As Hyland and Tse (2004, p. 174) said, metadiscourse is "as important as the information," because it is how the reader/listener perceives and reacts to the writer/speaker. This model has been widely adopted in linguistics research, and it has been proven to be effective in both written and spoken discourse (Lasagabaster & Bier, 2025; Mensah et al., 2025).

The five sub-categories of interactional metadiscourse, which this research is focusing on, are as follows. Hedges are words that show an incomplete commitment to the proposition (Hyland, 2005). Example hedges are: maybe, perhaps, I think, and might. Boosters are words that show complete commitment to the proposition and, likewise, reject all other possibilities. Some examples of attitude markers are: unfortunately, surprisingly, and I hope. Self-mentions make the author present in the discourse (Puspita & Suhandano, 2023). Finally, engagement markers make the audience part of the discourse and words such as: you know, listen, look, and consider (Mensah et al., 2025).

A specific dimension of human identity is represented by each distinct element. Experts claim that hedges demonstrate emotional caution, while boosters indicate certain confidence. Attitude markers show emotional openness because self-mentions express personal power, and engagement markers reveal connections between people.

The reason for selecting the interactional over the interactive dimension is that the former is the one through which speakers position themselves emotionally and relationally, compared to which the latter is more concerned with the organization of the text for the reader. Each of the sub-categories was considered as an identity marker: hedges were regarded as signs of a character's emotional deliberation and uncertainty about the claim she is making; boosters as signs of a character's self-assurance and confidence; attitude markers as the character's evaluative and emotional stance; self-mentions as a character's assertion of her agency and of her centrality in the narrative; and engagement markers as a character's relational focus. The patterns in these categories were interpreted as providing a character's psychological profile rather than as simple counts of the usage of another linguistic sign.

2.2.Interactional Metadiscourse and Gender

Research on gender differences in interactional metadiscourse has highlighted and reinforced similar trends in different contexts and genres. Puspita and Suhandano (2023) examined 20 personal essays from Chicken Soup for the Soul using AntConc 3.5.9 and Hyland's (2005) model. Half the essays were authored by women and the other half by men. After normalizing their results per 1,000 words, the authors found that women exhibited a higher use of interactional discourse markers. Women had a significantly higher use of boosters (1.99 vs. 0.70), attitudes (0.66 vs. 0.30), and engagement markers (3.21 vs. 0.99). Self-mention was the highest category for both genders. The study found that women write in a more emotionally expressive and audience-centered style, whereas men write in a more event-centered style without emotional detail.

Similar research was conducted by Al-Otaibi and Hussain (2024), who focused on 46,453 tokens of Saudi EFL student's argumentative essays on a gender-sensitive issue. Using AntConc and Hyland's (2005) model, the authors found that female students had higher uses of attitude markers, boosters, hedges, and self-mentions than male students. Interestingly, female students who argued a position in favor of males used hedges, indicating that hedging was influenced by both gender and by the position taken. The authors attributed women's higher uses of boosters and attitude markers to their increasing assertiveness and suggested that social and cultural factors affect the use of metadiscourse.

Spoken discourse in TED Talk speeches from male and female motivational speakers was analysed by Azlia (2022) using a corpus of 43,160 female characters and 51,873 male characters. Many scholars believe that female speakers used more self-mention and engagement markers because these female speakers possessed more expressive and communicative qualities in their speech, while male speakers remained direct and content-centered. A consistent trend emerges across these studies. Female language users tend to be more interactionally rich, especially regarding self-references, engagement markers, and attitude markers. Hedging is more ambiguous, however. While Azlia (2022) and Al-Otaibi and Hussain (2024) observed that women hedge more, Puspita and Suhandano (2023) reported the contrary in personal essays. The results support the idea that hedging may not be a definitive gender phenomenon. Chou et. al. (2023) substantiated this view and conducted a corpus-based study of both translated and untranslated English texts. They reported that, within the various genres, hedges along with other interactional discourse markers were highly variable. The results confirmed that interactional metadiscourse is influenced by the communicative context in which it is found.

2.3.Female Identity in Television and Media

Television and film are seen as critical areas in the construction of gender identity and its circulation. A corpus-based analysis by Montasseri et. al. (2020) examined gender representation in American films through the lens of the COCA fiction corpus and Van Leeuwen's (2008) social actor model. Their analysis revealed that, in general, female characters were depicted as playing roles that were weak in power and low in status. The authors stated that movie scripts are, in general, ideological tools to shape audience views on

gender. Their analysis shows the value of analyzing scripted language as a representation of gender.

Wu and Fakhruddin (2023) arrived at a comparable result in their analysis using Systematic Functional Linguistics to study Netflix productions. They reported that Netflix female characters were created using westernized language choices that framed women's representation as submissive, high-maintenance, and objectified. Their study confirmed that TV dialogue constructs gender identity for a target audience at the global level. However, their study did not employ metadiscourse and corpus tools, which the current study addresses.

Mensah et al. (2025) employed Hyland (2005) to analyze five episodes of a Ghanaian TV talk show within the period of the 2020 elections. They found that participants of the talk show employed a considerable amount of interactional metadiscourse, with self-mentions and engagement markers being the two largest categories. They indicated that metadiscourse resources were ample in talk show discourse, including non-fictional talk show dialogue, and that the categories had distinct communicative functions. Mensah et al. (2025) importantly called for metadiscourse research in contexts outside the academy, noting the great need for metadiscourse resources in daily discourse and media discourse. Lasagabaster and Bier (2025) made a similar remark in their research on interactional metadiscourse in English-medium lectures of three disciplines, where they found that metadiscourse placement was determined by the speaker's contextual and institutional positioning. This is also equally relevent of fictional characters, whose created and scripted roles of discourse are likely to elicit the same metadiscourse response.

Through the academic works that were mentioned before, three major points were revealed. To begin, it has been observed that women who use language show higher communicative depth in interactional metadiscourse, especially when they use self-mentions, engagement markers, and attitude markers, even though hedging changes when the situation of communication changes. Another point shows that the identity of women is created on purpose when female language users make specific selections of words. As a third discovery, factors like the subject of discussion, the style of writing, or the environment of communication alter the interactional metadiscourse markers, which means that gender is not the only cause of these variations (Chou et al., 2023; Al-Otaibi & Hussain, 2024; Lasagabaster & Bier, 2025). Although these academic investigations have given valuable knowledge, researchers have not investigated interactional metadiscourse inside the prepared conversations of imaginary women who act in Sci-Fi and fantasy TV programs. Because this specific empty space in methodology and context exists, the present study addresses this empty space directly.

3. Research Methodology

A mixed method approach is adopted for this study. In this case, the researcher uses a quantitative framework for the first phase and follows it with a qualitative framework for the second phase. The design is appropriate for this study considering the nature of interactional metadiscourse. It necessitates the identification and counting of linguistic features to outline patterns, and subsequently, the interpretation of those patterns in context to assign their

significance (Puspita & Suhandano, 2023; Azlia, 2022; Al-Otaibi & Hussain, 2024). The first phase of the research focuses on quantitative analysis to ensure that fictional dialogues are not oversimplified to mere data. The second phase is a qualitative analysis that ensures that the results are not oversimplified. Measures established in the first phase of the research allow for qualitative, descriptive, and meaningful results.

3.1.Sampling Method and corpus Design

Purposive sampling is utilised in this scientific work because participants are chosen for a specific objective instead of being selected by chance (Mensah et al., 2025). Indeed, experts claim that the chosen characters analysed are Wednesday Addams from Wednesday (Season 1, 2022), Wanda Maximoff from WandaVision (Season 1, 2021), Lyra Belacqua from His Dark Materials (Season 1, 2019), Ellie from The Last of Us (Season 1, 2023), and Eleven from Stranger Things (Season 4, 2022). This study examines character's trauma, outsider identity, supernatural powers, and emotional complexity. These traits are believed to influence diverse and complex interactional metadiscourse. These traits are also uncommon in fictional characters, so random sampling was inappropriate.

The data includes all dialogue for the sampled characters across one full season, totaling 43 episodes. Sampling full seasons provides the opportunity to capture character's full emotional and communicative development throughout the series and improves the study's validity (Mensah et.al., (2025). Altogether, a sum of 69,908 tokens is gathered from all the selected characters, which represents the entire text size. Through closer inspection, it has been observed that Table 1 presents the specific numbers of these tokens for each individual character.

Table 1: Sub-Corpus Size by Character

Character	TV Series	Season / Year	Episodes	Total Tokens
Wednesday Addams	Wednesday	Season 1, 2022	8	12,358
Wanda Maximoff	WandaVision	Season 1, 2021	9	9,855
Lyra Belacqua	His Dark Materials	Season 1, 2019	8	16,573
Ellie	The Last of Us	Season 1, 2023	9	16,020
Eleven	Stranger Things	Season 4, 2022	9	15,102
Total			43	69,908

Note. Total tokens represent the combined word count of dialogue extracted for each character across the listed episodes.

3.2.Data Collection Procedure

Data collection came from publicly available transcripts of five TV series. These transcripts were collected from source websites (Springfield! Springfield!, Scraps from the Loft, and Simpleremix Scripts). The remaining data were collected from the focus character's dialogue. The speech of remaining focus characters, stage directions, scene descriptions, and the narrator's text were all discarded. The dialogue of each focus character was stored as a separate text document. Together, the five text documents constituted a multi-character corpus of this TV series and were imported to AntConc for analysis.

3.3.Data Analysis Procedure

The analysis followed four structured steps:

Step 1 (Corpus Preparation): Each character uploaded their text file into AntConc. Word frequency lists identified linguistic norms and checked that data was cleaned.
Step 2: Feature Identification. Using AntConc's Word List and Concordance, this study searched for interactional metadiscourse markers in each sub-corpus. The five markers by Hyland (2005) were as follows: hedges (maybe, perhaps, I think, I feel, I guess, might, could, possibly, probably, seem, sort of, and kind of), boosters (always, never, certainly, definitely, clearly, obviously, absolutely, of course, I know, and indeed), attitude markers (unfortunately, surprisingly, I hope, I wish, I am glad, I am sorry, terrible, amazing, and horrible), self-mentions (I, me, my, mine, myself, and we), and engagement markers (you know, listen, look, remember, you see, and consider). Each token was checked in its concordance context, as per the verification procedure of Al-Otaibi and Hussain (2024) and Lasagabaster and Bier (2025).
Step 3: (Quantitative Comparison) The unstandardized frequency of each category was recorded for each character. For each character, data was normalized to 1,000 tokens. This was the case as the five subcorpora presented disparate sizes, making raw numbers potentially unclear (Chou et al., 2023). The results were recorded in Microsoft Excel.
During Step 4 (Qualitative Interpretation), the analysis of quantitative data focused on character identities, trauma, and narrative roles. This analysis went beyond the description of the frequency of features and considered the reasons for the frequency.

3.4.Ethical Considerations

This research is an analysis of TV transcripts that the public can access, and no humans are involved in this research, so there are no ethical issues of privacy, consent, or confidentiality. The transcripts are cited, and this research follows the APA guidelines to eliminate plagiarism. The research is of a noncommercial nature, and the research adheres to the Corpus Research Center's data policy. The data stay jointly owned by the researcher and the Corpus Research Center.

4. Data Analysis

4.1.Overview of Data Analysis

This research examines the Spoken Dialogue of five female fictional characters from five Science Fiction and Fantasy television series. The focus for the study is on: Wednesday Addams (Wednesday, Season 1, 2022) who has a corpus of 12,358 tokens from 8 Episodes, Wanda Maximoff (WandaVision, Season 1, 2021) who has a corpus of 9,855 tokens from 9 Episodes, and Lyra Belacqua (His Dark Materials, Season 1, 2019) who has a corpus of 16,573 tokens from 8 Episodes. Ellie from The Last of Us (Season 1, 2023 provided 16,020 tokens across 9 episodes. Eleven from Stranger Things (Season 4, 2022) provided 15,102 tokens across 9 episodes. The total combined corpus is 69,908 tokens across 43 episodes. Transcripts were taken from Springfield! Springfield!, Scraps from the Loft, and Simpleremix Scripts. Because the investigation required accuracy, the researchers manually gathered and cleaned the dialogue of each fictional character while they removed other speaker's lines, stage instructions, and narration text. It has been observed that the collected data represents scripted spoken discourse which was created by authors to mimic realistic speech while building the persona, traits, and emotional state of each figure.

4.2.Method of Analysis

A sequential mixed-method design organises this scientific investigation. In the first quantitative phase, the interactional metadiscourse markers within the five sub-corpora were identified and computed using the software AntConc, which is consistent with Hyland's (2005) five-category model. When researchers compare language patterns across five different characters and text collections, using this methodology guarantees the evaluation is structured, objective, and repeatable, which is extremely important (Puspita & Suhandano, 2023; Al-Otaibi & Hussain, 2024). After counting, basic frequency numbers were adjusted to a standard of 1,000 tokens because this adjustment permits accurate comparisons to happen despite variations in the size of the text groups, which experts claim is a standard procedure in corpus-based metadiscourse research (Chou et al., 2023; Lasagabaster & Bier, 2025). Throughout the subsequent qualitative portion, the discovered language patterns were explained by linking them to the mental state, story function, and emotional background of each character, which connects statistical numbers to the true meaning that those numbers hold within the constructed identity of each figure.

4.3.Step-by-step Analytical Procedure

The same four-step procedure from the Methodology section (i.e. Corpus Preparation, Feature Identification, Quantitative Comparison, and Qualitative Interpretation) was conducted. Each metadiscourse marker was verified by context checking of the word, which concurs with the procedures of Al-Otaibi and Hussain (2024) and Puspita and Suhandano (2023).

4.4.Reliability and Trustworthiness

For the purpose of making the research analysis reliable, every found metadiscourse token was examined in its concordance context within AntConc because researchers wanted to confirm that the token was truly acting as a metadiscourse marker instead of a normal vocabulary word. Experts claim that this method of checking context is similar to the procedures which were utilized in previous similar investigations (Al-Otaibi & Hussain, 2024; Lasagabaster & Bier, 2025). Before the main analysis started, researchers completed a preliminary test on a small portion of every sub-corpus so that the system of coding would remain uniform for all five characters.

5. Findings

5.1.Overview of Findings

Hyland's (2005) interactional metadiscourse model was represented in every character's dialogue. The analysis showed a prevalence of Self-mentions, followed by Engagement Markers, Hedges, Boosters, and Attitude Markers. The distribution of the categories was Largely consistent across all five sub-corpora, with self-mentions ranking first for three characters (Wednesday, Lyra, and Eleven) and engagement markers ranking first for the remaining two (Wanda and Ellie). Thus, the most characteristic interactive feature for scripted female dialogue in this genre was the inclusion of Self-mentions and relational Engagement. Observed in Table 2 are the frequencies and rates per 1,000 tokens for all characters across the five categories

Table 2

Interactional Metadiscourse Frequencies and Normalised Rates per 1,000 Tokens by Character

Character	Tokens	Hedges (raw/1k)	Boosters (raw/1k)	Att. Markers (raw/1k)	Self-Mention (raw/1k)	Eng. Markers (raw/1k)	Total
Wednesday	12,358	130 / 10.52	79 / 6.39	7 / 0.57	946 / 76.55	650 / 52.60	1,812
Wanda	9,855	125 / 12.68	49 / 4.97	5 / 0.51	680 / 69.00	712 / 72.25	1,571
Lyra	16,573	209 / 12.61	56 / 3.38	2 / 0.12	1,216 / 73.37	1,034 / 62.39	2,517
Ellie	16,020	231 / 14.42	49 / 3.06	4 / 0.25	1,116 / 69.66	1,126 / 70.29	2,526
Eleven	15,102	184 / 12.18	44 / 2.91	7 / 0.46	1,155 / 76.48	971 / 64.30	2,361

Note. Values are presented as raw frequency / normalized rate per 1,000 tokens (raw/1k).

5.2. Finding for Research Objective 1: Interactional Metadiscourse Features in Female Character Dialogue

The first research objective investigated which interactional metadiscourse features were found in the dialogues of five selected characters. The analysis established that all five features were present in all five sub-corpora, although with variable frequencies.

Self-mentions were far and away the largest category. Wednesday generated 946 unadjusted self-mention tokens and, with Eleven (1,155), both achieved the highest counts, although Wednesday's count gave her a normalized figure of 76.55 per 1,000. The remaining normalized figures were: Lyra 73.37, Ellie 69.66, Wanda 69.00, and Eleven 76.48. The first-person singular pronoun 'I' was the dominant form of self-mention for all five characters. This corroborates the findings of Puspita and Suhandano (2023) and Al-Otaibi and Hussain (2024) regarding the prominence of self-mention in the respective corpora.

The second largest category was engagement markers. Wanda had the highest nominalized figure for engagement markers (72.25 per 1,000), and Ellie was next (70.29 per 1,000). Eleven was approximately 6 points behind (64.30 per 1,000), followed by Lyra (62.39 per 1,000), and Wednesday was last (52.60 per 1,000). Across all five characters, the second-person pronoun 'you' was the most frequent engagement marker. This was an engagement marker, and in a TV discourse analysis, Mensah et al. (2025) found that engagement markers were frequently the largest subset of interactional resources.

Table 2 shows the distribution of hedges amongst the five characters. A higher distribution of hedges was found for Ellie (14.42 per 1000, 231 raw tokens), Wanda (12.68 per 1000, 125 raw tokens), Lyra (12.61 per 1000, 209 raw tokens), Eleven (12.18 per 1000, 184 raw tokens), and Wednesday (10.52 per 1000, 130 raw tokens) in the order given. The highest used hedges in the five characters were maybe, might, I think, I guess, probably, and kind of. The

presence of hedges in the five characters shows that uncertain expressions are frequent markers of the scripted female speech in this genre. However, the presence of hedges in the speech of the five characters is not equal.

Boosters are also not common. Wednesday also shows the highest booster occurrence (79 raw, 6.39 per 1000), and the highest occurrence of boosters in total. Wanda had the next highest occurrence at (49 raw, 4.97 per 1000), Lyra (56 raw, 3.38), Ellie (49 raw, 3.06), and Eleven (44 raw, 2.91). The total number of attitude markers was also low. Wednesday and Eleven had 7 raw tokens, Wanda had 5, Ellie had 4 and Lyra had 2. This was lower than female writers in academic genres (Puspita and Suhandano, 2023; Al-Otaibi and Hussain, 2024). This also shows that attitude markers are less in scripted fictional dialogue than in academic written dialogue.

Some examples of the quantitative measures described above are as follows. They illustrate four of the marker types used in the samples of scripted dialogue. Each metadiscourse marker shown below is emphasized.

(1) Wednesday Addams - Booster

"It's definitely a match."

This booster reflects Wednesday's tendency to be assertive, which shows her refusal to soften her claims, and which is consistent with her having the highest booster rate of the 5 characters.

(2) Ellie - Hedge

"You seem capable enough."

This hedge reflects Ellie's guardedness and caution to others, which is consistent with her having the highest hedging rate of the 5 characters.

(3) Wanda Maximoff - Engagement Marker

"You're a real cut-up. You know, I always…"

This engagement marker directly calls upon the addressee to be part of the utterance, which is consistent with Wanda's high engagement and her narrative arc of being relational and connecting.

(4) Eleven - Self-Mention

"I'm here. I'm here."

The repeated self-mention focuses on Eleven's presence in the discourse, which is consistent with her being one of the characters with the highest self-mention rate.

(5) Lyra Belacqua - Attitude Marker

"Hopefully, we shall prove fast enough."

This attitude marker reflects Lyra's rare expression of evaluative stance through speech; her overall low attitude-marker frequency suggests that her emotions are more often conveyed through action than through explicit verbal evaluation.

These examples give quantitative measures when corresponding dialogue samples are provided.

5.3. Finding for Research Objective 2: Cross-Character Comparison of Metadiscourse Patterns

Research Objective 2 also includes the comparison of the metadiscourse patterns of the characters. However, the focus was on the differences and the convergence of patterns. The comparison of the characters showed that there are some common metadiscourse patterns for the five characters and some that were unique to an individual character.

In examining similarity, three of the five characters (Wednesday, Lyra, and Eleven) follow the categorical order: self-mentions, engagement markers, hedges, boosters, and attitude markers, while Wanda and Ellie show engagement markers ranking above self-mentions. The significance of the character's self-mention categorical order indicates that there is a pattern on the level of a genre, a way of constructing identities for women using language in Sci-Fi and fantasy TV. This pattern also supports findings across studies that women language users place a greater emphasis on the presence of the self and interpersonal engagement as opposed to the more direct or evaluative aspects of language (Puspita & Suhandano, 2023; Mensah et al., 2025).

The most notable variation is in the case of engagement markers. Wednesday's (52.60 per 1,000) is nearly 20 points lower than Wanda's (72.25 per 1,000); this is the largest disparity in any category. This speaks to each character's personality. Wednesday's character is designed to be emotionally and socially withdrawn; therefore, direct engagement with the audience is lower. In contrast, Wanda and Ellie are both characters with a designed strong need to engage and connect to the audience. Here, Wanda, who is trying to maintain her grief-constructed world, and Ellie trying to guard the ones she loves and express this in her high rates of engagement markers. This supports Al-Otaibi and Hussain's (2024) study on metadiscourse as relational positioning that goes beyond gender. In self-mentions, the gap between the highest and lowest rates is about 7.5 points (Wednesday at 76.55 vs Wanda at 69.00). Wednesday and Eleven produce the highest self-mention rates, which is consistent with both characters being written with deeply personal, identity-centred storylines. Wanda's lower rate may reflect her more team-centred narrative in WandaVision, where the story is as much about the people around her as it is about her.

In boosters, Wednesday clearly is the most assertive, at 6.39 per 1,000, which is more than double Wanda's rate and more than double Eleven's rate. This is consistent with her characterization as an intellectually self-assured and an assertive person. Conversely, Eleven, who is characterized as emotionally fragile and still healing from the aftermath of her traumatic past, yields the fewest boosters, at 2.91 per 1,000. Chou et al. (2023) observed that interactional markers, or boosters, are particularly sensitive to the speaker's context and frame, which is clearly visible in the contrast between Wednesday and Eleven.

In hedges, Ellie stands out as the only character with a significantly higher rate, at 14.42 per 1,000, while the other four characters showed values between 10.52 and 12.68 per 1,000. The higher hedging characterizes Ellie, who like a survivor in a dangerous context, is a teenager

in modern-day America where a high degree of care combined with a high degree of hedging is a psychosocially appropriate response. This is consistent with Azlia's (2022) conclusion that the female speaker's interactional markers indicate her engagement with the speaker's content.

In attitude markers, the numbers are sufficiently low that the ability to interpret with confidence is limited. However, Lyra's extremely low frequency of attitude markers, at 0.12 per 1,000, is significant and would appear to be consistent with the assertion that in the series, her emotions are primarily expressed through actions, and more direct forms of speech.

6. Discussion

The results from this research show that interactional metadiscourse displays an identifiable structure in the scripted female dialogue in Sci-Fi and fantasy television. The most outstanding result is that self-mentions in the five character's background have a broad scope of 69.00 to 76.55 self-mentions per 1,000 tokens. This pattern reveals characteristics of the writing process of those characters. Characters that predominantly use first-person self-referential language are written as being self-aware, agentive, and as being in the center of the narrative. The presence of this linguistic feature in the dialogue of the five characters is a deliberate writing decision to ensure that the five characters are the primary subjects of their narratives, as opposed to being secondary characters to someone else's narratives.

Confirmation of this reading is found in the next most dominant category in the metadiscursive engagement, which suggests that speakers and the addressees create a shared space, and as a result, the character is portrayed as being relational and emotionally present. Wanda and Ellie demonstrate the highest degree of engagement. This suggests that Wanda and Ellie are indicative of characters who are written to make relational engagement, connection, and presence, which are depicted to be potentially painful and even impossible in their circumstances. The engagement rate in Wednesday's dialogue is 52.60, which expresses her preference for a relatively distant style of emotional engagement. As Mensah et al. (2025) demonstrate, engagement markers are indicative of the speaker's relational intent, and this is depicted clearly in all the characters.

Regarding the identity of each person, the variation that is found in hedges and boosters among the different characters provides the most useful information. It has been observed that Ellie utilizes a very high rate of hedges (14.42 per 1,000), which demonstrates a speaking style that is defined by carefulness and uncertain words, and this language matches completely with her true self because she is a young person who is unable to give full trust to her world, her own feelings, or the people who live around her. Showing a great difference, the heavy booster rate of Wednesday (6.39 per 1,000), which is more than double the rate of any other character, reveals her strong mental confidence and her complete refusal to make her claims soft. Many scholars believe that these linguistic patterns of hedging and boosting in scripted dialogue are not simple accidents of style, but they are deliberate decisions that are made to make each character stable in their thoughts and familiar in their emotions.

Regarding the investigation, the lowest application of attitude markers was discovered across all five characters, which ranged from only 0.12 to 0.57 for every 1,000 tokens. These

numbers of attitude markers are extremely small when researchers compare the data with female academic writers working in scholarly environments (Al-Otaibi & Hussain, 2024; Puspita & Suhandano, 2023). Many people believe that the emotional state of characters in television drama is presented to the viewers through physical acting, background music, and screen visuals, which makes the presence of evaluative language less necessary. Individual characters can easily show deep sadness, terror, or happiness through these performance tools. Because of these visual and auditory tools, the high demand for attitude markers in written dialogue decreases when compared with the written text of an author.

6.1.Connection with Past Literature

These findings partially agree with existing literature on inter-related metadiscourse and gender, while also extending on some findings. The dominance of self-mentions and engagement markers is in line with Puspita and Suhandano (2023) who found self-mentioning was the most important interactional category in personal essays, and with Mensah et al. (2025) who described self-mentions and engagement markers as the most common interactional resources in television talk shows. However, in the present study, dominance of the two categories was more pronounced compared to the above mentioned real world examples. The likely reason for this is that scriptwriters enhance personal presence and direct relationalness to depict emotionally vivid characters. The variation across characters in the use of hedging supports Azlia's (2022) proposition that interactional markers used in spoken discourse reflect the speaker's relational context, and confirms Al-Otaibi and Hussain (2024), who found that hedging is influenced by attitude and social context, and is not gendered. Ellie's high hedge rate exemplifies what is situational for her, not a fixed gender way. Wednesday's booster contradicts the prevailing view that female speakers are generally less assertive than males. It aligns with Al-Otaibi and Hussain (2024), aiming for a more intricate framework, arguing that assertiveness in metadiscourse is contextually constructed identity and positioning, and is not necessarily bound by gender. The low attitude markers of the five characters in the current study are in stark contrast to Puspita and Suhandano (2023) and Al-Otaibi and Hussain (2024), who argue that female writers in an academic setting exhibit high levels of attitude markers. This, however, is a consequence of the difference in genre. Chou et al. (2023), in their multi-genre corpus study, argue that attitude markers and other stance features may vary across a wide range of genres, sub-genres, and suppress certain communicative contexts. Wu and Fakhruddin (2023) argue that Netflix, through a specific language framework, provides a construction for the gender ideology of its female characters. The current study provides evidence of this claim in the way that metadiscourse interactional features were employed to construct the identity of five female characters in a Non-Stereotypical way.

6.2.Theoretical Implications

Adding to metadiscourse theory, this study demonstrates that Hyland's (2005) interactional model can be further productively applied to scripted fictional dialogue. This extends the model's application from strictly academic writing and formal spoken genres to other domains. This finding helps answer Hyland's request (cited in Mensah et al., 2025) to expand

metadiscourse research from the few text types it has been restricted to. The fact that three of the five characters organise self-mentions, engagement markers, hedges, and boosters followed by attitude markers in the same hierarchy, while the remaining two show engagement markers ranking above self-mentions, offers a testable hypothesis about a metadiscourse framework for female characters in fantasy television. The hypothesis is certainly novel, but is also immediately testable, and as such can be improved further by other researchers.

6.3.Practical Implications

This study offers a systematic, evidence-based approach for media and gender researchers to examine the linguistic construction of female identity in popular television. For language teachers and corpus linguists, this study shows AntConc with Hyland's (2005) model can be applied to fictional media texts and beyond the academic texts. This broadens the types of text that can be included in corpus-based research and classroom pedagogy. Finally, screenwriters can learn how the use of hedging, boosting, self-mention, and engagement can enhance audience perceptions of the psychological and emotional reality of female characters.

6.4.Connection to Research Objectives

Both research objectives were fully accomplished. Analysis of the sub-corpora as a whole confirmed the presence of the metadiscourse features in each character's dialogue for all five categories and all five sub-corpora, allowing the researcher to achieve Research Objective 1. Normalized cross-character comparison permitted the researcher to achieve Research Objective 2, as it disclosed both the metadiscourse patterns categorical hierarchy that is shared by all five characters and the metadiscourse patterns individual differences that constitute all five characters' personalities and identities.

7. Conclusion

This study sought to portray female identity in Sci-Fi and fantasy television through the analysis of interactional metadiscourse in character dialogue, particularly focused on the characters of Wednesday Addams, Wanda Maximoff, Lyra Belacqua, Ellie, and Eleven. The study utilized a corpus of 69,908 tokens, compiled from 43 television episodes across five different series, and provided a large enough sample from which both qualitative and quantitative analyses to be conducted. Interactional features that were most prevalent across all five characters were self-mentions, followed by engagement markers, followed by hedges, and boosters and attitude markers, with self-mentions ranking first for three characters and engagement markers ranking first for Wanda and Ellie. The patterns that were identified for each character demonstrated that Sci-Fi and fantasy television genre features portray female characters who are relationally engaged. Metadiscourse made evident that each character's individual personality and emotional history and character role was distinguished through the use of hedging, boosting, and engagement.

This study presents three primary advancements. Theoretically, it broadens the scope of Hyland’s (2005) interactional model to scripted fictional dialogue. This highlights the model’s versatility and suggests that genres beyond the academic and formal prompts of spoken discourse may be appropriate. This development responds to the suggestions of

Mensah et al. (2025). Methodologically, it takes an initial step in developing a systematic, referable, and replicable framework for cross-character metadiscourse analysis, employing a corpus-based tool in AntConc. Empirically, it offers a resource of substantive and distinct engagement for five widely recognized fictional characters, which may be drawn upon for future inquiries into the interplay of language, identity, and representation within contemporary fictional constructs.

There are some limitations. The size of the corpus prevents reliable conclusions beyond the analysis of these characters, and the findings are restricted to these five characters and television series. Future studies may aim to incorporate a comparative analysis of male characters. One possibility may be applying this study's framework to the analysis of characters portrayed in television series that are produced in languages beyond English. It is also likely that a multimodal analysis of language and performance, sound, and visual elements may provide greater depth to the study of female identity. Although this study has many limitations, it may be the first of its kind to illustrate how language in a scripted medium constructs female identity within a highly reproductive sphere of popular culture.

Because this study lacks a male comparison group, it describes the interactional metadiscourse of the five female characters, rather than stating that such patterns are gendered, and claiming a gender difference would need a comparative male sample. Another limitation is regarding coding reliability: all data coding was done by one researcher and no check of inter-rater reliability was done. In order to improve coding quality, a second independent coder should classify the markers.

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