

## Original Paper

# Unveiling Gendered 3MT Presentations: A Corpus-based Analysis of Evaluative Language *Important*

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### Abstract

*Originating at the University of Queensland (UQ), the 3 Minute Thesis (3MT) has evolved into a pivotal form of academic communication. The linguistic resource important is often employed by presenters to underscore the significance of specific concepts, discoveries, or viewpoints, revealing their epistemic and evaluative stance. By constructing a corpus encompassing all award-winning 3MT presentations from UQ, with a particular focus on the usage of important and its related words, we found that (1) there was no statistically significant gender-based discrepancy in the frequency of employing important; (2) male presenters employed important in isolation, while their female counterparts opted for more expansive terms such as significant or crucial, encompassing a broader range of interpretations; (3) in terms of contexts, female speakers tended to extend their use of these terms beyond academic contexts, linking them with lived experiences more often than male presenters. The observed patterns related to how male and female presenters convey the importance of their research can enhance our comprehension of the subtle ways in which language mirrors and perpetuates gendered norms and expectations. More importantly, they may facilitate progress towards fostering more inclusive and equitable academic environments.*

### Keywords

*3MT, gender differences, important*

### 1. Introduction

Academic discourse is a key area of focus in research, examining its ontological aspects such as vocabulary, grammar, and rhetorical strategies. This exploration is grounded in the needs of students and scholars for academic language proficiency. Academic spoken discourse, as a vital form of communication in academia, is an integral component of academic discourse research. When scholars

communicate disciplinary knowledge, employing a discourse style that aligns with the norms of their discipline aids in conveying their message efficiently and effectively. One notable example of academic discourse in action is the Three Minute Thesis (3MT) competition, established by the University of Queensland, Australia, in 2008. The competition challenges doctoral students to present the significance and impact of their research in a clear, compelling, and understandable manner to a lay audience. The 3MT format is stringent: participants have three minutes to present their research, using only a static PowerPoint slide, without any props or visual aids. This format reflects a newer type of spoken academic English discourse that responds to the competitive nature of the contemporary academic landscape and the need to make scientific knowledge more accessible to the public (Hyland & Zou, 2021).

As 3MT presentations emerge as a vital genre of academic discourse, they offer students a platform to present their subject knowledge to a broader audience, thereby contributing to the direct dissemination of academic advancements. In the context of 3MT presentations, the appropriate use of evaluative discourse resources, particularly attitude markers, can enhance speakers' ability to express their stance and attitude, promote their academic achievements, and effectively disseminate cutting-edge information about their discipline to a wider audience. A preliminary search based on the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English revealed that the attitude marker "important" is a frequently used expression in spoken academic discourse, with 823 matches found in total. Given the high frequency of the lexical item "important" in academic spoken discourse, this study focuses on the use of this specific type of attitude marker in 3MT presentations, purporting to explore how it contributes to the dissemination of scientific knowledge.

As noted earlier, academic discourse is a nuanced form of communication influenced by the specific context in which it occurs. This context includes the academic community's environment, social norms, and expectations, shaping how language is used in academic settings. Gender, as one of the contextual variables (Labov, 1973) potentially influencing linguistic resources employed by academic authors, has received much attention (Biber & Burges, 2000; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013; Lakoff, 1973; Lillis & Curry, 2018; Tse & Hyland, 2008; Wang & Hu, 2023). However, studies on gender-preferential discourse features have yielded conflicting results (Crismore, Markkanen & Steffensen, 1993; Tse & Hyland, 2008). Therefore, this study intends to further explore the male and female presenters' use of attitude markers, i.e., the use of *important*, in 3MT presentations. It is expected to provide new evidence on gender-related discursive practices in the academic context and add to our understanding of the mediating impact of gender on academics' expression of evaluative stance in communicating scientific knowledge.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 *Research on Attitude Markers in Academic Spoken Discourse*

Academic spoken discourse in English is characterized by its use of specific lexical, grammatical, and syntactic structures to convey scientific knowledge and engage listeners. However, research in this area is limited and fragmented due to challenges in collecting natural spoken data. As a result, much of the existing research uses corpus research methods (Dang & Webb, 2014; Yang, 2014), and extant research on academic spoken English primarily focuses on vocabulary, encompassing two main aspects: the form and function of word combinations (Grant, 2011; Biber et al., 2004) and the interdisciplinary scope of academic vocabulary (Dang & Webb, 2014). Given its close connection to words, research on vocabulary in academic spoken English discourse has garnered significant attention in the academic community. However, many studies have not adequately addressed the functional role of attitude markers in academic spoken contexts.

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs primarily aim to enhance students' awareness and proficiency in academic English. They help students effectively communicate academic knowledge, construct academic identities, and integrate into the academic discourse community (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995). In the contemporary academic landscape, shaped by rapid advancements in communication technologies and evolving methods of knowledge exchange, future scientists, or students, will encounter increasingly diverse audience groups and modes of interaction. This includes the synergistic use of multimodal discourse resources (Hyland & Jiang, 2019; Kuteeva & Mauranen, 2018). Consequently, the traditional emphasis on academic writing skills is no longer sufficient. Proficiency in academic oral communication has become a crucial criterion for assessing a scientist's qualifications. The neglect of attitudinal discourse markers in the study of academic spoken discourse could impede students' successful integration into the academic discourse community and hinder effective interactions with diverse audience groups.

The 3MT competition has emerged as a significant platform for academic presentation and communication. It allows students to share their disciplinary knowledge with a broader audience beyond their specific field. While some studies have begun to explore the structure and delivery of 3MT presentations, there is a notable dearth of research on the effective rhetorical strategies employed by speakers to persuade their audiences (Qiu & Jiang, 2021). The grammatical and lexical resources utilized in academic spoken discourse play a vital role in conveying scientific information and enabling scholars to express their stance. Stance refers to authors' attitudes and evaluations of disciplinary propositions within their text. The appropriate use of attitude markers is essential for conveying personal stance, constructing scholarly identity, and effectively promoting scientific research results.

Scholars have shown great interest in exploring the lexicogrammatical resources and rhetorical strategies used in spoken discourse in recent years. Among these, metadiscourse has emerged as a major research topic, with perspectives gradually expanding from single ontological studies to

combined studies encompassing pragmatics, function, identity, and cross-culture differences. Attitude markers, as a subcategory of interactional metadiscourse markers, are often studied alongside hedges, boosters, and self-mentions, particularly regarding their interpersonal functions such as rhetoric, admonition, and communication (Azar & Hashim, 2019; Lee, 2021).

Scholars have also conducted studies on language markers in spoken discourse, including sentence connectives (Fraser, 1999; Halliday & Hasan, 1976), discourse connectives (Unger, 1996), discourse auxiliaries (Aijmer, 1997, 2002), pragmatic markers (Brinton, 2017), and metadiscourse features (Hyland, 2004, 2019), highlighting the variable or multifunctional features of these markers. However, existing literature has broadly categorized attitude markers as interactional metadiscourse markers and has not given adequate attention to specific types of attitude markers. For instance, Hyland (1998a, 2001a, 2001b) conducted a series of interdisciplinary comparative studies on various types of linguistic resources in academic interaction models. In these studies, Hyland extensively examined lexico-grammatical resources, including hedges, amplifiers, and attitude markers, in 240 research articles from four hard disciplines (mechanical engineering, electrical engineering, physics, and microbiology) and four soft disciplines (philosophy, marketing, sociology, and applied linguistics). His findings indicated that social scientists use more attitude markers than natural scientists, while hedges and amplifiers are more prevalent in soft disciplines than in hard ones.

It is worth noting that there is a significant gap in research when it comes to exploring attitude markers in academic spoken discourse, particularly in the context of the 3MT competition. Stance, which encompasses an author's attitudes and evaluations of disciplinary concepts, is crucial for effectively communicating scientific ideas. The careful selection and use of linguistic resources, both grammatical and lexical, are essential in expressing one's stance. However, it is concerning that there is a shortage of studies that focus on attitude markers in the 3MT presentations, as these markers not only convey personal perspectives but also shape scholarly identity and aid in the dissemination of research findings. Therefore, this study aims to fill this research gap by analyzing evaluative linguistic resources that indicate importance and contribute significantly to scholarly discourse.

## *2.2 Research on Gender-specific Discursive Practices in the Academic Context*

The concept of gender defines the social roles of men and women in society (Orazbekova, Zhalalova, & Cengiz, 2014). This concept intersects with other factors, such as disciplinary preferences and conventions, influencing how men and women communicate in academia. Liu's study (2019) analyzed the use of intensifiers in academic lectures and explored how gender-specific language patterns affect perceptions of competence and authority. This study found significant gender and interdisciplinary differences, with women being more inclined to use modifiers to weaken their statements, potentially indicating a greater tendency to express uncertainty, while male speakers were more likely to use direct and assertive language, such as intensifiers. Tse and Hyland (2008) conducted an analysis of various metadiscourse features, including attitude markers, hedges, and boosters, in book reviews. Their

findings suggest that academics engage in a continuous negotiation of their gender identities. They may conform to or transcend stereotypical “masculine” and “feminine” styles, depending on the discourse objectives in academic writing. Also as noted by Cameron (2005), gender identities are not fixed and stable attributes of individuals but are constructed within specific contexts through particular practices. Nevertheless, studies investigating discourse features that exhibit gender preferences have generated varied and inconclusive results. Researchers delve into how language choices may differ based on gender, yielding a complex array of findings that often lack consensus. Some research uncovers the continued prevalence of a gendered discourse that excludes certain groups (Fairchild et al., 2022). Alotaibi (2021) analyzed gender differences in letters of recommendation, revealing that male recommenders tended to utilize more hedges and boosters compared to their female counterparts. Conversely, attitude markers were more prevalent in the letters written by female recommenders. Heteronormative discourses have been identified as sources of disruption, limiting the opportunities for female academics to participate in academic mobility (Cohen et al., 2020). Gendered language is not context-independent and does not exclusively manifest when gender is explicitly highlighted, as might be observed in situations involving mixed-gender groups (Hussey, Katz & Leith, 2015). De Simone and Scano (2018) employ critical discourse analysis to investigate the mechanisms governing the modern gender hierarchy. They elucidate how hegemonic masculinity influences discourses promoting uniformity to suppress gender disparities, while the portrayal of women’s inherent domestic roles disrupts this narrative, injecting fresh perspectives into discussions regarding female professional trajectories.

In contrast to the aforementioned studies revealing gender-related features in discourse, certain investigations have identified limited gender differences in academic discourse, implying a transition toward a discourse that embraces inclusivity and questions conventional gender assumptions (Fairchild et al., 2022). For instance, Francis, Robson, and Read (2001) observed that male and female university students exhibited similar usage of tentative expressions. Additionally, in a subsequent study, Francis, Robson, and Read (2002) noted that both male and female university students employed a considerable number of assertive statements to convey certainty in their essays. A more recent examination of funding applications by Horbach, Schneider, and Sainte-Marie (2022) similarly found minimal distinctions in writing style between male and female applicants. Wang and Hu’s (2023) study further reinforces this perspective, as their quantitative analysis revealed no significant difference between male and female authors in terms of their overall utilization of linguistic expressions of interest in academic writing.

Research findings regarding gender-based differences in academic discourse present a complex landscape, revealing inconsistencies that emphasize the necessity for more exploration into how gender influences the dynamics of academic communication. Of particular pertinence to this inquiry is the noticeable dearth of studies examining potential gender disparities in the utilization of attitude markers

that express importance, such as “big”, “significant”, and “critical”, in academic spoken discourse. These expressions are epistemological and are inherently linked to the construction of knowledge in academic discourse. Therefore, exploring whether there are gender-based differences in the use of attitude markers that express importance could also shed light on how male and female researchers position themselves in knowledge-making practices.

Thus, this study intends to investigate gender differences in the use of lexical resources in 3MT presentations. Specifically, the study focused on how the male and female presenters conveyed the concept of “important” in their presentations. By examining the semantic conceptual representations of these terms, the study aimed to explore how their use in academic spoken discourse reflects speakers’ attitudinal interventions and evaluations of the propositional content. This analysis primarily focuses on word frequencies and usage of attitude markers expressing the concept of importance across genders of speakers. This study is guided by the following research questions:

- (1) Do male and female presenters in 3MT competitions differ in the frequency of emphasizing the concept of “importance”?
- (2) Do male and female presenters in 3MT competitions differ in how they emphasize the “importance” of their research? If yes, in what ways?

### **3. Research Methods**

#### *3.1 Corpus*

The selection process for award-winning speeches in the 3MT contest hinges on their exceptional reference value. Winning presentations, subjected to rigorous scrutiny, excel in both content and rhetorical delivery, setting a standard for excellence in the academic community. The language used in these award-winning presentations is examined for clarity, persuasiveness, and potential contribution to broader discourse in the field. Thus, these speeches serve as models of effective scholarly communication.

This study delves into the nuances of the attitude marker “importance” and its antonyms and derivatives as portrayed in award-winning 3MT presentations at the University of Queensland from 2008 to 2022, aiming to uncover gendered features in the communication of significance within oral scientific discourse. To establish a comprehensive dataset, an exhaustive search was conducted on the University of Queensland’s official website, retrieving all award-winning 3MT presentations spanning the aforementioned timeframe. This collection formed the basis of our corpus, which was meticulously constructed to encompass the entirety of award-winning speeches from 2008 to 2022, amounting to a total of 35 text samples. This academic endeavor led to the compilation of an English spoken discourse corpus, offering a rich tapestry of linguistic data for analysis. Among the corpus, 19 presentations were delivered by female award-winning speakers, while 16 were delivered by male counterparts. The corpus, comprising approximately 18,000 words in total, served as the focal point of our investigation

into the gendered connotations surrounding the articulation of importance in scientific discourse, as detailed in Table 1.

**Table 1. Description of the Corpus**

3MT sources	Number of texts	Total number of words
Female	19	8818
Male	16	7883
Total	35	16701

### 3.2 Coding

The corpus underwent transcription utilizing iFlytek Listen software, followed by a meticulous cleaning process using TextEditor to rectify errors originating from machine transcription. This rigorous refinement procedure involved collaborative efforts between two researchers, who alternated tasks to ensure the accuracy and methodological integrity of the cleaning process. Commencing in 2022, text samples were systematically numbered as “1, 2, 3,...” and subjected to manual verification by both authors. The first author initially scrutinized texts with odd-numbered sequences, while the second author conducted a secondary review, with roles reversed for texts bearing even-numbered sequences. This iterative approach underscores our commitment to scientific rigor in data preparation, emphasizing precision and consistency in handling textual artifacts. Through such meticulous scrutiny and refinement, researchers aimed to bolster the reliability and validity of subsequent analyses and interpretations, thereby fortifying the scholarly foundation of the study.

Utilizing resources from the Collins Dictionary, Merriam-Webster Dictionary, and Thesaurus Dictionary, an exhaustive compilation of synonyms for the term “important” was meticulously assembled. To streamline the process, duplicate entries among the synonym lists extracted from these three references were identified, while words appearing in two out of three lists were duly noted. Drawing insights from the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE), four words boasting the highest frequency within academic discourse were singled out: “big”, “significant”, “critical”, and “serious”. These lexical choices, in addition to “important”, were designated as search terms within our corpus to pinpoint instances of attitude markers.

Recognizing the potential for the concept of “importance” to manifest in negated forms (e.g., “is not insignificant”), antonyms were thoughtfully incorporated into the search word roster. However, words such as “critical” in contexts like “critical writing” and “big” in phrases like “the big bang” were deliberately excluded, as they were deemed unrelated to attitude markers. To facilitate the annotation process, we employed the AntConc (version 3.5.7) software, which efficiently identified and annotated instances of the attitude marker “important” and its synonyms, antonyms, and derivatives within our corpus. This meticulous approach ensures the precision and comprehensiveness of our analysis, laying

a robust foundation for subsequent investigations into the nuanced portrayal of importance within oral scientific communication.

### *3.3 Data Analysis*

In order to ensure an equitable and accurate analysis, the data underwent normalization to achieve a uniform sample size of 100 words. This methodological step enhances the precision of our examination by mitigating the influence of varying sample sizes. SPSS 23.0 was employed to ascertain the significance of our findings. Utilizing the Log-Likelihood Ratio (LLR) based on annotation results, we meticulously identified and analyzed the occurrence of this type of attitude marker across speakers of different genders. Our objective was to unravel gender-specific linguistic traits and elucidate how discourse conventions and academic contexts shape the use of attitude markers among individuals of varying genders. Furthermore, a Chi-square test was applied to the same dataset to corroborate the outcomes of the LLR analysis. This complementary approach allows for a more thorough validation of our findings regarding the utilization of attitude markers denoting importance among researchers of different genders.

The rationale behind employing both the LLR and Chi-square tests lies in their suitability for distinct facets of data analysis, complementing each other synergistically. The LLR excels in detecting nuanced variations in token use within standardized datasets, particularly in scenarios with limited sample sizes. It assesses the relationship between variables, such as gender and the use of attitude markers, determining whether a statistically significant association exists between them. Conversely, the Chi-square test offers a broader perspective by evaluating the overall significance of differences between groups. It scrutinizes disparities between observed and expected event frequencies, discerning whether discrepancies are statistically meaningful or merely random chance. By integrating both statistical methodologies, we attain a comprehensive understanding of the underlying patterns present within the data. This multifaceted approach not only bolsters the robustness of our findings but also heightens the validity and reliability of the conclusions derived from our analysis.

## **4. Findings**

Our findings revealed that female speakers exhibited a higher frequency of employing this type of specific attitude marker, totaling 20 occurrences. In contrast, male speakers used them 14 times. This discrepancy underscores gender-specific tendencies in linguistic expression, shedding light on the diverse communicative styles adopted by individuals of different genders within the context of oral scientific communication.



**Table 2. Attitude Markers by Gender (Total Number of Occurrences and per 100 Words)**

	Female 3MT		Male 3MT	
	Occurrences	Per 100 words	Occurrences	Per 100 words
<b>Attitude Markers</b>	20	0.23	14	0.18

The obtained result from the Log Likelihood Ratio (LLR) analysis, with a value of 0.5 and a p-value exceeding 0.05, suggests that there is no statistically significant difference in the frequency of usage of the attitude marker expressing importance between male and female speakers. A lower LLR value, such as 0.5, indicates a lesser degree of distinction between the two categories, namely male and female speakers. Moreover, the Chi-square test yielded a p-value greater than 0.05, aligning with the findings of the LLR analysis. This further supports the conclusion that there exists no notable disparity in emphasizing the concept of “importance” between male and female speakers within the analyzed dataset. Consequently, based on these results, we accept the null hypothesis, indicating that there is no significant variance in the usage of attitude markers expressing importance between speakers of different genders.

**Table 3. The Distribution of Attitude Markers**

3MT sources	Distribution of attitude markers
Female	important (10), importantly (1), importance (1), significant (4), significantly (1), big (2), critical (1)
Male	important (8), importantly (4), significantly (1), critical (1)

**Table 4. Log-Likelihood Ratio and Chi-square Test**

Test	Value	df	p
LLR	.50	-	.48
Chi-square test	5.545	2	.063

Male and female presenters within the dataset show no significant disparity in the frequency of attitude markers conveying importance, indicating a shared awareness and deliberate utilization of the concept within their research presentations. However, nuanced differences emerge in how male and female presenters articulate this notion. Specifically, the dataset reveals a noticeable variance in lexical diversity between male and female speakers. Female presenters demonstrate a wider array of expressions emphasizing importance compared to their male counterparts, as depicted in Table 3. Their linguistic repertoire encompasses a broader spectrum of attitude markers, reflecting a more nuanced and varied approach to conveying the significance of their research findings. Conversely, male presenters predominantly rely on the use of “important” and its derivative form “importantly”.

Furthermore, female presenters tend to extend the usage of these terms beyond the confines of academic discourse, seamlessly integrating them into personal narratives or discussions of broader societal implications. This multifaceted approach is exemplified by the following examples.

Example 1. And this is not only *important* for our future babies, but it actually sends a *big* message to all of us. (Yunan Ye, 2022 Winner, Female, “The big bang—how it all started”)

Example 2. But regardless of the cause, difficulties with language can have a *significant* impact on a person’s quality of life. (Emma Schimke, 2020 Winner, Female, “To sleep or not to sleep”)

Example 3. It could be collapsing their lungs infect, because everyone acknowledges that communication is *important*, but getting their lungs working better whilst they still require support this priority. (Anna-Liisa Sutt, 2016 Winner & People’s Choice, Female, “Dying to talk”)

In the aforementioned examples, female speakers employ attitude markers expressing importance to accentuate the significance of research beyond the traditional confines of academic discourse, thereby emphasizing its broader impact on various facets of life beyond scholarly realms. Specifically, they illuminate the relevance of research findings to the wider societal landscape, extending its implications to domains such as the well-being of future generations, the enhancement of overall quality of life, and the facilitation of effective communication among individuals. This emphasis on the broader implications of research underscores its multifaceted relevance, transcending disciplinary boundaries and resonating with broader societal concerns.

Conversely, male speakers predominantly emphasize the “importance” of research within the academic context, with fewer extrinsic connections, as evidenced by the following examples. They underscore the notable impact of negative pressure wound therapy in pediatric burns, a crucial aspect highlighted within the thesis, and the seriousness of an issue that demands urgent attention. However, the emphasis primarily revolves around the intricacies of the research itself, with relatively diminished attention directed towards considerations beyond the academic realm, as illustrated by examples 4-6. In other words, the broader societal implications of the findings receive comparatively lesser emphasis.

Example 4. Those with negative pressure fared *significantly* better. (Cody Frear, 2019 Winner, Male, “Negative Pressure Wound Therapy in Pediatric Burns: No-No or Noo-Noo?”)

Example 5. A thesis is like a game of trivial pursuit with a couple of important differences. (Richard Ronay, 2009 Winner, Male, “Trivial Pursuit: Graduate Edition”)

Example 6. And this question is *important*, because this problem costs Australia \$8 billion every year, not to mention the psychological and emotional cost to the people with recurring pain. (David MacDonald, 2009, Runner-Up, Male, “Why do some people keep hurting their back?”)

## 5. Discussions

### 5.1 The Overall Distribution of Attitude Markers Expressing the Concept of Importance

The statistical findings reveal no significant difference in the frequency of attitude markers expressing

importance between male and female speakers. This outcome is consistent with a recent study by Wang and Hu (2023), which similarly indicated that male and female authors exhibited no disparities in their overall use of linguistic expressions of interest. These results imply that gender may not directly correlate with the frequency at which speakers employ such words to convey their emotions, attitudes, and stances. This aligns with existing research suggesting that gender-based distinctions may not always be prominently manifested across various aspects of academic discourse. For instance, research conducted by Achkasov and Barsova (2020) indicates that both men and women tend to express disagreement explicitly using basic mitigation strategies, thereby influencing the word choice of males and females in their speeches. It is plausible that speakers of different genders employ similar communication strategies, potentially leading to no significant difference in the frequency of using attitude markers.

Scholars are naturally expected to communicate scientific knowledge in a manner consistent with the norms and standards of their respective disciplines (Hyland, 2009). The 3MT presentations constitute an academic context characterized by well-established and universally recognized format guidelines. Within such a context, both male and female presenters may opt for language choices that closely adhere to academic norms. Additionally, participants in this competition are Ph.D. students who typically undergo rigorous academic training, enabling them to articulate the significance of their research and effectively promote their findings using language that aligns with academic community expectations. Thus, it is plausible that female speakers may adopt an academic style characterized by traits traditionally associated with masculinity, such as competitiveness and assertiveness (Tse & Hyland, 2008). Despite prevalent notions of gendered communication patterns, certain contexts or linguistic features may exhibit a degree of gender neutrality or convergence. This nuanced perspective challenges simplistic assumptions about gender differences in academic discourse and underscores the importance of considering multiple factors that shape language use within scholarly contexts.

### *5.2 Gender-specific Use of Attitude Markers Expressing the Concept of Importance*

While no significant differences were observed across gender in the frequency of using attitude markers such as “important”, “big”, “significant”, “critical”, “serious”, and their antonyms and derivatives, there exist subtle yet noteworthy gender-specific patterns in their use. Female speakers demonstrate a tendency to employ a wider range of expressions when emphasizing importance compared to their male counterparts. Their nuanced approach to conveying significance is reflected in the diverse array of attitude markers they select. Conversely, male speakers exhibit a propensity to heavily rely on the term “important” and its variations, such as “importantly”. Notably, men often emphasize the importance of research within the academic context while establishing fewer extrinsic connections, as evidenced by the provided examples. Female presenters frequently integrate academic terminology into their discourse in a more personal and relatable manner, expanding its meaning beyond the confines of academia. They often incorporate personal narratives and societal implications

to offer a holistic understanding of these terms.

Through a contextual analysis of attitude markers expressing importance, this study has identified differences in linguistic choices within the oral discourse of different genders. Male speakers may favor employing the term “important” and its derivatives as part of their linguistic repertoire, reflecting underlying communication patterns influenced by social and cultural factors. Research by Holmes and Meyerhoff (2008) suggests that men tend to use more assertive language in discourse, utilizing terms like “important” to convey confidence and authority. Moreover, the selective use of these terms by male speakers may indicate gender-specific linguistic strategies or stylistic preferences within discourse. Studies by Tannen (1990) and Lakoff (1973) have indicated that men often employ language emphasizing status and dominance, focusing on precisely presenting scientific facts in their academic achievements as part of their speaking strategy.

Conversely, female speakers exhibit more diverse language choices concerning the term “important”. In addition to using “important” and its derivatives, they employ synonyms such as “significant”, “critical”, and “big”, encompassing a broader range of meanings. Female speakers may emphasize the broader societal or problem-solving significance of their research findings. Understandably, in accordance with Lakoff (1973), women often avoid strong expressions of feeling, favor expressions of uncertainty, and elaborate on means of expression regarding subject matter deemed “trivial” to the “real” world.

In contrast to males, female speakers demonstrate a tendency to employ the word “important” in contexts extending beyond academic settings, connecting with social contexts. This is evident in examples such as: “This is not only important for our future babies, trust is crucial to how we communicate...” On the other hand, male speakers may utilize the word more frequently to underscore the importance of their research findings or critical points of their presentations, as demonstrated by: “This question is important”, “Why is it so important that I continue to study...” These differences suggest that male and female speakers adopt distinct approaches when emphasizing the importance of their research. Such tendencies may also stem from females’ inclination to employ strategies aimed at enhancing readers’ comprehension of the propositional content (Wang & Hu, 2023).

Delving into the lexical choices and syntactic structures employed by male and female presenters, it becomes apparent that the linguistic nuances are not solely attributable to individual idiosyncrasies but are intrinsically tied to contextual considerations and communicative strategies adopted by each gender. Tannen (1990, 1994) found that men tend to focus on the literal meaning of a message, while women are more attuned to metamessages. In this study, women’s inclination towards intertwining academic discourse with personal anecdotes or societal relevance underscores a holistic approach to knowledge dissemination. Conversely, men’s tendency to focus predominantly on the intrinsic significance of research findings reflects a more traditional emphasis on academic rigor, potentially at the expense of broader contextualization and societal resonance. Tannen delineated the conversational styles of men as

predominantly focused on imparting information, while women's conversational styles were described as oriented towards fostering rapport. Essentially, men often assert dominance in conversations by assuming a lecturing role, showcasing their expertise, and positioning themselves prominently within a hierarchical social structure resembling a pyramid. Conversely, women tend to engage in empathetic listening and emphasize shared experiences to cultivate and sustain interpersonal connections and rapport. Thus, the observed differences not only shed light on gender-based variations in communication styles but also underscore the complex interplay between linguistic choices, communicative strategies, and contextual considerations in scholarly discourse.

Furthermore, the gender differences in using words like "important" may reflect distinct rhetorical strategies. Female speakers might employ the word "important" to emphasize the significance of their work, but they might also utilize other strategies like synonyms or modifiers to express nuanced assessments. Male speakers may adopt a more direct and confident style to underscore the importance of their research findings, employing fewer forms of attitude markers expressing importance. Rubin and Greene (1992) found that female students tended to position themselves as lacking status, whereas people in power saw less need to do so. It means that female students were more likely to mark their emotions and project their attitudes, which are usually recognized as unwanted hyperbole and a linguistic property of the weak. In contrast, male students used fewer exclamations and constructed a cool, detached style, suggesting that they positioned themselves more confidently. Females recurrently use particular ways of implementing the tactics of mitigating implicit expressions, which may be due to their specific individual styles. It could also be attributed to the discourse surrounding women, which often depicts them as objects characterized by their sexual nature, necessitating euphemistic expressions, and portrays their social roles as derived and dependent compared to those of men (Lakoff, 1973).

## 6. Conclusion

The study delves into gender disparities concerning how the concept of importance is emphasized in 3MT presentations, analyzing award-winning presentations and annotating attitude markers related to importance. Employing statistical analyses, including Log-Likelihood Ratio and Chi-square tests, enhances the validity of the findings, identifying gender-specific language patterns.

Findings indicate no significant difference in the frequency of using attitude markers expressing importance between male and female speakers, suggesting a shared consciousness in highlighting the significance of their research. However, two differences emerge in how this concept is articulated in the oral discourse of different genders. Firstly, female presenters exhibit a more diverse range of expressions emphasizing importance compared to their male counterparts, who predominantly rely on the use of "important" and its derivative form "importantly". Secondly, female presenters extend the use of these terms beyond academic discourse, incorporating personal narratives or broader societal

implications, while male presenters primarily underscore the importance of research within the academic context.

This study offers valuable insights into gender differences in linguistic choices within 3MT presentations, contributing to a deeper understanding of how gender influences language choices and communication strategies in academic settings. It also provides potential rhetorical strategies for novice researchers engaging in international academic oral communication, aiding in the effective dissemination of academic findings during conferences and academic exchange events. Additionally, this research can inform academic English oral communication instruction, enhancing students' awareness of appropriate rhetorical strategies and enriching teaching materials for EAP (English for Academic Purposes) instructors.

However, the study has limitations, focusing solely on 3MT presentations from the University of Queensland, limiting the scope of the collected data. Moreover, the limited sample size raises concerns regarding the generalizability of the conclusions. Future studies could collect more data and explore whether gender differences in linguistic choices affect the audience's perception of research significance, incorporating interviews with the audience.

In conclusion, the use of attitude markers expressing importance in academic discourse by both male and female speakers sheds light on the complex interplay between gender, language, and power dynamics. To effectively address gender imbalances within academia, structural and institutional changes are necessary, alongside considerations of linguistic and sociocultural factors influencing communication practices and scholarly interactions. Efforts to promote gender equity in academia should involve challenging stereotypes, fostering inclusive language, and creating supportive environments that empower all scholars to thrive.

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