

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study

In everyday speech, women's language has a set of distinctive features that are frequently used, according to Lakoff (1973). In articulating their thoughts, behaviors, and feelings, women use women's language to express themselves, and it is all influenced by the oppression and degradation over time since earlier times. Therefore, women's choices in language, tone, and self-expression are not simply matters of personal style, but deliberate social tactics developed in response to gender-based power imbalance. These communication patterns gradually developed into markers of women's limited social roles, shaping the way they conveyed their emotions, identities, and ideas in both intimate and public settings (Lakoff, 1973).

The 2020 Women's March demonstrations, which took place on January 18 and October 17, 2020, were a continuation of similar events that occurred in 2017. The women's Marches that were held globally in January 2017 attracted significant media attention due to their unprecedented scale, recognized as the largest single-day march in American history, with 3-5 million people in 600 cities across the country, with additional marchers in approximately 80 other countries. Notably, these events were largely ignored or overlooked during the White House press conference that afternoon (Kipper, 2020). The Women's March originated as a reaction to the election of Donald Trump and has since evolved into a nationwide movement, as stated on the Women's March page, the organizers adhere to eight unity principles, which include women's rights to choices over their own body and lives, the cessation of violence, the protection of reproductive rights,

LGBTQIA rights, workers' rights, civil rights, immigrant rights, and the promotion of environmental justice as the themes of demands during the demonstration. The objective of the march is to “harness the political power of diverse women and their communities to effect transformative social change” (Kipper, 2020).

The dates January 18 and October 17, 2020, were selected because protests held on those occasions encompassed a wider and more concentrated range of issues communicated through public protest slogans than other Women's March events. These gatherings therefore provide particularly rich data for tracing how participants articulated intersecting political and social concerns during 2020.

The 2020 Women's March in Washington, DC, constitutes a particularly important yet under-researched moment. Taking place during an election year, amid the Trump impeachment process and intensified debates over reproductive rights, the march reflects a context in which language was not only expressive but strategically confrontational and politically urgent (Bonikowski, 2017). However, existing literature has not sufficiently addressed how these socio-political pressures influenced the linguistic framing of bodily autonomy, citizenship, and resistance in protest slogans. In particular, the explicit mention of female anatomy and the frequent use of ownership markers (“my body,” “my choice”) signal a shift toward embodied political discourse, a phenomenon that remains under-analyzed linguistically (Butler, 1990; Martin, 2004).

In a social movement, the use of language is characterized by its expressive power and force, which allows access to subjective, relational, and emotional dimensions, thus strengthening incitement and persuasion (Denton, 1980; Stewart et al., 2012). Slogans consist of short, concise, memorable phrases and constitute a significant genre in political

communication. According to Lu (1999: 493), these slogans serve to unite public thought and stimulate public action and reaction during social movement. Although they may initially seem superficial or simple at first glance, slogans have played a crucial role in shaping political and social identities and advocating for change during some of the most significant political events in history.

The slogans used during the Women's March functioned as a form of linguistic resistance, transforming language from a symbol of subordination into a tool of empowerment and protest. This aligns with Lakoff's perspective that language not only reflects the social position of women but also serves as a powerful strategy for resistance in all social and political movements. The use of language in the Women's March slogans demonstrates how women reclaim their voices through deliberate linguistic choices that challenge traditional norms and affirm equality (Lakoff, 1973).

## **1.2 Research Question**

1. What are the most frequently used protest slogans in Women's March 2020, and what messages do they convey?
2. How do the slogans represent different social actors, such as the protesters, political figures, or institutions?

## **1.3 The Objective of the Research**

The objective of this research is to conduct a systematic linguistic analysis of protest slogans used during the Women's March in Washington, DC, in 2020, with particular attention to how language functions as a tool of social activism. This research investigates protest slogans by identifying the most frequently used protest slogans along with the

messages they convey. This research also analyzes how these slogans represent different social actors, including the protesters themselves, political figures, and institutions.

#### **1.4 Focus of Research**

This research investigates how language was employed during the Women's Marches held on January 18 and October 17, 2020, in Washington, DC, as a potent means of social activism and collective resistance. In order to address the first research question regarding the most frequently used protest slogans and their messages, this study specifically examined how language was used within slogans as a form of social activism. The slogans were treated as linguistic data for this research, allowing the researcher to identify patterns in which slogans appeared most frequently and to determine what messages these slogans conveyed. In order to address the second research question concerning how slogans represent different social actors, this research further analyzed how slogans positioned protesters, political figures, institutions, and marginalized groups through strategic linguistic and representational choices. Overall, this research is intentionally limited to the analysis of language use in protest slogans as a form of social activism.

#### **1.5 Method of Research**

This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach to systematically identify and categorize the diverse themes present in the 2020 Women's March slogans. This study uses an identification process in which categories emerge from the linguistic evidence found in the 45 samples of protest slogans from several internet sources such as CNN, Getty Images, and The New York Times website. The protest slogans in this study were classified according to their thematic categories by examining the keywords contained in each slogan. The

classification process involved identifying keywords and phrases. This research also uses a qualitative method to analyze the data. It actively centers on providing a detailed description and interpretation of the language found in the text, prioritizing rich, contextual insight over numerical data or statistical analysis (Creswell, 2014).

### **1.5.1 Data Collection**

This research utilized data from the selected images or documentation of protest slogans from several internet sources. The data for this research consist of 45 samples of protest slogans collected from images and photo documentation of the 2020 Women's March in Washington, DC, from several internet sources including the CNN article *How Protest Signs Are Being Used at the Women's March* published in January 2020, Getty Images documenting the 2020 Women's March, and *The New York Times* article *Issues Abound at 4th Women's March, "But It All Ties Into Trump"* published in 2020. First, the researcher conducted a systematic search for images and photo documentation related specifically to the Women's March in Washington, DC, 2020. The researcher will compile the 45 selected protest slogans from the internet sources. Next, the author will record details of the language of each protest slogan from the internet that the protesters used during the Women's March in Washington, DC, 2020. Finally, the collected slogans were organized systematically in a data table, including information such as the slogan text and its thematic category.

### **1.5.2 Data Analysis**

In analyzing the data, the researcher employed the theory of language and sex proposed by Peter Trudgill (2000), complemented by the theory of social actor



representation by Theo Van Leeuwen (2008). In this section of the study, the researcher comprehensively analyzed the selected data and themes related to language as social activism, focusing on its role in communication, identity, and social variation. This research identified the most common protest slogans, examined the messages they conveyed, and analyzed them as found in the selected image documentation from the Women's March in Washington, DC, 2020.

In this section, the researcher compiled and organized the language used in protest slogans into a table. The tabulation included themes, frequencies (f), percentages (%), and examples of slogans. This tabulation allowed the researcher to clearly identify which themes dominated in the Women's March and served as a basis for further qualitative interpretation using Van Leeuwen's social actor representation strategy. After all slogans had been categorized, the researcher counted how many slogans appeared in each theme to calculate the percentage of each theme using the following formula:

$$\text{Percentage} = (\text{Frequency of a theme} / \text{Total number of slogans}) \times 100$$

## 1.6 Definition of Key Terms

### a. Social Activism

Social activism usually arises from individuals who do not have conventional access to power and is not necessarily about obtaining power itself but seeking to change (Anderson & Herr, 2007).

### **b. Slogans**

Slogans are widely used as tools to influence people and public opinion, particularly in advertising and political movements (Lu, 1999).

### **c. Social Actors**

A social actor or participant is defined as any individual, group, or institution involved in or affected by a social practice under discussion (Fairclough, 2001).

### **d. Feminism**

Feminism, in the sociolinguistic sense, involves an effort to reclaim the power of language. Feminism seeks to dismantle linguistic biases that categorize women as "subordinate" or "passive" and encourages the use of language as a tool for social mobilization and identity construction (Trudgill, 2000).

### **e. Misogyny**

According to Kate Manne, misogyny is not simply the hatred of women, but a system that polices and enforces patriarchal norms. She defines it as “the law enforcement branch of patriarchy,” meaning it serves to punish women who challenge male dominance (Manne, 2017).