

Feminist stylistic analysis of women's intelligence in *Hidden Figures* by Margot Lee Shetterly

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Abstract

*This research analyzes women's intelligence and feminism in Margot Lee Shetterly's *Hidden Figures* through a feminist stylistic perspective. The objective of this study is to examine how linguistic features at the word, sentence, and discourse levels construct the representation of women's intelligence and feminist values. This study applies a qualitative descriptive method, using Sara Mills' Feminist Stylistic Analysis as the analytical framework. The data consist of selected words, sentences, and discourses from the novel *Hidden Figures* that highlight the intellectual contributions of the female characters Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson. The analysis reveals that at the word level, elements such as generic pronouns (15 data, 6.6%) expose gender bias while also reflecting women's resilience. At the sentence level, presupposition and inference (17 data, 7.5%) challenge societal assumptions and emphasize women's authority. At the discourse level, focalization (16 data, 7.0%) centers women's perspectives, validating their agency and leadership. Overall, the findings indicate that linguistic features across all levels contribute to resisting gender stereotypes and affirming women's intellectual presence in male-dominated fields. This study enriches feminist stylistic scholarship by demonstrating how language not only reflects but also reinforces women's agency and intellect in literature.*

Keywords: *feminism; feminist stylistic analysis; level analysis; woman intelligence*

INTRODUCTION

Feminist stylistics is an approach to analyzing language and literature through a feminist lens, examining how linguistic choices reflect and reinforce gender ideologies (Caroline et al., 2023; Dalimunte et al., 2025a; Fatima et al., 2023). This field, pioneered by scholars such as (Mills, 1995) cited in (Lu'luil Maknun et al., 2023; Maknun et al., 2023; Suchana, 2024), explores how language constructs gender identities, represents women, and perpetuates patriarchal norms in texts. Feminist stylistics promotes more inclusive and empowering depictions of women while criticizing the use of stereotyped character portrayals, prejudiced language, and male-dominated narrative frameworks (Wulan, 2023; Ufot, 2012; Sunbal Razzaq et al., 2025). The portrayal of women

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in texts is the focus of the feminist stylistic approach. This theory was proposed by (Mills, 1995) to prove how women are often marginalized in social life even in a text. We can determine the ideology of a text writer by examining the words and sentences used to describe women. Through the use of their writing style, this method seeks to investigate the assumptions or ideologies of the text writer.

Because of the prevailing idea of male supremacy, women have been stigmatized differently from males in society, both physically and cognitively. According to (Bell Hooks, 1984) in (Rudan, 2023; Rudan & Battistini, 2023), there is a condition where American women socially interact with racial and sexual imperialisms that are maintained and formed in white supremacy and patriarchy as a result of American history (1982:120). Thus, it emerges that the determinant of women inferiority is rooted from prevailing patriarchal society. The consequence of this is that a great number of women in society collectively can gain the opportunities to have choices, but in a very inadequate manner, leading to discrimination and exploitation.

Feminism is broadly defined as a movement and ideology that advocates for the social, political, and economic equality of all genders, particularly focusing on the rights and experiences of women (Aulia et al., 2024; Jaysawal & Saha, 2023; Mardiyani & Tawami, 2022). According to (Hooks, 2000), feminism is "a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression," emphasizing that the struggle is not against men, but against systemic injustice rooted in patriarchal ideologies. Similarly, (Tong, 2009), outlines feminism as a diverse theoretical framework that seeks to understand and address the complex ways gender intersects with race, class, and other social categories in shaping individual experiences and societal structures. These scholarly perspectives underscore feminism as both a theoretical lens and a political practice committed to challenging gender-based inequalities and promoting equity.

"*Hidden Figures*" by Margot Lee Shetterly tells the inspiring true story of three African American women, they are Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson who made significant contributions to the early years of the U.S. space program at NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration). Despite facing racial and gender-based discrimination, these women demonstrated exceptional intellectual brilliance, solving complex mathematical and engineering problems that were pivotal to the success of space missions, including John Glenn's orbital flight. Their woman intelligence is not only reflected in their advanced academic skills but also in their perseverance, problem-solving abilities, and leadership in an environment that systematically undervalued their contributions. The novel showcases how these women's intellectual capabilities were integral to groundbreaking scientific achievements, highlighting how their linguistic representations in the text reflect their cognitive strength and resilience in the face of systemic barriers, making them central figures in the history of space exploration.

(Mills, 1995) proposes three level of analysis as follows: Word level analysis, focusing on sexism language and its meaning in the text. Sentence level analysis, looking at naming, ready-made phrase, metaphor, transitivity choice, jokes/humor which carry ideology that look down on female, Discourse

level analysis, scrutinizing the character/role, fragmentation, focalization and schemata.

Literature has evolved into a mirror that records and reflects many facets of human existence in accordance with social and cultural changes (Hari Kurniawan, 2024; Semiyeva, 2025). Novels are a powerful literary form for constructing stories and illustrating a range of characters (Braun et al., 2024). Women claim to be the family's primary pillar of support (Zahrok & Suarmini, 2018). Society's perception of women is greatly influenced by how women are portrayed in literature. Although there has been a paradigm shift in the way women are portrayed in literature over time, concerns remain concerning how accurately this portrayal captures the realities of women's existence in society. The resulting worldview holds that women are bad, weak, and the cause of issues (Sobari & Silvian, 2019).

Several previous studies have employed feminist stylistic analysis, particularly Sara Mills' framework, to explore women's representation in literature and media. However, a focused linguistic analysis of woman intelligence remains underdeveloped. (Mukminin et al., 2024), applied feminist stylistics to the song *Sit Still, Look Pretty*, analyzing the use of empowering diction and independent sentence constructions to reveal resistance against gender norms; yet, woman intelligence was not a central focus. (Suryaningsih & Sayuti, 2023), examined the movie *Mother* using feminist stylistic analysis, identifying how linguistic features expressed female resistance and agency through strong adjectives and complex sentence forms; intelligence was implied through character action, but not explicitly dissected linguistically. Meanwhile, (Maknun et al., 2023), used feminist stylistics to analyze *Beauty is a Wound*, highlighting women's suffering and survival through word choice and discourse structures; however, the analysis was focused on emotional resilience rather than intellectual capability. Similarly, (Qayyum et al., 2019) explored Doris Lessing's *A Woman on a Roof*, revealing negative representations of female characters through discourse-level analysis, while (Afzal & Sheikh, 2020) contrasted portrayals in short stories by Mueenuddin and Shahraz, showing patriarchal bias against more nuanced female characters. In media contexts, (Ginting et al., 2020), examined stylistic choices in women's commercial product advertisements, identifying rational, informational ("hard sell") language strategies that appeal to logic rather than emotion. In the film genre, (Dalimunte et al., 2025) studied *Enola Holmes 2*, where female characters were described with feminine stereotypes and physical attributes, contrasting with male depictions of strength and professionalism. From a literary perspective, (Br Pane et al., 2024) examined Jane Austen's *Emma*, identifying gendered lexical choices that construct female identity, while (Ashimbuli, 2022), analyzed Namibian women's poetry, highlighting how language often portrays women as weak, domestic, and silenced. These studies collectively demonstrate the usefulness of feminist stylistics in uncovering gendered meanings across texts; however, none provide a concentrated linguistic analysis of women's intellectual representation, leaving a significant research gap.

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(Triana et al., 2021) applied feminist stylistic principles to news media during the COVID-19 pandemic, noting the use of technical vocabulary and assertive sentence constructions when depicting women experts, a portrayal closer to intelligence yet still not a full, dedicated analysis of linguistic strategies constructing intellect.

While numerous studies have utilized Sara Mills' feminist stylistic analysis to examine women's representation in various texts, there remains a noticeable gap in exploring how women's intelligence is linguistically constructed. Most previous research, such as that by (Maknun et al., 2023; Mukminin et al., 2024; Suryaningsih & Sayuti, 2023; Triana et al., 2021b), focuses on themes like resistance, emotional resilience, and empowerment, often highlighting diction and sentence structure without specifically analyzing how intelligence is portrayed through language. Although some studies touch upon intelligence indirectly, such as through depictions of female experts or characters making autonomous decisions, they stop short of offering a detailed linguistic investigation into how intellect is shaped and conveyed. This presents an opportunity for further research, particularly through the lens of feminist stylistic analysis as proposed by Sara Mills, which provides tools to uncover subtle power dynamics and gendered meanings in texts. The novel *Hidden Figures* serves as a powerful and relevant case study, as it centers on real-life African-American women whose intelligence drives both the plot and their personal narratives. Yet, how their intellect is encoded in the language of the novel remains insufficiently explored. Thus, this study aims to fill the existing research gap by analyzing the linguistic representation of women's intelligence in *Hidden Figures* using Sara Mills' feminist stylistic framework, contributing to a deeper understanding of how feminism and language intersect to construct women's intellectual identity.

This research offers a clear novelty by providing the first focused linguistic investigation into the representation of women's intelligence using Sara Mills' feminist stylistic framework. While earlier studies on feminist stylistics have highlighted women's empowerment, emotional resilience, and resistance to patriarchal norms in songs, films, advertisements, and novels, they have largely overlooked the explicit construction of women's intellect through language. Unlike those works, this study analyzes *Hidden Figures*—a text centered on real African-American women mathematicians and engineers—

through word, sentence, and discourse levels to uncover how intelligence is linguistically encoded. The novelty lies in three aspects: (1) shifting the analytical focus from resistance and emotion to intellectual capability, (2) applying feminist stylistics to a scientific-historical novel that has not been linguistically examined before, and (3) foregrounding intersectionality by showing how race and gender intersect in shaping the representation of women's intellect. Thus, this research expands feminist stylistic scholarship by demonstrating how language not only portrays but also legitimizes women's intelligence in literature, offering new perspectives that have not been addressed in prior studies.

This study introduces an investigation into how women's intelligence is represented linguistically in Margot Lee Shetterly's *Hidden Figures*, analyzed through the framework of Sara Mills' feminist stylistic analysis. The purpose of this research is to examine how language reflects and constructs the intellectual capacities of the main female characters—Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson—within the context of gender and power relations. The main objective is to identify and analyze the linguistic strategies at the word, sentence, and discourse levels that contribute to portraying these women as intelligent figures. By doing so, the study seeks to reveal how feminist values are embedded in the text and to demonstrate how feminist stylistics can be applied to capture the nuanced portrayal of female intellect in literary narratives.

METHOD

Understanding phenomena in their natural environments and interpreting the meanings that people assigned to them were key components of the qualitative research method. (Creswell, 2014) defined qualitative research as “*an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem.*” It entailed gathering information verbally (through observations, interviews, and texts) rather than numerically, and it was employed to investigate complex problems for which numerical data would not be adequate.

(Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S., 2011), described qualitative research as a collection of material, interpretive practices that brought the world into focus. Field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self were several examples of how these practices turned the world into a collection of representations. In this tradition, researchers investigated phenomena in their natural environments, attempting to understand or interpret them in terms of the meanings that individuals assigned to them.

(Miles et al., 2014), pointed out that qualitative research used descriptive data and concentrated on processes, meanings, and understanding. It applied both iterative and inductive analysis to look for patterns, themes, and holistic features.

In literary and linguistic studies, this approach worked effectively because it enabled scholars to interpret texts, examine language, and comprehend cultural or social contexts. In this study, feminist stylistic analysis

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was applied to understand how women's intelligence was constructed in literature.

Thematic theory referred to the method of identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns or themes within qualitative data, especially in texts (Ahmed et al., 2025; Naeem et al., 2025). Braun and Clarke (2006, cited in Pranskuniene & Perkumiene, 2021), who were widely cited in thematic analysis, defined it as “*a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data*,” emphasizing that it went beyond mere description to interpret the underlying meaning. (Guest et al., 2012), cited in (Cattonar et al., 2024; Morgan & Nica, 2020; Swain, 2018), stated that “*a theme is a pattern found in the information that at the minimum describes and organizes the possible observations and at the maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon*.” Thematic theory was useful to reveal how texts reflected cultural values, ideologies, or power relations, particularly in feminist and critical discourse studies where recurring themes exposed deeper gender-based assumptions or social critiques.

Instruments

The data of this study consisted of selected linguistic expressions, sentences, and discourses found in *Hidden Figures* by Margot Lee Shetterly. These data included narrative descriptions, dialogues, and character reflections that revealed the representation of women's intelligence, particularly those related to the intellectual contributions of the main female characters—Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Jackson. The data were analyzed using Sara Mills' feminist stylistic framework, focusing on the word level, sentence level, and discourse level.

The primary source of data was *Hidden Figures*, written by Margot Lee Shetterly and first published in 2016 by William Morrow, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers. This literary work served as the main material for textual analysis, as it presented the real-life stories of African American women mathematicians and engineers who made significant contributions to the early space missions of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). The novel provided rich linguistic data for examining how women's intelligence was portrayed through language, making it a relevant and valuable source for feminist stylistic analysis.

Procedures

The data were collected by reading the novel repeatedly and closely examining the text. The researcher collected words or terms used in the novel that reflected sexism, bias, or gendered meaning. The focus was placed on how language structures represented gender ideology, including the identification of broader textual structures that reflected women's roles.

Data analysis

The data in this study were analyzed using the interactive model of data analysis proposed by (Miles et al., 2014), which involved four phases: data collection, data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. These

phases were applied interactively and continuously throughout the research process. The analysis focused on identifying and interpreting linguistic elements at the word, sentence, and discourse levels, in accordance with Sara Mills' feminist stylistic framework, to explore the construction of women's intelligence in *Hidden Figures*.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

This study found that a total of 226 linguistic data in *Hidden Figures* constructed women's intelligence across three levels: word level (91 data, 39.8%), sentence level (77 data, 31.1%), and discourse level (58 data, 25.4%). At the word level, sexist language and gendered expressions reflected underlying bias, while sentence and discourse levels highlighted women's agency through presuppositions, agentive verbs, metaphors, and focalization. Unlike previous studies that focused mainly on female empowerment or resistance, this research emphasizes how women's intellectual capacity is explicitly built through language. The results show that the novel not only challenges stereotypes that equate intelligence with masculinity but also portrays African-American women as intellectual authorities in science. Thus, the analysis answers the research questions by demonstrating the specific linguistic features that represent women's intelligence, revealing how Sara Mills' feminist stylistic framework uncovers feminist values, and affirming the importance of a feminist perspective in exposing bias, highlighting agency, and redefining intelligence in literature.

Level Analysis Contribute to The Representation of Woman Intelligence

1. World Level

Table 1. The Number of Word Level Data

	Categories	Total Data	Percentage
Sexism in Language	-		
	Linguistic Determinism	10	4,4%
	Generic Pronoun	15	6,6%
	Generic Noun	13	5,7%
	Woman as Marked Form	11	4,8%
Sexism and meaning	Effect of Sexist Language	9	4,0%
	Naming & Androcentrism	7	3,0%
	Semantic Derogation	6	2,6%
	Endearments & Diminutives	8	3,5%
	Euphemism & Taboo	5	2,2%

The data reveals that a total of 91 linguistic data, accounting for 39.8% of the overall findings, exhibit features of sexist language in the *Hidden Figures* novel. These are categorized into two main groups: Sexism in Language and Sexism and Meaning. Within the first category, Generic Pronoun (15 data, 6.6%) and Generic Noun (13 data, 5.7%) are the most frequent, followed by Linguistic Determinism (10 data, 4.4%) and Woman as Marked Form (11 data, 4.8%). The subcategory Effect of Sexist Language also appears in 9 data (4.0%). In the second category, instances of Endearments & Diminutives (8 data, 3.5%), Naming and Androcentrism (7 data, 3.0%), and Lexical Gaps and Male Point of

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View (7 data, 3.0%) suggest how language centers male experiences and diminishes female identity. Less frequent but still significant are Semantic Derogation (6 data, 2.6%) and Euphemism & Taboo (5 data, 2.2%). These patterns highlight how the novel reflects subtle and overt forms of sexism through linguistic choices that shape perceptions of gender roles and reinforce patriarchal ideologies.

2. Sentence Level

Table 2. The Number of Sentence Level Data

Categories	Total Data	Percentage
Ready-Made Phrases	15	6,6%
Presupposition and Inference	17	7,5%
Metaphor	8	3,5%
Jokes and Humor	9	3,9%
Transivity Choice	9	3,95
Feminism and Ideology	13	5,7%
Total	77	31,1%

The data reveals that a total of 77 linguistic data, accounting for 31.1% of the overall findings, exhibit sentence-level features in the *Hidden Figures* novel. These are categorized into six subcategories: Presupposition and Inference (17 data, 7.5%) is the most frequent, followed by Ready-Made Phrases (15 data, 6.6%) and Feminism and Ideology (13 data, 5.7%), all of which reflect how assumptions, fixed expressions, and ideological language are used to communicate or challenge gender norms. Jokes and Humor (9 data, 3.9%) and Transitivity Choice (9 data, 3.95%) highlight the ways in which sentence structure and humor can either empower or marginalize female characters. Meanwhile, Metaphor (8 data, 3.5%) reveals how figurative language contributes to the portrayal of women's intelligence and identity. These patterns demonstrate how the novel constructs and conveys meaning about gender roles through various sentence-level linguistic strategies.

3. Discourse Level

Table 3. The Number Discourse Level Data

Categories	Total Data	Percentage
Characterization and Roles	15	6,6%
Fragmentation	14	6,1%
Focalization	16	7,0%
Schemata	13	5,7%
Total	58	25,4%

The data reveals that a total of 58 linguistic data, accounting for 25.4% of the overall findings, reflect discourse-level features in the *Hidden Figures* novel. These are divided into four subcategories that illustrate how broader narrative structures contribute to the representation of women's intelligence and feminist themes. Focalization (16 data, 7.0%) appears most frequently, emphasizing how the point of view centers on female experiences and perspectives. This is followed by Characterization and Roles (15 data, 6.6%) and Fragmentation (14 data, 6.1%), which reveal how women are positioned in terms of social roles and how their stories are either cohesively or disruptively presented. Schemata (13 data, 5.7%) uncovers how readers' prior knowledge and expectations are

engaged to interpret gender dynamics within the narrative. Together, these discourse-level features illustrate how the novel organizes and communicates deeper ideological meanings about gender, power, and intelligence.

The application of Sara Mills' Feminist Stylistic Framework Constructs and Communicates Women's Intelligence

The feminist stylistic framework by Sara Mills reveals how language constructs and communicates women's intelligence at various levels in the text, highlighting the empowering roles women play in male-dominated spaces. At the word level, empowering and technical vocabulary is used to depict women as intellectual figures. At the sentence level, active structures and agentive subjects place women as central figures in scientific achievements. The discourse level further emphasizes leadership, resilience, and intellectual agency.

1. Word Level

- a) Linguistic Determinism: The phrase *"This job requires a man's mind"* (page 23) reinforces the stereotype that intelligence is inherently masculine, excluding women from intellectual roles.
- b) Generic Pronoun: *"If a candidate is capable, he will be noticed"* (page 38) uses *"he"* as a universal reference, reinforcing male default in positions of competence.
- c) Generic Noun: *"An astronaut must be brave"* (page 34) associates bravery and expertise with men, making women in such roles seem exceptional.
- d) Women as Marked Form: *"Our female analyst checked it twice"* (page 43) marks women as different, reinforcing the idea that professional intelligence is not typically associated with women.
- e) Effect of Sexist Language: *"They assumed she would quit after marriage"* (page 51) reflects biased assumptions about women's professional commitment based on gender.

2. Sentence Level

- a) Ready-Made Phrase: *"Katherine worked around the clock to solve the equations"* (page 53) emphasizes women's persistent intellectual labor.
- b) Presupposition and Inference: *"As always, the women arrived early and stayed late"* (page 57) highlights women's dedication without direct mention, countering stereotypes.
- c) Metaphor: *"Their courage-built bridges in a divided institution"* (page 101) metaphorically frames women's intelligence as transformative.
- d) Jokes and Humor: *"I guess the computers wear skirts now"* (page 64) uses irony to challenge gender roles in technical fields.
- e) Transitivity: *"She challenged the system with data"* (page 109) positions women as active agents in intellectual and professional change.
- f) Feminism & Ideology: *"The women demanded equal access to resources"* (page 118) directly challenges structural inequality, showcasing feminist resistance.

3. Discourse Level

At the discourse level, the novel *Hidden Figures* constructs women's intelligence and feminist values through several strategies. First, characterization and roles are shown in the statement *"Mary, you don't need to be an engineer to make a difference"*

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(p. 61), which emphasizes that women's influence extends beyond formal titles and institutional roles. This reflects how the novel portrays women as impactful agents in professional spaces, even when their authority is not formally recognized.

Second, fragmentation is evident in *"Meanwhile, over in West Computing, things were falling apart"* (p. 56). This illustrates how women's struggles are often isolated and rendered invisible, making their contributions appear fragmented compared to male counterparts. Such linguistic patterns echo (Mills, 1995), observation that discourse frequently marginalizes women's roles by fragmenting their presence in narratives.

Third, focalization is found in the line *"Through Dorothy's eyes, the future looked programmable"* (p. 101), which centers the narrative on a Black woman's vision of technological change. This strategy foregrounds women's intelligence and foresight, aligning with (Mills, 1995), view that focalization can shift narrative authority toward female perspectives.

Finally, schemata are reflected in *"They gave me the job after I trained the machine to do it"* (p. 103). This statement critiques the unequal recognition of women's expertise, exposing the gender bias in professional acknowledgment. As and (Lazar, 2005), argue, discourse structures often reveal underlying power relations in gendered interactions, and in this case, the novel both uncovers and resists such inequality.

This analysis shows that the novel uses language strategically to affirm feminist values and intellectual agency, positioning women as active contributors to intellectual and professional fields, despite societal and linguistic barriers. As Mills (1995) points out, discourse choices often reveal how women are positioned ideologically, either reinforcing or challenging patriarchal structures.

Essential to Examine the Representation of Women's Intelligence in *Hidden Figures* from a Feminist Perspective

1. To Uncover Gender Bias Embedded in Language

A feminist perspective reveals subtle gender biases often hidden in traditional literary analysis. Through feminist stylistics, readers can identify how language constructs and communicates gendered assumptions. For example, in the sentence *"They gave me the job after I trained the machine to do it"* (page 103), the woman's achievement is acknowledged, but the phrase *"they gave me the job"* implies a delayed recognition, exposing a subtle power imbalance.

2. To Recognize Women's Agency in Male-Dominated Fields

Feminist analysis highlights women's agency in male-dominated fields such as science and mathematics. By examining sentence structures and verb choices, such as in *"She challenged the system with data"* (page 109), the active role of women is emphasized. This language portrays women's

intellectual resistance, challenging the stereotype of passive women in these fields.

3. **To Highlight the Intersection of Gender and Race in Representation**

A feminist perspective integrates intersectionality, especially for Black women, who face both racial and gender-based marginalization. The sentence “*Through Dorothy’s eyes, the future looked programmable*” (page 101) centers on a Black woman’s intellectual vision, challenging both race and gender stereotypes. Feminist stylistics helps reveal how race and gender intersect in women’s representation and linguistic portrayal.

4. **To Reveal Power Dynamics Through Narrative Perspective**

A feminist stylistic lens examines how narrative voice and focalization reflect power dynamics. In patriarchal narratives, men often hold narrative authority, but in *Hidden Figures*, women’s intellectual contributions are foregrounded. For example, “*Through Katherine’s calculation, the path to space was clear*” (page 98) places intellectual success through a female perspective, empowering women’s intellectual authority.

5. **To Challenge Traditional Representations of Intelligence**

Traditional representations often associate intelligence with masculinity—objectivity, logic, and technical knowledge. A feminist analysis challenges this binary by showing that women can embody analytical and scientific thought. For example, “*Mary didn’t just understand the numbers; she questioned the assumptions behind them*” (page 110) highlights both technical skill and critical thinking, broadening the scope of female intelligence in literature.

6. **To Contribute to Feminist Literary and Linguistic Scholarship**

This analysis contributes to feminist scholarship by focusing on women’s intelligence in scientific contexts, a topic that remains underexplored in feminist criticism. It enhances understanding of how language can empower or oppress women. The sentence “*The numbers spoke to her, and she answered them with precision*” (page 96) exemplifies how language can humanize and elevate female intellect, offering a model for future feminist linguistic studies.

DISCUSSION

For the first question, the results were obtained by applying Sara Mills’ feminist stylistic framework, which emphasizes analyzing texts not only at the lexical level but also through syntactic and discursive structures that shape gendered meaning (Mills, 1995). At the word level, the frequent use of generic pronouns and instances of linguistic determinism reflected how language embedded patriarchal assumptions, as also noted by (Sunderland & Litosseliti, 2002), who argues that even minor lexical choices can reinforce gender ideologies. For instance, the use of masculine pronouns to represent a general audience or authority subtly excluded women. However, within the same linguistic environment, female characters in *Hidden Figures* used language to assert agency, resist stereotypes, and establish credibility—indicating resilience against biased structures. As (Mills, 1995) stresses, even the smallest lexical choices can contribute to the ideological positioning of women in texts, and in

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this case, those choices helped both expose and subvert gendered power relations.

At the sentence and discourse levels, features like presupposition, inference, and focalization served as key tools in constructing women's intelligence. (Mills, 1995), notes that syntactic structures and narrative strategies often position women as passive or marginal, but when reversed, they can empower female voices. In *Hidden Figures*, sentence constructions with strong presuppositions and assertive ready-made phrases suggested that the women's intellectual capabilities were assumed rather than questioned. This aligns with (Kendall & Tannen, 1997), view that conversational and narrative structures can either reproduce or resist gendered asymmetries. Meanwhile, discourse-level techniques like focalization and characterization allowed readers to experience the story through the minds of intelligent female protagonists, reinforcing their authority. These findings support (Lazar, 2005), argument that feminist stylistic and discourse analysis can reveal how texts resist gender stereotypes and highlight women's agency.

For the second question, the results of this study were possible through the application of Sara Mills' feminist stylistic analysis, which emphasizes examining how language functions ideologically at the word, sentence, and discourse levels (Mills, 1995). At the word level, elements such as generic pronouns and linguistic determinism exposed gender bias that often-marginalized women linguistically. However, in *Hidden Figures*, these same features were reappropriated to highlight women's resilience and intelligence, showing how language can reflect empowerment. This resonates with hooks (2000), who emphasizes that feminist resistance is often embedded in everyday practices, including linguistic ones. At the sentence level, the use of presuppositions, inferences, and ready-made phrases challenged patriarchal assumptions by positioning women as authoritative and knowledgeable. These sentence structures did not just describe the characters; they linguistically confirmed their legitimacy in intellectual and professional spaces, echoing (Sunderland & Litosseliti, 2002), observation that grammar and syntax can play a crucial role in shaping gendered identities.

At the discourse level, features like focalization and characterization allowed the novel to center women's experiences and intellect through narrative perspective. (Mills, 1995), framework views such discursive strategies as crucial in determining whose voice is privileged and whose knowledge drives the text. In *Hidden Figures*, the thoughts, decisions, and actions of the female protagonists were foregrounded, positioning them as central sources of knowledge and authority. (Lazar, 2005), argues that such narrative strategies are vital in feminist discourse because they shift the power balance by giving women epistemic authority. This analysis demonstrated how feminist stylistic tools uncovered the ways in which the novel constructed women's intelligence not only explicitly but also subtly through linguistic patterns. Ultimately, the study confirmed that language in *Hidden Figures* functioned as a vehicle for feminist resistance, challenging traditional gender norms and affirming the centrality of intelligent, capable women in both story and society.

For the third question, the function of Sara Mills' feminist stylistic analysis was to uncover how language in texts both reflected and challenged societal ideologies, particularly those related to gender and power (Mills, 1995). Feminist stylistics investigated how women were linguistically positioned in texts through analysis at the word level, sentence level, and discourse level. This framework made it possible to see how lexical choices (such as empowering or biased terms), syntactic constructions (such as agency in sentence structure), and broader narrative features (such as who controlled perspective or how characters were framed) worked together to either sustain or resist patriarchal ideologies. In the case of *Hidden Figures*, the novel used language that actively challenged traditional representations of women, especially Black women, in scientific and intellectual spaces. As (Hooks, 2000), emphasizes, the intersection of race and gender often compounds oppression, making the recognition of Black women's intellectual contributions particularly significant. Through the lens of feminist stylistics, the text revealed how women's intelligence was not only described but granted narrative authority and epistemic space. By doing so, the novel linguistically constructed its female characters as agents of knowledge and progress, affirming (Lazar, 2005), claim that feminist discourse analysis highlights resistance and empowerment within texts.

CONCLUSION

At the word level, elements like generic pronouns (15 data, 6.6%) and linguistic determinism (10 data, 4.4%) revealed gender bias while simultaneously highlighting women's resilience. At the sentence level, presupposition and inference (17 data, 7.5%) and ready-made phrases (15 data, 6.6%) challenged societal assumptions and emphasized women's authority. At the discourse level, focalization (16 data, 7.0%) and characterization (15 data, 6.6%) placed female perspectives at the narrative center, granting women epistemic authority. These findings demonstrate that linguistic features across all levels in *Hidden Figures* worked together to resist patriarchal stereotypes and affirm women's intelligence. Sara Mills' feminist stylistic analysis thus proved effective in revealing how language is not neutral but ideologically charged, shaping the representation of women's intellect through word choice, sentence structure, and discourse strategies. The female characters were portrayed not as passive figures but as active agents whose intellectual authority and decision-making were foregrounded.

In conclusion, this study shows that *Hidden Figures* constructs women's intelligence both thematically and linguistically, with feminist stylistic features functioning as tools of resistance against gender bias. The novelty of this research lies in its focused examination of women's intelligence—an aspect often overlooked in feminist stylistic studies that tend to emphasize empowerment or emotional resilience rather than intellectual capacity. While some features of sexist language in the text appeared to reproduce patriarchal assumptions, the novel reappropriated these same features to highlight women's intellectual resilience, showing a discrepancy between surface-level bias and deeper feminist resistance. This duality illustrates how language can simultaneously

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constrain and empower; a finding consistent with Mills' (1995) view that texts are sites of ideological struggle.

The implications of this research extend beyond literary analysis: they encourage broader recognition of how language can construct women's intellectual presence in professional and scientific contexts. For future research, feminist stylistics could be applied to other genres—such as films, speeches, or digital media—to explore whether women's intelligence is represented similarly or differently across contexts. Moreover, intersectional perspectives could be further developed to investigate how race, class, and gender jointly shape linguistic portrayals of female intellect. Ultimately, this study contributes to feminist linguistic scholarship by demonstrating how literature can function as a site of resistance, using language strategically to affirm women's agency and redefine the representation of intelligence in patriarchal discourse.

AUTHOR STATEMENTS

Sharon Dinda N. Hutabarat, the first and corresponding author, was responsible for collecting and analyzing the data, as well as drafting the findings and discussion sections. She also formatted the manuscript in accordance with the journal's guidelines and thoroughly proofread all versions of the article. **Syahron Lubis**, the second author, contributed significantly to the data analysis process and co-wrote the findings, ensuring clarity and coherence throughout the discussion. **Alemina Perangin-angin**, the third author, **Rahmadsyah Rangkuti**, the fourth author, and **Rusdi Noor Rosa**, the fifth author, assisted in interpreting the results and reviewing the manuscript for accuracy and consistency. They provided critical feedback during the revision stages and contributed to refining the structure and language of the paper. All authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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