

LANGUAGE AS LIBERATION: A FEMINIST STYLISTIC EXPLORATION OF GENDER SUBVERSION IN UMAIRA AHMAD'S PEER-E-KAMIL

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Abstract

Women continue to endure systemic discrimination and stereotyping within patriarchal societies, realities that are frequently mirrored in literary representations of female characters as passive, naive, and subordinate to male authority. This study examines the linguistic construction of gender in *Peer-e-Kamil*, a seminal Urdu novel by Pakistani female author Umaira Ahmad. Employing Sara Mills' feminist stylistics as its analytical framework, the research critically analyzes selected passages at the word, phrase, and discourse levels to investigate how language mediates gender ideology within the text. The study adopts a qualitative approach and argues that Ahmad strategically subverts conventional gender roles, deploying language as a site of resistance against patriarchal norms and expectations. The findings reveal that far from reproducing hegemonic constructions of femininity, Ahmad's narrative challenges male-centric power structures and dismantles entrenched gender assumptions. This research contributes to the broader scholarly conversation on feminist literary criticism in Pakistani fiction and underscores the role of women's writing as a vehicle for ideological resistance and social critique.

1. INTRODUCTION

Feminism, at its core, interrogates the linguistic and ideological mechanisms that sustain gender inequality, making it an indispensable framework for literary and discourse analysis. Contemporary feminist critique has moved decisively beyond broad historical surveys to sharpen its focus on the subtle yet systemic ways in which language constructs, constrains, and at times liberates women's identities and agency. In this regard, Sara Mills' (1995) feminist stylistics offers a particularly incisive analytical instrument – one that enables

scholars to dismantle the intricate interplay of language, power, and gender in literary texts, and to trace how patriarchal norms are simultaneously propagated and subverted through discourse.

It is within this theoretical framework that the present study situates itself. Drawing on Mills' model, this research undertakes a critical stylistic analysis of *Peer-e-Kamil*, Umaira Ahmad's culturally significant Urdu novel, which unfolds against the charged terrain of female agency within deeply patriarchal and religiously conservative social structures. As one of the most widely read works

of contemporary Pakistani fiction, *Peer-e-Kamil* occupies a unique cultural position – simultaneously engaging with and challenging the ideological assumptions that govern gender relations in South Asian Muslim society. Yet despite its cultural prominence and thematic richness, the novel remains largely unexamined through a feminist stylistic lens, a gap this study seeks to address.

Through close linguistic and narrative analysis, this paper maps the tensions that animate the novel's gendered landscape: the conflict between empowerment and constraint, between vocal female agency and its systematic silencing, and between submission to and defiance of patriarchal authority. In doing so, it contributes not only to the feminist stylistic study of Pakistani literature but also to the broader interdisciplinary conversation surrounding gender, religion, and power in the South Asian context – a field that, despite its urgent relevance, remains conspicuously underrepresented in feminist literary scholarship. This study, therefore, positions itself as both a textual inquiry and a critical intervention in an area that demands sustained scholarly attention.

Research Questions

- In what expedient does the female protagonist challenge the male dominance?
- How are gender roles linguistically shaped in *Peer-e-Kamil*?
- How do the selected scenes from the novel present females in a subversive or resistant role?

Objectives of the study

The objectives of this study are:

- To examine how Umaira Ahmad challenges patriarchal society through her female lead.
- To interpret female resistance from traditional norms.
- To examine how female language subverts traditional gender roles.

2.Literature Review

Language is not mere representation, but rather a tool which plays a role in human thinking and social reality. Lee (1992) highlights the selectivity of language in encoding complex experiences, reducing reality to concepts. This is an essential understanding that directly relates to Fairclough's (1989) statement, according to whom language is a powerful tool that allows dominant groups to maintain social control. The intersection of these views locates language as the unavoidable component in decoding power relations, including gendered power. However, this conceptualization still needs further elaboration, particularly regarding how linguistic preferences can both constrain and facilitate subaltern voices amid hegemonic discourses, a point that has often been noted but remains underdeveloped in sociolinguistics (Fairclough, 1989; Mills, 1995).

Language and Women's Place, Lakoff (1975) was a seminal attempt at explicit feminist linguistic questioning. By discovering that women in their speech applied hedges, tag questions, and politeness strategies, Lakoff suggested that speech displays and reinforces the passive position of women in society. This deficit paradigm, which posits that women have weaker language, was quite influential but nevertheless problematic. Critics such as Bucholtz (1999) claimed that Lakoff was too essentialist, disregarding the role of surrounding factors (such as people's categories, race, and power relations in particular situations). In addition, the deficit perspective to difference made women's linguistic agency and the changeable quality of gendered interpersonal communication disappear. This criticism was extended by Mills (1995), who underlined that original models did not consider language's role in shaping gender as a performative reshaping, but instead approached issues of gendered speech as predetermined.

Although the framework provided by Lakoff made the linguistic operation of sexism clear, it underrepresented the multidimensionality introduced by power and intersectional identities

(Bucholtz, 1999). In another example, Bucholtz (1999) asserted that gendered modes of speech could not be isolated from their cultural and social contexts, nor from their universality and biological determination, as Lakoff had introduced. This conflict indicates a gap in the research: the profession has always given preference to Anglophone, Western-centric, and fixed understandings of gender, and more individualistic, less deterministic perspectives are needed.

Gender performativity theories, which are inspired by Butler (1990), have shifted the focus back to the active construction of gender identities through language instead of mere reflection. According to Mills and Mullany (2011), language in use is a continual locale of gendered performance, subjected to social conventions that may be variably undermined by subversion. This performative approach is a reaction against the binary and essentialist models, which were demonstrated by the picture of gender as fluid and constructed discursively. The most important repercussion is a more active interpretation of the place and role of language, not only as a representation of inequality, but also as a means of resistance.

Mills (1995) expounds on the point that gendered linguistic characteristics - pronouns, occupational titles, etc. are both strengthening and breaking down the male-centrism they represent, interfering with it when gender-neutral or non-traditional forms are used. This view represents a substantive advance from early deficit models, synthesizing sociolinguistic and feminist insights. However, while performativity enriches theoretical frameworks, the challenge remains to empirically capture the variability of discourse across the intersections of race, class, religion, and culture, which is often glossed over or unevenly addressed in existing research. There remains a paucity of large-scale empirical studies documenting how performative gender shifts operate in non-Western or post-colonial settings (Mills & Mullany, 2011).

Feminist stylistics, as articulated chiefly by Sara Mills (1995), emerged to address the limitations of traditional stylistics by embedding feminist theory into linguistic analysis. Its hallmark is a critical linguistic examination of how texts—literary and non-literary—encode and perpetuate gender ideologies through style, syntax, and discourse. Unlike traditional stylistics, which privileges aesthetic and formalist approaches, feminist stylistics explicitly aims to uncover and challenge patriarchal power structures embedded in language (Mills, 1995; Montoro, 2014).

Mills (1995) emphasizes that feminist stylistics critically analyzes multiple textual layers, from lexical and grammatical choices to narrative structures, revealing both overt and subtle sexist representations. For example, novels may simultaneously depict women as passive victims and active agents, reflecting complex ideological tensions within patriarchal societies (Mills & Mullany, 2011). This layered approach allows a more nuanced understanding of gendered language, moving beyond simple binary oppositions. However, much feminist stylistic research has centered on Western literary canons, raising the need for its application to diverse genres and cultural contexts (Montoro, 2014).

Critically comparing Mills's model with other feminist discourse approaches—such as critical discourse analysis—reveals strengths and shortcomings. Mills' stylistics foregrounds language form and agency within texts but occasionally risks neglecting broader socio-political contexts unless combined explicitly with CDA frameworks (Fairclough, 1989; Mills & Mullany, 2011). CDA, conversely, excels at situating texts within power relations but may sacrifice detailed linguistic description. Integrating these methodologies has proven fruitful but remains underdeveloped, especially in corpus linguistics and media studies.

Mills (1995) incorporates Halliday's systemic-functional linguistic tools, such as transitivity and agency, to examine how linguistic structures construct gendered meanings. For instance,

transitivity patterns where women are positioned as non-agentive “patients” reinforce passivity, while men as “agents” denote activity and power (Mills & Mullany, 2011). Such micro-level analyses reveal the grammar of sexism, which broader discourse analyses have previously glossed over.

Critical discourse analysis complements this by framing texts within ideological systems that legitimize male dominance (Fairclough, 1989). Mills’ fusion of these methods allows a comprehensive critique of gendered language at multiple levels. Nonetheless, most feminist stylistic studies using these methods remain confined to literary or canonical texts. There is a growing research need to apply such combined approaches to contemporary mass media, digital communication, and cross-linguistic contexts to document the evolving complexity of gendered discourses, an underexplored frontier (Mills & Mullany, 2011).

Studies analyzing texts such as Umaira Ahmad’s Urdu novel *Peer-e-Kamil* provide concrete illustrations of feminist stylistics in non-Western contexts. Mujib Rahman (2022) employs Mills’ model to show how female characters’ agency is simultaneously asserted and constrained within patriarchal religious and domestic frameworks. Women oscillate between passivity and active resistance, reflecting the socio-cultural tensions of contemporary Pakistani society. This dual representation highlights ideological negotiations around gender norms, but findings suggest residual stereotypical patterns persist, indicating incomplete empowerment (Rahman, 2022).

Similarly, feminist stylistic analysis of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *The Thing Around Your Neck* reveals how women’s linguistic portrayal as passive victims masks underlying power dynamics. Such studies affirm feminist stylistics’ utility across cultural contexts but also expose a significant research gap: comparative cross-cultural analyses remain scarce. Given the global diversity of gender ideologies, systematic comparative studies incorporating postcolonial, religious, and socio-political dimensions are

critical for a fuller understanding (Rahman, 2022; Mills, 1995).

Sexism in language, encompassing derogatory terms, gendered generics (e.g., “mankind”), and narrative representations, continues to shape social attitudes and power relations (Mills, 1995; Weatherall, 2015). Progress has been made, notably through campaigns promoting gender-neutral terms (“firefighter” vs. “fireman”), reflecting linguistic shifts aligned with feminist goals (Mills, 2008). However, subtle sexism such as objectification in media or erasure of female agency persists, demonstrating language’s evolving but tenacious role in sustaining power inequities. Feminist stylistics and critical discourse analysis remain crucial tools for exposing these dynamics. Yet, there is an identified gap regarding longitudinal and corpus-based research that systematically tracks changing sexist language patterns over time, especially in digital and social media platforms. Furthermore, while feminist stylistics critiques patriarchal ideology, there is scope for deeper engagement with intersectional oppressions—such as race and class—that complicate experiences of sexism and its linguistic expressions (Mills, 2008; Ahmed, 2017).

Research Gaps

Intersectionality and Context: Existing models, especially early ones, often fail to adequately integrate intersectional identities (race, class, religion), resulting in partial accounts of gendered language.

Expansion to Diverse Texts: Feminist stylistics primarily analyzes literary texts, neglecting media, digital communication, and other emergent discourse forms.

Cross-Cultural and Comparative Analyses: Scarce comparative research limits understanding of how gendered language operates differently across cultures and socio-political contexts.

Methodological Integration: A fuller integration of linguistic description and critical discourse analysis across diverse datasets is needed to capture the complexity of gender discourse.

Audience Reception and Impact: Little research examines how readers interpret and resist gender biases in texts, a vital area for assessing the social impact of feminist stylistic insights.

Longitudinal Corpus Studies: Tracking the evolution of sexism in language over time, particularly in digital contexts, is underdeveloped and critical to contemporary relevance.

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach, utilizing Feminist Stylistics, as developed by Sara Mills, to analyze the selected book. Feminist Stylistics offers a comprehensive framework that examines the text at three levels: word, sentence, and discourse. At the word level, the analysis focuses on identifying sexist language that reveals gender discrimination, while the sentence level explores how different segments portray or marginalize underrepresented genders. The discourse level investigates broader structural patterns of sexism embedded throughout the text, drawing on Carter and Simpson's (1989) concepts of textual communication systems and the social values reflected in language use. The data consists of three purposively selected conversational scenes involving the character Imama: a dialogue between Imama and her father, Hashim Mubeen, about her marriage, their conversation after a rebellion regarding her studies, and an interaction between Imama and Salar where Salar mocks her love for Jalal Ansar based on his recitation of *nat*. Such scenes have been selected for their connection to the themes of gender, power, and resistance. Systematic coding of data was selected, in which the data were subjected to repeated readings to become familiar with the material before initial codes representing gender representation, power relations, and feminist stylistic aspects were produced. These codes were then sorted into general themes, which are equivalent to analytical levels. The coding procedure was also circular and team-based, involving the three researchers coding the data independently and then discussing any differences to reach agreement, with each

researcher ensuring they agreed on code meanings and standards. This inter-coder reliability process adds validity and reliability to the results by reducing subjectivity and enhancing clarity. In general, this approach combines feminist stylistics theory and critical qualitative coding to offer in-depth, credible insights into gender and power relationships in the chosen textual scenes.

4. Theoretical Framework

Feminist stylistics is an interdisciplinary critical approach that combines concepts from feminist theory and linguistic stylistics to question how languages create, sustain, and oppose gendered power relations in texts. Unlike stylistics, which commonly treats language as non-neutral, feminist stylistics treats language as a site of ideological battle where patriarchal norms are reproduced and opposed through linguistic choices. One of the most important contributions to the topic is Sara Mills's pioneering feminist approach, *Feminist Stylistics* (1995), which offers a comprehensive and systematic analysis of texts from a feminist perspective. Mills conceives of feminist stylistics as a political methodology for uncovering encoded sexism, gender bias, and power imbalances in language. The intersection between literary and linguistic theory at which she works provides a means to examine a diverse array of texts, including canonical literature as well as popular culture, under the head of gender. Notably, Mills situates feminist stylistics within the socio-historical dimension of language use, with the intention that texts are the result of, and yet help create, dominant gender ideologies. Her framework prompts scholars to think critically about how readers are positioned by a text and how meanings are negotiated in interaction with cultural norms. By combining feminist critique with close linguistic analysis, Sara Mills' feminist stylistics does not merely disrobe the subtle workings of gender bias in language but also celebrates the subversive capacity of women's writing to subvert and remake patriarchal discourse. This is why feminist stylistics is an

important tool for advancing gender equity in literary and cultural studies.

5. Discussion

The story of Imama Hashim in *Peer-e-Kamil* may be regarded as an enriched case study of the complexity of spiritual, social and personal transformation in the context of South Asian societies. The severe nature of her own questions and spiritual desire led to one of the biggest breaks with her personal past, much less so the past of her family and her community, with the conversion to the Sunni Muslim faith in place of the Ahmadi system of beliefs. The ensuing alienation from her family, particularly her paternal father, who is strict and bound to reputation-ideology, further reflects upon the larger-scale conflict between personal rights and societal norms in Pakistani culture. Theological dilemmas are not the only thing Imama has to face during her trials. She has to struggle with the psychological anguish, social marginalization, and even violence, all of which indicate a powerful obstacle in the way of all people, especially women, who attempt to practice self-willed religious faith or self-identify. Her unwavering faith during difficult moments highlights the novel's primary theme: genuine faith in some situations may require sacrifice, strength, and the readiness to face severe personal loss. In the end, Imama is not shown to overcome her roots but to reassert her agency. The plot of her trip combines themes of faith, love, and self-discovery, suggesting that the freedom of the self and spiritual fulfillment may involve both internal conviction and a resolve to resist the inhibitions of society and family. The experience of Imama, the main protagonist in *Peer-e-Kamil*, therefore offers

a subtle way to examine the costs and merits of pursuing authenticity amid societal pressure in modern-day Pakistani society.

Umaira Ahmed presents the interminable lives of two people, Imama Hashim and Salar Sikander, in her book *Peer-e-Kamil*, which is interspersed with the realities of present-day Pakistani society.

The novel is the story of a young woman, Imama, and her family from the Ahmadi community, who are forced to become Sunni due to massive shifts, both personal and social.

The family of Imama is portrayed as conservative and reputation-conscious, especially her father, who is described as merciless and domineering over her religious preferences and individual freedom.

The process of transformation of Imama promoted in the narrative is not only religious; she is facing her social rejection, emotional isolation, and even violence as a consequence of her choice to leave her family and her religious tradition.

Amid all those difficulties, Imama continues her education, discovers her profession, and finally becomes a doctor with a new, independent personality.

As the text depicts, Imama is persistent and strong, which helps her to self-actualize and serve as an example of spiritual strength and personal value.

6. Analysis

6.1 Words-Level Analysis

Word-Level analysis indicates the words that are more gender associated, as far as the physical appearance of the characters is concerned. The following are the words that the researchers discovered in the novel, given in the table below:

Specific Gender (Word Level)	The Novel " <i>Peer_e_kamil</i> "	The Novel " <i>Peer_e_kamil</i> "
Specific Gender (Word Level)	Male	Female

1	Handsome (p,29)	Beautiful(p,120)
2	Tall (p,29)	Shape(p,20)
3	Fair (p,236)	Size(p,20)
4	Athletic (p,103)	Fair(p,248)
5	Dark (p,29)	Dark(p,20)
6	Attractive(p,103)	Plain(p,20)
7		Tall(p,72)
8		Slim (p,72)
9		Pale(p,156)
10		Attractive(p,279)

The genders in *Peer-e-Kamil* are not presented neutrally: male is associated with strength and stature, while female is portrayed as emphasizing beauty and body shape. Moreover, some negative connotations are also associated with females, such as “bitch” (p. 190), “prostitute” (p. 183), “crazy” (p. 115), “idiot” (p. 42), “duffer” (p. 42), and “foolish” (p. 103), indicating gender discrimination. Where gender stereotyping is visible in the novel, the female protagonist is appeared as strong women, as words like, angry, independent, have been used for her both the terms are usually referred to male, but through Imama, Ahmad (2014) subvert the traditional norms, by giving her protagonist self-independence, challenging patriarchal society where women are always expected to be polite, gentle in behavior and always dependent on male.

A generic pronoun refers to a character in general rather than in particular. The generic pronoun **he** or **his** has been used to refer to all male characters, e.g. Salar, Furqan, Usman, Hasim Mubeen; however, for female characters, the generic pronoun **she** has been used in the novel.

Generic Noun

Generic nouns refer to the words that present the whole class or group of people. In *Peer-e-Kamil*, “friend”, “children”, “people”, “students” and “neighbors have been used to refer to everyone. The gender-neutral pair words have been used by the author to maintain a smooth flow, without marginalizing any specific gender. The masculine and feminine terms that have been used in pairs to refer to both genders are given below in the following table;

Generic Pronoun

Masculine and Feminine terms in *Peer-e-Kamil*

1	Father (p,129)	Mother(p,128)
2	Brother(p,4)	Sister (p,32)
3	Husband(p,110)	Wife (p,143)
4	Boyfriend(p,103)	Girlfriend(p,21)
5	Baba (p,70)	Ammi (p,70)
6	Son (p,149)	Daughter(p,85)

6.2 Phrase and Sentence Level Analysis

Analysis at the sentence and phrase levels includes four lenses for analyzing the text. Ready-made phrases, presupposition and inference, joke and

humor, and transitivity choices are used to analyze the sentence or phrase level in the text.

Ready-Made Phrases and Sentences

These phrases and sentences mark the gender stereotype and power imbalance that often marginalize women in society. In the novel, when Hashim Mubeen denied Imama education because of changes in her religious perspective, his words, "No more education for you" (p. 57), indicate that men can control women's lives. "Imama was allowed to go to college" (p. 57). After begging and pleading, she was allowed to continue her education; this shows her vulnerability. She did not stop reading those books that provoked her thoughts... (p. 57) Imama, despite her vulnerability and the deprivation of the freedom to choose her own religion, continues to fulfil her mission; this is how she challenges traditional norms and resists male influence.

Presupposition and inference

In the text, background knowledge implicitly suggests a worldview about a certain gender role, implying power dynamics and ideologies. "You'll marry Asjad, and on the day I have decided" (p. 86). This sentence reflects male dominance; this shows how Imama's father forces her to get married against her will. In a patriarchal society where males are always dominant in their behavior, they control the life choices of women by forcing them to live according to their terms and conditions. "It's not fair!" (p. 86). This phrase indicates Imam's resistance in a society where women are expected to agree with the males. Imama's decision subverts the silence and makes her more aware of what is right and what is wrong for her. Claiming her father's decision "unfair", she challenges the stereotypes, focusing on transformation and self-assertion.

Joke and Humor

The novel's tone is serious, but it contains some humorous passages. Mills (2005: 106) is of the view that gender discrimination can be concealed in humor, and readers can sustain gender bias if it makes them laugh. When Imama told Salar why she fell for Jalal, Salar laughed at her: "So you fell in love with him just for that, I can't believe it"

(p.121). His attitude is the indicator of his insensitivity, and his ostensible belief that males think that females ought to accept their declaration. But Imama's remarks, "Then don't...who need your conviction" (p. 121), declare that she is not someone who would agree with the opinions of others.

Transitivity Choices

External and internal expressions are conveyed through diverse transitivity patterns that constitute the role of language (Whales, 1989). Transitivity choices reflect what does what to whom or what and how. Mills (2005) states that the active and passive positions of characters are determined by transitivity choices. Transitivity choices are examined for mental, material, and relational processes, with regard to whether the agent is male or female.

In the novel, to show the active and passive states of characters, transitivity choices are used to present Imama's actions as challenging.

"She held on to his wrist with her left hand" (p. 69) (material action with female actor)

"Her right hand slapped him sharply" (p.69) (material Action with female actor)

"If my parents pressurize me, I will have to leave home" (p. 85) (material action with female actor)

"Imama gave him an angry glance" (p. 120) (mental action with female actor)

"You will not be able to debate with me on this issue" (p. 100) (relational process with female actor and male as passive)

"Your faith is your personal matter and mine is my personal matter" (p.100) (relational process with female as actor and male as passive).

These few lines were chosen to illustrate transitivity choices.

6. 3. Analysis at Discourse Level

Analysis at the discourse level takes into account the traditional beliefs that make women appear weak or passive in society. Mills (1995) classified the discourse into characterization, focalization, and schemata.

Fragmentation

In feminist stylistics, fragmentation serves as a form of resistance for the character. The binary picture of women as good or bad, talkative or silent, fragile or strong is taken into account through fragmentation. Peer e Kamil portrays Imama as someone whose silence speaks volumes, because whenever she remains silent, it is her resistance, either against her family or her circumstances. Her silence is a way to communicate with others around her, who are actually not her center of attention during those times.

“He cast an inquiring glance, but she was silent, so he rephrased his words”. (Pg. 10)

Imama resists others' questions or remarks through her silence; it also reveals her emotional state when she does not feel the need to justify herself to anyone, or even to be right or wrong.

“She just sat silent, watching the water flow past. After a long spell of silence, she muttered to herself, 'What am I doing to myself?'” (pg. 60)

Her silence is a source of self-scrutiny; she does not just challenge the dominance of male society, but also finds answers to her own choices; she reflects on her existence and chooses her path through it.

“Imama's response was to stare silently out of the window” (pg. 120)

As her silence plays a role in her character in many of her appearances throughout the novel, it signals that her silence is her greatest weapon against all odds, whether to resist patriarchy or to reflect on her choices and deeds.

Characterization

In text, how characters are portrayed through language and actions reflects the dominance of, challenge to, or acceptance of stereotypes. In a patriarchal society, males are expected to be dominant, aggressive and controllers of women's actions. Ahmad (2014) portrayed her female lead character as strong, authoritative, and commanding, on par with male characters. Characters' behavior, actions, and values are constructed through the text's language. Who is

the agent and who is passive reflects whether the text is providing more power to males or females. To challenge societal norms and break traditional expectations, Ahmad (2014) subverts them through her female protagonist. In a society where women are assumed to be caregivers, Imama Hashim tried to provide first aid to Salar, but his resistance and misbehavior led her to take strict, unexpected measures. “She held on to his wrist with her left hand and her right hand slapped him sharply across his face. It was such a stinging blow that he came to a moment when he saw her face red with anger. If you make another move, and I promise I will slash your other wrist too, do you hear me? She shouted(p,69). Imama's frustration or anger depicts her formidable and decisive side, subverting the presumptions of male dominance and the expectation that women be mild-mannered and nurturing.

Focalization

Texts are usually presented from a male perspective, portraying women as passive and weak. Women are often defined by their appearance and their sexuality, rather than their intellectual role. Likewise, their voices and opinions are not taken into account, giving men more power and control. But Ahmad (2014) challenges the role: her female character is allowed to present her opinion and feelings, whether they hurt, challenge, or clear the society's expectations. Imama's dialogues show that she can say whatever she thinks is right or true, even if it means expressing her emotions or giving her point of view about men. “I loathe the look in your eyes and your unbuttoned shirt” (p. 210). This scene declares that even being a woman, it is not acceptable for Imama to accept others with all those characteristics she hates, so she is in a position to clearly give her remarks. This also reverses gender roles, giving women greater authority and freedom to express themselves.

Schemata

As the patriarchal society views women as fragile, dependent, naïve, and emotional, the text shapes the minds of the reader in such a way that they read the character with already shaped ideologies. However, Ahmad (2014) challenges these beliefs, portraying her female character as strong and in control of her life and choices. Imama is an intelligent and ambitious woman who does not let her guard down and takes every step very carefully. When Salar threatened her because of her circumstances, she showed him her pistol and warned him to shoot her. "In Imama's hand was a small and costly ladies' pistol. Seeing her grip on the weapon, he realized that she was not an amateur" (p.128). This shows that women are not expected to meet society's standards; instead, they can be as independent and brave as men, and Ahmad challenges those stereotypes by subverting gender roles through her female character.

7. Findings

The findings show that language in the text can subvert existing ideologies, and Pakistani female writers like Ahmed (2014) can challenge male dominance in society through fiction writing. Through the selected scenes, the researchers have extracted how gender and language are dealt with through female authors in fiction writing, including the belief that female authors themselves portray their female characters as some low creature who are expected to be gentle caregivers and emotional, yet Ahmad's (2014) character is more focused on her transformation and self-assertion. Imam Hashim, despite all her hurdles, including her deprivation of freedom, remains steadfast; her toughness and willpower help her to resist the traditional gender roles and male dominance.

8. Conclusion

The present study has demonstrated that Umaira Ahmad's *Peer-e-Kamil* constitutes a linguistically subversive text in which language functions not merely as a communicative medium but as a site

of ideological contestation. Through the analytical lens of Sara Mills' feminist stylistics, the three-tiered examination — encompassing lexical, syntactic, and discourse levels — has revealed that the novel systematically deconstructs patriarchal representations of femininity, exposing and resisting the normative gender scripts that dominant discourse seeks to naturalize.

At the lexical level, Ahmad's deliberate linguistic choices in representing Imama Hashim disrupt the conventional asymmetries that Mills identifies as hallmarks of gendered language — asymmetrical naming, marked and unmarked terms, and the objectifying force of the male gaze encoded in everyday diction. At the syntactic level, Imama's positioning as grammatical subject rather than passive object enacts what Mills theorizes as the redistribution of narrative agency — a structural refusal of the subordination written into the grammar of patriarchal discourse. At the discourse level, the novel invites what Mills terms a resistant reading, positioning the reader to interrogate rather than absorb the ideological assumptions embedded in conventional representations of Muslim Pakistani womanhood.

Ahmad's construction of Imama as intelligent, autonomous, spiritually grounded, and self-determining stands in deliberate contrast to the culturally prescribed feminine ideal of naivety, dependence, and submission. Far from being an incidental characterization, this is an act of linguistic and narrative resistance — one through which the author reconfigures the representational space available to women in Urdu literary fiction. In this sense, *Peer-e-Kamil* does not merely tell the story of a woman who resists patriarchy; the text itself performs that resistance at every level of its linguistic architecture.

This study has, however, been limited to a single novel and a single theoretical framework. Future researchers may extend this inquiry by applying Mills' model comparatively across Ahmad's broader oeuvre, or by examining how other female Urdu novelists employ linguistic strategies to

negotiate gender, religion, and identity. A cross-cultural feminist stylistic analysis – situating Ahmad's work alongside South Asian women writers beyond the Urdu literary tradition – would further illuminate the extent to which linguistic subversion of patriarchal norms is a shared feminist literary strategy rather than an isolated authorial choice. Additionally, corpus-based feminist stylistic analyses of a wider body of Pakistani women's fiction could yield more generalizable insights into the relationship between language, gender, and literary resistance in postcolonial Muslim contexts.

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