

Women's Language Features in *Malioboro at Midnight*: A Sociolinguistic Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the women's language features employed by the female protagonist in Skysphire's novel *Malioboro at Midnight* (2023). The research aims to identify the women's language features used by Serana Nighita Siviera (Sera) based on Lakoff's (1975) framework and to examine their functions within the narrative. This study employs a qualitative descriptive design. The data source is the novel *Malioboro at Midnight*, consisting of 430 pages. The data comprise words, phrases, sentences, and dialogues related to the female protagonist. Data were collected through documentation and close reading techniques and analyzed using descriptive analysis. The coding process was based on Lakoff's ten categories of women's language features. The findings reveal that Sera employs seven of the ten women's language features proposed by Lakoff. A total of 32 occurrences were identified, consisting of empty adjectives (28.1%), tag questions (18.8%), emphatic expressions (15.6%), intensifiers (12.5%), lexical hedges (9.4%), avoidance of strong swear words (9.4%), and superpolite forms (6.2%). No instances of precise color terms or hypercorrect grammar were found, while rising intonation was excluded because phonological features cannot be verified in written literary texts. The dominance of empty adjectives indicates that emotional evaluation and personal expression are central to the protagonist's communication style.

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1. Introduction

This study examines the representation of women in Skysphire's novel *Malioboro at Midnight* (2023), focusing on the character of Serana Nighita Siviera (Sera) and her journey through emotional hardship, self-discovery, and personal transformation. As the protagonist, Sera experiences a life crisis resulting from a troubled romantic relationship, yet gradually develops into an independent individual capable of making autonomous decisions and defining her own identity. Her transformation raises important questions regarding how contemporary Indonesian literature constructs female identity and agency, particularly in relation to patriarchal expectations that often position women as dependent, passive, or secondary to men.

The study focuses on two interconnected dimensions: linguistic features and feminist representation. The first concerns how language is used by the female protagonist, while the second concerns how such language contributes to the construction of women's identity, agency, and subjectivity within the narrative. Rather than treating language as a neutral medium, this study views linguistic choices as potential indicators of broader social and ideological meanings related to gender.

Research on language and gender has long suggested that women and men may employ different communicative strategies. Holmes (2013) argues that women tend to emphasize interpersonal relationships, solidarity, and emotional engagement in communication. One of the most influential

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frameworks in this field is Lakoff's (1975) model of women's language, which identifies ten linguistic features commonly associated with female speech, including hedges, tag questions, intensifiers, empty adjectives, polite forms, and emphatic stress. Lakoff argues that these linguistic features reflect women's subordinate social position within patriarchal societies.

However, Lakoff's framework has been widely debated in contemporary gender and language studies. Scholars such as Cameron (1992) and Mills (2008) criticize Lakoff's model for essentializing women's speech and treating female language use as a relatively homogeneous category. These scholars argue that linguistic behavior is influenced not only by gender but also by social context, power relations, culture, and individual agency. Therefore, this study does not adopt Lakoff's framework as a universal description of women's language. Instead, Lakoff's linguistic categories are employed as analytical tools for identifying language patterns in the novel, while the interpretation of those patterns is guided by a feminist theoretical perspective.

The feminist framework adopted in this study is Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist feminism. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir (2016) argues that women have historically been positioned as "the Other" within patriarchal societies, where their identities are defined in relation to men rather than through their own subjectivity. Her famous statement, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman," highlights the socially constructed nature of gender roles. From an existentialist perspective, women possess the freedom to transcend socially imposed limitations through conscious choices and self-determination. Consequently, this framework enables an examination not only of how women are portrayed in the novel but also of whether the protagonist is represented as an autonomous subject capable of shaping her own existence.

Although previous studies have examined the representation of women in Indonesian literary works, most have focused primarily on ideological representation without paying substantial attention to linguistic realization. Fitriani (2023), for example, explored women's representation in *Jalan Panjang Menuju Pulang* through existentialist feminism, while Akhirah (2023) investigated women's representation in *Laut Bercerita*. These studies contribute to understanding women's positions in literary narratives; however, they do not systematically investigate how linguistic features contribute to the construction of such representations. Conversely, studies employing Lakoff's framework often concentrate on identifying linguistic features without connecting them to broader feminist interpretations of gender representation and agency. This creates a gap between linguistic analysis and feminist literary criticism.

To address this gap, the present study integrates Lakoff's linguistic framework with Beauvoir's existentialist feminism. Lakoff's model is used to identify linguistic features associated with the female protagonist, while Beauvoir's theory provides the interpretive lens for understanding how those linguistic features contribute to the representation of women as subjects, agents, or "Others." By combining these approaches, the study seeks to connect linguistic patterns with broader questions of gender identity, power, and female agency.

This study contributes to the existing literature in three ways. First, it provides a critical application of Lakoff's framework by treating women's language features as contextual linguistic resources rather than fixed characteristics of female speech. Second, it bridges linguistic analysis and feminist literary criticism by examining the relationship between language use and gender representation. Third, it enriches studies of contemporary Indonesian literature by demonstrating how linguistic choices participate in the construction of women's agency, subjectivity, and resistance to patriarchal norms.

2. Methods

2.1. Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive design to investigate the relationship between women's language features and feminist representation in Skysphire's novel *Malioboro at Midnight* (2023). Qualitative research is appropriate because it seeks to understand meanings embedded within social and cultural phenomena (Creswell, 2016), while descriptive research aims to provide a systematic account of observed data without statistical generalization (Arikunto, 2013). The study combines linguistic analysis and feminist literary criticism by examining how the female protagonist's language use contributes to the construction of women's representation within the narrative.

2.2. Data Source and Data Selection

The primary data source is *Malioboro at Midnight* by Skysphire (2023), a 430-page novel published by Bukune. The novel was selected purposively because it centers on a female protagonist, Serana Nighita Siviera (Sera), whose experiences of emotional struggle, self-discovery, and personal transformation are directly relevant to the study's focus on women's language and feminist representation.

The data consist of words, phrases, clauses, sentences, paragraphs, and dialogues associated with the protagonist. Only excerpts that were relevant to the research questions were included. Data selection was guided by two criteria: (1) the presence of linguistic features identified in Lakoff's (1975) framework of women's language, and (2) textual evidence related to the representation of women's agency, subjectivity, independence, resistance, or dependence. These criteria ensured that the selected data directly addressed both research questions and represented the novel sections most relevant to the study's objectives.

2.3. Coding Categories

To ensure transparency and replicability, the analysis employed predetermined coding categories derived from the theoretical frameworks.

2.3.1. Linguistic Categories (Lakoff, 1975)

The first level of coding identified women's language features, including:

- Lexical hedges and fillers
- Tag questions
- Rising intonation in declarative statements
- Empty adjectives
- Precise color terms
- Intensifiers
- Hypercorrect grammar
- Super-polite forms
- Avoidance of strong swear words
- Emphatic stress

Each excerpt containing one or more of these features was assigned the corresponding code (e.g., INT for intensifiers, HED for hedges, POL for polite forms).

2.3.2. Feminist Representation Categories (Beauvoir, 2016)

The second level of coding examined how the protagonist was represented within the narrative. Based on Beauvoir's existentialist feminism, the following analytical categories were employed:

- Subjectivity (instances where Sera acts as an autonomous decision-maker)
- Agency (actions demonstrating initiative and personal choice)
- Independence (economic, emotional, or social self-reliance)
- Resistance (rejection of patriarchal expectations or restrictive norms)
- Otherness (situations where Sera is positioned as dependent upon or defined by others)
- Self-realization (moments of personal growth and existential awareness)

These categories were selected because they directly reflect Beauvoir's concepts of freedom, transcendence, and the struggle against being reduced to "the Other."

2.4. Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected through systematic close reading. The novel was read multiple times to develop familiarity with the narrative, characters, and themes. During subsequent readings, relevant passages were highlighted and extracted into a data sheet. Each excerpt was recorded together with page number, narrative context, speaker, and preliminary code.

The coding process occurred in two stages. First, excerpts were coded according to Lakoff's linguistic categories. Second, the same excerpts were examined for evidence of feminist representation using Beauvoir's conceptual categories. This dual-coding procedure enabled the researcher to investigate connections between language use and gender representation.

2.5. Data Analysis Procedure

Data analysis was conducted in four stages.

2.5.1. Stage 1: Identification

All relevant excerpts were identified and categorized according to Lakoff's women's language features. The purpose of this stage was descriptive rather than confirmatory; the study does not seek to validate Lakoff's claims about women's speech but to identify linguistic patterns present in the novel.

2.5.2. Stage 2: Categorization

The identified excerpts were grouped according to their linguistic categories. Frequency and distribution patterns were noted to determine which features appeared most prominently in the protagonist's speech and narration.

2.5.3. Stage 3: Feminist Interpretation

Each coded excerpt was then interpreted through Beauvoir's existentialist feminist framework. The analysis examined how linguistic choices contributed to the portrayal of Sera as a subject, agent, independent individual, resistant figure, or "Other." Analytical decisions were made by considering both the linguistic form and its narrative context rather than examining isolated words or sentences.

2.5.4. Stage 4: Cross-Analysis

The final stage involved connecting linguistic findings with feminist representation. The analysis explored whether particular linguistic features were associated with moments of agency, resistance, dependence, or self-realization. This stage enabled the study to explain not only what language features were used but also how they contributed to the construction of women's representation within the novel.

3. Results and Discussion

The analysis reveals that Sera employs several women's language features proposed by Lakoff (1975), particularly tag questions, lexical hedges, empty adjectives, intensifiers, superpolite forms, and emphatic expressions. However, not all categories proposed by Lakoff were found in the dataset. The identified features demonstrate how Sera expresses emotions, maintains interpersonal relationships, and negotiates her experiences throughout the narrative.

Table 1. Women's Language Features Used by Sera in *Malioboro at Midnight*

Women's Language Feature (Lakoff, 1975)	Example from the Novel	Linguistic Function
Tag Questions	"Biasanya kalo kucing suka bau apek ya, kok ini nggak?"; "Apakah anak pertama harus selalu mengalah untuk adiknya ya?"	Seeking confirmation, inviting interaction, encouraging reflection
Lexical Hedges	"Mungkin emang kuntilanak kali."; "Tapi kan hantu sudah mati."	Softening statements, expressing uncertainty or reflection
Empty Adjectives	"terkagum-kagum"; "hebat"; "gemas"	Expressing personal feelings and emotional evaluation
Intensifiers	"benar-benar bawel"; "semakin merasa kesepian"; "selalu sendirian"	Strengthening emotional meaning and emphasis
Superpolite Forms	Questions formulated politely when interacting with Malio	Maintaining harmonious interpersonal relationships
Emphatic Expressions	"menggeleng dan memukul kepalanya"; expressions emphasizing emotional distress	Conveying strong emotional involvement and psychological intensity
Precise Color Terms	Not found	Not identified
Hypercorrect Grammar	Not found	Not identified
Avoidance of Strong Swear Words	Mild emotional expressions rather than profanity	Avoiding strong offensive language
Rising Intonation	Not analyzed	Cannot be verified because the data are derived from a written novel rather than spoken discourse

To strengthen the gender-related interpretation, the analysis compares Sera's linguistic practices with utterances produced by male characters in comparable narrative contexts. The comparison is not intended to establish an absolute binary distinction between male and female language, but rather to examine whether features identified through Lakoff's framework are exclusive to Sera or also occur in male speech. Each relevant comparison therefore considers the linguistic form, its contextual function, and its implications for gendered subjectivity. Lakoff's framework is used to identify and classify the linguistic features, while Beauvoir's existentialist feminism is applied to interpret how these features relate to Sera's agency, subjectivity, autonomy, and resistance to socially imposed gender roles.

3.1. Tag Questions

One of the most prominent features is the use of tag questions. This feature appears when Sera asks Malio about his cats:

"Biasanya kalo kucing suka bau apek ya, kok ini nggak?"

Usually if cat like smell musty YA why this NEG (Data 1)

Cats usually smell musty, don't they? Why doesn't this one?

Although not all of these examples fit Lakoff's original grammatical definition of tag questions, they share a similar interpersonal function by inviting responses and sustaining conversation. This finding suggests that Sera frequently uses interactive questioning strategies, reflecting her desire to maintain social engagement and express curiosity. The particle *ya* functions as a confirmation-seeking marker that invites the interlocutor to respond. In Lakoff's framework, tag questions are traditionally associated with women's language because they may reduce the force of an assertion and create an interpersonal orientation. However, the function of *ya* in this context is not simply to express uncertainty. Sera uses the question to obtain information about Malio's cat and to sustain the conversation.

The male comparison is provided by Malio's response: "*Gue pake cat litter tofu dibandingkan pasir gumpal, soalnya jadi nggak bau dan bersih*" ("I use tofu cat litter instead of clumping litter because it does not smell and keeps things clean"). Malio responds with a direct explanatory statement rather than a tag question. This contrast shows that Sera's questioning functions as part of her particular conversational role, while Malio occupies the position of information provider.

From Beauvoir's perspective, Sera's question does not necessarily represent dependence or weakness. She initiates the topic, requests information, and directs the interaction according to her own curiosity. Thus, the feature identified by Lakoff becomes a communicative resource through which Sera exercises agency and constructs her own understanding.

"Lo sejak kapan suka kucing?" (Data 2)
 'Since when have you liked cat?'

The question functions as an interactive device through which Sera seeks information about Malio. Although it does not strictly correspond to Lakoff's canonical grammatical definition of a tag question, it performs an interpersonal function by extending the conversation and inviting a response. The narrative explicitly states that Sera continues wanting to know about Malio and his cat.

The male comparison is important because Malio does not respond by producing another question in the available excerpt. Instead, his role is that of the person providing information. This contrast indicates that the questioning pattern is not automatically a manifestation of female linguistic weakness but is related to Sera's position as an active information seeker.

From Beauvoir's perspective, Sera's curiosity demonstrates subjectivity. She does not passively accept her initial assumption that men such as Malio would not like animals. After discovering that her assumption is incorrect, she asks further questions. Her questioning therefore becomes an expression of intellectual curiosity and agency. The data suggest that the linguistic feature associated with women by Lakoff can function as a means of actively constructing knowledge.

"Sekalipun lo anggap Malio temen, apa ada jaminan dia juga anggap lo temen?" (Data 3)
 "Even if you consider Malio a friend, is there any guarantee that he also considers you a friend?"

In Data 3 this male utterance is important because it demonstrates that questioning is also produced by a male character. The question is not used to express uncertainty in the sense assumed by a stereotypical interpretation of women's language. Instead, it is used argumentatively to challenge Sera's assumption about her relationship with Malio.

3.2. Lexical Hedges

The data also show the use of lexical hedges, although less frequently than other features.

"Tapi kan hantu sudah mati." (Data 4)
 But ghosts are already dead, after all.

The particle *kan* presents the proposition as something that can be recognized or shared by the interlocutor. In Lakoff's framework, hedging may reduce the categorical force of an assertion. Nevertheless, the narrative context indicates that Sera is not simply expressing weakness. She is internally evaluating her father's explanation about ghosts and identifying a logical contradiction.

The male comparison is Sera's father, who states: "*Hantu itu nggak ada, Sayang*" ("Ghosts do not exist, dear"). The father uses a categorical assertion, while Sera responds through an internally formulated proposition containing *kan*. The contrast does not prove that men are more assertive and women are more hesitant. Rather, it reflects their different positions in the narrative: the father is attempting to reassure his daughter, whereas Sera is critically evaluating his explanation.

From Beauvoir's perspective, Sera's thought demonstrates intellectual subjectivity. She does not simply accept an explanation offered by a male authority figure. Instead, she evaluates it through her own reasoning. Consequently, the hedge functions within a process of critical reflection and does not necessarily signify female inferiority.

(Data 5)
 "Tapi mungkin ada beberapa hal yang nggak bisa Sera lakuin, kayak kemarin benerin genteng atau benerin gas."
 "But maybe there are some things Sera cannot do, such as repairing the roof or fixing the gas."

In Data 5 the word *mungkin* (“maybe”) is a clear example of a hedge produced by a male character. This finding is particularly important for the gender comparison because it demonstrates that hedging is not restricted to Sera. Malio uses *mungkin* to soften his assessment of Sera’s abilities. Rather than making an absolute statement, he qualifies his claim.

This example challenges a direct interpretation of Lakoff’s model in which hedges are treated primarily as characteristics of women’s language. Both female and male characters employ hedging, although their contextual functions differ. Sera uses *kan* while reflecting on a belief, whereas Malio uses *mungkin* when making a qualified assessment.

Through Beauvoir’s perspective, Malio’s hedge also has implications for female agency because he acknowledges that Sera is capable of doing many things while recognizing certain limitations. The comparison therefore shows that gendered interpretation should consider context and interaction rather than assuming that a linguistic form is inherently feminine.

3.3. Empty Adjectives

Another frequently occurring feature is the use of empty adjectives, which express personal evaluation and emotional response. In Data 4, Sera is described as “*terkagum-kagum*” after hearing Malio’s explanation about his cats. The expression emphasizes admiration and emotional appreciation.

Sera terkagum-kagum mendengar penjelasan Malio.” (Data 6)
 “Sera was deeply impressed by Malio’s explanation.”

The expression *terkagum-kagum* expresses Sera’s personal emotional evaluation. In Lakoff’s framework, evaluative adjectives are associated with women’s language because they foreground subjective feelings. However, the comparison with Malio is necessary before interpreting this feature as gendered. In this scene, Sera evaluates Malio’s ability to care for cats and realizes that her previous assumption about men and animals was incorrect. The expression therefore communicates not merely emotion but also a change in her understanding.

From Beauvoir’s perspective, the emotional evaluation is part of Sera’s subjective consciousness. She observes, evaluates, recognizes that her assumption was wrong, and revises her understanding. Emotional expression therefore does not indicate a lack of rationality. Inst

“benar-benar bawel dengan semua rasa penasarannya” (Data 7)
 EA talkative because of all her curiosity

Similarly, Data 7 portrays Sera as becoming when discussing cats with Malio. These evaluative expressions reflect emotional involvement and subjective judgment, characteristics that Lakoff associates with women’s language. Rather than merely describing reality, these expressions communicate Sera’s feelings and personal reactions toward events and people around her.

“Hebat ya anak perempuan bisa pasang gas, Tante aja nggak bisa.” (Data 8)
 “It is impressive that a girl can install a gas cylinder, even you cannot.”

The adjective *hebat* (“great/impressive”) functions as an evaluative expression and is produced by the male character Malio. This is significant because the category of empty adjectives is the most frequent feature in Sera’s data, yet the male comparison demonstrates that evaluative language is not exclusive to female speakers.

The comparison therefore challenges an essentialist reading of Lakoff. Rather than treating evaluative adjectives as inherently feminine, the data indicate that both male and female characters can use evaluative language when expressing personal judgments.

The difference lies in the object of evaluation. Sera’s *terkagum-kagum* expresses her personal reaction to Malio’s behavior, while Malio’s *hebat* evaluates Sera’s practical ability. From Beauvoir’s perspective, Malio’s evaluation is also significant because it recognizes Sera’s competence in an activity that may traditionally be associated with men. The male character’s recognition thus contributes to the construction of Sera as an autonomous and capable female subject.

3.4. Intensifiers

“*Benar-benar bawel dengan semua rasa penasarannya.*” (Data 9)
 “Really talkative because of all her curiosity.”

The reduplicated intensifier *benar-benar* strengthens the adjective *bawel*. Lakoff associates intensifiers with emotional involvement in women’s language. However, the narrative context shows that Sera’s talkativeness is directly connected to her curiosity about Malio and his cat.

A male comparison is available in the same interaction through Malio’s more restrained explanatory response. He answers Sera’s questions directly rather than intensifying his own emotional state. This difference suggests that the feature reflects different communicative roles rather than an inherent female linguistic trait.

From Beauvoir’s perspective, Sera’s curiosity is important because it demonstrates active engagement with the world. Her intensification does not merely portray her as emotional; it emphasizes her willingness to seek knowledge and interact with another person. The linguistic form therefore contributes to her representation as an active subject.

“*semakin membuat Sera merasa kesepian*” (Data 10)
 Made Sera feel increasingly I

In Data 10, the narration states that the sound of rain and thunder “*semakin membuat Sera merasa kesepian*” and that she felt like giving up. The word *semakin* intensifies the emotional condition represented by *kesepian*. The expression emphasizes the increasing intensity of Sera’s loneliness. In Lakoff’s framework, such intensification may be associated with emotional involvement.

The available male comparison is not structurally equivalent because the novel passage describes Sera’s internal emotional condition rather than a comparable male emotional expression. Therefore, this data should not be presented as proof that women use intensifiers more than men.

From Beauvoir’s perspective, the expression is more appropriately interpreted as evidence of Sera’s subjective consciousness. The intensifier makes the progression of her emotional experience visible and contributes to the portrayal of her inner life. Thus, the feature demonstrates emotional subjectivity rather than inherently feminine weakness.

‘*selalu sendirian*’ (Data 11)
 Always alone

Similarly, Data 11 describes how Sera would “*selalu sendirian*” during difficult nights after experiencing the loss of her father and changes in her family’s economic condition. These intensifying expressions strengthen the emotional impact of the narrative and highlight the depth of Sera’s experiences. Consistent with Lakoff’s observation, intensifiers are used to emphasize emotional meaning and personal involvement.

3.5. Superpolite Forms

The findings also indicate the presence of superpolite forms. When speaking with Malio, Sera consistently frames her questions in a socially acceptable and non-confrontational manner. For example, instead of challenging or commanding, she asks questions respectfully, such as “*Lo sejak kapan suka kucing?*” and seeks explanations regarding cat care. These linguistic choices help maintain harmonious interaction and reflect sensitivity toward the interlocutor. According to Lakoff (1975), women tend to employ more polite forms in order to preserve social relationships and avoid conflict.

3.6. Emphatic Expressions

‘*menggeleng dan memukul kepalanya*’ (Data 12)
 Shook her head and hit her hand

Another noticeable feature is the use of emphatic expressions. In Data 8, Sera struggles against negative thoughts urging her to jump from a balcony. The narration emphasizes her reaction when she “*menggeleng dan memukul kepalanya*” in an attempt to reject those thoughts.

The expression emphasizes Sera’s intense psychological reaction. Because the data come from a written novel, this should be treated as an emphatic narrative expression rather than phonological emphatic stress. This distinction is necessary because written text does not provide sufficient evidence for actual stress or intonation.

The male comparison should be used cautiously here. The available data do not provide a structurally equivalent male action in the same context. Therefore, the expression should not be used to claim that women are more emotionally emphatic than men.

From Beauvoir’s perspective, the expression reveals Sera’s struggle to resist unwanted thoughts. Her emotional vulnerability does not eliminate agency. Rather, her attempt to reject the negative thoughts demonstrates an effort to maintain control over her own consciousness. The feature therefore contributes to the construction of Sera as a subject struggling for autonomy rather than merely as an emotionally weak woman.

3.7. Avoidance of Strong Swear Words

“*Gue kesel, kecewa, capek, please.... I need you*” (Data 13)
I am angry, disappointed, tired

The avoidance of strong swear words should be interpreted cautiously because the presence of mild emotional expressions does not automatically demonstrate that Sera avoids profanity because she is female. The novel contains emotionally intense expressions from Sera, including “*Gue kesel, kecewa, capek*” (“I am angry, disappointed, tired”), but these expressions do not necessarily constitute strong swear words.

A gender comparison should therefore focus on whether comparable male characters use stronger profanity in similar narrative situations. Without systematic counting of male and female swear-word usage, the data cannot support a claim that women generally avoid strong swear words more than men.

From Beauvoir’s perspective, the more significant finding is that Sera is capable of expressing anger and dissatisfaction without her speech being reduced to profanity. Her emotional expression therefore demonstrates agency while challenging the assumption that female assertiveness must take the form of stereotypically masculine verbal aggression.

3.8. Male Comparison of Linguistic Features

To strengthen the gender-related interpretation of the findings, a comparison between Sera’s linguistic practices and those of male characters in the novel is necessary. The comparison is not intended to establish a rigid distinction between male and female language. Instead, it examines whether the linguistic features identified in Sera’s utterances through Lakoff’s framework also occur in the speech of male characters. This approach is important because the occurrence of a particular linguistic feature in female speech alone cannot establish that the feature is exclusively characteristic of women.

The comparison shows that several linguistic features identified in Sera’s speech also appear in the utterances of male characters. For example, questioning is not restricted to Sera. In one interaction, a male character asks, “*Sekalipun lo anggap Malio temen, apa ada jaminan dia juga anggap lo temen?*” The question is used to challenge Sera’s assumption about her relationship with Malio. This finding demonstrates that questioning can also function as an argumentative and interpersonal strategy in male speech. Therefore, the presence of questioning in Sera’s speech should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of female uncertainty or weakness.

A similar pattern can be observed in the use of lexical hedges. Sera uses the particle *kan* in “*Tapi kan hantu sudah mati,*” while Malio uses *mungkin* in “*Tapi mungkin ada beberapa hal yang nggak bisa Sera lakuin.*” The two expressions perform different contextual functions, but both demonstrate that hedging or mitigation occurs in male as well as female speech. Sera uses *kan* while internally evaluating an explanation about ghosts, whereas Malio uses *mungkin* to qualify his assessment of Sera’s abilities. This comparison challenges an interpretation in which hedging is treated as an inherently feminine linguistic characteristic.

The male character also produces evaluative language, which is relevant to the category of empty adjectives. Malio states, “*Hebat ya anak perempuan bisa pasang gas, Tante aja nggak bisa.*” The adjective *hebat* expresses an evaluation of Sera’s ability. This occurrence is significant because evaluative expressions are among the linguistic features associated with women’s language in Lakoff’s framework. The presence of the same type of evaluative expression in male speech indicates that such expressions are not exclusively used by female characters.

The comparison is also evident in the use of polite and mitigated expressions. Malio says, “*Mau minta tolong apa, Tante? Semoga aja saya bisa bantu nih,*” when responding to a request for assistance. The expression *semoga aja saya bisa bantu* (“hopefully I can help”) softens his response and establishes an interpersonal tone. This demonstrates that politeness and mitigation are also available as communicative strategies for male characters. Consequently, the presence of polite forms in Sera’s speech cannot by itself be used to argue that politeness is a uniquely feminine linguistic characteristic.

The male comparison therefore provides an important qualification to the application of Lakoff’s theory. Lakoff’s categories remain useful for identifying linguistic patterns in Sera’s speech, but the novel demonstrates that these patterns are not consistently restricted to female characters. Questioning, hedging, evaluative expressions, and polite or mitigated forms can occur in both male and female speech. Their meanings depend on the communicative situation, the relationship between the characters, and the purpose of the utterance. The findings consequently do not support an essentialist interpretation in which particular linguistic forms are automatically determined by the speaker’s gender.

The comparison also strengthens the application of Beauvoir’s feminist perspective. Rather than asking only whether Sera speaks in a manner associated with Lakoff’s concept of women’s language, the analysis can examine what Sera accomplishes through her linguistic choices. Her questions allow her to seek information and direct conversations; her evaluative expressions communicate her personal perceptions; her hedging accompanies processes of reflection; and her emotional expressions reveal her subjective experience. These linguistic practices therefore contribute to her representation as an active subject rather than simply reproducing an image of a passive or subordinate woman.

The contrast between Sera and the male characters further demonstrates that linguistic form and gender identity should not be treated as having a one-to-one relationship. Male characters may use linguistic forms traditionally associated with women’s language, while Sera may use language in ways that demonstrate assertiveness, curiosity, critical thinking, and emotional agency. For example, Sera’s questioning in her interaction with Malio is not merely an indication of uncertainty; it allows her to obtain information and construct knowledge about him. Similarly, her response to her father’s explanation about ghosts demonstrates that she is capable of independently evaluating an explanation offered by a male authority figure.

Thus, the male comparison changes the interpretation of the findings from a simple identification of “women’s language” to a more critical examination of gendered language use. Lakoff’s framework helps identify the linguistic forms present in the data, while Beauvoir’s perspective provides a basis for examining how those forms participate in the construction of female subjectivity and agency. The comparison ultimately suggests that the gendered meaning of language in the novel is contextual rather than fixed: the same linguistic form may perform different functions when used by different characters, and its significance must therefore be interpreted in relation to interaction, social position, and the character’s agency.

However, not all features proposed by Lakoff were found in the data. No evidence of precise color terms such as *lavender*, *turquoise*, or *magenta* was identified. Likewise, no clear examples of hypercorrect grammar were observed. Furthermore, because the data originate from a written literary text rather than spoken interaction, features such as rising intonation cannot be reliably analyzed. Consequently, the findings suggest that only some of Lakoff’s categories remain relevant to the linguistic portrayal of Sera.

Overall, the results indicate that tag questions, empty adjectives, intensifiers, superpolite forms, lexical hedges, and emphatic expressions are the most salient women’s language features employed by Sera. These features contribute to the portrayal of a character who is emotionally expressive, reflective, curious, and highly engaged in interpersonal communication. At the same time, the absence of several categories proposed by Lakoff suggests that contemporary literary representations of women do not necessarily conform to the complete set of linguistic characteristics originally identified by Lakoff.

Table 2. Distribution of Women's Language Features

Feature	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Empty Adjectives	9	28.1
Tag Questions	6	18.8
Emphatic Expressions	5	15.6
Intensifiers	4	12.5
Lexical Hedges	3	9.4
Avoidance of Strong Swear Words	3	9.4
Superpolite Forms	2	6.2
Precise Color Terms	0	0
Hypercorrect Grammar	0	0
Total	32	100

Table 2 shows that empty adjectives are the most dominant feature used by Sera, accounting for 28.1% of all identified features. This finding indicates that emotional evaluation and personal expression play a significant role in the protagonist's language use. The second most frequent category is tag questions (18.8%), followed by emphatic expressions (15.6%). These findings suggest that Sera's speech is characterized by interpersonal engagement and emotional expressiveness. Conversely, no instances of precise color terms or hypercorrect grammar were identified, indicating that not all features proposed by Lakoff (1975) are present in the novel. The distribution therefore suggests that Sera's linguistic profile only partially aligns with Lakoff's model and reflects the contextual nature of language use in contemporary Indonesian literary discourse.

4. Conclusion

This study examined the women's language features employed by the female protagonist, Serana Nighita Siviera (Sera), in Skysphire's *Malioboro at Midnight* (2023) using Lakoff's (1975) framework. The findings reveal that Sera employs seven of the ten women's language features proposed by Lakoff, namely empty adjectives, tag questions, emphatic expressions, intensifiers, lexical hedges, avoidance of strong swear words, and superpolite forms. Among these features, empty adjectives were the most dominant category, accounting for 28.1% of the total occurrences, followed by tag questions (18.8%), emphatic expressions (15.6%), intensifiers (12.5%), lexical hedges (9.4%), avoidance of strong swear words (9.4%), and superpolite forms (6.2%). In contrast, no instances of precise color terms or hypercorrect grammar were identified in the analyzed data, while rising intonation was excluded from the analysis because phonological features cannot be reliably examined in a written literary text.

The predominance of empty adjectives suggests that emotional evaluation and personal expression play a central role in Sera's language use. Similarly, the relatively high frequency of tag questions and emphatic expressions indicates that her speech is characterized by interpersonal engagement, emotional involvement, and reflective communication. These findings demonstrate that the linguistic features identified in the novel are primarily used to express feelings, negotiate social relationships, and communicate personal experiences rather than merely reflecting stereotypical notions of women's speech.

Furthermore, the findings support contemporary critiques of Lakoff's framework by showing that women's language features do not necessarily function as indicators of uncertainty, weakness, or social inferiority. In the context of *Malioboro at Midnight*, lexical hedges, tag questions, and other linguistic features often serve as communicative strategies that enable the protagonist to express emotions, seek understanding, and maintain interpersonal connections. Therefore, the study suggests that the interpretation of women's language features should consider narrative and contextual factors rather than relying solely on generalized assumptions about gendered speech.

Overall, the linguistic profile of Sera portrays a character who is emotionally expressive, communicative, reflective, and actively engaged in social interaction. The findings contribute to the study of language and gender in contemporary Indonesian literature by demonstrating that women's language features are not fixed linguistic markers of femininity but dynamic resources through which characters construct meaning, express personal experiences, and negotiate their relationships with others.

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