

FEMINIST CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF FEMINIST VOICES AND RESISTANCE PRESENTED IN POETRY

¹*Mahnoor*

Scholar, Department of English, GC Women University, Sialkot.

²*Dr. Aisha Farid*

Assistant Professor, Department of English, GC Women University, Sialkot.

Email: aisha.farid@gcwus.edu.pk

Abstract:

The current research work offers a multi-level Critical Discourse Analysis of the poems of two cross-border females, Kishwar Naheed from Pakistan and Maya Angelou from the United States, to analyse the use of language to highlight, critique, and challenge the linguistic practices that persistently uphold patriarchal power. Grass Is Really Like Me and Still I Rise are two poems analyzed using Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis at interconnected levels of linguistic use, as a framework developed by Lazar in 2005 and 2007. Lexical-level analysis provides insight into the use of metaphors, vocabulary, and repetition for ideological function, showing that language not only gives words meaning but also constructs gendered resistance. Syntactic-level analysis shows that transitivity patterns, grammatical modality, active and passive voice constructions, and syntactic parallelism are examined to reveal how sentence structure itself encodes agency, defiance, and the centering of female subjectivity. At the discourse level, the study highlights the intertextuality, subject positioning, rhetorical progression, and interdiscursivity to illuminate how both poems operate as counternarratives within broader patriarchal and colonial discourse systems. The findings of the work show that language not only conveys meanings but also certain gender based concepts and ideologies. It shows that the feminist voices, themes, and issues faced by women are the same across cultures and borders. The application of Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis contributes by providing in-depth, multi-level analysis of the poems, rather than focusing on surface-level analysis, and by highlighting major feminist voices and patriarchy.

Keywords: *Kishwar Naheed, Maya Angelou, Lexical Analysis, Syntactic Agency, Discursive Analysis, Feminist resistance, Feminist resilience, Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis*

1. INTRODUCTION

In literature, literary discourse has been used to advance ideological arguments and amplify feminist voices through different genres. Feminist discourse, particularly taking into account two poems: "Grass is Really Like Me" by Kishwar Naheed of Pakistan and "Still I Rise" by American poet Maya Angelou, as data samples. These poems highlight the use of language to portray concepts of language use, power, ideology, and the patriarchal system. These poems show how concepts about women are naturalized through language and how to denaturalize them.

The theoretical framework of this research is Feminist Discourse Analysis, as developed by Lazar (2005, 2007), which explains the relationships among language, gender, power, and ideology. In contradiction to Critical Discourse Analysis, FCDA examines particularly how gendered assumptions are naturalized through discourse and how feminist texts work to denaturalize them. This framework is developed at the syntactic level by Halliday's (1985) Systemic Functional Linguistics, particularly its transitivity system, which provides tools for analyzing how grammatical choices distribute agency within clauses. The combination of these

frameworks enables an analysis that is simultaneously feminist in its politics and rigorous in its linguistic method.

The importance of cross-cultural convergence of both the poets, one is a Pakistani poet and the other is an African American poet, yet themes on Feminist resistance, resilience and patriarchal system are common and shared. It shows the issues with female portrayal and that their thoughts are represented the same way across the globe, despite their different ethnicities. Both poets come from different ethnic backgrounds, hold different traditions and cultures, and espouse different religious ideologies, yet their poems depict feminist issues and the patriarchal systems in their societies.

Problem Statement

Women in history have been suppressed and dominated not only socially and politically but also through the themes that are presented in literature, justifying the workings of patriarchy in society. As argued by Lazer (2007), who states that gender-based assumptions and ideologies have been so natural that the suppression of patriarchy feels acceptable, normal and inevitable to question, and this has affected women in the long run.

The issue of this language use is very complex and serious, yet the research analyzing feminist voices has been limited to identifying metaphors and other literary devices, providing a surface-level analysis. This study aims to conduct a multilevel analysis at the lexical, syntactic, and dispersive levels to provide multidimensional linguistic applications that highlight linguistic features and feminist themes.

Research Objectives

The present study pursues the following three objectives:

1. To identify and analyze the lexical choices, including metaphors, vocabulary, repetition, pronouns, and personification, used by Kishwar Naheed and Maya Angelou to challenge patriarchal structures of society in the selected poems.
2. To examine the syntactic structures, such as transitivity patterns, grammatical modality, active and passive voice, and syntactic parallelism, by which both poets construct grammatical agency, encode defiance, and center female subjectivity.
3. To investigate the discourse-level strategies, which include intertextuality, subject positioning, rhetorical progression, and interdiscursivity, by which both poems function as counter-narratives within and against broader patriarchal discourse formations.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1: How do cross-border female poets Kishwar Naheed and Maya Angelou use lexical choices such as metaphors, vocabulary, pronouns, repetition, and personification to resist and challenge patriarchal power structures in the selected poems?

2: How do the syntactic structures of both poems, such as transitivity patterns, modality, voice, and parallelism, distribute grammatical agency and construct resistance at the sentence level?

3: How do both poems, at the discourse level, employ intertextuality, subject positioning, rhetorical structure, and interdiscursivity to constitute counter-patriarchal feminist narratives?

Delimitation of the study

This study is delimited to a linguistic and discursive analysis of two poems: Grass Is Really Like Me by Kishwar Naheed (originally written in Urdu, translated by Rukhsana Ahmad, 1991)

and *And Still I Rise* by Maya Angelou (1978). The analysis is conducted exclusively through the lens of Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis as developed by Lazar (2005, 2007), supplemented by Halliday's transitivity framework for syntactic analysis. While the poems carry significant thematic resonances with anti-colonial and anti-racist discourse, this study deliberately confines its focus to feminist dimensions — specifically, the critique of patriarchy and the assertion of female agency. Racial, colonial, and postcolonial dimensions of Angelou's poem, though richly deserving of analysis, fall outside the scope of the present study. Similarly, the religious and nationalist dimensions of Naheed's cultural context are noted but not analyzed in depth. The study employs qualitative content analysis as its research design.

Significance of the Study

The present study makes several contributions to the existing scholarly literature. Theoretically, it demonstrates that FCDA, as a framework, is capable of operating across multiple levels of linguistic analysis simultaneously—a methodological contribution that enriches its application to literary texts beyond its more common use in media and political discourse analysis.

Empirically, it provides the first comparative, multi-level linguistic analysis of Naheed's and Angelou's selected poems, revealing that despite their divergent cultural contexts, both poets deploy structurally similar strategies of resistance at the lexical, syntactic, and discourse levels. This cross-cultural convergence has implications for feminist theories of poetic language and for our understanding of patriarchy as a transnational discursive formation.

Pedagogically, the study offers a model for teaching and analyzing feminist poetry with greater linguistic rigor — moving students and scholars beyond impressionistic readings toward a systematic understanding of how language constructs resistance. Finally, for women writers and readers navigating patriarchal societies, the study affirms that language itself is a site of struggle and transformation, and that poetic discourse remains a powerful tool for feminist praxis.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A rich body of scholarship on how language both reflects and reproduces gendered power relations has emerged from the intersection of feminist theory and discourse analysis. The following review surveys key contributions relevant to the present study, organized thematically.

Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis

Foundational work established by Lazar (2002,2007) FCDA as a politically committed framework that goes beyond describing gendered discourse to actively interrogating and resisting the ideological structures it uncovers. According to Lazar, the main aim of FCDA is to analyze how 'gendered assumptions and dominance that are often taken for granted' are constructed and maintained through language, making patriarchal arrangements appear natural rather than historically contingent. This emphasis on naturalization and denaturalization provides the analytical backbone of the present study.

FCDA applied by Basra et al. (2002) alongside Halliday's and Fairclough's models to Fahmida Riaz's poetry, finding that feminist poetry explicitly reveals male dominance while simultaneously empowering women silenced by patriarchal structures. Their multi-model approach anticipates the multi-level methodology of the present study, though they do not systematically distinguish between lexical, syntactic, and discourse-level findings.

Linda M Crate's poem *Women Aren't Weak* was examined by Rehman and Nawaz (2002), through FCDA, demonstrating how gender roles constructed by patriarchal society are both reproduced and contested within poetic discourse. Their study foregrounds women as resisting

subjects rather than passive victims. It's a finding that resonates with the subject positioning analysis undertaken in the present study.

Poetry as Feminist Resistance

It is argued by McKenzie (2002) that live poetry functions as a medium for protesting oppressive patriarchal structures, with its affective power deriving precisely from its capacity to connect audiences to lived experiences of gendered oppression. This affective dimension of feminist poetry is relevant to the present study's analysis of rhetorical structure and audience positioning.

As examined by Shoaib and Zafar (2002), Kishwar Naheed's poetry, through James C. Scott's theory of resistance, traces a shift from feminine submissiveness to active, open defiance of patriarchal norms. Their focus on Naheed as a transformative voice in Pakistani feminist discourse complements the present study's analysis of the syntactic and discourse-level dimensions of her resistance strategies.

Kumari (2025) examines the poetry of Kamala Das and Sylvia Plath, illuminating resistance to patriarchy through feminist literary criticism, arguing that women continue to write against oppressive structures even in contemporary contexts. This study reinforces the present study's premise that feminist poetic resistance is an ongoing and globally distributed practice.

Maya Angelou: Imagery, Intersectionality, and Resilience

Structural analysis conducted by Arbia (2019) of imagery across five of Angelou's poems, identifying auditory imagery as the dominant mode through which resistance, subjugation, and empowerment are expressed. This finding is relevant to the present study's syntactic analysis of how Angelou's imperative and declarative constructions create an auditory rhetoric of defiance.

Intersectional feminism, examined by Azizah (2024) across African American poetry from three historical eras, finds that poetry by women of color consistently addresses the compounded oppressions of race, gender, and class. While the present study focuses specifically on feminist rather than intersectional dimensions, Azizah's work provides important context for understanding Angelou's poem within its broader discursive environment.

Audre Lorde's poetry was analyzed by Alqaryouti et al. (2005) to examine how Black lesbian women deploy verse to resist multiple, intersecting forms of marginalization. Their foregrounding of resistance as a discursive practice, rather than merely a thematic concern, aligns with the methodological commitments of the present study.

Research Gap

The foregoing review reveals that while feminist poetry has been analyzed through literary, thematic, and occasionally discourse-analytical lenses, no existing study has conducted a systematic three-level linguistic analysis (lexical, syntactic, and discourse) of both Naheed's and Angelou's selected poems within a unified FCDA framework. Studies that do employ discourse-analytical tools tend to focus on a single level or conflate levels without distinguishing their specific analytical contributions. The present study fills this gap by offering a methodologically differentiated, theoretically grounded, and comparatively oriented analysis that treats the linguistic construction of feminist resistance as operating simultaneously across all three levels.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA)

Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, as developed by Lazar (2005, 2007), is both a theoretical framework and a methodological orientation. Theoretically, FCDA holds that language

is not a neutral medium for transmitting pre-formed meanings but is itself a site of ideological production — a system through which gendered power relations are constructed, reproduced, negotiated, and contested. The analytical task of FCDA is to make these processes visible, revealing how gender operates in and through discourse in ways that are often naturalized and thus invisible to those who participate in them.

Lazar (2007) distinguishes FCDA from general CDA by its specifically feminist political commitment: FCDA does not merely describe gendered discourse but actively positions itself against patriarchal ideology, seeking to denaturalize what patriarchy presents as inevitable and to illuminate possibilities for resistance and transformation. This dual character — simultaneously analytical and political — makes FCDA particularly appropriate for the study of feminist poetry, which is itself both a discursive artifact and a political intervention.

Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics: Transitivity

For the syntactic level of analysis, the present study draws on Halliday's (1985) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), particularly the transitivity system. In SFL, transitivity refers to the grammatical system through which experience is organized into processes, participants, and circumstances within clauses. The transitivity system includes several process types — material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioral, and existential — each of which distributes agency differently among participants.

In feminist discourse analysis, transitivity analysis is particularly valuable because it reveals who is grammatically constructed as an Actor (the initiator of a process) and who is constructed as a Goal (the recipient or object of a process). A text that consistently positions women as Goals — objects acted upon by others — constructs a very different gendered ideology from one that positions women as Actors exercising their own agency. The transitivity choices in Naheed's and Angelou's poems will be analyzed with this in mind.

Discourse-Level Analysis

The discourse-level analysis draws on several complementary concepts. Intertextuality, as developed by Kristeva (1980) and elaborated in CDA by Fairclough (1992), refers to the ways in which texts are constituted by and respond to other texts and discourses. In feminist poetry, intertextual analysis reveals how poems position themselves against dominant narratives — historical, cultural, and patriarchal — and claim authority through dialogue with these narratives.

Subject positioning, drawing on Foucauldian discourse theory as interpreted by Lazar (2007), refers to the process by which discourse constructs subject positions — locations from which speaking and being spoken about are organized. Feminist discourse analysis attends to how women are positioned — as victims, resisters, subjects, objects — and how feminist texts work to claim or transform these positions.

Rhetorical structure analysis, informed by Rhetoric and Composition theory, examines the organizational logic of texts — how arguments are developed, how emotional appeals are deployed, how conclusions are reached. In feminist poetry, this analysis reveals how resistance is not merely asserted but built, escalated, and performed through the poem's structural movement.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative content analysis design, which is appropriate for the close, interpretive reading of literary texts within a theoretically specified framework. Qualitative content analysis allows the researcher to attend to the particularity of textual choices — the specific word,

the specific grammatical structure — while situating those choices within broader patterns of meaning and ideology.

Data

The primary data consists of two poems: *Grass Is Really Like Me* by Kishwar Naheed (originally written in Urdu; translated by Rukhsana Ahmad, 1991) and *And Still I Rise* by Maya Angelou (1978). The selection of these two texts is purposive: both were written by women who have been recognized as major feminist voices in their respective national and cultural contexts; both address the experience of gendered oppression and the assertion of resistance; and both have been widely read, taught, and cited in feminist literary scholarship, making them important objects of rigorous linguistic analysis.

Analytical Procedure

The analysis proceeds across three levels in sequence, with each level building on and informing the others. At the lexical level, the poems are read for metaphor, vocabulary, pronouns, repetition, and personification, with each device analyzed not merely for its presence but for its ideological function within the FCDA framework. At the syntactic level, clauses are analyzed for transitivity type, process assignment, modality, voice, and parallelism. At the discourse level, the analysis moves outward from individual clauses and stanzas to consider the poems' intertextual dialogues, subject positioning strategies, rhetorical progressions, and interdiscursive formations.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis is organized around three analytical levels. Within each level, findings from both poems are presented comparatively to enable identification of cross-cultural parallels and divergences.

a. Lexical-Level Analysis

The lexical level constitutes the most immediately visible dimension of poetic language and has received the most attention in prior scholarship on these poems. The present analysis reexamines familiar devices — metaphor, repetition, and pronouns — with a more rigorous FCDA lens, attending to their ideological rather than merely literary function.

Metaphor: Constructing the Ideological Landscape

In *Grass Is Really Like Me*, Naheed's central metaphor — the identification of the female speaker with grass — is not merely a literary comparison. Grass, in the patriarchal symbolic economy, occupies a position of insignificance: it is ubiquitous, unremarkable, subject to being cut, trampled, and managed. By identifying with grass, Naheed simultaneously acknowledges the position patriarchy assigns to women and subverts it: grass is not destroyed by cutting but grows back. The metaphor thus encodes both the reality of suppression and the fact of resilience in a single image.

"The grass is also like me" (lines 1 and 6)

The lawnmower metaphor, introduced to figure patriarchal power, is equally significant in ideological terms. The lawnmower is a machine — impersonal, repetitive, devoid of malice but also devoid of conscience. By figuring patriarchy as a lawnmower, Naheed captures something essential about systemic rather than individualized oppression: it operates not through exceptional acts of cruelty but through routine, mechanical maintenance of the existing order. The metaphor naturalizes the operation of patriarchy even as it makes it visible.

"the lawnmower obsessed with flattening it into velvet, mows it down again" (lines 8–10)

The straw metaphor works in opposition to the grass metaphor, figuring women who have surrendered their agency under patriarchal pressure. Straw — dead, dried, drained of life —

represents the outcome of capitulation. This contrast between grass (resilient, living, resistant) and straw (inert, co-opted, defeated) creates a binary that implicitly calls women to choose between resistance and complicity.

In *And Still I Rise*, Angelou deploys a series of metaphors that escalate in scale and grandeur. The dust metaphor positions the speaker as something that rises naturally, effortlessly, defying those who have tried to grind her down. The oil wells metaphor invokes wealth, abundance, and self-possession — asserting not merely survival but prosperity. Most powerfully, the air metaphor claims for the speaker the quality of being everywhere, intangible, impossible to confine or destroy.

"But still, like dust, I'll rise" (line 4); "like air, I'll rise" (line 24)

From an FCDA perspective, the escalating scale of Angelou's metaphors — from dust to oil wells to black ocean to air — performs the very resistance it describes. Each metaphor is larger and less containable than the last, enacting through figurative language the accumulating momentum of feminist defiance.

Repetition: Insistence as Ideology

Repetition in both poems functions not as redundancy but as ideological insistence. In 'Grass Is Really Like Me,' the repeated line 'The grass is also/really like me' (lines 1, 6, 20) serves as a refrain that anchors the poem's argument, returning periodically to reassert the central identification despite everything said about suppression and patriarchal pressure. The structural return of this line mimics the structural return of grass itself — cut, growing back; suppressed, reasserting itself.

In *And Still I Rise*, the repetition of 'I rise' (lines 4, 24, 30, 32, 36, 38, 41–43) is one of the most rhetorically powerful features of the poem. The phrase accumulates force with each repetition, moving from assertion to declaration to what can only be described as incantation. By the poem's end, 'I rise' has become less a statement about a particular act and more a statement about the nature of the speaker herself — her irreducible, unconquerable subjectivity.

Pronouns: Centering the Female Self

The pronoun choices in both poems reveal deliberate ideological positioning. In *Grass Is Really Like Me*, the pronoun 'me' places the speaker in the position of grammatical object in the title and opening line — a position that initially echoes the patriarchal positioning of women as objects rather than subjects. However, this apparent objectification is immediately complicated: the speaker is the one making the comparison, exercising the interpretive authority to define what she is like. The pronoun 'you' addresses the oppressive other, making patriarchal power visible as an agent rather than an anonymous force. 'They', used for women who have capitulated to patriarchal pressure, creates a third category — neither the resistant self nor the oppressive other — that implicitly calls such women to reassert their agency.

In *And Still I Rise*, the pronoun 'I' dominates the poem to an extent that is ideologically significant. Angelou's poem performs female subjectivity through the sheer insistence of 'I' — a grammatical enactment of the self-assertion the poem thematizes. The contrast between 'I' as grammatical subject and 'me' as grammatical object in certain lines performs the very tension between patriarchal objectification and feminist self-assertion that the poem addresses.

Vocabulary: Charged Lexical Choices

Both poets select vocabulary that carries ideological weight beyond its denotative meaning. Naheed's 'manifest life' asserts not merely survival but purposeful, directed vitality — a refusal of the diminishment patriarchy imposes. 'Scorching defeat' is a compound that intensifies failure

beyond ordinary loss, awakening readers to the magnitude of what is at stake in surrendering to patriarchal norms. 'Grafted' — used metaphorically for women absorbed into the earth — implies a forced, surgical assimilation that denies individuality and agency.

Angelou's 'sassiness' is a lexical choice with a complex cultural history. In African American vernacular, sassiness connotes a refusal of the deference expected from those in subordinate positions — it is the voice that speaks back, the manner that refuses to efface itself. By opening with this word, Angelou immediately claims a mode of self-expression that patriarchal (and racist) discourse has consistently sought to suppress and pathologize.

b. Syntactic-Level Analysis

The syntactic level of analysis reveals how sentence structure — the grammatical organization of clauses — distributes agency, encodes modality, and creates rhetorical effect in ways that are not reducible to lexical choices. This level has been largely neglected in prior analyses of both poems.

Transitivity: Who Acts and Who is Acted Upon

Transitivity analysis, following Halliday's (1985) SFL framework, examines how grammatical processes distribute agency among participants. In *Grass Is Really Like Me*, the opening clauses position the speaker as a participant in relational processes ('The grass is also like me') — establishing equivalence and identification rather than action. As the poem develops, however, material-process clauses emerge in which the grass — and, by extension, the woman — becomes an Actor in processes of growth and self-assertion. The lines 'desire to manifest life' and the final return to 'the grass is really like me' position the female speaker as an agent of ongoing, irrepressible life.

By contrast, the lawnmower is constructed as an Actor in material processes that operate on the grass-as-woman: 'mows it down again.' This transitivity pattern is ideologically significant — it acknowledges the reality of patriarchal power as operative, acting upon women's lives. But the poem's final movement reasserts the grass/woman as a participant that cannot be eliminated, a Reactor whose responses exceed and outlast the Actor's operations.

In *And Still I Rise*, transitivity choices construct Angelou's speaker as an Actor in material processes of rising, walking, and claiming. The repeated construction 'I'll rise' positions the speaker as an Agent in a material process — not merely a Goal or Reactor but an initiator of action. This grammatical construction of agency is particularly notable given that the poem opens with the speaker as the goal of patriarchal acts: 'You may trod me in the very dirt.' The poem thus performs a grammatical shift from Goal to Actor — a syntactic enactment of resistance.

"You may trod me in the very dirt / But still, like dust, I'll rise" (lines 3–4)

The shift from 'me' as Goal in line 3 to 'I' as Actor in line 4 is one of the most syntactically significant moments in the poem. It performs at the sentence level the very movement — from object to subject, from passive recipient to active agent — that the poem thematizes.

Modality: Certainty, Permission, and Defiance

Grammatical modality — the expression of possibility, necessity, permission, and certainty — is a key dimension of the syntactic construction of power and resistance. In *And Still I Rise*, Angelou's use of 'you may' constructions throughout the poem is ideologically complex. 'You may trod me... You may shoot me... You may cut me... You may kill me' — the modal 'may' formally grants the oppressor permission, but does so only to immediately withdraw its consequences with 'But still, like air, I'll rise.' This modal grammar constructs a speaker who is so confident in her

own resilience that she can afford to acknowledge the oppressor's power without conceding that it will achieve its purpose.

The future modal 'will' in 'I'll rise' expresses certainty rather than mere possibility. Unlike 'I might rise' or 'I hope to rise,' the contracted 'I'll rise' makes rising a foregone conclusion — grammatically inevitable. This epistemic certainty is itself a form of resistance: it refuses the doubt and contingency that patriarchal suppression seeks to install.

In *Grass Is Really Like Me*, modality operates through declarative constructions that assert the speaker's nature as factual rather than aspirational. 'The grass is really like me' is not 'the grass might be like me' or 'I hope to be like the grass.' The declarative present tense makes the identification a statement of fact, claiming ontological rather than merely aspirational equivalence with the resilient natural world.

Active and Passive Voice: Visibility and Erasure of Agents

Voice choices in both poems reveal how the poets strategically make patriarchal agency visible or invisible. In *And Still I Rise*, Angelou's use of active voice in the 'you may' constructions is ideologically significant: by using second-person active constructions rather than passive ones, she forces the oppressor into grammatical visibility. 'You may trod me' is grammatically different from 'I may be trodden' — the first names the oppressor as agent; the second would erase that agent. Angelou's choice to actively grammaticalize the oppressor refuses the naturalization that passive constructions enable.

In *Grass Is Really Like Me*, the lawnmower construction similarly maintains agentive visibility: 'the lawnmower... mows it down again' retains the lawnmower (patriarchal society) as grammatical subject and Actor. This syntactic choice keeps the mechanisms of oppression visible rather than allowing them to disappear into passive constructions that would naturalize female suppression as something that simply happens rather than something that is actively done.

Syntactic Parallelism: Rhythm as Resistance

Both poets deploy syntactic parallelism — the repetition of identical or similar grammatical structures across multiple clauses — as a device that creates rhetorical force through structural accumulation. In *And Still I Rise*, the series 'You may shoot me with your words, / You may cut me with your eyes, / You may kill me with your hatefulness' (lines 21– 23) deploys perfect syntactic parallelism: each line follows the pattern [You may + Verb + me + with your + Noun]. This parallelism has several ideological effects. It creates a rhythmic inevitability — each new clause confirms and extends the pattern, building an expectation that is then dramatically interrupted by 'But still, like air, I'll rise.' It also accumulates the oppressor's potential acts of violence into a list that becomes, through its very comprehensiveness, less threatening rather than more — as if the speaker is saying: I have surveyed all of your weapons and found none of them sufficient.

In *Grass Is Really Like Me*, parallelism operates across the poem's structural returns rather than within individual stanzas. The structural repetition of 'The grass is also/really like me' creates a parallel architecture across the poem's three movements, each return enriched by what has come between. This macro-level syntactic parallelism performs the poem's central argument: suppression and return, suppression and return — a structural grammar of resilience.

c. Discourse-Level Analysis

The discourse level moves outward from individual clauses and stanzas to consider the poems as whole texts operating within broader discursive formations — historical, cultural, and ideological. This level of analysis is the most expansive and the most theoretically demanding.

Intertextuality: Dialogues with Dominant Narratives

Both poems are constituted by and against prior texts and discourses. *And Still I Rise* is explicitly intertextual in its opening lines: 'You may write me down in history / With your bitter, twisted lies' (lines 1–2). The reference to history invokes the entire apparatus of patriarchal and colonial narrative — the records, accounts, and representations through which women's (and Black women's) experiences have been distorted or erased. By directly addressing this intertextual weight, Angelou positions her poem as a counter-narrative, an act of discursive self-inscription against a history of imposed misrepresentation.

Grass Is Really Like Me engages intertextually with the cultural and religious discourses of Pakistani patriarchal society, which construct women's roles through a complex of tradition, religion, and nationalist ideology. Naheed does not name these discourses explicitly — the poem operates through metaphor rather than direct address — but the lawnmower, the straw, and the grass all invoke a context in which female resilience must assert itself against systematic management and control. The poem's intertextual dialogue is with the entire discursive formation of Pakistani patriarchal culture.

Subject Positioning: Claiming the Speaking Position

Drawing on Lazar's (2007) concept of subject positioning, both poems can be analyzed in terms of how they claim, transform, or resist the subject positions available to women within patriarchal discourse. In patriarchal discourse, women are typically positioned as objects of male action and judgment — they are seen, evaluated, controlled, and spoken about rather than speaking. Both poems resist this positioning by claiming the subject position of the speaker — the 'I' who sees, judges, names, and addresses.

In *And Still I Rise*, Angelou's claiming of the subject position is extraordinarily forceful. The poem opens with 'You' — the oppressor — as grammatical subject, but immediately positions the speaker as the resilient respondent whose rising is the poem's central action and argument. By the poem's final stanzas, the speaker has moved from respondent to protagonist: 'I am the dream and the hope of the slave' (line 42) positions her not merely as an individual resisting oppressor but as the embodiment of a collective historical aspiration.

In *Grass Is Really Like Me*, subject positioning is more nuanced. The speaker claims the position of the one who makes comparisons — who decides what she is like — rather than being defined by others. The pronoun 'you' addresses the oppressor directly, constructing the speaker as someone who sees and names patriarchal power rather than being invisibly subject to it. This naming of the oppressor — rather than enduring unnamed, structural oppression — is itself a discursive act of resistance.

Rhetorical Structure: Building the Argument of Resistance

Both poems exhibit distinctive rhetorical structures — organizational logics that shape how resistance is built, accumulated, and declared. In *And Still I Rise*, the rhetorical structure can be characterized as escalating defiance. The poem opens with an acknowledgment of patriarchal power ('You may write me down in history') and proceeds through a series of increasingly comprehensive acknowledgments — shooting, cutting, killing — before concluding with declarations of an agency that transcends all such acts. This escalating structure advances the poem's argument: the more fully the oppressor's power is acknowledged, the more fully it is shown to be insufficient.

In *Grass Is Really Like Me*, the rhetorical structure is cyclical rather than escalating. The poem returns three times to its central identification, each time after exploring different dimensions

of suppression and resilience. This cyclical structure enacts the grass's own pattern of growth — not a linear progression toward a triumphant conclusion but a repeated return, a structural resilience that mirrors the content. The rhetorical form of the poem is thus an argument in itself: resistance is not a single dramatic gesture but an ongoing practice of return and reassertion.

Interdiscursivity: Borrowing and Transforming Discourses

Interdiscursivity refers to the ways in which texts draw on and transform discourse types from beyond their immediate genre or context. Both poems exhibit complex interdiscursive operations that contribute to their feminist arguments.

Grass Is Really Like Me draws heavily on natural discourse — the discourse of ecology and natural processes — to make its feminist argument. By figuring women through natural processes (grass, earth, growth), Naheed invokes a counter-discourse to the patriarchal association of women with nature-as-passive-object, transforming nature discourse into a vehicle for claiming resilience and agency. The poem also draws on the discourse of traditional Pakistani rural life — the grass, the lawnmower, the earth — and reframes these familiar cultural materials in feminist terms.

And Still I Rise draws interdiscursively on the discourse of African American spirituality and resistance tradition — the tradition of testimony, witness, and overcoming that runs through the history of Black religious and political expression. The poem's refrain structure, its rhetorical questions, and its climactic declarations all invoke this tradition, positioning Angelou's feminist resistance within a larger cultural history of resilience and transformation. The poem also draws on the discourse of wealth and prosperity ('oil wells,' 'gold mines') in ways that transform the material markers of success into metaphors for psychic and spiritual self-possession.

6. SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The following table summarizes the analytical findings across all three levels for both poems:

Analytical Level	Grass Is Really Like Me (Naheed)	And Still I Rise (Angelou)
Lexical – Metaphor	Grass (resilience), lawnmower (patriarchy), straw (capitulation)	Dust, oil wells, black ocean, air (escalating freedom)
Lexical – Repetition	"Grass is really like me" (cyclical, structural)	"I rise" / "Still I rise" (accumulating force)
Lexical – Pronouns	Me (resistant self), you (oppressor), they (compliant women)	I (dominant subject), me (objectified/reclaimed), you (oppressor)
Lexical – Vocabulary	Manifest life, scorching defeat, grafted (defeat of surrender)	Sassiness (reclaimed voice), bitter twisted lies (patriarchal history)
Syntactic – Transitivity	Shift from relational to material process; grass/woman as eventual Actor	Speaker shifts from Goal (trod me) to Actor (I'll rise)
Syntactic – Modality	Declarative present tense asserts factual resilience	"You may" grants permission; "I'll" asserts inevitable certainty

Syntactic – Voice	Lawnmower as active agent — keeps oppression grammatically visible	"You may" constructions name oppressor as active agent; refuse passive erasure
Syntactic – Parallelism	Macro-level structural returns of central line	"You may [verb] me with your [noun]" — builds and then defeats oppressive list
Discourse – Intertextuality	Dialogue with Pakistani patriarchal/cultural discourse (implicit)	Explicit dialogue with history of racist and patriarchal misrepresentation
Discourse – Subject Position	Speaker claims interpretive authority — defines herself through comparison	Moves from respondent to protagonist; claims collective historical identity
Discourse – Rhetoric	Cyclical structure: suppression → return → suppression → return	Escalating structure: acknowledge oppression → accumulate defiance → transcend
Discourse – Interdiscursivity	Nature discourse reframed as feminist resilience	African American spiritual/resistance tradition; discourse of prosperity reframed

7. DISCUSSION

The findings presented above reveal that feminist resistance in both poems is not a matter of theme or intention alone but is systematically constructed across all three levels of linguistic organization. At each level, both poets make choices that are ideologically coherent and mutually reinforcing — lexical, syntactic, and discourse-level strategies work together to produce a total discursive argument for female agency and against patriarchal suppression.

The analysis has shown the cross-cultural convergence of both poets: one is a Pakistani poet, and the other is an African American poet; yet themes of feminist resistance, resilience, and the patriarchal system are common and shared. It shows the issues of female portrayal and the representation of their thoughts is the same across the globe, despite belonging to different ethnicities, supporting Lazar's (2007) theoretical claim that patriarchy, despite its local variations, is a discourse formation with cross-cultural features, and that feminist counter-discourse develops, partly independently and partly through transnational feminist exchange, comparable tools of resistance.

Syntactic-level analysis has shown that transitivity choices, modality, voice, and parallelism distribute agency in ways that grammatically enact the very resistance the poems thematize. It shifts speakers from Goals to Actors, asserting certainty rather than contingency while keeping oppressive agents grammatically visible.

Discourse-level Analysis of both poems engaged in intertextual dialogues, presenting dominant narratives that claim subject positions against the grain of patriarchal discourse. It builds rhetorical structures of escalating or cyclical defiance, drawing interdiscursively on broader cultural traditions of resilience and resistance

8. CONCLUSION

The present research has shown that the feminist resistance described in the works of both the poets, *Grass Is Really Like Me* by Kishwar Naheed and *Still I Rise* by Maya Angelou, operates across lexical, syntactic, and discursive levels of linguistic organization, demonstrating richness and systematic coherence in representing feminist resistance.

Prior works were limited to lexical-level analysis of these two poems, unable to capture multi-level FCDA.

Lexical-level analysis of both poems shows the use of metaphor, repetition, pronouns, and vocabulary choices that are ideologically determined. Every word in the poem not only describes but constructs a gendered reality where female resilience is shown against patriarchal suppression. Syntactic-level analysis has shown that transitivity choices, modality, voice, and parallelism distribute agency in ways that grammatically enact the very resistance the poems thematize. It shifts speakers from Goals to Actors, asserting certainty rather than contingency while keeping oppressive agents grammatically visible.

Discourse-level analysis of both poems reveals intertextual dialogues that present dominant narratives claiming subject positions against the grain of patriarchal discourse. It builds rhetorical structures of escalating or cyclical defiance, drawing interdiscursively on broader cultural traditions of resilience and resistance.

The analysis has shown the cross-cultural convergence of both poets: one is a Pakistani poet and the other an African American poet, yet themes of feminist resistance, resilience, and the patriarchal system are common and shared. It shows the issues with female portrayal and that their thoughts are represented the same way across the globe, despite their different ethnicities.

Future researchers can extend this multi-level FCDA methodology to analyze the works of other feminist poets across different national and cultural contexts. They can also examine these operating strategies in other genres, such as memoir, manifesto, and speech. The current research conducted a multi-level FCDA of feminist literary texts that would not be possible using a single-level analysis, providing detailed insights into feminist resistance and the patriarchal system.

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