

REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN BARBIE (2023) FILM: A MULTIMODAL GENDER DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This study examined the representation of women in the Barbie (2023) film through a multimodal gender discourse analysis integrating linguistic and visual modes. A descriptive qualitative design was employed, focusing on transcribed utterances and selected visual figures featuring the film's central female characters, Stereotypical Barbie and Gloria. Guided by Lakoff's (1975) women's language theory and Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) visual grammar, the analysis revealed that nine out of ten linguistic features appeared in the data, with hedges and intensifiers occurring most frequently, indicating patterns of emotional expressivity associated with traditional femininity. Furthermore, visual findings showed a dominant use of offer images, eye-level shots, and moderate social distance, fostering audience connection and relatability. At the same time, modality shifts between Barbie Land and the Real World reflected ideological contrasts between idealization and realism. Critically, the study highlights how these multimodal resources both align with and complicate post-feminist discourses by portraying women as expressive and empowered yet still shaped by prevailing gender expectations. The findings contribute to broader debates in multimodality, film studies, and media literacy by illustrating how cinematic techniques shape the public's reading of femininity and offering analytical tools for understanding gendered meaning-making in contemporary media.

Keywords: Women's Language Features, Multimodal Discourse Analysis, Gender Representation, Visual Grammar

Introduction

The representation of women in the media has been the subject of

extensive scholarly debate. Over the years, the portrayal of gender roles in movies has evolved, reflecting shifts in cultural attitudes influenced by feminist perspectives. Film, as a form of mass media, is a powerful tool for conveying messages to society through images and dialogue, communicating ideas, emotions, and stories (Malisi, Sibram, & Surawan, 2023). It not only serves as a source of entertainment and cultural expression but also plays a significant role in shaping societal values and perspectives. Through storytelling and role-playing, films can influence public opinion and shape cultural norms such as gender perceptions (Garczewska, 2019).

The notable *Barbie* film, released in 2023, has significant potential to shape society's perceptions of gender roles through popular culture. *Barbie*, as both a doll and a cultural icon, has been at the center of these discussions, with its portrayal of women's issues being a significant focus of research. The recent *Barbie* (2023) is a fantasy comedy film directed by Greta Gerwig that reignited conversations about gender representation, particularly issues related to women. Based on Mattel's Barbie fashion dolls, it is the first live-action Barbie film after numerous animated films. It was released on July 21, 2023, and became a major hit, largely due to its satirical portrayal of patriarchy and the depiction of women in "Barbie land." The film became highly popular, grossing over \$1.03 billion worldwide (Rothenberg, 2023). Its exploration of womanhood and girlhood resonated with many viewers, who found its message relatable. In fact, the *Barbie* (2023) film premiered in the Philippines on July 19, 2023, and received significant attention there, given the global popularity of the Barbie brand and its exploration of gender and cultural themes, as well as strong local interest in its portrayal of women (Llemit, 2023). The story begins when *Barbie* (Margot Robbie) lives in a utopian matriarchy, only to enter the real world, where she faces patriarchy and objectification, and ultimately embraces her humanity. The *Barbie* film has the potential to shape society's perception of gender roles. Its characters and narratives can shape understanding of gender roles, especially by helping children grasp the diverse roles men and women can play.

Hence, this paper aimed to investigate how women were represented in the *Barbie* (2023) film through language and visual modes. While previous studies had explored gender portrayals in *Barbie* (2023), they lacked a multimodal perspective combining linguistic and visual analysis. This created a methodological gap regarding how both visual and linguistic elements are integrated to represent women in the film. To address this gap, this study utilized a multimodal discourse approach focusing on the linguistic and visual aspects of the *Barbie* film. By applying Robin Lakoff's

characters. This approach provided a comprehensive perspective on how linguistic and visual elements interacted to shape gender representation in contemporary media.

Review of Literature

The following review highlights the theoretical frameworks mainly utilized in this study. Robin Lakoff's (1975) *Women's Language Theory* guides the analysis of female speech features. Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) *Visual Grammar* provides the framework for analyzing the interactional semiotic function in visual communication.

Women's Language Features

In 1975, linguist Robin Lakoff became interested in language use. The term women's language features was first coined by Lakoff (1975). Women's language features are linguistic patterns that women use more often than men. A woman will receive criticism if her speech style does not resemble that of a "lady" (a classy woman), as it is considered unfeminine. In her paper, she presented data gathered through introspection, interviews, and conversations with her acquaintances, and identified features common to all the women she considered. This paper focuses on the language features she claims in her book *Language and Woman's Place* (1975), which are as follows:

Lexical hedges or Fillers: Lakoff (1975) claims that hedging is used to avoid making strong statements (similarly to intensifiers), since women's language is less powerful, and women are portrayed as insecure most of the time. Lakoff (1975), as cited by Itmeizeh and Ma'ayeh (2017, p. 35), distinguishes four types of hedges. The first type is to express uncertainty, such as 'well' and 'kinda/kind of'. The second type is a hedge used for politeness, such as 'sorta' or 'sort of'. The next type is to express that the speaker is sure of the truth of a statement to attract the listener's attention, e.g., you know. The last type is used as a preface to a statement or question, e.g., I guess, I wonder, and I think. In addition to lessening the force of a statement, hedges function as fillers. It refers to meaningless words that women always use. Jonsson (2016) defines fillers as "any sound we make to fill a pause" (p. 7). Examples of fillers include "um," "oh," and "uh."

Intensifiers: Women tend to use intensifiers, such as so or absolute superlatives (like very, really, or utterly) to express their feelings or to avoid committing themselves to strong opinions. While so is usually used by

women to describe their feelings, men avoid using it to refer to anything personal (Lakoff, 1975, p. 48). Similarly, Holmes (2013) states that intensifiers aim to reinforce meaning and ensure that the interlocutor receives the message, e.g., really, so, such, quite, and very. Women use intensifiers to give their talk greater emphasis, impress their interlocutors, and increase the likelihood of acceptance and confirmation, as Sardabi and Afghari (2015) state.

Tag questions: Tag questions fall between an explicit declaration and a yes-no question and follow a syntactic rule that women tend to use more than men (Lakoff, 1975). They are often used to make a claim when the speaker is unsure of its truth. Tag questions can be used in various contexts, such as confirming something already known, corroborating an opinion, or checking whether something is true. In other cases, tag questions are used when the speaker makes a claim but is not entirely sure it is true. Women like to use tag questions because they make the tone less tense.

Emphatic stress: Lakoff (1975) states that Emphatic stress is a term to emphasize the most important word in a speaker's statement. It refers to situations in which a speaker emphasizes certain words or parts of an expression or utterance. Women utilize this characteristic to accentuate and strengthen their speech, or to express more stress. It happens when a woman wants to make a stronger statement. For instance, "It was a BRILLIANT performance". The capitalized word "brilliant" shows that the speaker wants to strengthen the meaning of the utterance. Women can use italics, color, repetition, bold, capital letters, or complex lettering to highlight or reinforce certain words and stress the opinion in written text (Pebrianti, 2013).

Rising intonation on declaratives: Women tend to change their intonation in declaratives again to avoid making strong statements. As explained in Lakoff (1975), "There is a peculiar sentence intonation-pattern, found in English as far as I know only among women, which has the form of a declarative answer to a question, and is used as such, but has the rising inflection typical of a yes-no question, as well as being especially hesitant." (pp. 49-50). An example might be when someone answers a question. However, they want the listener to decide for them: "(A) When will dinner be ready? (B) Oh... around six o'clock..." (Lakoff, 1975, p. 5).

Avoidance of strong swear words: Women tend to use less strong words in their speech, as the use of swear words like shit, damn, or hell is not well seen when used by women. Instead of swearing words, women tend to use terms classified as 'meaningless' particles or weaker expletives. These are words that have no referent in interaction but that "define the social context of an utterance, indicate the relationship the speaker feels between himself

and his addressee, between himself and what he is talking about” (Lakoff, 1975, p. 44). For example, expressions such as oh dear, goodness, oh fudge, or dear me reflect that the addressee is known to the person speaking.

Super polite form: Politeness is defined by Holmes (2013) as the “behaviour which is somewhat formal and distancing, where the intention is not to intrude or impose”. Some examples of polite behaviors might include “apologising for an intrusion, opening the door for another, inviting a new neighbour in for a cup of tea, using courtesy titles like sir and madam” (Holmes, 2013). Politeness particles are terms that soften statements so that they “prevent the expression of strong statements” (Lakoff, 1975, p. 51). As Lakoff (1975) further explained, “women are believed to be experts of euphemism and know the right things to say to other people.” For example, women tend to say, “would you please close the door?” which shows a 'super polite' form rather than “would you close the door?” which shows usual polite form.

Empty adjectives: Adjectives that have the function of expressing the feeling of the speaker, in relation to admiration or approbation. This category includes some neutral adjectives, such as great, terrific, cool, and neat, and others that are representative of women’s speech, such as adorable, charming, sweet, lovely, and divine (Lakoff, 1975, p. 45). Women are free to choose to use the word neutral or women-only, whereas if men use the word women-only it will look unmasculine. The use of empty adjectives in women’s language shows that the speaker wants to show the relationship between her emotional expression and the person being addressed.

Precise color terms: According to Lakoff (1975), women have a wider lexical variety than men. A more specific example is terms related to colors. Women say the colors are frequently used, while men consider them unrealistic. Commonly used words in women’s active vocabulary include beige, lavender, maroon, mauve, magenta, mustard, pink, navy, nude, and aquamarine. Women often use precise discrimination, such as fuchsia, beige, coral, mocha, and magenta. It is a vocabulary commonly used by women, not men.

Hypercorrect grammar: The final characteristic of women’s speech is Hypercorrect grammar. According to Lakoff (1975), women are said to adhere more strictly to grammatical rules, often avoiding contractions or colloquialisms. Lakoff attributes this to societal pressures for women to conform to norms of “ladylike” behavior, as deviations might be judged more harshly. Women also pay more attention to the use of standardized language than men do, so they are more strict about the rules of language use. They avoid using modified words like am not to ain't or don't know to

dunno or dropping the g in verbs such as goin or singin, because it will make their utterances sound rough for the recipients.

Visual Grammar

Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) visual grammar outlines a method to analyze how depicted elements combine in texts to form complete and coherent visual messages. They posited that visual symbols, like language, perform three metafunctions: representational, interactive, and compositional. They argued that what is conveyed through linguistic choices—such as word selection and semantic structures—can similarly be expressed through visual elements like line, color, and perspective. As Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) assert, “the visual component of a text is an independently organized and structured message” (p. 18), meaning it carries its own set of meanings alongside or even separate from the verbal narrative. For this reason, visual grammar provides an essential toolkit for decoding the visual representations of women in the Barbie (2023) film, uncovering the implicit visual meanings that shape perceptions of femininity. However, interactive meaning is the most essential one among the three meanings of images because of its communicative feature.

Interactional Semiotic Function

The interactional semiotic function considers the viewer's relationship to the represented characters (both interactive and represented). Key elements, such as contact, attitude, social distance, and modality, reveal how characters relate to each other and to the audience. Halliday (1994) describes this function as the interpersonal metafunction, which refers to the encoding of relationships among communicative participants. For Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), “any mode has to represent a particular social relationship between the producer, the viewer, and the object represented” (p. 42). As viewers interact with the film, they form an imaginary connection with the depicted participants or with the interactive participants (image producers).

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) describe how visual resources in images represent interactions not only among depicted people, places, and objects (represented participants) but also between these subjects and viewers (interactive participants). This interaction creates three types of relationships: (1) between the depicted elements themselves, (2) between viewers and the depicted elements (reflecting viewers' attitudes toward

them), and (3) between the viewers and producers of the image, highlighting the communicative intent behind the visual design.

The use of gaze, for instance, plays a significant role in creating a contact or pseudo-social bond with the viewer, even at an imaginary level. When characters in an image look directly at the viewer, a “demand” is created, as if they were seeking engagement or a response. This engagement can vary depending on the character’s expression; a smile might invite friendliness, whereas a cold stare can create distance. When characters do not look at the viewer, the interaction is presented as an “offer,” positioning the viewer as an observer rather than a participant. Here, viewers take on the role of “invisible onlookers,” examining characters as objects of observation rather than directly engaging with them (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 119).

Attitude, related to angle or perspective, shapes the viewer’s perception of the characters. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) discussed two types of angles: horizontal and vertical. The horizontal angle emphasizes involvement or detachment by positioning participants as parallel, aligned, or divergent. A frontal horizontal angle, for example, indicates involvement, inviting viewers to engage with the character directly. In contrast, an oblique angle conveys detachment, positioning the viewer as an outsider.

Meanwhile, the vertical angle shows power relations between the represented participant and the viewer. For Martin (1968), a high angle denotes the subject as inferior or insignificant, while a low angle denotes the subject as superior or conveys a sense of exaltation and triumph. However, no power relationship is involved when the angle is set at eye level, suggesting equality.

Social distance can reveal the level of affinity between participants. As in daily life, a shorter distance usually means a closer relationship. According to Horakik (2015), as cited by Padilla and Padilla (2023), this involves the level of viewers’ involvement with the represented participants and the causal relationship of physical proximity in everyday interaction. Furthermore, in visual discourses, the choices of “close-up shot”, “medium shot”, and “long shot” suggest the interpersonal relations from intimacy to separation. Following Hall (1966), Kress & Van Leeuwen (2006, p.124-125) determined the following types of distance: intimate distance, close personal distance or the distance at which ‘one can hold or grasp the other person,’ far personal distance or the distance that ‘extends from a point that is just outside easy touching distance by one person to a point where two people can touch fingers if they both extend their arms’; close social distance or the distance at which ‘impersonal business occurs; far social distance or

the distance where business and social interaction has a more formal and impersonal character; and public distance or the distance between people who are and are to remain strangers.' It can be inferred that the closer the represented participants are to the viewer, the more intimate the relationship becomes.

Finally, modality, or the degree of realism in an image, contributes to the interactional dimension by indicating how "real" or authentic the depiction is meant to appear. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) emphasize that modality is socially constructed and varies according to cultural standards of "natural" representation. Factors like color saturation, depth, and brightness are used by image producers to create high, medium, or low modality, thus shaping how viewers perceive the truth value or credibility of the scene. To create a high modality in visual content, image creators focus on several important elements: color, which is manipulated through saturation, variation, and adjustment; contextualization, or the expression of abstract ideas; representation, or the depiction of visual details; depth, or the use of perspective; illumination, or how light is used; and brightness, which refers to the lightness or darkness of the colors.

Critical Perspectives on the Frameworks

While this study adopts Lakoff's (1975) Women's Language Theory and Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Grammar as its primary analytical frameworks, it recognizes that both models have been subject to recent critique. For example, several studies argue that Lakoff's claims about "women's language" do not universally apply across contexts. Svendsen (2021) reviewed empirical evidence and noted that features such as hedges and tag questions do not exclusively index female uncertainty; in some cases, they perform strategic, relational, or discourse-management functions. Similarly, Ulianitckaia (2021) further emphasizes that gendered linguistic behavior is shaped by social and cultural conditions rather than being determined by biological sex, echoing broader feminist linguistic critiques that challenge essentialist views of gendered communication (Cameron, 1992; Mills, 2003), calling for a more flexible and context-sensitive use of Lakoff's framework. In line with Butler's (1990) notion of gender as performative rather than inherent, this study treats Lakoff's categories as heuristic tools rather than fixed indicators of feminine identity (prescriptive), allowing a more nuanced interpretation of the speech of Barbie (2023) characters.

Visual Grammar has also been subject to critical discussion. Although widely used, scholars argue that Kress and van Leeuwen's framework offers

a generalized system that may not fully capture the complexity of dynamic filmic representations (Navarro & Adriano, 2024; Xu & Cao, 2023). Moving-image texts combine image, dialogue, sound, editing, and pacing, which can extend beyond static image analysis. By applying Visual Grammar to selected film figures from Barbie (2023), this study acknowledges these limitations while demonstrating that interactional choices—such as gaze, angle, social distance, and modality—remain productive lenses for examining gendered visual meaning. This critical stance positions the present research within ongoing debates about the adaptability of multimodal models to contemporary media forms.

Furthermore, post-feminist scholars argue that contemporary media often oscillate between empowerment and the reinforcement of traditional feminine ideals (Gill, 2007; McRobbie, 2004). The multimodal patterns observed in Barbie (2023)—such as the coexistence of linguistic vulnerability and visually agentive framings—reflect this tension. Rather than simply affirming empowerment narratives, the film's multimodal construction of femininity appears ambivalent: it foregrounds emotional expressiveness while simultaneously negotiating societal expectations. This critical engagement enables the findings to contribute more meaningfully to wider debates in feminist media studies, demonstrating how multimodal representations can both challenge and reproduce cultural understandings of gender.

Several studies employed multimodal discourse analysis to examine how films and other media use semiotic resources to convey meaning. For instance, Bateman et al. (2017) applied Kress and van Leeuwen's framework to explore how visuals, sound, and dialogue collaborate in films to shape narratives and engage viewers emotionally. Their study emphasized how these elements can reinforce or challenge genre conventions, illustrating the power of multimodal resources in filmmaking. O'Halloran (2004) analyzed cinematic texts, showing how visual techniques such as framing, lighting, and color work with dialogue to guide audience interpretation and evoke emotion. This highlighted the importance of considering both visual and linguistic modes in film analysis.

Specific to Barbie (2023), recent research has explored various aspects of the film's multimodal representation. He (2024) analyzed the Barbie (2023) movie poster using Halliday's systemic functional grammar and Kress & van Leeuwen's visual grammar, revealing how visual and textual elements construct the concepts of feminism and empowerment. Similarly, Lau (2023) conducted a feminist multimodal analysis of dancing scenes in Barbie (2023), emphasizing the visual and audio modes to explore diversity

and empowerment. Meanwhile, Zhou (2024) explored Barbie (2023) through Tajfel and Turner's social identity theory, analyzing language and visuals in character interactions to uncover societal norms and gender dynamics. A similar study was conducted by Yakali (2024), who investigated masculinity in Barbie (2023) through Butler's gender theory and Critical Discourse Analysis, examining how male characters challenge traditional gender norms. Moreover, Li (2024) analyzed Barbie (2023) within the Hollywood industry's post-feminist narratives, critiquing the male gaze and exploring themes of self-identity and body acceptance.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive research design to explore how women are represented in the Barbie (2023) film. As Creswell (2012) notes, this approach allows for an in-depth examination of human behavior and communication through words, images, and actions. It was chosen to provide a detailed account of both verbal and visual elements as they appear in the film. Specifically, the qualitative data included the spoken utterances and visual scenes featuring the film's two main female characters, Stereotypical Barbie and Gloria. These elements were categorized and interpreted in tabular forms based on recurring linguistic and visual patterns, thereby offering a systematic account of how femininity is portrayed in media.

To obtain the data, the film Barbie (2023) served as the sole source. With a duration of 113 minutes and 54 seconds, the film was purposively selected for its thematic engagement with gender identity, its widespread exposure in Philippine media, and its use of English. Data were gathered through documentation, which involved observing multimodal resources (e.g., text, images, or videos), taking notes, and capturing scenes. The film was viewed using the Loklok application, and the official script transcript was downloaded from <https://scrapsfromtheloft.com/movies/barbie-2023-transcript/> to aid in identifying and verifying utterances. Subsequently, dialogues were cross-checked with on-screen subtitles for accuracy, after which utterances reflecting Lakoff's (1975) women's language features were manually coded. Visual data were obtained by capturing screenshots of key moments relevant to the analysis.

The data analysis was conducted in sequential stages. Initially, linguistic data were examined using Lakoff's Women's Language Theory. Only dialogues spoken by the two main female characters were included because they carry the central narrative and embody the film's primary

representations of femininity. Excerpts were selected if they contained at least one of Lakoff's women's language features, typically during key narrative moments illustrating emotional expression, conflict, or decision-making, and when they reflected shifts in character agency or interaction. Each feature (e.g., lexical hedges, tag questions, and intensifiers) was identified, classified, and counted to determine its prevalence in the selected characters' speech. Following this, visual figures were analyzed using the interactional semiotic function of Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Grammar, comprising four key elements: contact, attitude, social distance, and modality. Selection focused on scenes where gaze direction clearly indicated demand (direct gaze) or offer (indirect gaze) images; where camera angle—high, low, or eye-level—shaped perceived power relations; and where camera distance—close-up, medium, or long shot—significantly influenced viewer intimacy, emotional involvement, or social distance. Figures were also examined for modality contrasts between the hyper-stylized aesthetic of Barbie Land and the more realistic portrayal of the Real World. This selection procedure ensured that the analyzed data reflected the film's major multimodal strategies for constructing representations of women.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the results of the feminist linguistic and visual analysis conducted on the Barbie (2023) film. Employing Lakoff's (1975) Women's Language Theory and Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) Visual Grammar, the study identified women's language features and explicated the construction of interactional meaning in the film.

Analysis of Women's Language Features

The first objective of this paper was to identify how female characters were represented based on women's language features. The analysis revealed various features, including lexical hedges, intensifiers, and emphatic stress. These were quantified and expressed as percentages based on their frequency of use by the main female characters. The analyses were divided into ten (10) sub-sections according to the type of language feature found. Each excerpt taken from the Barbie (2023) film was accompanied by its corresponding scene timeframe to indicate the data source. Moreover, some features of women's language identified by Lakoff (1975), such as emphatic stress and rising intonation in declaratives, required audio analysis. To address this, the study employed Jefferson Transcription Notation to represent vocal features

even in the absence of audio.

Among the ten (10) women’s language features identified by Robin Lakoff, only nine (9) features were identified in the utterances of the main characters. These included lexical hedges or fillers, intensifiers, tag questions, emphatic stress, rising intonation in declarative sentences, avoidance of strong swear words, super-polite forms, empty adjectives, and hypercorrect grammar. The precise color terms were not found in any of the utterances of the main characters.

The table below illustrates the frequency of the women’s language features found in the utterances of Barbie, Margot, and Gloria.

Table 1
Frequency and Percentage of Women’s Language Features

TYPES OF WOMEN’S LANGUAGE FEATURES	BARBIE MARGOT	GLORIA	FREQUENCY (F)	PERCENTAGE (%)
Lexical Hedge or Fillers	74	15	89	31.44%
Intensifiers	68	20	88	31.09%
Tag Question	2	0	2	0.70 %
Emphatic Stress	18	44	62	21.90%
Rising Intonation on Declarative	7	3	10	3.53%
Avoidance Strong Swear Words	5	2	7	2.47%
Super Polite Forms	9	2	11	3.88%
Empty Adjective	7	1	8	2.82%
Precise Color Terms	0	0	0	0%
Hypercorrect Grammar	3	3	6	2.12%
Total			283	100%

Table 1 above shows a total of 283 identified instances of women's language features. Among these, the most dominant feature is the use of lexical hedges or fillers, which occurred 89 times, making up 31.44% of the total. This is followed by the use of intensifiers, which appeared 88 times, accounting for 31.09% of the overall features observed. The third most frequent feature is emphatic stress, with 62 occurrences (21.90%), indicating its prominent role in expressing strong emotion or emphasis in speech. Meanwhile, features such as super polite forms (3.88%), rising intonation on declarative sentences (3.53%), and empty adjectives (2.82%) were also present but to a lesser extent. Moreover, less frequently occurring features include avoidance of strong swear words (7 instances, 2.47%) and hypercorrect grammar (6 instances, 2.12%). The least frequently used feature is the tag question, which only appeared 2 times (0.70%). Notably, the use of precise color terms was not found in any of the main female characters' utterances.

Lexical Hedge or Fillers

Hedges and fillers are expressions used to signal uncertainty, politeness, hesitation, or indirectness. In pragmatics, hedges are defined as sounds, words, or phrases that function to reduce the impact of assertive or forceful utterances between the speaker and the hearer. They are used in a sentence to suggest ambiguity, likelihood, caution, or indecision, as opposed to conveying full accuracy, assurance, confidence, or decisiveness. Lakoff (1975) defines hedges as “words or phrases that represent uncertainty,” including I think, it seems like, I guess, you know, well, perhaps, and maybe. Tamulis (2017) states that a filler is a word or sound used by a speaker to indicate a pause, hesitation, transition, or to hold their turn in conversation. It is said that women use fillers more often than men do. They tend to use fillers that match the rhythm or tone of their speech, such as uh, hm, and oh.

Data 1 (Scene 00:20:14 – 00:20:20)

Weird Barbie: Never seen that before.

Barbie Margot: Really?

Weird Barbie: Whoa.

Barbie Margot: Okay. Well, can you, you know, fix them?

The data above is from the conversation between Barbie Margot and Weird Barbie, shortly after Barbie Margot begins experiencing distressing changes in her appearance—most notably, the flattening of her feet. In a

panic, she visits “Weird Barbie,” a doll who has been labeled eccentric due to being played with too hard. Barbie, distressed and uncertain, seeks guidance on how to fix herself. Her tone is hesitant, and her language reflects this insecurity.

Barbie Margot’s use of “Well” and “you know” functions as classic lexical hedges and fillers. The filler “well” serves as a pause, allowing women a moment to consider their next words. Barbie also used the lexical hedge ‘you know’ in her answer. She used this to reinforce her opinion about what she is talking about. “You know” is often used to seek mutual understanding and implies shared knowledge, even when such knowledge might not exist, making it a polite strategy to mitigate imposition. These hedges reflect Barbie’s vulnerability and need for guidance. According to Lakoff (1975), women use such a feature more frequently as a linguistic strategy to remain non-confrontational, reflecting hesitation, doubt, and indirectness. Here, Barbie is uncertain of Weird Barbie’s abilities, so she uses hedges to make her request more socially acceptable and less demanding. This interpretation is further supported by Wulandari and Pusita (2024), who noted that this feature is also known as pauses, takes the form of phrases, or serves as fillers to show a lack of confidence or incomplete information. Furthermore, Azizah (2021) claims that fillers such as ‘well’ are used by female speakers as strategies to avoid being too direct and to seek agreement subtly.

While Lakoff’s (1975) claim that hedges reflect women’s uncertainty has been influential, modern feminist linguists argue that hedging can also signal strategic politeness rather than simply weakness. Holmes (2013) and Coates (2015) explain that hedges like ‘well’ and ‘you know’ often serve to build rapport, show empathy, and maintain conversational harmony. This means that Barbie’s hedging may reflect relational sensitivity rather than linguistic insecurity. Similarly, post-feminist theorists such as McRobbie (2004) and Gill (2007) argue that contemporary femininity often interweaves emotional expressiveness with empowered self-presentation, challenging earlier assumptions that features like hedging indicate passivity. Within this framework, Barbie’s use of hedges reflects a communicative style oriented toward relational awareness rather than linguistic uncertainty. As Genz and Brabon (2009) emphasize, post-feminist discourse positions women’s interactional sensitivity as a form of strategic agency rather than a sign of weakness. This aligns with Butler’s (1990) view of gender as performative, where linguistic choices help construct femininity as both relational and agentive. Contemporary critique also highlights that hedges are used by people of all genders in different contexts (Mills, 2003), suggesting that Lakoff’s framework, while foundational, may overgeneralize women’s

linguistic behavior. Even so, Barbie's use of hedges reveals how femininity is linguistically shaped through politeness, empathy, and social sensitivity.

Intensifiers

Both women and men use intensifiers, but women tend to use them more frequently (Lakoff, 1975). Intensifiers are words, usually adverbs or adjectives, that have little meaning on their own. However, they are used to strengthen or emphasize another adjective, verb, or adverb. Common examples include so, very, just, really, extremely, absolutely, and completely. These words help either reduce or increase the emotional intensity of a speaker's statement. Intensifiers can also subtly guide the listener's expected feelings toward what is being said. Talbot (2010) supports this claim, stating that women frequently use intensifiers in their speech to heighten their audience's feelings and emotions.

Data 2 (Scene 00:13:15 – 00:13:24)

Barbie Alexandra: This is a real rager, Barbie.

Barbie Margot: THANKS, BARBIE! Gosh, this night is just perfect.

Barbie Sharon: It's perfectly Perfect!

Barbie Emma: You look so beautiful, Barbie!

Barbie Margot: Thanks, Barbie. I feel so beautiful.

The data above is taken from the conversation between Barbie Margot and other Barbies. This scene happens during a joyful party at Barbie Margot's Dreamhouse. The place is full of energy as all the Barbies gather to dance, laugh, and celebrate together. Barbie Margot is in a good mood, smiling and interacting with the others. She felt so happy that night that she expressed a compliment, saying that the night was perfect.

The use of intensifiers in this exchange is prominent and intentional. Barbie Margot's phrase "Gosh, this night is just perfect" uses "just" as an intensifier to heighten the sense of completeness and perfection of the event. It reflects her overwhelming satisfaction, suggesting that nothing could make the night any better. When Barbie Emma compliments Margot by saying, "You look so beautiful," she uses "so" to strongly emphasize her appreciation for Margot's appearance. This word choice strengthens the compliment, making it more heartfelt and impactful, highlighting the emotionally expressive and affirming nature of women's speech. Therefore, this supports Lakoff's (1975) claim that intensifiers are employed to emphasize praise and strengthen statements. The moment also reflects

women's tendency to use supportive language that builds relationships, which is a central aspect of women's language patterns. This aligns with Rizki, EF, and Fauzi's (2022) study, which found that female characters frequently employed intensifiers such as *so* and *very* to stress emotional expression and amplify compliments, thereby reinforcing solidarity. This reflects a broader pattern in female discourse, where mutual appreciation and interpersonal connections are emphasized. Similarly, Holmes (2013) argues that intensifiers can also index stance-taking, enthusiasm, and interpersonal involvement. Rather than signaling linguistic weakness, intensifiers allow speakers, especially women, to heighten affect and strengthen interpersonal bonds.

Moreover, feminist discourse scholars note that women's use of amplifying language often reflects solidarity building rather than insecurity (Talbot, 2010). Thus, Barbie Margot's repeated use of *just* and *so* demonstrates her emotional alignment with other Barbies, expressing joy and social connection. Post-feminist interpretations would add that such expressive language both affirms traditional femininity and reframes it as a source of empowerment rather than limitation. Scholars such as McRobbie (2004, 2009) and Gill (2007) argue that post-feminism emphasizes emotional expressiveness, individuality, and agency within contemporary media culture. However, scholars such as Mills (2003) critique Lakoff's binary framing, arguing that intensifier use varies across contexts, identities, and interpersonal goals. Therefore, Barbie's intensifiers should be viewed not as passive emotional leakage, but as meaningful linguistic resources used to construct affiliative femininity.

Tag Question

Tag questions are short questions added at the end of a statement. They are described as grammatical structures in which a declarative sentence is followed by an attached interrogative clause, or "tag." According to Lakoff (1975), women tend to turn statements into questions to reduce their impact. Tag questions are often used to express uncertainty, seek confirmation, or gain approval from others. These forms can reflect a speaker's desire to be polite, considerate, or less dominant in conversations. Tag questions are commonly used when the speaker is unsure about a topic. Examples include: *don't you?*, *haven't we?*, *did you?*, and *isn't it?*

Data 3 (Scene 00:18:31 – 00:18:35)

Barbie Alexandra: You're malfunctioning.

Barbie Margot: What? No, I'm just, I'm... Am I?

The data above is taken from the conversation between Barbie Margot and Barbie Alexandra. This scene takes place at the beach in Barbie Land, where Barbie Margot begins to physically and emotionally malfunction. After days of feeling strange, thinking about death, having bad breath, taking a cold shower, and falling off her roof, she suddenly topples to the sand while trying to walk. She discovered she was no longer on tiptoes; she just got flat feet. The Barbies around her, including Alexandra and Emma, rush to help and express concern. Barbie Alexandra bluntly tells her she's "malfunctioning," which surprises Barbie Margot. She instinctively denies it by saying, "No, I'm just..." but suddenly pauses and questions herself, asking, "Am I?"

Tag questions are often used by women not only to confirm information but also to reduce the directness of a statement. In this case, Barbie first rejects the idea that she is malfunctioning by saying, "No, I'm just..." but then she hesitates and ends her sentence with "Am I?" This short question shows her uncertainty. It highlights her confusion and inner conflict, suggesting that something deeper is changing within her, though she doesn't yet fully understand it. Rather than firmly denying the claim, she opens herself to the possibility that it might be true. The rising intonation in "Am I?" also invites others in the conversation to either reassure her or agree, which aligns with Lakoff's (1975) idea that women often use language to seek confirmation and maintain connection. This reflects a common pattern in women's speech, where tag questions soften a statement and create space for the listener to respond. It also reflects Barbie Margot's emotional state—she is unsure of herself and begins to question her own identity. This aligns with Amalia's (2022) findings, which showed that tag questions were among the most frequent linguistic features used by female characters in film to express uncertainty or seek support. This is further supported by Rizki et al. (2022), who found that female characters frequently use tag questions to express uncertainty or to seek affirmation, reflecting broader patterns in women's language use.

Although Lakoff (1975) associated tag questions with women's uncertainty, contemporary feminist linguists argue that tags also serve multifunctional purposes, including facilitation, politeness, and involvement (Holmes, 2013). Instead of reflecting powerlessness, tag questions can reflect a collaborative conversational style aligned with women's socialization

toward relational communication. In this sense, Barbie's use of "Am I?" functions not only to express vulnerability but also to create space for interaction and relational support. Coates (2015) similarly argues that such usage promotes solidarity rather than signaling weakness. McRobbie (2009) and Gill (2007) note that modern femininity often negotiates the tension between traditional forms of self-doubt and newer expressions of reflexive self-awareness. Barbie's tag question reflects this negotiation, performing both emotional openness and emerging agency. At the same time, Cameron (1992) cautions that Lakoff's framework risks reinforcing stereotypes by labeling certain linguistic features as inherently 'female.' Therefore, Barbie's tag questions should be understood not merely as markers of insecurity but as strategic linguistic resources for negotiating identity and relationality.

Emphatic Stress

Lakoff (1975) defines emphatic stress as the deliberate emphasis on particular words to highlight their importance in a speaker's statement. Women tend to use this linguistic feature to express intensity, emphasize emotions, or convey urgency. It happens when a woman wants to make a stronger statement. Safitri (2017) further notes that "women generally have a tendency to emphasize certain part[s] of their utterances to help them convey the specific meaning of their utterances" (p. 5). Nevertheless, when women use emphatic stress, they are free to select whichever word in the sentence they wish to stress, and this is usually done by increasing the pitch range.

Data 4 (Scene 01:13:49 – 01:14:50)

*Gloria: It is literally impossible to be a woman. You are **SO** beautiful and **SO** smart, and it kills me that you don't think you're good enough. Like we have to always be extraordinary, but somehow we're always doing it wrong. You're supposed to be **THIN** but not **TOO THIN**, and you can never say you want to be **THIN**, you have to say you want to be **HEALTHY**, but you also have to **BE** thin. You have to **HAVE** money, but you can't **ASK** for money because that's crass. You have to be a boss, but you can't be mean. You have to **LEAD**, but you can't squash other people's ideas. You're supposed to **LOVE** being a mother but don't talk about your kids all the damn time. You have to be a career woman, but also **ALWAYS** be looking out for other people. You have to answer for men's bad behavior, which is **INSANE**, but if you point that out, then you're accused of complaining. You're supposed to be pretty*

*for men but not SO pretty that you **TEMPT** them too much or threaten other women because you're supposed to be part of the sisterhood but always **STAND OUT** and **ALWAYS** be grateful. But never forget that the system is rigged, so **FIND** a way to acknowledge that but **ALSO** always be grateful. You have to never get old, never be rude, never show off, never be selfish, never fall down, never fail, never show fear, never get out of line. It's too **HARD**, it's too contradictory and nobody gives you a medal or says thank you. And it turns out, in fact, that not only are you doing it all wrong, but also **EVERYTHING** is your fault. I'm just so tired of watching myself and every single other woman tie herself into knots so that people will like us. And if all of that is also true for a doll just representing a woman, then I don't even know!*

This scene unfolds at a turning point in the movie. Barbie Margot, having internalized the contradicting pressures and overwhelming expectations imposed on women, begins to emotionally break down. Seeing Barbie's despair, Gloria, who has experienced the same struggles in the real world, delivers this intense monologue. Gloria says all her opinions about how social expectations are unrealistic and contradictory.

Gloria's speech is a profound example of emphatic stress, where emotional intensity is embedded in nearly every line through strong pitch, repetition, and vocal emphasis. In this case, Gloria uses emphatic stress heavily in her monologue; it is evident that she voices her frustration with social expectations for women that she considers unrealistic and contradictory. She emphasizes some key words to highlight the pressure and double standards women face, making her speech feel more urgent and emotionally powerful. Notably, the dialogue bursts with stressed content words such as **THIN, SO, TOO, INSANE**, and others, delivered with rising pitch and strong emotion to show how unrealistic these expectations can be. Two other examples of strong emphasis in her speech are the underlined and italicized words *kills* and *doll*. This use of emphasis aligns with Jefferson notation, where capitalized text signifies increased volume or heightened intensity, and underlined words indicate deliberate stress. In this monologue, Gloria uses stress or emphasis as a rhetorical tool to underline the absurdity and contradiction in how women are expected to behave. This aligns with Safitri's (2017) claim that women often emphasize certain parts of their speech to convey their meaning clearly. This supports how Gloria uses stress to help her message stand out. Additionally, Oktapiani et al. (2017) observed that female characters employ emphatic stress to assert themselves and express intense feelings.

Furthermore, reconsidering emphatic stress through contemporary linguistic and feminist scholarship reveals a shift from interpreting it as mere emotional excess to recognizing it as a deliberate rhetorical strategy. Although emphatic stress has historically been associated with heightened emotionality in women's speech, recent studies show that emphasizing particular words can signal agency, stance, and communicative intention (Coates, 2015; Holmes, 2013). Gloria's emphatic delivery intensifies her critique, demonstrating assertiveness and rhetorical control rather than uncontrolled emotion. Feminist and post-feminist theorists further note that expressive linguistic features can function as forms of resistance to gendered expectations; McRobbie (2009) and Gill (2007) argue that emotional expressiveness within post-feminist media often reframes feeling as a mode of empowerment. Cameron (1992) likewise contends that women's so-called "expressive" speech should not be dismissed as overly emotional but understood as a legitimate communicative strategy. Accordingly, emphatic stress in Barbie (2023) operates as a complex linguistic resource that conveys conviction, emotional depth, and social critique rather than conforming to stereotypical depictions of feminine emotionality.

Rising Intonation on Declarative

Lakoff (1975) argues that rising intonation in the declarative form is used to answer a typical yes-no question, as well as to be hesitant. People employ rising intonation to confirm or ask a question. Women may use uptalk when they feel uncertain, wish to sound less assertive and more polite, or when asking for confirmation. As cited in Murti (2018), Lakoff suggests that women use hedges when they hesitate to offer a statement of fact. Therefore, by adapting the sound to the rising tone, they appear to offer their response.

Data 5 (Scene 00:21:39 – 00:21:44)

Weird Barbie: There's the girl and the doll. And never the twain shall cross.

Barbie Margot: The twain is crossing?

Weird Barbie: Yes.

The data above is taken from the conversation between Barbie Margot and Weird Barbie. Weird Barbie discusses the separation between the human world and Barbie Land, leading Barbie to question the merging of the two.

Barbie's inquiry, "The twain is crossing?↑" uses rising intonation to express confusion and to seek confirmation. Barbie's literal interpretation, expressed with a rising tone, signals uncertainty. The declarative tone mimics a question, inviting clarification. As per Lakoff (1975), this exemplifies a woman using uptalk when navigating unfamiliar or abstract territory, reinforcing its function of expressing uncertainty and requesting confirmation. Barbie's intonation here underscores her difficulty in grasping the concept of the two worlds intersecting. The use of uptalk here also invites further explanation from Weird Barbie, signaling her lack of clarity on the matter. Coates (2004) reinforces this idea by highlighting that women often use rising intonation when confronting unfamiliar or unexpected circumstances, as a way of opening up space for additional information. This aligns with Syarifudin and Gunawan's (2022) study, which found that women often use rising intonation to express confusion in unusual or extraordinary situations. Similarly, Talbot (2010) argues that rising intonation in women's speech can also function as a softening device, making their uncertainty less confrontational and more collaborative.

Recent studies also show that rising intonation can help speakers seek clarity, show openness, invite confirmation, or encourage co-construction of meaning, rather than indicate doubt or weakness (Warren, 2016). Barbie's rising tone expresses confusion but also encourages explanation to maintain interaction and seek clarity, aligning with women's socially conditioned tendency toward cooperative discourse (Coates, 2015). Moreover, feminist linguists argue that uptalk often supports cooperation and understanding in conversation (Mills, 2003). This means that rising intonation should be viewed as a communication strategy rather than solely a sign of insecurity. From a post-feminist perspective, rising intonation can also be interpreted as a linguistic space where uncertainty coexists with agency, reflecting complex negotiations of identity in moments of confusion or cognitive challenge.

Avoidance of Strong Swear Words

Women use harsh or swear words less than men, in line with society's assumption that women should be gentle and graceful, not rude. When women are angry, they tend to control their emotions and think about what they want to say. They do not want to hurt the interlocutor and maintain their image. Instead of saying shit or damn, they prefer to use words like "oh dear, goodness, and oh fudge. Generally, when someone uses these expressions, they are experiencing an intense feeling toward an object, person, or thing.

Data 6 (Scene 00:29:03 – 00:29:16)

Barbie Margot: Geez, you would think a construction site at lunchtime would be the perfect place for a little woman power, but this one was so... male.

Ken Ryan: Everything is almost like... reversed here.

The data above is taken from the conversation between Barbie Margot and Ken Ryan. In this scene, Barbie and Ken are in the real world, where she observes the gendered atmosphere of a construction site.

Barbie Margot used the word 'Geez' to avoid strong swear words. Her expressive exclamation reflects frustration or discomfort but is a softened substitute for stronger expressions like Jesus or damn. The use of the word 'Geez' itself is to soften the actual word so as not to sound too harsh to the interlocutor. This aligns with the linguistic feature of women avoiding swear words, even when they feel alienated or disturbed. 'Geez' allows Barbie to express disapproval in a socially acceptable way, demonstrating internalized gender norms around proper female speech. It showcases Barbie's reluctance to use harsh language despite her evident discomfort. Lakoff (1975) also explained that women are not meant to speak harshly and that they avoid swearing because it is considered unladylike. She also noted that women often opt for euphemisms to avoid sounding aggressive or vulgar. This is further supported by Lubis and Bahri (2020), who state that the function of avoiding swear words is to show a strong expression of the speaker's opinion, by using more subtle swearing and/or not using harsh words at all. It reinforces Barbie's ladylike persona and aligns with societal expectations that women should speak politely and moderate their emotional expressions, especially in moments of stress or discomfort. Those are seen as taboo in a specific culture and bring negative impacts. In society, women and children cannot swear as freely as men (Oktapiani et al., 2017). Nevertheless, Lakoff's (1975) claim that women avoid strong swear words has been widely debated, with later feminist scholars arguing that swearing is shaped more by context, identity performance, and social norms than by biological sex (Mills, 2003; Cameron, 1992). While Barbie's substitution of strong swear words with milder alternatives aligns with traditionally feminine politeness norms, this linguistic choice can also reflect cultural expectations rather than personal insecurity. Holmes (2013) notes that avoiding harsh expletives can function as a strategy for maintaining social harmony and projecting politeness. In feminist discourse, such choices illustrate the tension between conforming to normative feminine speech and resisting linguistic stereotypes. Therefore, post-feminist perspectives

argue that women's avoidance or adoption of strong language can be strategic, highlighting how femininity is actively performed and negotiated rather than biologically predetermined.

Super Polite Forms

Lakoff (1975) emphasizes three super polite forms: avoiding swear words, extensive use of euphemisms (when a word becomes associated with anything unpleasant or embarrassing, individuals may seek euphemisms to avoid the discomfort), and using more particles in a request sentence. Some examples of euphemisms include saying passed away instead of died and put to sleep instead of euthanize. Alongside euphemisms, women employ modals such as should, could, would, and might when making requests and giving orders to sound less direct and more polite.

Data 7 (Scene 00:49:34 – 00:49:46)

1950 Woman: I always find I think best at kitchen tables. Tea?
Barbie Margot: Uh, yes, please.

The data above is taken from the scene when Barbie is offered tea by an old woman in the 1950s setting. She responds to the offer of tea with a polite, yet casual, affirmative. This moment demonstrates Barbie's responsiveness to social norms, reflecting her adherence to polite conventions in unfamiliar settings.

Barbie's response, "Uh, yes, please," employs super-polite forms, particularly in the request, which is softened by the word "please." Here, "please" turns a simple affirmation into a more gracious request, aligning with cultural expectations of politeness. This type of politeness is often used in situations where individuals are trying to avoid appearing demanding or rude, especially when interacting with someone of higher perceived status. According to Lakoff (1975), as cited by Agustia (2023), women are not considered disrespectful because they are skilled at using euphemisms, which are associated with positive expression, wisdom, and the appropriate way to speak to others. In this case, Barbie Margot shows respect for the older woman in the 1950s setting by using polite language. Therefore, Barbie points out that she knows the appropriate language to use with her interlocutor. Aini (2016) reinforces this idea by highlighting that women are supposed to maintain "lady-like" behavior, unlike men, and are generally considered more polite than their male counterparts in speech.

Although Lakoff (1975) linked women's use of polite forms to societal

subordination, modern feminists argue that politeness is a social practice that expresses alignment, respect, and relational competence (Mills, 2003). Barbie's use of "please" reflects learned politeness norms but also demonstrates her ability to maintain social harmony through linguistic choices. From a feminist perspective, super polite forms reveal how cultural expectations of gentleness and refinement shape femininity, yet post-feminist theorists note that politeness can also be a form of agency—allowing women to navigate power dynamics strategically (Cameron, 1992). Thus, Barbie's politeness cannot be reduced to weakness; it reflects the ongoing negotiation between traditional expectations of feminine politeness and contemporary notions of empowered femininity.

Empty Adjective

Adjectives are words used to describe something or someone. They often appear immediately before the noun they modify. According to Lakoff (1975), empty adjectives express approval based on personal emotions rather than indicating a general reaction. Instead of providing specific facts, women tend to use empty adjectives to convey their emotional responses. Lakoff points out that many adjectives used to express admiration or approbation are strongly associated with feminine speech. Words such as great, terrific, cool, and neat are considered neutral, while adorable, charming, sweet, and lovely are often seen as feminine-only. Nevertheless, women can use both types, but men typically do not.

Data 8 (Scene 01:32:45 – 01:32:53)

Barbie Margot: Ken. Are you okay?

Ken Ryan: Yeah. Totally.

Barbie Margot: "It's okay if you're crying. You know, I cried too. It's actually kind of amazing."

The data above is taken from the conversation between Barbie Margot and Ken Ryan. This moment occurs during Barbie's emotional reconciliation with Ken after the climax of their journey. Barbie comforts Ken as he expresses vulnerability, affirming the value of emotional expression.

The adjective "amazing" is categorized by Lakoff (1975) as an empty adjective—a term conveying admiration without providing specific content or rationale. Its function here is affective rather than descriptive. Barbie is not analyzing the act of crying logically, but rather expressing an

emotional connection. The modifier ‘kind of’ further softens the certainty of the statement, increasing its intimacy and empathy. Thus, the empty adjective aligns with Lakoff’s (1975) assertion that women tend to use language that emphasizes emotional expression and interpersonal connection.

Comparably, modern feminist linguists argue that evaluative adjectives play a key role in expressing affect, solidarity, and emotional alignment (Holmes, 2013; Coates, 2015). Barbie’s use of “amazing” fosters empathy and relational closeness, reflecting women’s tendency toward rapport-oriented communication, rather than being linguistically “empty,” such adjectives index affective stance and interpersonal warmth—qualities central to many women’s communicative styles. However, Cameron (1992) cautions that labeling such adjectives as inherently feminine reinforces stereotypes. A post-feminist reading recognizes that while these words historically align with femininity, they also empower characters to construct emotional connections and articulate nuanced experiences. Today, such adjectives are recognized as meaningful tools for expressing feelings and strengthening relationships.

Hypercorrect Grammar

According to Lakoff (1975), women tend to use hypercorrect grammar to conform to linguistic norms and avoid appearing unrefined or impolite. This feature includes the use of complete grammatical structures, correct verb forms, and standard pronunciation, avoiding slang or contractions like *goin’* for *going*. Men tend to drop the *g*’s, whereas women pronounce the phoneme /*g*/ in gerund forms to adopt the more prestigious standard variety of English. Therefore, women are more socially conditioned to speak with precision and correctness as a form of politeness and self-discipline.

Data 9 (Scene 00:27:57 – 00:28:03)

Barbie Margot: What’s going on?

Beach Dude: Give us a smile, blondie.

Barbie Margot: Why are these men looking at me?

Barbie walks through Venice Beach in the real world and starts feeling objectified for the first time. She is confused and disoriented by the male gaze and unwanted attention.

Barbie again employs grammatically complete sentences: “What’s going on?” and “Why are these men looking at me?” These utterances use proper subject-verb agreement, correct auxiliaries, and standard verb forms.

The use of "going" instead of the relaxed "goin'," as discussed by Lakoff (1975), reinforces Barbie's tendency toward hypercorrect grammar. Women often use standard language more than men. Even in moments of distress and vulnerability, Barbie maintains correct language use, highlighting her polished and socially conditioned speech. Her grammatical precision not only emphasizes composure but also reflects the societal expectation that women should remain "proper" even in emotionally charged or confusing situations. This aligns with Coates (2004), who notes that women are more likely to adhere to standard language forms to maintain social respectability. Similarly, Trudgill (2000) stated that women are more conscious of linguistic norms than men. It makes women choose not to speak out of linguistic norms. Furthermore, Xia (2013) states that women pay more attention to syntactic accuracy. When expressing her thoughts, she would clarify her speech by using proper grammar.

However, recent feminist linguists argue that hypercorrect grammar should not be viewed only as a sign of women's desire to appear "proper," but also as a strategic choice linked to social awareness and identity work (Holmes, 2013; Mills, 2003). Using standard grammar can signal professionalism, credibility, and politeness, especially in situations where women feel observed or judged. Cameron (1992) also notes that labeling hypercorrect speech as a uniquely feminine feature risks reinforcing stereotypes about how women "should" speak. Instead, a post-feminist perspective views Barbie's precise grammar as a way of navigating unfamiliar or uncomfortable situations while maintaining control and clarity. This shows that hypercorrect grammar functions not only as a reflection of social expectations but also as a resource women use to manage impression, maintain dignity, and assert linguistic competence.

In summary, the analysis of the linguistic features used by the female characters in Barbie (2023) reveals a consistent pattern of speech associated with traditionally feminine language. While Lakoff's (1975) framework provided an initial lens for identifying and categorizing these features, the findings also show that these forms of speech do more than reflect uncertainty or politeness. Across the data, the characters used these features to express emotion, build connection, seek clarity, maintain cooperation, and navigate social expectations, functions supported by more recent feminist linguistic research. Overall, the linguistic findings contribute to broader discussions in feminist linguistics by illustrating how women's language features function in contemporary media: not as stereotypes, but as flexible resources for expressing identity and navigating social relationships.

Analysis of Visual Structure through Interactional Semiotic Function

The second objective of this paper was to examine how interactive meanings were constructed in relevant scenes from the Barbie (2023) film, using the Visual Grammar framework postulated by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006). The analysis explored the relationship between represented and interactive participants. It focused on the visual semiotic choices used to represent the main female characters and how these choices shaped viewer engagement and gender representation.

On contact, the analysis revealed that the majority of the selected figures employed offers (e.g., Figures 1, 3, 4, and 6), in which the characters' gaze was directed away from the viewer. According to Royce, the presence or absence of visual techniques determines the speech function of a particular visual. The direction of a participant's gaze has potential meaning regardless of whether direct eye contact is established. In this film, the frequent use of offers positions the viewer as an onlooker, fostering a sense of detachment from the events being represented. This further situates the participants as objects of observation among "invisible onlookers" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), highlighting how the film favors storytelling over direct audience interaction. However, Figures 2 and 5 depict demand acts, in which Barbie gazes directly at the audience. These rare moments establish an imaginary relationship (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), inviting emotional involvement.

Regarding attitude or perspective, most figures employed a frontal horizontal angle to position the viewer within the characters' world. This angle created a sense of presence and emotional involvement, as seen in Figures 2, 4, 5, and 6. The vertical angle, on the other hand, influenced the viewer's perceived relationship to power. For example, Figure 1 used a low angle to depict Giant Barbie, thereby elevating her symbolic importance and creating a sense of awe. Meanwhile, Figures 2, 4, 5, and 6 employed eye-level shots, which, according to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), promote a feeling of equality and identification between the viewer and the character. Conversely, Figure 3 employed a high vertical angle, portraying Barbie in a passive or observed state, contributing to a sense of the viewer's detachment and dominance (Yao & Zhuo, 2018, p. 127).

In terms of social distance, the film strategically modulated viewer affinity through varying shot types. Long shots, such as in Figures 1 and 3, established impersonal social distance, positioning Barbie within a larger environment and signaling a more observational stance. Close-up and medium close-up shots, seen in Figures 2 and 5, created greater intimacy,

allowing the viewer to perceive emotional nuances and form a more personal connection. According to Hall (1966, as cited in Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), such framing suggests social proximity akin to that between friends or family. Medium shots, used in Figures 4 and 6, struck a balance, providing moderate engagement suitable for everyday social interaction.

As for modality, visual realism varied across settings. Figures 1, 3, 4, and 6, which were set in Barbie Land, reflected low modality, characterized by highly saturated colors, less contextual detail, and an overall stylized appearance. This artificial aesthetic reinforced the dreamlike, fantastical tone of Barbie Land, distancing the viewer from any real-world identification. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) explain that modality is influenced by elements such as color saturation, illumination, and background detail, all of which in Barbie Land leaned toward abstraction and idealization. By contrast, Figures 2 and 5, which were set in the real world or moments of personal emotion, showed high modality, marked by muted tones, more detailed contexts, and higher representational realism. These figures encouraged greater viewer involvement by presenting more believable settings and emotional authenticity.

Below is the tabular presentation of the visual grammar analysis of the Barbie (2023) film based on interactional semiotic functions.

Table 2
Interactional Analysis in the Selected Figures

FIGURES	CONTACT	ATTITUDE	SOCIAL DISTANCE	MODALITY
1	Offer	Frontal, horizontal angle; low vertical angle	Long shot; impersonal	Medium modality on color and representation
2	Demand	Frontal, horizontal angle; eye-level	Medium close-up shot; close	Medium modality on color and representation (confident smile)
3	Offer	Frontal, horizontal angle; high vertical angle	Long shot; far personal distance	Low modality on stylized color and contextualization
4	Offer	Frontal, horizontal angle; eye-level	Medium shot; personal	Low modality on stylized color and representation
5	Demand	Frontal, horizontal angle; eye-level	Close-up shot; intimate	High modality on representation (tears, expression) and color
6	Offer	Frontal, horizontal angle; eye-level	Medium shot; personal	High modality on representation (gentle expression) and color

Analysis of Scene 1: Giant Barbie (1950s Barbie Arrival Scene)

This scene powerfully introduces Giant Barbie (Margot Robbie) as a transformative figure, disrupting the status quo (playing dolls) in the children present (Gerwig, 2023).



Figure 1. Giant Barbie towering over the children in the opening desert sequence.



Figure 2. Giant Barbie winking directly at the viewer during her introduction

The scene begins with showing Giant Barbie in a 1950s black-and-white striped swimsuit, towering over small children in a desert-like setting (Figure 1). The background features a hazy orange-brown sky and stylized rock formations. In terms of contact, the figure employs an offer act, with Barbie's gaze directed slightly to the side, avoiding direct eye contact. As explained by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), an absent gaze constitutes an offer act, presenting the participant for contemplation rather than interaction. This detachment positions the viewer as a passive onlooker. Similarly, Wang (2023) notes that offers are often used in films to portray imaginary or mysterious worlds. The social distance created by the framing is impersonal, reinforcing Barbie's symbolic scale and emphasizing her dominance (Hall, 1966, as cited in Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Meanwhile, the low vertical angle elevates Barbie's presence, suggesting power and control over the scene (He, 2024). Despite this sense of distance, the frontal horizontal angle allows some involvement, aligning the viewer directly with her entrance (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 134).

The scene transitions as Barbie winks and smiles directly at the viewer (Figure 2), shifting from an offer to a demand act. As Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) state, a demand act occurs when the represented participant gazes directly at the audience, thereby establishing an imaginary relationship with the audience. Halliday (1985) affirms that gaze can invite emotional connection or action. Barbie's confident expression and wink function as a request for attention or alignment (He, 2024), drawing the viewer into her world. The frontal and eye-level angle conveys equality between Barbie and the viewer, removing hierarchical distance (Padilla & Padilla, 2023).

Moreover, the medium close-up reduces social distance, making Barbie appear approachable and emotionally accessible. This framing aligns with Padilla & Padilla (2023) and He (2024), who argue that such shots create intimacy and suggest relationships similar to those between friends or family.

In terms of modality, the scene achieves a medium modality. While the concept of a giant Barbie is fantastical, the realistic human features and muted desert palette lend some grounding in reality. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), modality is shaped by elements such as color saturation, detail, and contextual realism. The dusty orange and golden tones evoke a stylized natural environment, while Barbie's figure is rendered with high fidelity. This blend of realism and fantasy creates a balanced visual style that enhances the scene's symbolic yet believable tone.

Analysis of Scene 2: Barbie Wakes Up in Her Pink Dream House

This scene depicts Barbie's idealized morning routine in her pink dream house. The scene employs a range of figures to establish the artificial perfection and stylized beauty of Barbie Land (Gerwig, 2023).



Figure 3. Barbie sleeping peacefully inside her stylized pink dream house.



Figure 4. Barbie standing at her rooftop as she prepares to begin her day in Barbie Land

The scene opens with Barbie (Margot Robbie) sleeping peacefully in a perfectly arranged pink bedroom (Figure 3). The architecture and furniture are stylized, resembling plastic toys. Her closed eyes indicate an absent gaze, constituting an offer act (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 116), positioning the viewer as an observer rather than a participant. Barbie is presented for contemplation, with no direct interaction. The long shot creates social distance, allowing the viewer to see her clearly along with parts of her environment, while still maintaining formality. The frontal horizontal angle connects the viewer with Barbie's world, creating a sense of involvement. However, the high vertical angle suggests detachment and oversight, implying that the viewer looks down on her and potentially framing Barbie as passive in this context (Yao & Zhuo, 2018, p. 127).

The scene concludes with Barbie standing in a doorway or on a

rooftop, about to exit her dream house (Figure 4). Here, a medium shot, frontal angle, and eye-level vertical angle are used. Barbie's forward gaze is again an offer act (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 116), as she does not engage the viewer directly. The medium shot allows for a closer social distance, while the eye-level angle creates a sense of equality between viewer and participant (Hu & Luo, 2016, p. 160; Yao & Zhuo, 2018, p. 127).

In terms of modality, this scene conveys low modality, evident in bright, saturated colors and stylized settings. The dominance of vibrant pinks and geometric designs creates a toy-like, artificial look. While Barbie appears realistic, her environment stands in stark contrast, emphasizing the fantastical nature of Barbie land. The visual style does not aim for realism but instead embraces an idealized, dreamlike world (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

Analysis of Scene 3: Barbie Cries for the First Time – Discovery of Emotion

This scene portrays Barbie (Margot Robbie) crying for the first time, capturing a deeply emotional and transformative moment. It marks a significant turning point in her journey, as she begins to confront complex human feelings she has never experienced before. (Gerwig, 2023).



Figure 5. Barbie shedding her first tear while gazing directly at the viewer.



Figure 6. Barbie speaking gently to an elderly woman at the bus stop.

The scene opens with a close-up of Barbie's teary-eyed face (Figure 5). A single tear rolls down her cheek as she gazes directly at the viewer with a surprised and vulnerable expression. Her pink outfit, white hat, and patterned scarf stand out against a softly blurred green-and-white background. In terms of contact, Barbie's direct gaze constitutes a demand act (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 116), forming an imaginary relationship with the audience. According to He (2024), a participant who looks directly at the viewer becomes a "requester," and Barbie's teary expression invites empathy. The close-up framing creates an intimate social distance, emphasizing emotional proximity (Hu & Luo, 2016, p. 160). This aligns with He (2024), who notes that the closer the camera, the closer the social relationship, and with Padilla

& Padilla (2023), who explain that medium-close shots often imply intimacy, friendship, or familial connection. The eye-level angle suggests equality, reinforcing the universality of her emotional experience (Yao & Zhuo, 2018, p. 127), while the frontal angle enhances viewer involvement (Kress & vanLeeuwen, 2006, p. 134).

The scene shifts to a medium shot of Barbie at a bus stop beside an elderly woman (Figure 6), maintaining a frontal, eye-level perspective. Barbie turns slightly to compliment the woman, initiating a subtle moment of connection. Here, the gaze shifts away from the viewer and becomes interpersonal—an offer act directed at the woman (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). The medium shot and frontal angle maintain closeness and viewer involvement (Hu & Luo, 2016; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

As for modality, these figures reflect high modality. Barbie's human features, expressive emotions, and the realistic environment, complete with visible texture and natural lighting, contribute to believability. Although Barbie wears vibrant pink, the colors remain within realistic saturation levels. The recognizable outdoor setting, combined with genuine human expressions, shifts the visual tone from fantasy to grounded emotional realism (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), aligning with the film's movement toward authenticity and self-awareness. Furthermore, according to Wang (2023), simplified backgrounds can enhance the focus on the represented participants. In normal situations, the background is always less detailed than the symbols it represents. In this case, the realistic outdoor setting emphasizes Barbie's figure. Padilla & Padilla (2023) reinforce this idea by stating that an interpretation of why the backgrounds were unmodulated could be to emphasize the image's salient parts. So, the viewers' attention was drawn to the people shown rather than to the things around them.

In summary, the visual analysis shows that Barbie (2023) predominantly employs offer images, eye-level angles, and moderate social distance in Figures 1–6. The film's predominant use of offer images, frontal angles, eye-level shots, and moderate social distance positions the female characters as emotionally expressive and visually relatable, reinforcing a femininity that appears gentle, approachable, and reflective. These features act as semiotic cues shaping how audiences perceive characters and their social roles (Forceville, 2020; Machin & Mayr, 2012). For media literacy and feminist pedagogy, this offers a clear example of how visual grammar participates in the cultural production of gendered identities, encouraging viewers to examine how aesthetics shape the meanings attached to femininity in contemporary film.

Conclusion

In brief, this study examined how the *Barbie* (2023) film constructs female identity through both linguistic and visual means. In a time when the media shape public understandings of gender roles, films like *Barbie* contribute significantly to the ongoing discourse on women's representation. In response to stereotypical portrayals of femininity, *Barbie* (2023) reimagines the female experience through a feminist lens.

Linguistically, the high frequency of lexical hedges and intensifiers reflects emotional expressivity and social awareness, features often associated with traditional femininity. Nevertheless, in the film, these features function as tools for relational agency rather than subordination. Visually, the predominance of offer images, consistent eye-level angles, and close-to-medium-close shots position viewers as reflective observers, fostering emotional connection and emphasizing the characters' subjectivity rather than their objectification. The film shifts representation away from the historically male-dominated gaze toward a more egalitarian framing that foregrounds women's perspectives and emotional interiority. Modality shifts from the stylized vibrancy of Barbie Land to the muted realism of the Real World further highlight the film's negotiation between idealized femininity and authentic womanhood.

These findings suggest that the film is an effective resource for understanding gender as a social and cultural construct, as various semiotic resources interact and integrate to convey the discourse's ideological stance. The potential meaning of multimodal texts, such as this film, is strengthened when relationships between viewers and represented characters are established—achieved when audiences are invited to reflect on characters' emotional and social realities through linguistic expression and visual semiotic choices.

In the broader sense, the findings offer practical value for media literacy education and feminist pedagogy by showing how films shape gender ideologies through both language and visual design. They can help educators teach students to analyze how representation, power, and identity are constructed, and guide film studies learners in examining multimodal resources as ideological tools. These insights also promote critical viewing, enabling audiences to recognize how media either reinforces or challenges dominant gender norms.

While the film promotes empowerment, it still operates within commercial, aesthetic, and narrative constraints. The exaggerated femininity of Barbie Land, the polished emotional tone, and the stylized visuals can be

read as both a critique and reinforcement of beauty-centered femininity. Some feminist scholars argue that post-feminist texts risk commodifying empowerment, turning it into a marketable aesthetic rather than a structural critique. These tensions reveal that the film's feminist message is negotiated rather than absolute—an important insight into its multimodal construction of identity.

Furthermore, these multimodal patterns contribute to broader debates in feminist theory and post-feminist media studies by illustrating a negotiated portrayal of women who neither fully conform to traditional gender norms nor entirely reject them. Instead, the film constructs femininity as emotionally expressive, self-reflective, and relational, while still operating within familiar aesthetic conventions. This ambivalence aligns with post-feminist interpretations that view empowerment and traditional femininity as coexisting in contemporary media.

Overall, the study shows that the film's linguistic and visual features work together to shape how femininity, emotion, and gender roles are portrayed. These multimodal patterns offer practical tools for media literacy, feminist pedagogy, and film analysis by helping viewers recognize how gendered meanings are constructed. At the same time, the film's feminist message remains ambivalent, promoting empowerment while relying on polished, commercial, and traditionally feminine aesthetics. This tension reveals that the film both challenges and reinforces familiar ideas about women, reflecting the complexities of contemporary gender representation.

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