

## INVESTIGATING FEMINIST TENDENCY IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S "THE HANDMAID'S TALE" IN TERMS OF SARA MILLS' MODEL. A FEMINIST STYLISTIC STUDY

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper purports to explore the relationship between linguistic structures and socially construed meanings in a narrative text. A stylistic analysis is conducted to unravel the design agilities of Margaret Atwood's novel "The Handmaid's Tale". It tries to investigate her stylistic traits whereby much of the time her words seem to cloak or obscure what really happened. By adopting Sara Mill's Model, the researcher attempts to reveal the ideology and power relations that underpin a literary text from different levels (according to the model) word, phrase, and discourse. The evidence seems to be strong that the model, however, has identifiable functions which contribute to the effective meaning of the novel. On this basis, it may be inferred that these elements trigger and play significant roles in passing the intention of the writer across.*

**KEYWORDS:** Stylistics, Stylistic Analysis, Ideology, Feminism, Fragmentation, Focalization

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### INTRODUCTION

#### Rationale

Feminism is a theory, movement, and ideology strives to achieve social rights for women. As a theory, it aims to highlight the nature of gender inequality. It is a movement adopting an idea that it would not be easy to believe these days that women have never been more oppressed, whereas it is an ideology simply because inequality is a phenomenon rooted with societies watering their cultures with negative attitudes against the half of humanity. Nevertheless, equality is not an idea of what something is or how it works. It's not something we should be trying very hard or struggling for. It's a necessity. Equality is like the natural force that tends to cause people, whether they are men or women, to move towards each other. We need it to stand on this earth as men and women or as women and men, and the hatred of women that is in every culture is not a true part of the human condition. Thus, it is reasonable to talk about women as rational creatures instead of considering them fine ladies. Feminism is the act of looking for equality in regards to women's rights. Hence, this paper tackles that problem which was diagnosed by linguists and writers. One of those writers is Margaret Atwood who has based her novel on the idea: men are afraid that women will laugh at them, women are afraid that men will kill them.

#### Feminism

Feminisms might be considered as a theory or ideology. As a matter of fact, this consideration is based on Tony Trew's assumption, "the concepts in a discourse are related as a system, they are part of a theory or ideology, that is, a system of concepts and images which are a way of seeing and grasping things, and of interpreting what is seen or heard or read (Trew in Fowler

*et al.* 1979:95). Equally important, the people who are feminists believe that this theory or ideology holds a belief that women in general are treated oppressively and differently and they are inferior and subject to personal and institutional discriminations. Ideologically speaking, Eccleshall confirms, for de Tracy the aim of ideology was to establish a solid and unquestionable method by which correct ideas could be scientifically identified so as to foster the use of reason in the governance of human affairs for the betterment of society as a whole (Eccleshall et al., 2003:3). Additionally, The British philosopher and literary critic, Terry Eagleton observes that 'ideology' has a whole range of useful meanings, not all of which are compatible with each other. He affirms that the word 'ideology', one might say, is a text, woven of a whole tissue of different conceptual strands (Eagleton, 1991:1).

Freeden (2003:5) points out that the role of ideology was to smooth over those contradictions by making them appear as necessary, normal, and congruous. That way social unity could be maintained and enhanced. Ideology was a sublimation - in its various guises such as morality, religion, and metaphysics - of material life. In addition, ideology was disseminated by those specialized in the mental activity of sublimation: priests offering 'salvation' were an early example of that 'emancipation' from the real world. Thompson expressed the function of ideology when he states, "It has been assumed that ideology operates like a sort of social cement, binding the members of society together by providing them with collectively shared values and norms" (Thompson, 1984:5). Consequently, there is a connection between feminism and society in terms of the social function of ideology. To put it more simply and to clarify such a connection, In his book, *Ideology: A Multidisciplinary Approach*, Van Dijk (1998:138) asserts the relationship between ideology and sociology, "ideologies simply serve groups and their members in the organization and management of their goals, social practices and their whole daily social life. All these functions are social, and the concepts involved in their description largely sociological. Indeed, they are essentially conditions for the existence and the reproduction of groups, or for the collective management of the relationships between groups, rather than functions that only serve individuals". Likewise, Mitchell (1971:156) moves a step further and observes that part of the function of the ideology of the family is to preserve the unity of the family in the face of its essential break up. Males'evic' draws the attention to the function which is related to existence by stating that "ideology is not viewed as something imposed upon human beings, but rather as a functional necessity without which society cannot exist" (Males'evic', 2006: 61).

Due to this, literature should be taken into consideration simply because it reflects the society. On the whole, literature tackles what is considered to be good or bad and also it finds out causes and possible remedies of social problems. In this way literature also contributes to creating major impact on the society. To verify such an impact, In his book *Criticism and Ideology*, Terry Eagleton (1976:64) expresses the relationship between literature and ideology as, "The text . . . is a certain production of ideology, for which the analogy of a dramatic production is in some way appropriate.". Literature, Eagleton says, "is the most revealing mode of experiential access to ideology that we possess" (Eagleton, P.101). Literary discourse, Macherey (1978:64) notes, "gives an implicit critique of its ideological content". Here the writer shows the effect of sociology on literature and vice versa this will definitely lead to a compromise between literature and ideology. Besides, there is an attitude towards literature which is very well expressed by Van Wyck Brooks cited in Hall's article. Brooks marks: "We live in a very happy world at present . . . and the public has a right to expect from its poets and thinkers some light on the causes of our problems and the ways to a better future"(Hall, 1941:389).

The influence of literature on society can be clearly seen when the novel is treated as a social problem in which prevailing social problems such as gender, race or class prejudice are being dramatized through their effect on characters of the novel. Such literary works are strongly weighted to convert the reader to the author's stand on a social question. Usually, a social problem novel limits itself to the exposure of a problem. Most social problem novels derive their chief interest from their novelty or timelessness ([www.Britannica.com](http://www.Britannica.com))

### **Stylistic Analysis and Feminism**

We start this section with encouraging quotation, "Every study which contributes to the comprehension and interpretation of a literary work is legitimate. Every kind of study is welcome if it adds to our knowledge of a literary work or if it permits us to feel and enjoy it better. (Alonso, 1942: 489). To begin with, the principal aim of this work is exactly the same as that of stylistics. The aim of stylistics is to show how the linguistic features of a literary work, such as phonological, lexical, grammatical, semantic, and pragmatic create meaning, and to what extent they contribute to its overall meanings and effects.

Stylistic analysis, according to Short and Semino (2008:117), is a linguistic criticism. Furthermore, it attempts to provide a commentary which is objective and scientific, based on concrete quantifiable data, and applied in a systematic way rather than subjective emotions and desires. That is, to construe how our understanding of a text is achieved by examining in detail the linguistic organization of the text and how a reader, informed, model, or super reader, needs to interact with that linguistic organization to create meaning. Thus, it could be concluded that every analysis of style is an endeavour to find out the artistic principles underlying a writer's linguistic choices of language. Notably, all authors, whatever their ideologies are, or all texts, whatever their genres are, have their individual qualities.

Here, Holmes states that "Linguistic behaviour expresses complex social meanings. Through language we assert or cede control, we indicate the different social groups with which we identify, the social roles we embrace, and the sometimes conflicting values we espouse (Holmes, 1997: 195)". Similarly to what has been mentioned earlier, the analysis of feminism is basically concerned with language, for language is the principal medium of the meaning which serves to sustain relations of domination. Thus, to study feminism in a literary text is to study the ways in which meaning serves to sustain relations of domination. In other words, language is not the only instrument of communication or even knowledge, but it is also an instrument of power.

### **The Adopted Model of Analysis**

The main concern of this section is the presentation of Sara Mills' model of feminism (1995). This model includes:

#### **Analysis at the Word Level**

This part of analysis deals with the question of gender bias at the level of the analysis of individual words. The model focuses on the more general and theoretical aspects of sexism and gives an account of generic usage. Furthermore, the researcher examines through the procedures of the model specific types of sexist language-use. Also the model which is proposed by Mills is concerned with the way that feminist critics have dealt with sexism in language, and the effects which they claim this type of language-usage has on readers, particularly females. By examining examples of usage such as the sex-specific pronoun use,

the misuse of generics, address terms and the negative descriptions of females in a variety of texts, it is hoped to show that language-use can present and perpetuate a particular view of women (Mills, 1995: 62).

### **Analysis at the Phrase/Sentence Level**

Analysis at the Level of Phrase/Sentence is concerned with the way that we can analyse language-use beyond the level of the word. In other words, we are concerned with the way that phrases and sentences make sense in relation to their co-text, their context, the history of their usage and also the background knowledge which is needed for their making sense. We shall be arguing that the way that meaning takes place often involves the process of meaning-production. In that sense, in order to do a feminist analysis of sentences, some archaeological work is needed to excavate the places where ideological knowledge informs meaning (Mills, 1995: 98).

### **Analysis at the Discourse Level**

In this part, Mills examines the way that feminists can undertake a gendered analysis focusing on the larger-scale structures at the level of discourse, that is, above the level of the sentence. It is the intention of this part not to focus on content as if it were a self-evident given, but to see content, the substance of texts, as something which is the negotiation of textual elements and codes and forces outside the text which influence both the way that the text is constructed and the way that we decipher what is written. However, it is very much concerned with the larger structures and patterns which determine the occurrence of the individual lexical items, and it is also concerned with the effect of the items and larger structures on readers. In this way, the analysis links the word and the phrase with a larger notion of ideology through these textual patterns and structures. Besides, the way those stereotypical notions often inform the language choices which are made when describing characters in fiction, and also the way people describe themselves. Also the model considers the roles that female characters can fill, and then go on to examine particular language choices in terms of the description of the fragmentation of the female body. Along with, focalization is adopted in this model because it refers to the perspective through which a narrative is presented. In literature, one can achieve this effect through first-person narration, free indirect discourse (Mills, 1995: 123).

## **A Stylistic Analysis of “The Handmaid’s Tale”**

### **General Overview of the Novel**

Margaret Eleanor Atwood was born on November 18, 1939, in Ottawa, Ontario. She is well known for both the quality and the quantity of her writing. She has published novels, shorts stories, poems, and works of literary criticism. She has written science fiction, speculative fiction, historical fiction, and realistic fiction. Taking into account the power of language, her books often engage with the necessity of storytelling and with the power of language to convey one’s point of view through writing. She has focused on “dehumanization of women” (Snodgrass, 2006, P. 269). So she is a feminist writer, and when she first became well known in the 1970s, she was considered not just a role model and groundbreaker for Canadian writers, but for female writers as well. Atwood not only spoke about issues of gender in the world of publishing, she also wrote about many of the issues of concern to feminists from the '70s up to today. Atwood’s novels feature female protagonists who are characteristic of Atwood: they are, as Judy Klemesrud reported in the *New York Times*, “intelligent, self-absorbed modern women

searching for identity, “who” hunt, split logs, make campfires and become successful in their careers, while men often cook and take care of their households."In Atwood's plots, the lives of these women are shattered by overwhelming threats” (Sinha, 2008: 88). *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), a novel by Margaret Atwood, winner of multiple prizes, is set in a fictional future theocracy in which women have lost all civil rights(Hacht &Hayas, 2009, P. 46).

Unfair treatment of women led Margaret Atwood to be considered one of the well-known feminist writers. Her novel, “*The Handmaid's Tale*”, indicates that pre-Gileadian society (an imaginary military dictatorship formed within the borders of what was formerly the United States of America) was not favorable for women. In this society, women feared physical and sexual violence, and despite long-running feminist campaigns, they had not achieved equality.

## DATA ANALYSIS

### The Level of Words

To be a feminist, we have to avoid sexism by finding out alternative words. The reason behind this avoidance is simply because sexist words treat the other sex in a discriminatory manner. In most societies, men, not women, are considered the norm or standards of proper or acceptable behaviour for the human species: their thoughts, actions, characteristics and beliefs are viewed as fully representing those of all humans, male and female. This series of actions altogether eliminates women in language or can make them discreet. Common forms of sexism include:

### The Use of Generic Nouns

Investigating the whole novel for different examples, '*Man*' is a well – known generic masculine term used more than once. Besides its reference to male human being, it can also refer to the whole race (men and women). Generic nouns refer to what is normal or typical for members of a class (Quirk & Greenbaum 1989:89), for example:

1. **When the *man*\* in charge cut off the grain, the first group gave up quite soon, the second group a little later. (P.70) [*emphasis added*]**
2. **The hall is dusky, this is a *man*, his back to me. (P. 49)**
3. **The announcer is saying something, but I don't hear it: I look into this *man's* eyes, trying to decide what *he's* thinking. (P.83)**
4. **From what they said, the *man* had been *cruel and brutal*. (P.37)**

The previous sentences contain the generic noun '*man*'. In example **1**, the problem is that, we can't know the exact sex of '*man*'; it is used in **1** a generic noun because there is no specific reference to make it refer to a male rather than to a female. Sentences **2**, **3**, and **4**, have references as follows:

**2)** The possessive adjective '*his*' identifies that '*man*' refers to a male person, **3** the subject pronoun '*he*' indicates a male person, whereas in **4** both the predicative adjectives '*cruel*' and '*brutal*' are connected with '*man*' because they both indoctrinate the notion of “cruelty”. Likewise, unspecified sex in **5** also excludes femininity:

**5. This must have been an apartment once, for a student, a young single person with a job. (P 62)**

Thus, in support of the belief that language merely being a mirror of patriarchal societies (Johnson, 2004: 29); there is evidence that where gender-free terms such as ‘*student*’ and ‘*person*’ are, they create sexist meanings through their use.

Besides, the recurrent use of gender free lexical items such as ‘*Teacher*’, ‘*doctor*’,

‘*professor*’, ‘*traveller*’, ‘*secretary*’, ‘*witness*’, ‘*director*’, and ‘*scientist*’ throughout the whole novel refers to both sexes. In connection with the point earlier mentioned, Vetterling-Braggin (1981:2) points out that a statement is sexist "if it creates, constitutes, promotes or exploits an unfair or irrelevant marking of the distinctions between the sexes". In this way, language which presents the female as the ‘*marked*’ form and the male as the ‘*unmarked*’ or neutral form is sexist. Similarly, one of the uses that Atwood cuddles up is the use of the word ‘*girl*’:

**6. Modesty is invisibility, said Aunt Lydia. [Aunt Lydia's Role in Gilead In change of education programs] Never forget it. To be seen—to be seen —is to be—her voice trembled—penetrated. What you must be, girls, is impenetrable. She called us girls. (P.28)**

The word ‘*girl*’, it is not sexist when it is used to describe females under aged, but it is sexist, as in 6, when used to refer to females over that age.

What is more, the item ‘*pregnant*’ also has a negative connotation:

**7. One of them is vastly pregnant; her belly, under her loose garment, swells triumphantly. (P. 26)**

Nevertheless, the conception of “pregnancy” is, on the other hand, conventionally being describable differently from a male perspective in slang terms .For example, the expressions ‘*to get someone pregnant*’, ‘*to get someone in the family way*’, denote impregnating someone is something which a male does to a female, rather than its being seen as a female activity. On the other hand, the female fitting description of the same process, i.e. “pregnancy” is a passive one as in: ‘*I’m expecting*’, ‘*I’m pregnant*’, ‘*I’m in the family way*’, where a state is referred to rather than an action. This may echo back the stereotypical views of pregnancy and fertilization where the ‘*egg*’ is seen as static and the ‘*sperm*’ as the dynamic active element. The conventional ways of writing and talking about sex extend to human reproduction(Mills, 1995:79).Never the less, nowadays people can chart patterns in the state provision of medical care positively for pregnant women and this also affects changes in relation to employment and leisure which all contribute to the welfare of womanhood.(Hanson,2004:5).What is more, Atwood declares that the idea of pregnancy and birth has increasingly and extremely a high value when she announces in her novels "Give me children, or else I die. There's more than one meaning to it".

In the pursuance of commenting on the use of words with sexist fittings, adjectives can also be imbued with sex connotations as is the case in the following sentence:

**8. We hear it, shrill and silver, an echo from a volleyball game of long ago. (P.279)**

The adjectives ‘*shrill*’ is used almost exclusively to describe women, and seem to have connotations of excess, even when they are used positively. ‘*Shrill*’ generally presupposes those certain women whose voices are unpleasantly high or loud in comparison with ordinary feminine norm of quietness and a masculine norm of low pitch (Mills, 1995:44).

Mention needs to be made of naming which is also used to express this ideology. Generally speaking, lexicon, especially English lexicon is considered one of the most obvious evidences of sexism. In the same context, English affixation envisages lexical items referring to femininity as a derivation form masculine lexical items. Therefore, the resultant feminine lexical items can either be morphologically unmarked for gender like “father” vs. “mother” or they can be morphologically marked for gender like “host” vs. “hostess” (Quirk et al., 1987: 315).

Examining the text under study, there are more than one example that supports this idea. Table (1) illustrates this:

**Table (1): The feminine Affixes in “The Handmaid's Tale”**

Masculine	Feminine
Host	hostess
Lord	lady
King	queen
Master	mistress
Man	women
God	goddess
Ancestor	ancestress
Waiter	waitress

This suffix explicates that females are under the hegemonic males who can take the leadership of females and dominate them. As such, derivative lexical female items whether or not morphologically marked for gender are a kind of linguistic discrimination against the concept of femininity whereby women are subdued by men.

In conclusion, the lexical items denoting femininity whether morphological marked or unmarked for gender may air a connotation or a meaning of triviality, dependence, subordination or they may make a reference to a person of a lower social rank or status.

Having insight into the meaning of some of the previous pairs, we may find that the suffix ‘-ess’ not only marks the secondary position of the feminine words but also connotes the relationship between the female and male reference to the pair of words. What follows is an example of this, sentence 9:

**9. Men at the top have always had *mistresses*. (P.66)**

Here ‘*top people*’ are being advised to restrict their sexual rampage to one person when they go away on business (that is, one person other than their spouse). Here ‘*Men*’ is generic, but the ensuing sentence ‘*had a mistress*’ and the accompanying story make clear the fact that the reference is to males only. This can be perceived clearly by paying heed to the words like “master” vs. “mistress”, and “lord” vs. “lady” where the first part of the pair always

reiterates its association with power, prestige and dominance, while the second part of the pair has the tinge of periphery and it is always pertinent to sex, lust and other pejorative meanings.

For many feminists, women are particularly subjected to the effects of ideology of sexism and they are under taboo words and expressions. Words such as ‘*fucking*’, ‘*snatch*’, ‘*sexual*’, and ‘*sluts*’ were used by the author. Sentence **10** is an illustration:

**10. They were *sluts*. (P.113)**

A step further and semantically speaking, if we peruse one semantic area of English, revolving around animal expressions in relation to people in general, we can see how culture looks at males and females differently. References to the categories of animals such as ‘*bitch*’, ‘*rabbit*’, ‘*kitten*’, ‘*lamb*’, ‘*bird*’, ‘*duck*’, ‘*pet*’, and ‘*pigeons*’, can have depreciatory connotations when they are related to female, but can have neutral or desirable connotations when related to a male. The following sentences **11**, **12** show this:

**11. I won't have to listen to that old *bitch*. (P. 89)**

**12. She walks demurely, head down, red-gloved hands clasped in from, with short little steps like a trained *pig's*, on its hind legs. (P. 29)**

As a matter of fact, we live in a patriarchal world where men outweigh women. As a result, there is a lack of equality between men and women terms of reference. Sentence **13** illustrates these linguistic choices:

**13. I don't like to come upon the Commander's *Wife* unexpectedly.(P.13)**

If we analyze the noun “wife” and the address term “Mrs.”, we can conclude that the word wife is always referred to in relation to her husband, *e.g. Smith and his wife, the baker's wife* etc. This is also true of the title or term of address “Mrs.”, since after marriage a woman changes her name into her husband's name to become “Mrs. John Brown” for instance and it seems that there is no possibility to know her first name after being taken into marriage. Thus, these words demean women by portraying them as submissive and subsidiary.

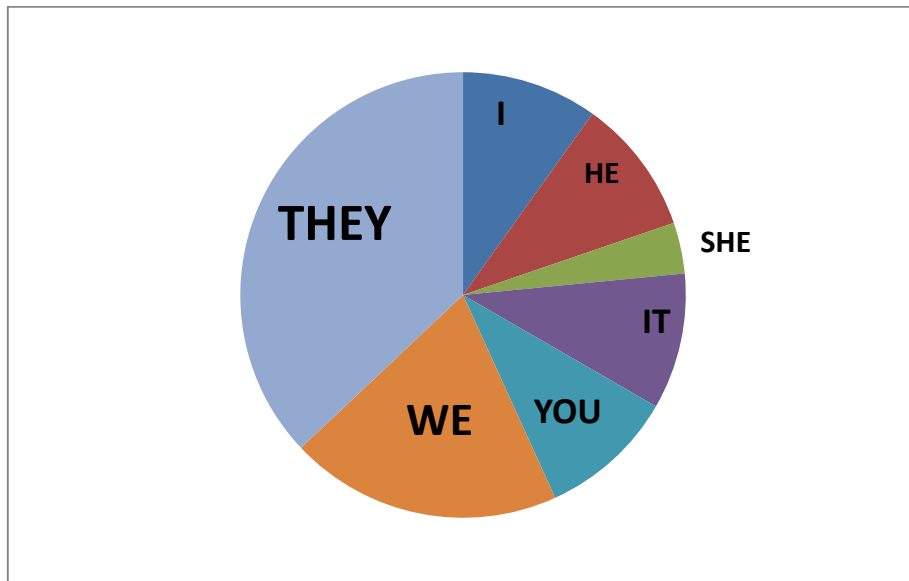
### Use of Generic Pronouns

Under certain circumstances, the generic pronoun ‘*he*’ is perhaps the most well-known example of gender-specific, and is frequently referred to in sexist language as ‘*he-man*’ language. An example of a generic pronoun is:

**14. Soon after the events our *author* describes, in one of the earliest purges: *he* was accused of liberal tendencies. (P. 309)**

The traditional argument is that the ‘*he*’ and ‘*his*’ are used here not sex-specifically, but generically; that is, although the pronouns refer grammatically to the singular male author, they should be taken to refer to both male and female authors in general. In other words, the generic pronoun such as ‘*he*’ is said to refer to women and men (Wood, 2011: 114). That is, the generic ‘*he*’ has a bias towards males, whereas the generic pronoun ‘*she*’ has a one in favour of females. The following figure (**figure 1**) clarifies to what extent language is a reflection of patriarchal values:





**Figure 1: patriarchal world of Pronouns**

### The Level of Phrase/Sentence

The following analysis deals with the levels that go beyond the word level, i.e. phrase/sentence levels:

#### Ready – made Phrases

Sometimes phrases are constructed to convey sexist meaning. That is, the order in which paired terms appear is another dimension presupposes the unequal status of masculine and feminine terms. It is quite obvious that the conventional binary terms consisting of male and female components foreground the male term to make it the focal area of these binary sets in an attempt to prioritize masculinity. Such a fronting seems very important in terms of information – processing (Mills, 1995:85). Examples of the masculine term conventionally preceding the feminine are:

- **a man and a woman (p. 83)**
- **boy and girl (P.13)**

These binaries when reversed will be odd and tend to breach collocation or selection restriction as in ‘a woman and a man’, or ‘girl and boy’.

Additionally, proverbs may also have hidden sexist messages. They are curiously cultural elements, which reflect unanimous incontestable conventional common sense. For example:

#### **15. You can’t make an omelette without breaking eggs. (p. 211)**

In order to achieve a goal, it is inevitable to give up of something of great value to oneself for a special purpose. This why Offered and the other handmaids try not to yield to the attempts of usurping their rights by men. They should oppose all unjust acts, because human rights are the rights that all should be entitled to. Again they must fight severely for equality with men and should not surrender otherwise they would be surmounted by masculine domination

## Inferences

Inferences are implied through words or a piece of information that lead the reader to make assumptions and draw final decision or judgment. In this respect, Boutonnet defines inference as, “ the key to uncovering the ‘true’ meaning (Boutonnet, 2006:409). To demonstrate:

**16. She then was a woman who might bend the rules. (P.14)**

What is implied in this sentence is that women are accused of breaking the rules. It suggests that their conduct is immoral and they do not work to rule or abide by the law.

## Jokes and Humour

Mills (2008:71) purports that jokes are an intricate way of presenting women as a “minority group” whereby, these jokes claim no responsibility to the exclusion of women as an unimportant group. Humour, the other facet of the same coin, plays with the stereotypical knowledge for comic effect so as to hold women up to ridicule. Women are attacked with taunts which are ironically worded. By so doing, women are sapped by bitter sarcasm. Sentences **17** and **18** are illustrative examples:

**17. Women used to carry such eggs between their breasts, to incubate them. (P. 110)**

**18. Doing their job, .... Keeping us safe. (P.20)**

## Metaphor

Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 5) describe metaphor as the essence of understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another. That is, it is associated with a particular rule of transference called metaphoric rule that indicates that the figurative meaning is derived from the literal meaning. Therefore, metaphor could be considered as a fundamental element in the way that we structure our thoughts and words. Metaphor, in this view, is seen not as a literary form or as a deviation from some supposedly literal language, but rather as one of the building blocks of our thinking, at both the level of language acquisition and language-use. Sentence **19** illustrates this:

**19. This smile of blood is what fixes the attention. (P.32)**

## Transitivity

Transitivity is concerned with the representation of *who acts* (who is the doer) and who is *acted upon* (who is affected by the actions of others or the patient). This view of transitivity forming a coherent world-view can quite easily be translated into concerns about the ways that language and ideology are interrelated (Mills, 1995:110). In order to analyse the transitivity choices in the selected sentences, the actors in each process are extracted, with the lexical realization of each process associated with them, as below:

**20. I remind myself that he is not an unkind man. (P.254)**

*Mental action internal*

**21. Her voice trembles with rage. (P.278)**

*Material action intention (affected=female body part)*

**22. The pregnant woman's belly is like a huge fruit. (P. 26)**

*Relational process*

As a matter of fact, and according to three previous sentences, there is a quality or general direction to make female characters to be represented as 'acted upon' by males. Instead of their being represented as active and acting upon others, they are very often passive or represented as the recipient of men's actions, in the object position rather than the subject position.

Fiction tries to universalize transitivity and feminism in most of the fiction world, males and females are usually stereotyped that is the male character can control his own circumstances and fate, while the female character is usually passive and helpless and ordained by fate that cannot be resisted.

### **The Level of Discourse**

In this part, the analysis links the word and the phrase with a larger notion of ideology through textual patterns and structures. In other words, it links micro-contexts of the effects of words across sentences or conversational turns with the macro-contexts of larger social patterns (Mills, 1995:123). Thus, such analysis is carried out above the sentence level. This section highlights the following areas:

#### **Characters**

The descriptions of clothes and facial characteristics are used to 'point to' the type of overall assessment that the reader is expected to make of the character (Mills, 1995:124).

Furthermore, one of the basic roles of characters is that they guide readers, helping them to understand plots and weigh themes in mind. Sentences **23** and **24** clarify the world of sexism in which women live:

**23. My name isn't Offred, I have another name, which nobody uses now because it's forbidden. I tell myself it doesn't matter, your name is like your telephone number, useful only to others; but what I tell myself is wrong, it does matter. (P. 84)**

Sentence **23** shows us a sense which is related to the loss of identity whereby women are assigned new identities. Here the narrator tries to become less connected with the new name the society has given to her. So to continue having or holding her identity, she unsuccessfully makes an effort to persuade herself that her new name is different from her identity.

Likewise, investigating the novel, Offred observes Serena:

**24. She doesn't make speeches anymore. She has become speechless. She stays in her home, but it doesn't seem to agree with her. How furious she must be, now that she's been taken at her word. (P. 58)**

What is interesting is that, while Serena had the power of expressing herself, now Offred believes that Serena's silence is a sign of having no power or unable to protest.

## Fragmentation

It is the process whereby characters in texts are described in terms of their body-parts instead of as people to refer to starkly juxtaposed bits and pieces (Mills, 1995:166). To demonstrate:

**25. We are containers; it's only the in-sides of our bodies that are important. The outside can become hard and wrinkled, for all they care, like the shell of a nut. (P. 96)**

The woman consists of two parts, *inside* and *outside*, the first is important whereas the second is not to express a sense of dislocation.

Another example of fragmentation when Offred discusses her creation while pondering over the act of waiting:

**26. I wait. I compose myself. My self is a thing I must now compose, as one composes a speech. What I must present is a made thing, not something born. (P.176)**

The idea of fragmentation is represented by composing herself of different parts. In the time of technology, she imagines herself like a machine consists of parts. So she tells the reader that she must create (or compose) a new self-heralding an end to the individual "self".

## Focalization

Focalization is the process whereby the events in a story are related to the reader through the consciousness of a character or narrator (Mills, 1995:166). The following passage clarifies how the narrator draws conclusions:

**Nothing changes instantaneously: in a gradually heating bathtub you'd be boiled to death before you knew it. There were stories in the newspapers, of course, corpses in ditches or the woods, bludgeoned to death or mutilated, interfered with, as they used to say, but they were about other women, and the men who did such things were other men None of them were the men we knew. The newspaper stories were like dreams to us, bad dreams dreamt by others. How awful, we would say, and they were, but they were awful without being believable. They were too melodramatic; they had a dimension that was not the dimension of our lives. We were the people who were not in the papers. We lived in the blank white spaces at the edges of print. It gave us more freedom. We lived in the gaps between the stories. (P. 74)**

Offred herself describes the fog in which women live, surrounding wherever they are. She is talking about people (women) who live on the margins, '*in the gaps between the stories*', women whose entire lives will never make history because their stories are in the gaps.

Other aspect of focalization to be considered is that of the time (Mills, 1995:140). As an example of this:

**There's time to spare. This is one of the things I wasn't prepared for—the amount of unfilled time, the long parentheses of nothing. Time as white sound (P.69).**

Offred is devaluing time and also distorts reader's sense of time with contradictory reference of time, 'time to spare' and 'unfilled time'.

Additionally, it is common to find that an external focalizer can function across all the temporal dimensions of the narrative, past, present and future, while the internal focalizer is limited to the 'present' of the characters. (Mills, 1995:141). To illustrate:

**It was warm for the time of year, the leaves were turning already, some of them; Luke drove, I sat beside him, the sun shone, the sky was blue, the houses as we passed them looked comforting and ordinary, each house as it was left behind vanishing into past time. (P.84)**

The narrator speaks in the past tense, we can be fairly confident that she knows the end of her own story, and that she has survived to tell it.

## CONCLUSION

Language is a social phenomenon. After all, it is part of our social world, the world in which people spend time talking to each other. Besides, language can tell us a lot about what is important in a particular social culture, the culture which affects in one way or another the human behaviour. Equally important, the relationship between man and woman should be equal but they are different. It must therefore be recognized that, the world has twisted the truth, i.e. men and women are created equally by God, and that both lives are highly valued deserving great respect. That is, woman is not created to compete with man but to complete him.

Investigating feminist tendency in Atwood's novel through a stylistic analysis offers us that literary texts are filled with sociocultural norms and ideologies. These ideologies are either positive or negative. The positivity or negativity of ideologies is related to culture. So the possibility of changing negative ideologies is the responsibility of people and institutions. Therefore, feminists have thus attempted to influence institutions, without directly forcing them, to adopt policies concerning sexism and working to eradicate sexism in everybody's interest so as to favour the doctrine of equal rights, benefits and opportunities for all citizens along with correcting laws when these would apply unfairly in special circumstances.

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