

Passivization and Negation as Markers of Gendered Ideology in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*

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Abstract

This study explores how passivization and negation function as ideological positioning markers of gendered ideology in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). The study has three interrelated objectives: first, to investigate how the grammatical structures of passivization and negation linguistically encode and reinforce gendered subordination and power asymmetries in *The Handmaid's Tale*; second, to analyze the ways in which the employment of passivization and negation reflect and sustain patriarchal ideology in the discourse of the novel; and third, to explore how Atwood's strategic use of passivization and negation provides discursive spaces for resistance and identity reassertion within the female narrative voice. The study draws on two analytical strands, critical discourse analysis and systemic functional grammar, to examine selected extracts from the novel. A qualitative textual analysis method is employed, focusing on patterns of passive constructions and negation in the discourse of the selected novel. This study has analytical and theoretical findings. Analytically, it reveals that passivization operates as a grammatical mechanism of control, concealing male or institutional agency and naturalizing female subjugation, and that negation constructs ideological boundaries by defining women's identities through prohibition and absence. This, in turn, indicates that the use of passivization and negation in the selected novel contributes effectively to sustaining gendered ideology. Theoretically, this study contributes to the field of feminist linguistics by linking literary and discourse-analytic approaches to decipher the function of language as a tool of control and empowerment in gender-related contexts.

Keywords: passivization, negation, gendered ideology, control, critical discourse analysis, Atwood, SFL, *The Handmaid's Tale*

1. Introduction

Starting from the assumption that language creates, reproduces, reflects, and opposes the beliefs ingrained in the social order, it can be employed as a gendered ideology conduit. This can be realized by using various linguistic structures to produce and reproduce gendered ideology in interlocation. Grammatical structures, such as passivization and negation, are among the aspects of language that can be used by interlocutors to communicate resistance, control, and power (Durán, 2023; Yang, 2025). Within particular contexts, these grammatical structures go beyond their semantically based function of concealing agency (passivization) and communicating repudiation and prohibition (negation) towards further illocutionary purposes, including manipulation encapsulated in a gendered ideological discourse, particularly in the discourse of the narrative genres. Such a grammatical manipulation is a method of creating gendered identities in patriarchal societies, including who does, who is done to, and who is excluded. Margaret Atwood's (1985) *The Handmaid's Tale* is a case in point, as it is an appropriate model to examine how grammar and ideology interact linguistically in the meaning-making process. Atwood's novel offers a linguistic model of gender discrimination because it was written in the totalitarian state of Gilead, where women's bodies and voices are controlled, manipulated, and repressed (Devi, 2023). The novel's unconventional first-person narrative style allows for a thorough examination of how language can be a tool of gendered ideology that entirely targets manipulation and oppression. This study, therefore, places itself within the theoretical and analytical framework of critical discourse analysis (CDA) and systemic functional linguistics (SFL) by focusing on passivization and negation to show how the two grammatical constructions contribute effectively to sustaining gendered ideology in the discourse of *The Handmaid's Tale*.

The selection of *The Handmaid's Tale* to be linguistically investigated here is due to the fact that the novel abounds in linguistic strategies that can be used to communicate gendered ideology. In feminist dystopias, Atwood's novel stands out due to its precise delineation of how syntax and discourse shape social reality. Gilead's fascist state consciously manipulates language to acclimatize patriarchal hegemony (Briedik, 2021). More specifically, the discourse of the novel governs grammatical forms themselves to see that the Handmaids are created in terms of passive constructions, such as "we were chosen" and "we were assigned," and solidified into negated possibility, as in "we are not permitted to read." These shifts make the novel an appropriate linguistic corpus for the examination of how grammatical structures reflect gendered ideology and institutional power. Also, the fact that Atwood herself was concerned about the politics of language makes the linguistic investigation of *The Handmaid's Tale* more pertinent to the context of this study. Further, the ongoing worldwide influence of the novel, particularly in feminist criticism and sociopolitical theory, ensures that offering a linguistic investigation on passivization and negation as markers of gendered ideology in the selected novel is anticipated to have repercussions not

only for literary linguistics but also for broader discussions of gender, ideology, and grammatical structures in language use (Hussein & Kadhim, 2025).

This study is both theoretical and analytical in its significance. Theoretically, it bridges the distinction between linguistic structures and ideological functions, demonstrating how superficially formal grammatical structures (passivization and negation in the context of this paper) are inevitably implicated in domination systems. Other critiques have discussed thematic or narrative aspects of *The Handmaid's Tale*, but none have analyzed its grammar as an ideological instrument systematically. Analytically, the current study is anticipated to contribute to feminist stylistics and discourse analysis by illustrating syntactic patterns encoding gendered power relations. The critique at the center of *The Handmaid's Tale* is of gendered ideology, a belief discourse and discursive practice constituting femininity on the basis of submission, silence, and service. In Atwood's dystopian novel, women turn into grammatical objects rather than subjects (Devi, 2023); they are silenced as actors of action performed upon them through passivization and negation, and their social existence turns into an organization around everything they are not and cannot be. As such, a linguistic investigation of passivization and negation is not only a strictly syntactic enterprise but also a question of how grammar performs the politics of gender and how linguistic structures, within specific contexts, reproduce and resist ideological hegemony.

The current study aims to achieve three interrelated objectives: first, to investigate how the grammatical structures of passivization and negation linguistically encode and reinforce gendered ideology that targets subordination and power asymmetries in *The Handmaid's Tale*; second, to analyze the ways in which the employment of passivization and negation reflects and sustains patriarchal ideology in the discourse of the novel; and third, to explore how Atwood's strategic use of passivization and negation provides discursive spaces for resistance and identity reassertion within the female narrative voice. In alignment with these objectives, two research questions guide the analysis: first, how do passivization and negation serve as linguistic strategies for encoding gendered ideology and concealing patriarchal authority and oppression in *The Handmaid's Tale*? Second, how do passivization and negation reveal the multifaceted interplay between linguistic forms and gendered ideology in Atwood's feminist discourse in the selected novel? These objectives and questions are pursued in light of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak, 2013; Wodak & Meyer, 2016) and systemic functional linguistics (Halliday, 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), which, in turn, accentuates the study's linguistic and analytical focus on how language structures both reflect and subvert systems of gendered ideology, situating Atwood's narrative as a site of ideological struggle and power relations articulated through grammar itself.

The rest of this study is structured as follows: Section 2 presents the literature review of the study, in which detailed discussions on critical discourse analysis, systemic functional linguistics, feminist discourse, language as ideology in feminist discourse, and passivization and negation as markers of gendered ideology are presented. This section also provides some previous and related studies that are pertinent to the topic addressed in this paper. Section 3 offers the methodology of the study, in which data collection, description, rationale, and the analytical procedures adopted in the analysis of the selected data are provided. Section 4 is dedicated to analyzing the selected data. Section 5 discusses the findings of the study. Section 6 concludes the paper and provides some recommendations for further research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is an interdisciplinary approach that investigates the relationship between language, power, and ideology by casting emphasis on how discourse operates as a social practice, reflecting and shaping the structures of society (Fairclough, 1995). CDA perceives language not only as a means of communication but also as a way through which dominance, inequality, and control are constructed and legitimized in social interaction. CDA advocates the assumption that discourse expresses and reproduces ideologies, such as sets of beliefs and values serving the interests of particular social groups, and thus discourse plays a central role in maintaining and/or challenging existing power relations (van Dijk, 1998; Wodak & Meyer, 2016). In this respect, CDA aims to reveal the invisible ways in which language works ideologically to legitimize social hierarchies and render systems of oppression natural or inevitable. According to Fairclough (1995), the analysis in CDA usually features the way in which linguistic choices, such as vocabulary, transitivity, modality, and voice contribute to representations of social actors and events in a way that reveals ideological bias. For example, the use of passive constructions conceals agency and responsibility, and the employment of negation communicates repudiation and prohibition.

Furthermore, CDA is critical, as it aims not only to describe how discourse operates within particular contexts but also to question and challenge the ideologies that sustain injustice (van Dijk, 1998). CDA assumes that texts are embedded in contexts of social struggle and that revealing these struggles through analysis can contribute to awareness and change (Wodak, 2013). According to van Dijk (1998), CDA empowers readers and analysts to recognize how discourse shapes their understanding of reality by revealing how language encodes assumptions about gender, class, race, and authority. Within feminist studies, CDA serves as a particularly powerful framework, as it exposes how patriarchal ideology is embedded in everyday language and institutional communication and how women's voices are marginalized through linguistic and discursive practices (Hussein & Kadhim, 2025). Thus, CDA functions both as a method of linguistic inquiry and as a form of social critique, highlighting the role of language in sustaining domination while also identifying the discursive ways through which resistance and change become possible (Wodak & Meyer, 2016).

2.2 Feminist Discourse

Feminist discourse involves the use and analysis of language as a means of examining, challenging, and reconstructing these gendered power relations that shape social, political, and cultural life (Lazar, 2007). As a discourse genre, feminist discourse perceives language as a

powerful ideological instrument that both reflects and reproduces the very patriarchal structures. From the perspective of feminist theory, discourse is held to be a site of struggle wherein meanings about gender, identity, and power are negotiated and contested. According to feminist scholars (Lazar, 2005; Mills, 2004; Litosseliti, 2002; Benwell, 2002), linguistic practice, from the level of everyday-occurring conversation to that of literary and institutional texts, plays an essential role in defining what it is to be "female" or "male" within specific socio-historical contexts. Feminist discourse, therefore, tries to uncover how language marginalizes, silences, or objectifies women by normalizing male-centered views and reinforcing stereotypes of femininity and subservience (Cameron, 1998). However, it highlights how women and feminist writers use language strategically to resist domination, reclaim identity, and articulate alternative realities. Accordingly, feminist discourse becomes a critical practice since it aims to uncover hidden ideologies while offering new modes of expression that affirm female agency and subjectivity. This intersects with critical discourse analysis casts emphasis on gender as a category of analysis by examining how linguistic structures, such as passivization and negation function as sites of ideological struggle. Significantly, feminist discourse operates at two levels: first, it offers critiques of the ways that language perpetuates gender inequality; and, second, it envisions speech, writing, and representation as a site of empowerment whereby women can challenge and reshape dominant discourses.

2.3 Language and Ideology in Feminist Discourse

Language and ideology are inextricably linked in feminist discourse, as language is not only a medium of communication but also a site where power relations, gender identities, and social hierarchies are built up, maintained, and contested. Within the scope of feminist linguistics, language is an ideological tool that reflects and reproduces the patriarchal order inculcated in cultural and social structures (Cameron, 1998; Lazar, 2005). Feminist discourse analysts suggest that the linguistic features of everyday communication, such as lexical choices, grammatical structures, and conversational patterns, can discursively reinforce gendered ideology and sustain the ideological dominance of masculinity (Baxter, 2003; Mills, 2004). Through language, it is social norms regarding femininity and masculinity that get internalized, normalized, and perpetuated. For instance, the frequent use of generic masculine forms, passive voice constructions that obscure male agency, and discursive strategies silencing or marginalizing female voices contribute to the reproduction of patriarchal ideology (Ehrlich et al., 2014). As such, language reflects gendered ideology and is a mechanism for its legitimation (Ahlstrand, 2021). The methodology of feminist discourse analysis, based on the broader field of CDA, therefore tries to show the ideological underpinning of linguistic practices and to point out how discourse both shapes and is shaped by the sociopolitical structure (Fairclough, 1992; van Dijk, 1998).

Moreover, within the theoretical and analytical framework of feminist discourse, language is perceived as a potential site of resistance and change. While patriarchal ideology is encoded in discourse, feminist writers can manipulate linguistic structures to challenge and subvert these dominant meanings (Lazar, 2007). In feminist literary texts, for example, linguistic strategies such as negation and passivization are often employed to expose and destabilize the discursive norms that constrain women's subjectivity. This dual function of language, i.e., as both an instrument of oppression and a medium of resistance, illustrates the dialectical relationship between discourse and ideology (Fairclough, 1992; Khafaga, 2022a, 2022b). Through critical linguistic analysis, feminist writers aim to make visible the ways in which linguistic structures naturalize gendered hierarchies and to reclaim language as a tool for ideological critique and empowerment (Lazar, 2007). Ultimately, feminist discourse analysis positions language as a social practice that both mirrors and molds gendered realities, emphasizing the need for conscious engagement with how linguistic forms encode, reproduce, or resist systems of domination. As such, feminist approaches to language and ideology provide an essential framework for understanding how power operates discursively and for envisioning emancipatory possibilities through linguistic intervention.

2.4 Passivization as a Gendered Ideology Marker

Passivization is a powerful linguistic mechanism that communicates gendered ideology and power relations in discourse. According to Halliday's (1994) systemic functional linguistics (SFL), passivization is a syntactic process that restructures the transitivity pattern of clauses by downgrading or hiding the actor, that is, the doer of the process, and bringing to the front the goal, the affected participant. This syntactic restructuring is both grammatical and ideological. In patriarchal discourse, passivization is one of the grammatical means by which agency is contextualized, particularly in contexts where power is exercised over inferior subjects or powerless interlocutors, such as women (Khafaga, 2017a). According to feminist linguists and critical discourse analysts, this grammatical strategy naturalizes opposition by presenting events as happening to women rather than being done to them by some agents (Lazar, 2005; Mills, 2004). In Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, the use of passive constructions is a clear example to show how women are syntactically positioned as passive recipients of external control. According to Fairclough (1992) and van Dijk (1998), such linguistic choices support the ideological mechanisms of maintaining social hierarchies by concealing responsibility and normalizing submission. Fairclough (1989) also argues that action processes can appear as active sentences or as passive sentences, stating that agentless passive functions to leave causality and agency unclear. Sornig (1989) also states that the use of the passive structures serves either to camouflage the author of an action or to diminish the credibility of a statement. Likewise, Fowler (1991, p. 78) argues that the difference between using the active and the passive lies in the fact that when active structures are chosen to be used, then "the focus is to be on the agent of the action, implying clear responsibility," while the use of passive forms "allows parts of the clause to be deleted...leaving responsibility unspecified." Passivization, therefore, is not only about grammatical form; it is about the politics of representation and the way in which language encodes an unequal distribution of agency and voice (White, 2000).

From a critical discourse analysis perspective, however, passivization not only reflects gendered inequality but also participates in its reproduction. To clarify, passive constructions nurture an interpretive habit in which female subordination is perceived as natural and

unquestionable. The cumulative weight of such patterns constructs a world in which women are grammatically objectified and semantically silenced, thereby reinforcing the patriarchal belief that female passivity constitutes an ontological state rather than a social condition. Yet, feminist discourse analysts also recognize that the passive voice can be perceived as a mode of resistance. Therefore, in some feminist writings (e.g., Lazar, 2007), passivization is used strategically to foreground victimization, defocusing blame from individual agents onto systemic injustice. By putting women in the role of goals of social actions, the passive voice can reveal the insidiousness of patriarchal control and force readers to question structures of dominance rather than isolated agents. This incongruity highlights the ideological intricacy of passivization, as it constitutes a vehicle of oppression and a potential tool of critique. Passivization as a gendered ideology marker underlines how grammar functions as a subtle yet powerful mechanism by means of which power relations are linguistically encoded and ideologically legitimized in discourse (Fairclough, 1995).

2.5 Negation as a Gendered Ideology Marker

Negation is a key linguistic means through which gendered ideology is communicated, maintained, and sometimes resisted in discourse. In feminist discourse analysis, negation is not only a grammatical means of denying or reversing meaning; it is an ideological tool for the governance of behavior, the delimitation of agency, and the shaping of consciousness within patriarchal structures. In light of SFL, negation can be viewed as a resource for the expression of prohibition, refusal, and opposition, all three constitutive of power relations (Halliday, 1994). For example, in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, negation is employed to encode restriction and obedience and is used to regulate women's bodies and voices, commanding silence and subordination through grammatical structures that embed authority in prohibition. Also, the use of modalized negations perpetuates an ideological system in which female identity is defined by limitation and absence rather than presence and agency. Within the analytical framework of CDA, this kind of linguistic articulation normalizes power asymmetries by internalizing patriarchal control, making submission a moral and social expectation rather than an explicit act of coercion (Lazar, 2005; Fairclough, 1992). Through negation, ideology functions as limiting possibility rather than simply imposing restrictions on women's sense of what is possible or permissible within their world.

In the same vein, feminist discourse analysis reveals that negation has a paradoxical potential; that is, while enforcing restriction, it can at the same time be a means of defiance and resistance. When women in patriarchal discourse employ negation in the form of self-assertion, it is a linguistic act of rebellion. As such, negation turns from a marker of limitation into a declaration of agency and identity (Durán, 2023). According to van Dijk (1998), ideology operates through cognitive control of discourse, but exactly the same discursive mechanisms can be used to challenge that control. Such an ideological control can be achieved by the strategic use of negation to reclaim voice and resist silencing by asserting autonomy against structures of domination. Furthermore, Fairclough (1989, p. 125) argues that the three types of grammatical processes "can be either positive or negative," maintaining that negation has experiential value in the sense that "it is the basic way we have of distinguishing what is not the case in reality from what is the case." He also points out that negation can be "sincere, manipulative, or ideological" (Fairclough, 1989, p. 155, emphasis mine). This means that negation encodes ideology, and, therefore, it can effectively contribute to communicating gendered ideology in discourse. Thus, negation embodies a dual ideological function, as it is a tool of patriarchal regulation and a resource for feminist resistance. Its power lies in its linguistic potential to define boundaries: what women are forbidden to do and what they consciously refuse to accept. By revealing this duality, feminist discourse analysis discloses the ideological work performed by linguistic structure, showing how even the tiniest grammatical choices may become a discursive site for gendered power (van Dijk, 2008). Negation, therefore, can be perceived as a linguistic marker of gendered ideology, which, in turn, encodes oppression and enables subversion within the politics of language.

2.6 A Systemic Functional Linguistics Perspective to CDA

From an SFL perspective, language is viewed as a social semiotic system, one that both constructs meaning and reflects the power structures of society (Halliday, 1994). If one applies this theory to *The Handmaid's Tale*, SFL provides an analytical strand through which linguistic choices function to encode ideology, control, and gendered subjugation. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2014), the three SFL metafunctions, i.e., the ideational, the interpersonal, and the textual, offer a means of investigating how language is used to enact social reality in Atwood's vision of a dystopian society. In terms of the ideational metafunction, it refers to how experience and action are represented, more specifically, through the transitivity structure by way of material, relational, and mental processes. Atwood frequently uses passivization to delineate a world where women are made out to be goals rather than actors, stripped of agency and reduced to objects of male or institutional control. Concerning the interpersonal metafunction, it shows how one maintains relationships and hierarchies through mood and modality. The prevalence of declarative clauses and modalized imperatives reinforces authority and discipline (Khafaga, 2023), positioning women as passive recipients of commands. As for the textual metafunction, how information is structured and foregrounded, it shows how Atwood manipulates linguistic forms to emphasize silence, suppression, and ritualized control. For example, the repetition of negation and the omission of agency mirror the systemic elimination of women's voices. Thus, from an SFL perspective, Atwood's linguistic patterns are not arbitrary but deliberate constructions that expose how grammar itself can serve as a vehicle for ideological dominance.

According to Fairclough (1992), CDA perceives discourse as a site where social power and gender ideologies are not only produced but also contested. The SFL approach offers a complementary way of systematically describing how these power relations are encoded at the grammatical level (Khafaga, 2017b). For example, passivization obscures male or institutional actors, thus depersonalizing oppression, while negation reinforces prohibition and self-regulation. These patterns linguistically realize what Foucault (1980) termed 'disciplinary power,' whereby control is internalized through discourse rather than being enforced solely by physical means. Moreover, SFL allows the

examination of how resistance is expressed through linguistic inversion. Thus, SFL provides the grammatical scaffolding for a critical interpretation of CDA, revealing how Atwood's text transforms language into both an instrument of domination and one of dissent. By integrating SFL and CDA, this study shows that *The Handmaid's Tale* is not only a political allegory but also a linguistic critique of patriarchy and gendered ideology, in which each clause, process, and modality encodes the irreconcilable struggle between silence and speech, control and autonomy, and oppression and resistance.

2.7 Previous Studies

Numerous previous studies have integrated systemic functional linguistics (SFL) and critical discourse analysis (CDA) to demonstrate the effectiveness of combining grammatical analysis with critical interpretation and to reveal ideological structures in discourse. Halliday's (1994) SFL framework has been widely employed to explore how linguistic choices reflect social and power relations through transitivity, modality, and thematic organization. Fairclough (1992, 1995) and Fowler (1991) advanced this integration by linking linguistic features to broader sociocultural ideologies, suggesting that grammatical structures are not ideologically neutral but serve to encode dominance and control. Other studies (e.g., Egging, 2004; Martin & Rose, 2007; Gebhard & Accurso, 2020, 2023) have reinforced the role of SFL in examining literary texts, emphasizing how language choices construct experiential and interpersonal meanings that shape reader perception. Doran et al. (2025), for example discuss the effective use of systemic functional linguistics to reveal the various social relations and everyday-occurring conversations in different social settings. They introduce a new model for analyzing how people negotiate social relations through the framework of systemic functional linguistics by focusing on SFL's concept of social context and in particular on the interpersonal component of context known as tenor. Within feminist discourse analysis, Lazar (2005, 2007) extended CDA to the study of gendered texts, demonstrating how linguistic patterns, particularly transitivity and modality, reproduce patriarchal hierarchies. These studies establish a methodological precedent for analyzing Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* through SFL and CDA, where form and ideology intertwine to construct a linguistically mediated reality of subjugation and control.

In terms of the use of passivization and negation as markers of ideological positioning in discourse, some studies have highlighted the significance of these grammatical structures as conduits of specific ideological purposes. Fairclough (2003), for example, noted that passivization is a strategic tool for concealing agency, especially in institutional and patriarchal discourse. He maintained that within particular contexts, the passive structures undermine the direct attribution of blame and responsibility. In institutional discourse, where authority can function without explicit responsibility, passivization operates effectively to normalize power relations in patriarchal discourse. Similarly, Fowler (1991) and Simpson (1993) observed that passive constructions often serve ideological functions in literary and political texts by removing responsibility. In feminist linguistic studies, Sunderland (2000) and Lazar (2005) argued that the use of passivization is gendered, reinforcing women's passivity and marginalization in discourse. They also stated that the employment of negation is identified as a powerful linguistic marker of prohibition, denial, and resistance. Further, Tannen (1994) found that negation in gendered discourse frequently signals control, clarifying that it serves to establish behavioral boundaries and reinforces social orders. Tannen's (1994) argument has been emphasized by Caldas-Coulthard (1996), who argued that the use of negation functions not only as a grammatical opposition carrier but also as a prominent control mechanism in gendered discourse. She maintained that negation controls behavior by defining what is not allowed through limits and prohibitions, which, in turn, upholds dominant social orders and strengthens power structures. Recently, Numanbayraktaroğlu (2019) discussed the use of passive voice in Turkish media reports to hide responsibilities and identity, particularly when speaking about violence committed against women. These insights have paved the way for the current study's focus on passivization and negation in Atwood's novel, illustrating how grammatical choices both reproduce and subvert patriarchal ideologies within literary representation.

Concerning *The Handmaid's Tale*, some linguistic and discourse-oriented studies have demonstrated how Atwood manipulates language to expose systems of power, control, and resistance. Khafaga (2017a) used political discourse analysis to examine the linguistic manipulation of political myth in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* by demonstrating how Atwood criticizes the deceptive use of language against women through the dystopia. Khafaga's (2017a) study emphasized the usefulness of language as a tool for changing attitudes and the significance of political myths in modern societies as a tool for manipulation and highlights the relationship between the fictional events of the novel and the actual practices of contemporary politics. Stillman and Johnson (1994) also investigated the effectiveness of negation in shaping a vocabulary of internalized control and domination, where verbal negation reflects the physical and moral imprisonment of women. Their study highlighted the significance of using syntactic structures to communicate manipulation in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. Further, Hussein and Kadhim (2025) employed CDA to show how language is employed to reveal power relations and communicate control in Atwood's novel. The main objective of their study was to demonstrate how language functions as a tool of oppression and resistance. When taken as a whole, these studies highlight how *The Handmaid's Tale* functions as a literary and linguistic critique of patriarchy, with the novel's main conflicts between speech and silence, dominance and rebellion, being embodied through the methodical use of passivization and negation.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data Collection, Description, and Rationale

The data employed in this study were taken from Margaret Atwood's (1985) *The Handmaid's Tale*, a dystopian feminist novel that provides a pertinent linguistic context for exploring the relationship between language, power, and ideology. This novel was chosen as the source of data because it embodies complex gendered power relations articulated through distinct linguistic usage of passivization and

negation. With the view of capturing the representation of gendered ideology, selected excerpts were extracted from various parts of the text, including dialogues, narrative reflections, and descriptive passages, which highlight the power dynamics between men and women. This involved purposeful sampling with the view of ensuring that the selected data represent instances of both patriarchal control and feminist resistance within the discourse of the novel. Crucially, the selected excerpts mainly focus on how Atwood uses passivization and negation in depicting gendered oppression and resistance. Each extract was analyzed at the SFL level for patterns of transitivity, voice, and polarity and at the CDA level for identifying the way in which these linguistic features contribute to communicating gendered ideology in the selected novel. The selected data also represent a combination of linguistic form and thematic content, allowing both micro-level syntactic analysis and macro-level ideological interpretation. This bidimensional analytical focus allows for a comprehensive understanding of how Atwood's linguistic choices function as representations of gendered social structures.

The rationale for adopting *The Handmaid's Tale* as the main corpus is twofold: first, it explicitly engages with themes of gender, power, and language, rendering it the appropriate text for analyzing the use of passivization and negation as markers of gendered ideology. Second, the selected novel presents linguistic structures in a way that is complementary to the aims of both CDA and SFL, which stresses the role of language in constructing ideology. By focusing on passivization and negation, the study aims to reveal how certain grammatical mechanisms encode patriarchal dominance by linguistic subversion. This study, therefore, contributes to the field of feminist linguistics by linking literary and discourse-analytic approaches and demonstrating that fictional narratives can shed light on wider sociolinguistic realities. As such, this study attempts to make grammatical choices more saliently ideological and reveal the function of language as a tool of control and empowerment in gendered contexts.

3.2 Procedures

The analytical procedures followed a qualitative, interpretive framework informed by SFL and CDA. First, the selected excerpts from *The Handmaid's Tale* were textually analyzed to identify instances of passivization and negation. Each instance was then coded and categorized according to Halliday's (1994) transitivity and polarity systems to examine how these grammatical patterns realize ideational and interpersonal meanings. Next, CDA offered a further dimension of analysis, comprising textual, discursive, and social levels, to link linguistic structures to their broader ideological implications. At the textual level, grammatical choices were analyzed for agency, voice, and modality; at the discursive level, the study examined how passivization and negation reflect power relations between genders; and at the social level, interpretations were connected to feminist critiques of patriarchy. The analysis was interpretive, ensuring that linguistic findings were consistently related to social meanings and feminist theoretical perspectives.

4. Analysis and Results

4.1 Passivization as a Gendered Ideology Marker in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*

Passivization functions as a linguistic and ideological strategy that mirrors gendered ideology in the discourse of *The Handmaid's Tale*. Passivization is discursively enabled as a linguistic marker that communicates two main functions: a marker of female agency exclusion, and a marker of female objectification and instrumentalization, which will be discussed in the following subsections.

4.1.1 Passivization as a Marker of Female Agency Exclusion

In the discourse of the novel, women's agency is systemically removed within the patriarchal theocracy of Gilead. This is clearly demonstrated by Atwood's employment of the passive structures that function to naturalize oppression and to construct a social order in which women are grammatically and socially diminished.

Extracts (1)

- (1a) We are for breeding purposes: we aren't concubines, geisha girls, courtesans. On the contrary: everything possible has been done to remove us from that category. (*The Handmaid's Tale* (henceforth, *THT*), 1985, p. 128)
- (1b) We are being looked at, assessed, whispered about; we can feel it, like tiny ants running on our bare skins. (*THT*, p. 197)
- (1c) We aren't allowed to go there except in twos. This is supposed to be for our protection, though the notion is absurd: we are well protected already. (*THT*, pp. 22-23)
- (1d) We were getting dressed. (*THT*, p. 199)
- (1e) Time's a trap, I'm caught in it. (*THT*, p. 134)
- (1f) I'm taken to the doctor's once a month, for tests: urine, hormones, cancer smear, blood test; the same as before, except that now it's obligatory. (*THT*, p. 60)

The above extracts show a clear linguistic realization of institutionalized female disempowerment, in which passivization serves as a core grammatical strategy for the systematic exclusion of female agency and the naturalization of patriarchal control in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. In (1a), the passive structure in "everything possible has been done" conceals the agent of the action, i.e., the patriarchal regime, and casts emphasis on the affected participants, the Handmaids. Through grammatical passivization, the ideology of gender control is naturalized; it portrays the oppressive measures as systemic and impersonal rather than as the deliberate acts of male authority. In Halliday's (1994) SFL terms, the clause realizes a material process with an unspecified actor, thereby obscuring responsibility. In light of CDA's analytical and interpretative framework, it reveals how such linguistic suppression of agency mirrors the sociopolitical silencing of

women's voices and their helplessness. That is, the women are grammatical patients, not actors, just as they are socially passive bodies in the Gileadean hierarchy. Similarly, the progressive passive in "are being looked at, assessed, whispered about" in (1b) places the Handmaids as goals, not actors. This, in light of SFL terms, communicates a material process whose actor is deleted, representing the ideological disguise of patriarchal power. Such a passivization process shows how language reproduces gendered ideology by normalizing women's constant visibility and self-regulation under male surveillance.

In the same vein, the construction "are not allowed" in (1c) demonstrates a passive with a modal restriction that encodes prohibition without naming the authority. The missing agent, namely state, religion, or men, turns coercion into an impersonal rule. Whereas the clause grammatically naturalizes obedience by communicating prohibition as intrinsic to the social order, it ideologically exposes Atwood's attempt to show how grammar can transform domination into duty. This reconciles with feminist CDA's view (Lazar 2005) that linguistic impersonalization sustains patriarchal control. Furthermore, the passive construction in "we were getting dressed" in (1d) shows another explicit passive, where women are the goals of a process enacted by unseen agents (i.e., Aunts, the state). The passive here ritualizes submission; that is, dressing becomes an act done to women, and it also foregrounds the affected participant by the actor's omission. Here, in light of the CDA interpretative framework, clothing operates as a linguistic and physical marking of ownership; the passive form transforms coercion into ceremony to normalize gendered subordination on the part of the Handmaids. The same holds for the passive construction in (1e), wherein the agentless passive "I am caught in it" compresses violent action into passive results. The grammatical focus on what happened rather than who did it parallels how Gilead deletes responsibility for brutality. Significantly, while the clauses make the women goal participants repeatedly, their repetitions ideologically function to construct women's manipulation, helplessness, and victimization as inevitable routines.

Likewise, the clause "I'm taken to the doctor's once a month" in (1f) is a material process in the passive voice, whereby the actor, or controlling authority, is fully suppressed while the handmaid is brought to the forefront solely as the goal/patient of the action. The first-person singular pronoun "I", which refers to Offred, the heroine, appears active only superficially, as she is syntactically positioned as a recipient of action rather than an initiator, which, in turn, mirrors her powerlessness. Such an actor's deletion is ideologically loaded because what it conceals behind this impersonal system of force is the responsibility of the state, medical authorities, and patriarchal governance. Crucially, this correlates with the some studies (e.g., Fairclough, 2003; van Dijk, 2008) that passivization is a strategic resource in the dissimulation of domination and circulation of responsibility. The list "urine, hormones, cancer smear, blood test," which sounds as if it is done in a detached and clinical nominal style, further reinforces biomedical objectification of the female body, reduces women to measurable reproductive functions, and diminishes their autonomous self. The adjective "obligatory" operates ideologically to normalize coercion as bureaucratic necessity rather than as political violence. In CDA terms, the clause constructs a regime in which the female body is appropriated by the state for demographic and reproductive purposes, and the use of passivization becomes a linguistic strategy through which gender hierarchy is reproduced by delineating women as controlled biological resources. In other words, passivization here is not only a grammatical choice but also a discursive strategy of gendered ideology wherein female subjectivity is demolished, control is depersonalized, and institutional dominance is rendered incontrovertible.

4.1.2 Passivization as a Marker of Female Objectification and Instrumentalization

Another function of the use of passivization as a marker of gendered ideology in *The Handmaid's Tale* is that it serves as a powerful linguistic strategy that changes women from autonomous subjects into instruments of the patriarchal state. Consider the following:

Extracts (2)

(2a) We've been warned not to look too happy. (*THT*, p. 82)

(2b) I'm told to enter. I open the door, step in. (*THT*, p. 128)

(2c) I went to the door, which was closed, knocked on it, was told to come in. (*THT*, p. 143)

(2d) we should remember to do what we are told and not get into trouble, because if we do we will be rightfully punished. (*THT*, pp. 260-261)

(2e) we chant, as we have been taught. (*THT*, p. 115)

The clauses "we've been warned" in (2a), "I'm told to enter" in (2b), "was told to come in" in (2c), "to do what we are told... we will be rightfully punished" in (2d), and "we chant, as we have been taught" in (2e) collectively construct a grammatical network of passivization and projected passivity through which female agency is systematically excluded and replaced by institutional command. From a systemic functional linguistics perspective, these clauses are dominated by mental and verbal processes in the passive voice, where women are consistently positioned as goals/receivers rather than actors/sayers. In (2a), the passive "have been warned" suppresses the authority figure issuing the warning and foregrounds the women only as passive recipients of ideological conditioning, even at the level of emotional regulation: "not to look too happy." In (2b) and (2c), the repetition in "I'm told" and "was told" further reinforces this grammatical displacement of agency: the woman does not decide to enter; instead, entry is authorized through an invisible power. Offred's subsequent physical action, "I open the door, step in," occurs only after institutional permission is linguistically settled.

In (2d), the passive in "what we are told" establishes obedience as a permanent grammatical condition, while the passive in "we will be rightfully punished" ideologically legitimizes violence by framing punishment as impersonal justice rather than as an act of power. In the same vein, in (2e), "we chant, as we have been taught" combines limited surface activity (we chant) with deep structural passivity (have been

taught), indicating that even apparent collective action is merely the mechanical reproduction of indoctrination. From a CDA's perspective, these passive constructions function as a discursive strategy of domination: the consistent deletion of the actor conceals the regime as the true source of coercion, while normalizing obedience as an automatic social condition. Together, these examples reveal how female subjectivity is linguistically structured around compliance, where women do not speak, choose, or act independently, but solely receive orders, internalize warnings, repeat lessons, and endure punishment. The employment of Passivization in these examples is strategic, as it is used as a core ideological strategy through which female objectification and instrumentalization are grammatically encoded as the natural order of life in Gilead.

4.2 Negation as a Gendered Ideology Marker in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*

The powerful linguistic tool of negation does not simply point at the absence of an action or state but can function ideologically. Throughout Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, and as a marker of gendered ideology, negation is dexterously employed to communicate two functions: it is used as a control-of-action marker negation, and as an internalized compliance marker. These are discussed below.

4.2.1 Negation as a Control-of-Action Marker

In the discourse of the novel, negation recurrently appears in constructions that prevent women from acting freely, i.e., reading, speaking, moving, or socializing, and functions to encode gendered limitations into language.

Extracts (3)

- (3a) She wanted me to feel that I could not come into the house unless she said so. (*THT*, p. 17)
- (3b) Aunt Lydia said it was best not to speak unless they asked you a direct question. (*THT*, p. 18)
- (3c) We are not shown any pictures of this. (*THT*, p. 80)
- (3d) But she'll never be sent to the Colonies, she'll never be declared Unwoman. That is her reward. (*THT*, p. 118)
- (3e) We can never stand long in any one place. We don't want to be picked up for loitering. (*THT*, p. 185)

The above extracts show how negation serves as a control-of-action marker in *The Handmaid's Tale*. From an SFL perspective, the clause "I could not come into the house" in (3a) is structured around a modalized material process "come" negated by "not," which cancels the possibility of action. The modal verb "could" normally encodes potentiality and personal capacity, but its negation transforms this into prohibited agency. Also, the conditional element in "unless she said so" introduces conditional authorization that makes female movement dependent on another woman's institutional alignment with power. From a CDA's perspective, negation here functions as a gendered ideological marker because it constructs the female subject as spatially restricted and permission-bound, a core feature of patriarchal surveillance. The clause also serves as a control-of-action marker, since movement is not only discouraged but also structurally forbidden unless sanctioned by authority. Importantly, control is exercised through another woman, Aunt Lydia, which reveals how Gilead sustains domination through internalized female observing by masking male power behind female intermediaries.

In (3b), the clause contains a verbal process, "said," projecting an embedded relational-evaluative clause in "it was best," which is followed by a negated material/verbal process in "not to speak." The implicit actor "you" is grammatically suppressed to mirror the exclusion of female subjectivity. Furthermore, the conditional in "unless they asked you a direct question" introduces externally controlled permission. From a CDA's standpoint, negation operates simultaneously as a gendered ideology marker and a behavioral regulation mechanism. This is realized by communication the meaning that women are constructed as speakers only in response, never as initiators. Silence becomes ideologically feminized and institutionally enforced. The negation of speech is also a control-of-action marker, since verbal self-expression is framed not as a right but as a risk. Linguistically, Gilead transforms silence into wisdom, which, in turn, naturalizes domination through moralized discourse. Likewise, the clause in (3c) exemplifies a passivized material process in "are shown" with explicit negation. In SFL, the negation marks the absence of visual knowledge. The senser "we" is a collective pronoun that foregrounds communal deprivation. From a CDA's perspective, this is a clear instance of epistemic control through negation: what women are not allowed to see defines the limits of their reality. As a gendered ideology marker, the clause encodes the assumption that women must be shielded from knowledge. As a control-of-action marker, negation restricts not physical movement but perceptual access, showing that domination in Gilead operates not only through bodily discipline but also through the strategic negation of information.

Similarly, the clauses in (3d) carry two future material processes in "will be sent" and "will be declared" that are negated by "never." The repeated negation functions as a rhetorical intensifier that serves to reinforce absolute immunity. The two clauses show how negation marks hierarchical gender ideology; that is, some women are linguistically constructed as exempt from the brutal fate imposed on others. The category "unwoman" exposes how womanhood itself is politically canceled. Negation here operates ideologically to legitimize selective privilege within female subjugation, while also functioning as a control-of-action marker through contrast. This is conducted by emphasizing who will never be punished. The text indirectly heightens fear and obedience among those who can be punished. In the same vein, the first sentence in (3e) contains a negated modal material process in "can never stand," denying both ability and permission. The second sentence shows a mental process clause in "don't want," which appears to express internal desire but is actually shaped by external coercion. From a CDA's angle, negation directly encodes disciplinary control over the female body in public space. Whereas the use of negation ideologically constructs women as inherently suspicious in visibility and presence, it functions as a control-of-action marker that regulates posture, duration, and location. Crucially, the illusion of personal choice in "we don't want" reveals how deeply state control has

been internalized into self-regulation.

4.2.2 Negation as an Internalized Compliance Marker

In many discursive situations in the novel, women are not only prohibited externally; they internalize negation as part of their own cognitive and behavioral framework.

Extracts (4)

(4a) What I feel is that I must not feel. (*THT*, p. 37)

(4b) We can be read to from it, by him, but we cannot read. Our heads turn towards him, we are expectant, here comes our bedtime story. (*THT*, p. 84)

(4c) I should not be rash, I should not take unnecessary risks. (*THT*, p. 261)

(4d) I've never held a pen or a pencil, in this room, not even to add up the scores. (*THT*, p. 172)

In SFL terms, the clause "what I feel is" in (4a) follows the pattern of a relational identifying clause and is followed by a modalized mental process in "must not feel" to communicate the extent to which negation is used as a marker of internalized compliance in the novel. The verb "feel" is repeated, yet its second occurrence is both negated and intensified by the deontic modal "must" to convey a strong paradox; that is, emotion is acknowledged and disallowed at once. Further, the use of the first-person singular pronoun "I" mirrors how the prohibition of feeling is no longer external but self-inflicted. On the ideological level, this instantiates a gendered requirement for emotional suppression, wherein negation serves as a psychological strategy of power, clarifying that in Gilead domination operates not only on bodies but also on inner consciousness. Similarly, (4b) juxtaposes two material processes, "can be read to" (passive, permitted) versus "cannot read" (active, negated). In the passive voice, women become receivers rather than actors, whereas in the negated active clause, their agency is explicitly denied. The circumstance "by him" reinstates male authority in the form of the controlling actor. From a CDA's perspective, negation serves both as a gendered ideology marker that constructs literacy and knowledge as masculine prerogatives and as an internalized compliance marker, since tone is not overtly resistant but resigned and normalized. The metaphor of the "bedtime story" further strengthens the ideological meaning that women are positioned as passive children, dependent upon male narration for access to meaning itself.

In the same vein, (4c) contains two modalized mental-material projections structured around the negated deontic modal "should not." In SFL, "should" typically encodes moral obligation rather than direct coercion, indicating that the regulation has been fully absorbed into the speaker's evaluative system. The material process "take risks" is explicitly negated, keeping action at the level of intention. From a CDA's viewpoint, this is a clear instance of negation as internalized compliance. The statement reflects how women are constructed as subjects who must be cautious, restrained, and risk-averse, while risk-taking is masculinized. Power no longer needs to intervene directly; it operates through the subject's own self-surveillance. Likewise, (4d) demonstrates a clause that is built around a negated perfect material process in "have never held," which emphasizes the total absence of action across time. The repetition of negation in "never" and "not even" intensifies the prohibition and foregrounds the systematic denial of literacy practices. The circumstance "in this room" localizes the prohibition spatially, which, in turn, marks the room as a controlled ideological zone. Significantly, negation operates effectively as a gendered ideology marker: writing, calculation, and symbolic inscription are forbidden to women because they enable autonomy and record-keeping. Also, the calm negation tone in (4d) signals internalized compliance in the sense that the prohibition is reported, not challenged, which communicates the most extreme forms of ideological domination.

5. Discussion

The above analysis demonstrates that passivization and negation function as two reciprocally reinforcing linguistic strategies for the construction and maintenance of gendered ideology in the discourse of Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. The analysis shows that the two grammatical structures encode women's subjugation as natural, inevitable, and structurally justified. From an SFL perspective (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), passivization contributes to delineating male and institutional actors in material processes (e.g., women are taken, assigned, declared, punished), thereby obscuring responsibility and presenting domination as an impersonal social fact rather than an agentive act of violence. This finding correlates with earlier CDA's research, which shows that passive constructions in patriarchal and legal discourses function ideologically to naturalize inequality (Lazar, 2007; Hussein & Kadhim, 2025). The analysis also clarifies that negation operates as a complementary mechanism that restricts women's possible actions, thoughts, emotions, and speech through recurrent negative polarity (e.g., cannot move, must not speak, never read, should not feel), thereby grammatically establishing women's lives around prohibition rather than initiative. This goes in conformity with some previous linguistic findings (Stillman & Johnson, 1994; Baccolini, 2004; Lazar, 2007; Khafaga, 2017a), whose contributions advocate the assumption that dystopian control in Atwood's novel is realized through the disciplined regulation of the female body and voice. However, the analysis in the current study extends these insights by demonstrating that gendered ideology is not only enacted through what is done to women (passivization), but also through what women are linguistically forbidden to do (negation).

Furthermore, while previous studies often treat passivization as the primary marker of the loss of agency (e.g., Sornig, 1989; Halliday, 1994; White, 2000; Martin & Rose, 2007) and negation as a secondary indicator of deprivation (Durán, 2023; Yang, 2025), this study shows that the two constructions operate in a systematic ideological division of labor: passivization removes visible male power from the grammar of domination, while negation internalizes that domination within the female subject's own perception of possibility. Moreover, whereas

previous feminist studies (Lazar, 2005, 2007) have emphasized the thematic silencing and objectification of women in Gilead, the present study demonstrates that this silencing is grammatically planned, with women simultaneously constructed as passive objects of institutional action and as active but permanently restricted subjects of negated clauses. In contrast to studies that interpret control in *The Handmaid's Tale* primarily as a top-down theological system (Khafaga, 2017a; Moldovan, 2019), this study reveals that gendered ideology is sustained through everyday linguistic micro-choices, where passivization makes domination appear agentless and negation makes restriction appear self-evident and self-imposed. Consequently, passivization and negation together form a closely intertwined discursive system through which Gilead transforms patriarchal violence into routine grammatical structure. This finding not only reconciles with earlier CDA's insights into ideological naturalization (e.g., Fairclough, 1995; Zhao & Tian, 2022; Yang, 2023) but also accentuates the assumption that gendered power is reproduced at the levels of syntax, polarity, and agency in Atwood's dystopian novel.

It is analytically demonstrated that passivization in *The Handmaid's Tale* is a major linguistic indicator of the exclusion of female agency, which systematically remolds women into entities to whom things happen rather than subjects who perform an action. From an SFL point of view (Halliday, 1994; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), this systematic use of passive voice material processes displaces women from the actor position and repositions them as the goal, and in this way, women are deprived even of grammatical control over actions affecting their bodies, identities, and social lives. This iterated practice of agency displacement lexicalizes powerlessness within the clause structure itself: women are not represented as choosing, acting, or deciding, but rather as being taken, examined, assigned, controlled, and used. The habitual ellipsis of the actor within these passive voices becomes ideologically salient because such ellipsis conceals the real agents of domination in the state, male authorities, and/or institutional machinery, and domination is presented as anonymous, procedural, and unavoidable. From a CDA's perspective (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2008; Wodak & Meyer, 2016), this grammatical backgrounding of authority naturalizes female subjugation since it presents the exclusion of women's agency as a natural condition rather than as a politically imposed reality. For this reason, agency is not only socially denied but also grammatically effaced. Accordingly, women are positioned as passive sites of power rather than active participants in their own lives. Through the sustained exposure to such passive structures, the narrative constructs a world in which female agency will eventually become linguistically unimaginable since the grammar itself denies women any access to action and intention. Consequently, in Atwood's novel, passivization operates not as an ideologically neutral stylistic preference but rather as a discursive mechanism by means of which female agency becomes ideologically legitimized and normalized throughout the textual representation of gender relations.

The analysis also clarifies that the use of passivization in *The Handmaid's Tale* serves as a fundamental grammatical strategy for constructing female objectification and instrumentalization, transforming women from acting subjects into passive sites of action within Gilead's ideological order. To clarify, the consistent use of material processes in passive voice systematically realigns women to the role of goal rather than actor; in other words, things are done to them rather than initiated by them. The analysis also shows that the frequent deletion of the actor in passive clauses produces the illusion that domination is procedural rather than political and automatic rather than imposed. Such elimination constitutes an ideological concealment of power, allowing institutional violence to appear neutral, medical, or administrative, which reconciles with Lazar's (2005) argument that female bodies are discursively reframed as objects of governance rather than bearers of rights or agency. Furthermore, passivization reinforces instrumentalization by aligning women with the logic of production: they are "examined," "checked," "assigned," and "used," all of which mirror industrial processes applied to objects rather than human beings. This linguistic construction supports Gilead's biopolitical agenda, within which reproduction is raised above personal and human needs, and women are reduced to reproductive infrastructure.

The analysis further shows that negation, being a gendered ideology marker in *The Handmaid's Tale*, emerges as a powerful control-of-action strategy that constrains women's physical movement, speech, visibility, literacy, and social interaction through repeated patterns of grammatical prohibition. It is analytically clarified that negation primarily targets material processes, cancelling women's capacity to act at the level of clause structure while often preserving them as grammatical subjects, which produces a paradoxical configuration in which the female subject is linguistically present but functionally disabled. This finding correlates with previous (e.g., Briedik, 2021; Devi, 2023; Hussein & Kadhim, 2025), which identify restriction, surveillance, and bodily discipline as central mechanisms of patriarchal control in Atwood's novel. The analysis also shows that negation performs the linguistic role of imperatives in the discourse of the novel. To clarify, instead of direct commands, Gilead relies heavily on normalized negative polarity (e.g., cannot, never, must not), which makes restricted action appear natural, routine, and self-evident rather than violently imposed. Further, the present analysis demonstrates that negation is not only representational but also operational, actively producing obedience by defining the very boundaries of possible action in advance.

Moreover, negation in *The Handmaid's Tale* operates not only as an external mechanism of prohibition but also as an internalized compliance marker, through which the female subject linguistically participates in her own regulation. Unlike overt commands and institutional directives, negation appears deeply embedded in self-referential clauses of thought, feeling, judgment, and intention (e.g., I must not feel; I should not be rash; we cannot read), revealing how authority migrates from external enforcement to internal self-surveillance. The analysis shows that negation frequently targets mental and relational processes, rather than only material ones, indicating that regulation in Gilead penetrates cognition, emotion, and evaluation. This finding correlates with previous studies that theorize power as disciplinary rather than purely repressive (e.g., Lakoff, 1973; Sunderland & Litosseliti, 2002; Ribeiro, 2002) and aligns with Foucault's (1980) argument that control is most effective when it is cognitively based. Still, this study demonstrates that negation is the primary grammatical mechanism through which internalization is linguistically realized. This finding does not correlate with much

previous research (e.g., Butler, 1999; Somacarrea, 2006; Namjoo, 2019) that treats compliance mainly as a psychological or thematic phenomenon by showing that it is systematically encoded through negative polarity combined with deontic modality. Compliance thus shifts from being an inferred mental state to a recurrent grammatical pattern of self-restraint. Moreover, while earlier studies often frame obedience as something imposed directly by male authority (Khafaga, 2017a; Devi, 2023), this study contradicts that view by showing that internalized negation frequently operates without immediate male presence and within female-only spaces, highlighting how women become linguistic agents of their own subjugation. Consequently, this study not only perceives passivization as the dominant markers of submission but also demonstrates that negation functions as the crucial bridge between institutional power and subjective obedience, reshaping not only action but also desire, thought, and self-evaluation. Through a dexterous employment of passivization and negation in *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood's manages to depict a particularly advanced form of linguistic domination, wherein the two grammatical structures go beyond their semantic functionality towards further pragmatic and illocutionary meanings to communicate gendered ideology in the discourse of the novel.

6. Conclusion

By drawing on systemic functional linguistics and critical discourse analysis, this paper provided a linguistic investigation of the use of passivization and negation as markers of gendered ideology in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. The analysis showed that the grammatical structures of passivization and negation go beyond their ordinary semantic and grammatical functions of concealing agency (as is the case for passivization) and communicating repudiation and prohibition (as is the case for negation) towards further illocutionary purposes to function as effective mechanisms of gendered ideology and manipulative control in the discourse of the selected novel. It was analytically evidenced that passivization often conceals the agentive, turning female characters into objects of ritualized authority, surveillance, and societal expectation, which, in turn, reinforces patriarchal hierarchies through a minimization of explicit acknowledgment of the oppressors' actions. The analysis also clarified that negation serves as a prescriptive and prohibitive tool that shapes restrictions of activity for women and internalizes a discourse of limitation and subordination on their part. Crucially, the employment of these grammatical structures, when analyzed in light of CDA and SFL, mirrors not only the systemic nature of gendered power but also shows the performative enforcement of ideology in language. The interplay of passivization and negation significantly highlights how dystopian language reflects and perpetuates social inequalities, thereby pointing out the multifaceted interconnection between discourse, power, and gendered ideology.

Future studies might contribute to the multidimensional interplay of linguistic strategies and gendered ideology in dystopian literature by looking beyond passivization and negation to other grammatical and discourse-level mechanisms, such as modality, nominalization, imperativity, and lexicalization, which similarly reflect power dynamics of control between interlocutors. Semiotically, further studies are recommended to show how semiotic choices in *The Handmaid's Tale* mediate the representation of female agency and oppression across contexts. This might reveal how the semiotic staging of the novel contributes to the meaning-making process. These recommended studies might reveal similar and/or different findings than those demonstrated in this study and also serve to offer useful insights into a deeper understanding of how language operates not only as a reflection of ideology but also as an active agent in its reproduction and contestation, particularly when it is used to enforce or resist gendered power relationships in literary genres and beyond.

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