

The Feminist Stylistics Analysis of Domesticity in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

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Abstract – This study involves a feminist stylistic analysis of domesticity in Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Through vocabulary and grammatical choices, the study aims to explore how domestic environments and experiences are linguistically and ideologically defined and created. The examination at the word level focuses on identifying and describing tactics, such as the nominalization patterns that either obfuscate or emphasize agency and the choice of nouns, particularly gendered, collective, abstract, and generic nouns. Additional focus is placed on the analysis of adjectives that contribute to the representation of emotional labour and domestic responsibilities, including empty, gendered, qualitative, diminutive, and qualifying adjectives. The study investigates how these linguistic components create gendered identities and place the female narrator inside the sociocultural realm of domesticity, drawing on an integrated linguistic model based on the research of Sara Mills, Lesley Jeffries, and M.A.K. Halliday's systemic functional grammar. Via adopting a mixed qualitative and quantitative approach for analysis, it is vital that Angelou's story presents domesticity as a contested, emotionally charged, and ideologically complicated phenomenon that is introduced through intentional linguistic choices rather than as a passive backdrop. The results reinforce how women's autobiographical writing can reveal the multi-layered representation of domestic agency, resistance, and limitation through feminist stylistic lens.

Index Terms— feminist stylistics, domesticity, agency, gendered identities, resistance, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*

I. INTRODUCTION

Feminist linguistics and stylistics have long focused on the language creation of gendered experience. Feminist stylistics provides a potent analytical framework in this area for examining how language, especially in literary texts, carries gender ideology (Mills, 1995; Lazar, 2005). Building on critical linguistics and systemic functional grammar, feminist stylistics examines how gendered meaning-making is influenced by ostensibly neutral linguistic decisions (e.g., noun choice, adjective use, and nominalisation). The representation of domesticity in women's memoirs is one area that is still largely unexplored; it is a space where language practices influence, contradict, or emphasise old gender beliefs (Wales, 2001; Sunderland, 2004).

Women's memoirs' portrayal of domesticity has long been a subject of ideological conflict and negotiation, frequently influenced by societal norms and patriarchal expectations surrounding gender roles (Mills, 1995; Cameron, 1992). Maya Angelou reshapes her childhood and womanhood experiences in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969), often describing home environments and duties that both mirror and defy gendered expectations. This study aims to investigate how domesticity is artistically represented in Angelou's story via a feminist stylistic lens with an emphasis on the language elements that create and mediate female agency within domestic spaces. Here, "domesticity" refers to the routine domestic realm, which includes caring, household chores, family responsibilities, and home space—all of which are conventionally classified as feminine and ideologically charged (Oakley, 1974; Delphy, 1984; Mills & Mullany, 2011).

Feminist stylistics, as introduced by Mills (1995) and further developed by Jeffries (2007, 2010), provides tools for analyzing how language constructs gendered meanings. A feminist stylistic model is used in this study, which focuses on the word level, specifically the naming and describing categories. Emphasis is placed on the choice of nouns, including gendered, abstract, collective, and generic nouns, as well as modification choices, such as empty adjectives, gendered adjectives, qualitative adjectives, diminutive adjectives, and qualifying adjectives (Mills, 1995; Jeffries, 2010). Additionally, it examines nominalisation as a syntactic tool (Halliday, 2014; Jeffries, 2010), exposing the restructuring of processes and agency in the portrayal of domesticity

Although the home and domestic experiences are important in Angelou's memoir, the linguistic construction of domesticity has not been investigated from a feminist stylistic standpoint. Despite previous study reinforcing themes of racial identity, trauma, and emancipation, little attention has been paid to the micro-linguistic techniques Angelou involves to encode home roles and relationships, despite previous study reinforcing themes of racial identity, trauma, and emancipation (Braxton, 1999; Tate, 2003). Additionally, African American literature's depictions of household settings have a certain historical and cultural meaning that is connected to resistance, survival, and generational continuity (Christian, 1985; Hooks, 1990). Feminist stylistics (Mills, 1995) provides a useful framework for examining how domesticity is portrayed and how it shapes female identity in Angelou's memoir. This study addresses that gap by applying a multi-dimensional linguistic model grounded in feminist theory and stylistics.

The following questions are the focus of this study:

1. In what ways does *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* use language to express domesticity?
2. To what degree do abstract and gendered nouns influence how women are portrayed in the home?
3. How does nominalisation work in home contexts to highlight or hide agency?
4. In domestic scenes, what representational patterns are revealed by the use of qualifying, diminutive, and empty adjectives?

A. Significance of the Study

The portrayal of Black female identity and domesticity in Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* has been the subject of numerous feminist stylistic and discourse analyses.

In her work on *Gendered Selves Reconstruction in African Autobiographies: A Feminist Reading of Maya Angelou's I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings and Buchi Emecheta's Head Above Water*, Ottoh-Agede (2013) shows how Angelou actively reconstructs Black female identity through linguistic tactics using social identity theory and feminist perspective theory. She draws attention to the concept of "triple victimization"—the interlocking oppressions of class, race, and gender—and explores how Angelou overcomes these through her self-expression and narrative style (Ottoh-Agede, 2013).

In a related study, Saeed et al. (2020) use Nancy Hartsock's feminist standpoint theory in *Re-Conceptualizing Women's Voices in Maya Angelou's I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* to examine how Angelou asserts her agency and voice in spaces that are typically shaped by gendered silence and domesticity. According to the study, Angelou's memoir reshapes the home and private sphere into a space of resistance and voice by transforming silence into a potent kind of autonomy and speech (Saeed et al., 2020).

A recent study by Ameen et al. (2023), titled *Black Feminism in Angelou's I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings: A Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis*, employs Michelle M. Lazar's (2005) Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) methodology. The study looks at how Angelou portrays Black women's marginalisation under patriarchal and colonial structures. Additionally, it examines Angelou's autobiographical story as an act of empowerment and "womanism," particularly in the context of the traditionally private and domestic domains, presenting them as places of resistance as opposed to passive imprisonment (Ameen et al., 2023).

B. Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that Angelou's portrayal of domesticity is linguistically complex, utilising both traditional and subversive techniques. The memoir deliberately uses abstract nouns, modification, and nominalisation to reconstruct domesticity as a complicated, politically contested realm, even while domestic spaces and functions may be depicted using gendered nouns and diminutive adjectives to suit societal expectations. As a result, the language of domesticity actively creates female subjectivity rather than passively, frequently striking a balance between resistance and conformity.

C. Aims of the Study

In line with the research questions stated above, this research aims to:

1. Examine how domesticity is discursively constructed in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* using feminist stylistic methods.
2. Examine how Angelou's use of gendered and collective nouns, nominalisation, and modifiers reflect feminist concerns.
3. Apply feminist stylistic models (Mills, 1995; Jeffries, 2010) and systemic functional grammar (Halliday, 2014) to autobiographical narrative.

Angelou's story, being used to identify, categorise, and interpret lived experience, particularly from

the perspective of a Black woman.

II Feminist Stylistics and the Representation of Domesticity: Word-Level Analysis

Feminist stylistics, when applied to domesticity, shows how language choices support women in the private sphere, frequently normalising selflessness, passivity, and caregiving (Sunderland, 2004; Litosseliti, 2006). According to Sara Mills (1995, 2008), discourse around women is constructed through both naming and describing, while Jeffries (2010) emphasizes that “the choices available in English systematically shape gendered meanings.” The word level—especially the use of nouns, adjectives, and nominalisation—offers insight into how women's identities are limited or defined through domestic roles.

A. Choice of nouns: The lexical words chosen to label individuals and actions are referred to as the noun choice. According to feminist stylisticians like Jeffries (2007) and Mills (1995), nouns frequently convey ideological presumptions that mirror conventional gender roles. For instance, women are often referred to by their domestic or familial ties in patriarchal discourse (e.g., “wife,” “mother,” “housewife”), which reduces their identity to activities in the private realm (Mills, 1995). The notion that a woman's primary function is to serve others is reinforced by such labeling. The value of women is portrayed in terms of their relationship to others, reflecting ideological embedding in such labelling (Mills, 2008; Cameron, 1992). This supports Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity, which holds that language enacts the roles that women are supposed to play. Mills (1995) argues that such nominal labeling “limits women's subjectivity by referencing them through family roles” (p. 82).

Jeffries (2007) supports this, suggesting naming is a “textual strategy that constructs identity ideologically” (p. 41), as in :

1. *She's a good wife and homemaker.*
2. *She is a devoted wife and mother.*

This construction ties her worth to her domestic role and names her by roles that exist in relation to others, not by individual identity.

1. Gendered Nouns: Gender-encoding nouns, such “waitress” and “actress,” reflect societal perceptions about women's roles. According to Mills (2008), gendered nouns frequently denote the feminine as “other” or inferior, making masculine terms the standard. These terms highlight gender binary thinking and vocational segregation. They emphasise the idea that women have different or inferior roles to men and frequently convey implications of triviality or aesthetic focus (Mills, 2008; Spender, 1980). Other forms of identity and agency are sometimes obscured by gendered nouns, such as “mother” and “wife,” which restrict women to their biological or relational position. Jeffries (p. 65, 2010). as in :

- (3) . *She worked as a cleaning lady* – emphasizes gender; vs.
- (4) . *She worked as a cleaner*” – neutral alternative.

Mills (2008) notes that “female-marked forms often carry connotations of triviality or marginality” (p. 56). Jeffries (2010) adds that such forms “naturalize the division of labor along gendered lines” (p. 87).

Spender (1980) and Mills (1995) argue that female-marked job titles frame women's roles as exceptions to the male norm, contributing to occupational segregation, as in:

- (5). *The cleaning lady came early.*
- (6). *The waitress brought our drinks.*”

The gendered noun is unnecessary and highlights gender over role.

2. Collective Nouns: Nouns that describe a group (e.g., “women”, “family”) can emphasize or obscure individual agency. Collective nouns can be used to homogenize experiences of women, potentially downplaying diversity and individual perspectives.” Jeffries (2010, p. 72). as in :

- (7) . *The mothers protested.* vs.
- (8). *A mother stood alone* – the former collectivizes experience, the latter individualizes.

Group nouns used to refer to all people, but were often gender-biased (e.g., *mankind*, *manpower*). Such terms exclude women linguistically while claiming to be neutral. This reflects androcentrism, where maleness is positioned as the norm (Pauwels, 1998; Jeffries, 2010), as in :

- (9). *Mankind has built civilizations.*
- (10). *Mankind has explored the universe.*

Pauwels (2003) stresses that collective male generics contribute to women's linguistic invisibility. Jeffries (2010) argues that “the use of male-coded collectives sustains the idea of male universality” (p. 69).

3. Abstract Nouns : The nouns that refer to intangible concepts (e.g., ‘freedom’, ‘obedience’, ‘domesticity’). In feminist stylistics, abstract nouns may obscure agency when used without clear agents, as

in :

(11). *Her submission was expected* .

“Abstract nouns often represent ideologies such as ‘purity’ or ‘respectability’, which are projected onto women without their consent or agency.”Jeffries (2010, p. 78).

Additionally abstract nouns often essentialize gender roles by romanticizing domestic life, portraying it as a woman’s destiny (Sunderland, 2004), as in :

(12). *Her life was defined by motherhood*.

(13). *Motherhood defines a woman’s purpose*.

Jeffries (2007) explains that “abstractions obscure historical and social factors, presenting gender roles as timeless truths” (p. 104).

4. Generic Nouns: Nouns that claim universality (e.g., ‘man’, ‘mankind’) but often exclude or marginalize women. These emphasize the default maleness of human experience (Bodine, 1975; Cameron, 1992).

“Generic nouns like ‘man’ suggest a neutral category but frequently erase female experience.”Jeffries (2010, p. 69). Feminist analysis challenges male-generic language for reinforcing androcentrism and linguistic invisibility (Bodine, 1975; Jeffries, 2010),as in :

(14). *Man has always sought freedom_excludes women’s experience*.

(15). *Each student must submit his homework*." Male pronouns used generic.

(16). *Man has always cared for his family*. Universal claim, gender-specific language.

Bodine (1975) and Cameron (1992) argue that generic masculines sustain linguistic exclusion and shape perception over time. Bodine (1975) also asserts that “male generics contribute to the linguistic marginalization of women” (p. 131). Jeffries (2010) on the other hand, reinforces how these forms make “women’s presence seem optional or invisible” (p. 76).

TABLE 1

NAMING AND DESCRIBING (WORD LEVEL)

Category	Description	Source(s)
Choice of Nouns	Selection of nouns reflecting domesticity or passivity	Mills (1995), Jeffries (2007)
Gendered Nouns	Use of explicitly male or female nouns such as (<i>mother, maid, man</i>)	Mills (1995), Jeffries (2007)
Collective Nouns	Nouns introducing groups, such as (<i>family</i>)	Jeffries (2007)
Abstract Nouns	Concepts or states, such as (<i>freedom, submission, domesticity</i>)	Jeffries (2007)
Generic Nouns	Use of general terms that mask gender such as (man as universal)	Jeffries (2007)

B. Choice of Modification: The adjectives or modifiers used with nouns shape how subjects are perceived. Adjectives like *gentle, devoted, and sweet* reinforce passive or emotional stereotypes about women (Mills, 1995). “Modifiers can reinforce ideologies of domesticity and passivity when women are consistently described with diminishing or infantilizing terms.” Mills (1995, p. 144), as in :

(17). *She is a mere housewife*” – ‘mere’ is a qualifying adjective that diminishes the role.

(18). *She is a gentle and dutiful wife.* Reinforces the idea of submissive femininity.

(19). *She's a loving, obedient wife.* Modifiers idealize submissiveness.

Litosseliti (2006) and Mills (2008) show that modifiers often reward conformity to gender norms, especially within domestic contexts. Mills (1995) also notes that modifiers are “a site of ideological inscription, reflecting expected behavior” (p. 89). Jeffries (2007) points out how “positive modifiers often reward conformity to gendered roles” (p. 60).

TABLE 2 MODIFICATION (WORD LEVEL)

Category	Description	Source(s)
Choice of Modification	Use of modifiers (pre-or post-modification) to qualify or limit meaning of nouns	Mills (1995), Jeffries (2007)

1. Empty adjectives :Empty Adjectives are terms that emphasise appearance or feelings and lack nuance (e.g., "cute," "lovely") when used to describe women. According to Lakoff (1975) and Mills (1995), these terms trivialise and feminise, emphasising emotional appeal over aptitude. "Empty adjectives are typically used to reinforce the stereotypes of femininity that center on emotion" Mills (2008, p. 93). As in:

(20). *she is a nice, sweet girl.* It is ambiguous, artistic, and effective.

(21), *She's such a lovely homemaker.* Charm is prioritised over hard work.

2. Gendered Adjectives: Adjectives stereotypically linked to one gender (e.g., *emotional, gentle, irrational*).“Gendered adjectives reflect broader societal tendencies to evaluate women's behavior differently from men's.” Mills (1995, p. 89). These adjectives reinforce stereotypes that disqualify women from authority. They also highlight gender binaries and restrict behavior (Mills, 2008), as in :

(22). *She was called emotional during the meeting* – gendered evaluation of behavior.

(23). *She's too sensitive for that role.*

(24). *She's too emotional to lead.* Emotion is feminized and devalued.

Mills (2008) states, “gendered adjectives function ideologically to exclude women from rational or authoritative domains” (p. 74).

3. Qualitative Adjectives: These adjectives describe qualities of the noun (e.g., *'hardworking', 'submissive'*). In feminist stylistics, attention is paid to which qualities are reinforced. Jeffries (2007) notes that when applied to women in domestic contexts, they often emphasize the normalization of unpaid labor, as in :

(25). *She was a dedicated mother* – praise focused on traditional caregiving roles.

(26). *She's a meticulous housekeeper.*

Here, “*meticulous*” praises domestic performance while reinforcing domesticity as her domain.“Such adjectives can either challenge or reinforce traditional gender norms, depending on the values they attach to women’s roles.” Jeffries (2010, p. 45).

4. Diminutive Adjectives : Adjectives that reduce size or seriousness (e.g., *little, cute*). Infantilize women’s roles and contributions. Such adjectives frame domestic work or women themselves as less serious. “Diminutives suggest weakness or smallness, subtly reinforcing the inferiority of women and girls.” Mills(1995, p. 94),as in :

(27). *She prepared a cute little dinner.*

(28). *She wore a little dress* – 'little' infantilizes and sexualizes.

Mills (1995) points out that “diminutives trivialize women’s actions and emphasize infantilization” (p. 66).

5. Qualifying Adjectives: These are adjectives that define or restrict the meaning of the noun (e.g., "*only a housewife, 'just a mother'*").According to Jeffries (2007), these styles minimise the roles that women play in the home or at work."Qualifiers like 'only' and 'just' are frequently employed to limit and diminish the roles of women." As in :

(29). *She's just a housewife* – diminishes the significance of the term Jeffries (2010, p. 70). "Qualifiers devalue the contributions of women by presenting their roles as inferior," according to Jeffries (2007) (p. 99).

TABLE 3
 ADJECTIVAL STRATEGIES (WORD LEVEL)

Category	Description	Source(s)
Empty Adjectives	Aesthetic but semantically empty such as (<i>lovely, charming</i>)	Mills (1995)
Gendered Adjectives	Adjectives highlighting gender stereotypes such as (<i>delicate, strong</i>)	Mills (1995)
Qualitative Adjectives	Evaluative descriptions of qualities such as (<i>obedient, independent</i>)	Jeffries (2007)
Diminutive Adjectives	Adjectives that minimise such as (<i>little, sweet</i>)	Mills (1995)
Qualifying Adjectives	Adjectives limiting or specifying meaning such as (<i>domestic, maternal</i>)	Jeffries (2007)

C. Nominalisation: Nominalisation refers to turning actions or processes (verbs) into abstract nouns (e.g., *cleaning, cooking*).

Nominalisation obscures agency and masks labor, especially in domestic work. “Nominalisation hides who is doing what to whom, and in patriarchal contexts, can conceal male dominance or women's lack of choice.” Halliday (2014, p. 215); Jeffries (2010, p.98), as in :

(30). *The cooking was done before noon. Who did it? Not stated.*

(31). *Her domestication was gradual* – the verb “domesticate” became a noun, removing agent.

(32). *The cleaning was finished before noon.* Agency is removed; the worker disappears.

Halliday (2014) points out that “nominalisation reduces transitivity and removes agency” (p. 217).

Jeffries (2010) adds, “nominalisation in domestic contexts contributes to the invisibility of women’s labor” (p. 104).

TABLE 4 NOMINALIZATION (WORD LEVEL)

Category	Description	Source(s)
Nominalisation	Process of converting verbs/adjectives into nouns	Halliday (1994), Jeffries (2007)

By examining word-level choices, feminist stylistics exposes how language naturalizes and idealizes patriarchal expectations of women's domestic roles (Walby, 1990; Delphy & Leonard, 1992). These patterns collectively emphasize the ideology of domestic femininity: women as nurturers, homemakers, and passive agents.

METHODOLOGY

A. *Data Description and Selection*

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings (Angelou, 1969), an autobiographical memoir authored by African American poet and activist Maya Angelou, is the main book being examined. This study looks at how language depicts women's domesticity, especially as it relates to the narrator's own experiences in early 20th-century America. With particular attention to the mother figure (*Vivian Baxter*), the grandmother (*Momma*), and the narrator herself, Angelou's memoir effectively conveys the interlocking struggles of gender, race, and class. These women carve themselves places of resistance and individuality while navigating a world that seeks to silence their voices. The selected extracts span the beginning and the middle of the narrative, with each containing references to domestic environments, and caretaking roles. The extracts were purposely chosen to emphasize the linguistic construction of gendered identities and power relations through a feminist stylistic lens (Mills, 1995; Jeffries, 2007).

B. *The Tools for Analysis*

Mills (1995) and Jeffries (2007) developed feminist stylistics, which are used in this work. Halliday (1994) describes nominalisation which incorporates these findings. Particular focus is placed on the following word-level characteristics: Examining how noun phrases are used to identify and depict women is known as "naming and describing" (Mills, 1995).

1. Choice of Nouns: includes generic, abstract, gendered, and collective nouns (Jeffries, 2007).
2. Choice of Modification: especially those of empty, gendered, qualitative, diminutive, and qualifying adjectives, are examined in modification (Mills, 1995).
3. Nominalization: According to Halliday (1994), nominalization is the process of turning processes into nouns in order to evaluate the agency conveyed in language. These frameworks show how language shapes the memoir's actions of resistance, gender roles, and agency expressions.

C. *Method of Analysis*

The study examines linguistic elements that reflect women's resistance and household duties using both qualitative and quantitative stylistic methodologies. Using feminist stylistic categories created by Mills (1995), Jeffries (2007), and Halliday (1994), extracts are qualitatively examined to see how linguistic choices represent power dynamics and ideological positioning. In order to find trends in how domesticity is portrayed, the study quantitatively tabulates the frequency of important lexical components, such as gendered nouns and qualifying adjectives. Hallidayan systemic functional grammar, in particular the idea of nominalization (Halliday, 1994), provides support for theoretical integration by illuminating the ways in which linguistic decisions reflect power dynamics and encode social meanings. Exploration of what is said, how it is said, and its ideological implications is made easier by this mixed-method approach.

D. *Procedures*

The following procedures were used to carry out the analysis: Choosing the Extracts: Important sections of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* that illustrate mothering, home life, and personal agency were found. Mills (1995), Jeffries (2007), and Halliday (1994) models were used to categorize word-level properties, and examples of nominalization and adjective use were found for further examination. These linguistic traits' textual function was investigated in order to determine how they support the portrayal of resistance, power, and gendered identity. Frequency tables and descriptive commentary were used to document the results for elements

such qualifying adjectives, abstract nouns, and gendered nouns. To explain how domesticity and agency are both created and challenged in the text, the results were interpreted using feminist stylistics.

I will select four extracts, two extracts from the beginning and two extracts from the middle of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. These extracts will specifically reflect themes of domesticity. By analyzing them, I aim to explore how these themes evolve throughout the memoir.

Extract 1

Momma kept us at the Store every minute that she could. When we finished our chores after school, we went back to the Store and waited for closing time. Then we walked home together in the dark. There was always something to do. The sawdust needed sweeping, the shelves had to be refreshed, and the beans and rice had to be weighed and bagged. When things were slow, Bailey and I washed our socks and underclothes and hung them to dry over the oven.

This extract from *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is a powerful representation of domesticity in the lives of Maya and Bailey, and it's ideal for feminist stylistic analysis because it reveals how domestic labor, routine, and familial duty structure Maya's early life. It presents domestic space as both laborious and nurturing, situating children's agency within constrained social and economic conditions

WORD LEVEL ANALYSIS

A. Naming and Describing:

Proper noun: *Momma* – The use of *Momma* instead of *Grandmother* represents familiarity and a matriarchal figure central to domestic life. Active verbs: *kept, finished, went, waited, walked, needed, had to be weighed, washed, hung* – These verbs emphasize structured routine and duty in the domestic sphere. *Momma, Store, Bailey, sawdust, beans and rice* are specific nouns that describe characters and settings central to domestic life. Describing tasks like *sweeping, refreshing shelves, and bagging* reflects the routines, repetitive nature of domesticity.

1. The Choice of nouns: Nouns dominate *Store, sawdust, shelves, beans, rice, socks, underclothes, and oven*. These ground the extract in the material, physical reality of labor. Nouns like *chores* and *closing time* show time as regulated by labor.

A. Gendered Nouns: *Momma* is gendered and positions her as the family's authority figure, highlighting matriarchal domestic power.

B. Collective Nouns: Implied in *we, us, our chores*—suggests communal domestic identity between siblings, and by extension, the Black family unit.

C. Abstract Nouns: Abstract labor is made through detailed tasks, but closing time and something to do abstractly represent duty and endlessness.

D. Generic Nouns: *Chores* is generic—covers a variety of domestic tasks and emphasizes routine work over individual acts.

2. The choice of modification: Minimal adjective use keeps focus on actions and duties. *Our chores* personalizes the work—indicating responsibility and shared labor.

A. Empty Adjectives: None. The language is functional, not decorative, reinforcing the serious, utilitarian nature of work.

B. Gendered Adjectives: Not directly used, but the task description (e.g., domestic chores) is implicitly gendered, especially in historical/feminist contexts.

C. Qualitative Adjectives: *Our chores* and *underclothes* are modestly descriptive, but adjectives are largely stripped down, emphasizing realism over emotionality.

D. Diminutive Adjectives: None. Reflects the non-sentimental tone and reinforces the weight of responsibility.

E. Qualifying Adjectives: Adjective use is sparse—possibly to minimize personal judgement or embellishment—reinforcing objectivity and normalcy of labor.

3. Nominalization: Few nominalizations, but *closing time* nominalizes a temporal action, turning a moment into a structured endpoint to the laboring day.

Extract 2

Here's another suitable extract from the beginning of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* that reflects domesticity:

Momma opened the Store in the morning at six and didn't close until late at night. She slept in the back room on a cot, and I lay beside her on a pallet made of old quilts. We got up every morning before the sun and worked until closing time, cooking, cleaning, and waiting on customers. The Store was our life, and every corner of it smelled of onions, vinegar, and the brown paper sacks we used to wrap up purchases.

This extract explicitly and implicitly reflects domesticity in the lives of women, represented through Maya Angelou's recounting of daily routines at the Store. The passage foregrounds female labor, space, and lived experience, mixing the private and public domains through the character of *Momma*.

1 WORD LEVEL ANALYSIS

a. Naming and Describing:

Examples of names and descriptions of items, roles, and environments in the home include *Momma*, *store*, *cot*, *pallet*, *old quilts*, and *customers*. The capitalization of *The Store* emphasizes its importance and makes it practically a character in and of itself, a symbolic extension of domesticity.

1. Choice of Nouns: *Store*, *pallet*, *quilt*, *onions*, and *customers* are examples of concrete and domestic terms, creating materiality in daily life based on household work.

A. Gendered Nouns: *Momma* denotes a feminized role in the home, indicating female autonomy and control.

B. Collective Nouns: *customers* represent the team and indicate the social nature of their work.

C. Abstract Nouns: *Life in The Store was our life* is an example of an abstract term that is used metaphorically to describe identity and existence via labor.

E. Generic nouns with a generalized purpose include *store* and *customers*. The terms *quilt*, *onions*, and

customers conjure up the universality of store and home life, making women's labor more widely accepted.

2. The Choice of modification : *Old quilts*, *brown paper sacks*, and other pre-modifiers provide historical and sensory details.

A. Qualitative Adjectives: *old (quilt)*, *brown (paper sacks)* – sensory detail, provide sensory and qualitative depth, reinforcing the materiality of domestic life.

B. Diminutive Adjectives: “*little*” not used, but the phrase *on a pallet* has a diminutive feel semantically and has diminutive connotation implying modest comfort.

C. Qualifying Adjectives: *old quilts* implies age, endurance. *old*, *brown* – restrict and specify meaning, enhancing vivid domestic realism.

3. Nominalization : *Closing time* is nominalized to refer to an event, while implicit nominal processes such as cooking and cleaning function as nominalized actions, abstracting repetitive work into habitual states.

Extract 3

Here's a well-known extract from the middle of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* that reflects domesticity, taken from the section where Maya lives with her mother, Vivian Baxter, in San Francisco: Extract (Chapter 22):

Mother's beauty made her powerful and her power made her unflinchingly honest. She was a terrible cook, and her stove was so spotlessly clean you couldn't believe she ever used it. She lived in a huge apartment with white rugs and a baby grand piano. I learned how to set a table properly in her house, and how to keep the bathroom spotless, with towels always straight and glasses shining.

1. Word Level Analysis

A. Naming and Describing

1. Choice of Nouns: *Mother*, *beauty*, *power*, *cook*, *stove*, *apartment*, *rugs*, *piano*, *table*, *bathroom*, *towels*, *glasses*. Here, Vivian and her surroundings are described using the nouns. In order to place Vivian inside the framework of her familial role, the noun *mother* is essential. Abstract nouns like *beauty*, *power*, and *honesty* are significant because they strengthen Vivian's character's complexities beyond looks. *Stove*, *apartment*, *rugs*, household items that contrast with Vivian's character attributes, reinforcing her ability to keep a spotless atmosphere despite her own flaws (such as being a terrible cook).

A. Gendered Nouns : The gendered noun *mother* is typically associated with women's nurturing and caring roles. The word highlights the passage's main theme of domesticity.

B. Collective Nouns: This extract lacks explicit collective nouns.

C. Abstract Nouns: *Beauty*, *power*, and *honesty* are abstract nouns that emphasise Vivian's qualities by connecting her external attributes beauty with her moral qualities power and honesty.

D. Generic Nouns: The nouns *stove*, *bathroom*, *towels*, and *glasses* illustrate the commonplace, ordinary facets of household life that Maya picks up from her mother, giving the house a feeling of normalcy.

2. Choice of Modification: word *spotlessly clean* is a modification of *stove*, emphasizing the stove's cleanliness and reinforcing the conflict between Vivian's ability to maintain a perfect home environment and her apparent lack of domestic skills (as a terrible cook). The adjective *Huge*: modifies *apartment*, expressing wealth and a level of comfort that Maya associates with her mother's lifestyle. Visual modifiers

are as follows: *White* (which modifies *rugs*) and *baby grand* (which modifies *piano*).

A. Empty Adjectives: There are no empty adjectives (those used primarily for emphasis or decoration without substantial meaning) in this extract .

B. Gendered Adjectives: In the context of domesticity, the adjective *terrible*, which modifies *cook*, may be considered gendered. In this context, the term *terrible* indicates a sarcastic perspective on the traditional association of cooking with women.

C. Qualitative Adjectives: The adjectives *spotlessly clean* (which modifies *stove*), *huge* (which modifies *apartment*), and *white* (which modifies *rugs*) all characterize the state and appearance of Vivian's home.

D. Diminutive Adjectives: There are no diminutive adjectives in this extract .

E. Qualifying Adjectives: Vivian's honesty is qualified by the adverb *unflinchingly*, which modifies the word *honest* and conveys a strong, unwavering veracity.

3. Nominalization: To emphasize the importance of these abstract attributes in forming Vivian's identity and her behaviour in the home, the terms *beauty*, *power*, and *honesty* are nominalized.

Extract 4

Here is a carefully selected extract from the middle of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou, which reflects themes of domesticity, especially within the context of Black womanhood and caregiving: Extract (Chapter 18):

Momma could add a cane chair to a straight-back kitchen chair and have it looking like something from the Sears and Roebuck catalog. She could clean a chicken with such elegance, detachment, and expertise that when I had to do it later, I felt like an executioner. She wiped her hands on a flour sack towel and went into the kitchen, where she made cornbread, greens, and our everyday miracle of meatless meals. The house smelled of onions and grease and the good brown smell of crusty cornbread.

This extract focuses on Momma's domestic labor, especially in the kitchen, showcasing care, resilience, and skill in food preparation and household management. It's rich in sensory language and implicit cultural values tied to domesticity in Black communities.

1. WORD LEVEL ANALYSIS

A. Naming and Describing

1. Choice of Nouns :The nouns in this extract are used to construct a domesticity and female agency world centered on maternal competence and creativity.

A. Gendered Nouns: The extract is dominated by the singularly gendered noun *Momma*, which emphasizes female identity and work. This word places the lady in the role of a traditional, caring mother.

B. Collective Nouns :Although traditional collective nouns (like “group” or “team”) are absent in this extract , there are plural forms with collective implications (plural rather than traditionally collective):*meals*, *greens*

,*onions* – point toward family consumption and provision. These function as synecdoche for communal life and shared sustenance.

C. Abstract Nouns :This extract consists of significant abstract nouns, especially to valorize labor: The abstract qualities *elegance* ,*detachment* ,*expertise* – ascribed to Momma’s actions, encoding admiration and reverence , reframing housework as an art. *Miracle* also – spiritually charged, functions abstractly to spiritualize daily labor.

D. Generic Noun: The following words are generic descriptors of household products or roles: *chair* ,*kitchen chair* ,*chicken* ,*towel* ,*kitchen* , and *meals*. They relate to kinds rather than specific people.

2. Choice of Modification: Here, the modification patterns that emphasize value, skill, and aesthetic in domestic work: *Straight-back kitchen chair* – functional, sturdy, plain. The compound modifier grounds domestic life in simplicity and necessity, contrasting with the later aesthetic transformation via Momma’s creativity. *Something from the Sears and Roebuck catalog* – a commercial modifier, transforming the domestic item into a symbol of modernity and value and linking homemade to store-bought. *Such elegance* ,*detachment* , and *expertise* – triples of abstract modifiers accentuating skill and mastery, typically unacknowledged in housework. *Flour sack towel* – modification shows resourcefulness and reuse, emphasizing economic precarity but also resilience, modifies *the towel* to highlight frugality and thrift, common in working-class homes. *Everyday miracle of meatless meals* – oxymoronic phrase; *everyday* (routine) contrasted with *miracle* (extraordinary).

A. Empty Adjectives :Possibly *good* in the *good brown smell* may be interpreted as an empty adjective, vaguely positive without precision, but even this contributes to sensory atmosphere. Still, it lacks specific content and fits Mills’s category .

B. Gendered Adjectives :Since *Momma* is described with adjectives typically associated with skill and detachment—qualities de-gendered or associated with professionalism rather than femininity, there are no overt gendered adjectives like “pretty” or “delicate.”.

C. Qualitative Adjectives :Here, *straight-back* ,*meatless* ,*crusty*, *brown* - refer to observable, sensory, or practical qualities. Also, *elegant* ,*detached*, *expert* (in abstract form) further construct *Momma*’s domestic labor as skill-based and nuanced.

D. Diminutive Adjectives: This extract does not contain any diminutive adjectives.

E. Qualifying Adjectives: *Meatless* is a qualifying adjective that denotes absence but also suggests tenacity and resourcefulness in surviving. Additionally, the word *everyday* qualifies as *miracle* in order to ground the domestic miracle in everyday life.

3. Nominalization :These nominalized forms *elegance*, *detachment*, *expertise* - nominalizations of verbs/adjectives (elegant, detach, expert), abstract *Momma*’s actions into praised attributes. This allows the reader to pause and admire rather than pass over her actions. These shift the focus from process (verbs) to quality (nouns), creating objectified recognition of *Momma*’s skill rather than framing her merely as “doing chores. Also, *miracle* - nominalizes a process of survival and transforms it into something semi-sacred. This elevates domesticity into a discursive space of reverence and reflection, not just description .

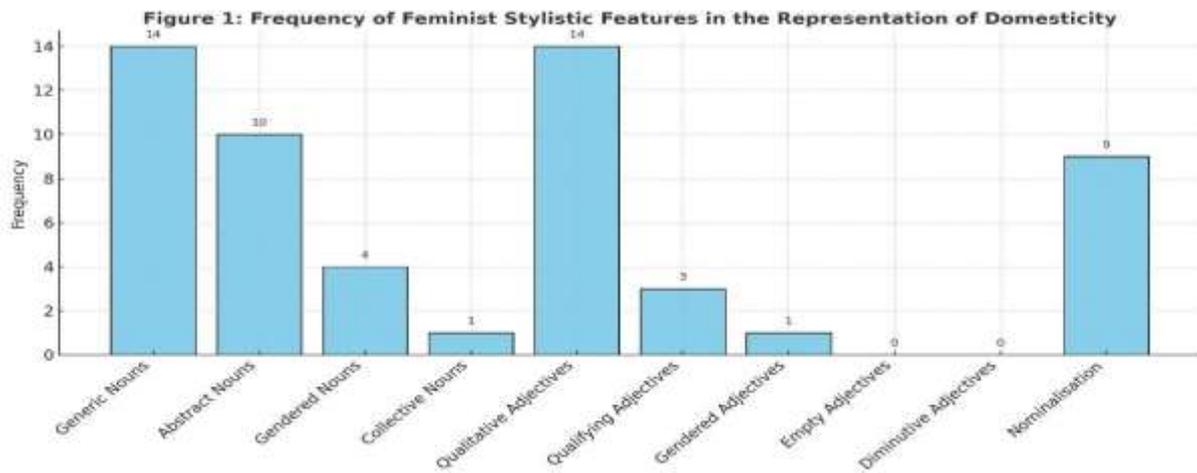
RESULT

This section is involved to present a quantitative analysis of selected linguistic features drawn from a feminist stylistic framework, applied to the representation of domesticity in the text. The analysis includes word-level elements such as noun types, adjectives, and nominalisation. The frequencies and percentages were calculated to reflect the prominence of each feature within the data set.

The following table show the frequencies and the percentages of each tool in the four analyzed extracts which are taken from the beginning and middle of the memoir.:

TABLE 5 NAMING AND DESCRIBING

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gendered Nouns	4	7.14%
Collective Nouns	1	1.7%
Abstract Nouns	10	17.8%
Generic Nouns	14	25%
Empty Adjectives	0	0%
Gendered Adjectives	1	1.7%
Qualitative Adjectives	14	25%
Qualifying Adjectives	3	5.35%
Diminutive Adjectives	0	0%
Nominalisation	9	16.07%
Total	56	100%



Generic nouns were the most common noun category ($n = 14$; 25%), suggesting a propensity towards generalisation in the portrayal of roles or subjects, which may diminish personal agency. A significant number of abstract nouns ($n = 9$; 17.8%) followed, frequently expressing intangible ideas like feelings or circumstances that could add to a story that is more politically charged. In contrast to collective nouns and gendered adjectives, which each appeared only once (1.7%), gendered nouns were employed four times (7.14%), showing the linguistic marking of gender. The most common adjectives in adjectival usage ($n = 14$; 25%) were qualitative adjectives, indicating a descriptive richness that could influence perception and support specific ideas about domesticity. Three instances (5.4%) of qualifying adjectives were used, giving descriptions more depth and specificity.

There was a dearth of overtly stereotyped vocabulary often associated with femininity because there were neither empty adjectives nor tiny adjectives (0%). Nine instances of nominalisation (16.07%) show a propensity to abstract actions or processes into nouns, which might cause the emphasis to change from actors to concepts. All things considered, this feature distribution sheds light on how domesticity is ideologically constructed in the text. In line with the main concerns of feminist stylistic analysis, the prevalence of abstract, generic, and qualitative forms as well as nominalisation suggests stylistic techniques that influence the representation of gender identities and domestic responsibilities.

DISCUSSION

Feminist stylistics frequently emphasizes the tangible and corporeal aspect of women's experiences, as Jeffries (2010) points out, and these extracts are prime examples of this framing by highlighting physical labour and home duties. This material framing is further supported by the high prevalence of Modification, which implies that home situations are thoroughly described in addition to being seen. This supports Mills's (2005) finding that feminist literature regularly employs modification to give ordinary experiences more depth and significance. By placing household activities within a larger narrative of care, responsibility, and survival, modifiers in these extracts lift them from the banal to the significant. The home sphere is clearly feminized, as seen by gendered nouns (7.14) and gendered adjectives (1.7%). This lexical gendering helps to create a stylistic frame that links women's identities and duties to domestic work. Finding such gendering aids in revealing hidden notions regarding gendered locations and labour divisions, as stated by Mills (2008).

The usage of such phrases in this context reinforces the gendered and normalized notion that household chores are the feminine embodiment of responsibility. Nominalization (16.07%) and Abstract Nouns (17.8%) indicate that the extracts also discuss more obvious, internalized aspects of domesticity, such as states, emotions, or values. By turning acts into philosophical themes, words like "responsibility" or "devotion" (if existent) might highlight the narrative's interweaving of emotional labour and obligation. Nominalization in feminist writings can draw attention to the long-lasting effects of roles and procedures that are frequently taken for granted, as Jeffries (2007) observes.

Crucially, the 0.0% lack of diminutive adjectives is consistent with a fundamental feminist stylistic

principle: the opposition to the trivialization of women's labour. The absence of diminutive forms in these passages imply that the household roles discussed are given weight and significance rather than being minimized, as these forms frequently infantilize or denigrate characteristics linked with femininity (Mills, 2005). The shared and communal nature of domesticity is further highlighted by the comparatively balanced occurrence of qualifying adjectives (5.35%). These representations of domestic work as a communal experience rather than only an individual burden align with feminist interpretations of the home as a place of oppression and solidarity (Lazar, 2005).

When combined, these results show that the stylistic decisions used in these paragraphs emphasize domesticity as an active, gendered, and emotionally charged space rather than as a passive background. The narrative emphasises the importance, visibility, and complexity of women's domestic work while resisting erasure and trivialisation. This aligns with the goals of feminist stylistic analysis, which aims to uncover the ways in which language conveys ideologies and social positions (Jeffries, 2010; Mills, 2008)

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the previous discussion, it is now the time to draw some conclusions:

1. By examining how domesticity is linguistically represented in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, this study fills a gap in feminist stylistic analysis, an area that has been neglected in literary studies that are stylistic and gender-focused.
2. The study uses feminist stylistic frameworks (Mills, 1995; Jeffries, 2010) and systemic functional grammar (Halliday, 2014) to investigate how low-level language choices (e.g., gendered nouns, abstract nouns, modifiers, and nominalisation) create or undermine gender ideologies in domestic contexts.
3. In order to provide insight into female agency, identity development, and the negotiation of established gender norms, the analysis focuses on the language encoding of domestic spaces, roles, and behaviours.
4. Using this perspective, Angelou's memoir is re-examined as a story of racial and personal liberation as well as a place of ideological conflict and resistance around domesticity.
5. The study focuses on how Angelou reclaims and reshapes domestic experiences to emphasise subjectivity, identity, and agency. It also seeks to underline the ideological ramifications of linguistic choices in domestic contexts.
6. Through the inclusion of Black women's autobiographical writing, this study expands feminist stylistics and provides fresh insights into language, gender, and power in literary discourse.

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