



اللغة والقوة والأيدولوجيا في مسرحية 'ترايفلز' لسوزان غلاسييل: دراسة في ضوء التحليل
Language, Power, and Ideology in Susan Glaspell's Trifles: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

This research paper applies Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to Susan Glaspell's one-act play Trifles (1916) to reveal how power relations and gender ideology are linguistically constructed within the dramatic structure. The study stems from a primary problem: examining how linguistic and conversational patterns produce a patriarchal authority that reinforces gender hierarchy while simultaneously providing possibilities for resistance through feminist discursive practices.

Drawing on Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) frameworks, Fairclough's three-dimensional model, and sociolinguistic approaches to gender, this study analyzes grammatical patterns, transitivity systems, modality markers, and evaluative lexical choices, as well as conversational dynamics and turn-taking organization, to uncover the mechanisms of ideological operation within dramatic interaction.

The results demonstrate that Trifles embodies a discursive struggle between institutional male authority and an alternative female discourse. This conflict is manifested through patterns of masculine linguistic certainty, objective control over the conversational flow, and the evaluative dismissal of domestic knowledge as "trifles." In contrast, female characters' employ indirect linguistic strategies, strategic silence, and cooperative communication to produce counter-knowledge that undermines male epistemic hegemony from within a marginalized space.

The study concludes that patriarchal ideology in the play operates not only at the thematic level but is embodied within the linguistic structure itself, where power relations are reproduced through precise grammatical and interactive choices. These findings contribute to extending the applications of CDA to dramatic texts and highlighting the role of language in constructing dominance and resistance within the early twentieth-century American social context.

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الملخص

تتبنى هذه الورقة البحثية منهج التحليل النقدي للخطاب (CDA) في دراسة مسرحية «ترايفلز» (Trifles) ذات الفصل الواحد للكاتبة سوزان غلاسبيل (1916)، وذلك للكشف عن كيفية تشكّل علاقات القوة والأيدولوجيا الجندرية لغوياً داخل البنية الدرامية. وتطلق الدراسة من إشكالية رئيسة تتمثل في بيان الكيفية التي تُنتج بها الأنماط اللغوية والحوارية سلطة أبوية تُكرّس التراتبية النوعية، وفي الوقت ذاته تتيح إمكانيات للمقاومة من خلال الممارسات الخطابية النسوية. وبالإستناد إلى أطر التحليل النقدي النسوي للخطاب، ونموذج فيركلاف ثلاثي الأبعاد، إلى جانب المقاربات اللغوية الاجتماعية للنوع الاجتماعي، تحلّل الدراسة الأنماط النحوية، وأنظمة العيور (Transitivity)، وأنماط التعبير عن الموقف (Modality)، والاختيارات المعجمية التقويمية، فضلاً عن ديناميكيات الحوار وتنظيم تباين الأدوار، للكشف عن آليات استغلال الأيدولوجيا داخل التفاعل الدرامي.

وتُظهر النتائج أن مسرحية «ترايفلز» تجسد صراعاً خطابياً بين سلطة مؤسسية ذكورية وخطاب نسوي بديل، يتجلى في أنماط اليقين اللغوي الذكوري، والسيطرة الموضوعية على مسار الحوار، والتقليل التقويمي من شأن المعرفة المنزلية بوصفها «تفاهات». في المقابل، تُوظف الشخصيات النسائية استراتيجيات لغوية غير مباشرة، وصمناً استراتيجياً، وتواصل تعاونياً يتيح إنتاج معرفة مضادة تقوّض الهيمنة المعرفية الذكورية من داخل فضاء مهثّش.

وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن الأيدولوجيا الأبوية في المسرحية لا تعمل على المستوى الموضوعي فحسب، بل تتجسد في البنية اللغوية ذاتها، حيث تُعاد إنتاج علاقات القوة عبر اختيارات نحوية وتقاطعية دقيقة. وتسهم هذه النتائج في توسيع تطبيقات التحليل النقدي للخطاب على النصوص الدرامية، وإبراز دور اللغة في بناء الهيمنة والمقاومة داخل السياق الاجتماعي الأمريكي في مطلع القرن العشرين.

1.Introduction

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has developed as a major interdisciplinary approach concerned with the relationship between language, power, and ideology in social life (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2016). Rather than viewing language as a neutral communicative tool, CDA conceptualizes discourse as a form of social practice through which power relations are produced, reproduced, and contested. It investigates how linguistic structures encode ideological assumptions and contribute to the maintenance of social hierarchies.

Within literary studies, dramatic texts provide a particularly rich site for CDA because they foreground dialogue, interaction, and conflict between competing systems of meaning. Through character speech, silence, interruption, and lexical choice, plays enact ideological tensions in concentrated linguistic form.

Susan Glaspell's one-act play *Trifles* (1916) remains one of the most significant early feminist dramatic texts in American literature. Set in a rural Iowa farmhouse during a murder investigation, the play stages a conflict between institutional male authority and marginalized female knowledge. While male officials conduct a formal legal investigation, the female characters interpret domestic details that ultimately reveal the motive behind the crime. The dismissal of these details as "trifles" dramatizes the ideological devaluation of women's epistemic domains within patriarchal discourse.

Although *Trifles* has received extensive feminist and theatrical interpretation, most existing studies focus primarily on thematic readings of oppression, isolation, and gender injustice. Fewer studies provide a systematic micro-linguistic analysis grounded in an explicit Critical Discourse Analysis framework. Moreover, limited research integrates Fairclough's multi-layered model with Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis to demonstrate how patriarchal ideology is grammatically encoded at the clause level.

Accordingly, the central research problem addressed in this study concerns how patriarchal power is linguistically constructed, normalized, and subtly contested through micro-level grammatical and interactional structures in *Trifles*. The study moves beyond thematic feminist interpretation to examine how ideology operates within modality, transitivity, lexical

evaluation, conversational organization, and discursive positioning. In doing so, it seeks to uncover the linguistic mechanisms through which authority is legitimized and resistance is strategically enacted.

To address this problem, the study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do linguistic patterns in *Trifles* construct and reinforce patriarchal authority?
2. In what ways do female characters employ discursive strategies that resist or negotiate institutional dominance?
3. How are modality, transitivity, and lexical choices used to encode epistemic authority and marginalization?
4. How does conversational organization (topic control, interruption, turn-taking) reflect and reproduce gendered power asymmetries?

The primary objectives of this study are therefore:

1. To apply a systematic CDA framework to the analysis of *Trifles*.
2. To conduct a detailed micro-linguistic examination of power encoding.
3. To demonstrate how dramatic discourse functions as a site of ideological struggle.
4. To contribute to feminist CDA scholarship by integrating literary analysis with structured discourse methodology.

The significance of this study lies in extending CDA application to dramatic texts while offering a linguistically grounded account of gender ideology. By bridging literary criticism and discourse analysis, the research provides a more structured understanding of how patriarchal power operates through everyday language practices in early twentieth-century American society.

Susan Glaspell's one-act play *Trifles* (1916), first performed by the Provincetown Players, stands as a foundational text in early American feminist drama. Set in a rural Iowa farmhouse during a murder investigation, the play stages a sharp ideological and epistemic conflict between male institutional authority and marginalized female experiential knowledge. While the County Attorney, Sheriff, and Mr. Hale conduct a formal legal investigation, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters remain in the domestic space of the kitchen, where they uncover the crucial evidence that explains Minnie Wright's motive. The men dismiss domestic details as "trifles," yet it is precisely these devalued objects and the women's interpretive discourse surrounding them that reveal the truth. Through this structural irony, the play dramatizes how patriarchal ideology marginalizes women's epistemic domains while simultaneously depending on them.

The play's enduring critical interest stems from its complex representation of how language operates as a site of ideological struggle. *Trifles* stages not merely a conflict between individual characters but a collision between entire systems of meaning-making, valuation, and authority that are fundamentally gendered. The men's authoritative, dismissive discourse embodies patriarchal institutional power, while the women's cooperative, indirect communication represents a marginalized but epistemically superior counter-discourse. This linguistic architecture makes *Trifles* an ideal text for Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), an approach that examines how language constructs, maintains, and challenges social power relations and ideological formations.

2-Theoretical Framework: Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis, as developed by scholars such as Norman Fairclough, Teun van Dijk, and Ruth Wodak, provides theoretical and methodological tools for examining the relationship between language, power, and ideology (Waugh et al., 2016). When combined

with feminist perspectives, CDA becomes particularly powerful for analyzing how gender hierarchies are reproduced and contested through discursive practices. Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) attends specifically to how gender ideology operates through language to naturalize patriarchal power structures while also identifying sites of resistance and counter-hegemonic discourse. (Lazar, 2007)

This study applies feminist CDA frameworks to *Trifles* to examine how the play's linguistic patterns, conversational dynamics, and discursive strategies reveal the workings of patriarchal ideology and feminist resistance. By analyzing gendered speech patterns, power asymmetries in dialogue, strategic uses of silence, and the ideological construction of knowledge and authority, this research demonstrates how Glaspell's dramatic text functions as a sophisticated critique of patriarchal discourse and a representation of women's linguistic agency. The analysis reveals that language in *Trifles* is never neutral but always implicated in relations of power, serving either to reinforce or to challenge the gender hierarchies that structure early twentieth-century American society.

3-Methodology

This study employs a feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) framework that integrates insights from multiple theoretical traditions to examine how language constructs, maintains, and challenges power relations and gender ideologies in *Trifles*. The analytical framework draws on three primary sources:

- CDA's general approach to analyzing relationships among discourse, power, and ideology;
- Feminist discourse analysis's specific focus on gender hierarchy and patriarchal discourse.
- Sociolinguistic research on gendered language patterns and communicative styles.

The textual examples were purposefully selected based on their density of power-related linguistic features, specifically focusing on interactions where gender-based conflict is most evident.

Analytical Model and Procedural Design:

This study adopts (Fairclough, 1995) Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis, which consists of three interrelated levels:

1. Textual Analysis (Description): This level focuses on vocabulary, grammar, modality, transitivity patterns, lexicalization, and syntactic structures. It investigates how linguistic choices encode power relations at the micro-level of clause and sentence structure.

2. Discursive Practice (Interpretation): This dimension examines interactional dynamics such as turn-taking, topic control, interruption, role allocation, and patterns of evaluation within dialogue. It explores how discourse is produced and interpreted within the dramatic context.

3. Social Practice (Explanation): This level situates linguistic findings within broader socio-historical structures, particularly early twentieth-century American patriarchy, institutional authority, and gender ideology.

In addition, the study integrates Teun van Dijk's socio-cognitive perspective to account for the role of shared ideological representations in shaping discourse, as well as Lazar's Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis framework, which foregrounds the gendered organization of power and knowledge.

Analytical Procedures

The analysis follows a systematic procedure:

- Close reading of the complete play to identify ideologically significant segments.
- Selection of excerpts based on recurrence, ideological salience, and relevance to key dramatic turning points.
- Micro-linguistic examination of modality (epistemic and deontic).

- Transitivity analysis to determine agency distribution and participant roles.
- Lexical analysis of evaluative expressions and labeling.
- Examination of conversational dominance through topic control and interruption patterns.
- Interpretation of findings within the socio-historical context of gender hierarchy.

Criteria for Selecting Textual Evidence

Textual examples were not selected randomly. They were chosen according to:

- 1-Frequency of ideological markers.
- 2- Representation of institutional authority.
- 3- Explicit dismissal or marginalization of women's discourse.
- 4- Strategic moments of epistemic shift in the play.

Data Collection and Corpus

The primary data for this analysis consists of the complete text of Susan Glaspell's *Trifles*, a one-act play of approximately 1,500 words of dialogue. The play features five characters: three men (George Henderson, the County Attorney; Henry Peters, the Sheriff; Lewis Hale, a neighboring farmer) and two women (Mrs. Peters, the Sheriff's wife; Mrs. Hale, the farmer's wife). A sixth character, Mrs. Minnie Wright, the accused murderer, never appears on stage but is the subject of much discussion.

The methodological design directly corresponds to the research questions outlined in the Introduction. Textual analysis addresses the encoding of patriarchal authority at the grammatical level (RQ1 and RQ3), discursive practice analysis examines resistance strategies and interactional asymmetries (RQ2 and RQ4), and social practice analysis situates these findings within early twentieth-century American gender ideology. This structured alignment ensures analytical coherence and methodological rigor.

4-Discussion

Though Susan Glaspell's well-known one-act play *Trifles* (1916) has been predominantly framed by the themes of female condition at the turn of the twentieth-century United States, it is intrinsically built on the concepts of detection and crime. The dramatic text reveals a narrative tendency that keeps deferring the detection of a case of murder committed within the farmhouse of the Wright family. Against the backdrop of its social and cultural context, the play gives voice to its female characters in the inspection of the crime whereas the male characters fail to detect the motivation behind the murder. This play argues that *Trifles* can be construed as a feminist crime account whose language and structure are couched in a narrative of deferral. The play subtly illustrates that the story of investigation not only shakes the strict bounds of convention but it also divulges precariousness of social justice particularly for women in the early twentieth-century United States. (Köşker, N. H. G. 2020)

The discourse in *Trifles* exhibits marked gender differentiation in language patterns and speech styles that reflect and construct distinct male and female identities. Male characters employ an authoritative, assertive discourse style characterized by declarative statements, commands, and evaluative judgments, while female characters employ a more tentative, cooperative style characterized by questions, hedges, and collaborative meaning-making. These patterns align with sociolinguistic research on gendered communication while also serving the play's ideological critique of patriarchal discourse (Misbah, 2022).

The County Attorney's speech exemplifies authoritative male discourse. His language is marked by legal and investigative terminology, direct assertions, and evaluative statements that position him as the arbiter of meaning and relevance. When he dismisses the kitchen as containing "nothing here but kitchen things," his utterance performs multiple ideological functions: it devalues domestic space and objects, establishes his authority to determine what counts as

evidence, and implicitly marginalizes women's knowledge and concerns. The phrase "nothing here but" operates as a discursive strategy that naturalizes the exclusion of domestic matters from serious consideration, treating this exclusion as self-evident rather than as an ideological choice.

It is crucial to note that these linguistic patterns are not inherent to gender but are discursive constructs shaped by the specific socio-institutional roles the characters occupy within the dramatic setting

Micro-Linguistic Analysis of Ideological Construction

A deeper linguistic examination reveals that ideological positioning in *Trifles* is encoded at the grammatical level. Male characters frequently employ categorical declarative structures lacking hedging devices, thereby constructing epistemic certainty. Statements such as "*nothing here but kitchen things*" operate as high-certainty assertions that close interpretive possibilities and assert institutional authority.

In contrast, female characters employ mitigated modality, including epistemic hedges such as "*I don't know as,*" "*maybe,*" and "*I wonder.*" These forms function not as indicators of cognitive uncertainty but as discursive strategies shaped by gendered power constraints. The recurrent use of mitigation reflects socially conditioned epistemic positioning rather than linguistic weakness.

Transitivity patterns further encode asymmetrical power relations. Male characters dominate material processes as grammatical Actors ("*we'll go upstairs,*" "*I'll look into that*"), whereas Minnie Wright is often grammatically backgrounded or represented relationally rather than agentively. This unequal distribution of agency constructs institutional dominance at the clause level.

Lexicalization also plays a critical ideological role. Terms such as "*trifles,*" "*worries,*" and "*little things*" function evaluatively to downgrade domestic knowledge. These lexical choices are ideologically loaded; they naturalize the marginalization of women's epistemic domains and reinforce gendered hierarchies of relevance.

Thus, ideology in *Trifles* operates structurally—within modality, syntax, and lexical selection—rather than solely at thematic level.

This structural embedding of ideology confirms Fairclough's assertion that power operates not only through overt domination but through the naturalization of particular linguistic choices that appear commonsensical and neutral (Fairclough, 1995). The County Attorney's high-certainty declaratives function as what van Dijk terms "ideological square" mechanisms, emphasizing institutional authority while backgrounding alternative knowledge systems (van Dijk, 2016). Such grammatical encoding transforms patriarchal hierarchy into linguistic normality.

The Sheriff's discourse similarly reflects institutional authority, though his speech is less elaborate than the County Attorney's. His brief, directive utterances "Well, can you beat the women! Held for murder and worrying about her preserves combine dismissal of women's concerns with an appeal to common sense that positions his perspective as natural and obvious. The exclamation "can you beat the women!" invites male solidarity in viewing women as incomprehensible and irrational, naturalizing gender difference as a source of male amusement rather than as a social construction.

Mr. Hale's discourse occupies an intermediate position, reflecting his status as a farmer rather than a legal official. His speech is more narrative and less authoritative than the County Attorney's, yet it shares the male characters' tendency toward direct assertion and evaluation. Significantly, Mr. Hale reports that when he visited the Wright house and asked to see John

Wright, Minnie Wright responded, "He's dead." This reported speech reveals the starkness of Mrs. Wright's communication under extreme circumstances, stripped of the hedges and indirection that characterize women's speech in less dire situations.

In contrast, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters employ discourse styles marked by tentativeness, cooperation, and indirection. Their speech is characterized by questions that invite collaborative interpretation: "Do you think she did it?" "I don't know as there's anything so strange." These questions function not as requests for information but as invitations to joint meaning-making, reflecting what sociolinguists identify as women's cooperative conversational style (Misbah, 2022). The hedge "I don't know as" exemplifies linguistic features associated with women's speech tentativeness markers that soften assertions and leave room for alternative perspectives. The women's discourse is also marked by attention to detail and careful observation. Mrs. Hale's description of Mrs. Wright's sewing "It's all over the place! Look at this sewing! All the rest of it has been so nice and even. And look at this! It's all over the place! Why, it looks as if she didn't know what she was about" demonstrates close attention to domestic work and the ability to read material evidence for psychological meaning. The repetition and exclamations convey emotional engagement, contrasting with the men's detached, analytical stance.

The play reveals that these gendered discourse styles are not natural expressions of gender difference but are shaped by power relations and social positioning. The women's tentative, indirect speech reflects their subordinate social position and the constraints on their authority to make definitive claims. When Mrs. Peters asserts, "The law is the law," she ventriloquizes male institutional discourse, but her subsequent actions concealing evidence reveal the inadequacy of this discourse for addressing the realities of women's lives. The women's cooperative, indirect communication style, while reflecting their marginalization, also enables them to develop counter-interpretations outside male surveillance.

The play thus demonstrates that gendered language patterns are not neutral differences but implicated in power relations. Male authoritative discourse is valorized as rational, objective, and competent, while female cooperative discourse is dismissed as trivial, emotional, and incompetent. Yet the play's dramatic irony the women discover the truth while the men remain ignorant exposes the inadequacy of patriarchal discourse and validates women's alternative ways of knowing.

Conversational interaction in *Trifles* enacts and naturalizes power asymmetries between male and female characters through patterns of turn-taking, topic control, interruption, and response. These micro-level features of dialogue construct and maintain gender hierarchy by positioning men as authoritative speakers whose discourse sets the terms of interaction and women as subordinate speakers whose contributions are subject to dismissal or appropriation.

The men's control over conversational topics is evident throughout the play. The County Attorney initiates and directs the investigation, determining what will be discussed and in what order. His questions structure the interaction: "Let's talk about that later, Mr. Hale. I do want to talk about that, but tell now just what happened when you got to the house." This utterance performs multiple functions: it interrupts Mr. Hale's narrative, redirects the conversation according to the County Attorney's priorities, and establishes his authority to manage the discourse. The imperative "tell now" positions Mr. Hale as subordinate despite his gender, demonstrating that institutional authority trumps gender solidarity in determining conversational power.

The men's dismissal of women's topics is a recurring pattern that enacts gender hierarchy. When the women discuss Mrs. Wright's preserves and quilting, the men respond with laughter and dismissive comments: "Well, can you beat the women! Held for murder and worrying"

about her preserves." This response performs ideological work by constructing women's concerns as trivial and irrational, naturalizing the exclusion of domestic matters from serious consideration. The laughter functions as a disciplinary mechanism that polices the boundaries of legitimate discourse, signaling that women's topics are not worthy of male attention.

Significantly, the men's dismissal creates the conditions for women's counter-discourse. After the men leave the kitchen to investigate upstairs, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters are free to develop their own interpretation of the evidence without male surveillance or interruption. The spatial and conversational segregation that reflects women's marginalization also enables their epistemic autonomy. Their dialogue in the men's absence is characterized by collaborative turn-taking, with each woman building on the other's observations: "She was piecing a quilt." "I wonder if she was going to quilt it or just knot it?" This cooperative pattern contrasts sharply with the men's competitive, hierarchical interaction style.

The women's responses to male dismissal reveal complex negotiation of power. Rather than directly challenging the men's authority, the women employ indirect strategies that preserve surface deference while enabling covert resistance. When the County Attorney patronizingly comments, "And yet, for all their worries, what would we do without the ladies?" Mrs. Hale responds with apparent agreement: "Duty's all right, but I wish I'd come over to see Minnie Foster sometimes." This response appears to accept the County Attorney's framing of women's concerns as "worries" and women's work as "duty," but it subtly shifts the conversation to Mrs. Wright's isolation and implicitly critiques the social conditions that produced the tragedy. The indirection enables Mrs. Hale to introduce a counter-interpretation without directly confronting male authority.

The play also represents power asymmetries through reported speech about Mrs. Wright. The men's references to her are impersonal and objectifying the woman "she" while the women refer to her by name and recall her past identity: "I wish you'd seen Minnie Foster when she wore a white dress with blue ribbons and stood up there in the choir and sang." This contrast reflects different relationships to Mrs. Wright and different ways of constructing her identity. The men's discourse positions her as a legal subject, an object of investigation, while the women's discourse positions her as a person with a history and a social identity. The women's use of her maiden name "Minnie Foster" is particularly significant, invoking her identity before marriage and implicitly critiquing how marriage to John Wright transformed and diminished her.

Interruption patterns also reveal power dynamics. While the text does not explicitly mark interruptions through stage directions, the flow of dialogue suggests that men interrupt women more frequently than the reverse, a pattern consistent with sociolinguistic research on gendered conversation (Misbah, 2022). The men's ability to interrupt and redirect conversation reflects their institutional authority and social dominance, while the women's acceptance of these interruptions reflects their subordinate position.

However, the play's dramatic structure ultimately subverts these power asymmetries. While the men control the official investigation and dominate conversational interaction, they fail to discover the crucial evidence or understand the motive. The women, despite their subordinate conversational position, achieve epistemic success through their marginalized discourse. This dramatic irony exposes the inadequacy of patriarchal discourse and validates women's alternative ways of knowing, suggesting that conversational dominance does not guarantee epistemic authority (Hussein, 2024).

Trifles stages a fundamental conflict between competing systems of knowledge and authority, revealing how ideology operates through discourse to naturalize particular epistemic

hierarchies while marginalizing alternatives. The play's central dramatic irony that women discover the truth while men remain ignorant exposes the inadequacy of patriarchal epistemic authority and validates women's experiential knowledge, challenging the ideological assumption that male institutional discourse provides privileged access to truth.

The men's discourse constructs knowledge and authority through appeals to institutional legitimacy, legal procedure, and rational investigation. The County Attorney's language is saturated with legal and investigative terminology that positions him as the authorized interpreter of evidence: "I guess we'll go upstairs first and then out to the barn and around there." His use of "we" constructs a collective male investigative subject that excludes the women, naturalizing their exclusion from the production of official knowledge. The men's investigation proceeds according to formal procedures examining the scene of the crime, looking for physical evidence, establishing timeline and motive that reflect legal-rational discourse's claim to objectivity and authority.

However, the play reveals that this official discourse is fundamentally inadequate for understanding the case. The men's investigation focuses on the bedroom where the murder occurred, searching for physical evidence of how Mrs. Wright killed her husband. They fail to recognize that the crucial evidence lies in the kitchen, in the domestic details they dismiss as "trifles." Their epistemic failure results from ideological assumptions encoded in their discourse: the assumption that domestic space and objects are irrelevant to serious investigation, that women's knowledge and concerns are trivial, and that truth can be accessed through detached, rational analysis rather than through empathetic understanding and attention to context.

The female characters in *Trifles* employ sophisticated counter-discursive strategies that challenge patriarchal discourse while navigating the constraints of their subordinate social position. These strategies including cooperative interpretation, reappropriation of devalued terms, strategic indirection, and silent solidarity demonstrate women's linguistic agency and reveal how resistance operates through discourse even in contexts of significant power asymmetry.

The women's cooperative interpretation of evidence constitutes their primary counter-discursive strategy. Unlike the men's competitive, hierarchical interaction style, the women engage in collaborative meaning-making that builds shared understanding through dialogue. Their conversation about the quilt exemplifies this pattern:

"She was piecing a quilt."

"I wonder if she was goin' to quilt it or just knot it?"

This exchange appears trivial to the men, who overhear it and respond with laughter, but it represents a sophisticated interpretive practice. The question about quilting versus knotting is not idle curiosity but a way of attending to Mrs. Wright's state of mind and domestic practices. The women's collaborative exploration of this question demonstrates their ability to read material evidence for psychological and social meaning, a form of knowledge production that operates outside and in opposition to male rational-legal discourse.

Significantly, the women's counter-discourse does not directly confront or attempt to overthrow patriarchal discourse but operates alongside and beneath it. The women do not argue with the men or attempt to convince them of their interpretation. Instead, they develop their understanding in the spaces that patriarchal discourse leaves unattended the kitchen, the domestic details, the moments when men are absent or inattentive. This strategy reflects both the constraints of women's subordinate position and the effectiveness of working within and around dominant discourse rather than confronting it directly.

Theoretical Clarification on Gender Representation

While the play foregrounds gender asymmetry, this study does not essentialize men and women as biologically fixed communicative types. Rather, discursive positions are understood as socially constructed within institutional hierarchies. Male dominance in the play is institutional and ideological rather than inherent, and women's resistance emerges from structural marginalization rather than innate cooperative disposition. This perspective aligns with contemporary Feminist CDA scholarship and avoids reductive binary categorization.

5. Limitations of the Study

While this study provides a systematic micro-linguistic analysis of *Trifles*, it is limited to a single dramatic text and does not include a comparative analysis with other works by Glaspell or her contemporary playwrights. Furthermore, the analysis primarily relies on textual-linguistic interpretation rather than empirical reception studies or performance analysis. Future research could expand this scope by adopting corpus-based approaches or cross-cultural feminist discourse comparisons to further deepen the understanding of gendered ideological constructions in early twentieth-century drama.

6-Conclusion

This conclusion synthesizes the linguistic findings in relation to the research question and methodological framework. The analysis demonstrates that power in *Trifles* is constructed and contested not only thematically but at the micro-structural level of grammar, modality, lexical evaluation, and discourse organization.

The examination of gendered language patterns revealed that male and female characters employ distinct discourse styles that reflect and construct gender hierarchies. Male characters' authoritative, dismissive language reinforces institutional power and marginalizes women's concerns, while female characters' cooperative, indirect communication reflects their subordinate position but also enables collaborative meaning-making and resistance. These patterns align with sociolinguistic research on gendered discourse while serving the play's ideological critique, demonstrating that language differences are not natural expressions of gender but are implicated in power relations (Misbah, 2022; Lazar, 2007).

Analysis of power asymmetries in conversational interaction showed how dominance is enacted through micro-level features of dialogue turn-taking, topic control, dismissal, and interruption. The men's control over conversational topics and their dismissal of women's discourse naturalizes gender hierarchy by positioning male concerns as important and female concerns as trivial. However, the play's dramatic irony exposes the epistemic inadequacy of patriarchal discourse, revealing that conversational dominance does not guarantee access to truth. The women's marginalized discourse, dismissed as concern for "trifles," produces the understanding that eludes official investigation.

The analysis of silence as discursive practice revealed its complexity as both symptom of oppression and strategy of resistance. Mrs. Wright's silence reflects the psychological devastation of domestic violence and isolation, literalizing the silencing of women under patriarchy. Yet silence also functions strategically, as Mrs. Wright's refusal to explain her actions represents rejection of patriarchal legal authority, and the women's silent concealment of evidence enacts counter-legal justice. The multiple forms and functions of silence demonstrate that discourse analysis must attend to what remains unsaid, recognizing silence as meaningful communication deeply implicated in power relations.

Examination of the ideological construction of knowledge and authority revealed how *Trifles* stages a fundamental conflict between competing epistemic systems. The men's rational-legal discourse claims objectivity and authority but produces ignorance, while the women's

experiential, empathetic discourse, though dismissed as subjective and trivial, produces truth. This reversal exposes the ideological nature of epistemic hierarchies, revealing that the valorization of male institutional discourse and the devaluation of women's knowledge serve to maintain patriarchal power rather than to access truth. The play demonstrates that epistemic authority is not natural but is constructed and maintained through discourse (Misbah, 2022). Finally, examination of spatial and social segregation as discursive practice revealed how the play's physical organization materializes gender hierarchies while also creating conditions for women's counter-discourse. The kitchen as women's space is ideologically devalued yet becomes the site of epistemic authority, demonstrating how oppressive structures can create unintended spaces of resistance. The spatial arrangements in *Trifles* show that power operates not only through language but through material and spatial organization of social life (Chaisilwattana et al., 2015).

This study's findings contribute to several areas of scholarship. For Critical Discourse Analysis, the research demonstrates the value of applying CDA frameworks to dramatic texts and extends understanding of how ideology operates through literary language. For feminist discourse analysis, the study illuminates mechanisms of patriarchal discourse and strategies of linguistic resistance, contributing to understanding of how gender hierarchies are reproduced and challenged through language (Lazar, 2007; Allagbé et al., 2020). For Glaspell scholarship, the analysis provides detailed linguistic examination that complements existing thematic and historical interpretations, revealing the sophistication of Glaspell's dramatic artistry and her contribution to feminist discourse.

The study also holds contemporary relevance. Although *Trifles* was written over a century ago, its representation of gendered discourse patterns, epistemic injustice, and linguistic resistance resonates with ongoing struggles against gender-based discrimination and violence. The play's dramatization of how patriarchal discourse marginalizes women's knowledge, dismisses their concerns, and silences their voices illuminates patterns that persist in contemporary society. The women's counter-discursive strategies cooperation, reappropriation, indirection, and solidarity offer models for feminist resistance that remain relevant to current discourse practices.

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