



A Feminist Stylistics Analysis of Sofia Isella's Song "The Doll People"

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 12 June 2026	Language in popular music actively constructs and challenges gender ideologies; however, feminist stylistic studies have predominantly examined mainstream artists whose feminist messages are relatively explicit and declarative. Consequently, the linguistic mechanisms through which indie music articulates feminist critique, particularly through irony, ambiguity, and the simultaneous coexistence of objectification and resistance within a single text, remain largely unexplored. This study investigates how linguistic features in <i>The Doll People</i> by Sofia Isella (2024) construct and resist representations of women within patriarchal discourse. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, the lyrics were analyzed using Sara Mills' (2002) feminist stylistics framework at the word, phrase/sentence, and discourse levels. The findings reveal that women are constructed as fragmented and consumable objects through sexualized lexical choices and transactional syntactic patterns, while resistance is articulated through pronoun shifts, collective identity construction, and the narrative progression from objectification to liberation. Thus, the song functions simultaneously as both a representation of and a protest against patriarchal discourse, demonstrating that feminist critique in indie music operates through irony and contradiction rather than through direct declaration. This study contributes to feminist stylistics by extending Mills' framework to indie music and demonstrating its effectiveness in uncovering ideological complexity in texts where objectification and resistance coexist, thereby providing a replicable model for future analyses of gender representation in contemporary independent music. This study demonstrates how close linguistic analysis of popular cultural texts can reveal the ideological mechanisms through which patriarchal norms are constructed, naturalized, and challenged in everyday cultural life.
Accepted: 24 July 2026	
Published: 06 Agustus 2026	
Keywords: Feminist Stylistics, Gender Representation, Objectification, Patriarchal Discourse, Sofia Isella	

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1. Introduction

Language is never neutral; every word choice, every grammatical structure, and every pattern of meaning reflects the values and power relations of the society in which it is produced (Fairclough, 2015). Nowhere is this more visible than in the representation of gender, where language has long been used to construct, reinforce, and sometimes challenge the unequal positions of women and men within patriarchal systems (Mills, 2002). Literary and popular texts, including music, carry this ideological weight in particularly powerful ways because they reach wide audiences and actively participate in shaping cultural norms and expectations about gender.

Within literary analysis, stylistics offers a systematic linguistic approach to understanding how meaning is produced through textual features. By examining phonological, grammatical, and discourse features, stylistics explains how texts construct meaning not only aesthetically but also ideologically (Leech & Short, 2013). Following Simpson's (2004) principles of rigor, retrievability, and replicability, stylistic analysis provides a structured method for linking formal language features to cognitive and ideological responses. When combined with feminist theory, stylistics becomes an especially powerful tool for exposing how language encodes gender bias and patriarchal ideology while also revealing how texts resist and subvert those same structures (Jeffries & McIntyre, 2010). Feminist stylistics, introduced by Mills (2002), combines linguistic analysis with feminist theory to investigate how language constructs gendered meanings and power relations. By focusing on elements such as point of view, agency, metaphor, and transitivity, it reveals how seemingly neutral linguistic choices may encode underlying sexism and ideological bias, while also identifying opportunities for resistance and redefinition (Gheni, 2021; Hutabarat et al., 2025; Mills, 2002; Ufot, 2012).

This framework has been applied productively in a growing body of studies on gender representation in popular music. A number of studies have focused on how feminist stylistics reveals the critique of gender inequality and patriarchal norms through linguistic choices (Caroline et al., 2023; Dharmaya et al., 2023). The previous researches demonstrated how the song critiques gender inequality. Dharmaya et al. (2023) extending this through transitivity analysis to show how the hypothetical desire to be a man exposes the privileges men enjoy that women are systematically denied. Similar to Situmorang et al. (2025) found that Beyoncé's "If I Were a Boy" exposes emotional double standards and the normalization of male privilege through lexical, syntactic, and discourse analysis. Meanwhile, Rangkuti and Hafifah (2022) showed that Lady Gaga's "Born This Way" raises feminist voices by emphasizing equality and self-acceptance through its linguistic choices.

A second group of studies has concentrated on how language constructs the objectification of women and the imposition of gender roles. Tarigan et al. (2023) revealed how metaphorical expressions in Bella Poarch's "Build a Bitch" critique traditional gender roles and the objectification of women, and Simanjuntak et al. (2024) demonstrated that in lyrics by Little Mix and Nicki Minaj, women are more commonly described by appearance than by capability or agency, reflecting persistent patterns of reductive gender representation in popular music.

A third group of studies has examined how popular music language promotes women's empowerment and resistance. Manurung et al. (2023) found that Ava Max's "Not Your Barbie Girl" promotes women's liberation through language emphasizing agency and resistance. Likewise, Wijayanti and Saraswati (2022) figured out that Taylor Swift's lyrics promote self-empowerment and gender equality, though they also reflect certain representational limitations associated with heteronormativity and white feminism.

Taken together, these studies confirm that feminist stylistics is a productive framework for uncovering how popular music both reproduces and resists patriarchal ideology. However, a closer examination of this body of research reveals two significant and related gaps. First, all existing studies have focused exclusively on mainstream artists with large commercial audiences and well-established public personas. Mainstream music, by its nature, operates within industry structures that tend to favour legible, marketable, and broadly accessible messages, including feminist ones. As a result, the feminist critique found in mainstream songs tends to be relatively direct, declarative, and unambiguous in its positioning. Indie music, by contrast, operates outside these commercial constraints and is therefore not subject to the same pressures toward clarity and accessibility. Indie artists are more likely to articulate feminist concerns through oblique, ironic, and formally experimental means, producing texts whose ideological positions are not immediately transparent and whose meanings must be worked out through close linguistic analysis. This distinction matters for feminist stylistics because it means that the analytical tools developed and tested on mainstream texts may need to be applied differently, and more carefully, when brought to bear on indie music. Yet this has not been attempted in the existing literature, leaving a significant portion of contemporary feminist musical expression analytically unexamined. Second, the previous studies share a common limitation in that they have all focusing on songs in which the feminist message is largely unambiguous: the text either critiques patriarchy or celebrates women's empowerment, and these positions are stated relatively clearly through the language of the song. What is missing is an analysis of texts in which objectification and resistance are not opposites but coexist within the same lyrical space, producing a more complex and contested representation of women that cannot be reduced to either straightforward critique or straightforward reproduction of patriarchal ideology. Such texts demand a more nuanced application of feminist stylistics, one that is attentive not only to what a text says about gender but to the tensions, contradictions, and ambiguities through which it says it. "The Doll People" by Sofia Isella exemplifies both of these gaps. Isella is a young Australian-based indie singer-songwriter known for her alternative pop style and layered lyricism (QLD Music Trails, 2024). The song constructs a striking and unsettling portrayal of women through the recurring metaphor of dolls, depicting them as artificial, controlled, and objectified figures within a patriarchal system. Unlike the songs examined in prior studies, it does not offer a straightforward message of empowerment but occupies a more complex discursive space in which objectification and resistance coexist within the same text, making it a compelling and underexplored site for feminist stylistic analysis. Therefore, this study aims to examine how linguistic and stylistic features at the word, phrase or sentence, and discourse levels construct and resist representations of women within patriarchal discourse in Sofia Isella's "The Doll People," demonstrating how feminist critique in indie music can operate through irony, ambiguity, and the coexistence of objectification and resistance rather than through direct and explicit declaration.

2. Literature Review

The previous studies share a common limitation in that they have all focusing on songs in which the feminist message is largely unambiguous: the text either critiques patriarchy or celebrates women's empowerment, and these positions are stated relatively clearly through the language of the song. What is missing is an analysis of texts in which objectification and resistance are not opposites but coexist within the same lyrical space, producing a more complex and contested representation of women that cannot be reduced to either

straightforward critique or straightforward reproduction of patriarchal ideology. Such texts demand a more nuanced application of feminist stylistics, one that is attentive not only to what a text says about gender but to the tensions, contradictions, and ambiguities through which it says it.

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3. Method

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore how linguistic features in song lyrics construct and challenge gendered meanings. Qualitative research is appropriate when the aim is to interpret non-numerical, textual data through systematic analysis rather than quantification (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This design is particularly suited to the present study because it enables an in-depth examination of the linguistic and ideological patterns embedded in the text, allowing the researchers to trace how meaning is produced across multiple levels of language without reducing the data to numerical frequencies.

3.2 Data Collection

The primary data of this study consist of the complete and unedited lyrics of “The Doll People,” released by Sofia Isella in 2024. To ensure that the version analyzed represents the official and authoritative text, the lyrics were sourced directly from the artist’s official YouTube channel (Sofia Isella, 2024), which serves as the primary and most authoritative platform for the song’s release. The full lyrics were subsequently cross-verified with two independent lyric platforms, namely Genius (Genius.com, 2024) and Musixmatch (Musixmatch, 2024), both of which are widely recognized as reliable sources for verified song lyrics. In cases where minor discrepancies were identified between platforms, the version published on the artist’s official YouTube channel was treated as the definitive source. Data collection proceeded through three stages. First, the researchers listened repeatedly to the song to develop familiarity with its prosodic and rhythmic dimensions, which inform the interpretation of the lyrics. Second, the full lyrics were transcribed from the verified official source and imported into a working document for systematic annotation. Third, all words, phrases, sentences, and discourse-level features relevant to gender representation were identified and marked as the primary data for analysis.

3.3 Procedures

The data were analyzed using Sara Mills’ (2002) feminist stylistics framework, which examines how language constructs gendered meanings and power relations across three levels. At the word level, the analysis focused on lexical choices that carry gendered ideological meanings, including naming practices, metaphor, and terms encoding objectification or agency. At the phrase and sentence level, the analysis examined how combinations of words construct subject positions, transitivity patterns, and power relations

between gendered participants. At the discourse level, the analysis traced narrative progression, pronoun shifts, and the overall ideological trajectory of the text as a unified whole. Each identified linguistic feature was interpreted in terms of its form, its function within the lyric, and its ideological implications with respect to feminist theory and patriarchal discourse (Mills, 2002).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Word Level

At the word level, the analysis focuses on how specific lexical choices carry gendered ideological meanings. Mills (2002) emphasizes that individual words are never ideologically innocent: naming and describing practices encode assumptions about who counts as a subject, who is reduced to an object, and whose experience is treated as normative. The following analysis examines the key lexical items in “The Doll People” and their feminist stylistic implications.

“The doll people are not men” the word “**doll**” is central to the song’s feminist critique. A doll is an object made to be looked at, handled, and controlled by others. It does not speak, move, or think autonomously. By using this word to describe women, the lyric draws attention to how society treats women as passive objects rather than active human beings. From a feminist perspective, this reflects the long-standing cultural practice of reducing women to their appearance and their usefulness to others, stripping them of voice and agency (Bartky, 2011). The choice of doll rather than any neutral noun is ideologically charged: it naturalizes control and passivity as intrinsic to femininity.

“The doll people are not men” the word “**people**” normally refers to human beings endowed with rights, thoughts, and feelings. When placed alongside doll in the compound “doll people,” it generates an uncomfortable semantic tension: women are acknowledged as people, yet they are simultaneously described through a word that denies their full humanity. Feminist scholars have long argued that women have historically occupied precisely this contradictory position, recognized as human but not fully treated as such (Mills, 2002). The word *people*, therefore does not function as affirmation but as a marker of the gap between formal recognition and substantive equality.

“The doll people are not men” in this line, “**men**” functions as the unmarked norm against which the doll people are measured and found lacking. This reflects what feminist linguists call the androcentric norm, in which the male experience is treated as the universal default and the female experience is defined only in relation, and in deficit, to it (Mills, 2002). By stating what the doll people are not, the lyric implicitly frames masculinity as the complete form of humanity while leaving femininity as the unnamed, residual category. This kind of negative definition reinforces the structural asymmetry between genders at the most fundamental linguistic level.

“They are made of ass and glass” the word “**ass**” reduces a woman’s entire identity to a single sexualized body part, constituting a direct example of what feminist theorists call the fragmentation of the female body, the practice of perceiving and evaluating women not as whole persons but as a collection of parts to be assessed and consumed (Bartky, 2011). The use of this blunt, vulgar term also reflects the operation of the male gaze, a concept developed by Mulvey (1975), which describes how women are positioned as visual objects constructed for male pleasure. The deliberate crudeness of the word refuses to soften or aestheticize objectification, forcing the listener to confront the dehumanizing reality it encodes.

"They are made of ass and glass" "**glass**" evokes something simultaneously beautiful and breakable. From a feminist perspective, this reflects the damaging dual expectation placed on women: to be attractive and delicate, valuable for their appearance yet easily disposable (Yolton, 1995). Glass captures a central contradiction in how femininity is constructed under patriarchy: it is a material admired for its aesthetic quality but defined by its fragility. Once shattered, it can be discarded. This word reinforces the idea that women's worth is tied to their appearance and that this worth is, by definition, impermanent and contingent.

"Our skin is clay and painted blue" "**clay**" suggests a material without fixed shape, one that must be formed by someone else's hands. In the context of the song, this functions as a powerful feminist metaphor for the social construction of femininity. Women are not born into a fixed identity; rather, their identity is shaped and modelled by the expectations, rules, and pressures of the surrounding patriarchal culture. This connects directly to de Beauvoir (2011) foundational argument that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." The word clay makes the external, formative forces of gender socialization linguistically visible.

"Our skin is clay and painted blue" the word "**painted**" reinforces the idea that women's identity is something applied from the outside rather than something that grows organically from within. To be painted is to have one's surface altered by another's hand. In feminist terms, this reflects the pressure on women to perform femininity through appearance, behavior, and self-presentation in ways that serve others' expectations rather than their own desires (Butler, 1999). What the world sees when it looks at a woman, the lyric implies, is not her authentic self but a version of her constructed and coloured according to someone else's standards.

"Our head can detach" the verb "**detach**" is one of the most semantically powerful choices in the song at the word level. The image of a head separating from the body directly represents the feminist critique of how women's intellect and voice are systematically disregarded while their bodies are foregrounded and consumed. In a patriarchal system, a woman's body is valued and appropriated while her thoughts and opinions are treated as unnecessary or inconvenient (Bartky, 1990). The matter-of-fact grammatical form, a simple declarative with *can*, heightens the ideological critique by presenting the erasure of women's intellect as unremarkable, as something that simply happens.

"We are art you can fuck" the word "**art**" is deployed with deep irony. Art is something society claims to value, preserve, and revere. By calling women art, the lyric initially appears to elevate them. But this elevation is immediately exposed as hollow when the phrase is completed. Feminist scholars have identified this pattern repeatedly: women are placed on a pedestal precisely so that they can be simultaneously admired and exploited (Bartky, 1990). The label art does not protect women from objectification; it is part of the same ideological system that enables it, since art is also something owned, displayed, and consumed by others.

"We are quiet" the word "**quiet**" carries heavy ideological weight in relation to gender. Historically, silence has been demanded of women as a mark of good character, obedience, and appropriate femininity. From a feminist perspective, the expectation of quiet is not merely a preference but a form of control: when women are told, overtly or through social pressure, to be quiet, their voices, opinions, and experiences are systematically erased from public discourse (Mills, 2002). The word quiet in this song encodes that ongoing practice of gendered silencing within a single, understated lexical choice.

"Drink the dolls" the verb "**drink**" takes objectification a step further than the visual. To drink something is to take it inside oneself, to consume and absorb it completely. Using this verb in relation to women implies total possession: not merely looking at or touching, but

fully absorbing the woman as consumable substance. From a feminist standpoint, this reflects an extreme form of commodification in which women are positioned not only as objects to be admired but as resources to be depleted and discarded (Walby, 1991). The word drink implies that once consumed, nothing remains, no selfhood, no residue of the person who was there.

“Beauty and buyer” the pairing of **“beauty”** and **“buyer”** converts the relationship between women and men into an explicit economic transaction. Beauty becomes the product; buyer names who holds the purchasing power. From a feminist perspective, this reflects the intersection of patriarchy and capitalism in the commodification of women (Walby, 1991): women’s worth is measured by their desirability, and men are positioned as the arbiters of whether that worth is sufficient. The transactional logic strips away any notion of genuine relation or equality, replacing it with the mechanisms of the marketplace in which women are the goods being evaluated and exchanged.

“They looked under our skirts one morning but all they saw were maggots” the word **“maggots”** is the most semantically disruptive in the entire song, and from a feminist perspective, it is also the most powerful. Maggots are associated with decay, decomposition, and the breakdown of something that was once alive. By introducing this image into a lyrical landscape populated by words like beauty, art, and doll, the song forces a confrontation with the end point of objectification: the thing treated as beautiful and consumable eventually rots. This word functions as an act of radical feminist resistance, refusing to allow the fantasy of the perfect feminine object to stand unchallenged and insisting on the ugly truth of what it means to reduce a human being to a thing.

4.2. *Phrase and Sentence Level*

At the phrase and sentence level, the analysis examines how combinations of words work together to construct subject positions, encode transitivity patterns, and build or subvert patriarchal ideology. Mills (2002) emphasizes that this level of analysis is crucial for understanding how agency is distributed between gendered participants in a text, and how syntactic choices reinforce or undermine power relations.

“Doll People” this noun phrase juxtaposes two semantically incompatible terms, an object (doll) and a human category (people), generating a tension that encodes a core feminist concern: the simultaneous recognition and denial of women’s humanity (Mills, 2002). The phrase functions as an ideological shorthand for the condition Mills describes, in which women are nominally acknowledged as persons while being treated as objects. Crucially, the phrase defines women not by what they are but by what they have been made: its grammar already encodes construction and imposition.

“Made of Ass and Glass” this phrase reduces the female body to two materials, one sexual and one fragile, constructing women as composite objects rather than persons. The passive construction made of is grammatically significant: it positions women as things that have been assembled rather than beings who exist independently. The phrase reflects both the fragmentation of the female body (Bartky, 1990) and the cultural expectation that women be simultaneously desirable and delicate. Ass denotes sexualized availability for male consumption; glass denotes fragility and disposability. Together, they construct a woman whose entire value is corporeal, contingent, and ultimately destructible.

“Our Skin is Clay” the use of the possessive pronoun *our* is significant because it positions the speaker as one of the women being described, establishing solidarity and shared experience rather than outside observation. The metaphor itself makes a feminist argument about social construction: clay has no inherent form until someone else gives it one. By

asserting that their skin is clay, the speaker acknowledges that femininity is not an essential or natural condition but something shaped and imposed by external pressures, social expectations, beauty standards, and patriarchal norms. This phrase linguistically enacts what de Beauvoir (2011) and Mills (2002) theorize: that femininity is constructed, not innate.

“The Doll People Are Not Men” as a complete sentence, this line performs the negative definition that characterizes how femininity is constructed within patriarchal discourse. It tells us what women are not, not men, rather than what they are. Feminist linguists, following Mills (2002), have noted that this kind of definition-by-negation is characteristic of how women’s identities have historically been constructed: as the absence of masculinity rather than as positive, self-determined categories. The grammar itself enacts the androcentric norm: men serve as the standard; women are defined only in their deviation from it.

“Our Head Can Detach” this sentence is one of the most disturbing in the song, and the disturbance is grammatically calibrated. The phrase uses can in a modal construction that presents detachment as a simple capability or fact rather than as a figure of speech. This neutralizing syntax heightens the ideological critique: the separation of women’s minds from their bodies, the erasure of their intellectual presence while their physical presence is consumed, is presented as so normal that it can be stated as unremarkably as any other observable feature. The sentence makes visible a violence that patriarchal culture renders invisible precisely by normalizing it (Bartky, 2011).

“We Are Art You Can Fuck” this sentence is the ideological center of the song’s feminist critique. It begins with an apparent elevation, we are art, that invokes cultural prestige and value, then immediately undermines it with language that is explicitly sexual and objectifying. The syntactic structure is important: you can fuck is a relative clause that modifies art, transforming the supposed compliment into an instrument of possession. The sentence thus exposes a defining feature of how women are treated under patriarchy: simultaneously idealized and exploited, placed on a pedestal in order to be more efficiently used (Bartky, 1990). The sentence’s power lies in its refusal to soften the contradiction, stating both propositions in a single breath and making hypocrisy structurally inescapable.

“Drink The Dolls” this imperative sentence is the only direct command in the lyrics, and its grammatical form is ideologically significant. An imperative does not describe objectification; it instructs it. By issuing a command to consume women, the lyric reflects how the objectification of women is not merely an individual attitude but a cultural directive, something normalized, transmitted, and expected (Walby, 1991). The imperative also positions the listener as the agent of consumption, implicating them in the very dynamic the song is critiquing. This is a distinctly ironic feminist strategy: the form of address that normally signifies authority is here used to expose the violence it licenses.

“We Will Become Maggots” this sentence delivers the song’s most powerful feminist statement about the consequences of objectification. After a series of images constructing women as beautiful, decorative, and consumable, the song forces a confrontation with what lies at the end of that process. Objects do not live; they decay. The sentence refuses the fantasy of the eternally desirable feminine object by insisting on its material, temporal reality (Bartky, 1990). From a feminist stylistic perspective, this functions as both a warning, showing what objectification leads to, and an act of resistance: by claiming decay rather than beauty as their final state, the doll people refuse to remain the objects they were constructed to be.

4.3. Discourse Level

At the discourse level, the analysis moves beyond individual words, phrases, and

sentences to examine how the song as a unified text constructs meaning through narrative progression, shifting speaker positions, the accumulation of ideological tension, and the transformation of repeated elements across the lyric's full structure. Mills (2002) argues that this level of analysis is essential for understanding how texts do not merely reflect ideologies but actively construct and contest them through their overall organization.

4.4 Narrative Progression: From Objectification to Collective Liberation

When read as a complete text, the lyrics follow a deliberate feminist narrative arc. In the first verse, the opening lines establish objectification as the dominant condition: women are presented as things that exist to be looked at and used. The chorus intensifies this through consumption and categorical imposition, showing how objectification operates not only on the body but through the social roles assigned to and imposed upon women. The second verse begins to fracture this framework, introducing epistemic uncertainty through the qualifier or so they say, which destabilizes the authoritative voice that has been defining women throughout the first verse. The bridge marks a further discursive turning point, presenting the constructed feminine identity as physically breaking apart. Finally, the outro delivers the full reversal: the desired object has decayed, and the women have escaped together. This narrative arc, from definition and consumption to awareness, deconstruction, and liberation, constitutes a discourse-level feminist argument that no single line could carry alone. It is built across the entire structural progression of the text (Mills, 2002).

4.5 The Shifting Position of the Speaker

One of the most significant discourse-level features of the song is the systematic shift in the speaker's grammatical position across the text. In the opening lines, the language is third person and exterior: the doll people are not men / they are made of ass and glass. Women are described from outside, positioned as objects of an observing gaze. Within the same verse, however, the speaker shifts into first person plural: our skin is clay and painted blue / our head can detach / we are art you can fuck. This grammatical transition, from they to our and we, represents a discursive movement from women being spoken about to women speaking from within their own experience. From a feminist stylistic perspective, following Mills (2002), this grammatical shift enacts the reclamation of subjectivity. The speaker refuses to remain an object of external discourse and inserts herself and her community into the center of the narrative.

4.6 The Construction of Collective Feminine Identity

Across the entire text, the consistent use of our and we construct a collective feminine identity that is central to the song's feminist politics. In the first verse, our skin is clay and painted blue / our head can detach positions the experience of objectification as shared rather than individual. In the chorus, we are wife, whore, mistress, maid, mother extends this collectively into the domain of social roles, suggesting that these categories are imposed on women as a group rather than freely chosen by any individual woman. In the outro, the dolls are off running and laughing together completes this collective identity with an image of shared liberation rather than individual escape. The consistent use of collective language across the entire discourse reflects the feminist principle that women's oppression is systemic and structural, and that resistance must therefore also be collective and solidarity-based (Mills, 2002; Walby, 1991).

4.7 *The Ideological Tension Between Objectification and Humanity*

At the discourse level, the song sustains throughout its entire length a productive tension between two competing ideological frameworks: one that treats women as objects and one that insists on their humanity. This tension is established as early as the first verse, where we are statues with a pulse places the dehumanizing image of a statue alongside the irreducible biological fact of a pulse. Similarly, we are paintings with legs pairs an art object with unmistakably human anatomy. These contradictions are not resolved within individual lines but accumulate across the whole text, creating a discourse that is fundamentally contested. The objectifying framework is consistently introduced and then immediately complicated, even within the chorus. The line a woman who doesn't want it is much hotter than one that does functions as a moment of ideological self-exposure: by stating the logic of the male gaze so plainly, it makes that logic impossible to naturalize or ignore (Mulvey, 1975). From a feminist stylistic perspective, this sustained ideological tension across the whole discourse argues that objectification is not a natural or neutral condition but a constructed, contested, and ultimately unstable one (Mills, 2002).

4.8 *The Discourse of Resistance as Collective Action*

By the time the outro arrives, the song has accumulated sufficient meaning across its entire structure that the final images carry the full weight of the feminist argument. The line they looked under our skirts one morning but all they saw were maggots works as a discourse-level statement because its power is entirely dependent on everything that has preceded it. The gaze that has been objectifying and consuming women throughout the song finally looks and finds not what it desires but decay. Similarly, the dolls are off running and laughing together registers as genuine liberation because the discourse has already shown the full weight of the confinement from which they are escaping. The repetition of wife, whore, mistress, maid, mother in the outro undergoes a significant transformation in meaning: what was presented as a system of categorical control earlier in the song is now voiced by women who are already in flight from it, transforming the list from a definition into a declaration of everything they are leaving behind. This transformation of meaning through repetition is only visible at the discourse level, where the full structural journey of the text gives each repetition a different ideological weight (Mills, 2002).

5. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that language in popular music functions as a complex and contested site of gender ideology. Through the application of Sara Mills' (2002) feminist stylistics framework to Sofia Isella's "The Doll People," the analysis reveals how linguistic choices at the word, phrase or sentence, and discourse levels work together to construct and simultaneously challenge representations of women within patriarchal discourse. At the word level, sexualized and reductive lexical choices such as doll, ass, glass, and maggots encode the fragmentation and commodification of women while exposing the instability of objectification. At the phrase and sentence level, passive constructions, modal declaratives, and imperative forms distribute agency in ways that normalize patriarchal control while making its mechanisms structurally visible. At the discourse level, systematic pronoun shifts, the accumulation of ideological tension, and the transformation of repeated elements across the full text construct a feminist narrative progression from objectification to collective liberation. Taken together, these findings confirm that feminist critique does not always operate through explicit declaration but can emerge through irony, ambiguity, and the

deliberate coexistence of objectification and resistance within the same text, a characteristic that appears less prominently in many of the mainstream songs examined in previous feminist stylistic studies (Caroline et al., 2023; Situmorang et al., 2025; Rangkuti & Hafifah, 2022).

In terms of theoretical contribution, this study makes two significant advances to the field of feminist stylistics. First, it demonstrates that Mills' (2002) framework, which has been predominantly applied to mainstream texts with relatively explicit feminist messages, remains analytically productive and even more revealing when applied to indie music where feminist critique operates through oblique, ironic, and formally experimental means. This extends the analytical reach of feminist stylistics beyond its conventional scope and demonstrates its capacity to uncover ideological complexity in texts that resist straightforward interpretation. Second, this study contributes to theoretical understanding of how objectification and resistance can coexist within a single text without cancelling each other out. Rather than treating these as opposites, the analysis shows that their coexistence is itself an ideological strategy, one that more accurately reflects the lived complexity of women's experience under patriarchy than any text offering a simple message of empowerment could. This finding invites feminist stylistics scholars to develop more nuanced analytical categories for describing texts that operate in this ambiguous discursive space.

In terms of practical implications, this study offers several contributions to music studies and gender discourse analysis. For music studies, the findings suggest that indie music deserves greater critical attention as a site of feminist discourse. Because indie artists operate outside the commercial constraints that tend to favor legible and marketable messages, their work may articulate feminist concerns in more complex, layered, and formally innovative ways than mainstream music. Feminist stylistic analysis is particularly well suited to uncovering these dimensions, and this study provides a replicable methodological model that future researchers can apply to other indie artists and songs. For gender discourse analysis more broadly, this study demonstrates how close linguistic analysis of popular cultural texts can reveal the ideological mechanisms through which patriarchal norms are constructed, naturalized, and challenged in everyday cultural life. This has practical implications for media literacy education, where analytical tools drawn from feminist stylistics could be used to help audiences recognize and critically engage with the gendered ideologies embedded in the music they consume.

This study acknowledges several limitations. The analysis is limited to a single song by a single artist, which means that the findings cannot be generalized to indie music as a whole or to Sofia Isella's broader body of work. Additionally, the study focuses exclusively on the linguistic features of the lyrics and does not account for other semiotic dimensions of the song, including its musical arrangement, vocal performance, and visual presentation, all of which may contribute additional layers of meaning to the feminist critique embedded in the text. Future research may address these limitations by applying feminist stylistics to a broader corpus of contemporary indie music, combining it with critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2015) and multimodal analysis to capture the full range of semiotic resources through which gender ideology is constructed and contested in popular music, and conducting cross-cultural comparisons of feminist stylistic features across different national and cultural contexts.

Acknowledgments

In addition to the academic support required for this work, the authors would like to thank the lecturer who provided insightful guidance during the research process. We are appreciative of all our colleagues' efforts, which included helpful critiques and stimulating

conversations. Lastly, we would like to thank the researchers and scholars whose work has contributed to the development of this study's theoretical framework. Their discoveries have had a significant impact on our analysis of the linguistic construction and resistance of gender ideology in Sofia Isella's "The Doll People."

Funding

No external funding was received for this research.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

Authors' Contribution

Shandy Prasetyo: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Writing – Original Draft, Writing – Review & Editing.

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Anggun Dhanisa: Investigation, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Writing – Original Draft, Writing – Review & Editing.

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Statement of the Use of AI

Artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used solely for language editing and proofreading to improve the clarity, grammar, and readability of the manuscript. AI was not used for data collection, data analysis, interpretation of findings, or the formulation of research conclusions.

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