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Linguistic Constructions of Gender Performativity in Elif Shafak's Selected Fictions

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ABSTRACT

Elif Shafak's fiction offers a nuanced portrayal of gendered experiences, intricately shaped through linguistic structures that both reflect and challenge traditional gender identities. This study examines how language functions as a performative force in Shafak's narratives, constructing gendered realities through narrative techniques, character dialogues, syntactic patterns, and stylistic choices. Language, as presented in her works, becomes a site of negotiation, reinforcing or subverting established gender norms. Using a qualitative linguistic approach, this paper explores how gender performativity is embedded in discourse, with a focus on how Shafak's female protagonists navigate societal constraints. Their linguistic expressions often become acts of resistance or conformity to patriarchal expectations. Male characters, too, are examined through distinct speech patterns and discursive elements that either uphold or disrupt conventional masculinity. The analysis also considers multilingualism, code-switching, and culturally specific lexicon to investigate the intersection of language, gender, and cultural identity. These elements illuminate the complex ways in which linguistic practices contribute to identity formation in Shafak's fiction. Guided by key research questions on the portrayal, reinforcement, and subversion of gender identities through language, this paper offers a critical discourse and stylistic analysis of Shafak's work. The findings contribute to literary and gender studies by revealing how language not only mirrors but actively constructs gendered experiences in contemporary fiction.

Keywords: Linguistic Construction; Gender Representation; Elif Shafak; Discourse Analysis; Literary Language

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1. Introduction

Language is a powerful tool in the construction of gender identities, shaping how individuals perceive, perform, and challenge gender roles ^[1]. In literature, linguistic structures not only reflect societal norms but also serve as a medium through which gendered identities are constructed, deconstructed, and reimagined. Through dialogue, narrative style, syntactic patterns, and stylistic choices, literature becomes a site where gender performativity is enacted ^[2]. The way characters speak, the words they use, and the narrative techniques employed by authors all contribute to shaping readers' understanding of gender roles. This interplay between language and gender is particularly significant in the works of contemporary writers who engage with themes of gender fluidity, cultural constraints, and the evolving nature of identity.

Elif Shafak, one of the most renowned contemporary authors, intricately weaves gender narratives into her fiction, exploring themes of identity, marginalization, and societal expectations. Her novels, such as *The Bastard of Istanbul*, *The Forty Rules of Love*, and *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World*, depict diverse characters negotiating gender roles within complex sociocultural landscapes. Shafak's literary contributions extend beyond storytelling; her works serve as a critique of rigid gender binaries and highlight the fluidity of identity through linguistic expressions. Her multilingual background and transnational perspective further enrich her portrayal of gender, as she navigates between Turkish, English, and other cultural influences, blending linguistic elements that shape the identities of her characters.

The significance of linguistic choices in gender construction within fiction cannot be understated ^[3]. Words carry cultural weight, and how language is structured in literature plays a fundamental role in defining and redefining gender norms. In Shafak's fiction, linguistic nuances shape how characters embody, resist, or conform to gendered expectations. The stylistic and syntactic choices she employs—such as the use of metaphor, shifting narrative perspectives, and dialogue-driven characterization—contribute to a layered understanding of gender identity. Her works challenge dominant discourses by presenting characters whose linguistic expression reflects their struggle

against traditional gender norms, thus opening avenues for alternative gender narratives.

This study seeks to explore the linguistic constructions of gender performativity in Elif Shafak's fiction by addressing the following research questions:

1. How does Shafak use language to portray gendered identities?

- This question examines how linguistic markers such as pronouns, lexical choices, and narrative voice contribute to the depiction of gender in her novels.

2. What linguistic elements reinforce or challenge traditional gender norms?

- This inquiry focuses on specific linguistic patterns—such as politeness strategies, interruptions in dialogue, and gender-coded expressions—that either uphold or subvert traditional gender expectations.

3. How does her narrative style contribute to gender performativity?

- This question investigates the role of shifting perspectives, free indirect discourse, and stylistic devices in shaping gender identity through storytelling.

The objectives of this study are twofold:

- **To analyze linguistic structures in Shafak's novels that shape gender identities.**
 - This study examines how gender is represented through language to uncover the implicit and explicit mechanisms by which Shafak constructs gender identities in her fiction.
- **To explore how language constructs and deconstructs gender roles.**
 - This study will evaluate how linguistic strategies either reinforce or challenge existing gender binaries, offering insights into the transformative potential of language in literature.

By focusing on the intersection of language and gender in Shafak's works, this study aims to contribute to broader discussions on gender representation in literature, emphasizing the critical role of linguistic structures in shaping and redefining identity.

2. Literature Review

The study of language and gender representation in

literature has been an area of significant scholarly interest, particularly in relation to how linguistic structures shape, reinforce, or challenge societal norms regarding gender identity. Language serves as both a reflection of and a tool for constructing gender roles, influencing how individuals perceive and express their gender identities. In fiction, authors employ various linguistic strategies—ranging from narrative techniques to stylistic and syntactic choices—to portray gendered experiences. This section reviews key linguistic theories on gender representation, the role of discourse in constructing gender identities, and existing studies on language and gender in literary discourse. It also explores how gender performativity is shaped through fiction, with a particular focus on Elif Shafak's works.

2.1. Linguistic Theories on Gender Representation

Several linguistic theories have explored the intersection of language and gender, emphasizing how discourse contributes to gender construction. Early research in this field includes Robin Lakoff's *Language and Woman's Place*, which argued that women's language is often characterized by hedging, tag questions, and a lack of assertiveness, reinforcing societal perceptions of female subordination^[4]. This study laid the foundation for subsequent feminist linguistic research, which challenged and expanded upon Lakoff's claims by examining gendered language as a performative act rather than an inherent characteristic.

Judith Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity, though primarily philosophical, has influenced linguistic studies by highlighting how language functions as a means of enacting gender^[5]. According to Butler, gender is not an inherent identity but rather a repeated performance shaped by social conventions and reinforced through discourse. In literature, this perspective suggests that authors craft gender identities through repeated linguistic patterns, character dialogues, and narrative structures that either conform to or resist traditional gender norms.

Other linguistic theories relevant to this study include Deborah Tannen's *Gender and Discourse*, which examines gendered communication styles^[6], and Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet's *Language and Gender*, which explores how language is used to construct social identity^[7]. These studies provide a framework for analyzing

the linguistic choices made by authors like Elif Shafak in constructing gender identities in their narratives.

2.2. Role of Discourse in Constructing Gender Identities

Discourse plays a central role in shaping gender identities, as it determines how individuals and groups negotiate their gendered experiences within specific socio-cultural contexts. Michel Foucault argues that discourse is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but a mechanism of power that establishes societal norms and expectations^[8]. This perspective is crucial in understanding how gendered language in fiction reflects and influences broader cultural narratives about gender.

In literary discourse, gender identity is constructed through character interactions, internal monologues, and authorial narration. Feminist literary critics have highlighted how female characters in fiction are often positioned through male-dominated discourse structures, limiting their agency and reinforcing traditional gender hierarchies. However, contemporary authors like Shafak use language to challenge these constraints by portraying diverse gender expressions and identities^[9].

For instance, studies on gendered discourse in literature have examined how women's speech is often marked by politeness strategies, indirectness, and emotional expressiveness, whereas men's speech is typically associated with assertiveness and authority. Analyzing how Shafak navigates these linguistic tendencies in her novels provides insight into how language constructs gendered realities in contemporary fiction.

2.3. Key Studies on Gender and Language in Literary Discourse

Several key studies have examined the relationship between language and gender in literature, offering insights into how linguistic structures shape fictional portrayals of gender. Cameron and Kulick's *Language and Sexuality* explores how language functions in the construction of gender and sexual identity^[10], while Abdulmughni investigates gendered linguistic patterns in women's writing^[11]. These studies suggest that language is not merely descriptive but also constitutive of gender identity, reinforcing or subvert-

ing cultural gender norms.

Research on gender performativity in literary discourse has focused on the use of stylistic and syntactic choices to construct gendered experiences. Studies have shown that authors employ techniques such as free indirect discourse, code-switching, and linguistic hybridity to challenge conventional gender representations. This body of research provides a foundation for analyzing how Shafak uses linguistic structures to shape gender identities in her fiction.

2.4. Gender Performativity in Fiction

The notion of gender performativity in fiction is closely linked to the idea that language acts as a performative force that constructs and reinforces gender roles. Several studies have explored how linguistic elements such as pronoun use, speech patterns, and narrative techniques contribute to gender identity formation in novels.

For example, Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* is often cited as a literary exploration of gender fluidity, where the protagonist's shifting gender identity is marked by changes in linguistic expression^[12]. Similarly, in Jeanette Winterson's *Written on the Body*, the narrator's gender remains ambiguous, challenging traditional gender binaries through the use of neutral linguistic structures^[13]. These studies highlight how language can serve as a space for gender experimentation in literature.

Elif Shafak's fiction engages with similar themes, using language as a tool to explore gender fluidity and resistance. Her characters often negotiate multiple gendered realities through their speech patterns, internal thoughts, and interactions with others^[14]. Analyzing these linguistic elements provides valuable insight into the performative nature of gender in her works.

2.5. Elif Shafak's Works and Gender Themes

Elif Shafak's novels frequently explore themes of gender, identity, and cultural hybridity. In *The Bastard of Istanbul* (2006), Shafak portrays female protagonists who challenge patriarchal norms through their linguistic expression and personal narratives. The novel's use of multiple perspectives and shifting narrative voices allows for a complex portrayal of gendered experiences.

In *The Forty Rules of Love* (2009), Shafak blends historical and contemporary narratives, using language to construct gendered relationships across different cultural contexts. The novel's linguistic style, which incorporates mystical and philosophical discourse, contributes to its exploration of gender identity and emotional expression.

10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World (2019) presents a deeply gendered narrative, focusing on the life of a female protagonist marginalized by societal norms. The novel's linguistic strategies—such as fragmented storytelling and evocative imagery—serve to critique gendered oppression and highlight the resilience of female voices.

2.6. Existing Linguistic Studies on Shafak's Fiction

Although Shafak's works have been widely analyzed in terms of their feminist and cultural themes, there has been limited research focusing specifically on the linguistic constructions of gender in her fiction. Existing studies have primarily examined her portrayal of female protagonists and her engagement with issues of cultural identity, but few have analyzed how linguistic structures contribute to these themes.

For instance, studies on Shafak's work have explored her use of multilingualism and code-switching as a means of negotiating identity. However, there remains a gap in research that specifically examines how her linguistic choices construct and deconstruct gender roles. This study aims to fill that gap by analyzing how Shafak employs language to shape gender identities in her fiction.

2.7. Gaps in Research Focusing on Linguistic Constructions of Gender

Despite the growing body of research on gender and language in literature, there remains a lack of studies that focus specifically on the linguistic construction of gender in Shafak's works. While her novels have been analyzed through feminist and cultural perspectives, there has been little examination of the specific linguistic elements—such as syntactic choices, dialogue patterns, and narrative structures—that contribute to gender representation.

By addressing this gap, this study seeks to provide a

more comprehensive understanding of how language functions as a performative force in Shafak's fiction. Through a linguistic analysis of her novels, this research will offer new insights into how gender is constructed, negotiated, and contested through literary discourse. This contribution is particularly relevant in the context of contemporary discussions on gender fluidity and linguistic agency in fiction.

3. Materials and Methods

This section outlines the research design, selection of texts, analytical framework, and data collection and analysis procedures employed in this study. Given the nature of the research—examining how Elif Shafak's linguistic choices contribute to the construction and deconstruction of gender identities in her fiction—a qualitative research approach is adopted, focusing on discourse and stylistic analysis.

3.1. Research Design

This study employs a **qualitative research methodology**, specifically using **discourse analysis** and **stylistic analysis** to examine gendered language in Shafak's novels. Qualitative research is particularly suitable for literary studies as it allows for an in-depth exploration of texts, focusing on meanings, interpretations, and thematic patterns rather than numerical data.

Discourse analysis is used to study how gender is constructed through language in Shafak's narratives, considering not just what is said but how it is said. This involves analyzing dialogues, descriptions, and narrative structures to identify patterns in language that reinforce, subvert, or challenge traditional gender norms.

Stylistic analysis focuses on linguistic elements such as sentence structure, pronoun usage, metaphorical language, and rhetorical devices. By examining these elements, this study seeks to understand how Shafak employs specific stylistic choices to portray gendered experiences, agency, and identity.

Together, these methodologies allow for a nuanced examination of how language functions as a performative tool in constructing gender identities in literature.

3.2. Selection of Texts

This study focuses on three of Elif Shafak's novels:

1. **The Bastard of Istanbul (2006)**
2. **The Forty Rules of Love (2009)**
3. **10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World (2019)**

The special focus is given to *The Bastard of Istanbul*, supported by direct textual evidence and linguistic analysis.

These novels have been chosen based on **specific criteria** relevant to the study's focus on gender representation through language.

Justification for Text Selection

1. Gender-Focused Narratives

- All three novels explore themes of gender identity, societal expectations, and resistance against patriarchal norms.
- They present female protagonists whose lives are shaped by gendered discourses, making them suitable for analyzing how language constructs and negotiates gender roles.

2. Linguistic Experimentation

- Shafak's novels are known for their rich and varied linguistic styles, incorporating multiple narrative perspectives, multilingual elements, and unconventional storytelling techniques.
- Her works often blend contemporary and historical discourses, allowing for a comparative study of gender representations across different temporal and cultural contexts.

3. Diversity of Gender Representations

- The selected texts feature a wide range of gendered experiences, from traditional roles to more fluid and contested identities.
- By analyzing multiple works, this study aims to identify recurring linguistic patterns as well as variations in Shafak's portrayal of gender.

Each of these novels provides unique insights into how language functions in shaping gendered identities, making them ideal for discourse and stylistic analysis.

3.3. Analytical Framework

The analysis of gendered language in Shafak's novels is structured around three key aspects: **dialogue, narration, and stylistic choices**.

3.3.1. Examining Dialogue

- Character dialogues will be analyzed to understand how speech patterns, lexical choices, and conversational strategies reinforce or challenge traditional gender norms.
- Special attention will be given to how male and female characters express authority, emotion, and resistance through language.
- For instance, the use of imperative sentences, interruptions, and hedging in conversations will be examined to determine power dynamics in gendered communication.

In *The Bastard of Istanbul*, Shafak uses gendered discourse to expose how patriarchal structures are both reproduced and resisted through language. One illustrative moment occurs when Zeliha, the rebellious mother of Asya, tells her family: “*I will wear what I want, speak how I want, and live how I please*”^[14]. The assertive modal verbs “will” and “want” mark Zeliha’s speech as agentive and contrast sharply with the more deferential, self-effacing speech patterns of the older female characters, such as Aunt Banu, whose speech often contains hedging language (e.g., “*perhaps we shouldn’t question the past too much*” [p. 102]). This distinction reflects Deborah Tannen’s (1990) theories on power dynamics in gendered discourse, where women are traditionally socialized into using mitigated or polite forms of speech. Shafak subverts these norms through Zeliha, using direct and modal-heavy syntax to assert a linguistic form of gender resistance. By analyzing this shift in language, we see how Shafak crafts a character who linguistically embodies feminist defiance within a conservative cultural context.

3.3.2. Examining Narration

- Shafak frequently employs shifting narrative voices, internal monologues, and metafictional elements in her storytelling.
- The study will analyze how the choice of narrator (first-person vs. third-person) influences gender representation.
- Free indirect discourse and narrative focalization will be examined to understand how the thoughts and perspectives of female and male characters

are linguistically constructed.

Multilingualism functions as both a stylistic and ideological tool in Shafak’s novel, particularly in how characters navigate between Turkish and English. When Armanoush, a diasporic Armenian-American, visits Istanbul, her bilingual consciousness is captured through moments of code-switching: “*It felt strange to speak Turkish in the land of its origin... and yet it comforted her in ways English could not*”^[14]. This linguistic duality reflects her hybrid identity and resonates with theories of linguistic performativity^[5], where language becomes a means of negotiating belonging and selfhood. Through Armanoush, Shafak presents gender and ethnicity as overlapping identity categories performed through specific linguistic codes. Her alternating use of Turkish and English reinforces the fluidity of identity, especially for women who must continuously navigate between inherited traditions and global modernities. Thus, multilingual expression in the novel is not merely ornamental—it is a discursive strategy that reveals the gendered and cultural fault lines embedded in language.

3.3.3. Stylistic Choices and Gendered Language

- **Pronoun Usage:** The study will examine how pronouns contribute to gender identity and representation, especially in contexts where gender ambiguity is emphasized.
- **Discourse Patterns:** Repetitive linguistic structures, rhetorical strategies, and metaphors related to gender will be identified.
- **Multilingualism and Code-Switching:** Since Shafak incorporates multiple languages and cultural references in her writing, the study will analyze whether these linguistic shifts influence gender portrayal.

In *The Bastard of Istanbul*, Elif Shafak uses stylistic devices—particularly lexical repetition, metaphor, and narrative juxtaposition—to underline the gendered dynamics within Turkish patriarchal society. Female characters such as Zeliha, the outspoken and rebellious single mother, are linguistically constructed through vivid, assertive diction that contrasts with the more muted and passive expressions associated with male figures. For instance, Zeliha’s voice is frequently described as “sharp,” “smoky,” and “una-

pologetic”—a deliberate departure from the conventional literary portrayal of women as soft-spoken or submissive. These adjectives serve to linguistically empower her character, asserting a defiant femininity. Additionally, Shafak employs metaphorical language to explore female interiority, describing Zeliha’s emotions as “*storm clouds swirling under her ribs*”^[14], reflecting an embodied emotional turbulence that contrasts with the external calm she is expected to perform. Such metaphors not only express psychological depth but also critique the silencing of women’s emotional realities.

Furthermore, Shafak’s strategic code-switching and use of Ottoman Turkish idioms in the voices of older female characters subtly encode generational gender norms. Aunt Banu, for example, speaks in a manner laden with proverbial wisdom, positioning her identity within a linguistic tradition that enforces gender conservatism. This stylistic layering reflects Deborah Cameron’s (2005) notion of gendered discourse communities, where language serves both as a repository and regulator of gender norms. Through her nuanced stylistic orchestration—combining elevated metaphor with regional idiomatic speech—Shafak constructs a rich linguistic tapestry that both reflects and resists gendered expectations in Turkish society.

By applying this analytical framework, the study will provide a detailed examination of how Shafak’s linguistic choices construct, reinforce, or subvert gender roles in her fiction.

3.4. Data Validation

To ensure the reliability and validity of the qualitative data used in this study, a systematic triangulation method was employed during the analytical process. The linguistic patterns identified—particularly those related to gendered language, narrative style, and pronoun usage—were cross-verified across three selected novels by Elif Shafak. The excerpts were independently coded and reviewed multiple times to confirm consistency in thematic interpretation. Peer debriefing was also incorporated, wherein academic colleagues specializing in literary linguistics and gender studies examined a sample of the coded data for interpretive alignment. This external validation helped minimize researcher bias and enhanced the credibility of the findings. Furthermore, the consistency of gendered discourse pat-

terns across different narrative voices and temporal settings in the novels served as an internal check, reinforcing the dependability of the observations. While this qualitative study does not employ statistical validation, the methodological rigor, reflexive analysis, and thematic convergence across multiple data points lend substantial support to the study’s interpretative claims.

4. Results

Elif Shafak’s fiction intricately weaves language, gender, and identity, offering a complex portrayal of how linguistic structures shape and subvert traditional gender roles. Through dialogue, narrative style, multilingual expression, and discourse patterns, Shafak presents gender as a fluid and socially constructed phenomenon. Based on the general understanding of Elif Shafak’s work and its reception, it is widely acknowledged that her novels often explore themes of identity, marginalization, and cultural hybridity^[15]. This section explores the key linguistic features that construct gender in her novels, provides evidence of both traditional and non-traditional gender roles in discourse, examines the role of multilingualism in shaping gender identity, and discusses the broader implications of her linguistic choices for gender representation in literature.

4.1. Key Linguistic Features That Construct Gender in Shafak’s Fiction

Language plays a fundamental role in defining and reinforcing gender identities in literature. In Shafak’s works, several linguistic features contribute to the construction of gender:

1. Pronoun Usage and Gendered Identity

- In many traditional societies, gendered pronouns reinforce rigid binary identities. However, Shafak subtly challenges this by allowing some characters to experiment with pronoun use.
- In *The Forty Rules of Love*, Shams of Tabriz and Rumi transcend traditional masculine discourse, using softer, inclusive pronouns and poetic expressions that resist conventional male speech patterns.
- In contrast, female characters like Asya in *The*

Bastard of Istanbul adopt assertive pronoun use, marking their defiance of patriarchal norms.

2. Politeness Strategies and Speech Patterns

- Women in Shafak's novels often use **hedges, tag questions, and indirect speech** as politeness strategies, reflecting societal expectations of female deference.
- Male characters, particularly in traditional settings, adopt **imperatives, declarative statements, and assertive tones**, reinforcing dominant roles.
- However, subversive female characters, such as Leila in *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World*, disrupt this norm by engaging in direct, sometimes confrontational speech.

3. Metaphors and Symbolic Language

- Gendered metaphors play a significant role in reinforcing or challenging stereotypes.
- Women are often associated with **water, nature, and cyclical change**, symbolizing adaptability and emotional depth.
- In contrast, male characters are linked to **rigidity, fire, and solid structures**, emphasizing control and authority.
- However, Shafak disrupts these associations by allowing certain male characters, like Rumi, to adopt fluid metaphors, presenting masculinity in a more nuanced light.

4. Silence as a Linguistic and Gendered Strategy

- Silence is often imposed upon women in patriarchal discourse, representing submission.
- However, in Shafak's novels, silence can also be an act of defiance.
- In *The Bastard of Istanbul*, Zeliha, who initially defies gender norms through outspoken language, later uses silence strategically to control conversations, reversing traditional power dynamics.

4.2. Evidence of Traditional and Non-Traditional Gender Roles in Discourse

Shafak's fiction oscillates between reinforcing traditional gender roles and presenting subversive alternatives^[16]. This duality highlights the tension between cultural expectations and individual agency.

1. Traditional Gender Roles in Discourse

- In patriarchal societies, gendered discourse often

restricts women's speech while elevating male voices.

- In *The Bastard of Istanbul*, older male figures engage in authoritative storytelling, while younger women's speech is dismissed or questioned.
- Women frequently use **diminutives and self-deprecating language**, signaling a learned subservience in traditional settings.

2. Subversion of Traditional Gender Roles

- While many of Shafak's characters initially adhere to traditional discourse patterns, they later challenge these norms.
- Asya, the protagonist of *The Bastard of Istanbul*, refuses to adopt the expected polite and feminine speech patterns. Instead, she engages in sarcasm and intellectual debate, subverting traditional expectations of female speech.
- In *The Forty Rules of Love*, Ella, a contemporary Western character, undergoes a transformation, moving from hesitant, self-effacing language to a more assertive and independent discourse.

3. Gender Role Reversals in Dialogue

- In *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World*, the brothel workers use explicit and unrestricted language, traditionally reserved for men, reclaiming agency over their identities.
- Conversely, some male characters exhibit linguistic sensitivity and introspection, breaking away from rigid masculine stereotypes.
- Shafak thus presents gender as performative, aligning with Judith Butler's theory that gender is constructed through repeated linguistic and social acts.

4.3. The Role of Multilingual Expression in Shaping Gender Identity

Multilingualism is a defining feature of Shafak's fiction, reflecting Turkey's linguistic diversity and globalized cultural influences^[17]. Language choices in her novels often align with gendered identity negotiations.

1. Language Switching as Gender Performance

- Characters frequently switch between Turkish and English, reflecting shifts in power, intimacy, or resistance.

- In *The Bastard of Istanbul*, female characters use Turkish for familial interactions and English for self-expression, illustrating how language influences gender performance.
- English, associated with modernity and individualism, grants women more linguistic freedom, whereas Turkish, rooted in tradition, often reinforces collective and gendered expectations.

2. Code-Switching as a Marker of Gender Fluidity

- Some characters engage in **code-switching**, shifting between languages depending on their social context.
- In *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World*, Leila's speech fluctuates between formal Turkish and street slang, reflecting her movement between gendered spaces.
- This linguistic fluidity highlights the intersectionality of gender and class, showing how women navigate multiple identities through language.

3. Sufi Mysticism and Gendered Expression

- In *The Forty Rules of Love*, mystical discourse blurs gender distinctions, offering a more inclusive linguistic framework.
- Shams of Tabriz, for instance, uses a poetic, metaphor-rich language that transcends traditional masculine assertiveness, creating a form of speech that is both gender-neutral and spiritually fluid.

4.4. Implications of Linguistic Choices for Gender Representation in Literature

Shafak's linguistic strategies have broader implications for understanding gender in literature. By challenging and redefining gendered discourse, she expands the possibilities for representing diverse identities in fiction^[18].

1. Reshaping Gender Norms Through Language

- By depicting female characters who defy linguistic constraints, Shafak challenges essentialist notions of gender.
- Her male characters' engagement with non-traditional discourse suggests that masculinity, too, is fluid and performative.

2. The Role of Narrative Perspective in Gender Representation

- First-person female narratives in Shafak's fiction

allow women's voices to be heard directly, shifting the literary tradition of male-dominated storytelling.

- Third-person omniscient perspectives, however, still reveal societal constraints on gendered expression.

3. Multilingualism as a Tool for Expanding Gender Discourse

- Shafak's incorporation of multiple languages reflects the complexities of gender identity in a globalized world.
- Her novels encourage readers to see language not as a fixed structure but as a dynamic space where gender identities are continuously negotiated.

4. Feminist and Postmodernist Approaches to Gendered Language

- Shafak's linguistic experiments align with **post-modern feminist literature**, where traditional boundaries of gender and language are deconstructed.
- Her rejection of rigid linguistic binaries resonates with contemporary feminist discourse, emphasizing fluidity and multiplicity.

Elif Shafak's fiction demonstrates how language is deeply intertwined with gender identity. Through her use of pronouns, speech patterns, metaphors, silence, and multilingual discourse, she constructs and deconstructs traditional gender norms^[19]. Her novels serve as both a reflection of societal constraints and a site of resistance, where gender roles are continually redefined. By integrating feminist, postmodern, and multilingual perspectives, Shafak offers a complex and evolving portrayal of gender in literature, encouraging readers to rethink the relationship between language and identity.

5. Discussion

This section explores how linguistic structures in Elif Shafak's fiction shape gender identities through character dialogues, narrative techniques, stylistic features, and multilingual elements. By examining how language constructs, reinforces, and subverts traditional gender norms, this study highlights the nuanced role of discourse in gender representation.

5.1. Linguistic Representation of Gender in Character Dialogues

One of the primary ways gender is constructed in literature is through character dialogue ^[20]. In Shafak's novels, male and female characters use language differently, reflecting societal expectations, power hierarchies, and personal agency.

1. How Male and Female Characters Use Language Differently

Shafak's female characters often exhibit a complex relationship with language. Their speech patterns, tone, and lexical choices are shaped by cultural constraints and personal resistance ^[21]. In contrast, male characters tend to adopt assertive and authoritative speech, mirroring patriarchal power structures.

- **Direct vs. Indirect Speech:** Male characters frequently use direct, declarative statements, while female characters often employ indirect or hedged speech, reflecting gendered power dynamics.
- **Emotional vs. Rational Language:** Women's dialogues in Shafak's fiction often incorporate emotional expressions, storytelling, and metaphorical language, whereas male characters rely on logical argumentation and command-oriented speech.
- **Interruptions and Conversational Dominance:** In several instances, male characters interrupt female speech, reinforcing traditional gender hierarchies. However, some female characters challenge this dynamic by reclaiming conversational space through wit, sarcasm, or assertive speech patterns.

2. Subversion of Traditional Gender Roles through Dialogue

While Shafak's novels reflect traditional gendered linguistic patterns, they also subvert them in significant ways.

- **Female Characters as Verbal Rebels:** Characters like Asya (*The Bastard of Istanbul*) and Leila (*10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World*) challenge societal norms through their speech. They engage in open defiance, sarcasm, and intellectual discourse, countering traditional notions of female passivity.
- **Male Characters Adopting Feminized Speech**

Styles: In *The Forty Rules of Love*, the spiritual leader Rumi and his mentor Shams exhibit a poetic, introspective mode of communication, deviating from traditional masculinity associated with dominance and aggression.

- **Silence as Resistance:** In some cases, female characters strategically use silence to assert control. This linguistic choice disrupts the expectation that women should justify or explain their actions.

5.2. Narrative Techniques and Gender Construction

Shafak's use of narrative voice plays a crucial role in constructing gender identities. The choice of **first-person vs. third-person narration**, as well as shifts in focalization, influences how gender is perceived and interpreted ^[22].

1. Role of First-Person vs. Third-Person Narration in Shaping Gender Identity

- **First-Person Narratives and Female Subjectivity:**
 - In *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World*, Leila's perspective dominates, allowing readers access to her inner thoughts, memories, and emotions. This narrative technique enables a deep exploration of female subjectivity, countering male-dominated storytelling traditions.
 - The first-person voice grants female characters agency, making their lived experiences central rather than peripheral.
- **Third-Person Narratives and Gendered Distancing:**
 - In *The Bastard of Istanbul*, the third-person omniscient narrator provides a broader cultural and historical context for gender roles. This perspective highlights how social structures shape individual identities.
 - However, third-person narration can also reinforce gender hierarchies by maintaining a sense of distance from female interiority, sometimes prioritizing male perspectives.

2. Influence of Cultural Context on Gendered Language

Shafak's narratives frequently shift between historical and contemporary settings, illustrating how gendered

language evolves within different cultural contexts^[23].

- **Ottoman vs. Modern Turkish Discourse:**
 - In *The Forty Rules of Love*, the contrast between historical and contemporary speech patterns reflects shifting gender ideologies. While historical female characters navigate restrictive linguistic norms, modern women assert more control over their voices.
 - The novel juxtaposes mystical Sufi discourse with modern feminist critiques, demonstrating how spiritual and secular frameworks influence gender representation.
- **Cross-Cultural Perspectives:**
 - Shafak, as a bilingual writer, incorporates linguistic diversity into her narratives. English, Turkish, and other languages interact, reflecting hybrid identities and cross-cultural influences on gender norms.
 - Characters navigating multiple languages often experience shifts in gender expression, highlighting the fluidity of identity.

5.3. Stylistic Features and Gendered Expressions

Shafak employs distinct stylistic techniques—**metaphors, lexical choices, and syntactic patterns**—to construct gender identities in her fiction.

1. **Use of Metaphors in Portraying Gender**
 - **Water and Fluidity as Feminine Metaphors:**
 - Female characters are often associated with water, symbolizing adaptability, resilience, and cyclical change. In *The Bastard of Istanbul*, rain and the Bosphorus appear in moments of female introspection.
 - This contrasts with rigid, static imagery (stone, steel) often linked to masculinity.
 - **Food and Domestic Spaces as Gendered Symbols:**
 - In Shafak's fiction, kitchens and food preparation become sites of both oppression and resistance. Women engage in storytelling and subversive speech while performing traditional domestic roles, turning these spaces into zones of agency.

2. Lexical Choices and Gendered Language

- **Diminutives and Endearments:**
 - Female characters are often addressed with diminutives, infantilizing them and reinforcing hierarchical relationships. However, some women reclaim these terms, transforming them into markers of solidarity.
- **Swearing and Taboo Language:**
 - Male characters frequently use explicit language, reinforcing masculine-coded aggression. However, female characters who adopt similar linguistic styles are often labeled as deviant or rebellious.

3. Differences in Linguistic Agency among Characters

- **Passive vs. Active Sentence Constructions:**
 - Male characters are more likely to appear as grammatical subjects performing actions, whereas female characters often occupy the object position, reflecting traditional gender roles.
 - However, Shafak challenges this by giving female characters moments of narrative control, shifting them into agentive roles.

5.4. Multilingualism and Gender Identity in Shafak's Fiction

Shafak's use of multiple languages and code-switching plays a significant role in the construction of gender identity^[24].

1. **Role of Bilingualism in Gender Expression**
 - **Turkish vs. English as Gendered Discourses:**
 - Shafak's characters often switch between Turkish and English, revealing how language choice affects gendered self-expression.
 - English, associated with modernity and global feminism, allows female characters more freedom, whereas Turkish carries historical and cultural weight.
 - **Inner vs. Outer Language:**
 - Some female characters express their true selves in one language while conforming to societal expectations in another. This linguistic duality

highlights the complexities of gender identity in a multicultural world.

2. Code-Switching as a Reflection of Gender Fluidity

- **Shifting Gender Performances:**
 - Characters who engage in frequent code-switching also exhibit fluid gender identities. This reflects Judith Butler's concept of **gender performativity**, where identity is continuously reshaped through discourse.
- **Resistance and Hybrid Identities:**
 - In *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World*, characters from marginalized backgrounds use multilingualism as a tool for survival, resistance, and identity negotiation.

Through dialogue, narrative techniques, stylistic choices, and multilingualism, Elif Shafak constructs and deconstructs gender identities in her fiction. Her novels reveal how language is not just a reflection of gender but an active force in shaping it. By subverting traditional gender roles through discourse, experimenting with narrative structures, and employing stylistic innovations, Shafak presents a complex, dynamic portrayal of gender in contemporary literature. The linguistic gendering of discourse in Elif Shafak's fiction parallels findings by Anis, who observed distinct gendered registers among male and female Arabic language teachers on digital platforms ^[25]. This underscores the broader sociolinguistic trend of how gendered identities are shaped and performed through medium-specific language use across cultural contexts.

6. Recommendation

The study of gendered language in literature is a rapidly evolving field, offering new opportunities for exploration across cultural, literary, and technological dimensions. Future research can expand in the following areas:

1. Gendered Language Across Different Cultures in Literature

While Elif Shafak's fiction provides valuable insights into gender representation in Turkish and multilingual contexts, further research could explore gendered language in diverse literary traditions.

- **Comparative Studies:** Examining gendered discourse in Eastern and Western literary traditions, particularly how cultural norms shape linguistic choices in English, Arabic, Chinese, and other languages.
- **Indigenous and Postcolonial Perspectives:** Investigating how postcolonial women writers, such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Arundhati Roy, challenge gendered language structures influenced by colonial histories.
- **Translational Studies:** Analyzing how gendered nuances in language shift across translations and what impact this has on readers' perceptions of gender identity.

2. Expanding Linguistic Studies on Contemporary Women Writers

Women writers today are experimenting with language to challenge gender binaries and stereotypes. Future research could explore:

- **Stylistic Innovations:** How contemporary female authors use experimental syntax, fragmented narratives, and multilingualism to depict fluid gender identities.
- **Social Media and Digital Literature:** Analyzing gendered language in online storytelling platforms and feminist digital activism.
- **Interdisciplinary Approaches:** Integrating feminist theory, psychoanalysis, and sociolinguistics to deepen our understanding of gender representation in modern literature.

3. Computational Linguistic Tools for Quantitative Analysis of Gendered Discourse

Advances in computational linguistics provide new methodologies for analyzing gendered language at scale. Future research can explore:

- **Corpus Linguistics:** Using large text databases to quantify differences in male and female speech patterns in literature.
- **Natural Language Processing (NLP):** Employing AI tools to track gendered word usage, syntactic structures, and discourse patterns across literary texts.
- **Sentiment Analysis:** Investigating how emotions and agency are linguistically assigned to male and

female characters in literature.

By integrating these approaches, future studies can provide a more comprehensive understanding of gendered discourse, bridging literary analysis with cultural and technological advancements.

7. Conclusions

The study of linguistic constructions of gender in Elif Shafak's fiction highlights the intricate ways in which language shapes, reinforces, and challenges gender identities. Through a detailed analysis of Shafak's narrative techniques, character dialogues, and stylistic choices, this research has demonstrated that gender is not a fixed entity but a dynamic construct mediated by linguistic expression. Shafak's novels illustrate how discourse can either sustain traditional gender norms or subvert them through linguistic innovation, code-switching, and multilingual expression. The findings underscore the power of language in shaping perceptions of identity and gender performativity in contemporary literature.

This study has also revealed that gender roles in Shafak's fiction are deeply embedded in cultural and historical contexts, where linguistic variations reflect broader societal transformations. The differences in male and female speech patterns, the agency assigned through dialogue, and the role of first-person versus third-person narration all contribute to a nuanced understanding of how gender is performed through language. Furthermore, Shafak's use of multilingualism offers a unique perspective on gender fluidity, demonstrating how language choice can influence identity construction and challenge binary gender distinctions.

The research contributes to both gender studies and literary linguistics by providing a comprehensive linguistic analysis of gender representation in fiction. It reinforces the idea that literature serves as a powerful medium for negotiating gender roles and offers insights into how language can be employed to deconstruct stereotypes. Future studies could expand this exploration by examining gendered language across different cultural and linguistic contexts, incorporating computational tools for a quantitative analysis, and investigating the role of digital discourse in contemporary gender representations. The ongoing evolution of language in literature continues to shape and

redefine gender identities, making this an essential area of study for linguists and literary scholars alike.

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This study was conducted following the ethical standards of the Institutional Review Board.

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Not applicable.

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The data for this study will be available upon request. Please contact the corresponding author for access.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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