



*Journal of International Students*  
Volume 16, Issue 5 (2026), pp. 63-78  
ISSN: 2162-3104 (Print), 2166-3750 (Online)  
jistudents.org  
<https://doi.org/10.32674/5yaadr98>



## Language, Power, and Gender in Transnational Education: A Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis of Women’s Representation in “*We Need New Names*”

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**ABSTRACT:** *In this paper, we use feminist critical discourse analysis (FCDA) to study the linguistic aspects that shape and frame gendered power and relations in *We Need New Names* by NoViolet Bulawayo. Through qualitative analysis of dialogues, narrative structures, and silences, we highlight how patriarchal norms are reinforced and challenged. The findings reveal four categories derived from the analysis: silence as resistance; silence as socialization; language marginalization in diaspora settings; and the inversion of colonial-patriarchal discourse. The findings suggest that silence in the novel can function simultaneously as a patriarchal disciplinary measure and a resistant counter discourse, enabling women to exercise their agency. The results also suggest how hybrid and diminished linguistic presence in the diaspora setting is symptomatic of the intersections of gender and cultural hegemony.*

**Keywords:** Feminist theory; critical discourse analysis (CDA); gender identities; power relations; women's agency; gender imbalances; patriarchal society

**Received:** Oct 5, 2025 | **Revised:** Dec 3, 2025 | **Accepted:** Jan 10, 2026

### How to Cite (APA):

Mahmood, H., Nusrat, A., Al Shlowiy, A., & Khoso, A. K. (2026). Language, power, and gender in transnational education: A feminist critical discourse

analysis of women's representation in "We Need New Names". *Journal of International Students*, 16(5), 63-78. <https://doi.org/10.32674/5yaadr98>

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**Academic Editors:** Dr. Muhammad Imran & Dr. Norah Almusharraf, Prince Sultan University, Saudi Arabia

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## INTRODUCTION

Language and gender are closely connected, as language often functions as the space where unequal power relations are produced, maintained, and sometimes resisted, particularly in postcolonial contexts such as those depicted in *We Need New Names* (Bulawayo, 2013).

The book is an instructive text for studying the intersection of gendered inequalities and discourse, as it features a range of female characters whose voices, silences, and discursive choices speak volumes about the power structures in which they find themselves. To map gendered discourse in the book, a suitable and coherent framework is necessary. To examine how gendered discourse operates in the novel, a coherent analytical framework is required. Previous scholars have argued that feminist critical discourse analysis (FCDA) is particularly suited for analysing how language constructs and sustains gendered power relations in literary texts (Abdalla, 2024).

FCDA is a research tradition that focuses on language and ideology in examining how various gender hierarchies are constructed as natural and how resistance is discursively achieved among marginalized and silenced groups (Lazar, 2007). This study uses the FCDA as its core analytical and theoretical tool, since it is concerned with language as a site of reproduction and resistance; thus, studying the mechanisms through which women in the novel population sustain and confront unequal power structures via discourse, the FCDA may provide a suitable analytical lens for such an inquiry. While critical discourse analysis (CDA) has been widely applied to examine resistance and power relations in media and social texts, FCDA specifically foregrounds gender as a central analytical category, making it particularly relevant for this study. There has been some FCDA and CDA research on the resistance of women and other minority groups in the literature and media.

However, there has not been an in-depth application of FCDA to *We Need New Names*. Previous studies have also focused primarily on overt forms of defiance, whereas the roles of silence, coded talk, and other forms of discursive subtlety remain largely unexplored. Although previous studies have examined overt forms of resistance in *We Need New Names*, more subtle discursive practices such as silence, coded speech, and restrained agency have received limited attention (Astley, 2024). This study, by focusing on how the female characters in the book utilize both speech and silence in their interactions with others, aims to

contribute to the FCDA research agenda on silence and, more broadly, on the performativity of postcolonial gendered identities.

The experiences of Darling and other female characters in the diaspora are undoubtedly similar to those of many people worldwide. However, it is only a tangential field of research, and the main contribution of this study to discourse-analytic conversation is its examination of language as a tool for reproducing gendered power in the novel.

For these reasons, this study is guided by the following research question:

*How does We Need New Names represent language as a tool of subordination and resistance through its depictions of women in different social settings?*

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent studies (Arshad et al., 2024), (Kenney, 2018), (Balango, 2023) have aimed to explore the intersection of gender, language, and power, with a particular emphasis on how female characters employ language as a medium of resistance and negotiation within patriarchal structures. Arshad *et al.* (Arshad et al., 2024) and Kenney (Kenney, 2018). Both use the FCDA in different literary texts to illustrate the interplay between gender, language, and power. Arshad *et al.* (2024) reported that female characters of Bapsi Sidhwa's short stories overcame linguistic marginalization through their attempts to assert identity and agency. Kenney (2018) concluded that Shakespearean women exerted influence in the male-dominated world by challenging patriarchal authority via rhetorical devices such as silence, rhetorical skill, and performativity. Balango (Balango, 2023) analyzed the language used by female characters in a contemporary novel set in a world resembling 18<sup>th</sup>-century England. The author pays attention to everyday speech as a subtle tool of the feminist critique of gender discrimination. The differences among the three studies lie in their distinct literary traditions and periods: South Asian postcolonial fiction, English drama, and modern literature. In turn, both Arshad *et al.* (2024) and Kenney (Kenney, 2018) emphasized verbal and performative tactics as tools of resistance by women in more traditional patriarchal societies, whereas Balango (Balango, 2023) focused on the structural features of language and women's personal experience to counter gender-based discrimination. In summary, all three studies suggest that discourse serves as a tool for both resistance and social conditioning, revealing gendered power and privilege hierarchies across contexts.

Other studies, such as those by Mears (Mears, 2009), Paul (Paul, 2020), and Usama (Usama, 2024), shared the objective of understanding how language functions as a mechanism of resistance across different social and cultural contexts, although each employed a different theoretical framework. Mears (Mears, 2009) analyzed Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* through Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, demonstrating that the protagonist employs direct speech to resist societal norms and to express personal autonomy. Paul (2020) focused on real-world female activists, particularly those from lower socioeconomic classes, and

examined their use of language to address societal constraints (Paul, 2020). Usama (Usama, 2024), applying CDA, explored how female characters in *Moth Smoke* asserted their voices within patriarchal Pakistani society. All three studies emphasized the significance of women's linguistic strategies as instruments of empowerment within patriarchal or class-stratified contexts.

Mears revealed that dialogue in *Efuru* functioned not only as a narrative device but also as a tool of resistance, reflecting the protagonist's efforts to assert freedom (Mears, 2009). Paul (2020) identified how socioeconomic marginalization intersected with gender to amplify silencing while also highlighting how language became a platform for asserting visibility and identity (Paul, 2020). Usama (2024) demonstrated that the women in *Moth Smoke* were not passive participants in discourse but rather active challengers of patriarchal norms, utilizing assertive speech to disrupt power hierarchies (Usama, 2024). Collectively, these studies expanded the scope of feminist discourse analysis by connecting language, resistance, and identity across both literary and nonliterary contexts. They addressed gaps by incorporating class-conscious and region-specific perspectives that are often excluded from mainstream feminist literary discourse.

Gilbert and Gubar (Gilbert & Gubar, 2020) examined how women writers and literary characters subvert and confront patriarchal forces through the use of literary and linguistic strategies. The researchers, employing Millett's feminist perspective, analyzed several narratives by and about nineteenth-century women, examining how they "distorted and revised" the widely accepted literary "codes" to challenge traditional notions of male control and female silence (Gilbert & Gubar, 2020), p. 45). Javed *et al.* (Javed *et al.*, 2025) also reported that modern-day female characters in fiction confront patriarchal power and oppression through collaboration, education, and self-expression, utilizing Millett's theory and Murphy's character analysis model.

In both papers, the common theme is how women utilize language, narrative style, and power dynamics to challenge the patriarchal status quo. The paper by Gilbert and Gubar (2020) focused more on literary subversion, such as metaphor and doubling, whereas Javed *et al.* (2025) emphasized characters' agency, identity, and psychological development. Overall, both studies expand on the use of feminist literary analysis to understand how the language of women's narratives challenges patriarchy and power across historical and cultural contexts.

Sharma and Hussein (Sharma & Hussein, 2021) and Balango (Balango, 2023) both explored how female characters in fantasy and contemporary novels resist gendered expectations through language use. Sharma and Hussein (2021) employed Lazar's FCDA framework (Lazar, 2005) to analyze how characters such as Hermione Granger and Susan Pevensie use words, intelligence, and rhetorical skills rather than brute force, repositioning feminist representation from physical empowerment to discursive and cognitive empowerment. Balango (2023), utilizing Millett's feminist theory, also demonstrated that women counter patriarchy through ordinary language and active verbal intervention, contesting stereotypes of female passivity. The key similarity between these studies is that both conceptualize discursive, rather than physical, forms of power as key to

women's agency. In fact, these works have demonstrated that linguistic forms of resistance, such as speech, narration, and rhetorical devices, enable women to challenge and negotiate gendered power relations across various genres. As such, these works could be useful considering the FCDA to examine *We Need New Names* and the representation of hybrid identity under postcolonial patriarchy, since these books conclude that language can be both a medium of power and a tool for resistance.

Ernanda (Ernanda, 2023) and Tian and Ge (Tian & Ge, 2025) shared an interest in using the FCDA to examine women's resistance in modern sociopolitical contexts. Ernanda (2023) analyzed the role of women in protecting the land in the documentary *Tanah Ibu Kami*, focusing on interviews and speeches by female leaders (Ernanda, 2023). Tian and Ge (2025) investigated digital feminist responses in China to a controversial restroom incident involving a mother and son. Their findings revealed that women asserted agency by defying expected gender roles and reshaping public discourse, whether through environmental activism or digital commentary (Tian & Ge, 2025). Ernanda addressed a lack of research on gender and environmentalism, whereas Tian and Ge introduced “C-fem,” a hybrid feminist model relevant to China. Collectively, these studies filled gaps in feminist discourse by expanding the application of the FCDA to the environmental and digital spheres (Ernanda, 2023).

Zahro (Zahro, 2025) and Abdurrahman *et al.* (Abdurrahman *et al.*, 2023) aimed to investigate how language and discourse reflected or challenged patriarchal ideologies in literary texts. Zahro (2025) adopted a descriptive qualitative method to study Nawal El Saadawi's *women at Point Zero*, highlighting how the protagonist Firdaus resisted male dominance through actions (Zahro, 2025). Abdurrahman (2023) applied Fairclough's 3D model of CDA (1989) to *Bliss* by Katherine Mansfield to analyze how linguistic techniques reinforced gendered power dynamics. Both studies focused on how female characters resisted or were subjected to male authority, either through decisive behavior or through discursive representation (Abdurrahman *et al.*, 2023). Zahro revealed that Firdaus challenged injustice through resilient acts, showing that empowerment did not always depend on speech. Abdurrahman's findings indicated that male dominance was encoded within the narrative structure, rendering women linguistically subordinate (Zahro, 2025).

McDuff (McDuff, 2015) and Rahim (Rahim, 2024) focused on language as a tool for female identity formation and resistance in migration and cultural contexts. McDuff (2015) explored, through a feminist lens, the experiences of Zimbabwean migrant women in the UK and South Africa (McDuff, 2015). Rahim (2024), using Fairclough's CDA model (Fairclough, 2013), examined how Iraqi women in the literature expressed selfhood and resistance (Rahim, 2024). Both studies focused on female narratives, both real and fictional, and focused on how women used language to challenge traditional gender roles across different cultural landscapes. Their findings highlighted that language empowered women to narrate resilience, reshape their identities, and redefine their social roles. McDuff filled a gap in the migration literature by showing how diasporic women

constructed agency through storytelling, whereas Rahim addressed the underrepresentation of Middle Eastern women's linguistic agency.

Jan and Rahman (Jan & Rahman, 2022) and Prasetyo & Suryaman (Prasetyo & Suryaman, 2022) examined how language and performativity construct and challenge gender roles in South Asian and Southeast Asian literature. Jan utilized Butler's gender performativity theory (1990) in conjunction with the FCDA (Lazar, 2005) to analyze gender roles in Muneeza Shamsie's *Cholistan Trilogy*. Prasetyo relied on feminist literary criticism and Sara Mills' approach to studying four female characters in *Garis Perempuan* by Sanie B. Kuncoro. Both studies explored how female characters resisted societal expectations and redefined femininity through language and discourse. Jan reported that female characters adopted different discursive strategies, such as talkativeness or silence, to disrupt conventional femininity. Prasetyo revealed that female characters use speech to reject patriarchal purity norms and assert agency.

Although *We Need New Names* and African and diasporic literature have long been analyzed for their portrayals of and interventions in gendered oppressions, few studies have addressed them through the FCDA. Moreover, to the extent that such work has been done, it has generally been thematic or symbolic rather than focused on silence, voice, and other linguistic dimensions and mechanisms of gendered discursive positioning and negotiations of power. The present study aims to address these gaps by applying the FCDA to *We Need New Names*, examining how the novel's language (re)constructs and negotiates gendered power relations.

## METHODOLOGY

The current research analyses how the power relations between the two genders are negotiated and constructed through language in *We Need New Names*. To do so, it uses Lazar's (Lazar, 2005, 2007), the FCDA. This type of analysis is well-suited to the project at hand, as it examines how gendered ideological operations are enacted in discourse and how women reproduce or resist patriarchal ideology through specific linguistic, nonverbal, and narrative practices (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This research aims to examine the relationship between language and gender disparities in Darling's hometown.

### Data Selection

The core data were extracted from *We Need New Names* that unambiguously depicted female characters' interactions with, representations of, or discursive positioning within patriarchal or postcolonial structures. Extracts were chosen based on two main criteria:

*Thematic relevance to the FCDA:* Passages that exemplify power asymmetry, gendered expectations, silence, negotiation of identity, or discursive resistance.

*Presence of analyzable linguistic features:* Texts in which language forms (e.g., silence, metaphor, narrative framing, and code switching) play a discernible role in constructing gendered meanings.

This purposive sampling approach ensured that the data were directly relevant to the research question and the FCDA's analytical objectives.

### **Analytical Framework**

The analytical approach employed in this study is based on FCDA, with Lazar (Lazar, 2005, 2007) providing the most extensive application. The approach perceives gender as a system of ideology that materializes in discourse; thus, we consider FCDA suitable for analyzing the manifestation of patriarchy reiteration or resistance in *We Need New Names*. When this framework was applied to the novel, the analysis focused on identifying linguistic and narrative strategies that construct and maintain gendered social practices and relationships. The main areas of analysis included the various ways in which women are either silenced or have limited agency and voice in the discourse, represented through metaphor or in hybrid forms that materialize postcolonial negotiation. Additionally, the analysis examined how power relations are embedded and reproduced in everyday communicative interactions, and how specific discursive practices normalize and naturalize gender hierarchies. The strategies of minor linguistic and narrative subversions employed by female characters to negotiate and subvert these structures, including withholding speech, refusing discursive authority, shifting discursive stances, and employing hyphenated or culturally hybrid forms, were also identified. By focusing on how to discourse both constructs and deconstructs gender, the analytical framework above enables an exploration of how language functions as a tool of ideological domination and resistance in the novel.

### **Data collection and analytical procedure**

To explore gender, power, and identity, the discussed study examined dialogues and story sections from *We Need New Names*, which were chosen based on their relevance to the main themes. The data analysis consisted of a series of readings of the novel. During these readings, linguistically notable text excerpts were marked, and preliminary codes for patterns related to research questions on silence, voice, agency, and gendered positioning were recorded. These were then grouped into themes in accordance with the FCDA, allowing the researcher to examine, for example, how silence (linguistic withholding of speech), metaphorical language, turn-taking, and hybrid language features contribute to the construction or disruption of power hierarchies. The researcher interpreted these features, then rechecked and refined them by rereading the text and comparing it across marked excerpts, drawing on the FCDA literature to ensure coherence with the theory. For analytic rigor, the coauthors shared the analytic notes. For analytic trustworthiness, the analysis was further validated through intratextual triangulation, in which multiple text excerpts exhibiting the same discursive features were compared.

## RESULTS

The application of the FCDA to the novel *We Need New Names* by NoViolet Bulawayo elucidates the treatment of women in society. This highlights that the struggle of women over power is mediated in silence, positioning, and the use of gendered and culturally hybridized language. The results of the textual analysis revealed that the women in the novel were more often victims of discursive violence; however, they were also found to attempt to subvert it, destabilize patriarchal power, and utilize silence as their own counter discourse. In total, four common discursive patterns were identified. **Figure 1** illustrates the four overlapping discursive practices in *We Need New Names*, showing (1) silence as resistance, (2) silence as social conditioning, (3) linguistic marginalization, and (4) language as a site of power, to demonstrate how gendered power is discursively produced, negotiated, and resisted.

### 1. Silence as Discursive Resistance

*Text 1.* In the need for new names, language is used as a tool to both subvert and reproduce patriarchal power. A clear example of this is the scene where Darling's mother is verbally humiliated by men in the market and where she does not respond:

"My mother was silent. She did not say anything when the men laughed at her. She just looked at them and went back to selling her things." (Bulawayo, 2013), p. 27

In this excerpt, Darling's mother is mocked by a group of men in the market. By not responding, she rejects the men's offer to engage in a verbal exchange on their terms, i.e., a two-way dialogue intended to publicly shame her. The very public nature of this exchange first reproduces the expectations of such humiliation, but her refusal to speak also resists this script. Her silence also represents a shift in her position: she is neither a passive victim nor a nonperson, but someone who steps outside the men's script to maintain her dignity. Using FCDA analysis, we can see here how a discursive site of silence is both reproductive and resistant to gendered power.

*Text 2:* When Darling recounts her mother's silent endurance in the private sphere, the novel frequently invites readers to reflect critically on the intersections of gender, language, and power:

"My mother never complained. She just did." (Bulawayo, 2013), p. 92)

In one sense, this silence (explained as not complaining) would be normalized, an acceptance of women's expected submission. From a feminist perspective, we could read it as a silent subversion of the expectation of vocalized suffering. The mother's refusal to complain confers agency on the silence as a way of suffering but without giving the patriarchy the pleasure of hearing her pain. The FCDA would notice such moments and see them as occasions to problematize

the dominant narrative of female subordination to see that power could be in not acquiescing to the expected vocal participation in one's own subjugation.

## 2. Silence as Social Conditioning and Gendered Discipline

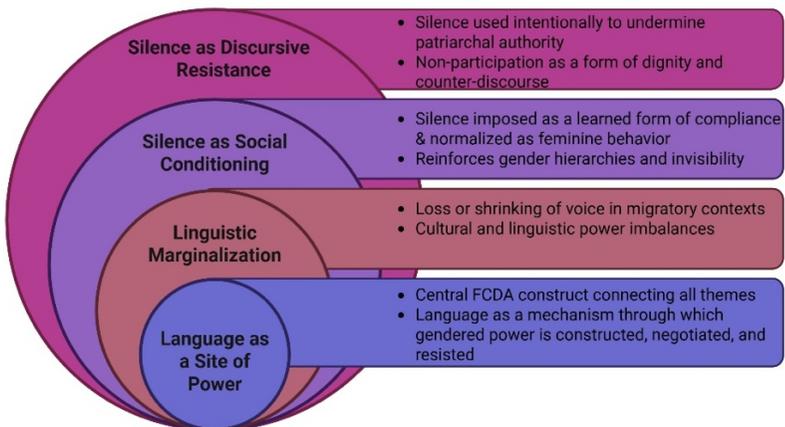
*Text 3.* The novel further explores how silence is portrayed as a socially constructed decorum that disciplines women into the submissive role:

*"The women did not say anything when the men spoke. They just sat there, their eyes on the ground, as if looking up might make them disappear."* (Bulawayo, 2013), p. 39

This scene reveals that women are silent, almost serving as a visual sign of their marginalization. Their lowered gaze and silence reflect an internalized voice telling them to be quiet in a male-dominated society. From an FCDA perspective, silence is a discursive tool through which the patriarchy monitors who is allowed to speak and who would go unheard. It is not as much a tool of resistance as it is a tool of disciplining women into silence, which in turn perpetuates gendered hierarchies and pushes women out of community leadership.

*Text 4.* Bulawayo's narrative also illustrates systemic marginalization through collective female imagery:

*"Look at them leaving in droves, the women with their babies strapped to their backs, their eyes dull like the morning sky."* (Bulawayo, 2013)pp. 56–57)



**Figure 1:** Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) Discursive Themes in *We Need New Names*

The image of women migrating in large numbers with "dull" eyes signifies not only physical hardship but also emotional dispossession. The language and imagery position them as bodies moving through public space under structural pressure, displaced and muted. From an FCDA perspective, the poem reveals how

sociopolitical systems foreclose women's agency by producing vulnerable positions; however, the narrative itself also operates as a countering discourse, rendering the speaker's suffering legible. The text demonstrates how silence and muted affect can also represent the cumulative forces of gendered and economic disenfranchisement.

### **3. Linguistic Marginalization and Hybrid Identity in Diaspora Contexts**

*Text 5.* Language as a site of power is further explored through the character of Aunt Fostalina, whose experience of displacement in the United States highlights the intersection of diaspora, gender, and voice:

*"In America, Fostalina's voice became small, like she was afraid to use it."* (Bulawayo, 2013), pp. 81–82)

Fostalina's "small" voice as an immigrant symbolizes both cultural insecurity and increasing loss of agency. Lacking the language and cultural capital within diasporic space to exercise authority, Fostalina's weakened voice diminishes her ability to act in her world. The FCDA illustrates how this encroaching lack of voice is constructed through overlapping hierarchies of power that determine who is allowed to speak, revealing how gendered inequity is reproduced both transnationally and intersectorally.

*Text 6:* A related example appears in a scene of domestic tension:

*"What in the world are you doing, Jameson? You want to kill us? Aunt Fostalina says. Her voice is a mix of sleep, shock, and panic. Uncle Kojo ignores her and gets out of the car, muttering. He stands there shaking his head, hands in his pockets, for a while. Then, he bends down to look closer at the right side"*. (Bulawayo, 2013), p. 77)

Aunt Fostalina's question establishes the foreground of a very explicit, affectively reactive form of agency (through the scream), and Uncle Kojo's response establishes a silently resistant, less emotionally reactive form of comfort in the privacy of the home. Importantly, the uncle's performance codes the acceptable and expected performance for men of certain classes in his culture: that of a nonreactive, stoic, emotionally absent father or uncle. In this interaction, Kojo's silence indexes his masculine control and agency, whereas Fostalina's vocalicity highlights the familial burden that women should not bear emotionally.

### **4. Discursive Reversal of Colonial and Patriarchal Authority**

*Text 7.* A striking example of discursive resistance appears in a confrontation with a white man:

*"Can't you read? You brought English to this country, and now you want your language explained. Have you no shame?"* (Bulawayo, 2013), p. 55)

In this dialogue, it is exhibited that language carries colonial history, as the speaker subverts the authority of the white man by sarcastically pointing out his

dependence on the very language imposed through colonization. English was introduced as a weapon of oppression, but now, the speaker wields it to emasculate the bearer of that weapon. Mockingly, he underlines the white man's reliance on that same weapon. Through sarcastic reference to the white man's dependency on English, the speaker recuperates the weapon of English, turning it into a tool of critique rather than obedience. In FCDA terms, this is an example of how play inverts relations of power through discourse by making the colonizer's linguistic weapon a tool of resistance.

Text 8. The reversal of authority intensifies in another confrontation:

*“And you, stupid white man, we do not care, you hear me? If you did not bring this land with you on a ship or plane from wherever you came from, then we do not care for bloody fucking, says the boss. He is waving his as in the white man’s face now”.* (Bulawayo, 2013), p. 61)

The conversation between the manager and the white man reveals a clear moment of opposition that reflects a criticism of the colonial past and the assertion of power by people under persecution. The aggressive tone of the boss and the act of brandishing an axe reflect a deep rejection of the colonial power structure. The claim that the colonial system can no longer have control or influence over the speaker and his people is evident in his statement, *“We do not care,”* and the rejection of the white man's presence, which represents a direct challenge to the legitimacy of colonial power. Blunt, coarse language is used to defy the colonial exercise of land and power, with a tone marked by defiance and anger. The dialogue analyses the historical relationship between colonizers and the colonized, with a focus on the long-lasting impact of colonialism, most importantly, the displacement and enslavement of the original inhabitants. The leader represents the regained space and authority through immediately and forcefully confronting the colonizer, thereby denying the physical and symbolic hegemony hitherto exercised by the white man over the country. In addition, the language chosen highlights the psychological and emotional impact of colonial domination on the oppressed community, thereby stressing the residual bitterness and yearning to be free. Reversing colonization is a physical, gut response to a history of exploitation, not just a verbal protest.

## DISCUSSION

In this research, the use of language to maintain or challenge the balance of power in *We Need New Names* is examined, employing the FCDA developed by Lazar (2005). The study reveals that language is not only a means of communication but also a site where gender beliefs and power relations are constructed and contested. This finding shows that the language used by female characters can either restrict them or serve as a tool for resisting those restrictions. The current study reveals that many women in *We Need New Names* are often silenced, as the male-dominated culture frequently denies them the right to speak.

When Darling's mother remains silent even as men mock her, she embodies both submission and resistance, aligning with the central ideas of the FCDA (Lazar, 2005). This finding supports Arshad *et al.*'s (2024) argument in Bapsi Sidhwa's novels, where silence expresses patriarchal pressure while simultaneously enabling resistance. Similarly, Kenney (2018) noted in her analysis of Shakespearean texts that silence can be a conscious and strategic act of defiance, reinforcing the view that silence is not merely the absence of voice but a space of hidden power and resistance.

Furthermore, by depicting the struggles of women and their migrations in vivid images, Bulawayo uses language to reveal social marginalization. Women with lifeless eyes symbolize things they are forbidden to express. This aligns with Mears's (1996) argument that women gain power through sharing their views. As a result, suffering becomes a channel for marginalized members to retell their stories. This visual representation of silence as suppressed discourse aligns with Kenney's (2018) findings, where resistance through nonverbal acts, such as Firdaus's silence among women at Point Zero, is understood as silent rebellion rather than compliance. This deepens the interpretation of silence in *We Need New Names*. Additionally, the study demonstrated that female characters frequently use language artfully to express confusion about English dominance in their colony. This use of gendered language to oppose colonial and patriarchal forces is described by Kenney (2018) as empowering language (Kenney, 2018). This echoes Rahim's (2024) findings on Iraqi women using literary narration to assert identity and resist cultural expectations (Rahim, 2024). In *need of new names*, the hybrid uses of language and narration challenge dominant power structures, demonstrating how language can become a means of empowerment and resistance in postcolonial settings.

These findings have direct relevance for the international student experience, as the linguistic and cultural adaptation challenges faced by Darling and other diasporic characters mirror those encountered by international students. Language barriers, identity struggles, and experiences of marginalization highlighted in the novel resonate with international students, who navigate unfamiliar academic and cultural environments. This suggests that literature such as *We Need New Names* can serve as an educational tool for developing empathy and understanding of students' transnational journeys, fostering inclusive practices in higher education.

The findings contribute to feminist discourse analysis by highlighting how language, gender, and power intersect during and after colonial periods. In contrast to feminist critiques that emphasize loud and overt resistance, this study explores the efficacy of subtle resistance through images, silence, and customary mannerisms. This shift from overt speech to silent rebellion mirrors the tension in *We Need New Names*, where characters employ alternating strategies of speech and silence to navigate the complexities of survival and subversion. Moreover, the study situates these literary findings in dialogue with real-life feminist struggles. It intersects with research by Ernanda (Ernanda, 2023) and Tian & Ge (2024), who analyzed women defying expectations in the environmental and digital spheres. Just as women in these contexts resist speech and activism, or online feminist movements challenge dominant narratives, Bulawayo's characters

speak or choose silence in spaces where their bodies and voices are politicized. This continuity highlights the applicability of the FCDA to both literary and real-world feminist discourses.

Sharma and Hussein (2021) emphasized intellect and language over physical strength in female heroes, supporting this study's attention to subtle forms of resistance. Female characters in *need of new names* rarely embody overt strength but instead embody quiet refusal, cultural code-switching, and intimate storytelling, each of which is a powerful act of reclamation within patriarchal and postcolonial frameworks. Overall, the novel's language reflects women's ongoing negotiation between subservience and defiance, shaping their narratives in ways that favor their empowerment. The research reveals language as a dynamic arena where gender roles and power are debated and defined. As Gilbert and Gubar (2020) identified metaphors of silencing and rebellion in classic literature and Javed *et al.* (2025) explored the role of language in growth and independence in contemporary texts, *we need new names* to enrich feminist literary discourse by illustrating how language in all its forms underpins women's endurance, adaptation, and resistance to oppression. This study, therefore, reaffirms and expands upon earlier scholarship, providing a refined understanding of discourse as a space for feminist resistance through the praxis of the FCDA in postcolonial literature.

Aside from literary contribution, this analysis also has implications for international education and international students. Darling's linguistic insecurity and cultural devastation can be seen as experiences and challenges shared by international students in their host countries as they navigate unfamiliar academic, social, and linguistic environments. The international education literature shows that international students from postcolonial and minoritized backgrounds experience marginalization in their host countries, including accent discrimination and assimilative linguistic practices (Abdalla, 2024; Astley, 2024). This study, by focusing on the concepts of silence and code-switching in international education, provides insight into how international students cope with power imbalances in their host countries. Literature can thus be seen as influencing international education, encouraging an empathetic and critical approach.

## CONCLUSION

This study employed the FCDA to analyze how gendered power dynamics in the novel *We Need New Names* by NoViolet Bulawayo are created, reinforced, and resisted through language. The findings highlighted the dual role of silence, both as a patriarchal instrument of discipline and a subversive tactic of resistance, allowing women to carve out spaces of dignity within oppressive confines. The narratives of linguistic marginalization in diasporic spaces underscore the intricate ways in which voice, agency, and identity are crafted at the intersection of gender, culture, and displacement.

This focus on the linguistic means by which these strategies are deployed also contributes to FCD scholarship by making visible the ways in which everyday language in the novel is the very site of power relations at play and how these are produced, negotiated, and redefined. While previous readings of the text have brought some of these themes and issues to the fore, the current work has shown how these negotiations are further, and more subtly, conducted through discursive means such as silence, narrative positioning, and hybrid speech in ways that impact the ways that women are able to manage relations with patriarchy and postcolonial authority.

In conclusion, this study contributes to feminist discourse analysis by exploring how language in *We Need New Names* functions as a space of struggle, resistance, and empowerment, as well as a means of survival. While there may be implications for research on how marginalized groups access power in other contexts or domains, including educational, social, and transnational ones, the current study focuses on what this means for literary work.

### Acknowledgment

*In the preparation of this manuscript, we utilized artificial intelligence (AI) tools for content creation with the following capacities:*

*None*

*Some sections, with minimal or no editing*

*Some sections, with extensive editing*

*Entire work, with minimal or no editing*

*Entire work, with extensive editing*

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