

Disrupting Masculine Hegemony: Feminist Stylistics and the Discursive Construction of Vulnerable Masculinity in *The King's Speech* (2010)

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ABSTRACT

This study draws upon Sara Mills's Feminist Stylistics framework and examines how the biographical film, The King's Speech (2010), reconfigures power and masculinity by disrupting hegemonic norms. The film centres on King George VI's struggle with a debilitating speech impediment against the backdrop of patriarchal monarchical traditions. Through close analysis of key linguistic and discursive features, including metaphor, pronoun usage, modality, lexical choices, and ideological framing, this research investigates how language destabilises hegemonic masculinity and constructs alternative narratives of male identity. The findings highlight how the interplay between vulnerability and power disrupts traditional norms of masculinity, positioning emotional openness and relational dynamics as integral strengths. The study subsequently critiques the patriarchal foundations of leadership and demonstrates how discourse can reimagine masculinity through feminist perspectives. By illustrating how films such as The King's Speech challenge binary gender constructs, vulnerability is not framed as a form of weakness but as a site of transformative power and resistance, advocating for inclusive and equitable representations of masculinity.

Keywords: critical discourse analysis; feminist stylistics; vulnerable masculinity; feminist media critique; film discourse

INTRODUCTION

Masculinity, long associated with strength, stoicism, and authority, remains a powerful sociocultural construct shaped by institutional, cultural, and historical narratives (Connell, 1995; M. Kimmel, 2005). Over the past two decades, however, critical shifts in feminist and gender studies have increasingly interrogated these hegemonic ideals, calling for broader representations that recognise vulnerability, emotional resilience, and relational dynamics as legitimate aspects of male identity (Anderson, 2009; M. S. Kimmel, 2018). In response to these critiques, emerging frameworks such as 'new masculinities' and 'inclusive masculinities' have gained prominence, reflecting the diversity of male subjectivities and the emotional labour embedded within them (Anderson, 2009; Anderson & McCormack, 2018; Bridges & Pascoe, 2018; Messerschmidt, 2019; N. Qayyum et al., 2024). Within this evolving discourse, popular culture and cinema in particular have emerged as a central platform for constructing, circulating, and contesting gendered identities. Film narratives not only reflect dominant cultural norms but also shape how audiences perceive masculinity, power, and identity (S. Robinson, 2019). As layered and ideologically charged cultural artefacts, films embed and naturalise gender ideologies through characterisation, visual grammar, and narrative structure (Cohan, 1997; Negra & Tasker, 2014;). Recent studies have underscored the critical role of cinema in destabilising hegemonic masculinity, foregrounding affect, care, and emotional complexity (Gürkan, 2022; Lawton-Westerland, 2025; S. Robinson, 2019; Schwan, 2020; Waldendorf, 2024; Waling, 2023). Moreover, as multidimensional storytelling forms, films act as textured discursive platforms through which audiences negotiate

cultural meanings of gender and power (Edam et al., 2024; Litosseliti, 2006; Sayogie et al., 2023). Against this backdrop, this study contributes to ongoing scholarly discussions by analysing *The King's Speech* (2010), a film that centres on King George VI's emotional and rhetorical struggles under the weight of monarchical responsibility. The film offers a compelling case for how cinemas, as a discursive medium, construct non-hegemonic masculinities by framing vulnerability as a vital aspect of leadership and identity through linguistic and narrative strategies. Widely acclaimed for its historical accuracy and emotional depth, *The King's Speech* remains a significant cultural artefact. Its critical success, including four Academy Awards, speaks to its broad cultural resonance. The narrative challenges dominant models of masculinity by positioning leadership through emotional openness and relational strength. King George VI's stammer, juxtaposed against the expectations of a patriarchal monarchy, highlights the internal tension between traditional masculine ideals and non-hegemonic emotional articulation (Edwards, 2020). Central to this transformation is the dynamics between King George VI and his speech therapist, Lionel Logue. Logue's empathetic and non-hierarchical methods enable the King to confront his vulnerabilities, reconfiguring masculinity around emotional authenticity and relational strength. This relationship not only challenges dominant gender expectations but also models alternative masculinities.

Despite rising interest in alternative masculinities, linguistic mechanisms such as metaphor, modality, and pronouns through which male vulnerability is constructed in elite contexts remain understudied. While feminist discourse analysis has traditionally focused on women's marginalisation (Manurung et al., 2023; Pratiwi et al., 2021), this study shifts the analytical lens toward masculinity. Scholars such as Lazar (2005) and Sunderland (2004) have long argued that dominant gender discourse prioritises power and stoicism while marginalising emotional vulnerability. This concern is echoed in works that examine hegemonic masculinity in film and media, including those by Brown (2016), Pua and Hiramoto (2020), and Gürkan (2022). Yet, little scholarly attention has been given to *The King's Speech* in terms of its linguistic construction of non-hegemonic masculinity. Furthermore, existing feminist media scholarship has focused on female representation (A. Qayyum et al., 2019; Darweesh & Ghayadh, 2016; Hussain & Jabeen, 2019; Kanwal, 2022; Sheikh et al., 2019), and while film-based feminist stylistics has interrogated femininity (Manurung et al., 2023; Wulan, 2023), masculinity as an approach has generally been sanitised. As such, this investigation draws upon Sara Mills's (1995) *Feminist Stylistics* to scrutinise male identities. Specifically, understanding how gendered power operates in media involves examining who is represented, but also how these representations are linguistically constructed. Therefore, linguistic analysis, including metaphorical framing, pronoun shifts, modality, and lexical choice, provides a tool for uncovering the subtle, often overlooked ways masculinity is encoded in discourse (Lazar, 2005; Mills, 1995), shaping how audiences interpret authority, strength, and emotionality (Reeser, 2010; Sunderland, 2004). Lawton-Westerland (2025), for instance, illustrates how male protagonists' emotional depth in cinematic narratives functions to destabilise binary constructions of gendered power.

By integrating Feminist Stylistics with feminist-informed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this study adopts a multi-layered analytical lens. While Feminist Stylistics focuses on micro-level textual features and ideology, CDA brings in broader socio-political and institutional contexts. Together, they enable a holistic reading of film as gendered discourse, revealing the mechanisms that sustain hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Litosseliti, 2006). Specifically, this study interrogates how *The King's Speech* constructs masculinity through emotional depth, relationality, and self-doubt, reframing vulnerability as a strength rather than a

deficit. In doing so, it contributes to broader feminist critiques of gender binaries and power. To guide this investigation, the study is structured around the following research questions:

1. How do lexical choices in *The King's Speech* reinforce or challenge traditional and emerging constructions of masculinity?
2. How do metaphors in *The King's Speech* construct emotional and psychological representations of masculinity?
3. In what ways do pronoun usages in the film reflect power dynamics and relational shifts in male identity?
4. How do expressions of modality and hedging in the film reveal uncertainty and collaboration, and what implications do these have for masculinity?

LITERATURE REVIEW

REFRAMING MASCULINITY: INTEGRATING FEMINIST STYLISTICS AND FEMINIST-INFORMED CDA IN MEDIA DISCOURSE

Feminist literary criticism has traditionally exposed the marginalisation of women in texts, often critiquing how male-authored works reinforce patriarchal structures (Manurung et al., 2023; Pratiwi et al., 2021). Expanding this scope, Sara Mills's *Feminist Stylistics* (1995) examines how linguistic choices encode gender ideologies, analysing lexical, syntactical, and discourse-level features. While largely applied to female representations, this study extends Mills's framework to masculinity, an underexplored area in stylistic analysis. By shifting the focus to male identities, it challenges hegemonic masculinity, often defined by dominance, control, and emotional detachment, while highlighting relational and sensitive masculinities as viable alternatives. Mills's approach also emphasises the socio-cultural and ideological contexts of texts, ensuring masculinity is studied as a dynamic, socially constructed phenomenon. This makes it particularly useful for analysing *The King's Speech*, where masculinity is both reinforced and contested (Lazar, 2005). Both Mills and Lazar argue that feminist CDA interrogates power hierarchies, revealing how gendered expectations influence media representation. Applying this lens to masculinity critically examines both the reinforcement and subversion of patriarchal ideals, offering a nuanced perspective on gendered power structures. T. Robinson (2019) critiques how men's depictions in media are restricted to binary tropes of strength and invulnerability. Feminist Stylistics and Feminist-Informed CDA work together to deconstruct these tropes, uncovering alternative narratives that validate male emotional openness and relational dynamics. This study advances feminist stylistic analysis by examining how media both challenge and perpetuate patriarchal norms through linguistic choices, including metaphors, pronouns, modality, and lexical selection. By analysing *The King's Speech* through this lens, the study demonstrates how discourse can destabilise rigid gender constructs and promote equitable representations of masculinity. By shifting the focus from femininity to masculinity, it underscores language's transformative potential in dismantling toxic hierarchies and fostering alternative masculinities, ultimately broadening feminist critique toward a more inclusive understanding of gender in media narratives.

REIMAGINING MASCULINITY THROUGH MEDIA AND LANGUAGE:
VULNERABILITY, AUTHORITY, AND THE DISCURSIVE TURN

Much of the scholarship in gender studies frames masculinity as a socially constructed identity, historically rooted in ideals of dominance, emotional restraint, and control—hallmarks of what Connell (1995) terms *hegemonic masculinity*. This dominant model privileges patriarchal authority while marginalising vulnerability, emotional expressiveness, and care. Media, and film in particular, has long served as a key site for circulating and naturalising these ideals, portraying men as emotionally detached and autonomous, thereby rendering alternative masculinities largely invisible (Clowes, 2013; Negra & Tasker, 2014). However, as gender discourse has evolved, so too have cinematic representations. Increasingly, recent scholarship emphasises the plurality and fluidity of masculine identities, highlighting the rise of *new masculinities*: discursive forms that challenge, subvert, or reconfigure dominant gender scripts (Lawton-Westerland, 2025; S. Robinson, 2019; Schwan, 2020). For instance, Bridges and Pascoe's (2014, 2018) concept of *hybrid masculinities* explains how men may adopt traits associated with femininity or marginalised masculinities in ways that appear progressive, yet often sustain patriarchal advantage. Complementing this, Messerschmidt (2019) reconceptualises masculinity as a “configuration of practice,” shaped by institutional, cultural, and narrative forces, while Waling (2019) foregrounds its performative and discursive nature. Within this framework, media texts are not merely reflective but play an active role in constructing and reconstituting masculinities. Films such as *Moonlight* (2016), *Call Me by Your Name* (2017), *The Last Black Man in San Francisco* (2019), and *Rye Lane* (2023) foreground male vulnerability, intimacy, and emotional complexity, directly challenging traditional associations between masculinity and emotional suppression (S. Robinson, 2019; RogerEbert.com, 2023). Likewise, television series like *This Is Us* (2016-2022) and *Fleabag* (2016-2019) depict emotionally nuanced male characters whose expressions of tenderness, insecurity, and care expand the affective repertoire of male identity. Such portrayals challenge binary constructions of strength versus weakness and reframe emotional openness as a site of connection and resistance.

Importantly, the transformative potential of media is not limited to characterisation or plot. It is also enacted through linguistic and rhetorical strategies. Language serves as a key medium through which masculinity is performed, negotiated, and contested. Metaphors, for example, often encode gender ideologies. Phallic and testicular metaphors such as “having a firm grip” or “the balls to lead” can be seen to reinforce control and rigidity (Baider & Gesuato, 2003; Ogotu, 2019). In contrast, generative metaphors like “planting the seeds of change” suggest alternative masculine values rooted in growth, empathy, and care (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Linstead & Maréchal, 2015). These linguistic dynamics are vividly illustrated in *The King's Speech*. King George VI's climactic line, “I have a voice!”, reclaims masculine authority not through dominance but through emotional struggle and vulnerability. Similarly, Lionel Logue's informal assertion, “My castle, my rules,” challenges hierarchical norms and models a masculinity grounded in mutual respect. Pronoun use further shapes masculine authority and ideological positioning. The generic “he” perpetuates androcentric norms (Alexis, 2022; Sunderland, 2004), whereas inclusive pronouns like “we” and “they” promote collectivity and challenge individualistic masculine ideals (Jones, 2016; Lenahan, 2021). Lexical choices also matter: words associated with aggression and control tend to reinforce hegemonic masculinity (Elyamany, 2018; Radzi et al., 2021), while gender-neutral and inclusive language aligns with more equitable discourses (Lazar, 2005). Additionally, modality and hedging reveal further dimensions of masculine identity. Modal verbs like “might” and “could” introduce openness and uncertainty, traits aligned with alternative masculinities (Fairclough, 1995; Li & Li,

2020). In contrast, the absence of hedging can signal confidence and assertiveness, reinforcing more traditional masculine expectations (Azizah, 2021). Collectively, these subtle linguistic choices reveal how masculinity is continuously shaped and redefined through discourse. In sum, masculinity in media is not fixed or monolithic. It is dynamically constituted through the interplay of evolving theoretical frameworks, cultural narratives, and linguistic practices. Representations of emotional expressiveness, vulnerability, and empathy do not merely oppose hegemonic masculinity but reflect a wider discursive shift toward transformation. As Waling (2019) observes, media texts are not passive mirrors of reality but active participants in shaping gendered subjectivities. *The King's Speech* exemplifies this shift by placing emotional complexity and interpersonal connection at the heart of masculine identity. Through both thematic content and linguistic form, the film functions as a cultural site where dominant masculine ideals are not only contested but reimaged. These shifts resonate with feminist critiques of patriarchy and advance broader efforts to dismantle rigid gender binaries and promote more inclusive understandings of identity.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a feminist-informed analytical approach by integrating Sara Mills' Feminist Stylistics with Fairclough (1995) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model to examine how *The King's Speech* constructs and critiques hegemonic masculinity. The focus is to uncover how language reflects, reinforces, or resists patriarchal ideologies, particularly through representations of vulnerability and shifting male identity. Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA framework, emphasising textual analysis, discourse practice, and socio-cultural context was selected for its analytical flexibility and focus on interdiscursivity and ideological critique. Although not explicitly feminist in origin, Fairclough's model is applied here through a feminist lens to interrogate gendered discourse. Compared to Van Dijk's cognitively oriented model and Wodak's historically grounded approach, Fairclough's model offers a more textually focused structure suited to analysing media representations in fictional narratives. Feminist Stylistics, developed by Mills (1995), complements this macro-level critique with micro-level analysis of how lexical, syntactic, and discourse-level choices construct gendered meaning. Applied synergistically, Feminist Stylistics and CDA enable a layered reading: uncovering language use within specific scenes while situating these uses within broader ideologies of masculinity and power. The analysis centres on four interrelated components: lexical choices (to examine how specific words reinforce or challenge masculine norms), metaphors (to frame emotion and transformation), pronouns (to reveal power and identity positioning), and modality and hedging (to explore expressions of authority, uncertainty, and collaboration). Intercoder reliability was established through a double-coding process on a subset of scenes, producing a Cohen's Kappa of 0.81 (Landis & Koch, 1977), indicating substantial agreement. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion to ensure consistency in interpretation.

TEXTUAL DECONSTRUCTION APPROACH: LEXICAL, SYNTACTICAL, AND DISCOURSE PERSPECTIVES

The analysis employs a three-tiered analytical approach: lexical, syntactical, and discourse grounded in Sara Mills' Feminist Stylistics. At the lexical level, the analysis investigates gendered language, verbs, adjectives, and metaphors to examine how power and agency are linguistically constructed. Metaphorical terms such as "monster" or "burden" exemplify how emotional struggle is framed not as weakness but as a humanising and relatable aspect of masculinity. At the syntactical level, attention is given to sentence structure, particularly subject-verb relationships and sentence complexity, to assess how agency and relational dynamics are embedded in the text. Pronoun shifts such as the movement from "I" to "we" mark transformations in identity and redistribute authority, reflecting a move toward collective and transformative masculinity. At the discourse level, the study explores broader narrative structures, character interactions, and thematic patterns. Here, linguistic features such as point of view, modality, and hedging (e.g., "might," "perhaps") are examined for how they negotiate power and vulnerability. For instance, Lionel Logue's phrase "Perhaps we could try..." avoids authoritative speech and instead fosters collaboration, demonstrating a discursive model of collaborative masculinity during the early therapy sessions. In addition to these tiered analyses, the study also interrogates broader linguistic patterns that reinforce or resist patriarchal gender norms. Specifically, it focuses on four core components; lexical choices, metaphors, pronouns, and modality and hedging, which collectively reveal how both hegemonic and emerging masculinities are constructed discursively within the film. These components are further contextualised through close readings of pivotal scenes, such as the contrast between Bertie's public stammering and his more fluent private speech. Such contrasts underscore the relationship between emotional safety and linguistic confidence, highlighting how language performs masculinity in varied contexts. To interpret the findings, the study uses Feminist Stylistics as its primary micro-analytic tool, while drawing on feminist-informed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) for macro-level ideological interpretation. For example, metaphorical patterns identified through stylistic analysis are interpreted via CDA to examine their role in either sustaining or resisting patriarchal authority. In summary, this integrated approach demonstrates how masculinity is not only performed but also reconfigured through linguistic strategies in media texts. By applying feminist stylistics to male-centred narratives, the study expands the scope of feminist critique, offering a deeper understanding of how language both reflects and redefines gendered power and inclusive masculinity in contemporary culture.

DATA COLLECTION, SELECTION CRITERIA, AND ANALYTICAL PROCESS

This study analyses 48 key scenes, comprising approximately 11,177 words of transcribed dialogue from *The King's Speech*. These scenes were selected for their portrayal of vulnerability, power dynamics, and non-traditional masculinity. Selection criteria prioritised moments of narrative significance, emotional complexity, and linguistic richness, particularly in lexical choices, metaphors, pronouns, modality, and hedging. The chosen scenes span private therapy sessions, confrontations with family and advisors, and major public addresses, illustrating masculinity in crisis, the negotiation of authority, and the transformation of vulnerability into strength. The analysis followed Sara Mills' Feminist Stylistics within a qualitative, three-phase process. The first phase, data reduction, involved coding transcriptions and excluding non-relevant material. The second phase entailed thematic and linguistic categorisation, beginning with open

coding to identify emergent discursive patterns, followed by axial coding to consolidate these into broader themes such as vulnerability as resistance, emotion in leadership, and hierarchies and resistance. Linguistic categories were organised around metaphor (e.g., “burden”, “constraint”), pronoun shifts (e.g., “I”, “you”, “we”), modality (e.g., “must”, “might”), and emotional markers (e.g., “I suppose”, “perhaps”). NVivo software was used to assist with systematic tagging and data organisation. In the third phase, textual analysis traced patterns such as metaphors of burden and transformation across scenes. These were then contextualised within the film's historical and sociocultural setting to highlight masculinity's constructed nature. This was followed by a critical interpretive phase that integrated Feminist Stylistics with feminist-informed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Together, these frameworks enabled both a micro-level linguistic analysis and a macro-level ideological critique, revealing how language can resist or reinforce hegemonic masculinity. Vulnerability was reframed as a communicative strength, and alternative masculinity models were foregrounded, which centred on emotional openness, interdependence, and relational identity. This layered analytical approach deepens the understanding of gendered discourse in media, illustrating how masculinity is not only performed but continuously redefined through language.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

CHALLENGING PATRIARCHAL CONSTRUCTS: LEXICAL CHOICES IN *THE KING'S SPEECH*

The analysis of lexical choices in *The King's Speech* offers significant insights into how language both reinforces traditional masculinity and actively constructs and promotes emerging models of masculinity, challenging conventional norms and redefining gender roles. The following tables highlight lexical choices and lexical patterns from the film that foreground Bertie as the central agent, showcasing how these choices reflect and challenge traditional masculine ideals:

TABLE 1. Lexical choices constructing vulnerable masculinity and challenging hegemonic masculine ideals

#	Lexical Choice	Scene Description	Analysis
1	"I'm not a king! I'm just a man... I'm just a stammerer!"	Bertie breaks down during a therapy session with Logue.	The repetition of “ <i>just</i> ” highlights Bertie’s internal struggle and feelings of inadequacy, diminishing his royal identity and emphasising his vulnerability. Challenges traditional masculinity.
2	"It's my stammer, and no one can fix it."	Bertie expresses frustration in an early therapy session.	The possessive pronoun “ <i>my</i> ” reflects ownership of his impediment, externalising his struggle and emphasising its role in defining his identity.
3	"Help me, Lionel."	Bertie seeks support during therapy.	The imperative “ <i>help</i> ” paired with “ <i>me</i> ” signifies Bertie’s acknowledgment of his need for assistance, defying masculine ideals of self-reliance and independence.
4	"The weight of their eyes is crushing."	Bertie expresses the overwhelming pressure of public scrutiny.	The metaphorical use of “ <i>weight</i> ” and “ <i>crushing</i> ” externalises the emotional burden, portraying Bertie as a vulnerable figure struggling to meet societal expectations.
5	"Like a bird trapped in a cage."	Bertie discusses his feelings of entrapment with Elizabeth.	The metaphor captures Bertie’s desire for freedom from societal constraints and royal obligations, aligning with themes of vulnerability and suppressed individuality.
6	"I see myself, but the image is fractured."	Bertie reflects on his self-doubt while observing his reflection.	The term “ <i>fractured</i> ” conveys a sense of broken identity and emotional fragility, emphasizing Bertie’s internal conflict and struggle to reconcile personal vulnerabilities with public expectations.

7	"Each word feels like a battle won."	Bertie reflects on his progress after a public speaking engagement.	The metaphor " <i>battle won</i> " frames speech as an arduous effort, positioning perseverance and emotional resilience as key aspects of Bertie's evolving masculinity.
8	"The chains of tradition bind me."	Bertie discusses the weight of royal expectations with Logue.	The word " <i>chains</i> " symbolises societal norms as restrictive and oppressive, portraying Bertie's masculinity as constrained and in conflict with traditional roles.
9	"It's not just a speech, Lionel. It's my voice."	Bertie explains the stakes of his public address.	The distinction between " <i>speech</i> " and " <i>voice</i> " underscores the personal significance of his struggle, highlighting the deep connection between vulnerability and self-expression.
10	"I feel like I'm drowning in silence."	Bertie opens up about his isolation caused by his speech impediment.	The metaphorical choice of " <i>drowning</i> " conveys the suffocating effect of his silence, reframing vulnerability as a shared human experience and contrasting with ideals of solitary masculine strength.
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The analysis is organised around themes that reveal how language functions to construct emotional and psychological dimensions of masculinity. These themes include rejection of hierarchical authority, emotional vulnerability as leadership, navigating societal expectations, and resilience through personal growth. By focusing on these dimensions, the analysis of lexical choices has demonstrated how strategic word choice in the film offers a powerful critique of patriarchal constructs and presents alternative frameworks for understanding masculinity. Each theme is supported by selected examples from the film, illustrating the linguistic strategies employed to depict Bertie's vulnerabilities and strengths. These examples, drawn from pivotal moments in the narrative, reveal how lexical choices capture the complexities of Bertie's character and his transformation throughout the film. To further ground this analysis, a lexical mapping of

the script was conducted to identify dominant collocations, semantic fields, and lexical patterns that construct masculinity throughout the film, which is outlined in the following table:

TABLE 2. Lexical Patterns, Semantic Fields, and the Discursive Construction of Masculinity in The King's Speech

Category	Recurrent Lexical Patterns / Collocations	Semantic Field	Function in Masculinity Discourse
Emotional Vulnerability	"I'm just a man... I'm just a stammerer", "Help me, Lionel"	Self-perception, emotional disclosure	Challenges hegemonic masculinity by positioning vulnerability as human and authentic
Burden and Weight Metaphors	"Heavy stone upon my chest", "Weight of their eyes"	Emotional pressure, responsibility	Externalises internal struggle; redefines masculinity through openness about emotional labour
Struggle and Conflict	"Each word feels like a battle won", "Cracking ice"	Conflict, resilience	Reframes courage as emotional perseverance rather than physical toughness
Imprisonment / Isolation	"Bird trapped in a cage", "Chains of tradition", "Drowning in silence"	Confinement, restriction	Portrays traditional masculinity as limiting; supports a transition toward emotional expression and freedom
Solidarity and Collaboration	"We'll get through this", "Let's try this together", "Perhaps we could..."	Support, empathy	Reinforces relational masculinity; critiques individualistic male authority
Epistemic Modality	"Might", "Could", "I believe"	Uncertainty, introspection	Marks a shift from absolute to flexible thinking; signifies emotional and psychological growth
Deontic Modality	"I must", "One has to", "I am expected to"	Duty, obligation	Reflects institutional pressures; gradually replaced by agentive, self-directed expressions
First-Person Pronoun Shifts	From "I can't" to "I believe I can"	Agency, identity	Indicates transformation from helplessness to empowered, self-aware masculinity
Lexical Field of Fear	"Monster", "Cracked vessel", "Fractured image"	Anxiety, inner turmoil	Makes emotional fragility visible; confronts cultural silence around male psychological vulnerability
Lexical Field of Connection	"Together", "Support", "Voice", "Our role"	Empathy, identity, shared leadership	Constructs masculinity around shared responsibility, relational authenticity, and emotional connection

These lexical features not only reflect character development but also serve as discursive mechanisms through which masculinity is challenged, redefined, and performed. Central to this exploration is the interplay between King George VI (Bertie) and Lionel Logue, whose contrasting linguistic styles highlight the tensions between hierarchical authority and mutual connection. Bertie's formal and restrained vocabulary, characterised by words such as "paramount" and "endeavour," encapsulates the weight of monarchical expectations and the rigidity of traditional masculine ideals tied to authority and emotional detachment. In contrast, Logue's casual and egalitarian language, with expressions like "mate" and "stuff up," signifies an alternative form of masculinity rooted in emotional openness and partnership. This linguistic juxtaposition not only underscores the differing approaches to masculinity but also signals Bertie's gradual transformation. As the narrative progresses, Bertie's language shifts toward more affective, inclusive, and less formal registers, illustrated by increased use of metaphor, emotionally resonant vocabulary, and collaborative phrases, which mirror his psychological journey toward relational strength and self-acceptance. The lexical tables (see TABLE 1 and TABLE 2) outline lexical choices and key collocational groupings such as metaphors of burden ("weight," "crushing"), emotional suppression ("drowning," "caged"), resilience ("battle," "struggle"), and solidarity ("we," "together") that frame masculinity in affective and relational terms. These patterns reflect a

systematic movement away from the isolated, stoic figure of traditional manhood toward a reimagined model based on shared vulnerability and communicative strength.

The analysis of lexical choices in *The King's Speech* highlights key themes that construct a multifaceted depiction of vulnerable masculinity. These themes reveal how the film challenges traditional masculine ideals by presenting an alternative framework that values emotional openness, supportive interaction, and personal growth. Emotional vulnerability emerges as a central strength in leadership. Lines like "I'm not a king! I'm just a man... I'm just a stammerer!" foreground Bertie's self-doubt, challenging expectations of stoic, invulnerable masculinity. Expressions such as "Each word feels like a battle won" redefine courage as confronting emotional struggles, framing perseverance and authenticity as essential aspects of masculinity. Similarly, the rejection of hierarchical authority is evident in Logue's declaration, "In here, it's better if we're equals," which subverts patriarchal norms by promoting social and collaborative dynamics. Bertie's admission of being "bound by the chains of tradition" underscores his role in questioning and challenging societal constraints on masculinity. The film employs vivid language to externalise emotional suppression and growth, such as "It's like a dam breaking inside me" and "I feel like I'm drowning in silence," to portray the overwhelming burden of repressed emotions and the importance of confronting them. Figurative expressions like "walking on cracking ice" and "a broken mirror" highlight Bertie's journey through instability and self-perception, emphasising masculinity as a fluid and transformative process. Finally, themes of societal pressure are depicted through phrases like "The weight of their eyes is crushing" and "Like a bird trapped in a cage," reflecting internal struggles and the tension between public expectations and personal authenticity. In summary, the lexical collocations and semantic fields presented in the table reinforce the manuscript's central claim that *The King's Speech* deconstructs traditional masculinity by foregrounding emotional honesty, relational support, and transformative growth. These linguistic strategies offer a powerful commentary on the evolving nature of male identity, promoting a more inclusive, empathetic model of masculinity that challenges patriarchal authority through language.

METAPHORS: FRAMING SENSITIVITY AND VULNERABILITY AS STRENGTH

Metaphorical language in *The King's Speech* plays a pivotal role in framing masculinity through emotional and psychological lenses, challenging ideals of stoicism and invulnerability. These metaphors express King George VI's internal struggles, revealing tensions between societal expectations, emotional vulnerability, and fractured masculinity. Drawing on Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) conceptual metaphor theory, which maps abstract experiences onto tangible imagery, the script uses metaphor to make complex emotions accessible, offering a layered critique of traditional masculinity. The analysis identified 55 metaphors linked to themes of vulnerable masculinity, with 30 key examples selected for their relevance to the film's construction of emotional and psychological male identity. These metaphors foreground Bertie's agency and highlight alternative masculinities that resist hegemonic norms. The analysis focuses on how the film reframes vulnerability as central to identity and leadership. Several recurring themes emerge. First, burden and responsibility appear in metaphors like "the weight of the crown" and "carrying a stone", which externalise leadership pressure and frame vulnerability as a tangible struggle against patriarchal expectations. Second, constraint and entrapment, as seen in "trapped in a cage" and "chains of tradition", emphasise Bertie's limited agency and the rigid norms of monarchy. Third, fragility and breakage, represented in "a cracked vessel", "the ice that cracks", and "a broken mirror", evoke his emotional instability and fractured self-image. Finally, isolation

and inadequacy are symbolised through “drowning in silence”, “a bird in a cage”, and “lost in a maze”, capturing his feelings of helplessness and alienation under societal pressures. These metaphorical frames collectively expose the emotional cost of hegemonic masculinity while advancing an alternative discourse of strength rooted in vulnerability, authenticity, and relational identity.

Importantly, many of these metaphors also operate intertextually, drawing on broader cultural, biblical, historical, and cinematic traditions. For instance, “the crown” is not only a literal burden but a symbolic reference deeply embedded in the cultural and religious imagery of divine monarchy. This echoes biblical notions of kingship as both anointed and sacrificial (e.g., the burden of the cross). Similarly, metaphors like “chains of tradition” resonate with discourses of historical continuity and inherited duty, recalling constitutional phrases like “the chain of command” or “unchangeable tradition” seen in royal and military discourses. “the flood of emotion” invokes biblical and cinematic intertexts alike, calling to mind both the emotional cleansing of Noah’s flood and the grand catharsis seen in films such as *Dead Poets Society*, where vulnerability and transformation break repressive barriers. By situating these metaphors within wider intertextual frameworks, the film’s discourse can be seen not only as a personal narrative but as a dialogic response to established narratives of masculinity. This aligns with Fairclough’s (1995) view of discourse as inherently shaped by prior texts, genres, and ideologies. The metaphors in *The King’s Speech* are thus part of a larger discursive tapestry that critiques hegemonic masculinity while offering redemptive and humanised alternatives. Metaphors of courage and transformation, such as “speech as a battlefield” and “the flood of emotion,” reframe vulnerability as strength. By challenging traditional masculine ideals of stoicism and control, they position emotional authenticity and resilience as vital aspects of leadership, offering an alternative model of masculinity rooted in growth and emotional depth.

TABLE 3. Metaphors illustrating the emotional and psychological construction of masculinity through language

#	Metaphor	Example lines in script	Analysis
1	The microphone as a monster	"The microphone looms ahead like an intimidating creature."	Externalises Bertie’s fear, showing vulnerability in public speaking.
2	A death march	"Bertie approaches...like a death march."	Emphasises the overwhelming dread tied to his speech obligations.
3	Trapped in a cage	"It’s like being trapped in a cage with no escape."	Reflects the suffocating constraints of royal expectations.
4	The weight of the crown	"The crown is too heavy for me."	Represents the emotional burden of leadership tied to masculine ideals.
5	Speech as a battlefield	"Every word is like stepping into a battlefield."	Frames vulnerability as courageous,

			redefining masculinity.
6	A cracked vessel	"I feel like a cracked vessel, unable to hold anything together."	Highlights emotional fragility and self-perception of inadequacy.
7	Drowning in silence	"It's like drowning, but no one can see the water."	Portrays isolation and the emotional toll of unexpressed vulnerability.
8	Carrying a stone	"Every word feels like I'm carrying a stone uphill."	Externalises the emotional weight of societal expectations.
9	Shadowed by the crown	"The crown looms over me, casting its shadow everywhere I go."	Symbolizes the oppressive expectations of tradition and leadership.
10	Lost in a maze	"Words feel like a maze, twisting and turning, with no way out."	Depicts frustration and confusion in self-expression.
11	The heavy mantle	"The mantle of leadership feels heavy on my shoulders."	Highlights the emotional and physical burden of societal expectations.
12	The flood of emotion	"Letting go feels like opening a floodgate, releasing everything at once."	Frames vulnerability as overwhelming yet transformative.
13	The chains of tradition	"The weight of tradition feels like chains dragging me down."	Captures the restrictive nature of societal and familial norms.
14	A bird in a cage	"I'm like a bird in a cage, longing to fly."	Symbolises Bertie's desire for freedom against his responsibilities.
15	A broken mirror	"I see a fractured image staring back at me."	Reflects a fragmented self-identity and internal conflict.
16	A voice choked by fear	"My voice feels choked, as if fear grips my throat."	Externalises fear, linking physical struggles to emotional vulnerability.
17	Walking on a tightrope	"Every speech is like walking on a tightrope, one misstep, and I fall."	Depicts the precariousness

			of public expectations versus personal fears.
18	The ice that cracks	"I'm like ice cracking under pressure, breaking apart."	Highlights fragility under the weight of societal expectations.
20	The cliff of uncertainty	"Speaking feels like standing at the edge of a cliff, unsure if I'll fall."	Represents the stakes of public vulnerability, reframing it as courage.
21	The shattered shield	"My confidence feels like a shattered shield, offering no protection."	Illustrates the collapse of traditional masculine defences.
22	The weight of words	"Words sit on my chest like a weight I cannot lift."	Highlights the immense pressure of expressing himself, externalising the emotional toll of societal expectations.
23	A fragile shell	"I'm like a shell, hard on the outside but hollow within."	Captures the disconnect between external composure and internal struggle.
24	Frozen in place	"I feel frozen, unable to move or speak."	Portrays the emotional and physical paralysis of vulnerability under societal pressures.
25	A crumbling foundation	"I feel like a building with a crumbling foundation, barely holding together."	Highlights the internal instability and emotional fragility Bertie feels as a leader.
26	A bird without wings	"I feel like a bird without wings, unable to fly."	Highlights feelings of helplessness and limitations, framing vulnerability as central to his identity.
27	A house without walls	"I'm like a house without walls, everything exposed."	Reflects feelings of exposure and insecurity, emphasizing

			sensitivity and vulnerability.
28	The stammer as a beast	"It feels like a beast inside me, clawing to get out but keeping me silent."	Personifies his stammer as an adversary, externalising his struggle and framing vulnerability as a fight against societal norms.
29	The shadow of perfection	"I live in the shadow of perfection, always failing to measure up."	Reflects the pressure of unattainable standards and the internal conflict of living in others' expectations.
30	A candle flickering in the wind	"My voice feels like a candle flickering in the wind, struggling to stay lit."	Reflects the fragility and resilience of his efforts to persist despite vulnerability.

The metaphors in *The King's Speech* draw on various elements;- animals, nature, physical and abstract representations, and artifacts to construct a layered depiction of masculinity. Animal metaphors like "a bird in a cage" and "like a lion forced to roar without sound" evoke fragility and entrapment, highlighting Bertie's struggle between societal expectations and personal limitations. Nature metaphors, including "the ice that cracks," "the flood of emotion," and "drowning in silence," symbolise emotional fragility and suppressed feelings. Ice represents instability, while floods and drowning reflect the overwhelming effects of vulnerability and fear, reinforcing Bertie's turmoil and transformation. Physical and abstract representations, such as "carrying a stone," "the chains of tradition," and "the heavy mantle of leadership," externalise responsibility and restrictive traditions, making Bertie's struggles viscerally felt. Objects like "the shattered shield" and "a broken mirror" reflect self-identity and protection. These shattered defences and a fragmented self-perception mirror his conflict between public duty and personal vulnerability. These universally resonant metaphors create emotional connections, evoking empathy for Bertie's journey. Their familiarity is shaped not only by their immediate context but by their roots in shared cultural, religious, and literary traditions, amplifying the ideological critique they offer. By framing vulnerability as a shared human experience, the script critiques hegemonic masculinity and advocates for a more inclusive male identity. This strategic use of metaphor enriches the film's narrative, reinforcing its themes of masculinity, vulnerability, and transformation. Ultimately, *The King's Speech* critiques traditional masculinity, presenting Bertie's vulnerable yet courageous journey as a reimagined model of male identity.

PRONOUNS: NEGOTIATING POWER AND RELATIONAL DYNAMICS

The analysis of pronoun usage in *The King's Speech* reveals how language intricately constructs a portrayal of fragile and evolving masculinity, centring on King George VI's journey of self-discovery and leadership. The following table outlines the critical and ideological functions of pronoun choices in constructing a counter-hegemonic performance of masculinity.

TABLE 4. Pronoun usage depicting fragile and vulnerable masculinity through Bertie's agency

#	Theme	Pronoun Example	Line	Scene Description	Analysis
1.	Emotional Vulnerability	"I"	"I'm not a king! I'm just a man... I'm just a stammerer!"	Bertie breaks down during therapy with Logue.	Highlights Bertie's internal conflict and fragile self-perception, challenging traditional masculine ideals.
2.	Collaborative Leadership	"We"	"Perhaps we could try it together."	Logue encourages Bertie during a rehearsal.	Emphasises shared leadership, subverting hierarchical masculinity in favour of relational collaboration.
3.	Family Support	"We"	"We'll get through this, Bertie."	Elizabeth reassures Bertie after a failure.	Demonstrates solidarity and mutual dependence, challenging norms of male independence.
4.	Empowerment	"You"	"You're the bravest man I know."	Logue praises Bertie after a therapy breakthrough.	Reframes Bertie's vulnerability as strength, contrasting with dismissive uses of "you" by others.
5.	Burden of Responsibility	"Your"	"Your duty is to lead."	King George V imposes expectations on Bertie.	Reflects the weight of patriarchal obligations, emphasizing tension between personal and societal roles.
6.	Ownership of Identity	"My"	"It's my stammer, and no one can fix it."	Bertie reacts defensively in early therapy.	Demonstrates initial resignation to his condition, later shifting toward agency and personal growth.
7.	Collective Identity	"Our"	"Our role is to unite, not divide."	Bertie's speech to the nation as King.	Invokes unity and inclusive leadership, rejecting isolated dominance associated with traditional masculinity.
8.	Dismissive Masculinity	"He"	"He'll never make anything of himself."	King George V criticizes Bertie.	Dehumanises Bertie, contrasting with his later use of "I" to reclaim his identity.

9.	Expression of Need	"Me"	"Help me, Lionel."	Bertie seeks support in therapy.	Portrays dependency as a form of strength, challenging norms of masculine stoicism.
10.	Objectification of Struggle	"It"	"It's not just a speech, Lionel. It's my voice."	Bertie explains stakes of his challenge to Logue.	Externalises his struggle, transitioning to personal ownership, mirroring his journey toward self-empowerment.

Based on TABLE 4, first-person singular pronouns such as "I" and "my" emphasise Bertie's internal struggles and emerging sense of self. His breakdown, as seen for example in the phrase "I'm not a king! I'm just a man... I'm just a stammerer!" indexes personal vulnerability and disrupts the dominant ideal of stoic, invulnerable masculinity. The use of "my" in "It's my stammer, and no one can fix it" marks a critical shift from helplessness to personal ownership and agency, underscoring the transformative arc in his self-perception. Shifts from singular to plural pronouns ("I" to "we," "my" to "our") are pragmatically significant. They indicate not only a change in Bertie's personal identity but also a relational redefinition of leadership and masculinity. For instance, Lionel Logue's "Perhaps we could try it together" and Elizabeth's "We'll get through this, Bertie" employ inclusive pronouns to position masculinity within a framework of solidarity and emotional support rather than authority and detachment. Bertie's eventual use of "our" in "Our role is to unite, not divide" reframes leadership as collective rather than hierarchical, marking a linguistic performance of shared responsibility and progressive masculinity. Second-person pronouns such as "you" further index power dynamics and relational positioning. Logue's affirming "You're the bravest man I know" attributes strength to Bertie's vulnerability, reinforcing the legitimacy of emotional expression in masculine identity. In contrast, King George V's "He'll never make anything of himself" exemplifies the top-down, evaluative discourse of patriarchal authority, reinforcing expectations of control and success. Bertie's emotionally charged "Help me, Lionel" highlights a plea for relational support, challenging the trope of masculine self-reliance and emphasising dependency as a strength rather than a weakness. Bertie's nuanced shift in referent pronouns, such as in "It's not just a speech, Lionel. It's my voice," symbolises his reclaiming of identity and emotional ownership. The pronoun "it" evolves from denoting an external task (the speech) to a metaphorical representation of his internal voice and selfhood, capturing the affective dimension of his masculine redefinition. Three pragmatic functions emerge from this analysis. First, inclusive pronouns such as "we" and "our" signal solidarity and alternative masculinity, where authority is dispersed and support is mutual. Second, affirmative second-person pronouns like "you" function as interpersonal affirmations, reconfiguring power as empathetic recognition rather than dominance. Third, first-person pronouns trace the speaker's journey from self-doubt to agency, showing how language enacts psychological transformation. These findings demonstrate that pronouns do more than refer; they index social relationships, power configurations, and identity positions. In *The King's Speech*, pronoun use becomes a strategic linguistic tool that negotiates masculinity through collaboration, emotional expression, and shared leadership. By tracing these shifts, the film presents a progressive model of masculinity that challenges hegemonic norms and offers a more inclusive, emotionally grounded alternative.

MODALITY AND HEDGING: REDEFINING MASCULINITY
THROUGH UNCERTAINTY AND SUPPORT

The use of modality and hedging in *The King's Speech* plays a key role in expressing emotion, negotiating authority, and reimagining masculinity. The analysis of modal verbs and hedging devices in the film reveals how expressions of uncertainty, obligation, and cautious collaboration challenge traditional masculine ideals, reframing vulnerability as a pathway to resilience, care, and relational leadership. This study distinguishes between epistemic modality, which refers to the speaker's degree of certainty or belief (e.g., "might," "could," "perhaps"), and deontic modality, which signals obligation, necessity, or permission (e.g., "must," "should," "have to"). This distinction is essential in interpreting the power dynamics at play, especially as masculinity is often tied to control, certainty, and assertion. King George VI (Bertie) frequently employs epistemic modality, as seen in lines like "I could not possibly do this" or "I might fail," signalling his deep uncertainty and internal conflict. These expressions reflect fragile masculinity, where doubt and self-perception of inadequacy contrast sharply with hegemonic expectations of strength and emotional control. Such modal expressions surface in pivotal scenes, particularly in therapy sessions or moments of public speaking, revealing the psychological burden of leadership bound to stoicism. Conversely, deontic modality appears when Bertie grapples with imposed duty, often externalising pressure through expressions such as "I must do this for the country" or "One has to speak." These lines reflect an institutional and moral obligation, aligning him with traditional expectations of masculine leadership. However, his discomfort with these modal forms illustrates the emotional cost of performing hegemonic masculinity under pressure. Lionel Logue, in contrast, consistently uses epistemic modality and hedging to foster collaboration and emotional safety. Phrases like "Perhaps we could try this," or "Maybe this will help," create an inclusive dialogic space. His use of low-certainty expressions models an alternative masculinity grounded in empathy and mutual respect. This softening of authority challenges hierarchical masculinity by replacing dominance with relational trust. TABLE 5 shows that as Bertie's confidence grows, his language shifts, with a decreasing reliance on high-modality expressions. This transition mirrors his embrace of vulnerability as a source of strength and his redefinition of leadership as relational and resilient. The following table outlines the use of modality and hedging in the script and their analyses that indicate fragile or vulnerable masculinity:

TABLE 5. The use of modality and hedging in expressions of uncertainty, collaboration, and vulnerability

#	Example lines in script	Context	Analysis
1.	"Perhaps we could try..."	Lionel during therapy sessions	Reflects collaboration and reduced pressure on Bertie's vulnerable state.
2.	"I'm not sure if I can do this."	Bertie expressing self-doubt	Shows Bertie's internal conflict and fragile self-confidence.
3.	"Would it help if we practiced more?"	Collaborative suggestion	Highlights Lionel's supportive and non-imposing manner.
4.	"I might be able to get through it this time."	Bertie preparing for a speech	Indicates cautious optimism, emphasizing Bertie's struggle with vulnerability.
5.	"Let's see if this works..."	Lionel encouraging during exercise	Creates a low-pressure, exploratory atmosphere.
6.	"I could try again later..."	Bertie reflecting on failure	Shows resilience while accepting his vulnerable position.
7.	"It might not be perfect, but it will be your voice."	Lionel encouraging Bertie	"Might" acknowledges imperfection, reinforcing authenticity over perfection.
8.	"Could we try this method instead?"	Lionel suggesting alternatives	Frames the suggestion as collaborative and non-imposing.

9.	"You may find it easier if you slow down."	Lionel giving feedback	"May" conveys a tentative suggestion, fostering trust.
10.	"If it's too much, we can stop and try again later."	Offering Bertie a break	Provides flexibility, prioritizing emotional well-being.
11.	"Perhaps you don't need to be perfect to be effective."	Discussing leadership	Challenges perfectionism with a soft, alternative perspective.
12.	"I should have said something earlier..."	Bertie reflecting on silence	"Should" indicates regret, exposing emotional vulnerability.
13.	"I'd like to give it another go, if that's alright."	Bertie asking to continue exercise	Polite hesitation reflects sensitivity and growing confidence.
14.	"We might not have much time, but we'll make it work."	Preparing for a speech	Balances uncertainty ("might") with optimism ("will").
15.	"It seems like you're trying too hard to force it."	Lionel analysing Bertie's speech	"Seems" softens critique, inviting collaboration.
16.	"I suppose we could adjust the approach if needed."	Adjusting the method	Flexibility and sensitivity foster an egalitarian dynamic.

The analysis also illustrates how Bertie's language evolves across the narrative. Early scenes show a reliance on deontic necessity and epistemic doubt, portraying him as constrained by duty yet crippled by uncertainty. As his therapeutic journey progresses, Bertie gradually adopts a more balanced modality, experiencing less deontic pressure and greater epistemic flexibility. This marks a discursive shift toward relational strength. For example, his later utterances, such as "I believe I can manage this", blend epistemic modesty with newfound agency, reflecting a redefinition of power as emotionally grounded rather than hierarchically asserted. In sum, the interplay of epistemic and deontic modality, along with hedging, underscores the film's critique of rigid masculine ideals. Bertie's shifting modal expressions from obligation and doubt to cautious affirmation, mirror his personal transformation. The film presents vulnerability and emotional honesty not as weaknesses but as strengths that redefine authority and masculine identity. By illustrating how modal choices encode psychological stance, social obligation, and relational negotiation, *The King's Speech* affirms the power of language to challenge patriarchal structures. This analysis highlights how even subtle linguistic elements such as "might," "must," "perhaps," "should" can serve as textual sites where masculinity is actively deconstructed and reimagined. Thus, modality and hedging operate not just as linguistic features, but as critical discursive tools for expressing a more inclusive, emotionally intelligent form of masculinity.

DISCUSSIONS

The analysis of linguistic features in *The King's Speech*, including lexical choice, metaphors, pronouns, modality, and hedging, offers a nuanced understanding of how the film critiques hegemonic masculinity while foregrounding emotionally resilient and relational forms of male identity. Framed within Sara Mills' Feminist Stylistics and feminist-informed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this study highlights how language does more than reflect gendered identities; it actively reconstructs masculinity as fluid, vulnerable, and cooperative. These findings contribute to wider conversations on masculinity in media by demonstrating how linguistic strategies challenge dominant gender ideologies and promote inclusive alternatives. Central to this discursive reconfiguration is the motif of "voice," both literal and symbolic, as it represents identity, power, and agency. Bertie's stammer is not merely a physical impediment; it metaphorically embodies his constrained self-expression under the burden of patriarchal expectations. His struggle to reclaim his voice parallels a broader redefinition of masculinity, one that values emotional authenticity, psychological growth, and interdependence.

A closer look at lexical choice reveals how shifts in register and tone mirror Bertie's evolving self-concept. Early in the film, his vocabulary is marked by formal, institutional terms such as "duty," "obligation," and "crown," evoking a semantic field of hierarchical authority and emotional detachment. These terms frequently co-occur with language associated with pressure and rigidity, reinforcing a collocational pattern that constructs masculinity as stoic and burdened. However, as Bertie grows in confidence, his language shifts toward a more emotionally open lexicon, including words such as "struggle," "help," "fear," and "voice." This shift in semantic orientation reflects a move from duty to care, and from authority to relational engagement. His evolving linguistic style, marked by personal admissions of fear and uncertainty challenges hegemonic ideals by foregrounding vulnerability as strength (Reeser, 2010). These shifts illustrate how lexical choice serves as a discursive marker of identity formation and ideological transformation, aligning with feminist critiques of inclusivity and affective expression (Radzi et al., 2021; Sunderland, 2004; Waling, 2019).

This discursive shift is further reinforced through metaphor. Key metaphors such as "chains of tradition," "a cracked vessel," and "the flood of emotion" frame masculinity as burdened, fractured, and yet capable of renewal. These metaphors echo feminist critiques of hegemonic masculinity, which argue that emotional repression serves to maintain patriarchal power but often isolates men from their own emotional lives (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; M. S. Kimmel, 2018). Importantly, the study extends previous metaphorical analyses by incorporating intertextual readings, linking metaphors like "the crown" and "the flood" to biblical, historical, and cinematic narratives. As Fairclough (1995) notes, discourse is shaped by prior texts and cultural knowledge. Here, intertextual metaphors amplify the ideological critique of hegemonic masculinity by placing Bertie's journey within broader narratives of kingship, sacrifice, and redemption. Metaphors of breaking and repair, such as "a cracked vessel" or "a shattered mirror" can be seen to capture moments of transformation. This supports feminist discourse perspectives that view masculine identity as fractured yet reconstitutable (Lazar, 2005; S. Robinson, 2019; Waling, 2023).

Pronoun usage in *The King's Speech* serves as a pragmatic marker of Bertie's evolving identity and relational stance. His early reliance on the first-person singular "I," and "my" indexes a model of isolated authority aligned with patriarchal ideals of self-reliance and stoicism (Edwards, 2020; M. Kimmel, 2005). As the narrative progresses, the shift toward inclusive pronouns "we" and "our" signals a transition to shared agency and a collective model of leadership. This discursive shift reflects a redefinition of masculinity that values relational identity and mutual support. In addition, the frequent use of second-person pronouns, particularly in Lionel Logue's affirmational utterances such as "You are strong enough" and "You have a voice", fosters dialogic validation, enabling Bertie to reconstruct his confidence and reframe vulnerability as empowerment (Anderson, 2009). These dynamics align with feminist linguistic approaches that foreground the role of emotional reciprocity and inclusivity in constructing non-hegemonic masculinities (Reeser, 2010; Sunderland, 2004; Waling, 2019).

Further evidence of masculinity's reconfiguration appears in the analysis of modality and hedging. Initially, Bertie's language is marked by high-modality statements such as "I could not possibly do this," reflecting internalised self-doubt and rigid expectations of authoritative masculinity. As his discourse evolves, he increasingly employs epistemic modality such as "might," "perhaps," or "I suppose" to express openness and uncertainty, signalling a shift toward emotional flexibility. In contrast, deontic modality, such as "must" or "should", is used less frequently and typically signals the burden of duty. By distinguishing between these types, the study demonstrates how modal choices function as linguistic tools for navigating identity and

authority. These patterns support feminist and CDA perspectives that interpret uncertainty not as weakness but as a site of dialogic strength (Azizah, 2021; Sunderland, 2004). Hedging further contributes to this reframing. Bertie's use of expressions like "I suppose" and "I could try" challenges traditional notions of assertive masculinity, allowing for hesitation and emotional vulnerability. In parallel, Lionel Logue's consistent use of hedging, such as "perhaps" or "maybe", models a mentoring dynamic based on equality and emotional support, subverting coercive ideals of male mentorship. As Waling (2019) observes, these linguistic features exemplify emerging frameworks of masculinity that favour collaboration and empathy over control and dominance.

While the findings resonate with existing literature on masculinity and feminist linguistics, this study extends the field by applying feminist stylistics to male-centred narratives. Traditionally, feminist stylistics has focused on the representation of women (Lazar, 2005; Mills, 1995), but this research illustrates its relevance for analysing male subjectivities that challenge patriarchal norms. It reveals how cinematic discourse challenges essentialist models of masculinity, promoting emotionally engaged and progressive alternatives. These findings also hold wider implications for the analysis of gendered communication in public discourse. Linguistic strategies such as lexical shift, metaphor, pronoun dynamics, and modality can inform leadership discourse, corporate communication, and policy rhetoric, redefining masculine authority in inclusive, equitable terms. Through its layered use of language, the film reimagines male identity as adaptive, emotionally authentic, and relational. By foregrounding vulnerability and mutual empowerment, the film reflects contemporary shifts in gender discourse as seen from this brief yet compelling analysis, demonstrating a counter-narrative to hegemonic masculinity.

CONCLUSION

This study examines how *The King's Speech* constructs and critiques hegemonic masculinity through linguistic and discursive strategies. Guided by four core inquiries, it explores the film's use of language to portray male vulnerability in leadership, analyses how the discourse sustains or reframes hegemonic masculinity, and demonstrates how Feminist Stylistics and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) reveal the ideological implications of such depictions. Central to this reimagining is the metaphor of "voice," symbolising both Bertie's literal speech impediment and his constrained agency under patriarchal norms. The study mapped his linguistic shift from isolated, high-modality expressions to inclusive, emotionally open dialogue, highlighting how language performs masculinity and disrupts hegemonic ideals. While discourse analysis has been applied to masculinity before, this study integrates stylistic and critical frameworks to foreground empathetic, cooperative masculinities. It shows that masculine authority, when expressed through inclusive language and emotional depth, can resist binaries such as strength versus weakness and control versus vulnerability. Beyond the film itself, the findings carry broader implications. Theoretically, they support views of masculinity as plural and discursively negotiated. These insights are relevant across educational, organisational, and political contexts, striving toward more equitable gender norms. However, the study is limited by its focus on a single film and its reliance on qualitative, scene-specific analysis. It does not account for cross-cultural representations or audience interpretations. Future research could broaden this scope by incorporating comparative genre studies, multimodal analysis, or reception studies to advance understanding of how alternative masculinities circulate across the media landscape.

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