



ADVANCE SOCIAL SCIENCE ARCHIVE JOURNAL

Available Online: <https://assajournal.com>

Vol. 05 No. 01. Jan-March 2026. Page# 903-913

Print ISSN: [3006-2497](#) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](#)

Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18517734>



Lexicalized Autonomy of Desire and Survival: A Feminist Stylistic and Cognitive Metaphor Analysis of Female Independence and Prostitution in Coelho's Novel "Eleven Minutes"

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ABSTRACT

The speech of independence reshapes the choice of moral grammar. Maria Coelho's protagonist of the novel "Eleven Minutes" is in search of true love and adventure transits into prostitution. Implied language presents readers with prostitutional diction, metaphorical conceptualization and gendered stylistic choices throughout the development of narrative. This qualitative research article aims to investigate the contribution of prostitutional linguistic construction and female independence by integrating Cognitive Metaphor Theory and Feminist Stylistics shaping the struggle between constraint and autonomy. Study also extends the analysis beyond fiction and analyzes the contemporary discourse about the modern independent women doomed to childlessness and singleness to resonate contemporary gender debate with Coelho's Eleven Minutes. Study has explored the language mediation which has normalized prostitution for the construction of independence in the shape of sacrifice and empowerment by examining stylistic patterns and lexical choices legitimizing prostitution as both choice and work. There is an observable discursive negotiation through transitivity, modality and evaluative language with recurring cognitive metaphors framing freedom, prostitution and female body. Feminist stylistic markers reveal tensions between exploitation and self-determination while the conceptual metaphors maintain homeostasis between relational and emotional loss. Dominant conceptual metaphors such as freedom as transition, sex as labour and body as capital have been explored through Lakoff and Johnson's Cognitive Metaphor Theory. The findings propose that Coelho's Eleven Minutes has linguistically framed independence as empowerment encoding freedom within metaphorical and economic structures of isolation, exchange and emotional repression. Study concludes that the modern-day feminist discourse and Eleven Minutes makes it problematic and reflects contemporary ideals of female independence through cognitive and stylistic mechanisms which construct gendered experiences of loss, struggle and autonomy.

Keywords: *Feminist Stylistics; Cognitive Metaphor Theory; Prostitution; Independence.*

Introduction

Background to the Novel *Eleven Minutes* by Paulo Coelho

To be understood is to prostitute oneself Fernando Pessoa. Paulo Coelho in *Eleven Minutes* (2003), tells us about the transitional journey of Brazilian women turned into prostitute. In the search for adventure, desire for love and pursuit of self-discovery leads simple Brazilian damsel into the Genevan world as prostitute. Maria's emotional fulfilment turns into economic survival with bodily awareness coupled with psychological awakening. She negotiates her narrative voice through notions of desire, freedom and identity holistic perspective narrated through reflective commentary. Coelho (2003) has put his readers to see prostitution not only as prevalent in society but a discursive field as the outcome of Maria naming, justifying and explaining her choices.

The Concept of Prostitutional Diction

Prostitution is more than a trade Coelho has successfully framed the narration of Maria's character through carefully chosen stylistics and lexical choices representing discipline, work, transaction and profession. Prostitutional diction is a patterned use of language which presents itself as a linguistic phenomenon organized and rational. This phenomenon includes word choice, metaphor and modality which has delicately normalized the stigmatized act of prostitution. A more failure presented as normalized and digestible. Mills (1995) emphasizes agency assignment and lexical selection to explore underlying gender ideologies through feminist stylistics. The novel has carefully crafted and articulated the profession and explained that how language mediates bodily controlled decisions and autonomous perception.

The Presentation of Prostitution (Constraint versus Autonomy)

Shadowed societies often measure women's choice materialistically. Novel is embedded with a tense and striking aura which portrays prostitution as a lead to autonomy and constraint in which economy driven Maria is compelled into prostitution but repeatedly framing her conscious choices of independence and self-awareness about her engagements in various stigmatized acts. Metaphorical patterns redefine the duality where freedom ends into sex labour and women's body becomes a form of capital weighed and valued monetarily. Cognitive Metaphor Theory metaphors shaping the conceptualization and understanding of the experiences (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). These metaphors reflect that how delicately the coexistence of empowerment and exploitation with a delicate balance.

Literature Review

Prostitution – Through the Lens of Language and Literature

Over decades, literature has enjoyed and manifested themes of prostitution depicted as exploitation, moral tension and marginalization in novels like *Tipping the Velvet* foregrounding sexual identity and gender which encapsulate gender fluidity, performance and prostitution. Studies have done thematic analysis; somehow, linguistic studies are scarcely available to see language in practice for topics like prostitution exploring objectification, sexual economy and struggles of the identities. Metaphorical feminine framing studies the framing of sexual identities in media contexts but still there remains a gap for the use of linguistic choices which normalize prostitution in the form of independence and autonomy. Rare examples are available in existing literature which have studied prostitution metaphorically, stylistically and lexically.

Sara Mills' Feminist Stylistics and Lakoff and Johnson's Cognitive Metaphor Theory

Gender discourse and linguistic analysis have been well bridged by emerging feminist stylistics. Feminist stylistics provides tools to understand that how language encodes power dynamics

and gender biases. Sara Mills' feminist stylistics focuses representation of body, modality, agency, lexical selection and narrative voice in order to reveal how texts portray men and women differently (Mills & Mullany, 2011). Majority of the feminist stylistic scholars focus texts for gender representation and identification of sexism for further exploration of gendered language patterns in modern day cultural products such as media discourse and social media (Shaffaqat et al., 2025). Narrative positioning and agency are the core targets of feminist stylistics which make is particularly suitable for analysis of leading female characters linguistically negotiating their autonomy. Very few onsets have applied these frameworks to portray prostitution as choice or as road to independence.

According to Cognitive Metaphor Theory, metaphors, instead of being figures of speech act as cognitive tools shaping the comprehension of abstract ideas such as agency, time and identity. The seminal theory of Lakoff and Johnson (1980) posits that experiences map from one domain to another through conceptual metaphors which empowers the readers to understand complex texts with the help of use of familiar imagery. For instance, gendered metaphors are analyzed through cognitive linguistics for media and advertisement which reveal the conceptualization of women and autonomous agents, nature and objects which meriting challenge or reinforce gender stereotypes (Aziz, 2025). Recent works have also explored shaping of characters through metaphors and revealed social realities – mostly narrowing it to general gendered discourse. The construction of narrative for independence and prostitution yet remains less explored. Cognitive metaphor analysis has highlighted the implicit construction of texts for empowerment and femininity.

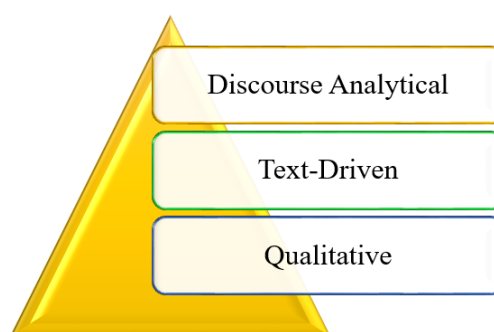
Research Gap in the Existing Literature

Albeit, feminist discourse and literature have given ample attention to the subject of prostitution but little attention has been paid to the construct of use of language language as a form of independence. Contrary to existing literature focusing on the thematic studies and morality studies; this research article focuses on the neglected areas metaphorical and stylistic analysis. The article has examined the novel *Eleven Minutes* for its prostitutional diction, conceptual metaphors and feminist stylistics in order to negotiate between constraint and autonomy linking the contemporary discourse on freedom, independent women and emotional grind.

Theoretical Framework

According to Mills and Mullany (2011), feminist stylistics in its core offers precise and proven set of tools which analyze language reflecting and shaping gender relations. This approach texts for their assignment on agency, use of modality, selection of lexicon, narrative voice and representation of female body wither to challenge or reinforce power structures. Agency assignment questions, who is being acted upon? Agent (Maria) making choices or

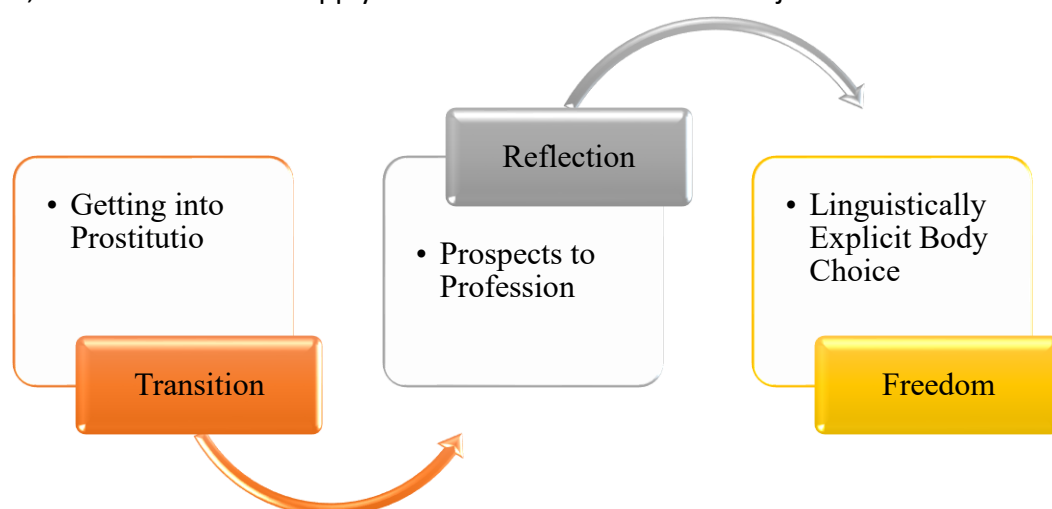
mere an object being acted upon subtly revealing power dynamics embedded in words and grammar (Biber et al, 2017). Terms like work, client, profession and contract show lexical choices; contract means autonomy instead of labels like fallen women or victim. Maria's framing of her decisions through modal verbs like should, can, must express obligation or neutrality – these decisions are self-directed, optional or compulsory (Tottie, 2019). Cognitive Metaphor Theory does not posit language use mere as ornamental but grounds it in our thinking process mapping one conceptual domain into another enabling reader to get



familiarize with abstract experiences (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Kövecses, 2015). The key concept in focus is freedom as transition, sex as labour and body as capital which can be invested, traded and managed neoliberal views where one acts as economic actor (Rottenberg, 2018).

Methodology

In order to investigate how language in *Eleven Minutes* creates the discourse of prostitution as a way to independence, this paper will use a qualitative, text-based discourse analysis. Qualitative discourse analysis is concerned with language at work-how words, structures, and patterns in written material provide more profound social conclusions, identities, and power relationships (McLeod, 2024). This is a method that transcends the surface meanings and looks at the ways linguistic choices are a mirror and a manifestation of social realities and thus it is best applied to analyze the subjective language that Maria uses regarding the subject of prostitution, autonomy, and identity. The corpus is composed of the selected passages of *Eleven Minutes* where Maria shifts to her thoughts of entering the world of prostitution, her perception of her career, and her story interpretations of independence are most vivid. These passages are selected intentionally since they predetermine linguistic and metaphorical patterns, which apply to the subject of research.

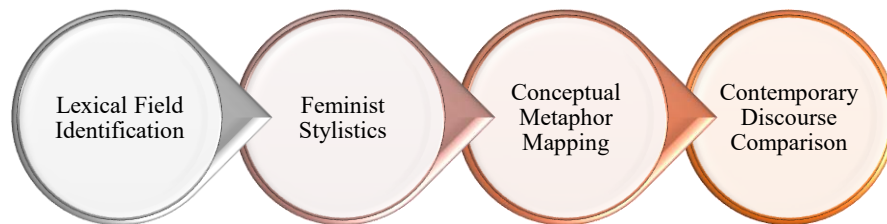


The analysis is systematic and takes four stages:

- **Determine lexical areas of prostitution:** The initial one will be close reading in order to gather words, phrases, and groups of words connected with prostitution, work, autonomy, choice, body, and freedom. The tendencies in lexical choice tend to show the way in which the prostitution is framed either as degradation, work, or autonomy. The literature on linguistic analysis highlights that fields of lexical analysis are central in building social themes within texts.
- **Patterns of trace agency and modality:** This phase involves the analysis of grammatical structures in terms of agency (who acts) and modality (degree of obligation, possibility or necessity). Agency and modality are useful to uncover the fact that Maria is either a linguistically positioned actor or linguistically positioned acted-upon (which is an important issue in the study of feminist discourse).
- **Find patterns in conceptual metaphor:** Based on the Cognitive Metaphor Theory, this phase consists in the identification of repeated conceptual metaphors such as freedom as transition, sex as labour and body as capital which structure the experiences Maria has conceptually. The analysis of metaphors explains the cognitive projection of

abstract areas such as independence and selfhood onto more concrete areas such as movement, economy, and embodiment.

- Lastly, **the linguistic patterns**, which were presented in the novel, are addressed concerning the discourse of independent, child-free, and single women which are produced in media narratives, feminist essays, and common discussion. Such comparative angle places the novel in the wider context of the sociocultural language practice, how the literary language reflects and also takes part in the existing gender debate.



This is a multi-layered qualitative methodology that assures the analysis of both the micro-level linguistic aspects and the macro-level ideological flows within the text, which will assist in bringing out a sensitive analysis of the discursive connection between prostitution and independence in *Eleven Minutes*.

Analysis and Discussion

In this section, the discourse analysis of *Eleven Minutes* is provided in terms of the concepts of the prostitutional diction, agency and modality, conceptual metaphors, and body representation. The discussion shows the ways in which the patterns of language in the novel naturalize the concept of prostitution as an economic decision and at the same time, they mediate the conflicts between restraint and freedom.

Lexical Normalization of Prostitutional Diction

In *Eleven Minutes*, Coelho uses neutral and professional lexical terms such as work, client, choice, contract, profession, numerous times to define the prostitution activity Maria is involved in. This use of language is an alternative to some of the more traditional forms of moral or emotive language, e.g. sin, victim, or fall, and it foreshadows moral judgment and not agency. The linguistic sanitization of prostitution in the story is achieved through the application of vocabularies that are generally linked to lawful careers and making it sound like a component of the occupational history of Maria.

Indicatively, Maria thinks about her association with clients in terms of transactions and not moral shortcomings, which is in line with the language of her profession and that of the work life. This normalization of lexicon coincides with the works that prove the effectiveness of metaphor and the label choice in influencing readers and their attitudes to controversial practices (Semino, 2018). The use of neutral terminology places the prostitution in a labor and choice scenario which supports its legitimacy as economic activity as opposed to mere moral deviance just a little.

Also, the systematic repetition of terms defining the jobs makes the readers cognitively group the prostitution with other occupations- a process that is comparable to how language can influence the social attitudes to stigmatized identities and positions (Deignan, 2020). This

lexical positioning plays a significant role in setting the informational prep work to autonomous dialogue on the issue of Maria.

Narrative Control, Modality and Agency

One of the strengths of Coelho story is the manner in which agency and modality is linguistically ascribed. Maria frequently puts up as the grammatical agent of the sentences describing her choices and thoughts. This stance prefigures her as an agentic person as opposed to a passive receptive to situations.

As an illustration, sentences such as, I decided not to leave, or I decided my frames are written in active voice and first-person modality to foreground Maria. The modal auxiliaries including can, will, choose and decide underline her power over actions and possibilities. Feminist linguistics studies highlight that modality is an important indicator of agency in narrative speech high agency language is associated with a feeling of freedom and self-control (Holmes and Meyerhoff, 2021).

This is however not an absolute negotiation. Maria is also constrained in some instances in the manner in which she uses language with the use of modals like must or have to combined with the economic necessity. Those trends exemplify a continuous compromise of freedom and necessity, in which Maria is not given absolute freedom but a situational decision, influenced by socioeconomic factors and personal contemplation.

Structuring Independence through Conceptual Metaphors

Three conceptual metaphors that are recurring in the cognitive framing of the experience of Maria are: Freedom as Transition, Sex as Labour and Body as Capital. These metaphors systematize the abstract notions with known domains, in a way that organizes how the readers perceive the complex emotional and social experiences.

- **Freedom as Transition:** The idea of the freedom is metaphorically represented in the novel as the movement or a voyage, Maria moves through cities, inner landscapes and emotional boundaries. Phrases that call to mind crossing, departure or arrival imply an idea of freedom in a dynamic, transitional state as opposed to a fixed state. This metaphor could be related to the cognitive linguistic research that has revealed that journey metaphors tend to encapsulate self-development and autonomy in narrative speech (Dayter, 2018). The fact that movement turns out to be an end in its own right and also as a process, as something that helps us to think of independence as a continuous negotiation and not an accomplishment is further ascertained.
- **Sex as Labour:** The economic language of Maria being sexually active including the clients, hours, payment brings the metaphor of Sex as Labour. In this case, work processes are linguistically superimposed on sexual interaction. Such framing resonates with the feminist critique of neoliberal economies that find a way to discuss the concept of intimate labor and commodification (Gill and Orgad, 2018). Prostitution has been placed in familiar economic frameworks through labor-language, which reduces the stigma surrounding it and restructures the presence of sex work as a kind of professional activity.
- Professionalism and efficiency are also highlighted by this metaphor and give Maria a sense of skill, setting boundaries, and transactional rationality. By so doing, prostitution is placed in the cognitive standpoint with other types of labor involving negotiation, performance as well as autonomy.

- **Body as Capital:** The other metaphor that is spread everywhere is Body as Capital- the body of Maria is linguistically approached as a resource that she uses, invests, or uses to trade in exchange relations. This metaphor echoes larger neoliberal discourses where bodies, time and emotions are commodified (Rottenberg, 2018). The body is not an object of moral value as much as it is part of economic unit, and a part of market relations of supply, demand and valuation.

Idea	Metaphorical Framing	
Freedom	Journey	Transition
Body	Resource	Capital
Sex	Work	Labour

These metaphors project independency of the body onto economic rationality and this is a move to push the readers to understand the choices of Maria as a strategic investment and not a moral trade-off. This conceptual framing is consistent with the recent studies that focus on the discussion of gendered bodies as economically active agents that are a construct of language in the modern discourse (Semino, Demjenen, Demmen, 2017).

Feminist Stylistic Tension and Representation of Body

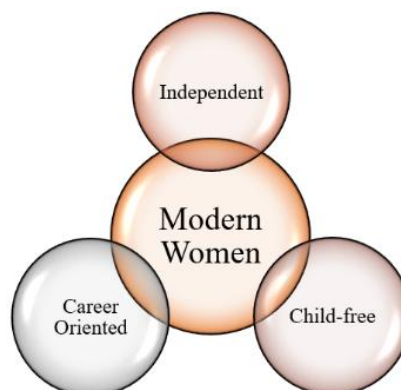
Though the narratives of professionalism and agency are developed by prostitutional diction and metaphorical framing, the body representations in the text expose the complex conflicts between objectification and ownership. On the one hand, the body of Maria is presented in the transactional manner which focuses on objectification and on the gaze of clients. Conversely, the narrative voice of Maria, in many cases, takes possession, her body is the place of choice, where she defines herself.

This two-sided image appeals to feminist stylistic discoveries whose representations of female bodies often have an alternating objectification and agency (Bucholtz and Hall, 2022). This oscillation is manifested in *Eleven Minutes* in the way Maria views and talks about her body; sometimes as a commodity in trade, at other times as her room of choice and self.

This kind of tension is a manifestation of the larger battle between exploitation and empowerment. Whereas the body is discussed in terms of market, the internalized narration of the body by Maria restores the ownership of the body by placing the body involvement within her own objectives and stories.

Maintaining Homeostasis between Autonomy and Emotional Drainage

Regardless of the economic and agency-based framing, the storyline continually brokered emotional loss and agency independence. The journey and transition metaphors are usually under-currented with loneliness, sacrifice, and compromise of emotions. As an example, the emotional cost of independence is merely recognized implicitly in metaphors that define independence as a transition over a threshold.



This homeostatic balance, the state of trying to keep gain and loss stable, in terms of cognition resembles the way abstract human experience is organized into metaphors, with dual forces (life vs loss, freedom vs constraint). Female independence is also discussed in modern times, and this theme also notes the problem of trade-offs involving emotional work and changed expectations of relations (Gill & Orgad, 2018).

In that way, the analysis shows that language framing by Coelho does not showcase independence as the unconditional liberation. Rather, it develops a complicated balance in which the autonomy is linguistically bound to emotive conflict and loss, which is a mirror to the real-life processes of gendered agency.

Drawing Parallel with Contemporary Feminist Discourse

Although *Eleven Minutes* is a fiction, the language patterns revealed in the narrative by Maria are deafeningly close to the current feminist discourse that discusses independence, career, body, and relational identity. Over the past years, both popular and scholarly literature has focused more attention on the lives of independent women, child-free women, and work-driven single women, who are often struggling on how words transform, as well as represent, notions of independence, worth, and emotional existence.

The modern feminist literature is characterized by the increase in the number of women who do not want to follow the classical patterns of life like early marriage and having children but care more about their professional career, mobility, and personal ambitions. The change has caused excitement and much criticism in the media, academia and social debates. Indicatively, a study on media images indicates that unmarried women and women without children tend to be discursively framed by imposing emotional burdens or moral evaluations on their individuality (Smith and Anderson, 2022). According to scholars, such women are at times celebrated as empowerment role models and criticized as social losers because of the relation or reproduction decisions they make.

On the same note, personal narrative and social media discourse studies indicate that a significant number of career-oriented women describe their identities by using linguistic metaphors of sacrifice, investment, and self-management (Lee and Park, 2021). Although these metaphors do emphasize agency, they nonetheless implicitly recognize the emotional and social trade-offs that such women make.

- **Freedom as a Sacrifice:** Modern discourses often construct freedom as a benefit with a price tag - a trade-off between independence and interpersonal/emotional satisfaction. As an illustration, women explain how they can reach professional success and feel socially isolated or doubt their relationship possibilities (Johnson & Miller, 2023). This follows the same pattern as the Maria narrative with its journey-and-transition metaphors which prefigure the shift towards independence at the expense of emotional grounding.
- **Body/Time as Capital:** In feminist accounts of neoliberal subjectivity both body and time are theorized as capital that can be invested in, maximized and managed (Rottenberg, 2018; Lewis and Hogan, 2024). Women talk about their bodies in economic terms, as assets, investments, sacrifices, particularly when they are talking of career promotion or decision not to have children. These metaphors also correspond with the Body as Capital framing in *Eleven Minutes* as Maria finds herself in a situation where her physical self is bargained in economic and emotional conditions.
- **Emotional Isolation as Empowerment:** The current feminist literature tends to think of solitude and emotional independence not as a lack but as a place of power. Emotional isolation is seen by single women and child-free women as an area where they can

reflect on themselves, be resilient, and own themselves (Taylor and Rivera, 2022). This story reminds the emotional homeostasis in *Eleven Minutes* when Maria is not alone but her solitude is her refuge where she can define herself and find internal unity.

The similarities of the language used by Maria in her framing and the modern discourse of feminism indicate that *Eleven Minutes* is an anticipation of modern discussions on women and their autonomy and identity. The language of the novel even though published years earlier than many of the new discursive directions suggests that economic metaphors, agency descriptions, and emotional balancing metaphors will become the focus of feminist expressions of independence.

The independence in the novel as well as in the modern discourse is not represented as the innocent freedom but a negotiated location which is achieved through sacrifice, investment, and emotional bargaining. The linguistic structures of the novel metaphors relating freedom to movement, sex to labour and body to capital are reminiscent of the discursive instruments women in the current times employ to define their multiple, ambivalent experiences of autonomy.

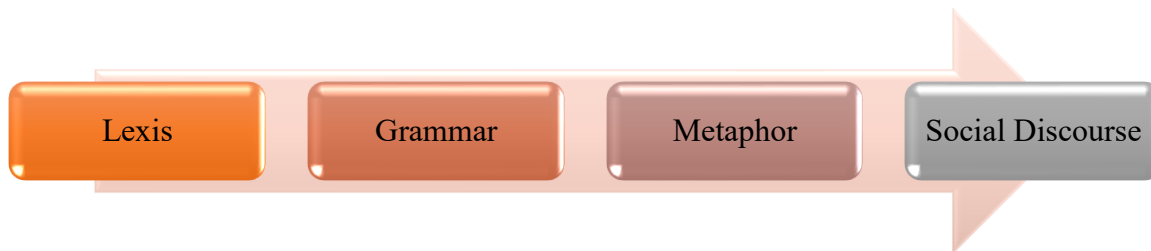
By placing *Eleven Minutes* in this overall linguistic continuum, the analysis does not only help make light of the role of language in creating meaning in fiction, but it also demonstrates how fictional language cuts across and even prefigures real-life gendered narratives that are discursively constructed.

Findings

When analyzing *Eleven Minutes* with the help of feminist stylistics and cognitive metaphor theory, it is possible to draw a number of definite and assertive conclusions concerning how the language creates the experiences and independence of Maria:

- **Prostitution as Work, Not Sin:** The prostitution in the novel is always described in non-moral terms by the author through the use of such words as work, client, profession, and contract. This choice of words puts the occupation of Maria in its linguistic regularity, as a rational, manageable, and valid form of work and not as a moral offense (Semino, 2018; Deignan, 2020).
- **Metaphorical Construction of Independence:** Economic and transitional metaphors are over and over again associated with independence. The metaphors that are conceptual like freedom as transition, sex as labour, body as capital structure Maria travels as a movement, investment and negotiation. These mental images abstractly overlay the notion of autonomy with well-known areas of travelling, employment, and management of resources and make it clear that freedom is achieved, negotiated, and contextually constrained (Dayter, 2018; Rottenberg, 2018).
- **Negotiation Exposed in the Feminist Stylistic Markers:** In feminist stylistic analysis, one finds tensions, as opposed to definite resolutions that are uncovered. Maria sometimes acts as retrogressively and an empowered agent which shows that she inevitable for the economic need – demonstrating narrative voice, modality and agency assignment. The story prefigures bargaining between female autonomy and institutional constraints, which emphasize the multifaceted nature of female autonomy (Mills and Mullany, 2011; Holmes and Meyerhoff, 2021).
- **Liberty This is Coded in Systems of Trade, Loneliness, and Emotional Iciness:** Independence is a conditional structured state which is encoded in linguistic patterns. Freedom is modeled through the use of transactional language, journey images and emotional commentaries as being interwoven with economic exchange, emotional loneliness and strategic sacrifice. The independence of Maria is thus discursively

positioned both in the opportunity and the constraint, which reflects the contemporary feminist discourse of independent and career-oriented child-free women (Gill & Orgad, 2018; Johnson and Miller, 2023).



Altogether, *Eleven Minutes* is a linguistically advanced building of female autonomy, in which prostitution is made natural, freedom is structurally supported, and independence is discussed at the macro-socio-emotional and economic levels. The results show that the novel anticipates the modern feminist stories by applying the language as one of the means to address, organize, and justify female choice and self-determination.

Conclusion

This paper will prove that *Eleven Minutes* is not just a story of prostitution or desire, but a linguistic and mental location where female autonomy is being negotiated and negotiated. Combining Feminist Stylistics and Cognitive Metaphor Theory, the study will demonstrate how the novel by Coelho contributes to the knowledge in several areas:

- **Feminist Stylistics:** The understanding about the mediation of the language with power, limitation and independence in female leading characters subtly interprets agency, narrative voice and modality along with body representation. It corresponds that there is no neutrality in stylistic elements but there is an encoded gendered experiences and social negotiations (Mills and Mullany, 2011; Holmes and Meyerhoff, 2021).
- **Cognitive Metaphor Studies:** The paper illustrates the thinking of the independence concept and empowering through the repetition of metaphors such as freedom as transition, sex as labour, and the body as capital to show how abstract ideas of independence and empowerment are cognitively mapped on familiar domains to inform the readers on their concept of choice, sacrifice, and bodily agency (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Semino, 2018).
- **Literary Discourse on Prostitution:** The study places literatures on prostitution in a line of research that the word prostitution has become normalized and professionalized, leaving moralistic or victimist interpretations. It makes Coelho novel a forerunner to the modern feminist literature about independent, child-free, and career-oriented women (Gill & Orgad, 2018; Johnson and Miller, 2023).

The pertinent perception which this examination has uncovered is that being independent in *Eleven Minutes* does not imply complete liberty. Instead, it is linguistically mediated negotiation between the self-determination of the self, loss of emotions, and structural constraints, disclosing the ambiguity of female self-determination in both literary and social worlds. The agency, freedom and ownership of the bodies is therefore dynamic and changeable as opposed to absolute or unqualified.

This research provides a way to further research. The same analysis would apply to the modern novels and media stories about female independence, living a career-driven life, and non-conventional ways to live. Through the application of feminist stylistics and cognitive metaphor analysis to other literary or cultural works, researchers can further explain how language has always been used to create, reflect and or contest the modern gendered experience.

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