

Feminist Stylistic and Visual-Semiotic Analysis of Selected Contemporary Films: Implications for Multimodal ESL Pedagogy

Nicole Venice O. Ambrosio, LPT¹, Hilda A. Manzolim, PhD¹

¹Isabela State University-Central Graduate School, San Fabian, Echague, Isabela, Philippines

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Email of Corresponding Author: ambrosionicolevenice.works@gmail.com

Abstract

This study examined women's empowerment in *Damsel*, *Swiped*, and *The Lost Daughter* through feminist stylistic and visual-semiotic analysis to inform the development of gender-inclusive multimodal ESL learning materials. Grounded in Third-Wave Feminism and supported by feminist stylistics, visual grammar, multiliteracies pedagogy, and theoretical triangulation, the study employed a qualitative, interpretative, text-based, comparative multiple-case design. It did not involve human respondents; instead, the data consisted of selected scenes, dialogue excerpts, screenshots, timestamps, and visual elements from the three films. The films were chosen through criterion-based purposive sampling, while the researcher-constructed instrument included thematic, narrative, feminist stylistic, and visual-semiotic matrices. Findings revealed five recurring themes: patriarchal oppression and gender inequality, psychological and emotional struggle, generational trauma and inherited expectations, resilience and survival, and female agency and empowerment. The films challenged traditional gender roles through revisionist fantasy, institutional realism, psychological narration, role reversal, symbolism, satire, and female-centered storytelling. Feminist stylistic analysis showed that lexical, syntactic, and discourse patterns may encode oppression but may also function as tools for resistance and narrative reclamation. Visual-semiotic analysis further showed that framing, gaze, gesture, lighting, and color externalized women's struggle, resilience, autonomy, and psychological complexity. The study concluded that feminist film analysis can be translated into multimodal ESL pedagogy for advanced learners, particularly through tasks that develop language proficiency, critical literacy, media literacy, and gender awareness. It aligns with SDG 4, Quality Education, and SDG 5, Gender Equality. Its sustainability impact lies in promoting inclusive education, gender-responsive learning, cultural awareness, and innovative use of contemporary media in ESL instruction.

Keywords: Critical Gender Awareness, Feminist Stylistics, Multimodal ESL Pedagogy, Third-Wave Feminism, Visual-Semiotic Analysis, Women's Empowerment

1. Introduction

This study examines women's empowerment in *Damsel* (2024), *Swiped* (2025), and *The Lost Daughter* (2021) through feminist stylistic and visual-semiotic analysis to inform the development of gender-inclusive multimodal ESL learning materials. It investigates how contemporary films construct, reinforce, or challenge gender norms and patriarchal narratives through dialogue, narration, framing, gaze, gesture, color, symbolism, and narrative structure (De Lauretis, 1987 & Johnston, 1973). Grounded in Third-Wave Feminism, the study connects feminist film analysis with ESL pedagogy by translating linguistic and visual findings into instructional materials that support language development, critical literacy, and gender awareness.

Feminist stylistics examines how language reflects, constructs, and reinforces gender roles, power relations, and inequality. In film, visual semiotics extends this analysis by interpreting how framing, color, gaze, gesture, and camera movement communicate meanings related to gender, power, and identity. Contemporary films provide rich multimodal texts because they combine verbal, visual, auditory, and symbolic resources that can be used not only for cultural interpretation but also for English language learning. Although films are increasingly used in ESL instruction, limited research has systematically translated feminist stylistic and visual-semiotic analysis into structured instructional design. Existing studies on feminist film analysis often focus on representation, ideology, and critique, while studies on multimodal ESL pedagogy often use film as a language resource without applying systematic feminist analytical frameworks. This study addresses that gap by analyzing *Damsel* (2024), *Swiped* (2025), and *The Lost Daughter* (2021) and converting the findings into task-based ESL activities such as guided viewing, dialogue analysis, visual interpretation, and critical reflection.

The literature on feminism identifies different historical waves of women's rights movements. First-Wave Feminism emphasized women's legal rights and suffrage, with Wollstonecraft (1792) arguing that women should be treated as human beings rather than property, particularly in relation to educational and political opportunities. Mill (1869) also supported women's equality in education and political rights, although he still viewed many women as inclined toward conventional

roles. Second-Wave Feminism focused on social and cultural equality, reproductive rights, and occupational discrimination. Friedan (1963) argued that women should not be confined to domestic roles because they can pursue education, employment, and personal development. De Beauvoir (1949) emphasized the social construction of womanhood through the statement, “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (p. 283), while Millet (1970) argued that male dominance is socially constructed rather than biologically determined. Third-Wave Feminism, which emerged through media and pop culture, foregrounds diversity, individual empowerment, and intersectionality (Baumgardner, Richards, & Hooks, 2000). The Fourth-Wave later expanded feminist activism through digital media, including movements addressing body shaming, sexual harassment, and criminal sexual culture (Cochrane, 2013). Among these, Third-Wave Feminism is most relevant to the present study because it emphasizes agency, individuality, diversity, and intersectionality in contemporary representations of women. Studies on contemporary cinema show that women are increasingly portrayed as active agents who resist patriarchal ideologies across cultural contexts (Kumar, 2024; Dhanya Shankar, 2025; Sanders, 2024; Ofori, 2024). These portrayals allow women to challenge traditional gender stereotypes and redefine personal development (Rohman, 2013). However, representation remains uneven because some films continue to reproduce objectification and ideological tension even while presenting women as resilient and autonomous (Gransden, 2024; Yang, 2024).

In Philippine cinema, women’s representation has shifted from submissive and patriarchal portrayals to more complex and empowered characterizations. Contemporary films increasingly depict women as independent and influential, while horror figures such as the aswang symbolize both resistance to male dominance and the persistence of social constraints shaping female identity (Gamayo et al., 2024; Arceño et al., 2025). These findings suggest that women’s empowerment in film is visible but ideologically unstable, often moving between resistance and patriarchal containment. Comparative studies further show that contemporary films may foreground women’s agency while still being shaped by patriarchal structures. Feminist film analyses present women as survivors and agents of resistance (Keeler, 2016; McDonough, 2017), while dystopian and transnational feminist films create spaces for challenging oppression (Bromage, 2023; Bhasin & Jain, 2021). However, stereotypes remain evident across film traditions: Hollywood may combine progressive narratives with verbal objectification, while Nollywood often reinforces women’s dependence on men (Martin et al., 2025). Philippine cinema frequently frames women through labor, devotion, romance, sacrifice, and social constraint (Tolentino, 2012; Ancheta, 2016; Pilar & Ferrer, 2024). Horror and revenge films may also equate empowerment with survival, trauma, suffering, and violence while limiting women’s intellectual agency and reinforcing neoliberal or patriarchal ideals of resilience and victimhood (Cowan & O’Brien, 1990; Welsh, 2010; Fairfax, 2014; Jones, 2015; Anderson, 2024; Veit-Wild and Dangarembga, 2005). Feminist stylistics provides a linguistic basis for analyzing these representations. Feminist narratology and stylistics explain how narrative structures and linguistic choices may reinforce or challenge patriarchal norms (Amerian & Jofi, 2015). Grammar and discourse may function as tools of resistance, memory, and empowerment (Chijoke et al., 2025). However, studies also show that men are often constructed as dominant agents through leadership-oriented language, while women are associated with supportive or deferential roles (Masimli, 2025; Zahoor & Zaidi, 2024). At the same time, assertive verbs and empowering adjectives can construct women as independent and resilient, thereby challenging gender stereotypes (Sitorus et al., 2025). Visual-semiotic studies also show that film techniques contribute to women’s empowerment or objectification. Close-ups, framing, camera movement, selective focus, and visual composition can emphasize women’s emotional depth, resilience, autonomy, and strength (Chusna, 2024; Nakassis, 2025; Salsabiila et al., 2025; Bhat, 2025). However, the same techniques may also reinforce patriarchal and male-gaze perspectives by aestheticizing women’s bodies, emphasizing vulnerability, and limiting agency through restrictive framing (Ifthikhar & Islam, 2017; Khederi, 2023; Sohail & Ahmad, 2024). Gazes and gestures likewise communicate awareness, introspection, vulnerability, desire, autonomy, resistance, and moral authority (Bezerra, 2012; Nadala, 2023; Fanaqi et al., 2025). Color grading and composition further shape women’s emotional and symbolic representation, with bright palettes associated with desirability and sexualization (Ijaz & Saddiqa, 2025), while dark tones, shadows, ruins, and muted colors communicate tension, resilience, vulnerability, and moral conflict (Yunus & Aswar, 2024). Specific colors and visual elements may also signify femininity, power, motherhood, sacrifice, cultural expectations, psychological tension, and hope (Rahmawati & Suyudi, 2023; Nurudeen et al., 2021).

In ESL pedagogy, multimodal literacy enhances language proficiency, motivation, and meaning-making by integrating visual, auditory, textual, and digital resources (Wang, 2022; Jamil & Aziz, 2021; Al-Muttairi & Al-Alusi, 2025). Video-based instruction, ICT integration, and multimedia platforms support diverse learning styles, retention, and independent learning (Nallaya, 2010; Ganapathy & Seetharam, 2016; Kummin et al., 2020; Ferrari et al., 2022). Multiliteracies pedagogy also connects learners’ real-life and academic discourses while strengthening teachers’ digital and instructional competencies (Els, 2021; Li, 2020; Early et al., 2015). Feminist pedagogy in ESL promotes inclusive and equitable learning environments by valuing student voices, supporting egalitarian teacher–student relationships, and challenging gender, racial, and cultural inequalities (Laverick, 2008; Pereira da Silva, 2024). It helps learners recognize and dismantle heteronormative and patriarchal biases through language texts and classroom discussions (Granger & Gerlach, 2024). It also incorporates postcolonial, third-wave, and Black feminist perspectives to examine intersections of gender, race, and

marginalization while developing language skills through empathy, collaboration, debates, and communicative activities (Tejero, 2013; Hammarström, 2015; Asanov, 2022).

Locally and nationally, the study is relevant to Philippine education because it supports gender-sensitive and multimodal approaches to English language teaching. It also responds to the continuing need for instructional materials that develop communicative competence, critical literacy, media awareness, and sensitivity to social issues. In the Philippine cultural context, the shift in women's cinematic representation from submissive roles to more empowered and complex identities provides a meaningful basis for classroom discussion and language learning (Gamayo et al., 2024; Arceño et al., 2025). Globally, the study is situated within broader feminist and educational discussions on gender representation, critical media literacy, and inclusive pedagogy. Contemporary cinema across cultures increasingly presents women as agents of resistance, although these representations remain shaped by genre, ideology, and cultural expectations (Kumar, 2024; Dhanya Shankar, 2025; Sanders, 2024; Ofori, 2024; Gransden, 2024; Yang, 2024). By using films as multimodal texts, the study connects global feminist media analysis with ESL pedagogy and demonstrates how popular culture may be transformed into critical, gender-responsive learning resources.

The study is grounded in Third-Wave Feminism (Walker, 1992), which emphasizes agency, individuality, intersectionality, and diverse representations of women. This framework supports the analysis of contemporary female protagonists whose empowerment is shaped by personal, social, cultural, and institutional conditions. The study also draws on Mills' (1995) feminist stylistic framework to analyze lexical, syntactic, and discourse features that construct gendered meanings. At the lexical level, the analysis examines naming, labeling, gendered titles, semantic derogation, and lexical asymmetry. At the syntactic level, it considers transitivity, presupposition, sentence structure, modality, and hedging. At the discourse level, it examines subject-object positioning, silencing, patriarchal discourse, and figurative language. For visual analysis, the study uses Kress & van Leeuwen (1996) visual grammar to interpret images as multimodal signs. This framework supports the analysis of camera techniques, framing, gaze, gesture, color, composition, and symbolism in constructing women's agency, vulnerability, resistance, and empowerment. These frameworks are extended into pedagogy through the multiliteracies model of the New London Group (1996), which enables the translation of analytical findings into ESL instructional design. The study also applies theoretical triangulation based on Denzin (1978) to strengthen multidimensional interpretation. Conceptually, the study follows an input-process-output logic. The input includes the selected films, thematic clustering, narrative analysis, feminist stylistic analysis, and visual-semiotic analysis. The process involves within-case and cross-case synthesis and the translation of findings into feminist-informed multimodal ESL pedagogy. The intended output is a set of multimodal ESL learning materials designed to support language learning outcomes and critical gender awareness.

The main gap addressed by the study is the limited integration of feminist stylistic and visual-semiotic film analysis with ESL instructional material development. Prior research has examined women's representation in film, gender ideologies, and feminist meanings in cinematic texts. Other studies have explored the usefulness of films and multimodal texts in ESL instruction. However, these two areas are usually studied separately. Feminist stylistic and visual-semiotic analyses often remain within interpretive or theoretical domains, while ESL studies using film rarely employ systematic feminist analytical frameworks that support gender-sensitive pedagogy. This study responds to that gap by analyzing how *Damsel* (2024), *Swiped* (2025), and *The Lost Daughter* (2021) represent women's empowerment through recurring themes, narrative techniques, female agency, visual elements, and linguistic patterns. It then translates the findings into prototype multimodal ESL learning materials for advanced learners. The study is therefore significant because it links film studies, feminist theory, stylistics, visual semiotics, and ESL pedagogy in one instructional framework.

The study aligns most directly with SDG 5 – Gender Equality because it examines how selected contemporary films represent women's empowerment, agency, independence, and resistance against patriarchal norms. By analyzing feminist themes and translating them into classroom materials, the study supports gender awareness and encourages learners to critically examine gender stereotypes, discrimination, and unequal power relations. The study also aligns with SDG 4 – Quality Education because it develops multimodal ESL learning materials intended to promote communicative competence, critical thinking, media literacy, and inclusive language learning. Its use of authentic films, guided viewing, dialogue analysis, and critical reflection supports learner engagement and provides opportunities for meaningful language use. The study's integration of feminist pedagogy and multimodal literacy also contributes to more inclusive and socially responsive English language instruction.

The study contributes to educational sustainability by proposing ESL materials that integrate language learning with critical literacy, media literacy, and gender awareness. This supports instruction that is not limited to grammar or vocabulary development but also develops learners' ability to interpret social meanings in multimodal texts. It contributes to gender and social sustainability by promoting critical discussion of women's empowerment, patriarchal norms, workplace inequality, motherhood expectations, and female agency. Through feminist stylistic and visual-semiotic analysis, the study encourages learners and educators to recognize how language and images can either reinforce or challenge inequality. It

also contributes to cultural sustainability by using contemporary films as cultural texts that reflect changing attitudes toward women's identity, autonomy, resilience, and representation. Since films are accessible multimodal resources, they can help learners connect language learning with cultural interpretation and social awareness.

Finally, the study contributes to digital and innovation sustainability in education by supporting the use of visual, auditory, textual, and digital resources in ESL instruction. Its proposed multimodal materials demonstrate how contemporary media can be transformed into structured, critical, and gender-responsive learning resources for advanced ESL learners.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study used a qualitative, interpretative, text-based research design grounded in Third-Wave Feminism and framed within a comparative multiple-case approach. It analyzed the thematic, linguistic, visual, and narrative representations of women's empowerment in *Damsel*, *Swiped*, and *The Lost Daughter*. Feminist stylistic and visual-semiotic analysis were applied to examine how gendered meanings were constructed through dialogue, narration, visual composition, camera techniques, symbolism, and narrative structure. The design also supported the development of theory-informed prototype multimodal ESL learning resources for advanced learners.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study did not involve a physical research locale because it was text-based and film-based. The primary sources were three full-length English-language contemporary films: *Damsel* (2024), directed by Juan Carlos Fresnadillo; *The Lost Daughter* (2021), directed by Maggie Gyllenhaal; and *Swiped* (2025), directed by Rachel Lee Goldenberg. These films served as the research context for examining feminist meanings and for informing the development of multimodal ESL learning materials.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The study did not involve human respondents. Instead, the data consisted of selected scenes, dialogue excerpts, screenshots, timestamps, and visual elements from the three films. These materials were used to examine representations of women's empowerment through feminist stylistic, visual-semiotic, thematic, narrative, and comparative analyses.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The films were selected through criterion-based purposive sampling. They were chosen because they feature female-centered narratives, engage with feminist themes such as autonomy, resistance, and systemic oppression, use rich multimodal storytelling techniques, were produced between 2020 and 2025, and contain authentic English dialogue with pedagogical relevance for ESL instruction. Dubbed and translated versions were excluded. Scene selection was conducted after full-film viewing and preliminary thematic coding. Only scenes with thematic relevance, narrative significance, linguistic richness, visual-semiotic salience, and empowerment-focused content were included. Approximately five to ten scenes per film were selected, resulting in a total of about twenty to thirty scenes across the three films.

2.5 Research Instrument

The study used a researcher-constructed qualitative instrument within a multiple-case framework. The instrument incorporated thematic analysis, narrative structure analysis, visual-semiotic analysis, and feminist stylistic analysis to examine how women's empowerment was represented through linguistic, visual, and narrative elements. To ensure analytical rigor and minimize researcher bias, the study used a structured three-tiered analytical instrument grounded in Feminist Stylistics (Mills, 1995). The lexical level examined word-level gender bias, including sexist naming, gendered titles, patronizing vocabulary, semantic derogation, gendered collocation, and lexical asymmetry. The syntactic level focused on sentence-level power relations, including transitivity, presupposition, sentence fragmentation, conjunction, modality, and hedging. The discourse level examined broader ideological patterns, including subject-object positioning, silencing, negation, representation of women, patriarchal discourse, and figurative language.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Data were gathered through repeated viewing of *Damsel*, *Swiped*, and *The Lost Daughter*. The researcher documented relevant scenes using field notes and organized them into a scene identification and documentation log. Each film was first examined independently through within-case analysis using narrative, feminist stylistic, and visual-semiotic matrices. The findings from each film were then synthesized to interpret how women's empowerment was represented. Afterward, cross-case analysis was conducted to identify similarities, differences, recurring themes, and broader patterns across the three films. The results were then translated into a pedagogical framework for developing prototype multimodal ESL learning materials. Transcripts, screenshots, coding grids, matrices, and synthesis notes were systematically archived to support transparency, dependability, confirmability, and audit trail documentation.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data consisted of timestamps, selected scene segments, empowerment codes, screenshots, and dialogue excerpts. These were transcribed and analyzed manually using Microsoft Word. Open coding was used to identify recurring themes, narrative patterns, linguistic features, and visual elements related to women's empowerment. Linguistic features were categorized according to lexical, syntactic, and discourse levels, while visual data were examined through annotated screenshots with timestamps. The codes were then grouped into broader categories and themes, compared across the three films, and interpreted in relation to the theoretical framework.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

The study did not involve human participants and therefore posed no direct risk to individuals. The data were drawn from publicly available films used strictly for academic analysis. All sources were properly cited, and screenshots were used under fair use principles for criticism and scholarship. The study followed Isabela State University research ethics guidelines, particularly on academic integrity, copyright compliance, and responsible data management.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Findings on Women's Empowerment and Cinematic Representation

3.1.1 Recurring Themes of Women's Empowerment

The analysis revealed five recurring themes across the selected films: patriarchal oppression and gender inequality, psychological and emotional struggle, generational trauma and inherited expectations, resilience and survival, and female agency and empowerment. These themes appeared differently across the films. *Damsel* presented women's empowerment through physical survival and resistance to sacrificial patriarchal traditions; *Swiped* showed professional marginalization and resistance within a male-dominated corporate environment; and *The Lost Daughter* explored maternal identity, emotional repression, and psychological struggle. Across the three films, the protagonists confronted systems that attempted to silence, control, or define them. These findings show that women's empowerment is represented not as a single experience but as a varied struggle shaped by social, institutional, and personal conditions. The themes align with third-wave feminist principles because they emphasize agency, resistance, and the multiplicity of women's experiences. However, consistent with Pilar and Ferrer (2024), the analysis also shows that women continue to experience structural constraints despite the presence of empowerment narratives.

3.1.2 Narrative Techniques and Devices Challenging Traditional Gender Roles

The films used different narrative structures to challenge traditional gender expectations. *Damsel* employed a linear revisionist fantasy structure that reversed the damsel-in-distress trope and transformed the prince figure into a source of danger. *Swiped* used an institutional realist structure to present gender inequality within corporate and technological spaces. *The Lost Daughter* used fragmented, non-linear psychological narration to portray maternal ambivalence and unresolved emotional conflict. Across the films, setting, role reversal, symbolism, satire, female-centered narration, and narrative resolution functioned as devices that moved the protagonists from passive positioning toward self-determination. These findings indicate that contemporary media can subvert conventional story structures across diverse genres. While some studies argue that empowerment narratives may still reproduce ideological hierarchies (Baines, 2015), the films analyzed in this study spanning fantasy, corporate drama, and psychological narratives, demonstrate active resistance to patriarchal systems. This supports Bromage's (2023) view of alternative narrative spaces where women challenge oppression. Across the three films, protagonists evolve from passive figures into active agents of change, reinforcing earlier findings that female characters increasingly embody feminist agency (Keeler, 2016; McDonough, 2017).

3.1.3 Comparative Representation of Female Agency, Independence, and Resistance

The three films shared a common representation of women as figures of agency, independence, and resistance. However, the forms of empowerment differed according to narrative context. *Damsel* emphasized physical survival and self-sufficiency, *Swiped* highlighted professional navigation and economic sovereignty, and *The Lost Daughter* foregrounded psychological adversity and emotional resilience. Resistance also varied across the films, appearing through the disruption of fairytale conventions, workplace sexism, and oppressive motherhood norms. These differences show that female empowerment is an adaptable spectrum rather than a uniform experience. Women exercise agency through diverse forms of resistance depending on their sociocultural contexts (Bhasin & Jain, 2021; Bromage, 2023). Their independence shaped by physical self-sufficiency, economic and professional sovereignty, or emotional resilience, as De Beauvoir (1949) views womanhood as socially constructed, allowing women to redefine themselves through physical, professional or emotional autonomy. Lastly their resistance targeted different milestone and expectations through disrupting fairytale narratives, disrupting workplace sexism, and disrupting oppressive motherhood norms, similar research argued that female characters symbolize resistance against male domination while remaining constrained by social expectations (Gamayo, Bien-Munsayac, & Calicdan-Del Campo, 2024).

3.1.4 Feminist Stylistic Patterns in the Selected Films

The feminist stylistic analysis identified patterns at the lexical, syntactic, and discourse levels. At the lexical level, gendered labels, patronizing vocabulary, derogatory terms, gendered collocations, and lexical asymmetry showed how language can reduce women to restrictive roles. At the syntactic level, the analysis showed how sentence structures positioned male characters as active agents while women were sometimes framed as passive objects; however, women also reclaimed agency through self-directed utterances, fragmented speech, hedging, and direct responses. At the discourse level, the films showed patriarchal control through subject-object positioning, silencing, negation, figurative language, and ideological framing, while the female protagonists used direct confrontation to expose deception, reject subordination, and reclaim their narratives. The application of Mills' (1995) feminist stylistics framework reveals how linguistic structures contribute to the construction of gendered meanings. At the lexical level, word choices often encode bias and reinforce restrictive gender roles. At the syntactic level, women's speech is frequently characterized by fragmentation and hesitation, reflecting structural constraints, while dominant discourse employs more assertive forms. At the discourse level, however, women challenge these constraints through direct confrontation and narrative reclamation. These findings both support and complicate existing literature, suggesting that while language may reflect inequality, it can also serve as a tool for resistance.

3.1.5 Visual-Semiotic Patterns of Women's Empowerment

The visual-semiotic analysis showed that camera framing, angle, gaze, gesture, lighting, and color contributed to the depiction of women's empowerment. In *Damsel*, medium close-up framing, eye-level angle, unbalanced composition, defensive posture, natural lighting, and orange-red tones emphasized danger, struggle, resilience, and transformation. In *Swiped*, close-up framing, eye-level angle, unbalanced composition, horizontal gaze, restrained gestures, low-key lighting, and monochromatic red tones emphasized emotional pressure, confrontation, and internal strength. In *The Lost Daughter*, close-up framing, obstructed composition, horizontal gaze, assertive posture, muted color palette, natural lighting, and green, blue, and white tones externalized psychological conflict, maternal ambivalence, and emotional complexity. The visual-semiotic findings demonstrate that framing, gaze, gesture, color, and lighting construct women's autonomy, resilience, and psychological complexity by externalizing internal conflict and challenging traditional gender archetypes, thereby extending Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) visual grammar to cinematic narratives. Medium close-up and close-up shots at eye level highlight the emotional depth, vulnerability, and resilience of female protagonists, supporting the findings of Chusna (2024) and Nakassis (2025). Obstructed and unbalanced framing, together with downward gazes, defensive postures, and assertive gestures, represent tension, constrained agency, self-preservation, and resistance, aligning with Bezerra (2012) and Fanaqi et al. (2025), while contrasting with Fairfax's (2014) argument that aesthetic framing may substitute for genuine narrative autonomy. Moreover, high-contrast lighting, monochrome palettes, muted tones, and symbolic colors such as red, orange, green, blue, yellow, purple, gold, black, and white communicate emotional intensity, identity conflict, maternal struggle, transformation, feminine power, wisdom, and resistance to patriarchy, reinforcing the color-semiotic interpretations (Ijaz & Saddiq, 2025; Nurudeen, et al., 2021; Rahmawati & Suyudi, 2023).

3.2 Pedagogical Translation into Multimodal ESL Learning Materials

The synthesized findings were translated into a multimodal ESL framework for advanced learners at the C1-C2 CEFR level. The framework used women's empowerment as the central theme and drew from *Damsel*, *Swiped*, and *The Lost Daughter* as film sources. It emphasized a multiliteracies approach, multimodal learning, and critical literacy tasks. The proposed activities connected recurring empowerment themes, narrative devices, comparative structures, lexical patterns, syntactic patterns, discourse patterns, and visual-semiotic patterns with advanced ESL competencies such as critical reading, sociolinguistic awareness, ideological analysis, nuanced argumentation, metalinguistic awareness, pragmatic communication, visual literacy, and multimodal textual analysis. The implication of the synthesized findings for the multimodal ESL pedagogy is the advanced language fluency cannot be achieved through grammar drills alone because the true fluency requires the simultaneous development of social consciousness, media literacy, and critical thinking. This finding supported by Wang (2022) that multimodal literacy improves real communicative competence. Even Granger & Gerlach (2024) view feminist and critical pedagogy beyond grammar drills. This multiliteracies include social and cultural awareness (Els, 2021; Li, 2020; Early et al. 2015).

3.3 Integrative Synthesis of Findings

The overall findings show that the three films collectively represent women's struggle for autonomy against systemic oppression, gender inequality, and societal expectations. Contemporary media was shown to subvert traditional narrative structures across different settings that oppress women. The analysis further revealed that empowerment differs according to context: *Damsel* centers on physical survival and fairytale subversion, *Swiped* focuses on professional autonomy and resistance to workplace sexism, and *The Lost Daughter* presents emotional resilience and resistance to restrictive motherhood ideals. Feminist stylistic patterns showed that word choices, sentence structures, and discourse practices may encode oppression, while visual-semiotic patterns showed how framing, gaze, gesture, color, and lighting can externalize conflict and establish autonomy. These findings demonstrate that women's empowerment across the three selected contemporary films can be understood through recurring themes, narrative structures, feminist stylistics, and visual-semiotic frameworks. Feminist stylistics of Mills (1995) divides in three categorical patterns, while visual-semiotic patterns

align with Kress & van Leeuwen (1996) framework. The synthesized findings can also be adapted into a multimodal ESL pedagogy in multiliteracies approach (New London Group, 1996). These theoretical triangulations of Denzin (1978) creates research and development framework aligned with quality education (SDG 4) and gender equality (SDG 5), specifically focuses in women's empowerment and multimodal ESL pedagogy.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

This qualitative text-based study analyzed *Damsel*, *Swiped*, and *The Lost Daughter* through feminist stylistic and visual-semiotic analysis grounded in third-wave feminism within a comparative multiple-case framework. The findings showed that the three films present women's struggle for autonomy against systemic oppression, gender inequality, and societal motherhood expectations, while contemporary media subverts traditional narrative structures across different settings of oppression. The films collectively dismantle patriarchal norms, reclaim bodily autonomy, and foreground women's control over their futures, although female agency, independence, and resistance differ through physical survival and self-sufficiency, professional navigation and economic sovereignty, and psychological motherhood adversity and emotional resilience. Feminist stylistics, following Mills (1995), revealed that lexical choices may encode oppression, syntactic patterns may show fragmented and hesitant female speech against rigid patriarchal structures, and discourse may expose deception, reject subordination, and reclaim women's narratives. Visual-semiotic patterns also subvert traditional and contemporary archetypes by externalizing internal conflict, building resilience, and establishing female autonomy, consistent with Kress & van Leeuwen (1996). Overall, the synthesized findings demonstrate that women's empowerment in contemporary films can be adapted into multimodal ESL pedagogy through the multiliteracies approach of the New London Group (1996), supported by the theoretical triangulation of Denzin (1978), and aligned with quality education (SDG 4) and gender equality (SDG 5).

Future studies may test the proposed framework in other forms of digital media, including video games, social media reels, and television series. Researchers may also examine non-Western contemporary films, particularly Filipino films, to determine whether they use different linguistic and visual patterns to reject systemic oppression. Further research may measure the actual language proficiency and critical thinking gains of ESL students who use the proposed multimodal pedagogy. Future projects may also expand Third-Wave feminist analysis by examining how race, class, and geography intersect with linguistic oppression. In addition, future researchers may submit the framework to ESL and multimedia experts for formal validation.

The study was limited to three selected contemporary films, namely *Damsel*, *Swiped*, and *The Lost Daughter*, which served as the primary data sources. It focused only on selected scenes based on predefined inclusion criteria rather than analyzing the entirety of each film. Dubbed and translated versions were excluded, and the analysis was limited to a qualitative feminist stylistic and visual-semiotic framework. The proposed multimodal ESL design framework was developed only as a prototype based on the synthesized findings and was not piloted, implemented, or empirically tested in an actual classroom.

Compliance with ethical standards

This study complied with institutional ethical standards and responsible research conduct. Since it involved only publicly available films and did not include human participants, voluntary participation, informed consent, and confidentiality procedures were not applicable; however, all materials were used strictly for academic criticism, analysis, and scholarship. The researcher observed proper citation practices, respected copyright ownership of the selected films, and used screenshots and excerpts only within fair use principles. No conflict of interest was declared, and all individuals who contributed to the completion of the study were properly acknowledged. The researcher assumes full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and ethical handling of all research materials and interpretations presented in the study.

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