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Research Article

Unmasking Patriarchy Through Language Indexicality: Masculine Ideals In When Life Gives You Tangerines

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Abstract

Masculinity in contemporary media discourse is increasingly understood as socially constructed and linguistically mediated; however, limited scholarship examines how generational masculinities are indexed in non-Western transnational television texts. Existing studies predominantly focus on Western media representations, creating a gap in understanding how Asian dramas circulate and influence gender ideologies within Southeast Asian sociocultural contexts. This study investigates how masculinity is linguistically constructed, negotiated, and reconfigured in the Korean television series *When Life Gives You Tangerines*, with particular attention to its reception within Filipino patriarchal sociocultural frameworks. Anchored in Patriarchal Theory and Indexicality Theory, the research conceptualizes language as a semiotic resource that signals gendered identities, power relations, and generational values. Using qualitative and multimodal discourse analysis, the study examines selected dialogues among male characters representing Generations X, Y, and Z to identify linguistic and pragmatic markers associated with authority, responsibility, vulnerability, and relational engagement. The findings reveal three generationally distinct indexical masculinities. Generation X masculinity reflects authoritative and hierarchical discourse patterns that reinforce traditional patriarchal authority and social dominance. Generation Y masculinity demonstrates negotiated and relational discourse, emphasizing shared responsibility, collaborative decision-making, and evolving gender expectations. Generation Z masculinity emerges through expressive and affective discourse, highlighting emotional openness, validation, and interpersonal sensitivity. The study demonstrates that masculinity in transnational media is not a fixed patriarchal construct but a dynamic identity shaped through interactional choices and generational stylistic variation. The research foregrounds indexical meanings in televised dialogue and contributes to global stylistics and discourse studies, positioning media discourse as a site where masculine ideologies are simultaneously reproduced and transformed. The findings also offer implications for critical language pedagogy, gender-responsive media literacy, and inclusive discourse frameworks within cross-cultural communication contexts.

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1. Introduction

Masculinity in contemporary society no longer exists as a fixed or monolithic ideal but emerges through everyday interactions, personal negotiations, and mediated cultural representations. Masculine expectations continue to shape identity formation, interpersonal relationships, and social positioning across diverse contexts. These expectations function as both cultural standards and social benchmarks that influence how men construct authority, express emotions, and negotiate relational roles (Edwards, 2025; Hine, 2024). Consequently, masculinity remains deeply embedded within gendered norms that sustain and reproduce patriarchal social structures.

The sociolinguistic concept of indexicality provides a critical framework for understanding how masculine identities are constructed through language. Indexicality emphasizes that linguistic forms enable function as social signs that project meanings beyond propositional content, allowing speakers to perform and negotiate identities in context (Steele, 2024; Visakko & Lehtonen, 2024). Within patriarchal environments, discourse frequently encodes masculine attributes associated with authority, dominance, and control, reinforcing hierarchical power relations and shaping expectations regarding male conduct and social presence (Henzel, 2023).

Media discourse represents a significant site where such gendered identities are both reflected and renegotiated. The Korean television series *When Life Gives You Tangerines* (2025) presents nuanced portrayals of male identity through character-driven narratives and interactional dialogue. The series has achieved substantial transnational reach, particularly in the Philippines, where Korean dramas maintain a strong cultural influence. Reports from the Korea Creative Content Agency indicate that approximately 67% of Filipino audiences engage with Korean dramas weekly, with *When Life*

Gives You Tangerines ranking among the most-streamed titles (Ramachandran, 2025). Within this context, the series contributes to the evolving public discourse on male vulnerability, relational masculinity, and shifting gender expectations.

Despite increasing global media exposure, Filipino society continues to operate within enduring patriarchal value systems that shape perceptions of masculinity and authority (Canibel et al., 2024). Masculinity often manifests through hierarchical and manipulative relational dynamics that sustain institutional and interpersonal power asymmetries (Lafrance & Hoebanx, 2025).

Although younger generations increasingly critique traditional gender norms, tensions persist between socially constructed masculine personas and evolving expectations surrounding emotional expression and relational equality (Marshall et al., 2019; Risan, 2018). These tensions illustrate how masculine performances that emphasize decisiveness and control frequently restrict emotional vulnerability and limit equitable gender relations (Sanz, 2024). In this study, Filipino sociocultural perspectives function as an interpretive lens that facilitates examination of how transnational media representations resonate within local patriarchal discourses.

Despite growing scholarship on gender and media, few studies have examined the linguistic construction of masculinity in non-Western transnational television texts, particularly Korean dramas widely consumed by Filipino audiences (Cabañes & Uy-Tioco, 2024). Existing research often privileges visual representation and narrative analysis while underexamining how indexical linguistic features within dialogue naturalize, reproduce, or contest masculine norms. This study addresses this gap through a sociolinguistic analysis of media discourse that foregrounds

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language as a site of gender identity construction.

This research also aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5, which promotes gender equality and empowerment across social institutions. Examining masculinity through linguistic and discursive frameworks contributes to this objective by critically interrogating rigid gender ideologies and identifying discursive spaces that support inclusive gender representations. Although the series originates from a Korean cultural context, its thematic engagement with masculinity demonstrates how patriarchal ideologies circulate across global media networks and intersect with localized sociocultural realities.

The primary objective of this study is to investigate how indexicality shapes and projects masculine ideals in media discourse through analysis of the Korean television series *When Life Gives You Tangerines*. Specifically, the study identifies linguistic and pragmatic features that construct masculine identities across spectrums of authority, relationality, vulnerability, and resistance.

Using a qualitative discourse analytic design, the research systematically examines character dialogue and narrative interaction through sociolinguistic and multimodal frameworks. This analytical approach contributes to a deeper understanding of the relationship between language, identity performance, and gendered power relations.

The findings of this study hold interdisciplinary significance across literature, linguistics, and media studies. Within literary scholarship, the research extends the analysis of character construction and narrative representation within patriarchal frameworks. Within linguistics, the study advances theoretical discussions of indexicality and the construction of gender identity in cross-cultural discourse contexts. At national and international research levels, the study provides empirical evidence and

conceptual insights that support comparative investigations of gender representation in global media, thereby contributing to broader scholarly efforts that promote gender equity and inclusive social transformation.

Research Questions

In this study, the research questions are crafted to investigate how masculine ideals are constructed, negotiated, and challenged through language in the film *When Life Gives You Tangerines*. Using discourse analysis and the concept of language indexicality, this study aims to unmask the subtle operations of patriarchy as reflected in the characters' dialogues and interactions. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do linguistic features in the Korean series *When Life Gives You Tangerines* index and project masculine ideals such as dominance, authority, vulnerability, and resistance based on intergenerational perspectives?
2. In what ways do these indexical representations of masculinity reinforce or challenge patriarchal norms within Filipino cultural and social contexts?
3. How can the findings on the linguistic construction of masculinity in *When Life Gives You Tangerines* contribute to developing more inclusive narratives in media and academic discourse on gender?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its potential to illuminate how masculinity, as constructed through media language, influences cultural understanding and social behavior across diverse contexts.

In the Filipino setting, where patriarchal traditions continue to shape family and community relations, examining masculine ideals in Korean drama provides insights into

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how foreign cultural texts intersect with local experiences.

Within the field of gender and development, the study offers a deeper understanding of how linguistic representations sustain or challenge power dynamics, thereby opening up possibilities for more equitable gender discourses.

For multi-generational viewers, the findings encourage critical reflection on how media narratives shape attitudes toward masculinity, whether reinforcing traditional expectations or allowing new interpretations.

In academia, language teachers and learners can benefit from the study's focus on indexicality, as it demonstrates how language constructs identity and ideology in subtle yet impactful ways, thereby enriching pedagogical approaches and promoting critical literacy skills.

Theoretical Lens

This study employs Patriarchal Theory (Waters, 1989) as one of its primary lenses to examine how language reflects, reinforces, and reproduces dominant masculine ideals in *When Life Gives You Tangerines*. Patriarchal Theory posits that societies organize social structures to privilege men and masculine values while subordinating women and femininity (Risman, 2018). As a systemic and institutionalized form of male dominance, patriarchy permeates social, cultural, and linguistic practices, shaping norms around gender identity, behavior, and power (Lindsey, 2020).

In this study, the theory provides a framework for analyzing how language serves as a medium through which male authority and hegemonic masculinity are enacted. Examination of speech patterns, word choices, and communicative strategies of male characters reveals how ordinary dialogue encodes patriarchal assumptions, naturalizing dominance and marginalizing alternative forms of masculinity. This perspective encourages researchers to

interrogate not only explicit statements but also the implicit social hierarchies embedded in language, offering a deeper understanding of gendered power relations within media narratives.

Complementing this approach, Indexicality Theory, as developed by Moore and Podesva (2009), frames the analysis of how language signals social meanings and constructs identities in specific contexts. Indexicality Theory posits that linguistic elements do not merely convey information; they also index social attributes such as gender, authority, and social position (Moore, 2020).

Within this research, indexicality clarifies how dialogue projects masculinity, communicates authority, or signals vulnerability in ways that align with or challenge patriarchal norms (Lawson, 2023). This perspective emphasizes the performative function of language, illustrating how identity and ideology emerge through interaction. Attention to indexical signs, including speech style, tone, and pragmatic choices, reveals the subtle mechanisms by which media discourse disseminates masculine ideals.

Together, Patriarchal Theory and Indexicality Theory create a comprehensive framework for understanding masculinity as both socially structured and linguistically enacted. Patriarchal Theory identifies the cultural and systemic forces shaping masculine norms, while Indexicality Theory demonstrates how these norms materialize in communicative practice. The dual application of these theories enables a holistic examination of the film, revealing how language mediates, reproduces, or contests power and identity.

This integrated perspective equips researchers with conceptual tools to uncover the complexities of gender representation and contributes to broader discussions of social behavior, media influence, and cultural transformation.

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2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Research Design

This study employs qualitative, text-based discourse analysis, grounded in Indexicality Theory, to examine how language constructs and negotiates masculine identities in *When Life Gives You Tangerines*. The research focuses exclusively on scripted dialogue and multimodal narrative interaction within the television series and does not involve human informants or audience-based interpretive validation.

Discourse analysis examines language in use through systematic investigation of communication patterns, interactional structures, and meaning-making processes within specific sociocultural contexts (Slembrouck, 2019). Indexicality provides a theoretical framework for explaining how linguistic forms signal social identities, interpersonal relationships, and ideological positions, enabling speakers to project attributes such as authority, vulnerability, and relational masculinity (Levon & Ye, 2020).

The corpus of the study consists of purposively selected dialogue sequences involving male characters representing Generations X, Y, and Z. Selection criteria include scenes that foreground interpersonal negotiation, expressions of authority or emotional vulnerability, and interactional exchanges that reflect masculine role performance. The analytic procedure follows a multi-stage coding process adapted from qualitative thematic analysis.

During the open coding stage, linguistic features such as lexical choice, speech style, tone, modality, and pragmatic functions are systematically identified and categorized. The axial coding stage then organizes these initial codes into relational categories that represent recurring masculine discursive patterns, including dominance, relational negotiation, emotional expressiveness, and resistance to patriarchal expectations. The selective coding stage synthesizes these categories into broader interpretive themes that explain how masculine

identities are discursively constructed and indexed across generational representations.

To enhance analytic rigor and reliability, the coding process involves two independent coders trained in discourse analysis and sociolinguistic interpretation. Coding consistency is evaluated through inter-coder agreement procedures, with discrepancies resolved through collaborative analytic discussion and reflexive re-examination of the data.

Reflexive validation is also employed to ensure transparency in interpretive decisions, with analytic memos documenting the rationale for coding, category development, and theoretical alignment. This systematic approach strengthens methodological credibility while allowing in-depth exploration of how conversational strategies, linguistic choices, and narrative structures contribute to the reinforcement, negotiation, or transformation of patriarchal masculine ideals in contemporary transnational media discourse.

2.2. Textual Corpus

The study utilizes a textual corpus derived from video transcripts of one complete season of *When Life Gives You Tangerines*, comprising sixteen episodes, to examine how masculine ideals are constructed and represented across generational contexts. The corpus focuses on dialogue sequences involving four central male characters who collectively represent multi-generational masculine identities.

The young character, Yang Gwan Sik, portrays youthful romantic masculinity through his role as the devoted lover of Oh Ae-sun. The adult character, Yang Gwan Sik, represents mature masculinity through paternal and marital responsibility. Park Yeong Bum embodies conflicted masculinity as Yang Geum-myeong's former romantic partner, while Park Chung Seob embodies supportive, relational masculinity as her husband during the narrative's resolution.

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These characters collectively represent Generation X, Generation Y, and Generation Z, enabling the study to examine generational variations in masculine identity construction.

Dialogue sampling employs purposive, theoretically driven selection criteria to ensure analytical relevance. A total of forty-eight scenes were selected across the sixteen episodes. Scenes qualified for inclusion when they satisfied at least one of the following criteria: (1) explicit articulation of authority, decision-making, or leadership roles; (2) interactional negotiation of relational responsibilities, including family, romantic, or social obligations; (3) expressions of emotional vulnerability or affective communication; and (4) discursive resistance to or reconfiguration of patriarchal gender expectations.

These “key dialogues” were selected because they foreground linguistic and pragmatic features that visibly index masculine identity performance and provide rich interactional contexts for discourse analysis. Scenes containing minimal character interaction or lacking gender-relevant discursive negotiation were excluded to maintain analytic focus.

To strengthen interpretive depth, the study incorporates audience-based interpretive validation through purposively selected informants representing different generational backgrounds. Informants were included if they had viewed the entire series and demonstrated the ability to reflect critically on character behavior, dialogue patterns, and gender representations. Individuals who had not completed the series, possessed only fragmented viewing experiences, or were unable to articulate gender-related observations were excluded. Informant insights function as supplementary interpretive data that confirm, clarify, or challenge discourse-analytic findings, rather than as primary analytic evidence.

Through triangulation between textual discourse analysis and interpretive validation, the study

enhances analytic credibility while preserving the primary focus on linguistic and narrative structures. This integrated approach enables a comprehensive examination of how indexical linguistic signals, interactional strategies, and narrative positioning reinforce, negotiate, or transform patriarchal masculine norms within transnational media discourse.

2.3 Instruments of the Study

This study uses video transcripts of Episodes 1–16 and forty-eight scenes from the Korean series *When Life Gives You Tangerines* as a multimodal research instrument. The transcripts capture spoken dialogue, along with relevant contextual and interactional cues derived from the audiovisual narrative.

Anchored in Patriarchal Theory and the concept of indexicality, these transcripts serve as the primary data source for analyzing how linguistic choices and narrative interactions index, reproduce, and negotiate masculine identities and patriarchal meanings within the series.

2.4 Procedure

The study begins with the systematic selection of the Korean series *When Life Gives You Tangerines* as the primary source of analysis. Researchers obtain complete episodes with clear audio and visual quality to ensure that all dialogue and character interactions are accessible for detailed discourse analysis. The video transcripts of Episodes 1–16 serve as a multimodal instrument, capturing both spoken dialogue and relevant contextual cues for analysis. Evaluators, serving as analysts of the instruments and results, systematically review the transcripts to identify linguistic features such as word choice, speech style, tone, and pragmatic functions.

Guided by Patriarchal Theory and the concept of indexicality, the evaluators analyze how language indexes masculinity, reinforces or challenges patriarchal norms, and negotiates identity within the narrative. The findings are synthesized to provide a comprehensive

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understanding of masculine ideals as represented in the series across the perspectives of Generations X, Y, and Z.

2.5 Data Analysis

This study employs multimodal discourse analysis as its primary analytical framework to examine how meaning emerges through the interaction of language, visual representation, auditory elements, and contextual interactional cues. Multimodal discourse analysis investigates how spoken dialogue, gestures, tone, pauses, facial expressions, and other semiotic resources operate simultaneously to construct social meanings and perform identities (Kress & Bezemer, 2023; Norris, 2004). The analytical framework is guided by Patriarchal Theory and Indexicality Theory, which together explain how linguistic and multimodal elements signal, reinforce, or contest masculine ideals within media narratives.

The study utilizes dialogue and multimodal transcripts derived from selected scenes in *When Life Gives You Tangerines*. The analytic process follows a systematic multi-stage workflow. First, transcription and segmentation were conducted to produce detailed multimodal transcripts that captured verbal dialogue, paralinguistic features, gesture, facial expression, camera framing, and relevant narrative context. Each scene was segmented into interactional units based on conversational turns and narrative shifts to facilitate precise analysis.

Second, indexical markers were identified through systematic coding of linguistic and multimodal features. These markers included lexical selection, speech style, modality, tone,

pragmatic functions, gesture patterns, spatial positioning, and visual framing that signaled masculine identity performance. Coding focused on identifying discursive indicators associated with authority, relational negotiation, emotional expression, and resistance to patriarchal expectations.

Third, generational comparison was conducted to examine how indexical markers varied across male characters representing Generations X, Y, and Z. This stage involved cross-case analysis to identify recurring patterns, contrasts, and stylistic variations in masculine discourse across generational portrayals.

Finally, a theoretical interpretation was undertaken by integrating Patriarchal Theory and Indexicality Theory to explain how multimodal and linguistic patterns construct, sustain, or transform masculine ideals within the narrative. This interpretive stage examined how interactional strategies, visual symbolism, and speech patterns collectively contribute to the reproduction or reconfiguration of patriarchal gender norms.

Through the integration of linguistic and multimodal analysis, the study provides a comprehensive examination of how masculine identities are discursively performed and socially negotiated in transnational media discourse. This methodological approach enables a nuanced interpretation of how patriarchal ideologies are simultaneously reinforced and contested across generational representations of masculinity.

3. Results and Discussions

The findings of this study provide insights into how language and interaction in the series construct, convey, and negotiate masculine

identities, offering a framework for understanding generational variations in perceptions of masculinity.

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Table 1. Discourse and Masculinity Across Generations in *When Life Gives You Tangerines*.

Character	Generation Alignment	Masculine Traits	Linguistic Features	Alignment with Patriarchal Indexicality	Interpretive Insight
Young Yang Gwan Sik	Generation Z	Passionate, impulsive, romantic, expressive	Direct and emotional language; frequent use of personal pronouns, exclamatory expressions, informal speech; high affective intonation	Indexes a younger, flexible form of masculinity; challenges some traditional authority norms while maintaining romantic hero ideals	Reflects Gen Z masculinity where emotional expression and vulnerability coexist with cultural patriarchal expectations
Yang Gwan Sik (Father)	Generation X	Responsible, protective, authoritative, family-oriented	Formal and measured speech; frequent use of directives and imperatives; low affective intonation; structured dialogue	Strongly indexes traditional patriarchal masculinity; emphasizes authority, responsibility, and hierarchy	Embodies conventional patriarchal ideals reflecting older generation's view of male roles in family and society
Park Yeong Bum	Generation Y	Conflicted, reflective, past-oriented, loyal	Hesitant speech, pauses, self-corrections; reflective narrative style; moderate tone	Indexes transitional masculinity; struggles between personal desires and traditional expectations	Demonstrates Gen Y masculinity negotiating between emotional needs and societal/familial norms
Park Chung Seob	Generation Y	Supportive, dependable, calm, committed	Polite, cooperative language; minimal interruptions; inclusive pronouns; moderate to low tone	Indexes relational masculinity; aligns with patriarchal ideals in supportive rather than authoritative roles	Illustrates evolving Gen Y masculinity where nurturing and relational support align with patriarchal expectations

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Table 1 presents the comparative generational analysis of the principal male characters in *When Life Gives You Tangerines*, illustrating how masculinity is discursively constructed through linguistic and interactional patterns. As shown in Table 1, Young Yang Gwan Sik represents Generation Z through emotionally expressive and affectively oriented discourse.

His speech frequently includes personal pronouns, exclamatory expressions, and informal language that signal emotional immediacy and relational openness. For instance, in one interaction, he states, “I don’t care what others say. I just want you to know how I feel.” Such direct emotional articulation indexes a masculinity that departs from rigid authority while sustaining culturally valorized romantic devotion. This portrayal aligns with findings that Generation Z often prioritizes emotional authenticity and flexible gender expectations (Hameed et al., 2025; Li, 2019).

In contrast, the adult Yang Gwan Sik exemplifies Generation X masculinity characterized by authority, responsibility, and hierarchical relational positioning, as summarized in Table 1. His discourse patterns frequently employ directive structures and formal speech. For example, he asserts, “You must trust my decision. I am doing this for our family.” The use of imperatives, controlled tone, and carefully structured phrasing reinforces patriarchal authority and duty-centered masculinity. These linguistic features reflect broader generational patterns that associate male identity with provider roles, moral leadership, and social stability (Weber & Morris, 2010; Lantiere et al., 2022; de Castro & de Guzman, 2023).

Table 1 further identifies Park Yeong Bum and Park Chung Seob as representatives of Generation Y masculinity, which demonstrates transitional and relational characteristics. Park Yeong Bum’s discourse frequently contains hesitations, reflective narratives, and self-repair structures that signal internal conflict between

personal emotions and societal expectations. In one scene, he remarks, “I thought I knew what was right... but maybe I was just afraid to admit how I felt.” This reflective language indexes adaptive masculinity that negotiates traditional norms with personal emotional awareness (Riemma et al., 2025).

Meanwhile, Park Chung Seob’s discourse emphasizes supportive relational engagement through inclusive and cooperative language, illustrated in statements such as, “We will decide together. Your happiness matters to me.” His interactional style demonstrates relational masculinity that integrates empathy and partnership within culturally accepted male roles (Dowley, 2025; Banerjee et al., 2023; Spiegel, 2013).

Cross-generational comparison highlights both continuity and transformation in masculine identity performance. As demonstrated in Table 1, Generation X discourse prioritizes authority and hierarchical stability, Generation Y discourse reflects negotiation and relational adaptation, and Generation Z discourse foregrounds emotional expressiveness and interpersonal validation (Kaistha & Kumari, 2024; Lee et al., 2024; Nataraja, 2025). Linguistic choices, pragmatic strategies, and paralinguistic cues collectively illustrate how masculine identities are indexed and performed through interactional discourse. These findings reinforce the interpretation that patriarchal norms persist but undergo gradual reconfiguration through generational shifts in communicative practice and relational expectations (Zahoor & Zaidi, 2024).

Overall, the comparative analysis demonstrates that masculinity operates as a dynamic and contextually negotiated identity rather than a fixed patriarchal construct. The multimodal and linguistic patterns summarized in Table 1 reveal how contemporary media discourse simultaneously reproduces, reshapes, and challenges traditional masculine ideologies across generational contexts.

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Table 2. Indexical Masculinity and Patriarchal Alignment.

Character	Generation Alignment	Indexical Representation of Masculinity	Reinforces Patriarchal Norms	Challenges Patriarchal Norms
Young Yang Gwan Sik	Generation Z	Emotional and direct language, impulsive actions, informal speech	Upholds romantic hero ideal, male initiative in relationships	Shows vulnerability and emotional openness uncommon in traditional norms
Yang Gwan Sik (Father)	Generation X	Formal, measured speech; structured dialogue; use of imperatives	Emphasizes male authority, familial hierarchy, responsibility to provide	Limited challenge; occasionally negotiates personal relationships
Park Yeong Bum	Generation Y	Hesitant speech, reflective narratives, pauses, self-corrections	Maintains loyalty and responsibility to others	Expresses internal conflict and questions obligations, showing negotiation of traditional norms
Park Chung Seob	Generation Y	Cooperative and inclusive language, calm tone, attentive interactions	Aligns with male provider and protector roles	Highlights relational and supportive masculinity over dominance-based norms

Table 2 presents the indexical representations of masculinity among the main male characters in *When Life Gives You Tangerines*, illustrating how linguistic and interactional cues reinforce or negotiate patriarchal norms within Filipino cultural contexts. As observed in Table 1, Young Yang Gwan Sik (Generation Z) demonstrates emotionally expressive and relational masculinity. His direct, informal language and spontaneous actions index vulnerability and openness, challenging traditional Filipino ideals of male stoicism while maintaining culturally valorized romantic heroism. For example, he declares, “*I just want you to know how much this matters to me!*” This reflects a generational shift toward emotional transparency and interpersonal connection in contemporary masculine identities (Canibel et al., 2024; Jamil, 2025; Rudgerb & Nielsen, 2012). Yang Gwan Sik (Generation X) exhibits formal, structured, and directive speech

that indexes conventional patriarchal masculinity, emphasizing hierarchy, responsibility, and provider roles. Yet, subtle contextual cues suggest adaptability, such as when he remarks, “*I will guide you, but we can decide together on this,*” indicating negotiation within familial and relational settings (Addis et al., 2016; Mazei et al., 2021). This reinforces the observation in Table 1 that traditional masculine norms remain influential but are contextually moderated.

Generation Y characters, Park Yeong Bum and Park Chung Seob, illustrate transitional and relational masculinities. Park Yeong Bum’s reflective and hesitant speech, marked by pauses and self-corrections, indexes internal conflict between personal desires and societal expectations, as seen in his line, “*I thought I knew what I wanted... but maybe I was wrong.*”

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This challenges rigid patriarchal norms by highlighting emotional complexity (Ali, 2025; Rutherford, 2023). Park Chung Seob, in contrast, employs cooperative, attentive, and inclusive language, such as “Let’s make this decision together; your feelings matter,” reinforcing relational masculinity that integrates care, empathy, and partnership without asserting dominance (Russell, 1985; Saba, 2024).

Synthesizing these observations, the series presents masculinity as a socially and culturally indexed construct shaped by generational and Filipino linguistic contexts. Language functions not only as a marker of adherence to patriarchal norms but also as a medium for negotiating, resisting, and reinterpreting them. Across generations, male characters perform a spectrum of masculinities, from authoritative and hierarchical to relational and emotionally expressive, demonstrating how Filipino men navigate and reconstruct culturally prescribed gender roles in contemporary media discourse (Metin, 2024; Gal, 2012).

Generational Linguistic Negotiation of Masculinity and the Expansion of Gender Narratives

The integrated analysis of discourse patterns and indexical meanings across the male characters in *When Life Gives You Tangerines* demonstrates that masculinity in the series is neither uniform nor static but is continuously shaped through generational positioning and linguistic practice. Rather than presenting masculinity as a fixed patriarchal role, the series constructs it as a negotiated social identity, sustained, adapted, or subtly reworked through everyday interaction. This finding emerges from the convergence of generational discourse styles and their corresponding alignment with, or departure from, patriarchal norms.

The Generation X representation, embodied by the father figure Yang Gwan Sik, reflects a form

of masculinity firmly anchored in traditional patriarchal expectations. His linguistic behavior, marked by measured tone, directive speech, and structured dialogue, indexes authority, responsibility, and hierarchical positioning within the family. However, this authority is not portrayed as purely coercive or absolute.

Contextual moments of restraint and relational negotiation indicate that patriarchal masculinity operates through consent and moral obligation as much as through command. This suggests that even conventionally aligned masculinity is sustained through interactional legitimacy rather than unquestioned dominance.

In contrast, the Generation Y characters illustrate masculinity as a site of tension and recalibration. Park Yeong Bum’s hesitant speech patterns, pauses, and self-corrections reveal an internalized struggle between personal desire and inherited expectations of male responsibility. His discourse does not outright reject patriarchal norms; instead, it exposes the emotional cost of maintaining them. This linguistic hesitation signals masculinity as reflexive and unsettled, highlighting how men positioned between generations often bear the burden of reconciling competing value systems. Park Chung Seob, by comparison, demonstrates a more stabilized adaptation. His cooperative language and relational attentiveness align with patriarchal ideals of protection and provision, yet they are enacted through support rather than authority. Masculinity here is validated by emotional availability and reliability, rather than dominance, indicating a reorientation of patriarchal legitimacy toward relational competence.

The Generation Z character, young Yang Gwan Sik, further extends this reconfiguration. His emotionally expressive and informal discourse foregrounds vulnerability, impulsivity, and affective engagement. While his masculinity retains familiar narrative elements of romantic initiative, it departs from traditional expectations of male restraint and emotional distance. The

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coexistence of emotional openness with culturally recognizable masculine ideals suggests that, for this generation, masculinity is not experienced as oppositional to tradition but rather as selectively reformulated. Language becomes the primary means through which this reformulation is normalized, allowing expressive masculinity to appear ordinary rather than transgressive.

Taken together, these patterns indicate that masculinity in the series functions as an indexical and relational construct, shaped by generational experience and enacted through linguistic choice. Patriarchal norms are neither uniformly reinforced nor decisively dismantled; instead, they are selectively retained, negotiated, and re-signified across characters. This discursive flexibility enables the representation

4. Conclusions

The findings of this study indicate that masculinity in *When Life Gives You Tangerines* is best understood as a generationally situated and linguistically constructed social identity rather than a fixed patriarchal role. Distinct discourse patterns among Generation X, Y, and Z characters reveal that masculine meanings are continuously produced, sustained, and reshaped through everyday language use. Traits such as authority, responsibility, emotional restraint, vulnerability, and relational care are not mutually exclusive; rather, they emerge as

5. Limitations

This study is limited to the analysis of a single cultural text, the Korean series *When Life Gives You Tangerines* (2025), thereby restricting the breadth of its findings to the representations embedded within that specific narrative. While the series provides a valuable site for examining the indexical construction of masculinity, the results may not be fully generalizable to other genres, media platforms, or cultural contexts. Audience interpretations, particularly in the

of multiple legitimate masculine identities within a shared cultural framework.

From a broader perspective, the series contributes to more inclusive gender narratives by demonstrating that masculinity need not be defined by a singular standard of authority or emotional suppression.

Through generationally differentiated language use, the text illustrates how masculine identity can accommodate vulnerability, reflection, and relational engagement without losing social coherence. Such representations are significant in media and academic discourse, as they shift the focus from binary oppositions between “traditional” and “modern” masculinity toward an understanding of gender as an evolving communicative practice embedded in social life.

context-dependent resources that speakers draw upon to negotiate social expectations. This confirms that language functions not merely as a representational medium but as an active mechanism through which gender norms are indexed, legitimized, and recalibrated within cultural settings. This study contributes to sociolinguistics by demonstrating how indexicality and generational variation intersect to construct, perform, and transform masculine identities in transnational media discourse

Philippine context, are examined using secondary data and reported viewership statistics, which may not capture the full range of individual experiences and meanings negotiated by diverse viewers. Furthermore, qualitative discourse analysis emphasizes depth of interpretation over quantitative measurement, which may limit the extent to which patterns of linguistic indexicality can be systematically compared across larger samples of media texts.

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6. Recommendations

The study offers several implications for linguistics, stylistics, discourse studies, and language education. First, it underscores the analytical value of examining generational variation as a lens for understanding gendered discourse, particularly in media texts where social change is both reflected and enacted. Second, it challenges binary classifications of masculinity (hegemonic vs. resistant) and advocates a continuum-based approach that accounts for negotiation, hybridity, and contextual alignment.

In language teaching and learning, the findings highlight that authentic media discourse is a potent pedagogical resource for developing critical language awareness.

Engaging learners with texts that model diverse and evolving masculine identities fosters deeper reflection on how linguistic choices shape meaning, identity, and social relations, thereby

strengthening interpretive and analytical competencies.

Future research should continue discourse-based investigations that integrate linguistic form, social indexicality, and cultural context rather than treating gender as a predetermined category. Longitudinal and comparative studies across genres, languages, and sociocultural settings can further illuminate how gendered identities are stabilized or transformed through repeated linguistic practice.

In educational contexts, incorporating discourse analysis and stylistic inquiry into language curricula using media texts can scaffold learners' understanding of language as a socially embedded system, enhance language proficiency, and promote critical engagement with ideological meanings encoded in discourse. Such approaches support more reflective, inclusive, and socially responsive language education.

Supplementary Details

Supplementary Materials & Data Availability Statement

The present study does not include supplementary files such as additional figures, tables, or videos. The primary data utilized for analysis consisted of video transcripts from the Korean television series *When Life Gives You Tangerines*, covering sixteen episodes and forty-eight selected scenes. These transcripts formed the textual corpus for multimodal discourse analysis and are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request to ensure transparency and reproducibility.

Author Contributions

All authors significantly contributed to the conceptualization, execution, and writing of this study. Nolyn Berly C. Gesulga led the conceptualization, design of the methodology, data analysis, preparation of the original manuscript draft, and visualization of results.

Dovie Jhane Mirafuentes was responsible for data curation, transcript management, and coding verification and contributed substantially to the review and editing of the manuscript. Yves Jerran G. Patal assisted with software tools for transcript coding and indexing, participated in formal analysis, and provided feedback during manuscript revision. Life Gabriel F. Osumo, LPT, MEd-LT, CRS, served as the project supervisor, overseeing the study's design, methodological alignment, and overall project administration, while also contributing to the review and refinement of the manuscript. All authors approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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Institutional Review Board (IRB) Statement

The study involved analysis of publicly available media texts and did not include human participants. As such, ethical approval from an Institutional Review Board was not required for this research.

Informed Consent Statement

No informed consent was necessary for this study because the research did not involve human subjects or personal data. The analysis was conducted entirely on publicly accessible audiovisual materials.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest relevant to the content of this study.

Disclosure Statement (Use of AI Tools)

During the preparation of this manuscript, AI-assisted tools such as ChatGPT were used solely to support language refinement, organizational clarity, and formatting consistency. The authors confirm that all AI-assisted outputs have been thoroughly reviewed, validated, and edited to ensure that the scholarly content, interpretation, and conclusions remain solely the authors' responsibility.

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