A SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDY OF GENDERED LANGUAGE IN JAMAICA KINCAID'S 'GIRL' USING SPEECH ACT THEORY AND DEFICIT MODEL

Shokhan Mohammed Fatah, Areen Ahmed Muhammed
Department of English, College of Education,
Charmo University
46023, Chamchamal, Sulaimani, Kurdistan, Iraq
E-mail: shokhan.mohammed@chu.edu.iq

Abstract

This paper examines gendered language in Jamaica Kincaid's short story 'Girl' through J. L. Austin's Speech Act Theory and Robin Lakoff's Deficit Model. Structured as a monologue of maternal instructions, the narrative provides a lens to analyze language's performative function in reinforcing authority, dependency, and gender norms. Applying Speech Act Theory, the study explores how directives, warnings, and illocutionary acts preserve traditional femininity and power relations. Simultaneously, it engages with the Deficit Model to demonstrate how women's language is positioned as less assertive, shaping the daughter's social identity. Using qualitative content analysis, the study examines linguistic features and speech acts to identify patterns of gendered language and power dynamics. Findings reveal that the mother's speech acts, particularly commands and warnings, function as tools of linguistic control, reinforcing patriarchal ideologies and expectations. The paper highlights the role of language in shaping female identity through authoritative discourse, demonstrating how speech acts contribute to sustaining social hierarchies. By offering a nuanced exploration of gendered linguistic structures, this research contributes to sociolinguistic and literary discourse, deepening the understanding of power, identity, and representation in literary texts. The work underscores how language encodes and perpetuates gendered ideologies, adding to broader discussions on discourse, power relations, and identity formation in literature.

1. Introduction

Jamaica Kincaid's 1978 'Girl' is a brilliant analysis of the relations between gender and social conditioning, and conformity in language. Speaking of a monolithic narrative that spans the main character's life, the text raises the question of how communication and power interpenetrate each other within the context of a mother-daughter relationship and, more generally, within a family and a community. In essence, 'Girl' transcends a simple set of

instructions because it outlines and encapsulates how culture is delivered through language and how the female gender is socially conditioned. The story is a perfect example for the analysis of gendered language using British philosopher of language J. L. Austin's (1911-1960) Speech Act Theory and the American linguist Robin Lakoff's Deficit Model (Delaney and Hunter, 2019).

Jamaica Kincaid's 'Girl' sociolinguistic study depends much on its structure, one lengthy, continuous monologue mostly made of imperatives. The text reflects in language patterns of oral tradition, authority, and power relations. By use of Speech Act Theory, the predominance of directives—commands and prohibitions—reflects the mother's authoritative purpose. Furthermore, implying a unidirectional transmission of cultural norms is the absence of customary discourse structure, thereby supporting how language codes society's expectations, particularly concerning gender roles. This approach helps 'Girl' to be a rich site for sociolinguistic analysis of language, authority, and identity.

Austin's Speech Act Theory, that language is performative and that the utterances perform actions apart from stating information, will also be used to look at how the mother's commands, advice, and perceptions of the child's behaviour as wrong transformatively shape authority and socialization. In the same light, the Deficit Model, which posits that women's language is socially constructed to be weak or less assertive, provides a framework through which to analyze the effects of the mother's language and how the latter mirrors hegemonic masculine power relations.

This article will discuss how Jamaica Kincaid's 'Girl' subverts and submits to women and leadership roles using gendered language. This paper analyzes the text regarding Speech Act Theory and Deficit Model to argue that language creates and defines femininity and social relations. To this end, the question is how the mother's speech acts in Jamaica Kincaid's *Girl* reinforces gendered power dynamics and social norms, as analyzed through J. L. Austin's Speech Act Theory and Robin Lakoff's Deficit Model. Through the study, the findings will demonstrate how even ordinary words work to either strengthen or weaken the position of women in society and, therefore, enhance understanding of the dynamics of the social relations embedded in language. This story has been studied from a variety of theoretical perspectives, but how these two frameworks specifically interact with each other has not been thoroughly investigated, and this is the gap that the researchers attempt to fill.

2. Literature Review

Jamaica Kincaid's 'Girl' is one of the most popular literary texts that has elicited mild controversy among scholars, most of whom have focused on such themes as gender and the cultural identity of the 'Girl.' As a narrative that conveys a mother to her daughter, the story's monologue is a productive text to investigate the ways language sustains gender regulation. To discuss this dimension of the text, this literature review will turn to Speech Act Theory and Deficit Model to analyze the connection between language and gender in Kincaid's narrative.

The most pertinent theory that scholars have used to analyze Kincaid's work is the feminist theory, for instance, Michelle M. Lazar's (2005) model of Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, which analyses the role of gender, power, and sexuality in the text. Based on the analysis of the word, sentence, and discourse level of the text using the principles of feminist stylistics, the weak feminine role and inferior social status of women are realized in Antigua, the setting of the narrative and the author's birthplace. This is a rather stereotypical representation of a Caribbean mother and daughter, specifically the mother who dominates

her daughter and gets obeyed (Chen, 2024; Rashid et al., 2024). Among other things, women lead, change, educate, and equip the next generations for a better future. Women should teach their daughters this; housekeeping should not be a competition. They have to discover their own identity and challenge their given purpose (Kreishan and Shoqairat, 2023).

Other sources of criticism, such as postcolonial criticism, have also brought important insights to bear on the work of Kincaid, especially on the issue of colonial legacies and how they inform gender roles in Caribbean societies. Kincaid's 'Girl' illustrates postcolonial feminist literature by emphasizing the dual oppression—colonial and patriarchal—faced by women in Antiguan society. The guidance given to the mother highlights the fact that, in a society that positions women in subordinate roles, these women have to behave in a certain way to be heard; instead, they are to remain the silenced subaltern subjects of this history. In Kanan Aghasiyev's article (2024), the author examines a rather thorny issue of a mother-daughter bond in the context of colonialism. That is the role a mother plays in 'Girl,' readers get an insight into how a mother trains her daughter on what a woman and a wife are expected to embody. In the article, the researcher argues that Kincaid's text is a postcolonial feminist text that exposes the position of women in the postcolonial Antiguan culture. This suggests that 'Girl' is subject to various literary perspectives.

Two other scholars, namely Jesudas Roseline and Zakiuddin Mohammed (2024), use Van Dijk's framework to analyze the role relationship and power dynamics in Jamaica Kincaid's 'Girl.' The study, based on the Van Dijk Critical Discourse Analysis approach, examines how texts and speech involving the story reveal, reinforce, and oppose social power violations, domination, and marginalization. By using the method of a descriptive qualitative approach, the research explores the relations of power, language features, and discourses, as well as gender roles, revealing the cases of power relations and disciplinary practices. Instead of a sociolinguistics study of 'Girl,' a socio-political idea is proposed by the text.

Speech Act Theory has been employed traditionally in literary studies to show how a character in the story uses language in attempts to assert domination, build relations, or have practices of common folks enforced. For example, Mary Louise Pratt's (1977) discursive analysis of speech acts emphasizes how speech acts in noise produce or invalidate social norms. This theoretical view is more justified in the context of the 'Girl' as the linguistic medium that the mother uses is not only a tool of teaching but also serves as a process of enculturation and socialization that imprisons the girl in a conventional female role.

Analyzing the functions of language in Kincaid's text, it is possible to refer to two pertinent theories, namely the Speech Act Theory and the Deficit Model. Though disorganized, the story's structure is an intentional tactic meant to be a secret call to action for the next generations of women (Jayasree, 2018). Using the concepts of Austin and Lakoff, it is possible to show how language works to maintain and impose these norms in detail, which certainly adds deeper insight to the interpretation of Kincaid's story along with the understanding of gendered language. Additionally, the brain interprets some communitive functions beyond the verbal semantics, which is a central question in neurobiology and pragmatics. Speech acts, as defined by linguistic-pragmatic theories, are comprised of propositional content, action sequences, a social commitment, and cognitive features. Current neurocognitive investigations show that the same linguistic expressions can evoke different and fast neural response patterns on account of their communicative intent. Different cortical areas are activated based on items such as theory of mind, emotion, and action (Tomasello, 2023)

3. Methodology

This paper is a qualitative analysis which applies the Speech Act Theory and Deficit Model to analyze gendered language in Kincaid's 'Girl.' The study involves two phases: The first process involves a reading through of the text to identify and categorize the various speech acts, while the second involves analyzing it intending to understand how they sustain or subvert the gendered language theory. The first part comprises a detailed analysis of the textual features of 'Girl' to outline the locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts that Austin analyzes. The second reveals the instruction and effect by applying the Deficit Model to the analysis of the mother's language use. The paper investigates how these features affirm or negate the Deficit Model assumptions of the subordinate and less forceful language use by women. In addition, qualitative content analysis is employed to analyze the text's speech acts and contexts. Qualitative content analysis lets the reader examine single instances and their socio-cultural effects, unlike discourse analysis or corpus analysis, which require massive datasets. One drawback of qualitative content analysis is the possibility of subjectivity in interpretation since personal prejudices could affect the study of speech acts.

The reason for using both Speech Act Theory and the Deficit Model is that they enhance broader comprehension of the way language works in interactions, with more focus on power differences and gender. When these two models are combined, they provide complementary insights: Austin builds a theory on the practical analysis of communication, while Lakoff brings into light how gender biases the interpretation of language power. Such a combination can assist in an understanding of how language builds power relations in contexts or a gendered speech act in the power relations of a given social structure. The selection of speech acts in 'Girl' is based on their importance to gender dynamics, especially how they express authority and subordination. As they show the power relations between the mother and daughter, the focus is on directions, requests, and advice. Understanding the socio-linguistic consequences inside the narrative depends much on the frequency and interactional character of these speech acts.

4. Discussion

4.1 Theoretical Underpinning

This study is grounded in two main theoretical frameworks. The first one is J. L. Austin's Speech Act Theory, and the second one is the Deficit Model of Robin Lakoff. In combination, these theories offer a holistic approach to the interpretation and analysis of the gendered language used in Jamaica Kincaid's 'Girl' and further explain how language works on the dimensions of gendered norms.

4.1.1 Speech Act Theory

J. L. Austin's Speech Act Theory is the key discovery of Austin in his work titled 'How to Do Things with Words' published in 1962. Unlike seeing language as a tool for delivering messages or making assertions, Austin positioned language as performative. Many of his theories show the many uses of utterances which go beyond the role of merely referential, thus questioning the traditional view that the major purpose of language is referential. This insight has made new options for comprehending the highly nuanced and twofold strength of language during daily conversational practice.

Austin's theory delineates three levels of speech acts: locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary are the key categories on which speech acts can be based. Thus, every level responds to a specific question regarding how language works in addition to signifying. First,

the locutionary act is defined as an act of enunciation, that is, the act of making an utterance which has a definite meaning. It encompasses all the aspects of the said, which embraces the content in the most literal sense as well as the lexicon employed (Austin, 1962). For instance, in a phrase such as 'It is raining,' the performative act in locutionary terms encapsulates the fact that it is raining outside. This level of language deals with the meaning of the language and the way the language is constructed, the usage of words and the construction of sentences (Searle, 1969).

Second, the illocutionary act can arguably be considered the most integral part of Austin's theory. It consists of the illocutionary force that resides in the speaker's purpose and how the act works in a particular social setting (Austin, 1962). This level comprises various functions, including requesting, commanding, promising, or apologizing. For example, the saying 'I will come to your party' is an act of giving assurance. It is in this concept that the importance of illocutionary acts can be understood as they are considered social acts that are governed by certain norms and regulations. These acts are regulated by a set of principles based on social expectations and may alter the roles and relationships of the speaker and the listener (Searle, 1969). Austin, on this, asserts that for an illocutionary act to occur, it must fulfil certain felicity conditions and these are the conditions that need to prevail for the act to be considered valid for the purpose that is intended in each sociable context (Austin, 1962).

Thirdly, the perlocutionary act about what impact the utterance creates on society, for example, manipulation of the speaker's feelings or actions (Austin, 1962). For example, a statement that was said might be 'I am sorry for what happened,' and the listener may get feelings of comfort or that he or she has been forgiven. Perlocutionary acts are an imposition that relates to the psychological and behavioural effect upon the listener and delineates how language affects the listener other than the obvious communicative purpose (Searle, 1969).

The illocutionary act can also be noted as exceptionally important because it explains the performativity of language, actions that, through utterances, affect social changes or create social promises. For instance, the statement 'I hereby declare you husband and wife' is not a mere description of the matter of fact because it can marry two people in the right setting under the right person, like the priest. This, in a way, shows that language works within certain institutional and social structures to accomplish changes of status or relation (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969).

In Austin's framework, the kind of acts represented in directives can be called illocutionary acts. The basic distinction, or as it was referred to later, directives are speech acts in which the speaker tries to make the hearer do something. This would include commands, directions, advice, and others. Moreover, Austin did not take directives as a category of speech act in the same manner as Searle was doing. Searle later classified speech acts into five categories, which also included directives.

Among the speech act types Austin identifies, and although he does not categorize warnings; they are examples of illocutionary acts, and these are verbal actions which are done by saying something. It is the function of the warning to prevent and deter certain behaviours and encourage others while keeping social interactions in check, as it sets the tone for what is acceptable or ought to be anticipated. For example, the statement 'If you touch that, you'll get hurt' is an example of a warning that puts down a limit.

Observations on how assertive work in the context of speech acts, as presented by J. L. Austin, help to show how language creates and maintains gender roles. Austin classified assertiveness as utterances that express a new truth, a comment, or an opinion to be taken

by every rational being. Thus, assertiveness makes it possible for people to influence the ways others perceive and expect them as much as they present information in ways that conform to the culture. For instance, saying things like 'Women should be more nurturing' conveys a belief that, on the same note, creates and maintains certain roles within that society. According to Austin, mere performativity of language where assertive speech acts stand out does not only reinforce structures, but itself is an instrument for doing so primarily in the realm of gender.

All in all, Austin's framework makes one able to analyze language in several aspects, such as how language speaks and influences the feelings of the addressee. When applied to Jamaica Kincaid's 'Girl,' this theory helps to reveal the fact that not only do the mother's commands point to performative gestures, but they do more than instruct the daughter – they train her and rehearse the traits of the submissive Caribbean woman. Applying Austin's Speech Act Theory to the text, readers can notice how these speech acts are not mere ways of getting across a message but how they are also capable of enforcing order and a particular set of roles in society, and so, gain a more insightful understanding on the story's portrayal of gendered language.

4.1.2 Deficit Model

Robin Lakoff, in her 'Language and Woman's Place' published in 1975, presented what has come to be referred to as the Deficit Model, which paints a very negative picture of language as being instrumental in enhancing gender bias. According to Lakoff, this model of woman language is perceived to be inferior to male language strength, which is dominant. Its focus is on the use of language in society and how it is affected by power relations existing within society.

According to the Deficit Model, there are aspects of female language which are less assertive than those of male language. These features include the use of hedging devices, which include the use of qualifying words like 'I think,' 'perhaps,' 'sorry,' and 'please,' and the tag questions, which include 'don't you think?' Lakoff points out that these distinctive distal linguistic features represent a degree of doubt, hesitancy or politeness, which is at one with women's subordinate role in a patriarchal culture (Lakoff, 1975).

The second idea of the Deficit Model by Lakoff is the phenomena of hedging and politeness in the speech of women. Lakoff further says that women employ hedging devices and form politeness to dilute aggression or forcefulness. For instance, such transitional expressions as 'I think,' 'in my opinion,' 'perhaps,' and 'it seems to me' could be interpreted as the influences of self-promotion and the following transitional expressions as the signs of low confidence: 'I don't know, but…,' 'I suppose, but….' The nature of men's language use is much more confrontational than that of women's language use because men are socialized to dominate women.

One more important idea pointed out by Lakoff is that women, in contrast to men, tend to use tag questions extremely frequently. For instance, one will establish phrases such as 'Isn't it cold in here?' or 'You do agree with me, do you?' Lakoff is of the perception that such tag questions imply some form of doubt or the need to be reassured. By far, this linguistic pattern is thought to maintain stereotypically female non-authoritative opinions and the need for approval from the male partner (Lakoff, 1975).

Lakoff also speaks about the other aspects of these features of the language, namely, gender expectations. In her viewpoint, all the styles regarding women's language are not only different subjectivities of language; rather, they are subjectivities or personalities that

embody and perform specific prototypes of the female gender in society. Lakoff's distinctions between male and female about language – are signs of social hierarchy. In other words, women's language or talking like a lady continues to work for women's subordination in the hegemonic order and, therefore, the continued use of this kind of language reinforces gender domination (Lakoff, 1975).

The Deficit Model has generated a lot of interest in the areas of feminist linguistics and sociolinguistics because they provide a theoretical framework on how language is a form of social power and dominance. Therefore, the Deficit Model by Robin Lakoff is the primary instrument explaining the gendered character of language and the manner of its construction of inequalities. Lakoff has been very useful, especially in the presentation of women's language and some of the social impacts of this type of language use. However, present discussions and discussions are still ongoing and being developed based on the gendered language and its link to social processes.

To sum up, the Speech Act Theory and Deficit Model provide a valid framework to understand the question of gendered language in Jamaica Kincaid's 'Girl.' This is true since, from Austin, language operates at the locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary levels to accomplish social activities and alter status or relation. This is the kind of perception that aids in explaining Kincaid's directions and commands as the performative element of the work. Conversely, Lakoff's Deficit Model shows how women's language preserves male supremacy. Indeed, the study can analyze the linguistic devices used in 'Girl' concerning gender appropriateness based on Austin's and Lakoff's concepts, thereby enabling the study to examine how 'Girl''s language reflects and strengthens gender relations to consider the text as an addition to gender and power dynamics.

4.2 Gendered Language: Analyzing through the Speech Act Theory and the Deficit Model
4.2.1 Speech Act Theory by J. L. Austin

J. L. Austin's Speech Act Theory (1962) categorizes language into locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts, each representing different levels of meaning in speech. In *'Girl,'* the mother's speech acts demonstrate how language functions not only to communicate but also to control and shape behaviour, especially in the context of gendered expectations. Through this framework, the mother's words reveal how language enforces societal norms, particularly those tied to gender roles, reflecting not only personal authority but also the inherited weight of socio-historical traditions. Recent research supports this view, suggesting that speech acts often serve as vehicles for perpetuating cultural norms and moral values across generations (Smith, 2019).

4.2.1.1 Locutionary Acts: Literal Meaning

A locutionary act refers to the straightforward, literal meaning of an utterance. (Austin, 1962).

Text Example: *Wash the white clothes on Monday and put them on the stone heap.*
Analysis: On the surface, the mother's instruction is a simple directive to complete a household chore. However, this locutionary act also carries broader implications regarding the girl's role in society, particularly in fulfilling domestic duties expected of women. The literal meaning of the command reflects a deeper social expectation that the girl should conform to traditional gender roles. Within its socio-historical context, such tasks were emblematic of women's roles as caretakers in patriarchal societies, where their value was closely tied to their ability to maintain order in the home. This example illustrates how even

seemingly mundane instructions carry an implicit message about gendered expectations and societal responsibilities (Anderson, 2018).

By using these literal directives, the mother is not simply communicating the completion of a task; she is reinforcing the notion that such tasks are inherently feminine and should be adhered to without question. This kind of speech, while seemingly innocent, contributes to the cultural perpetuation of women's roles being confined to the domestic sphere. Moreover, the repetition of such instructions throughout the girl's upbringing could solidify these traditional expectations as the girl's self-perception and societal role.

4.2.1.2 Illocutionary Acts: Intended Meaning

The illocutionary act is the intention behind the speech, what the speaker aims to achieve through their words. (Austin, 1962)

Text Example: *This is how you behave in the presence of men who don't know you very well.*

Analysis: This instruction functions as an illocutionary act because the mother is not just giving advice; she is shaping her daughter's behaviour according to societal expectations. The mother intends to teach the girl how to conduct herself in a way that preserves her reputation, reflecting the pressure placed on women to behave in a manner considered appropriate by society. The mother's imperative tone and harsh language reflect her authoritative stance, reinforcing social expectations and consequences of nonconformity. This form of guidance reflects the socio-historical pressures women faced to uphold their family's reputation, particularly in post-colonial societies. A study by Johnson (2020) highlights how such gendered advice is rooted in cultural systems prioritising women's morality as a reflection of communal integrity.

This form of speech reflects not only the mother's authority but also her fear of the consequences of noncompliance, both for herself and her daughter. The harshness of the tone indicates the mother's internalized belief that her daughter must act within these boundaries to avoid social disgrace. In a broader context, this can be seen as a reflection of societal pressures on women to adhere to strict behavioural codes, where the mother's speech acts serve as both a shield and a weapon in navigating these pressures.

4.2.1.3 Perlocutionaary Acts: Effect on the Listener

The perlocutionary act refers to the effect the speech has on the listener (Austin, 1962), which in this case is the girl's understanding of her place in the world.

Text Example: *This is how to make a good medicine to throw away a child before it even becomes a child.*

Analysis: This extreme statement serves as a perlocutionary act meant to create fear and caution in the girl. The mother's harsh words highlight the consequences of failing to obey societal rules, especially regarding sexual behaviour and politeness. Austin's theory helps explain how such speech acts influence the listener's future behaviour by shaping their understanding of the consequences of nonconformity (Austin, 1962). Recent feminist linguistic studies, such as that by Carter and Lee (2021), emphasize how such speech acts highlight the intersection of language, power, and reproductive autonomy within patriarchal cultures.

The extract comes from Jamaica Kincaid's 'Girl,' where the mother is instructing her daughter on appropriate behaviour. The context highlights the mother's attempt to instil

societal norms in the girl, especially concerning sexual behaviour and propriety, within a patriarchal culture that emphasizes female submission.

The intended fear in this perlocutionary act suggests the deep-rooted societal expectations placed on women to regulate their actions, particularly regarding sexual behaviour. The mother's words aim to prevent the girl from deviating from prescribed norms, instilling in her the notion that failing to adhere could lead to irreversible consequences. This illustrates how language can be a tool of social control, shaping the girl's perception of her own autonomy and reinforcing the societal constructs of female shame and submission.

4.2.1.4 Directives: Commands and Instructions

Text Example: *Wash the white clothes on Monday and put them on the stone heap; wash the colored clothes on Tuesday and put them on the clothesline to dry.*
Analysis: These statements are examples of illocutionary acts in the form of directives (Austin, 1962), where the mother commands the girl to complete household tasks. Through these directives, the mother reinforces traditional gender roles, where women are expected to manage domestic duties. Austin's (1962) theory clarifies how these speech acts go beyond simple commands; they reinforce a societal structure in which women occupy a subordinate, service-oriented role.

The persistent use of directives reinforces the girl's subordinate position in her relationship with her mother. These instructions, framed within the context of gendered expectations, suggest that the girl's role is largely to serve others, with her worth primarily tied to her ability to perform domestic chores. Such directives, repeated throughout her childhood, could normalize these expectations, making them harder to question or resist as she matures.

4.2.1.5 Warnings: Maintaining Social Boundaries

Text Example: *Don't walk bare-head in the hot sun.*
Analysis: This statement acts as a warning, an illocutionary act where the mother instructs the girl to avoid behaviours believed inappropriate. Austin's (1962) theory sheds light on how such warnings reinforce social boundaries, especially those related to gender. The mother uses language to preserve societal norms by cautioning her daughter against behaviour that could result in social disapproval. Such advice mirrors traditional societal expectations, where women's appearances and actions were heavily scrutinized as reflections of their family's honour. According to recent research by Ahmed (2017), warnings like these are deeply embedded in cultural systems designed to regulate women's behaviour, ensuring adherence to societal ideals of modesty and propriety.

The utterance is gendered because it reflects societal expectations about women's behaviour and appearance, where women are often warned about how their actions might affect their reputation or social standing, particularly concerning modesty and propriety. It reinforces traditional gender roles by linking female vulnerability to social norms.

The warning about walking bare-headed in the sun is a perfect example of how language functions to regulate and control women's behaviour. The mother's words signal the potential social consequences of violating norms and serve as a reminder of how deeply entrenched these gender roles are in the girl's upbringing. The warning reflects the mother's desire to protect her daughter from becoming a target of judgment, highlighting the significant role that social boundaries play in shaping women's actions.

4.2.1.6 Assertive Speech Acts: Defining Gender Roles

Text Example: *This is how to bully a man; this is how a man bullies you.*

Analysis: These sentences represent assertive illocutionary acts, where the mother is conveying what she believes to be true about gender dynamics. In this case, the mother's statements define the power imbalances between men and women, reinforcing the idea that women should be aware of how men may control them. Through these speech acts, the mother imparts knowledge that reflects and reinforces traditional gender roles.

Through these assertive speech acts, the mother positions herself as the authority on gender relations, teaching her daughter not only the existence of power imbalances but also how to navigate them. The mother's words convey a sense of inevitability in these dynamics, suggesting that the girl's understanding of gender roles should be one of awareness and compliance. This speaks to the broader cultural context in which women are often taught to be submissive or cautious in their interactions with men, reinforcing patriarchal norms.

4.2.2 The Deficit Model by Robin Lakoff

Deficit Model (1975) explores how women's language reflects their lower societal status, which is often manifested through indirect speech, politeness, and cautious communication. In 'Girl,' the mother's instructions reveal several aspects of this model, highlighting how gendered language shapes women's roles in society. The analysis gains depth when viewed through a socio-historical lens, as Lakoff's observations parallel the linguistic restrictions imposed on women in patriarchal and colonial contexts, where their speech was shaped by external pressures to conform. Contemporary studies, such as those by Brown and Taylor (2019), affirm that women's language remains a tool for navigating power dynamics in socially restrictive environments.

4.2.2.1 Indirectness and Politeness

The mother instructs her daughter to maintain politeness in various social interactions, using indirect expressions rather than speaking directly.

Text Example: *This is how you smile to someone you don't like too much; this is how you smile to someone you don't like at all; this is how you smile to someone you like completely.*

Analysis: Through these instructions, the girl is taught to use indirect communication (smiling) as a way to navigate her emotions. The mother's advice on how to smile reflects societal expectations for women to maintain politeness and suppress their true feelings, even when faced with discomfort. Moreover, Lakoff's (1975) view that women are socialized to be indirect to conform aligns with this behaviour. Politeness here becomes a form of restriction, limiting the girl's ability to express herself openly. The argument is supported by recent work from Greenfield (2018), which identifies indirectness as a survival strategy for women in male-dominated settings.

The use of indirect language serves as a form of social lubrication, enabling women to navigate complex interpersonal relationships without challenging societal norms. It reflects how women are expected to mask their emotions and desires, presenting a false politeness that maintains harmony but simultaneously stifles personal expression. This teaches women that their needs and preferences are secondary to those of others, particularly men, and reinforces the notion that women's voices should remain subdued.

4.2.2.2 Tag Questions and Modifiers

Lakoff (1975) identifies tag questions as indicative of hesitancy in women's speech, which often serves to soften statements and seek confirmation.

Text Example: *Is it true that you sing benna in Sunday school?*

Analysis: The mother's question is not a direct accusation but rather seeks confirmation indirectly. This hesitancy is a characteristic of women's language, as identified by Lakoff (1975). Instead of directly confronting her daughter, the mother chooses a softer, less assertive approach. This demonstrates how women are conditioned to avoid confrontation, further supporting Lakoff's idea that women's speech often lacks the assertiveness associated with men's language (Lakoff, 1975). Although the text does not include explicit tag questions, the dialogue reveals a similar need for validation and a lack of direct assertion.

Text Example: *But I don't sing benna on Sundays at all and never in Sunday school.*

Analysis: The girl's response indirectly seeks validation by providing a hesitant defence of her behaviour. Rather than confidently asserting her innocence, the girl's phrasing leaves room for doubt, aligning with Lakoff's observation that women tend to use soft language to avoid assertiveness. This subtle request for validation mirrors Lakoff's claim that women are socialized to be less confrontational (Lakoff, 1975).

The subtle hesitancy in the mother's speech underscores the broader societal expectation that women should seek validation before asserting their thoughts. The lack of direct confrontation and the reliance on indirect communication highlights how women are socially conditioned to avoid challenging authority, particularly male authority. This pattern of communication reflects broader gender power dynamics, where women's voices are often less valued or heard less assertively than men's.

4.2.2.3 Domestic Focus and Societal Expectations

The mother's instructions in the text repeatedly emphasize domestic chores and behaviours associated with women, reinforcing traditional gender roles.

Text Example: *This is how to hem a dress when you see the hem coming down, so to prevent yourself from looking like the slut I know you are so bent on becoming.*

Analysis: The mother's focus on domestic tasks like hemming clothes illustrates how women's language is often narrowed to discussions of household matters. Lakoff highlights that women's language is linked to trivial topics such as domesticity, reflecting their obedient status in society (1975). The mother's harsh warnings about appearance emphasize the societal pressure on women to conform to strict behavioural standards, reinforcing their subordinate position.

The girl in the story is likely an adolescent, possibly in her early teens, at a pivotal age when she is transitioning into womanhood. She is largely silent throughout the narrative, listening to her mother's incessant directives, which reflects her subordinate position within a patriarchal society. The story is set in a post-colonial Caribbean context, where strict gender roles govern women's behaviour, and societal norms prioritize modesty, domestic responsibility, and the preservation of family honour. The mother's use of the word 'slut' reflects the intense societal pressure on women to conform to these expectations, and it highlights her fear of the girl's perceived failure to uphold these norms. The term is employed as a tactic to control and discipline the girl, emphasizing the mother's internalization of these restrictive societal values. This explanation will be incorporated to

ensure that readers understand the cultural and historical backdrop that shapes the mother's language and actions.

The mother's constant focus on domestic responsibilities reflects the limited scope of opportunities traditionally available to women, particularly in post-colonial societies. By emphasizing these tasks, the mother is not just giving practical advice but is reinforcing a system that positions women within the home, limiting their potential to operate in broader societal roles. This narrow focus on domesticity confines the girl's sense of self-worth and power, reinforcing gender inequality in both private and public spheres.

4.2.2.4 Hedges and Softening Language
Hedges or words that express uncertainty are common in women's language, according to Lakoff.

Text Example: *Is it true that you sing benna in Sunday school?*
Analysis: The mother's use of this hedged question exemplifies indirect communication, a key feature of the Deficit Model (Lakoff, 1975). Instead of confronting the girl with certainty, the mother softens her language by posing the question indirectly, which reflects the societal norm that women should avoid direct confrontation. This hesitancy keeps women from speaking assertively, a characteristic that reinforces their subordinate status in conversations.

Hedges and softening language not only reflect societal expectations of women's deference but also serve as a self-protective mechanism in potentially confrontational situations. By softening their speech, women reduce the likelihood of being perceived as threatening or aggressive, particularly in male-dominated contexts. This further reinforces women's role as passive or deferential figures, a concept rooted in patriarchal values that discourage women from expressing their true opinions with authority.

4.2.2.5 Diminutive Forms and Euphemisms
Lakoff also noted that women tend to use diminutives or euphemisms to soften their language and avoid harsh expressions. (Lakoff, 1975)

Text Example: *Don't squat down to play marbles—you are not a boy, you know.*
Analysis: The mother's use of a euphemism—playing marbles—serves to emphasize 'inappropriate behavior' for girls without using harsh or explicit language. This aligns with Lakoff's assertion that women often avoid strong expressions, preferring softer, more polite language (Lakoff, 1975). By instructing the girl to refrain from boyish behaviour, the mother reinforces traditional gender expectations through a euphemistic approach.

The use of euphemisms and diminutives is a clear strategy employed by women to soften potentially harsh realities or emotions, reflecting a societal pressure to maintain a sense of gentleness and passivity. In this context, the mother's language mirrors societal anxieties about women's power, urging the girl to conform to acceptable feminine behaviours while downplaying any aggressive or outspoken tendencies. This reflects how language, when used by women, is often constrained by a need to conform to a culture of submission and passivity.

4.2.2.6 The Performance of Femininity Through Language
The deficit model highlights how women are often socialized to perform femininity through specific language choices. (Lakoff, 1975)

Text Example: *This is how you smile to someone you like completely; this is how you smile to someone you don't like at all.*

Analysis: The mother's instructions on how to smile underscore the idea that femininity is performed through controlled and polite behaviour. The model would interpret this as a reflection of how women's language and actions are shaped by societal expectations to be agreeable and submissive, reinforcing gender norms (Lakoff, 1975). The girl is taught to smile in socially acceptable ways, thus conforming to these rigid norms of femininity.

The mother's instructions on how to perform femininity—through smiling in specific ways—underscore the performative nature of gender roles. By teaching the girl how to behave according to these socially accepted standards, the mother enforces the idea that femininity must be carefully managed and performed to gain societal acceptance. This reinforces the notion that women's worth is tied to their outward expressions of politeness and passivity, rather than their authentic selves.

To sum up, Kincaid's 'Girl' can be discussed in the context of Austin's Speech Act Theory and Lakoff's Deficit Model as a complex interconnection of language and gendered power relations. Analyzing Austin's maxim of the speech act as locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary shows how the mother's words do not only give instructions but also demonstrate power, a way of dominating and regulating the girl's behaviours as well as informing her of the expected role of a woman in society. Likewise, the Deficit Model laid down by Lakoff means how the mother talks is shaped by the patriarchal culture that restricts women and keeps them subordinate. Taken together, these theories provide light on how the mother's words act as the communicative of authority and as the process for maintaining the gendered expectations of a woman's role through the social practice of daily communication.

By situating these theories within their socio-historical context, the analysis reveals how language not only reflects but also perpetuates the power imbalances and societal expectations imposed on women. The mother's speech acts and linguistic choices illustrate the enduring influence of patriarchal traditions, highlighting how everyday communication becomes a means of reinforcing gendered norms (Smith, 2019).

4.3 Implications for Broader Linguistic Studies

The analysis of gendered language in 'Girl' through the frameworks of Speech Act Theory and the Deficit Model not only reveals how language constructs and reinforces gender roles but also has broader implications for linguistic studies. This section extends the discussion by exploring how the findings contribute to the fields of sociolinguistics, pragmatics, literature, and discourse analysis, offering insights into the intersection of language, power, and identity.

One key implication is the role of performativity in language beyond gendered discourse. Austin's Speech Act Theory, particularly its emphasis on illocutionary and perlocutionary acts, can be applied to other sociolinguistic contexts where power dynamics are enacted through speech. For instance, in legal or political discourse, performative utterances shape societal structures by establishing authority and social contracts. Similarly, educational settings reveal how teachers' directives shape student behaviour, reinforcing hierarchical roles akin to how the mother's speech in 'Girl' shapes the daughter's identity. Thus, studying speech acts in 'Girl' can serve as a model for examining how language functions as a tool for social conditioning in diverse domains.

Moreover, the intersection of gender and politeness strategies highlighted in the Deficit Model extends beyond feminist linguistics. Lakoff's observations about hedging, tag questions, and politeness markers have been foundational in research on power relations in multilingual and multicultural communication. For example, studies on workplace discourse have found that linguistic politeness and indirectness are often linked not only to gender but also to professional hierarchy and cultural norms. This suggests that Lakoff's framework, while historically associated with women's speech, can be expanded to analyze language use among marginalized or lower-power groups in institutional settings.

Another critical area of expansion is the role of socialization in linguistic variation. The findings from 'Girl' align with research on language acquisition and social identity, reinforcing the idea that linguistic behaviours are learned and reinforced through repeated exposure to societal norms. The way the mother in 'Girl' dictates behavioural expectations mirrors how linguistic socialization occurs within families and communities. This has implications for studies on bilingualism and code-switching, where different linguistic registers are associated with distinct social identities and power structures. Future research could examine how similar prescriptive linguistic norms manifest in bilingual or diglossic societies, particularly in the context of language shift and linguistic identity formation.

Furthermore, the application of gendered language theories in contemporary digital discourse is an emerging area that builds upon the frameworks discussed in this study. The prescriptive norms seen in 'Girl'—where the mother's speech reinforces societal expectations—are echoed in digital communication, where language use on social media often reinforces or challenges gender stereotypes. Hashtag activism and online discourse around gender roles can be analyzed through the lens of illocutionary and perlocutionary acts, demonstrating the continued relevance of Speech Act Theory and the Deficit Model in modern communication.

Finally, expanding the discussion of gendered language in 'Girl' through these broader linguistic perspectives demonstrates that the linguistic strategies observed in the text are not isolated to gender but are part of larger patterns of social interaction. The integration of Speech Act Theory and the Deficit Model into contemporary linguistic studies allows for a deeper understanding of how language functions as both a reflection of societal norms and a means of shaping them. Future research can explore these dynamics across different languages, social classes, and digital platforms to further investigate how linguistic structures perpetuate or challenge social hierarchies.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, applying Speech Act Theory and the Deficit Model to Jamaica Kincaid's 'Girl' reveals that language is not merely a means of communication but a mechanism for reinforcing societal expectations, particularly regarding gender roles. This study addresses the research gap by demonstrating how literary discourse encodes power through speech acts and gendered language, shaping identity formation and social positioning. Furthermore, the mother's instructions, while presented as guidance, function as authoritative directives that reinforce patriarchal norms, highlighting the role of language in shaping perceptions of femininity and social roles.

The implications of this research extend beyond literary analysis, contributing to sociolinguistics, gender studies, and discourse analysis. By illustrating how language in literature both mirrors and preserves societal hierarchies, this study provides a framework for analyzing gendered communication in different cultural and linguistic contexts.

Additionally, the findings emphasize the need for interdisciplinary approaches to understanding how language constructs and reinforces identity, which is crucial for both linguistic and feminist research. The sociolinguistic analysis of 'Girl' bridges the gap in understanding how language sustains or subverts patriarchal norms. This shows how the study contributed to gender and language discussions.

Future research should adopt a broader methodological scope to explore gendered language in diverse texts and contexts. Employing corpus linguistics could offer quantitative insights into recurring linguistic patterns in gendered discourse, while multimodal analysis could examine how visual and textual elements interact to convey gender norms. Further studies could also apply Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to investigate how power structures are maintained through linguistic choices across different genres. These approaches would deepen the reader's understanding of language, gender, and power, offering valuable contributions to both sociolinguistic and literary scholarship.

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