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Linguistic Representation of Women: A Study of Eight Varieties of Women's Language in Little Women Movie

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ABSTRACT

Language not only reflects but also shapes societal roles, and in Little Women, the way women express themselves through language offers a powerful lens into their social realities. This study examines the linguistic representation of women using eight varieties of women's language in the Little Women movie. The central problem of this research is to identify which features of women's language are employed by the main female characters based on their social context. A qualitative descriptive approach was adopted, analysing data from the movie's dialogues and its script. The analysis was grounded in Lakoff's (1975) theory of women's language features. The findings show that not all varieties of women's language are employed by the main characters. Jo, the central character, utilized eight features, including lexical hedges (48.6%), empty adjectives (1.3%), intensifiers (8.5%), hypercorrect grammar (1%), rising intonation on declaratives (18.4%), and super polite forms (10.9%). Tag questions and precise color terms were not used. Furthermore, the use of these linguistic features is closely connected to the social conditions and gender roles in their society.

Key words: Women's Language; Little Women; Gendered Speech; Social Conditions; Lakoff's Theory

INTRODUCTION

The study of language and gender constitutes a pivotal domain within sociolinguistics, interrogating the ways in which linguistic practices both reflect and reinforce societal norms, particularly those pertaining to gender. As a socially constructed category, gender prescribes roles and expectations that significantly shape individual linguistic behavior. Empirical research has consistently demonstrated that men and women adopt distinct linguistic styles, which are embedded within broader social structures and power relations (Balamurali et al., 2023; Ahmad et al., 2024; Yanti, 2021; Simaki et al., 2017). Language thus functions not merely as a mirror of social realities but also as a mechanism through

which hierarchical relations are sustained. Within this framework, the study of women's language provides critical insights into how gender roles are enacted, negotiated, and contested in everyday discourse.

Robin Lakoff's seminal work Language and Woman's Place (1975) posits that women's language reflects their subordinate position in patriarchal society, characterized by features such as uncertainty, deference, and triviality. According to Lakoff, these linguistic markers reproduce societal expectations that women occupy marginal and less authoritative roles. Although her theory has been subject to extensive debate, it has catalyzed a substantial body of scholarship examining the relationship between language and gendered identity. Subsequent scholars, including Hornby (1995) and Svendsen et al. (2019), have nuanced Lakoff's perspective by acknowledging that features of women's language may serve functional purposes, such as facilitating communication and fostering social cohesion.

The linguistic representation of women has further been analyzed through specific speech features that distinguish male and female language practices. Studies indicate that women are more likely to employ standard pronunciation, demonstrate politeness and indirectness, and utilize hedges, euphemisms, and tag questions (Lin-hua, 2007; Bi, 2010; Hussein, 2012). These linguistic strategies are closely tied to societal norms surrounding femininity, wherein women's speech is expected to be expressive, cooperative, and conciliatory. Conversely, men's language is frequently characterized by directness, informality, and the use of slang or profanity, reflecting broader cultural expectations of masculinity.

Louisa May Alcott's Little Women, in both its literary and cinematic manifestations, offers a compelling case study for examining these dynamics. Situated within a historical context dominated by rigid gender roles, Little Women presents a nuanced portrayal of women's struggles against societal expectations. Central to the narrative is Jo March, an aspiring writer who resists conventional roles of marriage and domesticity. Her linguistic choices exemplify her defiance of traditional gender norms and her assertion of individuality. Jo's speech, alongside her actions, illuminates the tension between personal aspirations and the societal constraints imposed upon women.

Despite extensive scholarship on gendered language in sociolinguistic and literary contexts, cinematic adaptations of Little Women remain underexplored in this regard. A notable gap exists in the analysis of how women's language is represented in film, particularly in relation to how female characters' linguistic practices reflect their social realities and their negotiation of gender roles. This study seeks to address this lacuna by examining the language employed by the principal female characters in Little Women, situating their discourse within the gendered expectations of their historical milieu.

Drawing upon sociolinguistic theory, this research focuses on the cinematic discourse of Little Women, with particular attention to the linguistic practices of Jo March. By analyzing eight varieties of women's language, the study investigates how language in the film simultaneously reflects and challenges patriarchal structures that shape female identities. Through this lens, Little Women emerges not only as a literary and cinematic text but also as a sociolinguistic artifact that provides valuable insights into the role of gendered language as a site of negotiation, power, and resistance within historically constrained social environments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous Related Study

The study of women's language has been a significant area of interest within sociolinguistics, particularly in terms of how language reflects and reinforces societal gender roles. Early foundational work by Robin Lakoff (1975) in *Language and Woman's Place* focused on identifying specific linguistic features that are often attributed to women, such as hedges, tag questions, and rising intonation, which were seen as signs of women's marginalization and social subordination. Subsequent research expanded on Lakoff's theory, examining how these linguistic features function within social contexts. Holmes (2013) and Tannen (1990) argued that these features are not merely indicative of weakness, but serve social functions like maintaining politeness, solidarity, and interpersonal harmony. Studies of women's language in literature and media have also examined how these linguistic practices are used to navigate power dynamics and social expectations, with scholars noting the variation in language use based on context, social status, and the specific roles women occupy within society. In cinematic portrayals, films like *Little Women* have been analyzed for their depiction of female characters' language, shedding light on the gendered nature of speech and how it reflects or challenges traditional gender roles.

In the case of *Little Women*, previous studies have predominantly focused on how gendered language in the text reflects the historical and cultural norms of the time. Studies by Ainurisanti (2023) and Wulandari (2024) highlight the use of Lakoff's linguistic features in the film, showing how women's language reflects their societal roles and individual identities. These studies, however, often overlook the diversity of linguistic varieties used by the female characters, especially Jo March, who challenges traditional gender roles through her language and actions. While feminist perspectives (Salsabila & Hadi, 2025) have explored Jo's resistance to patriarchal norms, there is limited research that specifically examines the variety of linguistic strategies employed by the March sisters and how these strategies vary depending on the social dynamics and personal development of each character. Nityasa and Masykuroh (2024) have also explored expressive speech acts in the film, such as apologies and expressions of gratitude, but again, there is a lack of detailed analysis regarding the different linguistic varieties across the characters. This gap presents an opportunity to investigate the diverse linguistic features used

by the female characters in *Little Women*, providing a more comprehensive understanding of how language functions to express social realities, gender dynamics, and personal identity within the film's historical context.

Language and Gender

The relationship between language and gender has been a central topic in sociolinguistics, exploring how language reflects and reinforces societal roles. Gender is not simply a biological difference but a socially constructed system of expectations and behaviors that shapes how individuals express themselves. According to Eckert (2003), gender norms deeply influence the ways men and women use language, with distinct communication styles emerging from these societal expectations. The concept of "male" and "female" language has been widely discussed, where language differences are often attributed to power dynamics and social roles. Early research by Lakoff (1975) argued that women's language features—such as hedges, tag questions, and rising intonations—reflect their subordinate position in a patriarchal society. In contrast, men's language was described as more direct and assertive, often associated with dominance and control. These linguistic behaviors highlight how language functions as a tool for maintaining social hierarchies. Holmes (1992) and White (2003) expanded on these ideas, noting that women tend to adhere to more formal and polite speech patterns, aligning with societal expectations of women as caregivers and nurturers. Gendered language, therefore, becomes a way of expressing social identity and reinforcing roles within society.

Women's Language Features

Women's language has long been associated with politeness, indirectness, and emotional expressiveness. Lakoff's (1975) pioneering work identified several linguistic features that distinguished women's speech, such as lexical hedges, tag questions, empty adjectives, and precise color terms. These features, she argued, were indicative of women's subordinate role in society and their tendency to avoid asserting dominance in conversation. According to Lakoff, these language choices served to mitigate statements, express uncertainty, and enhance social rapport. Holmes (1995) further expanded on this idea, noting that women's language tends to favor more standard forms, reflecting their awareness of social class and status. For example, women often use more formal language and are more likely to adopt the prestigious pronunciation compared to men, a behavior that may be seen as an attempt to conform to societal expectations and maintain respectability. The use of empty adjectives, such as "adorable" or "charming," often reflects a focus on emotional expression rather than factual information, emphasizing the social role of women as caregivers and emotional nurturers. These features have been widely discussed in both sociolinguistic and feminist literature as part of the ongoing exploration of how language reflects gendered identities and power dynamics in society.

Linguistic Features in Women's Speech

The concept of "women's language" became a central focus of sociolinguistic research in the 1970s, with Lakoff (1975) leading the charge in identifying specific features that were thought to distinguish women's speech from men's. According to Lakoff, women's language includes lexical hedges, tag questions, rising intonation, intensifiers, and hypercorrect grammar. These features are often seen as reflective of women's socialization into a subordinate role, where they are expected to be polite, indirect, and deferential. Lakoff's work was foundational, but subsequent studies have added complexity to this view. For instance, Jakobsson (2010) argued that while hedges may indicate uncertainty, they also serve as strategic social tools to maintain communication and prevent conflict. The use of tag questions, as Lakoff (1973) noted, is a way for women to assert confidence, but it also serves a social function by inviting confirmation from others. These language choices are influenced by the social roles women are expected to play and their positioning within society.

Furthermore, research has also identified how these language features serve specific functions in social interaction. Pearson (1985) identified five main functions of women's language: to express uncertainty, to soften utterances, to initiate discussion, to express feelings, and to emphasize an utterance. These functions align with societal expectations of women as communicators who maintain harmony and manage relationships through language. By using lexical hedges and intensifiers, women can highlight their emotions and engage more fully in interpersonal communication. In contrast, men are often expected to speak in a more direct and assertive manner, with less focus on emotional expressiveness and more on transferring information. This distinction between male and female language use underscores the social implications of language in shaping gender roles.

The Function of Women's Language

Women's language serves various functions that go beyond merely reflecting gendered roles. According to Pearson (1985), one of the primary functions of women's language is to get responses, where women tend to ask more indirect questions and use more words to express their desires or needs. This indirectness can be interpreted as a strategy to maintain social harmony and avoid confrontation. Another key function is to express uncertainty, where women often use language features like hedges to soften their statements and indicate a lack of certainty. This is seen as a reflection of the social expectations that women should not be overly assertive or dominant in conversation. Additionally, women's language serves to soften utterances, using super polite forms and hypercorrect grammar to ensure that their speech is perceived as polite and non-threatening. The function of expressing feelings is also central to women's language, as women are often expected to be more emotionally expressive and communicative than men. These functions, according to Holmes (1992), are shaped by the role of women as caregivers and

nurturers, with language serving as a tool for managing relationships and social connections.

Women's Language in Film

The portrayal of women's language in media, particularly in film, has also received scholarly attention, though studies on the linguistic representation of women in films like *Little Women* remain limited. Films often provide a unique lens through which to examine the intersection of gender, language, and social roles. In *Little Women*, the portrayal of the March sisters, especially Jo, provides an opportunity to analyze how language reflects and negotiates the traditional gender roles of the 19th century. Jo's language, in particular, is a site of resistance to societal norms, as she challenges the expectations placed on women to conform to traditional roles of marriage and domesticity.

METHOD

Design and Samples

This study employs a qualitative research design, specifically a descriptive analysis of the linguistic features used by the main female characters in the Little Women movie, focusing on the character of Jo March. The research is grounded in sociolinguistic theory, particularly the framework developed by Robin Lakoff (1975) on women's language features. The sample for this study consists of the dialogues of the March sisters, with particular attention given to Jo, as the central female character. The data is drawn from Greta Gerwig's 2019 cinematic adaptation of Little Women, which is set in the 19th century and portrays the lives of the March sisters as they navigate societal gender roles. The selection of this film as the sample is based on its rich representation of gender dynamics, feminist themes, and social roles, providing a suitable context for analyzing how women's language is used to navigate power structures and societal expectations.

Instrument and Procedure

The primary instrument used for data collection is the script of the Little Women movie. The script serves as a reliable source of the exact dialogues spoken by the characters, particularly Jo March, allowing for a detailed linguistic analysis. The data collection procedure involves identifying and transcribing the relevant dialogues of the female characters throughout the movie. The focus is specifically on the linguistic features used by Jo and the other March sisters, examining the interactions within their family and with external characters. In terms of categorizing and analyzing the language features, the study utilizes Lakoff's (1975) framework of women's language, which includes features such as lexical hedges, tag questions, rising intonation, intensifiers, hypercorrect grammar, and super polite forms. These features will be identified in the dialogues, and each instance of usage will be recorded and classified accordingly. Additionally, contextual factors, such

as the social roles, power dynamics, and interpersonal relationships between characters, will be considered during the analysis.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process follows a qualitative approach that combines categorical and contextual examination of linguistic features identified in the dialogues. The dialogues of Jo and the other March sisters are transcribed, and each instance of the selected linguistic features is identified, with attention to both their frequency and the contexts in which they occur. For example, the use of lexical hedges (e.g., "I think," "maybe") and tag questions (e.g., "isn't it?" "don't you think?") is analyzed in terms of how they reflect uncertainty, politeness, or social positioning. The analysis further explores how these features correlate with the characters' roles within the family and their relationships with others, with particular emphasis on Jo's dialogues, which frequently challenge traditional gender roles and highlight her resistance to societal norms, such as her rejection of marriage in favor of a writing career. Ultimately, the findings are interpreted through the lens of sociolinguistic theories on gendered language and power dynamics, examining how language reflects the characters' social realities and identities, while also situating the results within existing scholarship on women's language to demonstrate how *Little Women* contributes to broader discussions of gender roles, feminism, and societal expectations.

RESULT AND DISUSSION

In this section the researcher explains the analysis of women speech features used by main female character in Little Women movie. Here is the result of analyzing the transcript of "Little Women" movie.

Women Language Features	Frequency	Percentage
1. Lexical Hedges	142	48.6
2. Tag Question	0	0
3. Empty Adjective	4	1.3
4. Intensifier	25	8.5
5. Hypercorrect Grammar	3	1
6. Rising Intonation on Declaratives	54	18.4
7. Precise Color term	0	0
8. Super polite Forms	32	10.9
9. Avoidance of Strong Swear words	3	1
10. Emphatic Stress	29	9.9
TOTAL	**292**	**100**

Based on the results, there were two most frequent features are used by Jo. Those were lexical hedges or fillers and rising intonation on declaratives features. Lexical hedges helped Jo when she was not sure about what she was going to talk. In this

movie, Jo talks to many characters and she expects to get respond from the interlocutors for sure. So, she uses rising intonation also to confirm the information she talks about.

Lexical Hedges or Filler

Extract 1

Jo is at Aunt March's house. She was reading Belsham but slowed down Jo and was caught by Aunt March. Then Aunt march woke Jo up and told her to continue reading Belsham.
Jo: Marmee loves her life.
Aunt March: you don't know what she loves. Your father cared more about educating freedmen's children than taking care of his family.
Jo: yes, but he was right.
Aunt March: it is possible to be right and foolish.
Jo: ***I don't think so.***
Aunt March: well, you are not paid to think.

In the following extract shows they are involved in arguing with each other about how a woman can be happy even though she is not married. How can a woman make her own way without getting married. And how money can make a woman happy. However, Jo seemed to disagree with aunt march's statement. And Aunt March clearly compares her unmarried life but has a lot of money with Jo's mother, who is married but doesn't have much money. Jo didn't seem to agree with aunt march's saying that his mother had a poor life, so Jo defended his mother by saying that "marmee loves her life". Later, she was refuted by aunt march that Jo didn't know what her mother liked. His father only cared about the education of abandoned children than he cared about his family. But according to Jo, his father had done the right thing. And again, aunt march refuted by saying that is it possible to be right and stupid at the same time. Then Jo said, *"I don't think so"*. That sentence shows the hesitation that Jo has. Jo was in a situation where she could no longer respond to what aunt march said but on the other hand, she did not agree with aunt march's opinion, so she showed his doubts. The sentence "i don't think so" is included in the lexical hedges section where it shows the hesitation of a woman in expressing her opinion. So, this feature includes *to express uncertainty* function.

Extract 2

When Jo and Beth were at the beach. Beth stared out into the ocean while Jo was reading George Eliot's The Mill on the Floss. The situation on the beach was deserted, dark, and cold.

Jo: what novelty is worth that sweet monotony where everything is known and loved because it is known? How great is that?

Beth: I love to listen to you read, Jo, but I love it even better when you read the stories you've written.
Jo: I don't have any new stories.
Beth: Why not?
Jo: Haven't written any.
Beth: you have pencil and paper. Sit here and write me something.
Jo: ***Uhh.*** *I can't,* ***I don't think*** *I can anymore.*
Beth: why?
Jo: it's just, no one even cares to hear my stories anyway.

In the extract above, Jo is reading a novel where he is also with Beth. Jo complimented the novel she was reading, then Beth retorted by saying that she enjoyed hearing Jo read, but she would have preferred if Jo read the story Jo wrote herself. A little saddened by what Beth said, then Jo said that she had no more stories to tell. Beth asks why Jo isn't writing anymore. Jo replied curtly by saying that she wasn't writing anymore. Suddenly Beth asked Jo to write her a story. At that point, Jo turned it down saying that she felt she could no longer write a story. There is a lexical *'uhh'* where it shows the hesitation Jo felt when she refused Beth's request. Then the utterance 'I don't think so' shows Jo's doubts about himself. She wasn't sure if he could write any more stories or not. Lexical *'uhh'* and '*I don't think so'* fall into the category of lexical hedges where these lexical hedges show a woman's hesitation in expressing her opinion.

Empty Adjective

Extract 1

Jo, asleep on the couch, is gently shaken awake. She sees:
Laurie: Jo? Wake up!
Jo: oh Teddy! My Teddy!
Laurie: dear JO, are you glad to see me then?
Jo: glad, my ***blessed*** *boy, is too small! Words can't express it.*

Connecting to the extract, after Jo talked to his mother while waiting for Laurie to arrive, she fell asleep on the sofa. Suddenly she was gently awakened by Laurie. How surprised Jo was at the time and happy. When asked by Laurie if Jo was happy to meet him, Jo replied *'glad, my blessed boy'*. That sentence indicates how happy Jo is to meet Laurie again, a childhood friend of Jo's own. Then, *"my blessed boy"* in that sentence there is *'blessed'* an empty adjective utterance. Indicates that Jo shows her happy emotion using that words when she meets Laurie. The use of empty adjectives in women's language indicates that the speaker wants to show the relationship of her emotional expression with her addressee. In addition, this feature includes *to express feeling* function.

Extract 2

Laurie: Jo! Get a branch!
Laurie: grab on! (to Amy)
*Jo: My sister, my sister, dear God thank you for my **sweet** sister.*

Connecting to the extract above, Jo obeys quickly, blindly, using the incredible strength that is available to people in times of cries—Jo drags a large branch over to Laurie, who stretches it over to Amy. Then she does, both Laurie and Jo lie flat on their stomachs so as not to disturb the ice, as they pull together. Jo is terrified but keeping herself together to get Amy safety. Tears are streaming down Jo's face as she strips off all her warm clothes and bundles them around Amy. Jo said *'dear God thank you for my sweet sister'* indicating that Jo was very grateful that Amy was safe and in good condition even though Amy was still in shock from falling in the ice hole. the word *'sweet'* in Jo's sentence impresses her feeling of her sister.

Intensifier

Extract 1

Jo, who has been roaming the room, stops in front of a portrait of Mr. Laurence. Laurie follows her gaze.
Jo: Christopher Columbus, look at that.
Laurie: That's my grandfather. Are you scared of him?
*Jo: I'm not scared of anyone! He looks stern, but my grandfather was **much more** handsome.*

In the extract above, when Jo was looking at a photo where the photo turned out to be Laurie's grandfather, but Jo didn't know and instead said that the person in the photo was Christopher Columbus. Then Laurie said it was her grandfather and asked Jo if it scared him, but Jo said she wasn't. And instead compares Laurie's grandfather and grandfather by saying *"he looks stern, but my grandfather was much more handsome".* The utterance *"much more"* signifies the intensifier in the sentence. Where is the intensifier which is used to emphasize or strengthen the meanings of the following words. This feature includes *to emphasize an utterance* function.

Extract 2

Unfortunately, during this speech, Mr. Laurence has entered with Mrs. March, unseen by Jo. Jo spins around and sees Mr. Laurence and her mother.

Marmee: Jo! We do not compare grandfathers!
Mr. Laurence: you think he is more handsome, hey?
*Jo: oh, no. You are **very** handsome. I didn't mean...*
Mr. Laurence: I knew your mother's father. You have got his spirit.

Jo: thank you, sir.

In this extract, when Jo turned around and saw Mr. Laurence had been behind him as soon as Jo felt guilty for comparing him to his grandfather and saying that his grandfather was more handsome than Mr. Laurence so Jo repeated the sentence and told Mr. Laurence *"you are very handsome",* the word *"very"* in that sentence signifies intensifier. Indicates that she uses *'very'* to make Laurie's grandfather believe in her opinions. The use of intensifier in women's language is to clarify their opinions to be accepted by the community itself.

Hypercorrect Grammar

Extract 1

Jo: No, Teddy—please don't.
Laurie: it's no use Jo; we've got to have it out..
Jo: No, No, /we don't…
Laurie: I've loved you ever since I've known you Jo—I couldn't help it, and you've been so good to me—I've tried to show it but you wouldn't let me; now I'm going to make you hear and give me an answer because I can't go on like this any longer.
Jo: I wanted to save you from this, I thought / you'd understand.
Laurie: (not listening to her) /I've worked hard to please you, and I gave up billiards and everything you didn't like, and waited and never complained about I hoped you'd love me, though I'm not half good enough—
Jo: ***yes, you are, you are a great deal too good for me, and I'm so grateful to you and so proud of you, I don't see why I… I can't love you as you want me too.***
Laurie: you can't?
Jo: (helplessly) I can't change the feeling and it would be a lie to say I do when I don't. I'm so sorry, Teddy, so desperately sorry, but I can't help it…

In this extract, the situation where Laurie wants to express her feelings to Jo. However, Jo didn't want Laurie to reveal it. Laurie ignored what Jo said. Laurie kept saying what she wanted to say about her feelings for Jo. Laurie said that she liked Jo from the start of their meeting. However, Jo only sees Laurie as a friend. Jo didn't want to be in such a complicated relationship. And Jo politely rejected Laurie's feelings by saying *'yes, you are, you are a great deal too good for me, and I'm so grateful to you and so proud of you, I don't see why I... I can' t love you as you want me too'*. In that sentence, Jo uses hypercorrect grammar where she respects her interlocutor by rejecting his feelings very politely. women have this kind of feature since they should behave politely and not talk roughly. Hypercorrect grammar is included in one of the categories of women language features. The aim of using hypercorrect grammar is to show the identity of the speakers. it is a device for women to claim their identity as an educated people. Based on the explanation, this feature includes to soften utterance's function.

Rising Intonation on Declarative

Extract 1

Jo sat, arms folded, trying to cover up the ink stains. Mr. Dashwood read his story pen in hand, happily scribbling and taking notes, changes. Every time his pen scratched, Jo felt his heart break. She almost cried when:

Mr. Dashwood: we will take this.
Jo: ***you will?***
Mr. Dashwood: with alternations. It is too long.

The extract shows after Mr. Dashwood checked all his writings, finally he agreed to publish his writings but, on the condition, that the writings were too long. Jo nodded in agreement then Mr. Dashwood returned his writing where page after page was full of scribbles. The words *'you will?'* with a slight increase in his tone indicate that this kind of speech pattern is used to reflect something real about character and play a part in not taking a woman seriously or trust her with the real responsibilities, since she cannot make up her mind and is not sure of herself. Based on the explanation, this feature includes *to get response* function.

Extract 2

Jo: should I tell my, my friend that you will take another if she had one better than this?
Mr. Dashwood: we will look at it. Tell her to make it short and spicy. And if the main character's girl makes sure she is married by the end or dead, either way.
Jo: ***excuse me?***

In the following extract, after Jo gave the story and Mr. Dashwood gives money in exchange for stories sold by Jo. Then Jo said that he wanted to tell his team if they made a better story than before then Mr. Dashwood will buy it again. Then, Mr. Dashwood agrees with what Jo said but, on the condition, that the story must be short and hot. And the main female character in the next story must marry or die at the end of the story. And that made Jo a little bit surprised and clarifying and raising his voice a little bit what he had heard so he said, *"excuse me?"*, but Jo didn't get any response from Mr. Dashwood because Mr. Dashwood was back busy with other business. It is included in the category of raising intonation on declarative where it appears there is a peculiar sentence intonation pattern only among women. for the question not only declarative answer needed, but also has a raising inflection typical of yes-no question and seems like being especially hesitant.

Super polite Forms

Extract 1

Jo entered a publishing room. He wanted to meet with the head of the publisher to publish the short stories he wrote. Jo walked past the table looking for someone. When he found him, Jo started greeting him.

Jo: ***Excuse me.***
Mr. Dashwood: (looks at her)
Jo: I was looking for the Weekly Volcano Office... I wished to see Mr. Dashwood.

In that moment, after arriving in front of Mr. Dashwood, Jo started to greet politely even though he was feeling nervous. After greeting, Mr. Dashwood just stared at him without asking anything. Jo then continued his sentence by telling his purpose of visiting Mr. Dashwood. Connecting to the extract above, Jo as the main character starts the conversation by using the sentence *"excuse me"*, where the utterance is included in the category of super polite forms. It is kind of super polite form as greeting. It showed that Jo reflected a polite attitude before starting the conversation. By using this term indicates that the speaker wants to show politeness on direct request. Apart from being a form of politeness, the expression *"excuse me"* used by Jo shows that she feels nervous and doubts if it's not Mr. Dashwood she wants to meet. So, Jo uses super polite forms and hopes that Jo gets a response from Mr. Dashwood. Based on the explanation, this feature includes to soften utterances function.

Extract 2

Jo removes the tongs and a burnt clump of hair follows. Jo scream and Meg screams because Jo screams.

Jo: ***Meg, I am so sorry!***
Meg: what have you done?! /marmee I am spoilt! I can't go! My hair!

In the extract above, before leaving for the party, Jo helped Meg straighten her hair. However, due to his carelessness, Jo broke Meg's hair. Jo was shocked and screamed making Meg also startled and screamed. Then Jo apologized to Meg saying "Meg, I am so sorry!". The use of the phrase *'I am so sorry'* shows that Jo really feels sorry for Meg for ruining her hair. The sentence *"I am so sorry"* also shows Jo's courtesy to her sister even though she is guilty.

Avoidance of Strong Swear Words

Extract 1

Amy: I burnt it up! I burnt up your book! I told you I'd make you pay, and I did!
Jo: ***You wicked girl! You wicked, wicked girl!*** *I can never write it again! I'll never forgive you as long as I live!*

Connecting with the quote above, when Amy admits that he was the one who burned Jo's writing because he was very annoyed with Jo. Amy felt that she was always second only to Jo. like what Amy said that she burned Jo's writing to make Jo pay for all the annoyance. Later, Jo was so angry and disappointed to hear what Amy said, that he said 'You wicked girl! You wicked, wicked girl!'. It could be seen that her utterance functions to show how strongly they were allowed themselves to feel about something. Then they are fighting, full-out fighting, during these last lines, as their sister and Marmee attempt to stop it. Based on the explanation, this feature includes *to express feeling* function.

Extract 2

Laurie and Jo are trying tricks and spin, but suddenly they hear the sound of ice splitting. And a high-pitched scream

Amy: HELP! HELP!
Jo: Amy! It's Amy! ***Oh God, oh God, dear God please….***

In the following extract, Laurie and Jo freeze and look at each other, and in the same time instantly they scramble up, Jo screaming. They race back, Jo sending up a breathless prayer, an incantation, a pleading with universe. She said *'oh God, oh God, dear God please'* indicates that to express her feelings. She was afraid that something bad would happen to Amy. She wished Amy well.

Emphatic Stress

Extract 1

Amy: Marmee! Marmee! Aunt March is going to Europe/and
Jo: wants me to go with her! ***How wonderful!*** *Now I know why I spent all those boring hours reading to her!*
Amy: no, she… she wanted me to come. As her companion.
Jo: (stunned) Europe? With you?
Amy: she wants me to work on my art, and my French, of course.
Jo: oh… I, ***that's wonderful*** *Amy.*

Connecting to the extract above, after Amy took Aunt March to her carriage, Amy was so happy that she even shed tears of joy and called out to Marmee, where Marmee was with Jo. When Amy was standing next to Jo, she said that Aunt March was going to Europe, she had not finished speaking yet then Jo happily interrupted Amy's conversation by saying that he was the person Aunt March wanted to come with her to Europe. The utterance *'how wonderful!'* signifies emphatic stress where he places emphasis on the utterance indicating that he is confident in himself that he will be invited by Aunt March to Europe. However, Amy later said that the one Aunt March would invite to Europe was her, not Jo. Then, it can be seen from the look on Jo's face that he is disappointed as evidenced by the emphasis on the word 'wonderful' in the next conversation. How he was devastated by what he had just heard. He had done what Aunt March had ordered him to do, such as reading boring books, but in fact it was not him who was invited, but Amy herself.

Extract 2

Jo, deeply offended, starts to gather up her work.
Jo: I can't afford to starve on praise.
Friedrich: are you upset?
*Jo: of course**, I'm upset!** You just told me you didn't like my work!*
Friedrich: I thought you wanted honesty.

In the extract above, Fredrich is reading Jo's writing, he gives a very honest criticism of Jo's writing, but Jo feels that Fredrich is making fun of his work, not criticizing it so Jo is angry. Jo said, *'I'm upset!'*, when Jo said that sentence, she put a little pressure, so Fredrich knew that Jo was angry and offended by what Fredrich had done. The example of the utterance falls into the category of emphatic stress in women's language where it occurs when women want to strengthen an assertion. Based on the explanation, this feature includes to emphasize an utterance function. This study examines the linguistic features employed by Jo March in *Little Women*, utilizing Lakoff's (1975) framework of women's language to analyze her speech patterns and their implications for gender roles, power relations, and identity construction. Jo's dialogue reveals a complex negotiation between societal constraints and individual agency as she navigates the patriarchal structures of her time. The linguistic features identified such as lexical hedges, intensifiers, super polite forms, and rising intonation illustrate both conventional aspects of women's language and Jo's resistance to gendered expectations. In doing so, the analysis contributes to ongoing sociolinguistic discourse on the intersection of language, gender, and identity.

Jo's frequent use of lexical hedges, including expressions such as "I don't think so" and "uhh," corresponds with Lakoff's (1975) claim that women's language is characterized by uncertainty and tentativeness. This observation is consistent with Holmes (1992), who argued that hedges often function as politeness strategies, mitigating the force of statements to avoid conflict. In Jo's case, however, hedges also serve as markers of self-expression, signaling both vulnerability and the

courage required for women to articulate opinions in male-dominated contexts. This nuanced function aligns with Svendsen et al. (2019), who contend that tentative language, while frequently interpreted as insecurity, can facilitate social interaction and enable women to assert presence in conversations where their voices are marginalized.

Unlike other female characters in *Little Women*, Jo employs empty adjectives sparingly. Lakoff (1975) suggested that women's use of adjectives such as "adorable" and "charming" reflects emotional expressiveness and a desire to establish interpersonal connection. Jo's limited reliance on such forms underscores her resistance to conventional femininity and preference for direct, assertive communication. This finding complements Salsabila and Hadi (2025), who, through a feminist reading of *Little Women*, argue that Jo's linguistic practices constitute a form of resistance to traditional gender roles, particularly through her rejection of emotional excess and pursuit of intellectual and creative autonomy.

Jo's use of intensifiers, including "very" and "much more," further distinguishes her speech. Holmes (1995) observed that intensifiers are frequently employed by women to emphasize statements and highlight emotional significance. Jo's deployment of intensifiers functions as a means of asserting agency and amplifying her voice, reflecting her determination to be heard. This observation resonates with Leung and Wong (2021), who argue that women's use of intensifiers represents an effort to command attention and underscore the importance of their contributions, particularly in contexts where female perspectives are marginalized.

Hypercorrect grammar, another feature identified by Lakoff (1975), appears in Jo's speech, albeit less prominently. Her adherence to standard grammatical forms reflects both an awareness of societal expectations and a desire to be recognized as an educated woman. This pattern supports Holmes' (2001) assertion that women, particularly those in subordinate positions, are expected to conform to linguistic norms signaling politeness and respectability. Eckert (2013) similarly emphasizes that women's linguistic practices often align with social respectability, serving as a means of presenting themselves as cultured and refined in order to secure social acceptance.

Jo's frequent use of rising intonation in declaratives also merits attention. Wardaugh (2006) noted that women are more likely than men to employ rising intonation, often interpreted as signaling uncertainty or inviting feedback. In Jo's case, rising intonation functions as a strategy to engage interlocutors and ensure her contributions are acknowledged. This finding is consistent with Bren (2006), who argued that rising intonation should not be understood solely as a marker of insecurity but as a communicative tool that fosters participation and inclusion in discourse.

Jo's reliance on super polite forms and avoidance of strong swear words further reflects the gendered expectations of her time. Lakoff (1975) argued that women

are socialized to employ polite forms to avoid offense and demonstrate adherence to social norms. Jo's use of expressions such as "excuse me" and "I am so sorry" illustrates her awareness of these expectations and her negotiation of power dynamics through language. Eckert (2003) similarly observed that women are often discouraged from using coarse or offensive language, reinforcing the gendered nature of speech. Jo's use of politeness strategies to express guilt or initiate dialogue underscores her sensitivity to social positioning and her attempts to navigate hierarchical structures.

Jo's use of emphatic stress to highlight key points in her dialogue demonstrates her effort to assert her voice and ensure her contributions are taken seriously. This feature reflects her determination to challenge societal norms and establish her presence in discourse. Svendsen et al. (2019) argue that emphatic stress in women's language strengthens the impact of statements and reinforces their authority, particularly in contexts where women seek to resist marginalization.

In sum, the analysis of Jo March's language in *Little Women* illuminates the dual role of linguistic practices in both conforming to and resisting societal expectations. Jo's use of hedges, intensifiers, rising intonation, and super polite forms reflects her negotiation of identity and power within a patriarchal society. Her linguistic choices, shaped by gendered norms yet strategically deployed to assert autonomy, highlight the complex interplay between language, social power, and resistance. These findings contribute to broader sociolinguistic discussions on gendered language, demonstrating how linguistic practices function as sites of identity construction and contestation within historically constrained social environments.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the linguistic representation of women through Jo March's speech in the Little Women movie, focusing on eight varieties of women's language as outlined by Lakoff (1975). The analysis revealed that Jo employed lexical hedges, empty adjectives, intensifiers, hypercorrect grammar, rising intonation on declaratives, avoidance of strong swear words, super polite forms, and emphatic stress, with lexical hedges emerging as the most dominant feature. These linguistic choices illustrate both conformity to and resistance against traditional gendered speech patterns, reflecting Jo's negotiation of identity, social expectations, and agency within a patriarchal context.

The absence of tag questions and precise color terms in Jo's speech further underscores her deviation from certain conventional features of women's language, highlighting her assertiveness and independence. Moreover, the identified functions of these features such as expressing uncertainty, initiating discussions, softening utterances, and conveying emotions demonstrate how Jo's language operates as a tool for both self-expression and social navigation.

Overall, this research emphasizes that women's language in Little Women is not merely a reflection of societal norms but also a site of contestation where female identity and power are negotiated. While limited to one character in a single adaptation, the findings contribute to broader discussions on the linguistic representation of women in cinematic portrayals. Future studies should extend this analysis to other characters and adaptations to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how women's language is constructed and represented across diverse contexts.

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