



LANGUAGE, GENDER, AND DISLOCATION:

APPLYING LINGUISTIC THEORIES TO KAMALA DAS'S AN INTRODUCTION

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Abstract

This study analyses Kamala Das's poem, "An Introduction," published in 1965, from a linguistic perspective. This poem explores themes of gender identity and language. This is a confessional poem. The present study uses three linguistic approaches to analyse the selected poem. The research methodology employed in this study is the application of speech act theory, politeness theory, and metaphor theory. The study will provide a close reading of the text "An Introduction" by Kamla Das. The study argues that linguistic theories enhance the interpretation of literary texts. This study reveals that Kamla Das's speech act emphasises autonomy, her refusal of politeness, the patriarchally imposed norms, and the metaphor of language and body, which focuses on identity dislocation.

Keywords: Feminist literary criticism, Literary linguistics, Metaphor theory, Politeness theory, Linguistic analysis, Gender identity, and Speech act theory.

Introduction:

Kamla Das is known as the mother of modern Indian English poetry. Poems by her are confessional and express bold opinions from the feminist point of view. This poem is a relevant text in today's world. This poem helps understand the true female voice in the Indian patriarchal system. Interpretation of such literary text with the help of linguistics theory is a very broad research field. Such a perspective helps interpret the text with great detail. To study literature, feminism, or post-colonialism in connection to linguistics provides an interdisciplinary



approach to the analysis of the literary text. Moreover, the selected poem by Kamla Das is an epitome of Indian feminist writing. An analysis of this poem with linguistic theories will deepen the understanding of the poem. The study is a contribution to the existing Scholarship of understanding women writing in the Indian context. they have been Limited existing studies focusing on linguistics theories to Indian English poetry the presence study will address this gap and offer is scope to integrated Indian text from a linguistic point of view and Deep the feminist and linguistics understanding of the text the selected Poem portrait women's voice and it is a relevant poem which has a confessional tone this poem talks about women identity language and resistance this poem has already been studied from the perspective of feminist lens. There are very few studies that apply linguistic theories to analyse how language can construct identity and resistance. The study aims to explore themes articulated by linguistic structure. This study draws on the theories of Austin and Searle's speech at Brown and Levinson's politeness theory, and finally, Lakoff and Johnson's metaphor theory. This study does not collect any empirical data. The scope of the study is limited to one poem, three theories, and qualitative text-based analysis. This study is relevant because it uses linguistic theories to deepen our understanding of women's identities in Indian English poetry. This paper offers a theoretical framework, applies linguistic theories to the poem, and discusses implications for feminist and post-colonial literary studies.

Literature Review-

Shankar Sarkar 2025 in the research paper "Analysis of the poem An Introduction based on politics of language" applies a politics of language framework to examine Das's negotiation of multilingual identity and gender expectations through speech act and linguistic resistance. Sarkar (2025) in the other studies and "An Introduction: Study of language, identity and feminist self- expression." Emphasizes Das refusal of patriarchal roles is encoded in her language choices. This study uses the linguistic identity and feminist course to interpret the poem. "Analysis of Kamla Das's language identity and power in poetry," published by Bengaluru Central University in 2025, explores the poem through the frameworks of language and identity. It highlights how Kamla Das's multilingualism and rejection of "mother tongue" expectation reflect a dislocated female identity. These studies have a limited focus on the



linguistic approaches to interpret it, while, on the other hand, the present study will surely contribute to the existing scholarship of Indian English poetry and its linguistic analysis.

Application of the Theories

Speech Act Theory

This study draws on three linguistic theories. Kamala Das's selected poem "An Introduction". The first theory application on the poem is the speech act theory by Austin and Searle. The line from the poem "I am Indian, very brown, born in Malabar" falls under the assertive speech act type. This line is a statement of fact, and by the use of this line, Das asserts women's identity and the sense of origin she talks of nationality, and the location of birth. Another assertive line in the poem is "I speak three languages, write in two, dream in one". This line suggests that the declarative nature of linguistic ability asserts autonomy in the selection of language of expression. "I am sinner, I am saint," this line from the perspective of linguistics states that this line challenges binary moral categories, which asserts Complex identity. Lastly, the line "I am what I am" explains the strong self-assertion. This line performs identities through language. There are two lines to apply a directive in the poem. The first is "Don't write in English they said." This line suggests a command from society; this shows external imposition on her voice, and another line from the poem that highlights this type of speech act is "Why not leave me alone?" It is a direct request, and it challenges women's lives. It can be seen in this line, "I will write in English, I will write in any language I choose," that this shows her commitment to self-expression and a promise to refuse any societal impositions. An expressive act can be seen in lines from the poem first line is "I was child and later they told me I grew up." This expresses the emotion and also the frustration at imposed roles. Secondly, in the line "I was married, I was forced to accept," this line expresses sorrow and an attempt to resist and uncover personal suffering. In the third line under the expressive act, "I am every woman who seeks love". This is a very powerful line that conveys solidarity and emotional truth with a confessional tone. At last, to apply the declarative from the speech act theory, two lines perfectly express the concept of declaration. "I am a poet, I am a woman." Here Kamla Das declares her identity and tries to enact her role with the help of utterances. "I



"I am every woman who seeks love" is a declaration because it states the universality of the female voice and transforms the personal emotion into collective emotion.

Politeness Theory

To understand and apply politeness theory, the study draws on the concepts of "face", positive face, negative face, and face-threatening acts. This approach will help us understand the poem from the perspective of sociolinguistics. Language and society are two closely linked phenomena. This section analyses poem lines from politeness theory; the first representative line is "I speak three languages, write in two, dream in one". This line can be studied from the perspective of positive face; this line asserts individuality, and it also seeks recognition and acceptance of her linguistic identity. Positive face refers to the desire to be liked and accepted. This line shows this intention of the poet to be liked and accepted by society. another line from the poem "I am every woman who seeks love". This line adheres to the positive face theory, and it appeals to shared human experience and tries to build solidarity with readers. This poem is an epitome of the request for autonomy, and these concepts or themes can be understood with the help of the negative face in the line "Why not leave me alone?" This line requests autonomy and withdrawal of societal interference through the lens of negative face exercise, desire for freedom, and patriarchal restrictions. The poem is analysed through FTA, which is a face-threatening act, in the line "Don't write in English they said." This line from FTA suggest that external restrictions from the society threatens her negative face; in other words, it highlights resistance to her autonomy and societal control leads to dislocation of women's identity. Another line from the poem is also a very strong line to be analysed from the face-threatening act, "politics is not for womens". Here, the patriarchal directive threatens women's positive face competence. Finally, to understand the politeness strategy, this study focuses on two lines from the poem. Bald—on records, "I am what I am." This line is a very direct and unapologetic assertion of her identity. Das refuses the dislocation of her identity. "This line rejects the need for sacrifice of one's own self. 'Leave me alone' is another powerful line from the poem, which shows a direct appeal to society to respect her autonomy." This suggests that society shouldn't interfere in her life and should let her choose and experience life in her own way.



Conceptual Metaphor Theory

Conceptual metaphor theory applied to the selected poem shows that metaphors function in cognitive linguistics. Cognitive because these metaphors shape the thinking and reasoning. This theory deepens the interpretation of the selected poem by Kamala Das. This theory maps two ideas onto each other, one being “sinner” and the other being “saint”, in the line “I am sinner, I am saint”. In this line, the two terms are in reference to abstract and concrete ideas. These are the moral metaphors - “sinner and saint”—used in the poem to portray selfhood as a very complex and contradictory concept. According to this theory, identity is not restricted to binaries, but it also incorporates multiplicity. Identity cannot be portrayed as black or white; however, it is grey in the true sense and carries even further several shades. In the selected line from the poem, “Politics is not for women.” Here, in this line, politics is considered a male-dominated domain, and women are excluded from this domain. Henceforth, it is argued that politics is portrayed as a masculine space. This uncovers a patriarchal metaphor that restricts women’s voice and existence. These conceptual metaphors structure thoughts, represent womanhood, resistance, and identity.

Conclusion

The poem shows the performative nature of language. Kamala Das performs her identity through her words and utterances from the selected poem, “An Introduction”. We find these concepts by applying Austin and Searle’s speech act theory to the selected poem. Analysis of the poem lines argues that speech acts help to empower the voices of the marginalised. This happens due to the transformation of words into actions. This is the crucial function of language, according to the proponents of the speech act theory, Searle and Austin. This theory falls under the category of pragmatics, and as a result, this study gains the pragmatic understanding of the selected Indian English poem. Politeness theory from the branch of sociolinguistics provided the foregrounding of language in relation to society. This theory helps explain Kamala Das’s rejection of societal politeness conventions. It is expected of women to follow and abide by the rules and conventions of society. Despite that, Das asserts her individuality unapologetically through language. She resists the patriarchal impositions, and it is referred to as a face-threatening act against societal authority. This theory helps understand



that politeness theory is not merely a social linguistics tool, but it is evidence of a power struggle. Such power struggles differ when they are in the domain of gendered power struggles. Moreover, the conceptual metaphor theory applied in this research study is a very powerful and insightful theory from cognitive linguistics. This theory helps structure thoughts through the concepts of “target” and “source.” Patriarchy is shown as the exclusion of women metaphorically. These metaphors explore the struggles of womanhood, resistance, freedom, and identity. All these are grounded in the culture.

The application of these three theories to the poem offered a comprehensive and layered understanding of the text. This study proves that the selected poem is not a mere autobiographical poem, but it is a linguistic act of resistance from the societal orthodox norms. Speech act theories helped perform the identity with the help of language. Politeness theory from sociolinguistics explains the resistance and rejection of imposition and negotiation of face. Whereas conceptual speech act theory reveals a framework of metaphors for struggles embodied in culture. These theories together provide a combined lens to the analysis of the selected text. Hence, the analysis becomes the multilayered assertion of autonomy, feminist protest, and identity.

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