

Silencing Women's Voices Through Patriarchal Language: Dale Spender's *Man Made Language* Applied to *Burnt Shadows*

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Abstract

This article aims to explore Kamila Shamsie's novel *Burnt Shadows* (2009) by applying Dale Spender's feminist linguistic theory of *Man Made Language* (1980). Spender argues that language is written by men, for men and around men to reflect male dominance and to marginalize women's voices. By the analysis of different female characters in the novel, this research highlights how women are linguistically and socially positioned as widows, outsiders, wives and "others". This study also investigates how women can resist these limits by use of multiple languages. This article is a contribution to feminist criticism which analyzes South Asian Anglophone fiction through the lens of Dale Spender's theory of *Man Made Language* (1980) which is relatively an underexplored area.

Keywords: feminist, identity, patriarchy, discourse, fiction

Introduction

Language is socially constructed and is shaped by power. Language has been used as a tool for social control from a very long time. According to feminist linguist like Dale Spender, throughout history men have been controlling linguistic systems and because of that, patriarchal attitudes have embedded in common speech and literature. Dale Spender's *Man Made Language* (1980) argues that language is a system that is historically built to reflect male experiences and to promote male power and is not just a medium of communication. This perspective emphasizes how voices of women are silenced, marginalized and are commonly disregarded as compare to men. As the theory is a major contribution to feminist linguistics, *Man Made Language* (1980) illustrates how linguistic choices reinforces patriarchal rule.

Kamila Shamsie is a Pakistani writer with a multicultural background. She lives in Karachi but has spent a major part of her life in the West (in the United States and Great Britain). That's why she has adapted knowledge of different cultures. All of her writings including *Burnt-Shadows* (2009), her fifth novel and some others are written in English. She chooses English language to address global Anglophone Audience. She usually explains the cultural specific references or incidents which can clearly be seen in her novels. Her linguistic choices and way of explaining diverse cultures creates a narrative which is easily accessible to readers outside Pakistan. This allows her works to enter a globalized world where a book written in one country can be published all over the world.

Burnt Shadows (2009) narrates a story that spans for sixty years. Main character of the story is a Japanese women named Hiroko Tanaka. The story evolves from some of the last moments of World War II to the post 9/11 incident. The story moves across different countries and each place represents a new phase and culture. The story begins in Nagasaki on the 9 of August 1945 and follows the life experiences of Hiroko Tanaka who is the atomic attack survivor. Hiroko's life starts from India in 1947, where she receives hospitality of the Anglo-German stepsister of her German fiancé killed in the atomic attack. There she meets Sajjad, whom she later marries. After that Hiroko and her husband move to

Pakistan after partition. Later the story moves to Karachi in 1980's, which is the time period of invasion of Afghanistan. The last part of the story revolves in the US and there they witness 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center. Following the tragedies of Hiroko's life, *Burnt Shadows* (2009) narrates the story of two families, the Asian Ashraf-Tanaka family and the western colonial Burton-Weiss family. The story of Hiroko is narrated in the third person narrative. Therefore, it intersects with those of the other characters of the novel. Different female characters in the novel have their own sufferings and experiences such as loss of their homeland, hybridity and foreignness which shapes their identities in relations to men hence ignoring women's individuality. Wives, widows, mother and such labels have made women dependent on male, denying their personal identity.

South Asian Anglophone Fiction refers to novels, short stories and literary works written in English by authors from South Asia (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal). Its roots are embedded in the (stories rooted in their local histories and identities) postcolonial period when English became both a colonial agency and a global literary medium. Kamila Shamsie's novel *Burnt Shadows* (2009) is a striking example of Pakistani Literature and South Asian Anglophone fiction. The novel moves across continents and historical moments, from Nagasaki to Delhi, Partition, Afghanistan and Karachi reflecting how personal lives and identities are shaped by global conflicts. In its Karachi sections, the novel discusses the complexities of Pakistani societies, cultural diversity, political instability and struggles of layman or females.

Though Spender's theory has been applied to traditional Western Works, there is still a very less evidence of its application in South Asian Anglophone Fiction. Kamila Shamsie's novel *Burnt Shadows* (2009) gives an extensive context on which Dale Spender theory can be effectively applied. The novel explores multiple nations and historical occasions including the Cold War, Partition, Atomic Bombing in Nagasaki and post 9/11 politics. Throughout multiple situations, female characters like Hiroko Tanaka, Kim Burton and Elizabeth Burton explore personalities created by societal, political, patriarchal and linguistic factors. Their experiences reflects how male dominant discourse portrays women as wives, widow's outsiders or "others", diminishing their individual identity.

Delimitation

The present study focuses on Kamila Shamsie's novel *Burnt Shadows* (2009) and analyzes it through the lens of Dale Spender's theory of *Man Made Language* (1980). The scope is limited to only one novel and one theory. The research puts emphasis on the way patriarchal language affects women's identity, keeping in mind the lives of female characters. The study analyzes novel linguistically, socially and thematically rather historically.

Problem Statement

Kamila Shamsie's novel *Burnt Shadows* (2009) explores multiple female personalities shaped by linguistic, social and historical factors. Previous researches on the novel focuses only on history and war and not on how patriarchal language shapes women's identities. According to Dale Spender's theory of *Man Made Language* (1980), language is produced in a way that women's voices are silenced and patriarchal rule is strengthened through linguistic creation. Through this lens, this study delves into looking at how multiple identities offers possibilities to resist and how gendered language operates within the novel.

Literature Review

Many studies on language and gender have proved that language is not just a set of rules, it's tied to emotions, cultures, identities and societies. It's not just a system of words or signs that are shared by a group of people to deliver messages and to communicate instead it plays a crucial role in developing subjection, degradation and enslavement of women. In fact, it is the language made by men that confine women to restricted situations where they have no choice except following dominance and patriarchy.

Dale Spender's book *Man Made Language* (1980) says that language is not neutral and static. It is built mostly by men that's why it reflects only male experiences. The language which is made by men sets women as "invisible" and men "authoritative." Barret and Mittus (1981) approached feminist linguistics by investigating language as a tool of social construct. They argued that commonly used linguistic choices marginalize voices of women while promoting males point of views. Their analysis highlighted how masculine terms (like man or he) erase women from discourse and often silence female voices. Tromel Plotz (1981) supported the idea of Spender revealing that how everyday talk like interruptions and politeness keeps men in power in public discourse. She argued that these language practices are not neutral rather these choices systematically silence women, positioning men as the dominant voices in discourse. Harvey (1982) extended this critique by focusing on the consequences behind this patriarchal language. He studies the ways in which women internalize linguistic structures that diminish their authority which results in reduced participation in public discourse.

Spender's later work on *Telling How It Is* (1983) looked at students. She found boys spoke more and got more teachers attention that's why taken more seriously hence ignoring girls voices. She argued that schools should change their language practices to promote equality. Lawson (1984) focused on practical solutions like changing sexist words in schools and media can help in resistance and challenges patriarchal notions. He highlighted that changing common speech could reshape cultural attitudes towards gender. In an interview with Spender, Daumer and Runzo (1985), Spender said that her goal was not to ban words but to highlight how language gives more power to men. She wanted people to notice these patterns and address them. Baron (1986) argued that discrimination is not only embedded in vocabulary but it is also present in the grammatical structures of language. He highlighted that grammar itself gives more power to men which helped in the growth of feminist linguistics. Philips, Steele and Tanz (1987) analyzed how gendered norms are reflected and reinforced in different cultures by language. Their comparative research revealed that patriarchal linguistic patterns are universal and they vary depending on cultural contexts. Cameron (1992) explored how gender inequality is created and maintained through language. She reviewed the feminist, Lacanian and postmodern perspectives to illustrate the complex nature of linguistic power. Jennifer Coates (1995) evaluated the development of feminist linguistic theories. She explained the shift from earlier views which saw women's language as weak to the later studies which showed men and women have different communication styles.

Christie (2000) explored the application of pragmatics to understand how language generates gendered meanings. She revealed how everyday linguistic patterns, speech acts, politeness strategies and communicative relevance frequently reinforce patriarchal norms. Alvanoudi (2008) utilize the ideas of Butler and Irigaray to examine grammatical gender using feminist deconstruction theories. She argued that grammatical structures influence identity and maintain patriarchal orders. Harleen Singh (2010) sheds light on the view that Pakistani literature reflects postmodern ideas shaped by South Asia's political, religious and cultural conflicts. Postmodern fiction questions caste, colonialism, faith and national narratives. This study examines Kamila Shamsie's novel *Burnt Shadows* using postmodern theory and textual analysis. Pascal Zinck (2010) reflects the tensions and ambiguities of all diasporic fictional discourse as elimination, displacement and recollections. He argued that after the two World Wars, the Holocaust, migrations and the horizon represents division and broken identities. Kamila-Shamsie's novel *Burnt Shadows* explores these themes through settings from Nagasaki to India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Guantanamo, reflecting how fragmentation and identity struggles defines the narrator's fugitive life. Omaishat (2011) investigated *Burnt Shadows* through a postcolonial perspective which focuses on identity and displacement. The analysis highlighted how Shamsie relates trauma with historical events. Wahid Pervez (2018) analyzes *Burnt Shadows* through postcolonial lens but highlights racism, diaspora and hybridity. According to the analysis, the book is a critique of cultural dominance and resistance. Tabassum Saba, Bushra Siddiqui and Awais Hamid (2021)

compared Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* with Bapsi Sidhwa's *The Bride* using feminist discourse analysis. The study explored how female protagonists overcome patriarchal culture by exposing gendered oppression in global contexts.

Modern feminist linguistic analysis looks at how gender is shaped in politics, media and advertising. Subasi (2020) analyzes Spender's idea today stating that obvious sexist words are less common while subtle patterns remain for example, saying just doctor for male and female doctor for females. According to Chaarani (2021), language is a powerful social tool that defines and communicates meanings about gender. Within feminist linguistic studies, scholars have argued that linguistic choices actively supports cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity.

Research Gap

Feminist linguistic theories have been extensively applied to Western Literature while its application in South Asian Anglophone fiction is underexplored. Majority of the previous study on the novel focuses on concerns such as war, conflict, politics, post 9/11 issues, trauma and cultural diversity, yet less attention has been paid to the ways language itself shapes female identities. Though Spender's theory of *Man Made Language* (1980) has not been applied to Kamila Shamsie's novel *Burnt Shadows* (2009). By analyzing the gap, this study focuses solely on the way patriarchal language affects women's identities by looking at the lives, recognition and representation of female characters.

Research Objectives

- To investigate how *Man Made Language* shapes women's identities in the novel.
- To examine the ways in which female voices are silenced and marginalized in the novel.

Research Questions

1. In which contexts *Burnt Shadows* constructs women's identities through the lens of *Man Made Language*?
2. In what ways female voices are silenced and marginalized in the novel?

Research Methodology

This study uses qualitative method which is based on textual analysis. The text which is under investigation is Kamila Shamsie's novel *Burnt Shadows* (2009), which is analyzed through Dale Spender's lens of *Man Made Language* (1980).

Research Method

The present study employs feminist linguistic framework developed by Dale Spender in *Man Made Language* (1980) as its methodological foundation. Spender's theory focuses on how language is socially constructed in favor of men to reflect their experiences and to uphold their dominance. By applying this lens to Kamila Shamsie's novel *Burnt Shadows* (2009), the analysis focuses on character relationships, narrative descriptions and dialogues to examine linguistic choices such as wife, widow, outsiders and others which are used to shape women's identities. The analysis also illustrates how females voices are pushed aside and ignored while discussing war and politics which reflects how women's perspectives are silenced and marginalized.

Theoretical Framework

This study relies on Dale Spender's theory of *Man Made Language* (1980). According to Spender's theory, language is not just a static system of communication rather it is constructed socially by males and for males, to reflect their experiences and to uphold their dominance and authority. Key principle of Spender's theory is that language actually creates realities. Women's identities and realities are misrepresented, degraded and neglected as men have been controlling structures of language historically. Words not only explain and describe the world instead they influence people's mind,

behaviors and actions. Men have been the creators and makers of language, specific linguistic terms are created to describe women by their relationship to men ignoring women's individual identities. Wives, widows, mother and such labels have made women dependent on male, denying their personal identity.

Additionally, Spender highlights the imbalance in conversation that men's speech is considered as logical, authoritative and rational while women's speech is considered and expected as emotional, irrational, exclusive, insignificant and submissive. This difference uplifts male's voices whether in politics, literature and culture while silencing and marginalizing women's voices, struggles and contributions. Women's words are seen through male-centered narratives, which restricts them to identify themselves individually. Women are not only excluded from discourse or literature but are silenced through interruption, dismissing and lack of vocabulary to reflect their experiences and to recognize their identity.

Finally, Spender puts emphasis on the possibility of resistance through feminist linguistic analysis. By investigating how patriarchal structures are formed, feminist linguists can challenge and deconstruct those structures. By challenging and redefining language, women can resist silencing and can assert subjectivity.

Data Collection

The selected data for this study is Kamila Shamsie's novel *Burnt Shadows* (2009). The data is a primary source and is analyzed through the theoretical framework of Dale Spender's *Man Made Language* (1980). By closely reviewing the quotations from the sample, researcher is able to indicate certain linguistic choices, labeling, silencing of women's voices and uplifting male dominant discourse.

Sampling Technique

The current study employs a purposive sampling technique. Kamila Shamsie's novel *Burnt Shadows* (2009) is selected as the main text among the wide range of South Asian Anglophone novels. The reason for this selection is that the novel deals with the theme of identity and displacement which connects with Dale Spender's feminist linguistic theory. The focus relies solely on analyzing one text instead of representing all South Asian fiction.

Data Analysis

The following data is taken from *Burnt Shadows* (2009) by Kamila Shamsie and is analyzed through Dale Spender lens of *Man Made Language* (1980).

In Kamila Shamsie's novel *Burnt Shadows* (2009), the representation of Hiroko as Konrad's widow is analyzed from her relationship with her late husband: "She was Konrad's widow, carrying his absence like a second skin" (Shamsie, 2009, p. 45). In many parts of the novel readers can see that Hiroko is most oftenly described as "the widow of Konrad" which reduces her individual sense of identity. Her subjectivity is darkened and she is recognized through a relational role. Dale Spender's theory can be applied to this quotation as women are introduced in relation to men. This strengthens Spenders claim that *Man Made Language* (2009) denies women's independent self.

Shamsie's depiction of Elizabeth as James wife is seen in the description: "Elizabeth had always been James Burton's wife before she was anything else" (Shamsie, 2009, p. 72). Elizabeth is introduced as "James wife" in the novel. She is given the label of "wife" before recognizing her own sense of self identity and her individual self is framed by her husband. According to *Man Made Language* (2009) certain linguistic choices are the reason for marginalizing women's identities and uplifting male dominancy.

The phrase "Kim was introduced as the daughter of James Burton, her own name secondary" (Shamsie, 2009, p. 110) exemplifies the representation of Kim Burton as the daughter of James Burton making her own identity as secondary and insignificant. Patriarchal language has tied her identity to parentage

which has blurred her individual identity and reinforced patriarchal structure. Spender puts emphasis on how women's identities are linguistically and socially marginalized and are recognized only in relation to men.

Shamsie's portrayal of Hiroko as Outsider in Delhi can be judged from the following labeling line: "In Delhi she was always the foreigner, her scars marking her difference" (Shamsie, 2009, p. 250). This statement illustrates how Hiroko is being excluded from the society and considered as an outcast. She is given the label of "an outsider" or "foreigner" which goes directly with Spender's view of excluding women from being a member of that society and reinforcing marginalization.

The following quotation underscores how women's voices are silenced and interrupted: "When Hiroko spoke of Nagasaki, the men interrupted, their words louder, more certain" (Shamsie, 2009, p. 220). This quotation reflects male dominance in conversation that when Hiroko wanted to share her experience and suffering of Nagasaki, the men interrupted. Spender's theory argues that women's voices are dismissed, considered insignificant and interrupted while men's speech is considered and treated as logical, rational and authoritative. This enforces gendered divisions and distinctions.

The description from *Burnt Shadows* (2009) highlights how Elizabeth's tale is blurred through her own husband's voice: "Her story was told through her husband's voice, her own words fading into his" (Shamsie, 2009, p. 236). Females' descriptions are reviewed through males' perspectives and voices. Elizabeth's words were not given the significance as compared to her husbands. Spender puts emphasis on the view that when women speak, their words are interrupted and interpreted by men which "silence" female subjectivity.

Representation of Hiroko as "Other" in Pakistan can be viewed from the following description taken from the novel: "They called her the outsider, the one who did not belong" (Shamsie, 2009, p. 290). Hiroko faced exclusion in Delhi as well as in Pakistan. She was treated and also given the label of an "outsider" which excluded her reinforcing cultural distance. Theory of *Man-Made Language* shows how language denies women inclusion in public discourse and enforces cultural boundaries.

Hiroko's resistance through multilingualism is seen in the following quotation: "Hiroko shifted between languages, refusing to be contained by one voice" (Shamsie, 2009, p. 150). Hiroko does not want to be recognized by one language or one nationality only. By her shift between languages, resistance can easily be seen. Hiroko challenges patriarchal silencing through multilingual subjectivity. *Man Made Language* or patriarchal language is resisted and exposed through Spender's feminist linguistic analysis.

Silence of Hiroko is analyzed from the line: "She wanted to speak of Nagasaki, but silence pressed against her lips" (Shamsie, 2009, p. 220). Hiroko wanted to speak about her trauma, but is suppressed by linguistic and social structures. These structures discourage women's narratives and experiences. The quotation conveys how language becomes a barrier, which denies her subjectivity. Hiroko's inability to speak about her trauma reflects conversational imbalance. Spender's view of men's speech being privileged and women's speech being marginalized can be seen in this quotation.

Shamsie's representation of women being confined to domestic roles is analyzed from the phrase: "The women were expected to remain in the private sphere, their voices kept within walls" (Shamsie, 2009, p. 268). Women were expected to stay within homes and their voices were not heard in public. This quotation aligns with Spender's critique of women's voices being confined to domestic spaces while men dominate public discourse. This reinforces gendered differences and divisions which silence women's perspectives and narratives in broader social contexts.

Results

The analysis of *Burnt Shadows* (2009) reveals that women in the novel are represented and described in such ways that are connected to men, such as Elizabeth being represented as "James Burton's wife", Kim as "James Burton's daughter" and Hiroko as "Konrad's wife". Voices of these women are not given space and acceptance in public discourses and conversations. Hiroko is also given some labels

such as “outsider”, ‘foreigner’ and “other” excluding her from the culture. These evidences support the idea of Dale Spender that language is shaped by men, for men and around men which limits women’s independence. Meanwhile, Hiroko’s use of multiple languages reveals that women can resist these limits and can empower their voices in societies and in public discourses.

Discussion

Analyzing the novel through Spender’s theory helps researchers examine how language works to keep women dependent on patriarchy. The analysis reveals how women are silenced, how they are locked or pushed into private spaces instead of public ones and how they are represented and defined by men. The novelist also gives signs that women can also resist such structures and fight back. This blend of resistance and oppression makes the novel a strong evidence and illustration of how language can both empower and restrict women. While the novel highlights how *Man Made Language* (1980) marginalizes and silences women, future researches can expand this investigation in some ways. Scholars and researchers might examine other South Asian Anglophone novels to see similar patterns, multimodal discourse analysis can be done to examine textual and visual elements to resist and reinforce patriarchal norms.

Findings

Men dominate language structures, public conversations and oppress women in order to make themselves more authoritative and dominant. Women’s voices are silenced, marginalized and kept in private spaces. Linguistic choices such as outsider, foreigner and others are used for the exclusion of women from belonging, culture and society. Women are represented through male identities and their statuses instead of their own sense of self. Women can challenge, resist and restrict certain limits and boundaries which are set by societies through being multilingual, multinational and empowered.

Conclusion

The study reveals that *Burnt Shadows* (2009) favors Spenders theory by supporting the idea that language is created in favor of men and bounds women to certain roles and expectations. The analysis also examines and highlights the ways in which women can resist by expressing themselves in many ways. These stances puts emphasis on the importance of feminist linguistic analysis as it helps in determining how language can be a weapon for control and a tool for challenge, empowerment and resistance.

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