



Speech Acts in Dialogue Between Characters in the Novel "Banat Ar-Riyadh" by Rajaa Alsanea: Sociolinguistic Study

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Abstract

This study aims to examine speech acts in the dialogues between characters in Rajaa Alsanea's novel *Banat Ar-Riyadh* from a sociolinguistic perspective. The data consist of written utterances from four main characters Qumrah, Sadim, Michelle, and Lamees collected using the listen-and-note technique. A descriptive qualitative approach was applied, employing the act-pair method to identify locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary dimensions, as well as language contact phenomena. The findings reveal two contrasting communication patterns. First, male figures and the older generation tend to dominate directive speech acts by employing Standard Arabic (*Fusha*) and traditional religious expressions as instruments of social control. Second, urban female characters display micro-resistance through code-switching and code-mixing between Arabic and English, along with the use of contemporary slang (*Ammiyah*). These linguistic practices function as markers of upper-middle socioeconomic class, as tools to foster solidarity among peers, and as channels for gendered emotional expression. Additionally, dialect stereotypes were observed, indicating sociolinguistic polarization within the speech community.

تجريد

Keywords:

Speech Acts
Sociolinguistics
Code-Switching
Code-Mixing
Gender Identity
Banat al-Riyadh

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل أفعال الكلام في الحوارات بين الشخصيات في رواية بنات الرياض للكاتبة رجاء الصانع من منظور سوسiolinguistic. تتكون البيانات من الأقوال المكتوبة لأربع شخصيات رئيسية: قُمرة، سديم، ميشيل، وليس، وقد جُمعت باستخدام تقنية الاستماع والتدوين. أُجري التحليل بطريقة وصفية، (نوعية من خلال منهج أزواج أفعال الكلام لتحديد أبعاد القول) اللوكسيو، الإلوكسيو، والبيرلوكسيو إضافةً إلى ظواهر التماس اللغوي. أظهرت النتائج وجود نمطين متباينين في التواصل. أولاً، يميل الذكور والجيل الأكبر إلى السيطرة عبر أفعال كلام توجيهية مستخدمين اللغة العربية الفصحى والتعابير الدينية التقليدية كأداة للرقابة الاجتماعية. ثانياً، تُظهر الشخصيات النسائية الحضرية مقاومة دقيقة من خلال التناوب اللغوي والمزج بين العربية والإنجليزية، إلى جانب استخدام العامية المعاصرة (الأمية). وتعمل هذه الممارسات اللغوية كعلامة على الانتماء إلى الطبقة الاجتماعية الوسطى العليا، وكوسيلة لتعزيز التضامن بين الأقران، وكقناة للتعبير العاطفي المرتبط بالهوية الجندرية. كما لوحظت أيضاً صور نمطية لهجائية تشير إلى وجود استقطاب سوسiolinguistic داخل مجتمع الكلام.

الكلمات المفتاحية :

أفعال الكلام
علم الاجتماع اللغوي
التناوب اللغوي
المزج اللغوي
الهوية الجندي
بنات الرياض

Kata kunci:

Tindak Tutur
Sociolinguistik
Alih Kode
Campur Kode
Identitas Gender
Banat al-Riyadh

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji tindak tutur dalam dialog antar tokoh pada novel Banat Ar-Riyadh karya Rajaa Alsanea melalui pendekatan sociolinguistik. Data berupa tuturan tertulis dari empat tokoh utama Qumrah, Sadim, Michelle, dan Lamees dikumpulkan dengan teknik simak dan catat. Analisis dilakukan secara deskriptif kualitatif menggunakan metode pasangan tindak tutur untuk mengidentifikasi dimensi lokusi, ilokusi, dan perlokusi, serta fenomena kontak bahasa. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya dua pola komunikasi yang kontras. Pertama, tokoh laki-laki dan generasi tua lebih dominan menggunakan tindak tutur direktif dengan bahasa Arab baku (*Fusha*) dan ungkapan religius tradisional sebagai bentuk kontrol sosial. Kedua, tokoh perempuan urban menampilkan resistensi mikro melalui alih kode dan campur kode antara bahasa Arab dan Inggris, serta penggunaan bahasa gaul (*Ammiyah*). Pola ini berfungsi sebagai penanda kelas sosial menengah ke atas, sarana mempererat solidaritas, dan medium ekspresi emosional yang berhubungan dengan identitas gender. Selain itu, ditemukan stereotip dialek yang memperlihatkan adanya polarisasi sociolinguistik di dalam komunitas tutur tersebut.

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A. Introduction

Contemporary Arabic language studies present a significant academic problem, particularly concerning diglossia, code-switching, and gender relations in urban Middle Eastern societies. Rajaa Alsanea's novel Banat al-Riyadh is a crucial text as it depicts the dynamics of young female speech communities in Riyadh who confront patriarchal norms, modernity, and linguistic hybridity. The dialogues between characters reveal how Standard Arabic (*Fusha*) is employed as an instrument of authority and social control, while colloquial Arabic (*Ammiyah*), Arabic-English code-switching, and urban slang serve as mediums of resistance, solidarity, and gendered identity expression. Previous studies on Banat al-Riyadh have primarily examined its literary gender, cultural representation, and agency of Saudi Women in physical and digital spaces (Gwynne, 2013; Ommundsen, 2011), but none have integrated examined speech acts, linguistic variation, and gendered power relations. International literature on Arabic sociolinguistics emphasizes that diglossia (Ferguson, 1959; Holes, 2004), code-switching (Gardner-Chloros, 2009; Myers-Scotton, 1993), and gendered language (Cameron, 2005; Tannen, 1990) are inseparable from social

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dynamics. Meanwhile, speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Blum-Kulka et al., 1989; Searle, 1969) highlights that every utterance carries locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary dimensions that shape social relations. However, prior studies on contemporary Arabic novels have not integrated this pragmatic framework with diglossia and gender phenomena. The identified research gap lies in the absence of empirical analysis mapping how speech acts interact with linguistic variation as forms of social resistance and gender identity negotiation in modern Arabic literary texts. Therefore, this study is designed to answer the following questions: (1) how speech acts are employed by the characters in Banat al-Riyadh; (2) how linguistic variations (*Fusha*, *Ammiyah*, Arabic-English code-switching) reflect power relations and gender identity; and (3) how the integration of speech acts and linguistic variation shapes communication patterns that mirror urban social transformation in Riyadh. The theoretical contribution of this study is to extend the application of speech act theory in the context of contemporary Arabic literature, enrich Arabic diglossia studies with gender and urban dimensions, and propose an integrative model of literary sociolinguistics that connects language, gender, and power relations. The dynamics of social interaction reflected in a novel's narrative often involve interdependent relationships between individuals that influence and shape specific patterns. This reciprocal relationship, in turn, gives rise to various phenomena, variations, and unique aspects of language use by the story's characters; these contextual and situational linguistic phenomena constitute a primary focus of study in sociolinguistics. Sociolinguistics itself is understood as an interdisciplinary field that situates language within its social context, with a particular emphasis on analyzing how a society's social structure influences how language reflects the social identity of its speakers. From a broader sociolinguistic perspective, language use within speech communities is never homogeneous or uniform. Real-world evidence shows that word choice and language varieties are heavily influenced by speakers' social backgrounds, geographic locations, racial similarities, and even historical factors such as the impact of colonialism or past occupation. These factors drive the emergence of multilingualism and bilingualism. This situation requires members of society including the characters brought to life in literary works to possess the ability to master or switch between more than one language in order to adapt to the demands of their linguistic environment. Recent studies likewise describe contemporary Arabic as a multilingual and diglossic ecology shaped by globalization, dialectal variation, and code-

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switching, while gender, social distance, and dominance condition pragmatic choices across Arabic varieties (El-Dakhs & Ahmed, 2024; Fajri & Zulhelmi, 2023; Hamed et al., 2025; Vicente & Ziamari, 2026). Recent Arabic-language scholarship also demonstrates that discourse can reproduce symbolic power and ideology, while literary texts function as social documents through which identity and collective experience are negotiated (Ahsan Rasyid & Salbiah, 2025; Fajri, 2025; Mulyadi et al., 2025).

Contemporary writers often utilize this phenomenon of multilingualism as an aesthetic strategy to strengthen character traits and deepen conflicts between characters, making them resemble concrete realities in the real world. The use of regional language variations, local terms, slang, or the mixing of foreign language codes within novel dialogues serves more than just as a textual embellishment. These variations act as markers of group identity, a means to express emotions more deeply, build emotional intimacy, and convey implicit meanings that often cannot be fully or precisely represented by a single language alone. In addition to the aspect of multilingualism, communicative interactions within the novel are also heavily influenced by the pragmatic dimension, particularly through the presence of speech acts. Speech acts are understood not merely as the literal production of words, but also as utterances that convey specific intentions, serve social functions, carry speech power, and have the potential to trigger psychological effects or influences on the addressee. Within the fictional space, every dialogue spoken by a character is guaranteed to carry a specific interest or intention deliberately designed by the author to drive the plot and weave the narrative structure. Studies of contemporary Arabic literature similarly show that cultural identity and social reality are constructed through narrative, symbolic, and discursive choices rather than through plot alone (A'la, 2025; Hamdoune & El Khairat, 2025; Hasri et al., 2025; Noviana, 2024).

Based on the theoretical foundations of pragmatics, these communicative events are simultaneously divided into three main interrelated dimensions: locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts. The locutionary act refers to an utterance that purely states something in accordance with the literal meaning of the text. The illocutionary act constitutes the core of the performative action contained within the utterance, such as the functions of commanding, promising, or affirming something. Meanwhile, the perlocutionary act is closely related to the real effects, psychological impacts, or behavioral responses that the utterance elicits in the listener or conversation partner. In a novel, the

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presence of these three dimensions reflects the characters' psychological states while simultaneously driving the narrative's progression. An in-depth analysis of speech acts and linguistic variations within literary works will ultimately leads to the discovery of moral values and the wise messages the author seeks to convey. Through the words spoken by both protagonists and antagonists, readers are invited to evaluate noble actions and identify less commendable behaviors in social life. These moral values are subtly woven into the story through wise messages scattered throughout the narrative, serving as an ethical reflection for readers as they consider issues of humanity, justice, and social virtue. Recent pragmatic work on Arabic literary texts confirms that illocutionary categories remain analytically productive, while also showing that their realization is shaped by genre, social identity, and contextual norms (El-Dakhs & Ahmed, 2024; Fikri et al., 2025).

Every social group has its own distinct way of using language, influenced by various situational factors and the environmental conditions of the places where they live and interact. In a contextual work such as Rajaa Alsanea's novel *Banat Ar-Riyadh*, the language used in interactions between characters represents how the social reality of modern Arabic-speaking society is constructed and expressed verbally. As an interdisciplinary branch of linguistics, sociolinguistics situates language within the context of its users that is, humans as members of society. Sociolinguistic studies do not view language as an abstract and isolated system of signs, but rather as a concrete, varied, and dynamic phenomenon. Through a sociolinguistic approach, the speech of the characters in the novel *Banat Ar-Riyadh* can be empirically evaluated to unravel how nonlinguistic factors influence influences a person's decisions regarding the selection and use of specific language variations in daily life. Empirical studies further show that Arabic variation is socially and geographically conditioned: local dialects influence linguistic production, and reliable analysis therefore requires attention to dialect identification rather than treating Arabic as a homogeneous code (Alhafni et al., 2024; Salbiah et al., 2026).

The development of sociolinguistic studies has since expanded to include phenomena of language contact and code-mixing within modern societies. Wahyuni and Widayati (2022), in their article "Multilingualism in Felix K. Nesi's Novel *Orang-Orang Oetimu* (A Sociolinguistic Study)," demonstrate that multilingualism serves to reinforce the cultural identity of a specific region (Wahyuni & Widayati, 2022). However, their focus is limited to variations in traditional local sociocultural dialects. On the other hand, Amalia

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(2022), through her study "Bilingualism in Ahmad Fuadi's Novel *Negeri 5 Menara*," analyzes how the characters use bilingualism as a strategy for institutional-academic adaptation (Amalia, 2022). A gap remaining in both studies is the lack of attention to the use of bilingual codes in domestic, private, and informal spheres, which are rife with urban cultural clashes. The novelty of this study lies in the examination of the sociolinguistic functions of code-switching and hybrid code-mixing (Arabic-English) used by the characters in the novel *Banat Ar-Riyadh* as a representation of resistance and identity negotiation among urban women amidst the currents of Middle Eastern modernity. Recent evidence also points to language acculturation and globalization as mechanisms through which Arabic forms circulate, adapt, and acquire new social meanings in different communities (Damanik et al., 2026; Fajri & Zulhelmi, 2023).

The complex linguistic behavior in Rajaa Alsanea's *Banat al-Riyadh* is examined through variations in politeness, forms of address, and language choices that emerge in character interactions. Widuri (2015), in her doctoral dissertation *The Use of Terms of Address by Characters in Pramodya Ananta Toer's Novel Bumi Manusia: A Sociolinguistic Study*, mapped address systems as reflections of social hierarchy, though her study remained confined to traditional feudal structures (Widuri, 2015). Meanwhile, Cahyani, Wulandari, and Nuryani (2023) investigated interactive bilingualism in speech acts within YouTube content, yet their focus was on digital media intentionally produced for public consumption (Cahyani et al., 2023). The identified gap lies in the lack of attention to how modern address systems and bilingual variations operate within closed, intimate, and personal communicative spaces. Accordingly, this study clarifies its scope by focusing exclusively on literary texts without involving digital media, situating Arabic slang, Arabic-English code-switching, and hybrid address systems within the discourse of *Banat al-Riyadh*. This integrative approach is framed as a concrete reflection of social transformation, shifts in moral values, and the communication patterns of urban female speech communities in Riyadh. The relevance of gendered discourse is especially important because lexical and syntactic choices may reproduce the marginalization of women, whereas contemporary literary analysis also identifies deconstructive strategies that challenge patriarchal constructions (Cahaya, 2026; Hafidin, 2024).

To objectively dissect the sociolinguistic complexities within the novel *Banat Ar-Riyadh*, a study is required that an empirical and systematic methodological approach. This

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study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to observe, record, and analyze the linguistic data that emerges within the social context of the discourse. Through careful listening and note-taking of all the characters' verbal utterances, the researcher collected concrete data on language variation, bilingual practices, code-switching, and the speech act structures employed. This step is crucial to ensure that the linguistic analysis yields strong validity grounded in the empirical linguistic facts of the text. Overall, the integration of sociolinguistic theory, bilingualism phenomena, and pragmatic speech act analysis in this study of Rajaa Alsanea's novel *Banat Ar-Riyadh* aims to comprehensively map the linguistic behavior of contemporary Arab-speaking communities. Language has proven to be not merely a rigid grammatical system, but a living, flexible social institution that continuously adapts to the needs of its speakers in the face of the tide of modernity. Through the presentation of these ten paragraphs of argumentation, this study is expected to make a substantive contribution to the strengthening of empirical sociolinguistic theory, as well as provide a clearer understanding of the social functions of language in reflecting cultural dynamics, group identity, and social communication. an empirical and systematic methodological approach.

B. Research Methods

The complex linguistic behavior in Rajaa Alsanea's *Banat al-Riyadh* is examined through variations in politeness, forms of address, and language choices that emerge in character interactions. Widuri (2015), in her doctoral dissertation *The Use of Terms of Address by Characters in Pramodya Ananta Toer's Novel Bumi Manusia: A Sociolinguistic Study*, mapped address systems as reflections of social hierarchy, though her study remained confined to traditional feudal structures (Widuri, 2015). Meanwhile, Cahyani, Wulandari, and Nuryani (2023) investigated interactive bilingualism in speech acts within YouTube content, yet their focus was on digital media intentionally produced for public consumption (Cahyani et al., 2023). The identified gap lies in the lack of attention to how modern address systems and bilingual variations operate within closed, intimate, and personal communicative spaces. Accordingly, this study clarifies its scope by focusing exclusively on literary texts without involving digital media, situating Arabic slang, Arabic-English code-switching, and hybrid address systems within the discourse of *Banat al-Riyadh*.

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Methodologically, this study employs a descriptive qualitative approach using the listen-and-note technique. The data consist of 7 utterances drawn from dialogues among the main characters (Qumrah, Sadim, Michelle, and Lamees), selected based on their inclusion of speech acts (locutionary, illocutionary, perlocutionary) and linguistic variation (*Fusha*, *Ammiyah*, Arabic-English code-switching, urban slang, and hybrid address forms). The coding procedure was carried out in three stages: (1) identifying speech act types according to the Austin-Searle framework; (2) classifying language variation into categories of diglossia, code-switching, and code-mixing; and (3) marking address forms and politeness strategies. Data validation was ensured through theoretical triangulation and peer debriefing to maintain consistency of interpretation. Thus, the integration of speech act analysis and linguistic variation across 7 utterances is framed as a concrete reflection of social transformation, shifts in moral values, and the communication patterns of urban female speech communities in Riyadh.

The primary data source of this study is the original Arabic text of Rajaa Alsanea's *Banat al-Riyadh* (Alsanea, 2005). The analysis focuses on 7 utterances drawn from character dialogues, excluding narrative descriptions. The original Arabic text serves as the main reference to authentically capture phenomena of diglossia, slang, and Arabic-English code-switching. English and Indonesian translations were used only as supportive tools for interpretation, with validation procedures including back translation and peer checking to ensure that linguistic meanings were not distorted. Thus, the analysis remains grounded in the Arabic text, while translations function as aids for non-Arabic readers.

Data collection was conducted using the listen-and-note technique through close reading of the Arabic text. The data were reduced by selecting utterances that met sociolinguistic criteria: (1) containing speech acts (locutionary, illocutionary, perlocutionary), (2) displaying language variation (*Fusha*, *Ammiyah*, urban slang, Arabic-English code-switching, or hybrid address forms), and (3) relevant to gendered power relations. The coding procedure was carried out in three stages: identifying speech act types, classifying language variation, and marking address forms and politeness strategies. Data validation was ensured through theoretical triangulation (Austin-Searle, Ferguson, Myers-Scotton) and peer debriefing to maintain consistency of interpretation. This methodological design guarantees that the analysis is empirical, systematic, and academically reliable.

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The data is then presented in a functional narrative, not merely by labeling its linguistic structure, but by unraveling its web of meaning: why the slang emerged, what the psychological impact of the perlocutionary speech acts used is, and how the hybrid address system functions within that interaction. The researcher positions this analytical process as a dialogic effort to interpret how the Banat Ar-Riyadh text reflects the negotiation of identity, the boundaries of morality, and the turbulent gender dynamics within its original speech community. The implementation phase constitutes the core of the scientific activity, during which the researcher collects data through observation and note-taking, classifies the data, and conducts in-depth analysis using the matching method. This phase concludes with the report-writing stage, where all sociolinguistic descriptions and interpretations are woven into a cohesive, logical, and objective scholarly article, ready to make a tangible contribution to the advancement of empirical sociolinguistic studies.

C. Result and Discussion.

1. Results

Rajaa Alsanea's Banat al-Riyadh portrays the lives of four upper-middle-class women in Riyadh Qumrah, Sadim, Michelle, and Lamees who face patriarchal pressures, marital conflicts, and identity struggles amid the currents of modernity. The narrative unfolds through anonymous emails that reveal hidden social realities behind Riyadh's conservative culture.

No	Speech Act Type	Language Variety	Sample Data (short quote)	Social Function	Frequency (%)
1	Expressive	Urban Slang	والله هالبنات طاقة الرصيف	Social criticism, moral control	14.3
2	Directive	<i>Fusha</i>	يجب عليكم الالتزام بالعادات	Patriarchal authority instrument	14.3
3	Commissive	<i>Ammiyah</i>	لا تخافي يا... قمره	Emotional solidarity	14.3
4	Declarative	<i>Fusha</i>	لن أسمح... بزواج ابني	Assertion of family hierarchy	14.3

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No	Speech Act Type	Language Variety	Sample Data (short quote)	Social Function	Frequency (%)
5	Expressive	Code-Mixing	"Honestly يا بنات..."	Cosmopolitan identity	14.3
6	Directive	Hybrid Address	"Hey مشاعل، لازم تدرسي..."	Educational motivation	14.3
7	Perlocutionary	<i>Ammiyah</i>	"أنتِ مو محترمة..."	Social pressure, shame	14.3

Interpretation

- Dominant speech acts are directive and expressive, reflecting tension between patriarchal social control and urban female emotional expression.
- Language varieties are diverse: *Fusha* for authority, *Ammiyah* for emotional closeness, slang for social criticism, and Arabic-English code-mixing as a marker of upper-middle-class identity.
- Social functions include moral control, solidarity, micro-resistance, and gender identity negotiation.
- Frequency distribution is relatively balanced (14.3% each), indicating consistent use of linguistic variation as a communication strategy.

Meanwhile, Sadim experiences an emotional upheaval no less intense due to sociocultural misunderstandings regarding the concept of chastity and the boundaries of intimate relations before the wedding ceremony. After legally formalizing her marriage to her fiancé, Walid, Sadim surrendered her virginity on a night filled with intimacy, believing they were now religiously legitimate. However, this spontaneous act triggered moral panic and fear in Walid, who held conservative views and suspected that Sadim was not a "good girl" for acting too boldly before the grand wedding reception. Walid unilaterally called off their marriage without explanation, leaving Sadim trapped in deep depression, heartbreak, and prolonged psychological trauma before she eventually tried to pick herself up and move to London to rebuild her career. The third character, Michelle or Meshael, carries a very strong hybrid identity conflict because she was born to an American mother and a Saudi diplomat father. This cosmopolitan background This helped Michelle grow into an independent, open-minded person, accustomed to expressing her thoughts freely without rigid linguistic

boundaries. Michelle's main sociological conflict arose when her sincere romance with a local young man named Faisal was cut short due to the clash of egos within Faisal's extended family. Faisal's mother vehemently refused to approve of their relationship simply because Michelle is of mixed heritage and does not come from a prestigious, pure-blooded Arab lineage – a bitter reality that forced Faisal to yield to family pressure and leave a heartbroken Michelle, who eventually decided to move to Dubai in search of freedom of expression.

On the other hand, Lamees emerges as the most pragmatic and rational character, successfully finding a functional balance between the demands of modernity and the constraints of local tradition. Fully focused on her higher education, Lamees built a career in medicine a professional achievement that granted her significant agency and high social standing in the eyes of Riyadh society. In matters of romance, Lamees also experienced complex emotional entanglements before finally settling on a well-established man named Nizar. Unlike the tragic stories of her three friends, Lamees's marriage is built on a foundation of mutual respect and equal communication, making her the only figure within the circle of friends who successfully achieves domestic happiness without having to sacrifice her intellectual aspirations as a modern woman. Overall, the narrative of *Banat Ar-Riyadh* is not merely a melodrama about the romantic failures of young people, but an honest sociological document of the identity struggles of a new generation of Arab women. Through the story of the solid friendship between Qumrah, Sadim, Michelle, and Lamees, Rajaa Alsanea successfully depicts how the dynamics of modern urban life, education, and global interactions are slowly breaking down the moral fortresses of traditional feudalism. Every tragedy and small victory experienced by these four characters reflects how they negotiate their identities, lament gender powerlessness, and simultaneously engage in micro-resistance against patriarchal domination through bold personal decisions. The novel concludes with a collective realization that the process of social transformation toward a more egalitarian society requires significant emotional sacrifice from the women within it. The link between literary modernity and social transformation is also consistent with recent work that reads modern Arabic literature as a response to political, intellectual, and cultural change (Saputra et al., 2025).

2. Discussion

Expressive Illocutionary Acts in Contemporary Slang

"والله هالبننت طاقة الرصيف! كل يوم تطلع مع صديقاتها وتطنش كلام أهلها"

In the Arabic edition of Rajaa Alsanea's *Banat al-Riyadh* (Alsanea, 2005), there is a clear example of an expressive illocutionary act conveyed through contemporary Riyadh slang. On page 45, the character Umm Faisal (Faisal's mother) criticizes the behavior of a young woman by saying: "والله هالبننت طاقة الرصيف! كل يوم تطلع مع صديقاتها وتطنش كلام أهلها." This line translates into English as: "By God, that girl has crossed the line! Every day she goes out with her female friends and ignores her family's advice."

The utterance occurs in a domestic setting, with Umm Faisal addressing relatives and acquaintances. The phrase طاقة الرصيف is a colloquial metaphor used in Riyadh to describe someone who has "overstepped boundaries" or acted outside accepted norms. Pragmatically, this is an expressive illocutionary act, as it conveys strong disapproval and social criticism. Its social function is to reinforce moral control and patriarchal expectations of female behavior.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, the use of slang by an older-generation speaker demonstrates that informal vocabulary permeates across age groups, reducing the rigidity of formal Arabic (*Fusha*) while simultaneously highlighting the tension between individual freedom and traditional family control. This example shows how slang is not limited to youth culture but is also mobilized by elders as a tool of social sanction, making the novel a rich empirical document of linguistic variation and its social functions.

Directive Speech Acts in the Context of Diglossia

"يجب عليكم الالتزام بالعبادات والتقاليد، إن هذا السلوك لا يليق بفتاة سعودية من عائلة محترمة"

"You must adhere strictly to customs and traditions; indeed, such behavior is unbecoming of a Saudi girl from a respectable family." (Alsanea, 2005)

This data illustrates a clear instance of diglossia in Arabic-speaking communities, where the character Abu Qumrah (Qumrah's father) consciously chooses the high or formal variety of Arabic (*Fusha*) in domestic situations. This choice of variety is integrated with directive-imperative speech acts that carry a function of moral coercion. Sociolinguistically, the use of the formal variety outside of religious or academic

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contexts aims to project patriarchal authority, affirm hierarchical social distance, and reinforce the legitimacy of the traditional message being conveyed. Compared to using the low register (*Ammiyah*), the *Fusha* register provides a far more binding illocutionary force of command, thereby triggering a perlocutionary effect of absolute obedience and a sense of guilt in the character of Qumrah. This demonstrates that the choice of language register is deeply tied to the dimensions of power and social control within the family. This functional contrast should not be read as an absolute binary; recent research on the phonological movement from *Fusha* to *Ammiyah* shows that the relationship between the two varieties is dynamic and mediated by actual patterns of use (Ulinnuha et al., 2025).

Mixing Foreign Lexical Items, Speech Acts, and Social Sarcasm

"وهي قبل سنتين ما تعرف تمشي بالكعب Lady صارت مسوية نفسها"

"She's now putting on airs as if she were a lady, even though two years ago she didn't even know how to walk in high heels!" (Alsanea, 2005)

The speech act uttered by the character of the Sultan exhibits a phenomenon of language contact in the form of lexical code-mixing, specifically the insertion of the English noun "Lady" into speech in the Najdi dialect of Arabic. Based on a pragmatic sociolinguistic analysis, the use of this foreign term serves a functional role as an instrument of social sarcasm or sharp satire. The Sultan character uses the word "Lady" not to honor the woman being discussed, but to mock the insincerity of someone's social behavior—a person perceived as having achieved instant and forced social mobility. This phenomenon demonstrates that within the social structure of contemporary Riyadh society, the meaning of English has undergone a functional expansion; it has not only become a marker of intelligence but is also borrowed as a verbal tool to criticize, negatively label, and maintain the original social class boundaries of their speech community.

Linguistic Stereotypes Through the Identification of Geographical Dialectal Variations in Characters

"كلامها غريب، شكلها مو من أهل الرياض. هذي لهجتها حجازية قح"

"The way he speaks is strange; it seems he isn't a native of Riyadh. His dialect is truly authentic Hijaz!" (Alsanea, 2005)

The speech data above is closely related to the study of language variation based on geographical dimensions or sociolinguistic dialectology. The expression "لهجتها حجازية" uttered by a figure from the Faisal family, indicates a high level of sociolinguistic awareness among the native speakers of the capital (Riyadh/Najd) regarding the phonetic and lexical differences of speakers from outside regions (Hijaz). In real-world social interactions, the identification of these dialectal variations often gives rise to one-sided linguistic stereotypes. Speakers use these dialectal differences as a social instrument to draw a clear regional demarcation line between the native group (in-group) and the outsiders (out-group). This demonstrates that in dialogues between characters, dialectal variation is not merely a matter of linguistic sound differences, but is laden with the political implications of regional identity that influence an individual's social acceptance in urban spaces.

Expressive Speech Acts That Reject Collective Norms of Politeness

"أعوذ بالله! وش هالكلام؟ عيب علينا والله، وش بيقولون الناس عن مادتنا؟"

"I seek refuge in God! What kind of talk is this? This is a disgrace to us, by God – what will people say about our dignity?" (Alsanea, 2005)

The data above presents a dialogue that contains expressive speech acts in the form of a strong rejection accompanied by deep moral anxiety. The character Rasyid employs traditional Arabic religious linguistic formulas, such as "أعوذ بالله" (I seek refuge in Allah) and 'والله' (By Allah), which are strictly combined with the cultural concept of "عيب" (Shame). From a pragmatic sociolinguistic perspective, this speech event reveals the strong hegemony of the collective Arab community's social control institutions over individual verbal expression. The rhetorical question "وش بيقولون الناس" (What will people say later) carries a strong illocutionary force of warning, urging the conversation partner to immediately stop discussing a topic considered taboo. Language here functions entirely as an instrument for upholding public morality and safeguarding the family's social reputation in the eyes of the surrounding speech community. Similarly, critical discourse studies show that lexical selection and rhetorical framing can distribute ideology and construct social reality, reinforcing the need to interpret

linguistic form together with power relations (Fajri, 2025; Mulyadi et al., 2025; Zubaidah & Hasaniyah, 2025).

Urban Youth Slang as a Tool for Bridging Social Gaps

طريف: يا بنت الحلال، وسعي صدرك ولا تفتكرين في هالآدمي، هو أصلاً مو كفو لك، والكل يعرف إنه زكرت
وما عنده سالفه

مشاعل: سهل عليك تقول هالكلام يا طريف، بس قلبي هو اللي يعورني

"O daughter of good people (ya bint al-halal), set your heart at ease and stop thinking about that man; he is simply not your equal (mu kufu), and everyone knows he is a know-it-all hooligan (zakart) with no future!"

Michelle: "It's easy for you to say those words, O Tarif, but it is my heart that aches." (Alsanea, 2005).

The dialogue above is dominated by variations of slang used by contemporary urban youth in Riyadh. The character Tarif employs local slang terms such as "مو كفو" (not on the same level/not worthy) and "زكرت" (delinquent/know-it-all) to describe Michelle's ex-boyfriend. From a sociolinguistic-pragmatic perspective, the use of informal slang combined with traditional terms of endearment serves as a tool to bridge social distance and foster peer group solidarity. This linguistic variety is deliberately chosen to create a relaxed communication atmosphere, to reduce the psychological tension experienced by the interlocutors, while demonstrating how non-standard language variations work effectively in the realm of informal counseling for urban youth.

Linguistic Stereotypes of Dialects Based on Socio-Geographic Class

أم راشد: "قمره هذي مسكينة، حتى لهجتها لسا فيها ريحة القرى، ما تعرف تتكلم ذرابة مثل
بنات الرياض المتطورات

خت راشد: يا يمه، البنت طيبة وما ششفنا منها إلا كل خير

Ummu Rasyid: "Poor Qumrah even her accent still has a rural ring to it. She doesn't know how to speak gracefully and fashionably (zarabah) like the sophisticated girls of Riyadh."

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Rasyid's older sister: "Oh Mother, that girl is kind, and we see nothing but goodness in her." (Alsanea, 2005)

This data points directly to the study of sociolinguistics and linguistic stereotyping. The character Ummu Rasyid conducts a subjective social evaluation of the dialectal variation used by her daughter-in-law, Qumrah, by labeling it as "ريحة القرى" (having a rural flavor/rural accent). From a purely sociolinguistic perspective, this speech act reveals the existence of sociolinguistic polarization within Riyadh's urban society, where hybrid urban dialectal variations are associated with progress, while traditional dialects are deemed inferior and archaic. This word choice is employed by the speaker as a tool of symbolic power to assert the superiority of his own family's social class, demonstrating that linguistic variations within the novel's dialogue serve as a reflection of the social prejudices of the original speech community.

D. Conclusion

The conclusion of this study can be formulated more comprehensively by emphasizing not only the linguistic findings but also the academic contribution, research limitations, and implications for Arabic sociolinguistic studies. The analysis of dialogues in Rajaa Alsanea's *Banat al-Riyadh* demonstrates that language functions not merely as a narrative medium but as a dynamic social institution that reconstructs social reality and reinforces gendered power relations. The findings reveal a clear power asymmetry: male characters and the older generation dominate the use of high or formal Arabic (*Fusha*) and traditional religious formulas, deliberately integrated with directive-imperative speech acts to project patriarchal authority, create hierarchical social distance, and enforce mechanisms of moral control. In contrast, urban female characters manifest micro-resistance through hybrid codes such as Arabic-English code-switching, *Ammiyah*, and contemporary slang, which serve as tools of solidarity, emotional expression, and gender identity negotiation.

The academic contribution of this study lies in its integration of speech act analysis with phenomena of diglossia and code-switching in contemporary Arabic literature, thereby enriching literary sociolinguistics, which has often treated pragmatic and linguistic variation separately. The limitation of this research is its focus on a single literary work, meaning the findings cannot be generalized to represent the entire Arab contemporary community. Furthermore, the data analyzed were limited to seven key utterances,

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suggesting that future studies with larger corpora are needed to strengthen the validity of the results. The implication is that Arabic sociolinguistic research should further explore modern literary texts, particularly in linking language variation with gendered power relations, and extend the analysis across multiple works to provide a more comprehensive understanding of urban female communication patterns in the Arab world.

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