



RELATIONAL FUNCTIONS OF ADDRESS TERMS IN LITTLE WOMEN

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji penggunaan address terms dan fungsi relasionalnya dalam dialog tokoh pada novel *Little Women* karya Louisa May Alcott dengan pendekatan pragmatik-sosiolinguistik. Bahasa dalam karya sastra tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai sarana estetika, tetapi juga sebagai medium representasi relasi sosial antar tokoh yang dibangun melalui pilihan linguistik tertentu. Data penelitian berupa 43 dialog antar tokoh yang mengandung bentuk sapaan eksplisit maupun implisit. Data dianalisis secara kualitatif dengan menjadikan tuturan dialogis sebagai unit analisis, bukan kalimat terisolasi, untuk menangkap makna relasional secara kontekstual. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa address terms dalam *Little Women* muncul dalam berbagai bentuk, seperti istilah kekerabatan, nama diri, sapaan afektif, dan sapaan tanpa bentuk leksikal eksplisit. Bentuk-bentuk tersebut berfungsi untuk membangun dan menegosiasikan kedekatan emosional, solidaritas, hierarki keluarga, serta kontrol sosial antar tokoh. Analisis juga memperlihatkan bahwa fungsi relasional tidak bersifat statis, melainkan dinamis dan bergantung pada konteks interaksi serta perkembangan relasi dalam alur naratif. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa dialog sastra dapat diperlakukan sebagai praktik komunikasi sosial yang sah untuk analisis linguistik. Penelitian ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan kajian pragmatik sastra dengan mengintegrasikan analisis address terms dan fungsi relasional dalam konteks sastra klasik anak, yang selama ini lebih banyak dikaji dari perspektif tematik dan ideologis.

Kata kunci: address terms; fungsi relasional; pragmatik sastra; dialog sastra; *Little Women*

Abstract

This study examines the use of address terms and their relational functions in the dialogue between characters in Chapter 1 of Louisa May Alcott's novel *Little Women* using a pragmatic-sociolinguistic approach. Language in literary works not only functions as an aesthetic medium, but also as a medium for representing social relations between characters that are constructed through specific linguistic choices. The research data consists of 43 dialogues between characters that contain explicit and implicit forms of address. The data were analyzed qualitatively by using dialogic utterances as the unit of analysis, rather than isolated sentences, in order to capture the relational meaning in context. The results show that address terms in *Little Women* appear in various forms, such as kinship terms, personal names, affective forms of address, and forms of address without explicit lexical forms. These forms serve to build and negotiate emotional closeness, solidarity, family hierarchy, and social control between characters. The analysis also shows that relational functions are not static, but dynamic and dependent on the context of interaction and the development of relationships in the narrative plot. These findings confirm that literary dialogue can be treated as a valid social communication practice for linguistic analysis. This research contributes to the development of literary pragmatics by integrating the analysis of address terms and relational functions in the context of classic children's literature, which has been studied more from a thematic and ideological perspective.

Keywords: address terms; relational functions; literary pragmatics; literary dialogue; *Little Women*

INTRODUCTION

Language in literary works functions not only as an aesthetic medium, but also as a representation of social relations between characters that are constructed through specific linguistic choices. One linguistic element that plays an important role in constructing these social relations is address terms or forms of address. Through address terms, speakers in



literary texts negotiate closeness, hierarchy, affection, and power in their social interactions. In pragmatic and sociolinguistic studies, address terms are understood as indicators of interpersonal relationships that cannot be separated from the social and situational context of the speaker (Holmes & Wilson, 2022; Mubarok et al., 2025). Therefore, analysis of address terms in literary texts allows researchers to reveal the dynamics of social relationships implied behind the dialogue between characters. This approach positions literary language as valid linguistic data for systematic analysis.

Studies on address terms have been conducted in various contexts, particularly in everyday verbal interactions, institutional communication, and specific cultural discourses. These studies generally highlight the relationship between forms of address and social variables such as age, social status, power, and level of familiarity (Holmes & Wilson, 2022; Purba et al., 2025). In the context of literature, address terms have also been analyzed to examine representations of gender, ideology, and social structure in texts (Brown & Gilman, 2012; Rizqi, 2023). However, most literary studies tend to focus on address terms as mere lexical categories without linking them deeply to dynamic relational functions in dialogic interactions. As a result, social relations between characters are often understood descriptively, rather than as the result of contextual pragmatic negotiation. This gap remains open for further exploration.

The novel *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott is a classic work of literature rich in domestic dialogue and family interactions, especially between female characters in private spaces. The dialogues in this novel feature a variety of address terms that reflect family relationships, emotional solidarity, and 19th-century social norms in America. Chapter One, in particular, lays the foundation for introducing the relationships between the characters, so the choice of address terms in this section is strategic and meaningful. However, research on *Little Women* has so far been conducted more from the perspectives of feminist literature, moral education, and thematic studies, rather than from a systematic linguistic pragmatic analysis (Fetterley, 1978). Address terms in this novel are often mentioned in passing, but are rarely analyzed as a consistent relational system. Thus, the linguistic potential of this novel has not been optimally utilized.

This study takes a distinctly different position from previous studies by focusing on address terms as a means of establishing relational functions in literary dialogue. Rather than merely cataloguing forms of address, this study analyzes how address terms function to build closeness, affection, hierarchy, and social control between characters in a particular narrative context. A pragmatic-sociolinguistic approach is used to interpret the relational meanings that emerge from dialogic interactions, rather than from linguistic forms that stand alone. Thus, the novelty of this research lies in the integration of address term analysis with relational functions in the context of children's-classical literature, which has often been treated as an object of pure literary study. This approach positions literary dialogue as a social communication practice that can be analyzed linguistically. This is not a repetition of old research, but rather a shift in the analytical perspective. Therefore, relational meaning in this study is understood as a dynamic outcome of dialogic interaction rather than a fixed function attached to a single form of address.

In addition, this study also offers analytical focus by using dialogic utterances as the unit of analysis, rather than isolated sentences. Social relations in literature cannot be understood through a single utterance, but rather through a series of continuous interactions between characters. By analyzing dialogue contextually, this study is able to capture dynamic changes



in relational functions within the storyline. This approach is rarely used in linguistic literary research, which still tends to be static and categorical (Leech, 2014). Therefore, this study contributes not only empirically but also conceptually to the development of literary pragmatics. It strengthens the position of linguistics as a relevant discipline in literary studies.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the forms of address terms and their relational functions contained in the dialogues of the characters of the novel *Little Women*. Specifically, this study aims to (1) identify the types of address terms used by the characters, and (2) explain the relational functions of these address terms in building social relations between characters. In line with these objectives, the research questions posed are: (1) What forms of address terms appear in the dialogue *Little Women*? and (2) What are the relational functions of these address terms in representing social relations between characters? With this formulation, the study is not limited to a mere lexical description but focuses on contextual relational meanings.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a pragmatic-sociolinguistic analysis design, which aims to describe the use of address terms and relational functions in the dialogue of characters in Louisa May Alcott's novel *Little Women*, particularly in Chapter One. A qualitative approach was chosen because the research data consisted of natural language units that could not be quantified statistically, but rather interpreted based on the social and relational context of the speakers.

Data Sources and Research Data

The source of research data is Louisa May Alcott's novel *Little Women* in English. The research data consists of 43 dialogues between characters that appear in Chapter One, which contain forms of address terms and show the social relations between speakers. The unit of analysis in this study is dialogic utterances, not isolated sentences, because relational meaning can only be understood through the interaction of speakers and addressees in a specific narrative context.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was carried out using the listening method with the listen-and-record technique (Sudaryanto, 1993). The researcher carefully listened to all the dialogues in Chapter 1, then recorded the dialogues that met the data criteria namely (1) involving direct interaction between characters; (2) containing explicit or implicit forms of address; and (3) showing certain social relations such as closeness, hierarchy, affection, or conflict. The identified dialogues were then inventoried in a data table to facilitate the classification and further analysis process.

Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis was carried out through the following systematic stages (1) dialogue identification; 43 dialogues in Chapter One were identified and separated from the descriptive narrative. (2) Address Term Classification; each dialogue is analyzed to find the form of address terms, whether in the form of personal names, kinship terms, affective greetings, or greetings without explicit lexical forms. This classification refers to the concept of address terms in sociolinguistic and pragmatic studies (Braun, 2012; Brown & Gilman, 2012). (3) Determination of Speakers and Addressees; each dialogue is analyzed to determine who the speakers and addressees are, taking into account the narrative context and the relationships between the characters in the story. (4) Relational Function Analysis; the address terms found



are analyzed based on their relational function, such as familiarity, solidarity, power, affection, or social control. This analysis uses a contextual pragmatic approach, which views the meaning of speech as the result of the interaction between linguistic form and social context (Cutting, 2005; Holmes & Wilson, 2022). (5) Contextual Interpretation; each finding is analyzed interpretively by linking the form of address and its relational function to the social background, family relationships, and characterization of the characters in the novel. (6) Data Validity; to maintain data validity, this study uses theoretical validity, namely by applying established concepts and categories of analysis in sociolinguistic and pragmatic studies. In addition, the consistency of the analysis is maintained by applying the same classification criteria to all analyzed dialogue data.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of an analysis of the use of address terms in the dialogue Louisa May Alcott's novel *Little Women* and discusses the relational functions produced by the use of these forms of address. The analysis focuses on the types of address terms and their relational functions in the context of the March family's interactions.

Types of Address Terms in *Little Women*

Based on the 43 dialogues data analyzed, four types of address terms were found to be used by the characters in *Little Women*. These types of address terms include: (1) kinship terms, (2) endearments, (3) proper names, and (4) zero address. Table below displays data example of four types of address terms found in *Little Women*.

Table 1: Presents representative examples of each address term type identified in the data.

No	Excerpt from dialogue	Speaker	Interlocutor	Address term	Types of address terms
1	"We've got Father and Mother..."	Beth	Sisters	Father, Mother	Kinship term
2	"We haven't got Father..."	Jo	Sisters	Father	Kinship term
3	"Mother proposed not having any presents..."	Meg	Sisters	Mother	Kinship term
4	"Come and kiss me, baby."	Mrs. March	Jo	baby	Endearment
5	"That's like you, dear!"	Jo	Beth	dear	Endearment
6	"Behave better, Josephine."	Meg	Jo	Josephine	Proper name
7	"Come here, Amy."	Jo	Amy	Amy	Proper name
8	"You're a dear, and nothing else."	Meg	Beth	Ø	Zero address
9	"Glad to find you so merry, my girls."	Mrs. March	Daughters	my girls	Kinship term
10	"I'm the man of the family now Papa is away."	Jo	Sisters	Papa	Kinship term



Table 1 shows that kinship terms are the most dominant type of address terms used in *Little Women*. In addition, endearments and proper names are used contextually, while zero address appears in interactions that indicate a high level of familiarity between speakers.

a. Kinship Terms

Kinship terms are the most dominant type of address term found in the data. These forms of address include terms such as Father, Mother, Papa, Marmee, and my girls. The consistent use of kinship terms reflects the strong family relationships between the characters. For example, the use of the terms Mother and Marmee in dialogues between sisters serves as a reference to moral authority figures in the family. These terms of address not only indicate kinship, but also serve to legitimize the values embraced by the March family, especially in the context of sacrifice and simplicity of life. This phenomenon is in line with the view that kinship-based address terms have a social function to strengthen the structure of relationships and norms in certain speech communities (AA, 2022; EKAPUTRI et al., 2024; Gao & Ma, 2023). This analysis highlights how kinship terms reinforce familial bonds and societal values within the March family, illustrating their significance in maintaining social cohesion.

b. Endearments

The next type of address terms that appear quite frequently are endearments, such as dear and baby. Endearments are generally used by the mother figure (Mrs. March) and Beth in situations involving emotion, empathy, and strengthening of affective relationships. The use of endearments serves to create a warm atmosphere and reduce potential tension in interactions. In the context of the March family, endearments become a linguistic means of expressing affection while maintaining harmony among family members. This function shows that language not only serves as a tool for conveying information, but also as a means of maintaining social relationships. Endearments also play a crucial role in fostering emotional connections and conveying warmth within family dynamics, as evidenced in various cultural contexts (AA, 2022).

c. Proper Names

Proper names such as Josephine, Jo, and Amy are used selectively by the characters. Interestingly, the use of Josephine's full name appears in the context of correction or reprimand, especially when Meg advises Jo. The use of the full name in this context indicates a shift in the relationship from casual interaction to a more formal and authoritative interaction. This indicates that proper names are not always neutral, but can carry certain pragmatic meanings depending on the context in which they are used. This finding supports the view that the choice of form of address is closely related to the communicative purpose of the speaker (Fahira & Ningsih, 2022; Margareta & Kinanti, 2022). This underscores the importance of pragmatic knowledge in understanding the dynamics of speaker intentions and contextual influences in communication (Mardiana, 2024). This analysis aligns with the findings in the study of politeness strategies in *Little Women*, highlighting the significance of context in shaping interpersonal communication (Laili, 2021).

d. Zero Address

In addition to explicit forms of address, zero address is also used, which is dialogue without mentioning specific names or forms of address. Zero address generally appears in informal interactions between sisters and indicates a high level of familiarity. The absence of address terms in this context does not indicate a lack of meaning, but rather reflects an established relationship that does not require explicit relational markers. Thus, zero address



can be understood as an indicator of closeness and solidarity in family relationships (Suyana et al., 2022). This phenomenon highlights the nuanced ways in which siblings communicate, reinforcing their bond through implicit understanding and familiarity, particularly in informal settings (Charoenporn & Sornlertlamvanich, 2023).

Importantly, zero address in this study should not be interpreted as the absence of relational meaning. On the contrary, the omission of explicit address terms often signals an already established intimacy and shared understanding between interlocutors. In the context of the March sisters' interactions, zero address functions as a pragmatic strategy that reflects equality, familiarity, and emotional closeness. This finding supports the view that relational meaning can be conveyed implicitly through the absence of address forms, especially in close-knit family settings where social bonds are taken for granted. Therefore, zero address constitutes a meaningful relational choice rather than a linguistic deficiency.

Relational Functions of Address Terms

In addition to identifying types of address terms, this study also reveals several relational functions that result from their use. These functions include solidarity, affection, authority, and politeness.

Table 2: Address Terms Relational Function

No	Excerpt from dialogue	Address Term	Relational Functions
1	"We've got Father and Mother..."	Father, Mother	Solidarity
2	"Mother proposed not having any presents..."	Mother	Moral authority
3	"Come and kiss me, baby."	baby	Affection
4	"Behave better, Josephine."	Josephine	Authority
5	"Poor Jo! It's too bad..."	Jo	Affection
6	"I'm the man of the family now Papa is away."	Papa	Solidarity
7	"Glad to find you so merry, my girls."	my girls	Affection + authority
8	"Really, Mother?"	Mother	Politeness

Based on Table 2, the most dominant relational functions are solidarity and affection. Address terms are used not only to greet the interlocutor, but also to maintain family harmony and emphasize the roles and social positions of the characters.

a. Solidarity Function

The solidarity function appears most frequently in dialogues between sisters, particularly through the use of kinship terms and zero address. These forms of address are used to emphasize a sense of togetherness and mutual support amid the economic limitations experienced by the March family. This linguistic solidarity plays an important role in constructing the image of the family as a social unit in which members are interdependent. Language, in this case, becomes a tool for reinforcing the collective identity of the family (Arifin, 2023).

b. Affection Function

The function of affection is primarily manifested through the use of endearments. Terms of address such as dear and baby are used to express empathy, affection, and concern, particularly in interactions between mothers and children. The use of these endearments shows that family relationships are not only bound by hierarchical structures, but also by emotional closeness that is manifested through specific language choices (Landmann, 2022).



c. Authority Function

The function of authority is evident in the use of certain proper names and kinship terms, especially when used in the context of reprimands or instructions. The use of Josephine's full name, for example, marks a corrective situation that places the speaker in a more authoritative position. This shows that address terms can function as markers of hierarchy and social control in family interactions, even when conveyed in a relatively informal atmosphere (Gao & Ma, 2023).

d. Politeness Function

Some address terms also serve to maintain politeness in interactions, especially when children speak to their mothers. The use of terms of address such as Mother reflects a form of respect and recognition of the mother's position as a respected figure in the family. This function of politeness shows that language choices within the family still take into account prevailing social norms and linguistic ethics (Efendi & Sukamto, 2020).

In addition to these categorical relational functions, the analysis reveals that the relational functions of address terms in *Little Women* are dynamic rather than fixed. The same address term may perform different relational functions depending on the interactional context and narrative situation. For instance, the address term *Mother* functions as a marker of moral authority when used in discussions of sacrifice and family values, while in other interactions it serves as a politeness marker or an expression of emotional reassurance. This dynamic use demonstrates that relational meaning emerges from dialogic interaction rather than from the lexical form of the address term alone. Thus, address terms in literary dialogue should be understood as context-dependent relational strategies that shift in accordance with character positioning and narrative development.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that the use of address terms *Little Women* is not random, but rather systematic and contextual. The forms of address used reflect the structure of family relationships, moral values, and emotional closeness between characters. These findings reinforce the view that literary works can be a relevant source of linguistic data for examining language use in specific social contexts, particularly within the family (Nasir et al., 2023).

From a literary-pragmatic perspective, the use of address terms in *Little Women* also contributes to character construction and narrative meaning. Jo's shifting forms of address reflect her resistance to conventional gender roles, while Meg's more corrective and formal address choices position her as a moral mediator within the family. Beth's minimal and affective address patterns reinforce her role as an emotional stabilizer, whereas Mrs. March's consistent use of endearments and kinship terms establishes her as the central moral and emotional authority. Through these dialogic choices, address terms function not only as linguistic devices but also as narrative tools that shape readers' understanding of interpersonal relationships and family ideology in the novel.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the use of address terms in *Little Women* functions as a significant linguistic resource for constructing and negotiating social relations within the March family. The findings show that address terms such as *Mother*, *Father*, *Papa*, *dear*, and *my girls*, as well as the strategic use of zero address, are not merely forms of reference but serve as relational markers that express solidarity, affection, authority, and politeness. These relational functions reflect the emotional closeness, moral hierarchy, and cooperative family



structure portrayed in the novel. Importantly, this study reveals that the relational functions of address terms are dynamic and context-dependent. The same address term may perform different relational roles depending on the interactional context and narrative situation. This finding confirms that relational meaning in literary dialogue emerges through dialogic interaction rather than being inherently attached to a particular lexical form. The use of zero address further supports this argument, as the absence of explicit address forms often signals assumed intimacy and equality among closely related characters.

From a broader perspective, this research contributes to the field of literary pragmatics by demonstrating that literary dialogue can be treated as a valid form of social communication for linguistic analysis. By integrating address term analysis with relational functions in a classical children's novel, this study extends previous research that has predominantly focused on thematic or ideological interpretations of *Little Women*. Methodologically, the use of dialogic utterances as the unit of analysis enables a more nuanced understanding of interpersonal relations in narrative discourse. Overall, the findings suggest that address terms in literary texts play a crucial role in shaping character relationships and narrative meaning. This study affirms the relevance of pragmatic and sociolinguistic approaches in literary analysis and highlights the potential of classical literary works as rich sources of linguistic data for examining social interaction in fictional contexts.

SUGGESTION

Further research is recommended to (1) analyze the use of address terms in other chapters of *Little Women* to examine the development of social relationships between characters. (2) Compare address terms in classic children's novels with contemporary children's literature to identify changes in family relationship patterns linguistically. (3) Integrate the analysis of address terms with a more explicit pragmatic or sociopragmatic approach to strengthen the linguistic contribution of literary research. Future studies may also examine how shifts in address terms correlate with character development and narrative progression across the novel.

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