

**Enacting Spousal Dominance through Language: An SFL Analysis of Mr. Kirsha
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Article Info	Abstract
<i>Article History:</i> Received 24 November 2025 Approved 11 February 2026 Published 30 April 2026 Keywords: <i>Critical Discourse Analysis, Midaq Alley, Naguib Mahfouz, Patriarchy, Spousal dominance, Systemic Functional Linguistics</i>	This paper investigates the linguistic construction of spousal dominance, especially in the marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Kirsha, in the novel <i>Midaq Alley</i> by Naguib Mahfouz. The approach to this study is underpinned by Systemic Functional Linguistics, focusing on the linguistic construction of patriarchy in the Egyptian culture during the 1940s. Compared with various analytical frameworks on one case, the major framework adopted in this analytical study is Systemic Functional Linguistics, illustrating the interplay of the ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions to construct spousal dominance. The results of the dialogic event analysis, which included commands, threats, and moral or religious justifications, following the ethnographic approach developed by Spradley, support the hypothesis that Mr. Kirsha wields his spousal dominance with directive control, moral justification, and authorization, while Mrs. Kirsha resists it with challenges, moral condemnation, and confrontational talk, thus articulating the sociocultural realities of the Egyptian gender discourses.

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INTRODUCTION

Naguib Mahfouz's *Midaq Alley* (1947/1975) continues to be considered one of the most influential novels of modern Arabic fiction, providing an immediate outline of urban life in the Egyptian capital in the 1940s. The characters in this novel, even the most ordinary ones, reflect the themes of poverty, tradition, morality, and power. Among these, Mr. Kirsha, the owner of a café, is noteworthy in the case of how his marital interactions with his wife are a linguistic performance of spousal dominance. His marital discourse does not only reflect personal temperament but is part of a repetitive linguistic pattern through which authority and hierarchy are performed and naturalized. His words index not

only his personal authority within the family but also larger patriarchal discourses inscribed in Arab society during the 1940s and in reshaped forms continuing into the present.

Talking is one of the most important ways in which social domination is manifested and reproduced. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has all along underlined the point that no language is value-free; instead, all language is necessarily and fundamentally embedded with the dynamic and ongoing relationship between power and ideology (Fairclough, 2023; Van Dijk, 2008; Wodak, 2015). In the domain of marriage relationships, CDA is a useful and productive approach that helps decode the ways in which non-symmetrical relationships of power are discursively reproduced via the mechanisms of

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directive speech, silencing, evaluative comments, and framing. In *Midaq Alley*, the conversation between Kirsha and his wife demonstrates how patriarchal power is naturalized via everyday conversation and how gender domination is legitimated through spousal domination.

Systemic-Functional Linguistics (SFL), on the other hand, completes the task of CDA with a detailed theoretical model for investigating linguistic resources whereby this domination is achieved. Halliday's model (Halliday, 2013; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013), for instance, proposes three metafunctions performed by language: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The ideational metafunction allows us to explore how Actor roles in material and relational processes are consistently realized for Mr. Kirsha, how meanings concerning his construction of control and agency on his wife are created. The interpersonal metafunction helps to explore how mood, modality, and appraisal systems in marital contexts encode notions of authority and obligation as well as resistance. The last metafunction focuses on how meanings are featured and projected, and on which meanings are rendered foregrounded, backgrounded, and thus on which meanings are considered acknowledged, negotiated, and asserted.

Although there are numerous studies investigating the various ways in which marital power plays out in *Midaq Alley*, particularly in terms of its literary, cultural, and social importance, relatively few studies have examined how language performs and sustains marital power relations at the micro-linguistic level. The previous CDA studies have largely been confined to discussing gender representation within political discourse, media, and film (Lazar, 2005; Sunderland, 2006; Wodak, 2015), while literary fiction, especially Arabic literary texts, has received relatively little attention so far within clause-level discourse analysis. Similarly, though SFL has gained a wider application in education, translation, and media studies, its potential for revealing the intersection of gender and authority impinging upon a certain cultural ideology in Arabic marital discourses remains underexplored.

By combining the former's ideological critique with the latter's grammatical precision, this study takes up this lacuna. It explores how Mr.

Kirsha enacts spousal dominance through patterned linguistic choices in ways consonant with broader patriarchal ideologies in Egyptian society during the 1940s and beyond. Such a combined framework allows for a systematic linking between micro-level linguistic features and macro-level structures of gendered power whereby literary discourse reflects and at once critiques social reality. Consequently, this present research intends to find answers to the following questions: (1) What ideational, interpersonal, and textual linguistic features does Mr. Kirsha use in *Midaq Alley* to dominate his wife? and (2) How are these linguistic features in both novels indicative of broader socio-cultural ideologies on patriarchy and spousal hierarchy in the Egyptian society of the 1940s and today? In addressing these questions, the study reveals how literary discourse forms a site of critical interest for deconstructing power relations, furthers discourse-based literary analysis, and contributes to ongoing debates on gender and authority within discourses of Arab cultures.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical Discourse Analysis and Power Relations

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a well-established approach used to explore how language acts as a tool for expressing and maintaining power and ideology. Fairclough's (2023) three-dimensional model views discourse through textual, discursive, and sociocultural lenses, allowing researchers to connect specific language choices with larger systems of belief and social control. Likewise, Van Dijk (2008) presents discourse as both a reflection and a mechanism of social inequality, showing how unequal access to communication helps preserve existing power structures. Wodak (2015) expands this framework by emphasizing the historical context of discourse, illustrating how power dynamics are continually reinforced, justified, or challenged over time.

In gendered settings, CDA has been particularly effective in revealing how patriarchal ideologies are constructed and sustained through language. Lazar (2005) explains how everyday talk makes gender hierarchies appear natural and unquestionable, while Sunderland (2006) demonstrates how both domestic and institutional exchanges reinforce inequality through

commands, moral evaluations, and control over conversation. These insights are highly relevant to interactions between husbands and wives, where dominance often takes shape through authority, silence, and moral judgment. Despite CDA's strong focus on power, however, much of the existing research has concentrated on political, media, or organizational discourse. This leaves literary portrayals of marital power—especially in Arabic fiction—largely overlooked at the linguistic level.

Furthermore, CDA studies in literature have frequently favored broad ideological interpretations over detailed grammatical analysis, leading to general claims about patriarchy without clearly showing how language enacts such ideologies. This study seeks to address that gap by applying CDA alongside Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to *Midaq Alley*. Through this combined approach, it grounds ideological interpretation in close clause-level analysis of spousal interactions, demonstrating how patriarchal dominance is realized linguistically within literary dialogue.

Systemic Functional Linguistics and the Linguistics of Power

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) builds on and extends Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) by offering a clear framework for understanding how power operates through grammar and meaning. Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) model views language as a tool for creating meaning across three interconnected metafunctions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual. The ideational metafunction explains how people represent their experiences, making it possible to study agency, responsibility, and causation—particularly in analyzing how Mr. Kirsha is portrayed as the Actor in both material and relational processes. The interpersonal metafunction, meanwhile, focuses on elements such as mood, modality, and appraisal, which reveal how authority, obligation, evaluation, and resistance are communicated in marital dialogue. The textual metafunction looks at how information is arranged and emphasized, showing how certain voices are given prominence while others are marginalized, thus reinforcing patterns of dominance.

Although SFL has been widely used in areas such as political communication, education, translation, and multimodal studies (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; O'Halloran, 2008), its use in literary analysis—especially in studying marital discourse in Arabic fiction—remains limited. In the few literary studies that have drawn on SFL, the focus has generally been on narrative organization, thematic development, or characterization rather than on how interpersonal power is expressed through dialogue. Consequently, the linguistic construction of authority and resistance within marriage has not received enough systematic attention.

This study aims to fill that gap by applying SFL to explore how patriarchal dominance is shaped through the marital exchanges between Mr. Kirsha and his wife. By emphasizing the interpersonal and ideational aspects of dialogue instead of mere narrative description, the research broadens the application of SFL in literary discourse analysis, placing spousal power dynamics at the core of its investigation.

Literary Discourse as a Site of Ideology

Literature has long been understood as a powerful space where culture and ideology meet. Eagleton (1996) suggests that literary works not only mirror but also influence social realities, while Said, as cited in Varisco (2004), highlights literature's ability to encode cultural relations of power. In the context of Arabic literature, Mahfouz's novels—especially *Midaq Alley*—have been celebrated for their sociological insight, portraying the complex tensions between modernity and tradition, poverty and ambition, and masculinity and authority in mid-twentieth-century Cairo (Alam, 2023; Al-Hamzi et al., 2024).

Despite this, much of the scholarly attention given to Mahfouz's work has focused on themes, symbolism, and social realism, rather than on the linguistic mechanisms through which power operates in conversation. The exchanges between Mr. Kirsha and his wife, for example, are often interpreted as simple representations of patriarchy rather than as dynamic discursive events where authority is constructed, negotiated, and resisted through language itself. Yet these dialogues are more than narrative elements—they are verbal spaces where patriarchal ideology takes shape

through everyday speech, reinforcing the culturally embedded norms of marital hierarchy.

By combining Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this study moves beyond thematic or character-centered readings toward a systematic investigation of how language functions as a means of enacting power in literature. This integrated approach allows for a detailed exploration of how grammar, interactional structures, and evaluative language work together to establish spousal dominance while also revealing subtle moments of resistance.

Here, the reviewed literature shows that CDA is invaluable for uncovering the ideological layers of discourse, SFL provides precise linguistic tools for analyzing how those ideologies are realized, and literary scholarship offers essential cultural and historical grounding. Yet, what remains missing is a unified approach that applies both CDA and SFL to the micro-linguistic study of marital power relations in Arabic fiction. Previous research has largely centered on political, media, or general literary discourse, without examining in depth how spousal dominance emerges at the levels of clause, mood, and interaction.

This study fills that gap by integrating CDA and SFL to investigate how Mr. Kirsha's speech patterns construct and sustain marital authority in *Midaq Alley*. In doing so, it contributes to both literary and discourse studies by showing how classical Arabic literature not only linguistically legitimizes patriarchal power but also occasionally challenges it—offering fresh insight into the ongoing conversations around gender and authority in Arab society.

METHODS

This study explores how marital dominance is expressed through language in Naguib Mahfouz's *Midaq Alley*, focusing on Mr. Kirsha's speech patterns and Mrs. Kirsha's responses. It investigates how these linguistic exchanges reflect and reinforce broader cultural ideologies of patriarchy and domestic hierarchy in 1940s Egypt. The corpus comprises carefully selected dialogues from the novel (first published in 1947; 5th edition, 2014) that explicitly depict power relations between husband and wife—such as commands,

threats, justifications, confrontations, and appeals to authority. Each selected dialogue serves as a unit of analysis, chosen for its relevance to moments of conflict, negotiation, or assertion of control within the marriage. This purposeful selection highlights the most significant linguistic features linked to dominance (Patton & Smith, 2020; Teddlie & Yu, 2007; Patton, 2002). The novel itself acts as a microcosm of Egyptian society, with Mr. Kirsha symbolizing patriarchal authority and Mrs. Kirsha representing moral and social agency. Together, their exchanges offer a sociolinguistically rich setting for analyzing the intersection of language, power, and culture.

The research employs a qualitative analytical framework that integrates Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), drawing on Xing's (2024) CDA-based linguistic approach and Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model. At the textual level, linguistic elements such as mood (imperative, interrogative, declarative), modality, transitivity patterns, appraisal resources, word choice, and evaluative expressions were identified and examined. Utterances were coded according to SFL's three metafunctions—ideational (process types, agency, causation), interpersonal (mood, modality, stance, evaluation), and textual (thematic organization and information flow). This process ensured a systematic connection between linguistic form and social meaning.

At the discourse-practice level, these utterances were analyzed as interactive moves within the marital dialogue, focusing on how authority, compliance, resistance, and moral accountability are expressed and negotiated. Speech acts were interpreted within broader patterns of interaction, showing how they collectively build and maintain relational hierarchies. At the sociocultural level, the analysis connects these linguistic behaviors to the historical, religious, and cultural context of 1940s Egypt, revealing how patriarchal ideologies shape and legitimize gendered communication.

To deepen this analysis, Spradley's (2016) ethnographic model was employed, incorporating domain, taxonomic, and componential analyses. Domain analysis identifies key cultural categories in marital interactions—such as authority, morality, obedience, and resistance—while

taxonomic analysis organizes different strategies of dominance and resistance. Componential analysis then compares linguistic features across speakers and contexts to highlight contrastive power dynamics. These ethnographic insights are aligned with SFL metafunctions, ensuring that linguistic patterns are meaningfully connected to cultural interpretation. A broader cultural theme analysis integrates these findings, linking micro-level language use to macro-level ideologies of patriarchy and domestic hierarchy.

To enhance analytical credibility, the study employs methodological triangulation, cross-referencing SFL-based grammatical analysis with CDA-driven ideological interpretation and existing literature on Arab gender roles and social norms. Multiple rounds of reading and coding were conducted to maintain accuracy and consistency in categorization and interpretation. This integrated methodology offers a robust and transparent account of how marital power is linguistically constructed and ideologically maintained in *Midaq Alley*.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Using Spradley's (2016) ethnographic model, the findings indicate that spousal dominance in *Midaq Alley* is enacted through recurrent and culturally routinized discursive patterns rather than isolated or exceptional utterances. Domain analysis identifies spousal confrontation—especially surrounding Mr. Kirsha's contested conduct—as the primary interactional site where power, legitimacy, and moral authority are negotiated. Within this domain, language operates as a symbolic resource for structuring hierarchy and regulating acceptable behavior.

Taxonomic analysis reveals a stable repertoire of dominance strategies, including directives, coercive and face-threatening acts, moral justification, normalization, and appeals to higher authority. As shown in Table 1, these strategies align systematically with Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) metafunctions. Interpersonal resources are dominant, particularly in imperatives, insults, threats, and accusations, which directly establish asymmetrical relations of

power. Ideational resources function to legitimize domination by reframing transgressive behavior as normal, justified, or morally defensible, while textual resources embed spousal conflict within broader religious, social, and communal narratives.

Table 1. Enacting Spousal Dominance through Language in *Midaq Alley*

Selected Texts / Utterances	Discursive Strategies	SFL Metafunction	Interpretive Function
Mr. Kirsha: "What do you want? Speak up now!"	Imperatives / Commands	Interpersonal	Directly asserts authority, controlling conversation, dominant in spousal interaction.
Mr. Kirsha: "Don't be stupid. Speak up or else let me go..."	Threats / Warnings	Interpersonal	Enforces dominance by intimidating and coercing wife to comply.
Mr. Kirsha: "Why shouldn't I have my parties where I please?"	Justification / Rationalization	Ideational	Frames behavior as his right, morally legitimizes actions to assert control.
Mr. Kirsha: "It is God's will."	Authority / Religious Reference	Textual	Uses external authority to reinforce dominance indirectly, legitimizes choices.
Mr. Kirsha: "He is a poor boy whose poverty I am trying to alleviate by being charitable to him."	Moral Justification	Ideational	Maintains control through moral framing, justifying actions as virtuous.
Mr. Kirsha: "All men do many things that are dirty and this is one of them."	Normalization / Justification	Textual / Ideational	Normalizes behavior to reduce social pressure, asserts interpretive control over events.
Mr. Kirsha: "It's as though our house were under suspicion..."	Interpretation / Framing	Ideational	Reframes situation to minimize blame, maintains control over narrative.
Mrs. Kirsha: "Just you try and move, you filthy wretch!"	Threat / Challenge	Interpersonal	Challenges husband's dominance, asserts her moral authority in confrontation.
Mrs. Kirsha: "The brazen immoral fellow has disgraced us all..."	Moral / Social Judgment	Interpersonal	Uses social consequences to confront husband's misconduct, threatens reputation.
Mrs. Kirsha: "If I see there is no hope of reforming him, then I will send fire raging through the whole alley..."	Threat / Warning	Ideational	Expands moral and social consequences, attempting to influence husband's behavior.
Mrs. Kirsha: "By God, if it were not for my age and the children, I would have left his house long ago."	Argument / Persuasion	Textual	Organizes narrative reasoning, emphasizes stakes and personal rationale for action.
Mrs. Kirsha: "Drink your tea, then, you son of a whore!"	Direct Insult / Confrontation	Interpersonal	Publicly asserts dominance and moral authority in front of others, enforces social power.
Mr. Kirsha (to wife): "What do you want, a new scandal?"	Sarcasm / Accusation	Interpersonal	Undermines wife's voice by reframing her plea as destructive, silencing her agency.

Selected Texts / Utterances	Discursive Strategies	SFL Metafunction	Interpretive Function
Mr. Kirsha (to wife & son): “Our Lord has obviously afflicted me with both of you as some sort of punishment.”	Blame / Insult	Ideational + Interpersonal	Frames family as divine curse, delegitimizing wife and son together.
Mr. Kirsha (to wife): “Were it not for your congenital insanity your son would not have gone off his head!”	Personal attack	Interpersonal	Projects son’s rebellion as mother’s fault, asserting spousal superiority.
Mr. Kirsha (to wife in public): “Don’t be slanderous, my boy. All is well with Muhammad’s people.”	Deflection / Authority Claim	Interpersonal	Dismisses moral accusations, reframes scandal as slander, exerting discursive dominance.
Mrs. Kirsha (to Kirsha): “I called you in to deal with him, not to call me names...”	Complaint / Resistance	Interpersonal	Pushes back against husband’s humiliation, asserts minimal agency.
Mrs. Kirsha (lament): “He keeps humiliating me! O God, by the murderous wrongs done to Hassan and Hussain...”	Religious invocation / Lament	Textual + Interpersonal	Constructs herself as victim through religious discourse, exposing spousal cruelty.
Mr. Kirsha (to Hussain): “Why don’t you answer, you son of an old hag? Do you really intend to go away and leave us?”	Verbal aggression / Interrogation	Interpersonal	Combines insult + coercion to intimidate son, asserting patriarchal authority.
Mr. Kirsha (to Hussain): “All dogs like you, brought up deprived and starving, go mad when they get money in their pockets.”	Dehumanization / Metaphor	Ideational + Interpersonal	Animalizes son, enforcing hierarchy and degrading rebellion.
Mr. Kirsha (to Hussain): “Take your black face away from me! ... As far as I’m concerned, you have died and gone to hell!”	Curse / Exclusion	Interpersonal	Extreme dominance: symbolically kills son via curse, severing paternal bond.
Mrs. Kirsha (to Hussain): “What’s wrong with you, you son of a villain?”	Insult / Reprimand	Interpersonal	Aligns briefly with husband’s dominance, reinforcing patriarchal model.
Mrs. Kirsha (to Hussain): “Have you gone mad, you son of a lunatic?”	Ridicule / Social shame	Interpersonal	Attempts to discipline son by invoking stigma, complicit in dominance cycle.
Hussain (to mother): “I must get away from this alley.”	Assertive declaration	Ideational	Rejects alley as symbol of oppression, indirect resistance to parental control.
Hussain (to Kirsha): “Yes, Father... I want to lead a different life.”	Assertion of autonomy	Interpersonal	Resists patriarchal expectation, positions self as independent subject.

Rather than operating independently, these metafunctions work cumulatively. Interpersonal coercion is consistently reinforced by ideational legitimation and textual embedding, producing what may be described as a layered model of dominance. Authority is displaced from the individual speaker to culturally sanctioned frameworks—religion, masculinity, and communal norms—thereby naturalizing spousal hierarchy and limiting the discursive space for challenge. This pattern explains how dominance is maintained even when overt coercion is resisted.

Mrs. Kirsha's discourse introduces moments of resistance through threats, moral condemnation, argumentative reasoning, and religious lament. However, the table demonstrates that such resistance is structurally constrained and often ambivalent. While her utterances contest her husband's authority, they frequently rely on the same interpersonal aggression and moral shaming that underpin patriarchal dominance. Resistance thus emerges not as a counter-discourse external to patriarchy, but as a reconfiguration within its limits.

The findings further show that spousal dominance extends beyond the marital dyad into the intergenerational domain. Mr. Kirsha's discourse toward Hussain intensifies into dehumanization, curse, and symbolic exclusion, marking the extreme end of patriarchal authority. Notably, Mrs. Kirsha at times aligns with this discourse, illustrating how subordinated actors may reproduce dominant ideologies even while suffering under them. This alignment highlights the cyclical nature of verbal violence within the family.

Hussain's discourse represents a qualitative rupture. His assertive declarations and final exit speech reject not only paternal authority but the alley itself as an oppressive socio-cultural domain. Through this move, resistance shifts from interpersonal confrontation to ideological withdrawal, transforming language from a tool of negotiation into a means of symbolic severance.

In this way, the findings demonstrate that spousal dominance in *Midaq Alley* is dynamic, negotiated, and discursively produced rather than fixed or uniform. Mr. Kirsha's authority is sustained through patterned combinations of interpersonal coercion, ideational legitimation,

and textual embedding within religious and cultural frames. Mrs. Kirsha's resistance remains partial and compromised, while Hussain embodies the possibility of rupture. By integrating CDA and SFL, the analysis shows that linguistic forms—imperatives, insults, justifications, and invocations—function as ideological acts that both reproduce and destabilize spousal power relations, embedding marital conflict within broader struggles over morality, authority, and survival.

Discussion

discourse patterns and then situating those patterns within broader socio-cultural ideologies. Linguistically, the analysis demonstrates that imperatives, commands, and directives constitute Mr. Kirsha's most salient strategies for enacting spousal dominance. These forms operate primarily through the interpersonal metafunction, positioning him as the interactional authority and limiting his wife's discursive agency. Rather than treating these utterances as isolated instances of rudeness or temper, the findings show that their force lies in their patterned recurrence and lack of mitigation, which collectively normalize asymmetrical power relations within the marital exchange. Threats intensify this interpersonal control, signaling that coercion is an available and culturally intelligible means of enforcing compliance.

From an SFL perspective, Mr. Kirsha's moral and religious justifications activate ideational and textual metafunctions that extend dominance beyond direct interaction. Appeals such as invoking divine will or charitable intent reframe personal behavior as morally sanctioned, thereby restricting the grounds on which it can be challenged. Importantly, the linguistic evidence indicates that these strategies do not replace coercion but work alongside it, producing a layered form of authority that combines interpersonal pressure with ideological legitimation. This pattern aligns with Fairclough's (1992) view of discourse as simultaneously constitutive of social relations and shaped by them, but here the emphasis remains on how these ideological effects are linguistically realized.

Mrs. Kirsha's discourse demonstrates that resistance is present but structurally constrained. Linguistically, her threats, insults, and

argumentative reasoning also draw on the interpersonal metafunction, allowing her to contest her husband's authority in moments of confrontation. However, the findings indicate that her resistance rarely reconfigures the interactional hierarchy; instead, it produces temporary disruptions within an otherwise stable pattern of dominance. Her appeals to morality, sacrifice, and religious suffering show how women's agency is negotiated through culturally sanctioned discursive resources rather than through direct challenges to patriarchal authority.

These patterns resonate with prior research on gendered discourse, which consistently shows that male speakers tend to rely on directives, threats, and rationalizations, while female speakers more often employ moral, relational, or socially oriented appeals (Holmes, 1988b; Broadbridge, 2003; Karlsson, 2007; Jones & Myhill, 2007; Yousef, 2018; Hamdan et al., 2025; Manaworapong & Bowen, 2022). What the present findings add is a fine-grained functional explanation of how these strategies are linguistically organized, demonstrating how interpersonal dominance is stabilized through ideational justification and textual embedding.

The socio-cultural implications of these linguistic patterns become clearer when situated within the patriarchal ideologies shaping Arab society in the 1940s. Male authority within the household was supported by cultural, religious, and legal frameworks that legitimized control over women's speech and mobility. Ethnographic work by Abu-Lughod (1986) illustrates how women's expression was mediated by honor and modesty codes, while men's authority was often asserted through direct commands and religious invocation. The linguistic findings from *Midaq Alley* reflect this configuration precisely, insofar as appeals to divine authority function discursively to foreclose negotiation rather than merely to express belief. Hatem's (2018) analysis further clarifies how religious discourse operates as a resource for legitimizing male authority, while Kandiyoti's (1988) concept of the "patriarchal bargain" helps explain why women's resistance often remains ambivalent and self-limiting. Mrs. Kirsha's oscillation between confrontation and complicity—particularly when she reproduces verbal aggression toward Hussain—illustrates this

bargain in linguistic terms, echoing Baron's (1997) account of constrained female agency.

Although social conditions have evolved since the 1940s, the discussion suggests continuity in how language sustains spousal hierarchy. Joseph's (2008) notion of "patriarchal connectivity" demonstrates that family relations in many Arab contexts remain structured through relational hierarchies, a pattern that is discursively reproduced through everyday speech. Contemporary studies support this continuity. Shoaib (2021) shows that Egyptian television dramas continue to circulate patriarchal speech patterns strikingly similar to those observed in *Midaq Alley*, while Hafez (2020) documents the emergence of counter-discourses in which women increasingly deploy assertive language and rights-based rhetoric. Seen against this backdrop, Mrs. Kirsha's religious lament can be interpreted as an early form of symbolic resistance—one that challenges dominance not by rejecting cultural frameworks but by reappropriating them.

From a broader CDA perspective, these findings confirm that spousal dominance is not merely enacted at the interpersonal level but is embedded in the ideological work of discourse (Fairclough, 1995). Mr. Kirsha's language does more than regulate family behavior; it reproduces patriarchal authority by aligning personal power with religious and cultural legitimacy. Mrs. Kirsha's constrained resistance demonstrates how agency operates within narrow discursive limits, while Hussain's declarations represent a break with both paternal authority and the socio-cultural order of the alley. Crucially, this rupture is linguistically marked by a shift from negotiation to exit, underscoring how resistance may culminate not in discursive reform but in withdrawal. This trajectory resonates with Deeb's (2006) observation that youth resistance in Arab contexts often targets both familial and communal hierarchies.

It is to say that the discussion shows that the linguistic patterns identified in *Midaq Alley* reflect both the persistence and transformation of patriarchal ideology. Imperatives, insults, justifications, and invocations are not neutral features of dialogue but ideological practices that construct, sustain, and at times destabilize spousal dominance. By maintaining a clear distinction

between linguistic evidence and cultural extrapolation, the analysis demonstrates how micro-level discourse patterns connect to macro-level social ideologies without collapsing one into the other. Language in *Midaq Alley* thus functions simultaneously as a mechanism of domination and a resource for resistance, embedding marital conflict within enduring struggles over authority, morality, and survival.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the linguistic mechanisms through which Mr. Kirsha enacts marital dominance in Naguib Mahfouz's *Midaq Alley* and explored how these mechanisms reflect broader socio-cultural ideologies of patriarchy in 1940s Egypt. The analysis revealed that imperatives, commands, and directives were the most salient features, operating through the interpersonal metafunction to assert authority and constrain Mrs. Kirsha's agency. Moral justifications, rationalizations, and appeals to religious authority functioned through the ideational and textual metafunctions, legitimizing control within culturally and religiously sanctioned norms.

Mrs. Kirsha's responses, including moral reasoning, social judgment, threats, and symbolic lamentation, illustrate limited yet strategic forms of resistance, showing how women navigate and contest power within constrained discursive spaces. Hussain's assertive declarations and eventual rupture from familial and societal authority further demonstrate that resistance can extend beyond interpersonal negotiation to critique wider socio-cultural hierarchies.

The findings highlight that language in marital interactions serves simultaneously as a mirror and instrument of socio-cultural power. Male dominance is enacted both directly, through commands and coercion, and indirectly, through ideological and moral legitimization, while female resistance exploits socially and morally sanctioned avenues to challenge authority. This dual function underscores the importance of examining both the interpersonal and ideological dimensions of discourse.

The study contributes to the fields of sociolinguistics, Critical Discourse Analysis,

Systemic Functional Linguistics, and literary criticism by providing a systematic framework for analyzing gendered power relations in Arabic fiction. Practically, the results inform literary interpretation, translation studies, media analysis, and gender-focused sociolinguistic research, offering insights into how discursive strategies sustain or contest patriarchal norms.

Future research could extend this approach to other literary texts, films, or media across different cultures, incorporate quantitative corpus-based methods, and undertake cross-cultural comparisons to explore universal and culture-specific manifestations of patriarchal discourse. By doing so, scholars can further illuminate how language continues to encode, negotiate, and challenge gendered hierarchies in both historical and contemporary contexts.

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