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## Castles and Curses: An Analysis of Speech Acts and Stereotype Threat in Diana Wynne Jones's *Howl's Moving Castle*

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

CASTLES AND CURSES: AN ANALYSIS OF SPEECH ACTS AND STEREOTYPE  
THREAT IN DIANA WYNNE JONES'S HOWL'S MOVING CASTLE

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

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by

Jennifer L. Peña

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To: Dean Michael Heithaus  
College of Arts, Sciences and Education

This thesis, written by Jennifer L. Peña, and entitled Castles and Curses: An Analysis of Speech Acts and Stereotype Threat in Diana Wynne Jones's Howl's Moving Castle, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

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Date of Defense: March 25, 2022

The thesis of Jennifer L. Peña is approved.

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Dean Michael Heithaus  
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Andrés G. Gil  
Vice President for Research and Economic Development  
and Dean of the University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2022

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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by

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This thesis analyzes significant moments and selected excerpts from Diana Wynne Jones's *Howl's Moving Castle*, focusing on the protagonist Sophie's character development and uses of magic through speech in relation to stereotype threat and speech act theory. This thesis connects recent scholarly conversations about stereotype threat to the metaphor of Sophie's spoken magic as the means by which she establishes her own identity and reclaims power over her life. This thesis considers Jones's reflections about connections between fantasy writing and reality, as well as the potential significance of those connections for children whose experiences are reflected in fantasy works by translation. This thesis thereby argues that Sophie's experiences with expectations of others that limit her perceptions of her own abilities and willingness to leave the place where she started can be seen as representative of real-world experiences of stereotype threat, an issue that is faced by children and adults alike.

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## Introduction

As fantasy author Diana Wynne Jones writes in *Reflections On the Magic of Writing*, “At its simplest, magic can be considered as a metaphor, or as functioning in the same way as metaphor” (129). Sometimes, the metaphorical potential of magic in a particular book can inspire close readings and analyses decades or even centuries after its initial publication, giving insights that readers can apply in their own lives or understanding of the real-world inspirations behind the magic. One such book is *Howl’s Moving Castle* by British fantasy author Diana Wynne Jones. Jones’s book has international name recognition decades after its initial publication by Greenwillow Books in 1986. A major factor in this lasting relevance, other than Jones’s own renown as a prolific fantasy writer, is that a well-known Japanese animation studio named Studio Ghibli created a film adaptation of the book in 2004, which used the same title and saw major success around the world. The film adaptation depicted major plot points and characters differently from Jones’s original book, the latter of which will be the focus of this thesis. With its own charm, Jones’s book that inspired the film represents themes of identity and power in ways that are relevant to present-day conversations in the field of writing and rhetoric, as this thesis will discuss.

Jones’s *Howl’s Moving Castle* follows the story of Sophie Hatter, the eldest daughter of three who believes she is resigned to her fate of an uneventful life at her family’s hat shop until an encounter with a witch whose magic turns Sophie into an old woman, spurring Sophie to leave the hat shop and travel on her own to find a way to break the witch’s curse. Along the way, she encounters the moving castle of the wizard Howl and decides to join its inhabitants on her quest to break the curse. By the end of the story, Sophie



realizes that she unknowingly cast the witch's curse on herself using magical powers she didn't realize she had for much of the story; by repeatedly *speaking* of herself as an old woman, Sophie had made that the truth of her situation. In particular, Sophie's sense of powerlessness over several situations in her life (such as being the eldest of three siblings and being cursed by the witch) are overcome through her character arc, including her realization of her own power as she casts magic using speech (both intentionally and unintentionally). As such, Jones's *Howl's Moving Castle's* depiction of power through speech can thus be considered as a metaphor for the act of asserting one's identity and reclaiming one's power through speech, both within Jones's book and in non-fictional contexts beyond the book's pages. While scholars have explored themes of self-empowerment in connection to one's sense of self (see San Juan García) in *Howl's Moving Castle* and Jones's other books (see Eastwood), this thesis aims to emphasize Jones's depictions of the power of individual voices and nontraditional rhetorical acts through a close reading and analysis of Sophie's power through speech.

### *Story Overview*

At the start of the book, Jones first introduces Sophie Hatter and her family, including her two sisters and step-mother. When Sophie's sisters leave home to pursue apprenticeships, Sophie stays behind as an unpaid apprentice at her family's hat shop, thinking that she is the one who should do so as the eldest of three siblings. She unknowingly imbues hats with magic by speaking to them, leading to pleased customers and increased attention to the shop, which draws in the Witch of the Waste. In an unpleasant visit to the shop, the Witch curses Sophie to become an old woman.

Thinking that her family should not see her in her cursed state, Sophie decides to leave home in search of a solution. Along the way, she encounters and boards the wizard Howl's moving castle, meeting fire demon Calcifer, apprentice wizard Michael, and the wizard Howl himself. Recognizing her magical potential, Calcifer asks Sophie to break his contract with Howl when she arrives at the castle, and a deal is made. Sophie repeatedly enchants objects around her without realizing that she is doing so because she does not acknowledge her magical potential; having magical abilities does not align with her view of herself. Even so, Sophie's magic usage grows along with a strengthened sense of identity, even though she takes the form of an old woman until the end of the novel. By the end, Sophie actively uses her magic to defeat the final antagonist, and she regains her younger form in the process of using her magic to break Calcifer's curse. Sophie's magic usage thus plays an important role in the resolution of Jones's book.

### *Fantasy and Reality*

Diana Wynne Jones was a prolific author of children's literature, known for her *Chronicles of Chrestomanci* series and other books beyond *Howl's Moving Castle*. In *Reflections On the Magic of Writing*, Jones establishes her motivations and processes for writing. In particular, she describes connections between fantasy writing and real-world experiences. The idea of literature in relation to reality can be seen in J. R. R. Tolkien's essay "On Fairy-Stories", in which he writes that a writer of fantasy creates an alternate (or secondary) world with hope that "the peculiar quality of this secondary world (if not all the details) are derived from Reality, or are flowing into it" (77). Jones's books thus reflect this idea that the realities of a fantasy world can reflect and transform reality, just as Sophie's limiting self-perception can reflect readers' real-world experiences and inspire readers to push past

the limits imposed by social norms, as Sophie does in Jones's secondary world. Plus, as Andi Zeisler writes in *Feminism and Pop Culture*, "pop culture, entertainment or not, is absolutely crucial to how people understand and live in the world" (3), which can be seen in Jones's uses of both translation and magic as metaphor in her works.

In *Reflections On the Magic of Writing*, Jones discusses the significance of fantasy and imagination in relation to learning and decision-making in the real world, writing:

Fantasy is a very important part of the way your mind works. People trot out as a truism that man is a tool-making animal, but nobody pauses to think that before a caveman could make a stone ax or an obsidian arrowhead, he had to *imagine* it first. (Jones 131)

Jones connects the importance of imagination to her ideas about not only using magic as a solution to the problems in fantasy stories, but rather presenting a problem "in equivalent magical terms and then link[ing it] with the minds and actions of people in such a way that a solution can be worked out in human terms as well" (130). By presenting problems and coming up with solutions in this way, "the problem becomes exciting rather than painful or intractable and the imagination is available to come to grips with the problem" (Jones 130). In that sense, Sophie's magic can be considered in a metaphorical sense by readers, who may relate to the struggles she overcomes related to her sense of identity over the course of the book and stereotype threat, in which the fear of proving a stereotype about a group to which one belongs to be true can limit or worsen performance (see Spencer et al.).

Jones also discusses how several of her stories have been translated from other stories and real-world experiences, as part of her "discovery that translating need not apply only to types of story. You can make other kinds of translation as well, all equally useful

and all equally telling. The other kinds I began to use straightaway and almost habitually” (209). Considering Jones’s uses of translation and her writing about magic as metaphorical, fantasy can be interpreted as a tool for understanding narratives beyond their boundaries in the form of book bindings. This approach applies to *Howl’s Moving Castle* as well; Sophie’s experiences can be seen as translation of real-world scenarios of self-deprecation, resignation to fear or others’ expectations, and stereotype threat. Sophie’s internalization of the idea that she is doomed to fail at her pursuits beyond her family’s hat shop limits her uses of magic as well because of her lack of acknowledgment of her own potential. Whenever she seems to feel that she has failed or otherwise fallen short somehow, throughout the book, she refers to her status as the eldest of three and the idea that it was obvious that she would fall short because of that inseparable part of her identity.

### *Background and Theory*

In Jones’s *Howl’s Moving Castle*, Sophie repeatedly casts magic by speaking throughout the text, sometimes consciously and other times accidentally. For a large portion of the book, Sophie does not realize that she has magical powers at all; arguably, magical abilities would not align with her self-image at the start of the text. Similar to how Sophie’s magic is central to her character arc and her role in the story, her uses of magic are significant within the story itself. Sophie’s shift from unconscious uses of magic to more intentional uses thus parallels Sophie’s growth in confidence (and in power through speech) as part of her character arc. Using selected dialogues from Jones’s book, this thesis will highlight instances in which Sophie uses magic on herself and on others (including objects). This thesis will first analyze Sophie’s character arc in the context of stereotype threat, interpreting Jones’s text as a translation of real-world experiences in which stereotypes can

cause one to limit oneself. By first discussing Sophie's growth in connection to stereotype threat, this thesis will highlight the real-world implications of Jones's depictions of Sophie's shifting uses of magic over the course of the book, especially in connection to larger themes of overcoming the limits imposed by social norms and coming into one's own power.

While stereotype threat provides a lens for interpreting Sophie's magic as a metaphor for overcoming limiting social expectations and thus connects to larger themes within Jones's book, speech act theory contributes means of classifying and further investigating the significance of individual moments in which Sophie uses magic. After discussing stereotype threat in connection to larger themes within Jones's *Howl's Moving Castle*, this thesis will then apply speech act theory to highlight individual moments of magic usage and interpret the significance of the differences in how Sophie uses magic throughout the book. Notably, speech act theory provides relevant terminology that will be used to categorize Sophie's different uses of magic in a way that allows clear distinctions to be drawn between Sophie's uses of magic on herself versus on others. Overall, this thesis will investigate the significance of Sophie's speech magic to larger real-world conversations about the importance of speech (whether to oneself or to others) as a way of affirming one's own identity and resisting stereotype threat.

The section in which this thesis will apply speech act theory will build on existing elements of speech act theory as described in Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* (1962) and in scholarly works that followed, such as Searle's "What Is A Speech Act?" (1971) and Horner's "Speech-Act Theory and Writing" (1981). Speech act theory pertains to the significance of instances of speech (spoken words or utterances) that are considered

speech acts when meaning is involved; John R. Searle notes that utterances are considered speech acts when they can be “said to *have meaning*” and when the one producing the utterances can be “said to *mean something* by those sounds or marks” (258). The idea of *meaning something* by one’s speech suggests an element of intentionality on the part of the speaker. Similar to Searle’s discussions of intentionality and indirect speech acts, Horner defines *illocutionary* acts as speech acts in which the speaker “*intends* the utterance to do something” (9). By considering the protagonist Sophie’s power of speaking magic as a type of speech act in the context of ideas from these and other texts (see Khazai et al.), this thesis will apply speech act theory as a framework to interpret Sophie’s uses of speech magic in connection to her character growth and the realization of her power (in spite of the limiting context in which she lives). This thesis will also explore and question the significance of intentionality in relation to Sophie’s character arc and the impacts of her uses of magic in the moments when her intentions are unclear. Overall, this thesis will emphasize the significance of Sophie’s uses of speech in relation to her changing perceptions of herself and her abilities, first in connection to her overcoming stereotype threat and then in relation to the classifications within speech act theory that allow her uses of magic and their significance to be further analyzed.

This thesis will emphasize Sophie’s character arc as a metaphor for realizing one’s own power through speech in spite of the limits imposed by stereotypes and social norms, with particular consideration for the significance of Sophie’s uses of speech to cast her magic. In connection to the potential for language to be impactful, Judith Butler writes:

We do things with language, produce effects with language, and we do things to language, but language is also the thing that we do. Language is a name for our

doing: both “what” we do (the name for the action that we characteristically perform) and that which we effect, the act and its consequences. (Butler 8)

Sophie’s uses of magic (and the effects of those moments) reflect the potential of speech to impact her world; in this sense, Sophie “produce[s] effects with language” (Butler 8), and those effects impact both Sophie herself and others (from hat shop patrons to inanimate objects), as this thesis will discuss. Because the idea of speech producing action/change (both in the more immediate contexts of individual scenes and in the broader context of Sophie’s character arc as a whole) is so integral to Sophie’s character, this thesis aims to establish the significance of this idea by interpreting Jones’s depiction of Sophie’s growth (both as an independent person and as a witch) as a powerful metaphor for reclaiming power and asserting one’s own identity through speech.

### **Stereotype Threat**

Sophie’s self-perception is often influenced by stereotypes about a particular aspect of her identity that is beyond her control: her being the eldest of three siblings. Sophie’s experiences at the start of her character arc (and later, as she still battles her own internalization of the idea that the eldest of three will fail) can thus be seen as a translation of real-world experiences of stereotype threat. As such, this section will discuss real-world conversations related to stereotype threat and discuss the significance of Sophie’s character arc in relation to the limitations she believes herself to have as a result of factors that are beyond her control, as well as the significance of social norms in Sophie’s character arc.

In *Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do*, Claude M. Steele describes stereotype threat as being “tied to an identity” and “very hard to shake” (5). To Steele, stereotype threat is “present in any situation to which the stereotype is

relevant” and “follows members of the stereotyped group into these situations like a balloon over their heads” (5); throughout Sophie’s character arc, these situations take the form of moments in which she feels that she has failed or expects that she might fail. In connection to the earlier discussion of a sense of identity as a major theme in Jones’s book, Steele notes that

despite the strong sense we have of ourselves as autonomous individuals, evidence consistently shows that contingencies tied to our social identities do make a difference in shaping our lives, from the way we perform in certain situations to the careers and friends we choose. (Steele 14)

In the context of the contrast between the more timid early-book Sophie and the more fierce character she embodies as an old woman, this idea of the impact of “social identities” holds greater significance in understanding Sophie’s character arc (Steele 14); over the course of the book, Sophie learns to harness (rather than deny) her magic abilities because she is able to begin seeing herself as separate from the limiting stereotypes about her identity as the eldest of three, in spite of being raised in an environment in which she finds herself resigned to a pre-determined fate despite her potential. The connections between stereotypes and Sophie’s sense of self will be further explored later in this thesis.

### *Social Norms and Collective Memory*

In relation to stereotype threat, Steele describes how bias influences interactions with the world: “Our understandings and views of the world are partial, and reflect the circumstances of our particular lives” (14). Part of how the world is understood by an individual, then, is reflective of the biases they hold. Similarly, stereotypes can be passed down from one group or generation to the next, taking the form of a collective memory in



a region. Scholars of rhetoric throughout history have discussed memory differently, depending on the time period; for instance, the idea of digital memory as it affects rhetorical choices is increasingly relevant in the current increasingly digital world. On the subject of rhetorical memory, Pruchnic and Lacey write about “the connections between rhetoric and memory [...] as forces that are co-implicated generally in everyday subjective experience and rhetorical performance” and the significance of external forms of collective and cultural memory on the rhetorical acts of members of related groups (473). They emphasize “memory’s function as a mediator or interface between human interiority and exteriority” (477), which can be seen in connection to Sophie’s internalization of the collective memory of the people in Ingary regarding the supposedly inevitable fates of the eldest of three siblings. The authors note,

When we have an affective response to an object or concept, it becomes ‘tagged’ or ‘marked’ in our memory with that feeling, increasing our chances of responding in similar fashion when confronted with or recalling the original stimulus as well as others that we perceive. (Pruchnic & Lacey 486)

In Sophie’s situation, the examples discussed thus far suggest that the concept or feeling of failure may have become associated (in her memory) with her status as the eldest of three, and she thus may have begun to associate the two concepts with each other to the extent that her behavior is affected both before and after the initial curse. Similarly, Guyll et al. write that in real-world educational contexts, “[i]n order for stereotype threat to occur, a negative stereotype relevant to one’s social group must be activated in the mind of the student” (120). It can thus be argued that Sophie’s experience of being resigned to failure, when interpreted as a fictional translation of stereotype threat, may take the form of a

negative stereotype that is activated through the kinds of affective tags or markers in memory that Pruchnic and Lacey describe in their article.

*Ingary and Reality*

In *Reflections On the Magic of Writing*, Jones addresses the significance of fantasy for helping children to navigate real-world problems they may be experiencing and situations they may have yet to face. She applies this logic to specific examples of problems that may impact children (and that also impact adults):

The fact that it has been put in terms of magic (or impossibility) has distanced the problem (which may actually be one painfully near to most children, like secret fears or racial difference) so that it can be walked around, followed through, and if possible, solved in some way. (Jones 130)

Jones's ideas in this excerpt can be seen in practice in *Howl's Moving Castle*, in which she depicts Sophie's deference to what she believes is her fate as part of the rules of the universe. Often, when the rules of a given fictional universe (or magic system, in fantasy contexts) are established at the beginning of a book, readers are given a sense of what to expect of that universe or the narrator who will guide them through it. In this case, Jones establishes the norms of the world by writing that as the eldest of three, "Everyone knows you are the one who will fail first, and worst, if the three of you set out to seek your fortunes" (5). It is given that Sophie's sisters both "set out to seek [their] fortunes" at the beginning of the book, and it is also given that Sophie (who was born and raised in Ingary) is aware of the presumed rule about the eldest of three in Ingary. Rather than stating that the eldest of three "will fail first" directly, Jones filters this rule through the lens of what "[e]veryone knows"—or rather, what everyone accepts as being true (5). This accepted

truth about the eldest of three is not challenged by Sophie, who seems to have been raised with this idea as part of either a collective memory and/or perpetuated stereotype within the culture of Ingary.

Worth noting is that the Kingdom of Ingary in which Sophie and Howl live is not the only country in this fictional universe, as Jones's other books in the series reveal. It may be telling that Jones establishes this rule of the eldest of three as an expectation in Ingary in particular rather than as a general norm or fact of life. This limiting stereotype may thus be a regional issue, but its significance to Sophie's character arc takes the forefront when it is revealed that she is capable of powerful magic that more experienced witches and wizards cannot easily undo and that she was, to some extent, aware of this potential (as revealed when Sophie reflects on her conversation with Mrs. Pentstemmon, Howl's former teacher) but did not believe that she could succeed at anything beyond her assigned lot in life (working at the hat shop), even if she tried. Jones ultimately shows that Sophie has been capable of wielding great power all along, despite what others had her believe about herself—and throughout the book, Sophie often uses that power to improve the conditions of others (and sometimes herself). As Jones writes in *Reflections*, “A book for children, like the myths and folktales that tend to slide into it, is really a blueprint for dealing with life” (132); Jones thus provides a guide for readers to believe in their own abilities rather than what others will have them believe about themselves through her depictions of Sophie's growth in spite of the limits imposed upon her by internalized preconceptions about a part of her identity. These preconceptions about Sophie as the eldest of three are an example of what Steele refers to as “*identity contingencies*—the things you have to deal with in a situation because you have a given social identity” (3). As a young

woman before the curse is initially cast, Sophie is resigned to the idea that she will fail at her pursuits because of the identity contingency of being the eldest of three and the negative stereotypes and expectations that are associated with that part of her identity.

Over the course of the story, Sophie encounters characters who do not share her limiting view of herself, from Calcifer (who often does as she says, despite his complaints) to the Witch of the Waste (who visits the hat shop to partake of Sophie's magic-imbued hats). The one who mentions her being the eldest of three tends to be Sophie herself, and her doubts about herself are refuted by others by the end of the book. In particular, when Howl reveals the truth behind his actions thus far to Sophie as they are caught in a strong wind, Sophie once again blames herself for the struggles they have had against their enemies up to that point as a result of her being the eldest of three. Howl counters that, on the contrary, Sophie "just never stop[s] to think" and is "too nice" (209). Sophie's change in confidence can also be seen in connection to Vincent J. Fogliati and Kay Bussey's research in their article, "Stereotype Threat Reduces Motivation to Improve: Effects of Stereotype Threat and Feedback on Women's Intentions to Improve Mathematical Ability". Fogliati and Bussey write that "identity-safe environments are particularly important for the motivation of stereotype targets who have received negative feedback in the relevant domain" (320). Away from her initial hat shop home in Market Chipping, Sophie develops confidence under the guise of an elderly woman, accepting truths about herself (such as her magical ability) along the way—with help from those around her who affirm her magic rather than expecting her to fail.

Further, when Sophie first begins living in the moving castle, she makes a deal with Calcifer, who is bound by contract to Howl and wants Sophie to free him from the contract.

In the final chapter, with Sophie's increased confidence in her abilities and high stakes leading up to the contract between Howl and Calcifer being broken, she asks Calcifer if he would die if she breaks the contract, leading to the following conversation:

“It would if anyone else broke it,” Calcifer said hoarsely. “That’s why I asked you to do it. I could tell you could talk life into things. Look what you did for the scarecrow and the skull.”

“Then have another thousand years!” Sophie said, and willed very hard as she said it, in case just talking was not enough. This had been worrying her very much.

(Jones 212)

In this scene, Jones suggests that Calcifer knew of Sophie's potential before she knew it herself. Another important part of this excerpt is Sophie's fear that “just talking was not enough”; at this point, Sophie may not understand exactly how her own magic works, but she is determined to use it (Jones 212), in contrast to her feeling that it “was not proper to have a magic gift because she was the eldest of three” earlier in the book (Jones 122). In an interview that is included at the end of the Kindle version of *Howl's Moving Castle*, Jones confirms that “Calcifer is very fond of Sophie because she released him from his contract with Howl and, in addition, gave him one thousand years of life (as a shooting star he should have died long ago)” (218), attesting to the power of her protagonist's speech magic and strength of will.

### **The Castle and Sophie's Character Arc**

This section will consider Sophie's characterization from the beginning of her character arc to the end, using selected excerpts and dialogues to represent Sophie's shifting mindset in relation to her identity as a young woman turned elder from one moment to the next. In

doing so, this section will highlight the underlying attitudes that influence Sophie's motivations and character growth over the course of the story, which connects to the manners in which she uses magic.

*Sophie, Eldest of Three*

In the first lines of her book, Jones sets the stage for Sophie's character by establishing the rules of the fairytale trope that she will subvert over the course of the story:

In the land of Ingary, where such things as seven-league boots and cloaks of invisibility really exist, it is quite a misfortune to be born the eldest of three. Everyone knows you are the one who will fail first, and worst, if the three of you set out to seek your fortunes. (Jones 5)

The expectation of failure for the eldest of three siblings is one that Sophie has evidently internalized. Sophie resigns herself to working at the family hat shop while her sisters leave home to pursue their goals. Despite Sophie's growing frustration at her work situation, the *eldest of three* trope deters her from attempting to leave the shop; as Jones writes, Sophie "was within an ace of leaving the house and setting out to seek her fortune, until she remembered she was the eldest and there was no point" (20). Jones thus depicts Sophie as limiting herself to the life she already has out of an internalized sense that she is bound to fail if she ventures out into the world as she is. Sophie's continual limiting of herself repeats and is seen in her behavior throughout the book. For instance, when Sophie later realizes and accepts that she is a witch, Jones writes, "It was as if Sophie had always known this. But she had thought it was not proper to have a magic gift because she was the eldest of three" (122). If Sophie had known and acknowledged her magical abilities earlier on, her circumstances may have been different; however, even though she had a feeling that she

might have such abilities, she denied herself the use of them, except perhaps in the instances when she used magic without clearly meaning to do so. In this sense, Sophie's status as the eldest of three limits her uses and perception of her own power; the internalization of the idea that she will fail, no matter what, has a stifling impact on her sense of agency. As Cheryl Geisler writes, central to a "common understanding of rhetorical agency" is "the capacity of the rhetor to act", expanding on the idea that "rhetoric involves action" (12). When Sophie leaves home and later accepts herself as a witch, she exercises rhetorical agency in this sense when she uses language to produce action and cause change willfully, on her own terms.

In Sophie's lower points later in the text, the internalized expectation of failure is revealed when Jones writes, "Sophie was a failure anyway. It came of being the eldest" (184), and again when Howl and Sophie return to the castle for their final confrontation with the main antagonist, as follows: "'I'm the eldest!' Sophie shrieked. 'I'm a failure!'" (209). Sophie again thinks of herself as the eldest of three when Howl's plan to have her visit the King of Ingary seems to have gone wrong. In this scene, Jones writes, "'It comes of being the eldest,' [Sophie] muttered while she was shoving the heavy doors open. 'You just can't win!'" (127). In these moments, Jones depicts the idea of being doomed to failure as one that has lingered in Sophie's mind, an indication of the limiting social norm that Sophie has internalized. These moments thus reflect real-world experiences of stereotype threat in that Sophie does not reach her potential as a witch for much of her life (thereby underperforming) because she believes the narrative that it is "not proper" for someone like her (eldest of three) to be powerful or otherwise successful (122).

### *Underlying Attitudes*

At the start of Jones's book, Sophie is depicted as being left in the "dust of the hat shop" while her sisters go off to learn new trades (8). Sophie seems to develop a nervousness around others after keeping to herself in her work at the hat shop, often by herself, to the point that she struggles on her way to visit her sister during her hometown's May Day festivities before the Witch of the Waste casts the curse on her:

[W]hen she at last put a gray shawl over her gray dress and went out into the street, Sophie did not feel excited. She felt overwhelmed. There were too many people rushing past, laughing and shouting, far too much noise and jostling. Sophie felt as if the past months of sitting and sewing had turned her into an old woman or a semi-invalid. (Jones 12)

Through this excerpt, Jones reveals Sophie's meek state of mind before the Witch of the Waste curses her. At this point, Sophie already perceived herself as being like an old woman, so the physical transformation as a result of the Witch's initial curse did not surprise her because her new form was in line with her self-perception at the time, saying to herself in the mirror, "You look quite healthy. Besides, this is much more like you really are" (Jones 22). Sophie's perception as she looks at her changed self in the mirror reflects what she had been thinking about herself, which is also reflective of the role to which she was resigned by her stepmother as the eldest of the three siblings.

Further, the narration toward the beginning of Jones's book suggests a timidity in Sophie that is revealed to be different from the strong personality she once displayed, which is more apparent once she becomes an old woman. In the following dialogue, Sophie compels Calcifer (who was first introduced to her as a fire demon who wants to be free of



his contract with the wizard Howl) to do as she says, revealing along the way that Sophie's personality was already fierce before she became an old woman:

“Now, Calcifer,” she said, “let's have no more nonsense. Bend down your head.”

“You can't make me!” crackled the fire demon.

“Oh, yes I can!” Sophie crackled back, with the ferocity that had often stopped both her sisters in mid-fight. (Jones 39)

In this excerpt, Jones retroactively depicts Sophie as being ferocious and having influence over her sisters, different from the more timid- and passive-seeming Sophie that readers meet in the early pages of the book. The timid version of Sophie that Jones introduces in the first chapter is the same version of Sophie who meets Howl with fear on May Day. When Howl first approached Sophie, Jones writes, “Sophie shrank into a shop doorway and tried to hide” (13). The contrast between Sophie in the first chapter and Sophie after she is cursed suggests that her strength of will (and her ferocity that is later described and shown in her interactions with others as an old woman) was muted as a result of her resignation to the *eldest of three* trope and a sense of what would be proper for her to do as the eldest.

Sophie seems to find strength (or at least a return of a strength she already possessed) when she is no longer the same person as before, in the literal physical sense. In an early encounter with a dog, Sophie is able to overcome her fears by thinking of herself as an old woman:

As a girl, Sophie was scared of all dogs. Even as an old woman, she was quite alarmed by the two rows of white fangs in the creature's open jaws. But she said to

herself, “The way I am now, it’s scarcely worth worrying about,” and felt in her sewing pocket for her scissors. (Jones 24)

As this excerpt suggests, Sophie’s newfound lack of the fear that “shrank” her on May Day leads her to act more like her true self—and without fear of the failure that she saw as being sure to follow if she left home as her younger self.

### *Identity*

In the beginning, Sophie’s sense of duty can be seen as a limiting factor that causes her to stay where and as she is. In particular, Sophie runs the hat shop without pay under the guise of being an apprentice to her step-mother, Fanny. Regarding Sophie’s work conditions, her sister Martha says that Sophie’s sense of duty is leading her to justify her own exploitation by her step-mother:

“Mother knows you don’t have to be unkind to someone in order to exploit them. She knows how dutiful you are. She knows you have this thing about being a failure because you’re only the eldest. She’s managed you perfectly and got you slaving away for her. I bet she doesn’t pay you.” (Jones 18)

Following this conversation, Sophie asks Fanny about being paid for her work and later realizes that Fanny does not seem to intend to pay her, Sophie says, ““Maybe I *am* being exploited, [...] but someone has to do this or there will be no hats at all to sell”” (Jones 18). Sophie then begins to doubt her own sense of obligation to work on the hats, saying, ““Does it matter if there are no hats to sell?”” (Jones 18). In this moment of doubt and frustration, Sophie thinks of herself again as the eldest of three and decides to stay where she is.

Sophie’s underlying temper and ferocity are revealed more openly when she appears to be an old woman, but Jones reveals that those traits were Sophie’s true nature

from the beginning despite not matching her self-perception. Excerpts like the one above reveal that Sophie did not lack power and strength of will before becoming an old woman; instead, the shift was in her perception of herself and her own ability, and thus in her presentation of herself to the world around her. This shift can be seen in connection to Sophie's physical distance from her original self in that she no longer *appears* to be the version of herself who was resigned to working at the hat shop instead of leaving home, and her encounters along her journey further shift her self-talk and help her to realize her power. Because Sophie's self-perception is closely linked to the limiting narrative about the eldest of three siblings at the start of the book, Sophie limits her own behavior and begins acting more meek, shrinking herself to fit within the constraints of the stereotypes about part of her identity. When she is able to separate her views of herself by seeing herself differently (as an elder), she then sets off on the journey along which her self-perception shifts. Sophie sees herself as different from the version of herself who was, primarily, the eldest of three siblings and then begins seeing herself separately from the stereotype associated with that part of her identity, in a process that leads her to accept another part of her identity: a witch.

The theme of one's sense of identity influencing one's behavior can be considered a major part of Sophie's character arc, especially in terms of Sophie's changing sense of self as she is abruptly transformed into an elderly woman at the start of the book and rapidly adapts to her new role. This adaptation is in part because she believes it fits well with her perception of herself and her identity before the transformation. In particular, the frustration Sophie seems to have with her life leads her to speak to herself as she had to the hats, but in a more negative sense. While the hats may have had imagined future wearers,

those wearers did not match Sophie's perception of herself, as Jones reveals in the following excerpt:

That night, as she sewed, Sophie admitted to herself that her life was rather dull. Instead of talking to the hats, she tried each one on as she finished it and looked in the mirror. This was a mistake. The staid gray dress did not suit Sophie, particularly when her eyes were red-rimmed with sewing, and, since her hair was a reddish straw color, neither did caterpillar green nor pink. The one with mushroom pleats simply made her look dreary. "Like an old maid!" said Sophie. (Jones 11)

In this excerpt, Jones describes Sophie's mistake of looking at herself in her negative emotional state and using her powerful words to compare herself to an old woman, the latter of which Sophie repeats throughout the book. Throughout the beginning of the book, as Sophie casts magic on the hats she sells (without realizing she is doing so), the magical words spoken to those hats becomes true for their future wearers. With that in mind, it is possible that part of the *mistake* Sophie makes here is that she uses her powerful words to say that a hat she is wearing makes her look like an old woman, which she may have manifested in saying so.

Later in the text, Jones reveals that by *speaking* of herself as an old woman, Sophie is thereby continuously casting the transformative magic on herself, even after many futile attempts by those around her to undo the so-called "curse". In doing so, Sophie turns her self-perception into a form of manifestation. Sophie's thoughts about her age render this revelation unsurprising; for instance, Sophie finds herself emboldened as a result of her transformation into an old woman at the start of the book: "It was odd. As a girl, Sophie would have shriveled with embarrassment at the way she was behaving. As an old woman,

she did not mind what she did or said. She found that a great relief” (Jones 45). This newfound confidence thus reveals a possible underlying motivation for Sophie to subconsciously cast the curse on herself through her own speech; in a way, she is removing herself from the confines of the hat shop to which she felt resigned as part of being the eldest of three, justifying her departure from that environment by inventing a new part of her identity. Her sense of connection to her identity as an old woman, despite the cause of this condition being a curse, is also reflected in her interactions with the environment:

The lane became steeper and steeper and she found the stick a great help. It was also something to talk to. Sophie thumped along with a will, chatting to her stick. After all, old people often talk to themselves. (Jones 24)

As this quote suggests, Sophie’s changed sense of identity (from a girl resigned to her fate to an old woman who moves forward despite being cursed) thus changes her behavior toward other people as well as inanimate objects. While she faced strangers with fear during the May Day festivities before being cursed, she approaches others with a sense of indignation and authority when she is an old woman. Despite still being the eldest of three siblings, Sophie no longer feels that there is no point to leaving home. Instead, her changed sense of her own identity through the curse pushes her to leave the hat shop behind and set out on the journey she sees no point in taking before starting to perceive herself differently. This change also marks the start of Sophie’s journey toward reducing the effects of stereotype threat on her uses of magic and self-perception.

### *Strength of Sophie’s Magic*

When Howl sends Sophie to meet his former teacher, Mrs. Pentstemmon, Sophie is still unaware that she is a witch. The conversation that ensues is part of a turning point in the

story, after which Sophie accepts that she has magical abilities. Sophie continuously denies her own potential to herself, even after signs of her influence on the world, like enchanting hats and speaking life into a scarecrow; in doing so, she limits herself by denying that she can be more than she is at the start of the book and as she was born—Sophie Hatter, the eldest of three siblings. The suit that Howl wears on the day of the meeting is one that Sophie had imbued with magic while mending it. Mrs. Pentstemmon points out Howl’s ““charmed suit”” with ““a dazzling attraction charm, directed at ladies—very well done, [...] and barely detectable even to [her] trained eye since it appears to have been darned into the seams—and one which will render him almost irresistible to ladies”” (Jones 119). At first, Sophie does not realize that she is the one who cast the magic on the suit; as Jones writes during Sophie’s conversation with Mrs. Pentstemmon,

[Sophie] had darned the seams without noticing it had anything particular about it.

But Mrs. Pentstemmon was an expert on magic, and Sophie was only an expert on clothes. (Jones 119)

The power of Sophie’s abilities is alluded to several times throughout the book, with other characters assuming that Sophie is aware of her uses of magic. Characters who are aware of others’ magical abilities (or otherwise possess magic themselves) refer to Sophie’s magic several times with that assumption in mind, as early as the start of the book, when the Witch of the Waste visits the hat shop and speaks to Sophie as if Sophie was aware of the enchantments she had put on the hats. Sophie’s internalization of the idea that the eldest of three siblings is not meant to be successful leads to distinctions between how she views herself versus how Jones suggests other characters see her. That internalization can be seen in connection to stereotype threat in that Sophie expects that she will fail because of a part

of her identity that is outside of her control. The significance of Sophie taking control over her life (and, in turn, using magic more deliberately) is then represented by way of the implied power of Sophie's magic by the end of the book. When Sophie gains agency in her uses of magic (in spite of the doubts caused by the stereotype about the eldest of three), she finds herself wielding power that Jones depicts as being particularly powerful.

Further, Sophie's powerful magic reflects the strength in spirit that she exhibits throughout the text. Jones reveals that the magic Sophie casts upon herself is so powerful that Howl's attempts to undo the spell (as well as the attempts of Mrs. Pentstemmon, Howl's former magic teacher) are ineffective. A particular instance that reflects the strength of Sophie's magic in connection to her aforementioned ferocity is when the King's daughter, Princess Valeria, has been threatened by the Witch of the Waste, about which Jones writes:

As Valeria had scrambled over her, Sophie remembered hearing that the Witch had threatened Valeria in some way, and she found herself saying to Valeria, "The Witch shan't hurt you. I won't let her!" The King had not said anything about that. But he had ordered out a royal coach for Sophie. (Jones 133)

In this scene, although Sophie is not specifically tasked with protecting the princess, she takes it upon herself to promise to do so, even without fully knowing the scope of her abilities to actually protect the princess against the magic of the Witch of the Waste.

Near the end of Sophie's character arc, another looming threat prompts Howl and his crew to move the castle, which is bound to several physical locations at once. The castle is moved to the building that previously housed the hat shop—Sophie's former home. When Howl asks Sophie what they should sell in the castle's new storefront, Sophie

decides that they will sell flowers. Rather than giving in to the sense of responsibility she once felt and the implications of her last name (Hatter), the decision to remake the shop into something new of her own choosing reflects how Sophie's attitude has changed over the course of her character arc (see San Juan García). The freedom she gains as the story progresses both emboldens and empowers her over time. At a point in the story when Sophie is able to more genuinely be herself (even without physically looking like herself), Sophie makes decisions about her future and remakes her former home into a place that suits her interests better than the shop she tended to, in part, out of a sense of duty. At this point in the story, Sophie's increased sense of empowerment to express her own wants is shown; she is evidently removed from the version of herself who was resigned to working at the hat shop as she seemed to wither away (and without being paid by her stepmother). Despite the location of the shop being the same, Sophie has spent a decent amount of time away from this environment, in which the negative stereotypes about the eldest of three were first instilled in her mind, and has been surrounded by people who recognize her magical potential and assume that she is also aware that she is a witch. While she still refers to herself as being an old woman and has still internalized negative ideas about herself as the eldest of three, she has started on the path to changing her self-talk and reducing the effects of stereotype threat on her performance of magic and presentation of herself.

### **Applications of Speech Act Theory**

Now that contextual factors and major themes from Jones's book have been established, this thesis will next discuss how concepts from speech act theory can be applied as a way of interpreting these ideas from the text. This section will first discuss major terms related to speech act theory and then complicate those terms in the context of Sophie's magic in



*Howl's Moving Castle*. Then, additional terms will be used to interpret the importance of intentionality as a complicating factor when discussing Sophie's speech magic, with specific consideration of Austin's, Searle's, and Hu and Chen's work on speech act theory.

#### *Illocutionary Acts and Perlocutionary Effects*

Searle discusses how illocutionary speech acts are speaker-oriented, with "the speaker intend[ing] to produce a certain effect by means of getting the hearer to recognize his intention to produce that effect" (261); in other words, the speaker's intent when uttering an illocutionary speech act is meant to be recognized and have the effect of the words spoken. Similarly, Horner notes that "[s]peech-act theory recognizes that meaning in spoken discourse depends upon the interaction between the speaker and the hearer within a given context" (10). For Sophie, the hearer is not always another person; rather, she performs speech acts in the company of inanimate objects (thereby animating them, in several cases). With Sophie's ability to animate previously inanimate objects (or to "talk life into things" [Jones 212]), the concept of being heard becomes complicated because the objects that are receptive of or otherwise affected by her magic can be considered her listeners when she engages in the speech acts that impact them. To engage with this distinction further, it can be useful to establish the connections between illocutionary acts and perlocutionary effects. A perlocutionary act is identified based on how the listener is to be affected; as Mikhail Kissine describes, perlocutionary speech acts pertain to *outcomes* of speech (also referred to as perlocutionary effects) and "should thus be understood as causal relations between two events, the cause being the production of an utterance by the speaker" (1191). Kissine defines perlocutionary acts as being "the only acts that the speaker performs by means of her utterance" (1193). Similarly, in the context of *Howl's Moving*

*Castle*, because Sophie's magic is cast through speech, the perlocutionary (listener-oriented) effects are thus tied to those instances of speech. Through her speech magic, Sophie produces effects on her listeners that can thus be considered perlocutionary effects.

### *The Question of Intentionality*

At the start of Jones's book, Sophie speaks to the hats she works on at her family's hat shop. While doing so, she unintentionally imbues them with magic that dictates to each hat "what the body under it ought to be like" (10). Sophie later discovers that the fates of the people who purchased the enchanted hats correlated with what she had said while trimming the hats, as with her stepmother Fanny's "cream silk hat trimmed with roses", to which Sophie had said: "'You are going to have to marry money'"; when Sophie and Fanny are reunited, "it was quite clear from the look of her that Fanny had" (Jones 192).

Considering that illocutionary acts depend on speaker intentionality, Sophie's early acts of casting magic on the hats could be considered speech acts, depending on whether they can be considered intentional or not. If Sophie had intended to charm the hats, these acts would be classifiable as perlocutionary acts because of the actual effect produced. However, because Sophie's seemingly did not intend to charm the hats, such instances of magic through speech can be said to be neither illocutionary nor perlocutionary. Even so, for the sake of Sophie's character arc, the realization that she is capable of magic—although it is revealed to be unsurprising to her—is a turning point after which her influences on her environment become more intentional. Although her enchantments of the hats were possibly not done with intentions of having consequences, the revelation that Sophie had suspected she was capable of using magic complicates the question of

intentionality. Whether she intended to produce the change or not, her speech magic effected positive changes for the future owners of those hats.

This section thus poses the question of intentionality. As in real-world contexts, speaker intentions can be difficult to discern. If the effect produced differs from the speaker's intentions, the designations of their speech as being *illocutionary speech acts* becomes complicated. Before Sophie realizes that her influences through speech are magical in nature, it is difficult for readers to recognize whether she spoke to the hats out of feelings of boredom or loneliness in the hat shop, a sense that she *could* influence their fates, or a good-naturedness (loosely defined). For the purposes of this thesis, the question of how intentionality impacts classification of speech acts will remain for those instances of speech that cannot be easily categorized. Because speech act theory relies on particular categories (which vary based on whose framework is applied), some of Sophie's uses of magic cannot easily be categorized according to existing frameworks of speech act theory. This, in turn, can be seen as reflecting an oversight in existing speech act theory frameworks when it comes to complex factors, such as stereotype threat and self-doubt, that can impact intentionality and self-perception of one's ability to produce change when performing speech acts.

In the context of Jones's book, the intentionality behind Sophie's uses of magic is difficult to determine because of Sophie's denial of her own potential as a witch. In particular, while Sophie has not accepted a view of herself as a magic user at the start of the book, Jones does not present her as intentionally using magic. Although Sophie may have a sense that her words have weight, the intentionality behind her magic usage is not clearly established until after Sophie accepts herself as a witch and gains agency in the

process, which empowers her to willfully impact others through her speech magic by the end of the book, such as by controlling the walking stick and granting Calcifer ““another thousand years”” of life (Jones 212). While classifications of different kinds of speech acts can still be useful for understanding connections their impacts, intentionality remains an important part of how those speech acts are often categorized. As such, the moments in which Sophie’s magic usage can be more clearly and accurately linked to her intentions to produce change will be further studied as speech acts for the remainder of this thesis.

### *Sincerity and Intentionality*

In the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Mitchell Green highlights components of illocutionary force from Austin’s prior work on speech act theory, several of which can be applied to interpret Sophie’s powerful speech. The seven components outlined are “[i]llocutionary point”, “[d]egree of strength of the illocutionary point”, “[m]ode of achievement”, “[c]ontent conditions”, “[p]reparatory conditions”, “[s]incerity conditions”, and “[d]egree of strength of the sincerity conditions”; of these components, the two that will be discussed in this thesis in relation to Sophie’s magic are “[m]ode of achievement” and “[s]incerity conditions” (Green). In particular, Sophie’s magic is cast through speech and sometimes requires additional spoken clarifications to make it work as she intends. An example of this is during the conflict at the end of the book, when she tells her cane to attack her enemy “but don’t hurt anyone else” (Jones 211). This form that her magic takes is “the special way [...] in which the illocutionary point of a speech act must be achieved”, or the “*Mode of achievement*” (Green).

Among the five distinct groups of speech acts established in John Searle’s *Mind, Language, and Society*, the two that apply most directly to Sophie’s abilities and character

arc are *assertives* and *directives*. Assertives include acts such as “statements, descriptions, classifications, and explanations” (Searle 148), and Searle describes “an assertive speech act” as one with “word-to-world direction of fit” in which “the sincerity condition [...] is always belief” (148). In Jones’s book, this type of speech act can be seen when Sophie declares that she is an old woman, thereby committing herself to being one; as Searle writes, “Every assertive is an expression of a belief” (148). Thus, Sophie’s uses of magic on herself can often be classified as assertives because they tend to take the form of statements about who or how she believes herself to be. In contrast, when she casts magic on others, her speech acts often take the form of directives, or “an expression of a desire that the hearer should do the directed act” through “orders, commands, and requests”, among other possibilities (Searle 149). By the end of Sophie’s character arc, she directly issues commands with awareness that she can use magic, as in the aforementioned example of her ordering her walking stick to attack only one person, even without her holding it:

Sophie had to let go of her stick and dive to rescue Calcifer. Her stick, to her surprise, hit Miss Angorian again on its own, and again, and again. But of course it would! Sophie thought. She had talked life into that stick. Mrs. Pentstemmon had told her so. (Jones 211)

When her enemy tries to hide behind someone while she is being repeatedly attacked by the stick (even after it catches fire), the walking stick acts as Sophie ordered it to:

Luckily, Miss Angorian hated it so much that she seized hold of Michael and dragged him in its way. The stick had been told not to hurt Michael. It hovered, flaming. Martha dashed up and tried to pull Michael away. The stick had to avoid her too. (Jones 212)

Without need for repeated interventions by Sophie, the stick that she brought to life hovers in the air and does as she commands even as it is on fire. In this context, Sophie's magic takes the form of a directive (using Searle's definition of the term), turning her will into action in the form of a magical command. The conversation with Mrs. Pentstemmon (in which Sophie being a witch is assumed) and the encouragement from Sophie's new friends at Howl's castle enhance Sophie's awareness of her own potential to the extent that she is able to issue magical directives that directly impact her surroundings in ways that are sometimes immediately apparent to herself and others.

Further, Sophie's use of magic to create a powerful weed-killer (as a way of expressing her anger), can be interpreted as an example of another listed component from Austin's framework, "*Sincerity conditions*", which are met as follows: "A speech act is sincere only if the speaker is in the psychological state that her speech act expresses" (Green). Sincerity can further complicate the question of intentionality; perhaps Sophie is sincere in her well-wishes to the hats as she imbues them with her magic and sends them on their way to their future owners. However, the question of intentionality then becomes: Does an instance of speech that is uttered with sincerity and evidently affects others become a speech act if the speaker was not aware of their own intentions or potential to produce those effects at the time of speaking?

A possible answer to this question can be found in Hu and Chen's interpretation of Searle's definition of indirect speech acts. Hu and Chen conclude that "irony is a special kind of indirect speech act" based on Searle's definition of such an indirect speech act as one in which "the implementation of an illocutionary force is realized indirectly through

the implementation of another indirect speech act” (672). As Searle writes in *Expression and Meaning*,

The problem posed by indirect speech acts is the problem of how it is possible for the speaker to say one thing and mean that but also to mean something else. And since meaning consists in part in the intention to produce understanding in the hearer, a large part of that problem is that of how it is possible for the hearer to understand the indirect speech act when the sentence he hears and understands means something else. (Searle 31)

Searle further complicates this idea by writing that “the speaker communicates to the hearer more than he actually says” when performing indirect speech acts, in part through “the general powers of rationality and inference on the part of the hearer” (31–32). In the context of *Howl’s Moving Castle*, the ones who function as the hearers when Sophie casts magic through speech are often inanimate objects (and more often objects that arguably cannot *hear* her in the usual sense). With the effect of Sophie’s speaking magic being, in part, that magic is being cast, it can be argued that the rules of magic in the universe in which she speaks make it so that her hearers (objects or otherwise) are aware of the possibility of magic at any turn.

Returning to the question of intentionality and the discussion of ironic speech acts in Hu and Chen’s text, the effect that is produced by Sophie’s spoken magic can thus be considered ironic; by declaring to the hats what they (or their future owners) should do or be, Sophie is producing another effect (the casting of her magic that has lasting impacts on others) indirectly at the same time. Whether these instances can be considered speech acts, indirect or otherwise, may thus depend on how hearers are defined and whether inanimate

objects (as in the context of Jones's book) can be considered to be hearing and engaging with speech. In *Howl's Moving Castle*, Sophie is depicted as treating the hats as though she is speaking directly to their future owners, as follows:

Sophie got into the habit of putting each hat on its stand as she finished it, where it sat looking almost like a head without a body, and pausing while she told the hat what the body under it ought to be like. She flattered the hats a bit, because you should flatter customers. (Jones 10)

With this treatment of the hats as representative of their future owners as an example, for the remainder of this thesis, the specific speech acts that will be discussed will be those that are more clearly intentional on Sophie's part, with those objects that are affected by Sophie's magic being considered her hearers. In the aforementioned example of Sophie ordering her walking stick to attack her enemy and no one else, Sophie lets go of the walking stick and finds that it stays in the air without her having to hold it. Although it starts as an ordinary stick, the power in her speech transforms it such that it is able to levitate, distinguish between her friends and her foe, and continue following her order despite being on fire. At this point in this book, the magic Sophie imbues in the walking stick through her directive demonstrates the strength and stability of her magic and reflects a shift in her willingness to use her magic, which can be seen as a parallel to the shift in her confidence and sense of self—in particular, her ownership over her identity as a witch beyond viewing herself as the eldest of three.

Considering Sophie's uses of magic in the examples highlighted in this section, Sophie's magical speech can repeatedly be seen as meeting sincerity conditions, and the perlocutionary effects of her speech can be seen in Jones's references to the fates of the



future owners of the hats Sophie enchants at the start of the book. The hats are enchanted before Sophie acknowledges that she is a witch and begins using magic more intentionally, yet they still produce material effects. Given that Jones presents Sophie as “talk[ing] life into things” (212) to the extent of giving an object the ability to act “on its own” (211), the objects that become animated can thus be seen as *hearers* in the sense that they can respond to Sophie’s speech. With these factors considered, this thesis tentatively reaches a *yes* in response to the question of intentionality posed in this section, arguing that an utterance that is sincere and produces material effects (even if the speaker is unaware that those effects can be produced at the time of speaking) can be seen as a speech act. This conclusion and the classification of Sophie’s uses of magic as speech acts thus attest to Sophie’s capacity to use speech to produce action, even without being aware that she is a witch at the start of the book. Sophie’s realization of her power and eventual deliberate uses of that power through speech reflect the power of words (through both mentorship and self-talk) to reduce the effects of stereotype threat.

### **Conclusion**

Throughout this thesis, Jones’s depictions of Sophie’s magic and empowerment have been interpreted as a strong potential metaphor for the real-world issue of stereotype threat. In particular, this thesis argued that Sophie’s uses of magic through speech represent the significance of speech as a way to gain agency (as in rhetorical agency) and overcome the limits imposed by others by speaking one’s truth and producing change in one’s surroundings. In the context of stereotype threat, Jones’s representation of Sophie as overcoming a limiting narrative about one part of her identity suggests to readers that they can accomplish more than what others might have them believe about themselves. This

takeaway connects to real-world experiences of limiting self-perceptions. For instance, while teaching a first-year writing course this semester, I read my students' self-reflections on their experiences with writing, and several of them noted that they avoided or disliked writing because they had been told by their English teachers that they were bad (or otherwise not good) writers when they were younger. Throughout the class, I have made efforts to emphasize the positive parts of their writing and to reassure them. The students in my class who wrote at the start of the semester that they thought of themselves as bad writers (because they had been told that they were by someone with authority) were fully capable of producing creative and effective writing, despite their internalizations of the idea that they are inherently bad writers. Similarly, in Jones's book, Sophie is fully capable of casting powerful magic, but she does not feel empowered to do so at the start, when she is limited by social norms that negatively impact her self-perceptions. Her limiting self-talk is fueled by preconceptions about the eldest of three, which she takes to heart. When she is surrounded by characters who recognize and encourage her power, she is able to move past prior ideas about herself. In the end, Sophie is the one who breaks Calcifer's curse and saves both him and Howl by wielding her power.

Given that Sophie's magic is cast through speech both before and after she acknowledges that she is a witch, this thesis interpreted specific instances of Sophie's magic usage through the framework of speech act theory. In the process, this thesis posed questions of intentionality in relation to speech acts, adding to recent conversations about irony and indirectness in speech act theory and aiming to contribute to existing approaches to analyzing fictional works through the application of Austin's and Searle's frameworks (among others) of speech act theory. Further research on these topics can consider other

scenarios in which speech acts are performed in fictional contexts with additional complications, which can lead to further discussions of the possible applications of speech act theory and opportunities for applying speech act theory to fictional texts, as in Hu and Chen's and Khazai et al.'s texts.

In addition to exploring questions about intentionality in relation to speech act theory, this thesis also discussed the idea of objects as hearers, which would be an opportunity for further exploration, especially considering the potential for further complications in other fictional contexts. Additional research could consider these ideas in connection to existing research on object-oriented ontology, or the idea of objects as independent from humans. Further research can also compare depictions of Sophie's character growth, uses of magic, and empowerment in *Howl's Moving Castle* to Jones's depictions of Sophie's character in her other books, as well as connections to real-world experiences of aging and identity in connection to Sophie's changing perception as she becomes an old woman (see San Juan García).

Overall, this thesis aimed to contribute to discussions of stereotype threat and speech act theory by discussing the potential for fiction to effectively relate to reality through translation of real-world experiences and issues, as well as the significance of doing so for the benefits of readers. Jones's book reflects the limits that stereotypes about one's identity can impose and the idea that limiting self-perception caused by the internalization of stereotypes does not necessarily reflect one's true potential. Perhaps most importantly, Jones's writing suggests that these limits can be overcome. Jones's *Howl's Moving Castle* thus highlights the powerful metaphorical potential of magic, leaving readers enchanted and inspired in the process.

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