Sociolinguistic Exploration of Language and Society in *'The Bluest Eye'*

Anjum Chaudhary

Assistant Professor, English Language Institute, Umm Al-Qura University, Makkah, Saudi Arabia
amchaudhary@uqu.edu.sa

Sahar AlZahrani

Associate Professor, English Language Institute, Umm Al-Qura University, Makkah, Saudi Arabia
smzahrani@uqu.edu.sa

Abstract

The present study aims to investigate the sociolinguistic features surrounding "The Bluest Eyes", a novel by Toni Morrison. In general, "The Bluest Eye" explores how cultural variables, particularly those about race, physical beauty, and identity, can affect the way people see themselves and the world. It is a compelling examination of the terrible and deeply personal effects that systematic racism and cultural beauty standards may have on individuals within a community. In an attempt to examine how societal dynamics are presented within a single-speech community, sociolinguistic literature has been reviewed. A thorough discourse analysis of the selected conversations of the fictional narrative is done using Hymes' S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G model. The samples are taken from the primary text – 'The Bluest Eyes' as the major corpus. The findings indicate that social variables like cultural norms, age, gender, race, class, etc. are very much prevalent in the language of the characters and influence the communication competence of the characters in the social milieu presented by Toni Morrison. To prove the viability of Hymes' proposition of the S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G model, the study may help teachers as well as learners to gain a better perception and understanding of any literary text. Moreover, it would be a useful guide to the analysis of the dimensions of communication.

1. INTRODUCTION

Language is an essential component of the social structure that man has sought to exploit its flexibility and dynamism since the dawn of civilization. Language is not static, and it changes over time. These changes can be observed in phonology, phonetics, syntax, semantics, and morphology. Therefore, languages must be relearned from one generation to another. Language is a binding force of society that helps to regulate social behaviors. Language varies according to age, gender, occupation, etc. The answers to the above changes are provided by linguistics. Linguistics can be defined as "the systematic study of language" (Aitchison, 2008, p.1) and it covers a wide range of topics, one of which is sociolinguistics. Sociolinguistics is one of the areas of linguistics that deals with the study of language to various social factors. Gumperz (1971, p. 223) defines sociolinguistics as an endeavor to establish relationships between "social and linguistic structures" and to track developments. Likewise, Holmes (1992, p.1) defines

sociolinguistics as the study of "the relationship between language and society". The idea that language cannot be examined in isolation but must be studied in the context of its users and various social dynamics, arose with the rise of sociolinguistics.

Sociolinguistics, dating back to the early 20th century, examines the link between language and society. Pioneers like Sapir and Whorf explored cultural influences on language. Labov's 1960s studies marked a turning point, emphasizing social factors in language variation. In the 1970s-80s, sociolinguistics gained recognition, evolving into variationist sociolinguistics with scholars like Milroy and Cheshire. The 1980s-90s introduced critical sociolinguistics, examining language's role in reinforcing societal power dynamics. Late 20th-century focus on globalization explored language contact and multilingualism. In the 21st century, digital sociolinguistics emerged, examining technology's impact on language. The increasing ubiquity of smartphones and the internet has led sociolinguists to employ methods such as smartphone or tablet recording and video conferencing for remote data gathering, as highlighted by several studies (Hall-Lew et al., 2022; Kelly & Diskin-Holdaway, 2022; Lemann et al., 2020; Sneller et al., 2022; Hochgesang, 2021; Nesbitt & Watts, 2022).

The current trends include intersectionality and applied sociolinguistics, addressing practical language issues in education and society. Sociolinguistics continues to evolve, with researchers exploring innovative methodologies and applying sociolinguistic insights to address contemporary linguistic challenges. The field remains dynamic, reflecting the ongoing interplay between language and society.

Similarly, the language used by the characters in the social settings of fiction cannot be studied in isolation, but it must be perceived in its social context. In the same vein, Bach and Harnish (1979) argued that social discourse in literary texts is constructed on linguistic and communicative assumptions in its social context. The present study aims to examine the conversations of the characters in *'The Bluest Eyes'* from the perspective of Hymes' SPEAKING model.

1.1. Research Objectives

The study aims to critically examine the sociolinguistic features in the conversational interactions of *'The Bluest Eyes'* using Hymes' S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G model. The study focuses on the sociolinguistic aspects of the selected interactions.

1.2. Research Questions

Q1- To what extent is Hymes' SPEAKING model viable in understanding the interactions of fictive characters in *'The Bluest Eyes'*?

Q2- To what extent does Hymes' SPEAKING model lead to a deeper understanding of the social-cultural context of the conversations in *'The Bluest Eyes'*?

1.3. Significance Of the Study

Defining the limits of the language in literature is an enormous task. Indeed, literature surpasses the constraints of the English language, but it does not resist them. Writers are free to rise above language and take from language whatever they need for their particular literary effect. Hence, there are practically no limits to the language of literature- all words, phrases, sequences of words, idioms, styles, and varieties are available as rich resources. Just as there

are no limits to the subject matter of literature, so there are no limits to the types and styles of language that literary writers use. Such an understanding of 'literary English' leads to a problematic implication - that there is no such thing as a literary style. As a result, there are several controversies surrounding the language and style of literary works. However, if we look at the features that appear with some frequency, we can move on to the analysis of literary style. Indeed, works in 'stylistics' - a field specifically devoted to the study of literary style - are rich with examples of particular ways in which language is used in literature. Furthermore, Literature is a form of social conversation in which the author works with the linguistic and communicative assumptions in the social context. The present study uses a sociolinguistic approach and intends to examine the viability of Hymes' SPEAKING model in acquiring a better understanding of the socio-cultural context of the interactions happening among fictional characters. Undoubtedly, the study may help the teachers as well as the students to use Hymes' model as an effective tool to analyze any literary text.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Language use in society affects all groups – young and old, male and female, rural and urban. Sociolinguistics aims to show how our use of language is influenced by variables such as class, gender, race, etc. By examining the interactions of fictitious characters in the novel, this article attempts to find sociolinguistic traits within a single speech community. To this end, we are reviewing the conceptual literature on the concepts and theories, and the empirical literature consisting of earlier studies similar to the current study. The literature of prominent sociolinguists has been reviewed such as William Labov, Peter Trudgill, Noam Chomsky, Dell Hymes, … etc.

William Labov (1966) in his landmark study -The Social Stratification of English in New York City, points out that language varies with social class and formality. His phenomenal work paved the way for quantitative research in the field. Furthermore, Sociolinguistics often implies a new interdisciplinary domain, exploring the intricate connections between language and society. However, the author may see this as a problematic idea, foreseeing a series of descriptive studies unrelated to fundamental linguistic and sociological issues. The author's goal should be to address linguistic problems while recognizing their inherent connection to the analysis of social behavior. (Labov, 1966)

Chomsky (1965) postulated the theory of 'linguistic competence', which says that it is necessary to do more than just linguistic analysis to understand a statement. Understanding the reference and meaning connected to the morphemes or words that make up the phrase is necessary for thorough comprehension. In this situation, grammar might not be very helpful.

By investigating language in its social context, sociolinguistic research, according to Peter Trudgill (2000), leads to a deeper understanding of the nature of human language. It also aids in a better understanding of the nature of language-society interaction. Peter Trudgill (2000) defines this branch of linguistics as "that part of linguistics which is concerned with language as a social and cultural phenomenon. It investigates the field of language and society and has close connections with the social sciences, especially social psychology, anthropology, human geography, and sociology." (p.21)

The definitions of Sociolinguistics given above reflect the fact that language needs to be studied in its social and cultural context. A sociolinguistic exploration of language and society in 'The Bluest Eye' can deepen understanding of the novel's cultural context, shedding light on how language reflects and shapes social dynamics. This research can contribute valuable insights to existing studies on intersectionality, racial identity, and socio-cultural influences in literature and linguistics.

2.1. Dell Hathway Hymes

Hymes - a linguist, sociolinguist, anthropologist, and folklorist - laid the disciplinary foundations for the comparative, ethnographic study of language use. His four parameters for communicative competence - possibility, feasibility, appropriateness, and confirmability - prove to be a refutation of Chomsky's linguistic competence, as Hymes states that linguistic competence alone is not capable of producing effective communication, but that a social context is required. Hymes' theory of the "ethnography of speaking" was transformed into the "ethnography of communication" in 1972 and it states that "the starting point is the ethnographic analysis of the communicative behavior of a community".(Hymes, 1962, p.9) He proposed six basic units - speech community, speech situation, speed event, speech act, speech style, and speech modes - to study the communication of a particular culture.

Hymes' S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G model helps us figure out how we communicate with people because the way we communicate is based on several components. These components help us figure out how to talk to other people. This framework shows that language and culture are interconnected and cannot be separated. Hymes (1974, p.4) asserts "…it is not linguistics, but ethnography, not language, but communication, which must provide the frame of reference within which the place of language in culture and society is to be assessed…". This model is part of the ethnography of communication. The acronym SPEAKING has the following meaning:

S- stands for scene and setting, i.e., the actual physical place where the conversation takes place.

P- means the participants or interlocutors in the conversation. It includes interlocutors, the demographics of the audience, and their interests.

E- stands for 'ends', which means the purpose or goals of communication. It provides the purpose for the message, which is critical to comprehend since it clarifies and strengthens the rationale. What message is the speaker attempting to convey? Is he attempting to persuade, inform, or apologize to someone?

A- is for 'Act Sequence'. This refers to the speech acts and the order in which they are presented to the speaker. Different speech acts include an apology, invitation, greeting, etc.

K- stands for 'key'. This refers to the manner of speaking, the tone of voice used, inflection patterns, prosody, and the way the message is conveyed.

I- stands for 'Instruments/ Instrumentalities'. This refers to the type of communication used in the conversation. It can be a telephone conversation, a text message, a broadcast message in an office, … etc.

N- stands for norms. Since language and culture are intertwined and cannot be separated, it is important to understand the culture in which the communication takes place. Some social rules govern communication, and following these norms is essential to communicate effectively with people in that group, language community, country, culture, etc.

G- stands for 'genre'. This refers to the different types of communication, e.g., telling a joke, telling a story, telling an anecdote, etc.

2.2. Toni Morrison and '*The Bluest Eye'*

Black women novelists have studied the relationship between class, race, and gender in the contemporary era. One of the best-known Afro-American writers, Toni Morrison asserts the aim of her writings, as she declares that she aspires for her creations to mirror the expansive creativity within the black community, blending the practical realities of daily life with a profound supernatural essence. For her black individuals seamlessly navigate the pragmatic and visionary aspects of existence. (McKay, 1983)

Toni Morrison examines the idea of a woman about racial and class prejudices in her work '*The Bluest Eyes'* (1970). The tragic narrative of Pecola, an eleven-year-old black girl, and her longing for the bluest eyes is told in *'The Bluest Eyes'* (1970). The bluest eyes are a symbol of beauty for her, and so she may be considered deserving in American society. It poignantly depicts the socio-economic environment of blacks entangled in the racist American society's middle-class values and aspirations. Pecola embodies victimhood in a dehumanizing world, where people are objectified and made to feel inferior. Hierarchies persist based on skin color, marital status, and more. (David,1982)

'The Bluest Eyes' (1970) is the story of a young black girl who comes from a poor family that is virtually cut off from the normal life of the black community. Pecola's mother, Pauline, who works as a domestic servant in a beautiful house, hates the ugliness of her house, her daughter, her family, and herself. Her father- Cholly Breedlove, a strong young man despite the trauma of his childhood and youth, brought his young wife North to better their lives. Even in Ohio, he finds himself frustrated and embittered by the demands of family and the social conditions facing black men. He causes his family to be placed "outdoor", as he tries to burn down their house. He can't be the romantic hero Pauline desires, nor can he be the full-time financial provider his family needs. Pecola goes to Lorain's "Spiritual and Psychic Reader," Soaphead Church, after the abuse and the resultant pregnancy and suspension from school, to ask him to give her blue eyes. Soaphead employs Pecola to get rid of a mangy old dog that spends his days on his doorstep before she leaves the house. He gives Pecola poisoned meat to feed the dog, telling her that the dog's response will be a sign for her whether she will get her 'wish'. Pecola is rejected by her family and community and American society drives Pecola into insanity. In her hallucination, Pecola does have blue eyes and an imagined friend who continuously assures her that her eyes are the bluest in the world.

2.3. Studies On the Hymes' Speaking Model

In this section, a list of the previous studies that are relevant and can assist in defining the related research field and staying on track is provided below. However, these studies belong to different genres of art.

Ray and Biswas (2011) observed a discourse among a homogeneous group of fifteen teaching and non-teaching personnel at a department meeting in a university college in 2011. The data was evaluated using Hymes' model and demonstrated that social and cultural factors influence communication variability and perceptibility. Furthermore, the social and occupational status of speakers in a given social situation influences the language they use.

Vakili et al. (2012) examine the prevalence of speech events in episode 1 (season 1) of the "Friends" comedy series. They discovered that confiding one's secrets, personal concerns, and issues with one's friends–as well as requesting support and sympathy–were the most common events in a friendly connection.

Wulandari et al. (2013) discover in their study "Ethnography of Communication of Matt in the Movie "The Descendants." the components of the Hymes' model in the dialogues of the character Matt King.

Mahdi (2014) in his study aims to discern how language usage reflects the characters' societal background and authors' writing techniques. The study seeks to identify intra-community linguistic variations through insights from eminent sociolinguists such as William Labov, Noam Chomsky, and John Gumberz, and meticulous discourse analysis of selected texts from the novels.

Umezinwa (2017) uses Hymes' SPEAKING grid to investigate a negotiating dialogue in a real-life context. A casual conversation between a housewife and a tomato vendor was taped and analyzed. The findings show how Hymes' theories can be used in discourse analysis.

In his article, Olaniyan (2017) explores the role of socio-contextual factors in the language employed by characters in Chinua Achebe's work – A Man of the People. He concludes that such an analysis aids the reader in comprehending the context of the language utilized.

Farrokh (2019) aims to examine how a discoursal approach impacts the reading comprehension of Iranian intermediate EFL learners. Pre and post-tests revealed that the Hymes' model improved comprehension, unlike the traditional approach.

Al-Khattabee and Ibrahim (2020) investigate a short story, analyzing discourse, character interactions, relationships, and event sequencing. Using Hymes's and Sacks's models, it highlights linguistic analysis's benefits in literature for language teaching.

El-Zaghal (2021) in this specific study analyzes a political speech delivered by US Vice President Joe Biden in 2021 concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It employs Dell Hymes' speaking model and the Ethnography of Communication theory to showcase the practical application of these frameworks in dissecting communication dimensions.

3. METHODOLOGY

This section elaborates on the research methods that were used in this study. The current study adopts a qualitative approach to investigation. This is a corpus-based study in which Toni Morrison's novel '*The Bluest Eyes*' (1970) is used to select conversational interactions. The primary corpus for this study will be excerpts from the novel. Specific conversations and

dialogues are carefully selected to capture a representative sample reflecting the cultural and social variables under investigation. Discourse analysis of the conversations of the novel's fictive characters is analyzed using Hymes' SPEAKING model. Each element of the model (Setting, Participants, Ends, Act sequence, Key, Instrumentalities, Norms, and Genres) is applied to selected conversations in the novel to uncover patterns of language use and communication competence.

The study aims to determine whether analyzing the interactions using the theory enables us to gain a better understanding of the text. This study is a modified conceptual replication of Olaniyan's (2017) study on Chinua Achebe's A Man of the People.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

The objective of this section is to conduct a comprehensive sociolinguistic exploration of language use and its implications on society within the context of Toni Morrison's novel, 'The Bluest Eye.' The analysis aims to uncover patterns, nuances, and socio-cultural implications of language within the narrative, contributing to a deeper understanding of the characters, their interactions, and the broader social dynamics depicted in the novel. A qualitative analysis is employed to interpret the findings. Patterns related to cultural variables, communication competence, and sociolinguistic features are identified and discussed concerning the research objectives. Hymes' S-P-E-A-K-I-N-G model is used to examine the dialogues of the characters from a selection of conversations. The analysis below explores how language contributes to the construction and negotiation of racial and cultural identities within the narrative.

Conversation 1

Background. It's an informal conversation among members of the Breedlove family who live in a small shack on the outskirts of a black neighborhood. The family in the novel is contrary to what its name suggests. Their battered lives are nourished and nurtured by the depravity, fear, hate, and oppression that each member lays upon the other. Overall, they breed destruction and love has little or no place in their lives. The conviction of their insufficiency learned through exposure to dominant prejudice forces the couple apart. The Breedloves are split by the cultural standards that measure Cholly's manhood in terms of his ability to sustain and protect a woman and Pauline's femininity in terms of her physical features. Consequently, Pauline's wrath is directed against Cholly. Moreover, the argument shows the economic and social realities of American society.

Pauline Breedlove: I need some coal in this house. Hear me?

Cholly: Awwwwww, woman!

Pauline Breedlove: I said I need some coal. It's as cold as a witch's tit in this house. Your whiskey ass wouldn't feel hellfire, but I'm cold. I got to do a lot of things, but I ain't got to freeze.

Cholly: Leave me 'lone.

Pauline Breedlove: Not until you get me some coal. If working like a mule <u>don't</u> give me the right to be warm, what am I doing it for? You sure ain't bringing in nothing. If it was left up to you, we'd all be dead…If you think I'm going to wade out in the cold and get it myself, you'd better think again.

Cholly: I don't give a shit how you get it.

Pauline Breedlove: <u>You going</u> to get your drunk self out of that bed and get me some coal or not? Cholly! Don't try me this morning, man. You say one more word, and I'll split you open!

Cholly: All right. All right. But if I sneeze once, just once, God help your butt!

Pecola: Don't, Mrs. Breedlove. Don't.

Sammy: Kill him! Kill him!

Pauline Breedlove: Cut out that noise, boy. Get up from there anyhow, I need some coal.

Pecola: (whispers) Please, God. Please make me disappear. (Morrison,1970, pp.40-45)

Speech Event. An argument.

Setting and Scene. The setting of the speech event is a small house by the roadside of a black neighborhood of Lorain, Ohio in the winters of the 1940s. The scene is an argument between a wife and a husband.

Participants. Pauline Breedlove (the wife), Cholly Breedlove (the husband), Sammy (the son), and Pecola (the daughter). All are members of the Breedlove family.

Ends. The Breedlove's home is a veritable battleground in which they nurture daily hate for one another while physically and mentally abusing one another. Thus, the sample register exemplifies distorted social relationships complimenting the kind of language used.

Act Sequence. The wife wants her husband to bring coal for the stove, but the husband doesn't respond to her demand. She tries to hit him with a pan. The daughter wants her mother to stop the fight, whereas the son wants her to hit the father hard. Pecola- the daughter tries to make herself disappear by covering herself with a quilt while listening to her parents' fight. The husband's reluctant response instigates a verbal spat between them. It further leads to domestic violence. It is a typical lower-class discourse that ends in a physical assault.

Key. As it is a written discourse, it is evident from the kind of words used in the dialogues that the tone must be serious and rude.

Instruments. The instrument of communication is written and verbal and the register is informal.

Norms. The interlocutors are using Afro-American vernacular English "an important linguistic characteristic of AAVE is the absence of the copula- the verb 'to be' in the present tense"

(Trudgill, 2000: 54). Even some abusive words are being used by the informants, a typical trait of non-standard language.

Genre. Indifferent and harsh familial-oriented interaction. Actually, it entails a lower-class couple engaged in a familial spat.

Conversation 2

Background. Maureen Peal, a light-skinned Black girl, has piqued Pecola's interest. Maureen, who is initially kind, eventually humiliates Pecola and her companions by calling herself "cute" and Pecola "ugly."

Maureen Peal: I just moved here. My name is Maureen Peal. What's yours?

Pecola: Pecola.

Maureen Peal: Pecola? Wasn't that the name of the girl in 'Imitation of Life?

Pecola: I don't know. What is that?

Maureen Peal: The picture show, you know. Where this mulatto girl hates her mother cause she is black and ugly but then cries at the funeral. It was real sad. Everybody cries in it….

Pecola: Oh.

Maureen Peal: Anyway, her name was Pecola too. She was so pretty…. Hey. There's an Isaley's. Want some ice cream? I have money. My uncle sued Isaley's…a policeman came in and beared the witness, so the suit went through.

Pecola: What's a suit?

Maureen Peal: It's when you can beat them up if you want to and won't anybody do nothing. Our family does all the time. We believe in suits. You all going to buy some ice cream?

Frieda: No.

Maureen Peal: … (She kept scooping the ice cream and said to Pecola) Did you ever see a naked man?

Pecola: no. Where would I see a naked man?

Maureen Peal: I don't know. I just asked…

Claudia: You stop talking about her daddy.

Maureen Peal: What do I care about her old black daddy?

Claudia: Black? Who you calling black?

Maureen Peal: You!

Claudia: You think you so cute!

Maureen Peal: (Screaming) I am cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly black e mos. I am cute!

Frieda and Claudia: (shouted together) Six- finger-dog-tooth-meringue-pie! (Morrison, 1970, pp. 67-73)

Speech Event. Persuasion and argument.

Setting. During a walk from their school down Twenty-first Street to Broadway towards their homes.

Participants. Maureen Peal, Pecola, Frieda, and Claudia. They all are schoolmates.

Ends. The end of the dialogue between Maureen Peal and Pecola is getting information from Pecola about a rumor. Hence, she seems friendly with Pecola at the beginning of the interaction. Her actions are the outcome of her adoption of "mulatto aesthetics." Pecola was disheartened when she accused her of seeing "her old black daddy" naked. She further asserts her control by teasing, "I am cute!" You, too, are unattractive (Morrison, 1970, p.73). Pecola has had several serious intra-racial confrontations over color.

Act. Maureen starts a friendly conversation with Pecola while walking towards their houses from the school. To Frieda and Claudia's surprise, she seems to be caring and kind to Pecola. However, as the conversation proceeds, it turns into an attempt to inflict her superiority over the three girls.

Key. The key of the speech act is unpleasant, serious, and mocking. It is also marked by non-verbal behavior when at the end Claudia tries to hit Maureen but misses doing so.

Instruments. It is a face-to-face written speech act, and the register is informal. The non-standard language used by the characters indicates the socio-cultural context of the speech community.

Norms. Afro-American Vernacular English (AAVE) has been used in the speech act. Since this was a fight, the interlocutors shouted. The contemptuous remark used by Maureen to lower the self-esteem of all the addressees provides an example of the reflection of the social power and authority in the character's language.

Genre. A friendly chat that ends up in an unfriendly argument.

Conversation 3

Background. Pecola crosses the boundaries separating "colored folks" from "nigger," light-skinned from black, and hand-me-down whiteness from actual culture when she stands in Geraldine's house, lured there by Geraldine's hateful son -Junior. Geraldine's surroundings and home are stunning in her eyes. Geraldine, on the other hand, notices Pecola's excessive breach, and Pecola - a hurting child - is transformed into a "nasty little black bitch"(Morrison, 1970, p. 72) in Geraldine's eyes. Geraldine clenches her teeth in defiance of any acknowledgement of a part of herself in Pecola. Geraldine is "the lovely milk-brown lady in the lovely gold and

greenhouse," according to Pecola (Morrison, 1970, p. 72). Morrison argues through her that the life of Geraldine can only be recognized by the exclusion of others.

Junior: Hey! What are you doing walking through my yard? Nobody can come through this yard 'less I   say so.

Pecola: This ain't your yard. It's the school's.

Junior: But I'm in charge of it. Wait. You can play in it if you want to. What's your name?

Pecola: Pecola. I don't want to play.

Junior: Come on. I'm not going to bother you.

Pecola: I got to go home.

Junior: Say, you want to see something? I got something to show you.

Pecola: No. what is it?

Junior: Come on in my house. See, I live right there. Come on. I'll show you.

Pecola: Show me what?

Junior: Some kittens. We got some kittens. You can have one if you want.

Pecola: Real kittens?

Junior: Yeah. Come on. There's nobody here. My ma's gone out, and my father's at work. Don't you want to see the kittens?

Junior: Hey, you. Come on. Come on. Here! Here is your kitten! (Throws a big black cat her face) You can't get out. You're my prisoner.

Pecola: You let me go.

Junior: No! (Pushed her down and locked the door)

Junior: Gimme my cat! (Snatching the cat from Pecola and swinging it around his head)

Pecola: Stop that!

Geraldine: What is this? Who is this girl?

Junior: She killed our cat. Look.

Geraldine: Get out. You nasty little black bitch. Get out of my house. (Morrison, 1970, pp.88-92).

Speech Event. Luring and abomination/ hatred

Setting. Geraldine's house is next to the playground of Washington Irving School.

Participants. Pecola, Junior, and Geraldine

Ends. Geraldine's son, Junior enjoys bullying girls, and lures Pecola to get into his house on the pretext of showing her kittens. However, he shut her down in the store and lied to his mother that the cat was killed by Pecola. The goal of the conversation is very well achieved by the addressers- Geraldine and her son.

Act. First of all, Junior lures Pecola to enter his house. Afterward, he held her captive, threw a cat at her face, and locked her in a room. In the beginning, Pecola is frightened by the whole episode, but she develops an affinity with the cat while being alone with him in the room. Junior cannot bear this intimacy and throws the cat towards the radiator resulting in the death of the animal. When his mother enters, he inflicts all the blame on Pecola.

Key. It's a written discourse, the language is friendly at the beginning of the conversation. However, as the mood of the interaction changes, the choice of words and tone change into rude and unfriendly.

Instruments. The register is informal and written.

Norms. Geraldine is enraged by the cat's injuries, but most of all by the presence of a young black girl in her home. Therefore, she expels the innocent girl with words that cut deeper than the cat's claws. This intra-racial prejudice hurts Pecola the hardest. The abusive words used by one of the interlocutors show the social status and hierarchy prevailing in society.

Genre. An informal conversation. The themes of intra-racism and sexism unfold through the given example of the conversation.

Conversation 4

Background. When Pecola arrives with other black girls in the kitchen of White Fisher's home to pick up the laundry. Rather than comforting her burnt daughter, Pauline screams out things like "rotten pieces of apple" (Morrison, 1970, p. 108) at the black girls and turns to hushing and soothing the cries of the little pink-and-yellow girl distraught by the accident. In comparison to the tiny White girl, Pecola is made to feel unattractive and foolish.

> **Pauline:** I'm gone get the wash. You all stand stock still right there and don't mess up nothing.
>
> **The little white girl:** Where's Polly?
>
> **Claudia:** She's downstairs.
>
> **The little white girl:** Polly.
>
> **Frieda:** Look, look at that (showing a silvery pan). It's still hot.
>
> **The little white girl:** Polly, come here.

(The pan tilted under Pecola's fingers and fell to the floor, hot juice splashed on Pecola's legs)

Pauline: (slapping Pecola) Crazy fool…my floor, mess…look what you…work…get on out…now that…crazy…my floor, my floor…my floor.

Pauline: (To the little girl) Hush, baby, hush. Come here. Oh, lord, look at your dress. Don't cry no more. Polly will change it.

Pauline: (To Pecola) Pick up that wash and get on out of here, so I can get this mess cleaned up.

The little white girl: Who were they, Polly?

Pauline: Don't worry none, baby.

The little white girl: You gonna make another pie?

Pauline: Course I will.

The little white girl: Who were they, Polly?

Pauline: Hush. Don't worry none. (Morrison, 1970, pp. 108-109)

Speech Event. Rejection and exclusion

Setting. White Fishers' kitchen where Pauline is working as a maid.

Participants. Pauline, Fishers' little white girl, Frieda, Claudia.

Ends. The absence of motherly love and care is very much evident in the speech act.

Act. Pecola along with her friends Frieda and Claudia come to the white Fishers' house to pick up the laundry. Her mother Pauline, who works for Fishers as a maid, asks them to stand still in the kitchen and wait for her, but tempted by the hot pie in a pan, Pecola tries to touch it and accidentally gets burnt as the pan falls. Instead of caring and soothing her daughter, Pauline blames the girls for the mess and shows their non-existence to the little white girl.

Key. Pauline uses a very harsh and rude tone to insult her daughter and her friends, showing no respect or love for them. A non-verbal clue is used when Pauline slaps her daughter- Pecola- and blames her for the accident of spilling hot pie.

Instruments. The channel of the speech act is verbal, written, and informal.

Norms. A feature of AAVE – using multiple negations in negative sentences- is present in the dialogue (Trudgill, 2000, p. 57). The nickname 'Polly' for Mrs. Pauline used by the white girl has a semantic relevance. It implies a sense of intimacy from the addresser towards the addressee. Pauline's language clearly shows her negative attitude towards her daughter and other girls in her black community.

Genre. An unfriendly and informal serious chat.

Conversation 5

Background. Cholly's mother left him when he was four days old and his father vanished virtually as soon as he was born. Cholly knows nothing about his father except his name, Samson Fuller. He locates his father and tries to talk to him, but the father rejects him.

> **Samson Fuller:** What do you want, boy?
>
> **Cholly**: Uh. I mean…is you Samson Fuller?
>
> **Samson Fuller:** Who sent you? Huh? You Melba's boy?
>
> **Cholly:** No, sir, I'm …I'm your boy.
>
> **Samson Fuller:** (Impatiently) Something wrong with your head? Who told you to come after me?
>
> **Cholly:** Nobody. I just thought…I mean, I was just wandering around, and uh, my name is Cholly…
>
> **Samson Fuller:** Tell that bitch she get her money. Now, get the fuck outta my face! (Morrison, 1970, pp.155-156)

Speech Event. Humiliation/ rejection.

Setting. At an alley in Macon County, Georgia.

Participants. Cholly- the son - and Samson Fuller- Cholly's illegitimate father.

Ends. The goal of the event is disappointment and rejection. The language used by Sampson reflects the complete rejection of Cholly.

Act. Cholly comes in search of his father, but the father rejects him. The situation is tense and sad.

Key. The tone has to be tense and worried.

Instruments. The non-standard language has been used in the sample. It is an informal, written register.

Norms. AAVE is used in communication. The abusive language used by Samson Fuller reveals his character in the socio-cultural context and portrays the interpersonal relationship between the informants.

Genre. An unfriendly chat.

Conversation 6

Background. Pecola has been shunned by her family and neighborhood, and she believes that having blue eyes- a symbol of beauty by white standards- will help her gain acceptance in society. Hence, she visits Soaphead Church, a Spiritual and Psychic Reader, to ask for blue eyes. He convinces Pecola to feed the dog, who spends his days at his doorstep, with poisoned

meat. He assures Pecola that the dog's reaction will indicate whether she will obtain her wish. Pecola stands there in awe as the dog staggers about the yard and eventually dies.

Soaphead Church: What can I do for you, my child?

Pecola: Maybe. Maybe you can do it for me.

Soaphead Church: Do what for you?

Pecola: I can't go to school anymore. And I thought maybe you could help me.

Soaphead Church: Help you how? Tell me. Don't be frightened.

Pecola: My eyes.

Soaphead Church: What about your eyes?

Pecola: I want them blue.

Soaphead Church: I can do nothing for you, my child. I am not a magician. I work only through the lord…If He wants your wish granted, He will do it. We must, ah, some offering, that is, some contact with nature. Perhaps some simple creature might be the vehicle through which He will speak. Let us see.

Soaphead Church: Take this food and give it to the creature sleeping on the porch. Make sure he eats it. And mark well how he behaves. If nothing happens, you will know that God has refused you. If the animal behaves strangely, your wish will be granted on the day following this one. Courage. Courage, my child. These things are not granted to faint hearts. Goodbye, God bless. (Morrison, 1970, pp 173-175)

Speech Event. Seeking help/ Persuasion/ convincing.

Setting. The speech event took place at Soaphead Church's home.

Participants. Soaphead Church, a spiritual reader, and Pecola.

Ends. The end of the dialogue between the speaker and the hearer is to persuade Pecola to feed the dog poisoned meat. The addresser achieves his goal and convinces the addresser to act according to his instructions.

Act. The action sequence is a tense situation. The speech act starts with an affectionate address.

Key. The tone is tense, worried, and sympathetic. Trudgill (1985, p.105) notes that "speech between individuals of unequal rank or status is likely to be less relaxed and more formal than that between equals".

Instruments. Verbal and written communication.

Norms. The language is polite and has religious references as expected from a spiritual reader in society. A negative sentence with multiple negations- a feature of AAVE- is used.

Genre. An affectionate informal chat.

Conversation 7

Background. Claudia and her sister offered their magical offerings to nature as a testament to their unspoken recognition that Pecola is the scapegoat for her community's deepest fears and concerns about both blackness and sexuality. Both sisters strive to change the course of events by planting marigold seeds rather than spending money and consuming to safeguard Pecola's unborn baby. The McTeers sisters want to conjure up a kind of magic out of sympathy that will help Pecola to enjoy a happier life. When they fail, they blame themselves for not performing the rituals correctly or for lacking faith.

Claudia: What we gone to do, Frieda?

Frieda: what can we do? Miss Johnson said it would be a miracle if it lived.

Claudia: so let's make it a miracle.

Frieda: yeah, but how?

Claudia: we could pray…

Frieda: That's not enough. Remember last time with the bird?... I still think we have to do something really strong this time.

Claudia: That was different…Let's ask Him to let Pecola's baby live and promise to be good for a whole month.

Frieda: O.K. But we better give up something so He'll know we really mean it this time.

Claudia: Give up what? We ain't got nothing. Nothing but the seed money, two dollars.

Frieda: We could give that. Or, you know what? We could give up the bicycle. Bury the money and…plant the seeds.

Claudia: All of the money.

Frieda: Claudia, do you want to do it or not?

Claudia: O.K. I just thought…O.K.

Frieda: We have to do it right, now. We'll bury the money over by her house so we can't go back and dig it up, and we'll plant the seeds out back of our house so we can watch over them. And they come up, we'll know everything is all right. All right?

Claudia: All right. Only let me sing this time. You say the magic words. (Morrison, 1970, pp. 191-192)

Speech Event. Sympathizing

Setting. Frieda and Claudia want to practice a belief to save Pecola's to-be-born baby.

Participants. Both sisters, Frieda McTeers and Claudia McTeers, are planning to execute their magic.

Ends. The end of the dialogue between Claudia and Frieda is about believing in practice to save the unborn baby.

Act. The act sequence is to conjure magic. It is a tense situation as the interlocutors do not want to make any mistakes in executing their plan.

Key. The tone may be flat, tense, and worried as per the situation in the speech event.

Instruments. It's informal and written communication.

Norms. Both interlocutors share common knowledge about the beliefs of their community and thus achieve solidarity in interaction. A feature of AAVE syntax – omitting the auxiliary- is used.

Genre. An informal dialogue between two growing-up sisters.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The social environment in which the story and the relationships in the book are set will be addressed in connection to our interpretation of the scenario in *'The Bluest Eyes'*. The novel's interactions appear to take place in various locations around Lorain, Ohio. The black community's neighborhoods are here as are the white dominating group's cultured communities. The black population is always in physical contact with white culture in the novel. It is, however, divided by limits that are partly topographical – etched in space – and partly psychological – etched in the characters' minds.

Even when set in the modern city of Ohio, Morrison's fictional communities have a rural feel to them, since they have formed a tribal bond to protect their survival. In conversation 6, Pecola tries to attain her wish by seeking help from a spiritual leader. In conversation 7, Frieda and Claudia try to live up to the belief that can save someone's life. Eventually, the interlocutors of the fictional world use language to engage with the characters' current condition and the setting in which they find themselves. Thus, the language used by the interlocutors of the fictive society is mainly the non-standard variety as the characters belong to the same speech community i.e., the marginalized Afro-American community. Socio-cultural factors are visible in the language used by the characters. For example, contemptuous remarks by Maureen Peals in conversation 2 and Geraldine in conversation 3 reveal that there exists a middle class within the marginalized black community. This indication tries to imbibe false imitations of the devastating socio-cultural norms that prevail in white American society. Furthermore, using derogatory language by a section of the community towards the not-so-well-to-do section of the same speech community shows the demoted social status and represents an aspect of non-standard variety. Consequently, there is an emergence of the intra-racial social dynamic that embarks an indifferent social division within the Afro-American community.

In addition, most of the informants are from the Afro-American speech community. Therefore, some typical features of AAVE are present in their language, such as the absence of '-s' in the third person singular, and verb 'to be' in the present tense form, and the presence

of "negativized auxiliary preposition" or "negative sentences with multiple negations" (Trudgill, 2000, p. 57).

Thus, the study explores the subtle but profound insights into the human condition in general, and black life in particular through the interactions of the novel's fictional characters. The central concept of the text is the dominance of the prevailing American beauty standards, which include blue eyes, blonde hair, and a white complexion among the blacks. It is the gold standard that runs through all Western cultures. Morrison is interested in the characters achieving a more authentic existence than those who conform to traditional standards from the start. She appears to be concerned with the importance of each character's relationships with others, especially with the dominant white culture that gives the prevalent, accepted images of self. Through her characters, Morrison represents a portion of the pattern of black connection that endures in the face of breakdown, as exemplified by Pauline's reluctance to mother her children and indifferent attitude towards her family and community as well in conversations 1 and 4. Geraldine's distorted view of family, Samson's rejection of his son, and Cholly's devastating mistreatment of his daughter reflect the fragmented social fabric within a community that results in the agonized and frustrated survival of the characters. Through an in-depth analysis of linguistic elements, discourse patterns, and socio-cultural nuances, this research seeks to unveil the underlying sociolinguistic dimensions that shape the characters and the broader societal fabric depicted in the narrative.

By exploring the components of Hymes' theory—such as setting, participants, ends, act sequence, key, instrumentalities, and norms—it becomes evident that the characters' speech acts are deeply embedded in their social environment. The interactions between characters reflect power dynamics, cultural norms, and the impact of societal structures on their communicative behaviors. Hymes' framework has been instrumental in uncovering the layers of meaning and significance within the characters' dialogues, shedding light on the complex interplay between language and culture in the novel.

Moreover, the analysis has contributed to a richer understanding of how language functions as a tool for both individual expression and social negotiation in "The Bluest Eye." The characters' speech not only serves as a means of communication but also as a reflection of their identities, aspirations, and struggles within a society marked by racial and cultural complexities. Hymes' theory has provided a structured approach to unpacking the intricate nuances of the characters' linguistic choices, offering a framework that goes beyond mere linguistic analysis to encompass the broader sociocultural implications.

6. CONCLUSION

To conclude, the application of Dell Hymes' Speech Model Theory to the conversations of the fictive characters in "The Bluest Eye" has illuminated the multifaceted nature of language use within the novel. The findings underscore the importance of considering the sociocultural context when examining literary discourse, emphasizing that language is not only a medium of expression but also a dynamic force that shapes and reflects the complexities of the characters' lives.

Moreover, using Hymes' model to evaluate key selected interactions, the novel validates the theory's viability and gives a better comprehension of the socio-cultural context and the communication skills of the story's primary characters. Most of the interactions in the data take place in casual settings where individuals converse informally, and the concerns expressed are framed by the novel's core themes. However, because the data source was a textual discourse, a few paralinguistic elements such as tone, pitch, and gestures were not properly recorded. Furthermore, the study allows the researchers to have a better understanding of the society and culture of an ethnic group through the communication process and have an insightful investigation of numerous socio-dynamics such as racism, sexism, cultural beliefs, uprootedness, etc. In addition, the study fulfills the research goal and would hopefully encourage other researchers to use Hymes' theoretical framework for the analysis of other literary texts. This study contributes to the ongoing discourse on language, identity, and culture in literature, inviting further exploration of the intricate relationships between fictional narratives and the sociolinguistic frameworks that underpin them.

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AUTHORS' BIOS

Anjum Chaudhary *is an Assistant Professor at the English Language Centre, Umm Al Qura University, Makkah. She got her doctorate in English (2005) from CCS University,*

India. Her research interests focus on Applied linguistics, ELT, Discourse analysis, and English Literature. She has presented papers at seminars and published articles in different international journals.

Sahar AL Zahrani *is the Director of the English Language Centre at Umm Al Qura University. She is an Assistant Professor of Applied Linguistics and ELT. She holds the degree of Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics from the University of Southampton, UK. She has presented conference papers and has been publishing on learner autonomy, innovations in teaching, blended learning, MOOCs, and online instructional design.*