

LANGUAGE AS LIBERATION: A LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF FEMALE VOICE AND SILENCE IN TONI MORRISON'S 'THE BLUEST EYE'

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ABSTRACT:

In *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison seeks to challenge the eroding sexual and racial prejudices affecting Black girls and women. This paper analyzes how Morrison employs language and voice and silence to portray how societal forces suppress Black women but to reveal that language is a tool for liberation and Black women's creation of the self. Through a close reading of the novel, I demonstrate how linguistic manipulation works to devalue Black women's voices and argue that the novel includes instances in which language allows them to speak against their suppression and to create their identities anew. With this study, I look at various sociolinguistic factors in this novel as the central point of focus to add to current understandings on power dynamics and linguistic transformation in both the literary analysis and general discussions.

In analyzing these elements and themes in Morrison's work the paper utilizes the keywords Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*, Language, Voice, Silence, Black Women, Feminism, Linguistic Analysis, Oppression, Liberation, Dialect.

Introduction:

While handling race along with gender and identity complexities in all her works, Toni Morrison also bagged North Nobel Prize and being considered one of the leading writers of the modern American literature. She looks at what consequences racial prejudice has for Black girls in the sense that black girls are forced to live up to unattainable standards of white beauty in her debut novel *The Bluest Eye* (1970). Language, on the other hand, is an extremely important factor towards the construction of the female characters' life in the novel where it is a means to oppress, but it can also be a way out of oppression.

Language manipulation and control, both work as a device of insidious means that oppresses use to exercise power. Self expression is identified and prevented for the purpose of keeping people out of society where their voices are subdued. In the novel, there is an accurate portrayal of systemized silencing of Black women and girls through racism placed internally into the victims and the expectations of society, and even direct language based hostility.

In the Toni Morrison's novel, there are some moments that reflect the despair as well as the resilient acts of individuals who articulated back. The novel claims that Black vernacular language,

storytelling and female solidarity serve as vehicles for the reclaiming of Black agency (the right to speak for oneself and direct one's own life), and working collectively in these forms empowers Black bodies to resist oppressors who try to silence them. This thesis analyzes how language can provoke its harm to Black female identities in the text, yet this same language can also be a resource from characters gaining recovery and strength.

Literature Review:

The Bluest Eye has been subjected to a number of studies based on race, as well as gender issues and beauty standards, together with the psychological effects of traumatizing experiences. Still, current scholarship of The Bluest Eye treats an analysis of language dynamics through character experiences of voice and silence from female characters as an understudied concept.

Mae G. Henderson (1991) demonstrates in "Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics, and the Black Woman Writer's Literary Tradition" that voice stands as a vital component in Black women's literature because voice recovery serves to battle historical violations of speech. In 1986, African American literature critic Deborah McDowell wrote to critics saying that they must start to develop, and find methods of studying the distinctive experience of African American women.

Because African-American vernacular English (AAVE) serves as an identity marker, and indicates cultural resistance, Henry Louis Gates Jr. (1988) investigates AAVE in *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*. Through "signifying" language manipulation Black people gain power to rewrite dominant narratives which helps them maintain their personal identity expression. Control images and stereotypes are mentioned by the author Patricia Hill Collins (2000) in the work entitled *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* as forces that squelch and restrain Black women's voices. According to Hill self definition as well as self empowerment requires the challenge of stereotypes through alternative narratives and vocal assertion of self.

Many scholars try to explain how Pecola Breedlove has devastating reactions to both internalizing racism and internalizing white beauty standards that have imposed themselves on her. Claudia Tate, in *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire: The Black Heroine's Text at the Turn of the Century*, analyzes how Pecola studies blue eyes because she wants to belong in the racist world. Michael Awkward (1990) describes in *Inspiriting Influences: Tradition, Revision, and Afro-American Women's Novels* that Pecola's self image is deformed due to her environment in the community and the absence of adult protection from racism and abuse.

The Bluest Eye has been the topic of study by a group of academics because of the traumatic links to silence. In *Trauma and Recovery*, Herman (1992) presents his research of trauma in relation to people and communities. This novel presents Pecola as one who becomes silent after she, a survivor of trauma, caused it to herself.

Analysis of words and of verbal interaction in The Bluest Eye is of use in research on language, because it tells just how words and verbal interaction force passive silence in Black women and gives them power at the same time. The aim of the research was to examine how language is used by Morrison to illustrate the complicated relationship between freedom and vocal expression for the protagonist female characters in her works.

Gaps in Existing Scholarship:

Research found on *The Bluest Eye* about most of its subjects is very important but they are unable to reach some crucial points:

This research does not include an explicit analysis of the numerous dialect patterns and code switch, as well as language strategies employed by characters in the story. In order to understand their power relationships and their methods of resistance at the micro level, the dialogues between the female characters require precise investigation. The way in which language helps to foster internalized oppression in self perception regarding beauty standards must be studied further.

Research Methodology:

The outline for this research is developed upon the qualitative method of qualitative method critical discourse analysis and close reading analysis to study the linguistic component within *The Bluest Eye* text.

Specifically, the research follows the following steps as methodology.

1. A thorough reading of *The Bluest Eye*, paying close attention to dialogue, narration, and linguistic patterns.
2. In order to assist researchers to locate the key passages where language can be used to silence people and empower them and also where it can shape the representation by individuals of their personal identity.
3. Discourse Analysis, which involves the examination of linguistic features in the short text selections including essential. The storyteller's narrative voice dictates how the readers comprehend both characters and their experiences as represented. Analysis of an inquiry into guilt feelings is followed by the figurative language, to determine important meanings and emotional voices through metaphors and similes and other such speech figures.
4. Contextualization: Placing the linguistic analysis within the broader context of the novel's themes and the historical realities of racism and sexism in America.
5. In order to read and interpret the patterns identified in this study along the idea of power dynamics and identity formation, it makes use of critical feminist alongside other post structural theory and critical race theory

Discussion:

The Silencing of Black Female Voices

Systemic procedures are used in this novel to suppress the pervasive Black female voice through multiple methods. Societal powers through racism promote the white beauty standard thus making black women rejected and prone to lose self esteem. The internal oppression of women makes them have no confidence to speak their minds while at the same time using bad language against themselves.

We show how Black women face repeated moments of silence, as it is demonstrated with the Breedlove family members. His presence has consumed Pauline Breedlove's existence as she has desired to imitate white physical standards and desert her actual existence. Where with her language, Pecola paints her fixation with white movie stars and white dolls and the white family

as printed in the magazine. Since she is subjected to white ideals everywhere, Pauline develops feelings of embarrassment towards her Blackness. As a consequence, she keeps a subdued vocal

quality since her voice reveals only very limited authentic expressions and doesn't confront the overly oppressive powers surrounding her.

Pecola, at such a young age, receives the most vulnerability to these messages of self hate because she is in her environment. Pecola, who endures endless discrimination at school and in her community, is finally dismantled of all self confidence until she disintegrates into nothingness. In order to feel safe and acknowledged in that society where racial oppression persists for young black women, she wishes for blue eyes. The desire to achieve blue eyes is rooted in a false concept of worth and in the end, it denies Pecola the opportunity to express herself, or, really, her true self. In the novel, the narrative structure along with the other elements helps silence Pecola. Morrison expresses how Pecola's mind has been damaged by fragmented non-linear storytelling. The story is filled with frequent interruptions along with changing viewpoint frames that demonstrate how her voice is systematically suppressed throughout the story. Claudia MacTeer and other characters shape or determine the way Pecola's life story unfolds to the point that she loses her own ability.

Language as a Tool of Oppression:

Through the narrative, the author displays how expressions of language produce the capture and transformation of Black women into objects. Through the use of derogatory terms and terms with racial slurs that are continuously asserting their inferiority, there is a language based environment of violence that prevents them from being able to express themselves.

Also, among the youths in the story, white social prejudices seem to influence the most hostile linguistic behaviors. Eventually, the cruel verbal harassment of the children, including naming her ugly names, makes Pecola feel that she is not deserving. Pecola receives verbal abuse from

her family and community, the abuse is not related to teasing; it is aggressive behavior that results to Pecola's mental collapse.

They become the instruments of the growth and flourishing of injustice out of ordinary and lovely words. More than anything advertising and popular media, film never abandoned using white beauty templates to silently communicate that Black women were not desirable. This language based slight of tongue greatly contributes to Black women feeling unconfident and they begin to doubt how they look and feel for themselves that is difficult to reclaim their voice and identity.

The Power of African-American Vernacular English (AAVE):

In *The Bluest Eye*, Black women manage to reach some power although oppressed, some freedom through language. The representation of Black Vernacular English (AAVE) in the novel serves as a crucial representation of Black cultural heritage while acting as rejection of oppression.

In this narrative Claudia MacTeer uses a speech pattern that is highly imperative for the Black community of Blacksburg. She shares her loyalty to Black culture as well as her refusal to accommodate European middle class norms through her use of AAVE. Claudia proclaims her

identity through her words and fights with the dominating ideologies that strive to silence the Black voices.

In the dialogues of Black women in the novel, AAVE is the most dominant linguistic expression which is used when they talk in their homes or communities. The women freely communicate their authentic thoughts and reject white cultural conformity demands with its demands through switching between Spanish and other languages. This is where language begins to function in

this space as an instrument that allows Black women to form solidarity by sharing their experiences, and coming against oppression.

Storytelling as Resistance:

The power source of the female characters in *The Bluest Eye* is storytelling. Sharing their stories gives black women a chance to protect their own experiences and personal narratives because it prevents erasure in the oppressive dominant discourse.

Frieda and Claudia are a mutual support system to find comfort in a world where there is rarely comfort for either of them. They get to understand what happened and are able to make meaning of their surroundings, and also get self assurance, through their stories.

Even the act of telling Pecola's story, despite its tragic ending, serves as a form of resistance. Readers are led to awareness by Pecola's struggles that they need to enter into the denied human worth of marginalized individuals who endure racism/sellism.

Moments of Linguistic Agency:

The novel also presents a few instances in which female characters have some temporary ascendancy over the language they speak. These are some of the short and weak instances revealing the amazing persistence of human spirit while at the same time being small pieces of optimism.

Claudia essentially breaks the white beauty rules, and yet the Blackness narratives, in her rejection of them, indicate literary power. Finally, she shows that language still possesses the power to fight oppression by her opposition to injustice and with her small acts of challenging the normal rules.

At those intimate times, black women use language in order to show understanding of each other, and that is a large part of linguistic empowerment. Acts of solidarity between two Black women become essential pillars of strength that aid them in maintaining endurance in the rough times.

Key Findings:

The discoveries of the analysis of *The Bluest Eye* through voice and language are derived from silence; three main ones come out:

1. People continue to maintain racism while there was still a form of sexism and an internalized oppression that makes Black female voices refuse to be expressed.
2. Those who are self hating racially find verbal confirmation for their inferiority which makes them shy away from communicating their thoughts to people.
3. Black women are able to express their real self and cultivate connections based on a common cultural heritage and opposition, while using Black vernacular English (AAVE).

4. By retelling stories, Black women can take back their agency via story telling and turn around their own stories against the popular story or cultural myths.
5. Female characters in the novel achieve linguistic agency when they take control of the oppression or ask questions or sort together.
6. Because of both the effects of oppression and those of violence upon Black women, silence in some cases acts as a resistant shield, a type of preservation, and sometimes a way of maintaining personal well being.
7. The book's broken storyline mirrors Pecola's mental disintegration and demonstrates her inability to determine her own destiny.

Conclusion:

The connection of language and voice that is equally related to silence is shown by many black women in *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison. Morrison uses the story to prove how language represents an oppressive weapon that allows racism as well as sexism and self denigration of Black people to persist. The text reveals that language serves two purposes, to be a means of liberation when Black Vernacular English and storytelling or solidarity bring people together, as well as to be a vehicle for oppression of people.

She tells the story of Pecola Breedlove as a warning not to let racist oppression win by the acts of damage it does to people psychologically as it is internalized by them and belief in that prejudice. Claudia MacTeer and other female characters vocalize hope since both voicing retrieval and cultural self assertion lead to liberating and resisting possibilities.

The Bluest Eye reveals the world into why people must do language awareness and stand up against dominant ones that render minority voices from speaking. Language sustains oppressive forces in our society so we can understand how it leads to a just and equal society that gives value to all voices.

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