

## Language as an Instrument Employed for Socio-Psycho Oppression and Its Depiction in a Raisin in the Sun by Lorraine Hansberry

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### Abstract:

The current research is discourse analysis of Lorraine Hansberry's play *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959): a play written in the background of racial discrimination. "A Raisin in the Sun" is a social satire presenting the theme of socio-psycho oppression and discrimination inflicted on colonized people by the colonizers in Afro American settings of 1960's Chicago. The theme of the play *A Raisin in the Sun* promotes class distinction among the characters of the play triggering social and psychological oppression among Afro-American Characters of the play. The power relations and segregation due to the capitalist control over 'subaltern' has been analyzed by the researchers through application of Critical Discourse Analysis propounded by Norman Fairclough (1949). The researchers have borrowed theoretical insights from Carl Marx's theory of Marxism; a theory focusing on how power structure and relations are built in society. Through the Critical Discourse Analysis of the collected text samples, the researcher has found that language has been used as a tool for exploitation of the underprivileged people presented in the selected work.

**Keywords:** Marxism, Critical Discourse Analysis, Power Relations, Discrimination, Social Ideology

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Critical Discourse Analysis' is the study of a language in a given context aiming to analyze a text. The analyst simply cannot look for the words only that make sentences but has to take notice of who is uttering those words and what is the context in which the speaker is uttering those words. Emerged in 1980's in England, the Critical Discourse Analysis has provided a path to uncover social and political inequalities in a society. There are two units of a language 'Text and context'. Kress and Hodge (1988) has differentiated between the texts and the discourses as 'Text' is a structural form of a message and 'context' is 'the Social process in which texts are embedded' (p. 78). Society plays an important part in building the personality and ideologies of a person who has great impact on society. Angela Brognolli (2008) has claimed that the hidden ideologies of a language are not linked with "linguistic system but are hidden in use of language" (p. 83). The impact of society is evident in the conversation of people as well. Critical Discourse Analysis plays an important part in revealing the underlying social, traditional, cultural and ideology based meanings of words. According to Fairclough, there are three stages of doing critical discourse analysis: interpretation, description and explanation. The research in hand has borrowed insight from Fairclough's dimension of 'social practice' in discourse analysis. The dimension of 'social practice' deals with the elements important for the social analysis in class difference and power relations that one can produce through discourses, by which can challenge the social structure or tries to transform in some possible ways. Marxism is a theoretical framework viewing social conflicts and class relationship by using materialistic interpretation of power relation development in a society. According to Marxism, the system of power relation in lower class or those who has no authority becomes a tool of production for those who are in power to impose their authority. A key focus of critical discourse analysis is uniting text with the discourse and sociocultural practices that the text reflects, and produces (Fairclough 1995).

In this research paper, we have collected textual samples from an Afro-American play *A Raisin in the Sun*: a play written in the background of racial discrimination. The story revolves round Youngers who have just receive a check

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of \$1000 as insurance money of deceased senior Walter. Lorraine Hansberry paints an impressive portrait of Youngers. The family of Youngers is determined to achieve something in their life but they are typical in their dreams. The family is composed of Mama Leena who is head of family. Her dream is to buy a house for her family. Walter Lee is mama's 39 years old son who works as a chauffeur but has a dream to open a liquor store by using the insurance money of his father. Ruth is Walter Lee's wife who is again pregnant with their second child but this news disturbs her as they are living in a small apartment and beside this their financial conditions are not good to support a family of five. She also wants to buy a house for family. Walter Lee and Ruth has a son name Travis who is always busy in playing elders against each other. Beneatha is Walter Lee's and Mama Leena's daughter. She wants to use insurance money for the tuition fee of her medical school. She is interested in both of her boyfriend George Murchison and Joseph Asagai. Beneatha wants to become a doctor. Walter Lee loses money that Leena gives her to start his new business and to pay Beneatha's tuition fee. But at the end of drama Walter Lee takes a stand as a man and supports his family by standing against social segregation. Mama Leena has a strong belief in unity of family and the drama ends with the family united on one dream of buying a house. They leave small apartment in which they were crumbling for years for new and airy apartment in their white neighborhood.

The researchers have analyzed the use of language as a mechanism for social and psychological manipulation through the dialogues of various characters in light in Norman Fairclough's (1949) insights of critical discourse theory, keeping in mind the plot setting of the play. The thesis has a theoretical basis given by Marxism's ideology. We gathered textual evidence and conducted discourse research to see how language could be used as a medium of social and psychological injustice. The research questions of this thesis are formulated below:

1. How do power relations and class distinction causes social and psychological oppression embedded in capitalism and power relations on the lives of Afro Americans in drama?
2. How are power relations constructed and deconstructed through discourse in drama A Raisin in the Sun?

### **2. Literature Review**

The review of the literature has encompassed the criticism both in favor and against the selected play A Raisin in the Sun. this review also included theory of Marxism and critical discourse analysis that offers assistance to the researchers in analyzing any discourse. Many previous works had focused on the theme of American Dream e.g. (May;2020, Mhayya;2018, Mulate;2008), class difference (Gordon;2008), theme of feminism (Orem;2017, Ghani;2011, Gomes;2010, Lipari;2004, Utomo;2003), double consciousness (Nowrouzi and faghfori;2015), identity crisis (Razil;2013, Jakubaik;2011, Mathews; 2008, Bernstein; 1999, Sarfraz and Kousar;2014), economic turmoil (Burrell;2014, Rose;2014), motherhood (Parkosa; 2012) and social segregation by using different theoretical frameworks but only few had considered the language of play. This part of research paper has reviewed the previous works done by different scholars and introduced the gap that this study has aimed to fill.

#### **1.1 Reviews and Criticism on a Raisin in the Sun**

The play had timelessness as it reflects the United States history when they were facing real social, legal and financial tensions. People were in constant struggle and this play had predicted the struggles of 1950's youngsters who were trying to gain a stable social position. People of that time had a social and personal connection to the story of this work that's why this drama was extraordinary demanded by the audience of United States without any biases of race or color. This was one reason that made A Raisin in the Sun more appealing and demanding at that time (Wilkerson, 1986 p. 144). Hansberry wrote her drama at that time and to play on screenplay with African American actors was a real challenge as before her no black person did so she broke a stereotype. This screenplay also won award that led to white's fear of metamorphosis (Lipari, 2004 p. 23). Almost all African American people had a dream to live a better and dream life. Their dream was of a better life not only for oneself but also for their whole family. The social circumstances had made Youngers a warrior as every member of family showed aggression against discrimination in society that prohibited them from attaining equality (Gordon 2008 p. 222).

#### **1.2 Reviews on Critical Discourse Analysis**

The modification of discourse analysis “bridged the gap between micro and macro-analysis of social phenomena” in which language is used by its user. The new dimension of discourse had provided a new way to study social and political issues expressed through language. Van Dijk wrote that the discourse analysis could be used for arguing the power relations and segregations through language. The language had not been limited to the communication only as it included written, and spoken communication as well to cover discourse and society. The purpose of this journal *Discourse and Society* was to comprehend the relation between social and political discourse (Van Dijk, 1990 pg. 8). CDA had standardized and descriptive nature as it had assessed the realities along with their explanation. The society, power, culture, all were seen as a part of society creating social practice through language. The “problematization” had been the relation of social problem and their solution that effected the discourse of individuals in a society. Critical Discourse Analysis helped in bring forward all the social, political and economic issues through language analysis (Fairclough, 2013 p. 108-194). The main aim of CDA was to uncover power relations and these power relations were analyzed by closely examining word choice. Critical Discourse Analysis was not limited to humanities only as this technique could be used by any researcher according to the goals of research (Mullet, 2018 p 48). The current study focuses on the use of language for social and psychological oppression through power relations.

Marxist theory has carved for the battle between individuals, financially or socially, and links all these struggles with antipathy existed between bourgeois and proletarians. In between historical Marxism and critical theory of Marxism, the theoretical framework had embodied many sub-categories of Marxism that linked or produced social theory of Marxism. There was a need to understand these sub-categories before reaching to the conclusion of Marxism as a contradictory concept (Gouldner 1974 p. 18). Carl Marx had not directly talked about concept of power but his concept of labor and property division were actually explaining the power relations in social structure. The property relations were the relations of force that needed force to impose domination and state tried to work for the interests of particular class. The particular class designed the discourse of state for their interests and benefits. They used the power to exercise it on a class of society that was used by them for personal benefits only. The dominants of power structures used power relations not on individual level but on social level. Carl Marx had given a general concept of power relationships that was studied in relation to other classes of society. The economic situation of a society was mostly a major cause of imbalanced political and social relations (McQuarie & Spaulding, 1989 p. 7).

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is a pure qualitative research where the researcher employed close reading techniques to extract the text samples showing that how oppressors psychologically dominate and rule the victims. We carried out textual analysis of the selected texts through the technique of discourse analysis model given by Norman Fairclough that guides as how to tackle with the texts for critical discourse analysis. A triangular insight propounded by Fairclough has been followed that addresses three stages of doing critical discourse analysis: interpretation, description and explanation.

### 4. DATA ANALYSIS

The researchers have carried out the textual analysis of the text samples collected through close reading techniques. As the selected work as a genre is a drama, therefore, the dialogues of different characters of the play have been analyzed to find the assertion that language of play *A Raisin in the Sun* has been used by the playwright Lorraine Hansberry as a tool of social and psychological oppression for African-Americans. The dialogues by different characters has been examined by using Norman Fairclough’s three dimensional paradigm of discourse analysis. The authors have focused on two research problems by evaluating the play’s language. The emergence and deformation of power relations by dialogues is one research issue and another problem is that social and psychological disparity enacts through dialogues in the lives of Afro-Americans.

The play *Raisin in the Sun* highlights the conflict of African American families with the black ghetto and bigotry. They have pursued a better life by relocating to a new house that is located in the white family community. The economic element of Marxism has been illustrated by whites benefiting from the force of blacks and their job

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production. Act I has started with strong evidence of miserable life of Youngers explained through the setting of their apartment. Youngers have tried their best to furnish their apartment to meet social requirements but every time youngers are defeated by “weariness” of things that “has actually won in this apartment (pg. 4 Act I Scene 1). Language of setting of the scene one has been clearly depicting the social oppression. This social oppression has forced Youngers, an Afro-American family, to live a life of a puppet who dances on fingers of power holders. Hansberry has explained the fact by writing, “All pretenses but living itself have long since vanished from the very atmosphere of this room” (Hansberry, pg. 24). This dialogue has been showing that Youngers are pretending to live according to the needs of their white society. It is a form of oppression, when a person has no freedom to live a life he desired, the person has to follow others and has to place self in his predetermined position of the society.

Lorraine Hansberry has further explained the social oppression by using language in another dialogue of the play as she writes, “it is morning dark in the living room” (Hansberry, p.3). The dark morning is a hint to the fact that apartment is surrounded by high buildings that are not letting the sunlight in. Likewise, Youngers’ society has surrounded African-Americans in such a way that it is not letting them to progress. African Americans are spending their life like a group who has been cast out of society by those who have power and authority. Ruth wakes her husband up by saying ‘you better get up from there... Travis (using the only bathroom in the building) be finished and Mr. Johnson ‘ll be in there, and you’ll be fussing and cussing ‘round here like a mad man! And be late, too!” (Hansberry, p.25). The bathroom has been shared by multiple families of building sheds light on the financial struggles these Afro-American families are dealing with. They are living in America in miserable conditions as they do not have access to many of social needs. Malcolm X (2003) has once stated, “Sitting at the table doesn’t make you a diner, unless you eat some of what’s on that plate. Being here in America doesn’t make you an American. Being born here in America doesn’t make you an American” (Marable, p. 429). The capitalist of society has succeeded in making them aware of fact that they belong to “the world’s most backward race of people” (Hansberry, pg. 31,32). The word ‘most’ is enough to tell reader about how social practices has discriminated Afro-American on the bases of color. The discourse of influential class is usually unclear as it has gaps that veils the social inequality and maintains their social privilege. Walter has comprehended that growing up thinking you are middle-class could somehow make you belong to the middle-class. This mentality, however, is not shared by all family members.

Mama believes that Walter's dreams about becoming a businessman is not something meant for people of their class. As at a point, Mama says that they are no business people (Hansberry, pg. 42). Her ideology about class shows another Marxist ideology of power belonging to upper-class. For Marx, ideologies presented in a capitalist society will explain, justify and support the capitalist mode of production. Mama Lena has seemed to lost her small hope of progress as she is surrounded by a segregated society. She even takes “flu as something that white people get” because go has created black man enough strong to face hardships of society (Hansberry, pg. 43). The use of language has been further illuminated by mama’s plant as she compares plant with her children by saying that both plant and her hasn’t gotten enough light to progress further. The light is opportunities with which they have been deprived of and major reason for these impoverishes is social practices. Lorraine Hansberry has further expressed about class difference from the mouth of Mama Lena by writing “something always told me I wasn’t no rich white woman” (Hansberry, p.45). The phrase “rich white woman” expresses the social ideology of Afro-American society that richness is something inherited by whites.

The concept that people should stick with their kind and their class is a concept widely believed not only by upper-class people of those times but all other classes as well. This concept has also been brought back later in Act II when Mrs. Johnson visits the Youngers and exclaims: "I'm telling you the Youngers is really getting ready to ‘move on up a little higher!’ - Bless God!" (Hansberry, pg. 99). The entire dialogue has a bitter satire as if Youngers are going to do something that is supposed to be impossible. This mentality is yet another reason why many families or individuals at that time did not pursue methods of changing their economic situations or changing class. As the community can be viewed as a microcosm of the larger socio-cultural milieu that existed in the American colony at the time in terms of its racial composition (Barron 39). Youngers have been excluded from the process of nationhood. They have been used to build nation as they are contributing in social structure whether as a chauffeur or a maid.

At another point in the play, the newspaper statement says "NEGROES INVADE CLYBOURNE PARK - BOMBED!" (Hansberry, p.102). In this particular statement, the word 'negro' has depicted the life value of blacks and their social position. Beside their identity that society has predicted the action of bombing a lower class is like killing some wild animals who were supposed to attack some rare species of earth. This is through discourse that drama predicts the position and identity of black people in America. Blacks are considered a big threat to the capitalist society. "Negros Invaded ... Bombed" is a sort of discourse that has hidden power relation from one side. Fairclough has explained that face-to-face discourse both receiver and producer participate but in this newspaper type of discourse only "producer's type of discourse is involved". A single statement like the newspaper statement is not enough to hold power as it needs a proper system to promote it. The whole system of Youngers' capitalist society is acting in handling power so power "of discourse type belongs not only to institution itself but to the power holders in those institutions (Fairclough, p. 61). The one who has control over society, usually wants a discourse under the control. Kress (1985) states that language of people are "systematically organized ideas giving meaning to the values of a social institution" (Kress, p.67).

Youngers belong to subordinated class of family but they want to change their social status as they want to move to Clybourne Park society that is a supposed to be a decent society. But their society has measured their social status in a scale of a servant or a bus driver. Wodak (1995) maintains that "power cannot be derived from language, but language can be used to challenge power" (Wodak, p.187). Likewise, Youngers used language to subvert the power structure of African American society. If discourse has played its part in constructing power relations, then it has also deconstructed the power relations of society. Walter seemed to accept Mr. Linder's offer of paying back money as his delay in response showed that " he appears to be accepting" powerful position of whites (Fairclough, p.70). The rejection of white man's idea and Walter Lee's action against deals shows that he has deconstructed the power relation through discourse. Lorraine Hansberry has focused on the goal of building African American nation by giving message of supproting each other like a family in her play *A Raisin in the Sun*. It is not important to be with the values and roles that a society demands from one even if one has to suffer. Youngers decides to move to their new home where Mama would have more opportunity to grow plants and children too after leaving their old and airless apartment.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

In light of the discourse analysis carried on the selected text samples, the researchers found that power relations have been formed and deformed by the use of language. The use of language in such ways has oppressed African American Youngers in the play. Language analysis has also proved the factors of social and psychological oppression have equally affected both males and females in the play. The findings of this analysis are consistent with those of Orem (2017), Burrell (2014), Brown (1974), and Rose (2014). Orem (2017) has shed light on the topic of class strife, but as he has concentrated on female roles in the play. His dissertation is a proof that problems like class difference has existed in the play. Burrell (2014) has composed in his article that the financial flimsiness has made mental injury in male characters of the play and female characters are appeared as family builders. Brown (1974) has reviewed the play as ironical presentation of American dream as Youngers wanted to equate a white society. He thinks that it is unachievable dream of Youngers to attain American dream. Rose (2014) has written an article on the screen play of *A Raisin in the Sun* to explore the racism and gender differences. She has explored racism on political ground as she maintains that equality needs accessibility to all the sources of society. Whereas, our study is not gender biased, as language analysis of the play has shown that both male and female characters have disturbed equally by social discrimination.

## 6. CONCLUSION

It is evident from discourse of play that power relations have created a sort of fear in subordinated class of a society. The language of Lorraine Hansberry's play *A Raisin in the Sun* reveals psychological and social oppression through its discourse. Each character like Mama Lena, Beneatha, Ruth, Mrs. Johnson, Walter lee, Asagai, and Travis has expressed the social and psychological oppression through their dialogues. Fairclough puts that language has been used to build power relations and Mr. Linder is

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mouthpiece of implementing power structure. Karl Marx says that an individual's social class had dictated the individual's social life and different interests would inevitably cause class conflict (Marx, p.36). Lorraine Hansberry's play puts it all in perspective and allows the readers to emphasis on a journey of self-discovery and understanding of class conflict. In the drama almost all the sufferings are caused by white people of society who are in power as compared to blacks. Discourse has not only been used to build those relations of power in a society but also has deconstructed the power relationships. In conclusion, *A Raisin in the Sun* has predicted language used as a tool of social and psychological oppression for African American people of 1960's Chicago. The play has analyzed the social disparities carried out on African American people through language as language is utilized by white citizenry as a social power to present their belief systems. The writer of thesis has concluded that *A Raisin in the Sun* play has spoken about the conflict of African American families with the black ghetto and bigotry. The economic element of Marxism has been illustrated by whites benefiting from the force of blacks and their job production. The occupants of power structure has used the discourse in such a way that it seems normal for African American people to grasp and acknowledge their social positions.

### 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study was in context of the premise of "Language as a Tool of Socio-Psycho Oppression and Its Depiction in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*". The researchers have studied language from the viewpoint of racial prejudice and power relations. The same play's linguistic study can be used to examine the American Dream, family harmony, and feminism. The dialogues of both male and female characters were analysed by the authors of current study. In prospective studies, only the dialogues of female protagonists can be analysed for critical discourse analysis. Females are often seen as feeble members of society that are incapable of making any decisions. Lorraine Hansberry has portrayed a number of powerful female characters. Lorraine Hansberry has portrayed some strong female characters in her work as they have ability to take decisions. Mama Lena and Beneatha are close example of strong female characters. Their dialogues can be analyzed for language analysis for further research. In this research, the researchers have used Norman Fairclough's technique of discourse analysis the future researchers can use Van Dijk's approach for social discourse analysis.

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