

ROMEO AND JULIET: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF SHAKESPEARE'S USE OF LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

The study intends to examine Shakespearean language in *Romeo and Juliet* by claiming that the author's understanding was deep to an extent that he was able to differentiate socially high and low status characters through the expression of their words. The concept of language has been represented as a main tool for the manifestation of any culture, society and even of human mind and nature. This is language which describes a human being whether high or low in status, the examination of a character, society and a whole nation is what can be considered as a combination of language. This research paper clearly demonstrates the nature of language in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and discusses to what extent the language in the play clarifies a reader mentally that a character speaking whether belongs to a high class family or a low family. The paper is qualitative by nature and employs social semiotics for the critical analysis of characters' speeches. This signifies characters' discourses clearly defining their nature and understanding towards the society. The main focus in this paper is on the dialogues of elite families which either refer to their social status in the society or their highness in the play. That is why, the recommendation for further studies resonates the concept of low class families' language which is also another fact for the representation of their lives and status in the society. The present study determines language as an unopened portion in Shakespearean plays.

Keywords: Language, Social semiotics, Class distinction, Social representativeness.

INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare's exquisite love play, *Romeo and Juliet* (1595, 2000), spins alongside with love to an extent that makes the readers obsessed to it. The love in the play, being the major theme, seems highly possessed by the language that the lovers use in their expression. The language used in the expression is the sign of reality that the writer wanted to elaborate. The drama is widely fortified with the language play which not only determine the work as a love play but also much of the play is influenced with the language approach. It is a fact that a society without a language is a hollowed soul but it is even clearer that the distinction between the language of high status and low status in the society has a role to play for the society. Therefore, Shakespeare in this play vastly focuses on the distinction of the language that he considers serious for the distinction of his characters. Verdonk (1993) remarks by acknowledging the social status in accordance with the language in this essence can rightly be determined obvious in favor of Shakespearean use of language where his

distinction of characters is mainly focused on the language he favors. The play clearly describe the superiority and inferiority of the characters in essence with the language. A reader can easily understand what kind of character is speaking because the writer has implicitly described the sense of supremacy and subservience in his characters through the very use of their language. Furthermore, the study focuses on the question of how Shakespeare has differentiated his characters with their social status through the language in *Romeo and Juliet*. Language in one hand plays an important role for the peculiarity of the characters in the play and the status in the society. On the other hand, it seems logical for the division of the people in a society who perceives, thinks and understands differently only because of the distinctive language they prefer (Sapir, 1949, 1958, p. 69; Whorf, 1956, pp. 213-214).

In the same manner, the study employs the theoretical framework of "Semiotics" within which "Social Semiotics" has been preferred to analyze

the text on the basis of the following theory. Bezemer and Jewitt (2009) acknowledge that: Social semiotics is concerned with meaning maker and meaning making... it draws analysis of records of meaning making, such as 'artifacts', 'text,' and 'transcripts,' to examine the production and dissemination of discourse across the variety of social and cultural contexts within which meaning is made (pp. 1-14).

The concerned critical approach greatly satisfies the needs for the analysis of Shakespearean text because Shakespeare being the 'meaning maker' of the language evaluates his production on the basis of social context which is praiseworthy to the preference of the language he chooses. While the concept of 'meaning making' seems to be obliged to the characters whose maker's choice falls into the consideration of whatsoever social status they have in the society. However, the study is limited only to the play Romeo and Juliet wherein the researcher aims to evaluate the choice of language in Shakespeare's major characters that he used in the play.

It is generally believed that language has an important role for the expression of self and modification of a character as per the status he believes to have. Same as the concept that Chomsky (2002) maintained by examining language as the manifestation of social identity. It is a fact that in present time one can comprehend the social dignity of elite family from the difference of the language. In fact language is the cynosure of any man it can make the things happen anytime whether better or worst. It gives speech to the silent. It makes decisive, indecisive. Interestingly, nothing to everything. In Romeo and Juliet one can envisage clearly that the words though silent portray the true picture of the society. The medium is certainly the language that speaks for the society. Lichtenfels and Hunter's (2004) interpretation of Shakespearean text illuminate the soliloquies in this play as the representation of a mere portrait of social perspective. It means that all the distinction of the language is destined to be based on the society. Importantly, Shakespeare demonstrates his dignified characters through the soliloquies they speak. Seriousness and ambiguity in words and characters make them seem more unlikely to others. It is the revelation of their minds and characters which signifies their social status in the society.

The study plans to employ qualitative research method by applying social semiotics concept for the analysis of the language.

Conclusion

Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet is a vivid example of a hive of his language which seems to be based on social realities and distinction. The exploration concludes that the language author preferred for his characters proves the sense of reality in the distinction of high and low classes. The examination of identity is the representation in words, the words are essential only when they are spoken because these not only contain meanings but meanings with discrepancy and self-esteem. Conversely, the study focuses only on the use of language that the major characters speak without regarding the use of language that low characters seem to use. The language of low class family is another topic which is a replication for the researchers to go through. This study, on the basis of social semiotics, concludes that Shakespeare's wit on the use of language has proven the ability to differentiate what language the high placed characters used to speak, this is what dignifies their concern to the society and marks understanding to the reader that what sorts of character is speaking.

Discussion

Romeo and Juliet (1595, 2000) by Shakespeare is a debatable play wherein the playwright seems to focus on various angles of human mind and nature. Obviously, Shakespeare is considered to be the man of universe as his all of the plays concern universe. Social factors in his plays is one of the yielding focuses in which the language for different characters seems to be highly spirited. Nonetheless, the wit which Shakespeare used for the expression of his major characters is bewitching though it is in the shape of expression of love, hatred, sympathy, or vulgarity. Ross (1999) proclaims Shakespearean language declarative because, in author's words, the language which Romeo and Juliet use for the expression of their love is totally understandable to their social status. He exquisitely puts in words:

"If I profane with my unworthing hand This holy shrine, the gentler sin is this:

My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand

To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss".

(Act 1. Scene 5. Lines 90-94)

When the only touch of a lover is a blasphemy and the physical structure metaphorically has a status of a holy shrine and the trivial lips are depicted as 'pilgrims' then certainly the reflection is of the character who has such status in the society as a holy shrine seems to have. Indeed, the sweet utterance belongs to Romeo who is addressing his lover Juliet. The expression in words not only reflects love but status. Shakespeare seems to dispatch prominence of his major characters in words that are considered embellished. It is obvious that the language plays a starring role for the elaboration of a society, culture and history. Cook (2007) rightly assumed that language along with the speech is also the representation of an entire culture and human community. The significance of the language lies not only in words but in signs which the society signifies whatever shape it may content. The language, semioticians believe, is the classification of human status and role that brings forth the notion of identity. Scholes (1982) remarks "Language is an example of a semiotic system, and each human language is peculiar to a specific historical culture" (p. 9).

Shakespeare similarly seems like to portray not only what is known as human nature but also the human dignity, status and the character by using language as a tool to portray the reality. The reality is the distinction between high born characters and low born characters. The characters in this play, considered to be supreme from their birth, are evoked in the use of language which is totally different to the language of the 'other' which seems a social reality. Chandler (2007), being a semiotician, states "Language use acts as a key marker of social identity" (p.172). Shakespeare was of the writers who never clearly portrayed his characters as weak or of less important but he always had some sorts of additional acquaintance to display his characters. Like from Capulets speech, when he is intending to decide Juliet's marriage, one can clearly understand that the character speaking rightly belongs a high family: "Let two more summers wither in their pride Ere we may think her ripe to be a bride."

(Act 1, Scene 1, Lines 10-11)

It is apparent to believe that the master of decision making belongs to the one who has a good status in the society same as Capulet who being the

custodian of his family is considered to be the decision maker of every concern. However, the language not only defines a determination but also describes a sign of reality that without hesitation contains some conclusion. Language without meaning is a body without a soul. Shakespeare used his language with clear meaning of understanding that a society stands on the combination of both elite family and low family. Raffel (2004) proclaims low characters using low kind of language where he gives example of the Nurse who, according to him, has been particularized to be a character without a proper status.

In this play through language the vividness of semantic approach can be traced through various speeches of characters as social semiotics remarks on the meaning of the words through the language and affirms language in a context that represents social values (Halliday, 1978). Shakespeare seems to portray the social values practiced by the characters through the language which identifies their status. On the other hand, it is greatly acclaimed that Shakespeare in Romeo and Juliet used a rhythmic language for his high status characters and prosaic language he used for his low born characters. As far as the supremacy in language among the major characters is concerned they undoubtedly seem to speak in a metrical order. The characters are as elevated as Aristotle proposed them to be which certainly signify the notion of seriousness as is propounded in heroic language of an epic. The author puts words:

"One fire burns out another's burning,
One pain is lessened by another's anguish;
Turn giddy, and be help by backward turning;
One desperate grief cures with another's languish;"
(Act 1, Scene 2, Line 45-49)

The words by Benvolio clarify that speech is a toned and well-thought advice which states a sense of knowledge that is mostly pertinent to the high class families at Shakespeare's time. In addition, insofar as the language is concerned it is in verse form which Shakespeare used in his sonnets. This clearly denotes Shakespeare implied poetic language for his well-positioned characters in Romeo and Juliet which differentiated them as far as the low ranked characters are concerned.

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