

Discourse Analysis in Shashi Tharoor's "The Village Girl"

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Abstract

The theory of discourse and power as put forth by Michel Foucault a French philosopher, is more often employed in literary criticism and theories. Conversation being one type of discourse plays a dominant role in understanding fiction; *Village Girl* is no exemption. Shashi Tharoor's *Village Girl* encompasses power changes and resuscitation that are revealed in a discourse. The purpose of this paper is to showcase how these changes are placed in discourse. To do so, four linguistic elements, namely: topic-control, interruptions, addresses, and turn-taking, are chosen to be analyzed in this story to present the change of power relations between two main characters Susheela and Sunder. This paper shows that critical discourse plays an essential role in understanding the change of Susheela's identity as well as the power-relation between her and Sunder. There is an inevitable relationship between language and social class to which the characters belong. This paper asserts that fictional language is an expression of the spoken practices done by actual speakers in real communicative and unrestrained situations. The paper illustrates that Tharoor in *The Village Girl* has used the conception of language variation as a stylistic device to divulge some significant societal aspects of Susheela and Sunder, the main characters of the story. Taking up Basil Bernstein's division between elaborated code and restricted code, the paper compares between Susheela as a low-class illiterate speaker to the Delhi brought up, *Malayali* Sunder. This paper hypothesizes that literary discourse, chiefly dialogues, can be treated as an ordinary language used in real and existent conversational state of affairs. The analysis is based on sociolinguistic perspectives.

Keywords: Discourse; Elaborated code; Language variation; Restricted code; Turn-turning.

Conversation is an important part of our lives and if we weigh and ponder before speaking then only it will be fruitful or else it will lose its importance. Letting someone dominate and not giving space to another person will impede our dialogue with another person. Philosopher H.P. Grice developed a Theory of the Cooperative Principle in 1975. He formulated these in the essay *—Implicature* published in the volume *Syntax and Semantics: Volume 3 Speech Acts*. To proceed with, one can reflect on Grice's remark on the prerequisites of the conversation: "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (Grice 45).

Grice puts forth that humans, while engaging in any conversation or discourse, ought to be cooperative to give the dialogues a push which in any case would not be achievable if there is simply a one-way communication. A two-way communication is always preferable wherein there is participation from both ends in terms of exchange of ideas and thoughts. Cooperative as per Grice means that the speaker is aware that each utterance, expression and statement is an apparent intervention and is an invasion of the personal rights and autonomy of the other individual and therefore for such reasons our utterances have to be shaped in certain ways so as both the parties have an agreed purpose and directions while the exchange in the conversation is taking place. Grice has given us the principle of cooperation, and his cooperative principles are a set of norms which are bound to occur in any conversation. It revolves around four maxims:

Maxim of Quantity: Be informative as required, do not say more or less, and make contribution accordingly.

Maxim of Quality: Stick to say the truth or something that is verifiable by adequate evidence

Maxim of Relation: Be relevant depending on the nature of conversation

Maxim of Manner: Avoid ambiguity or obscurity of expression and be brief and orderly

Geoffrey Leech has framed the Politeness Principle into the following maxims to study conversation and speech acts and the definitions have been explained as discussed in *Language, Discourse and Literature: An Introductory Reader in Discourse Stylistics*:

Tact-	(a) Minimize cost to other (b) Maximize benefit to others
Generosity-	(a) Minimize benefit to self (b) Maximize cost to self
Approbation-	(a) Minimize dispraise of other (b) Maximize praise of others
Modesty-	(a) Minimize praise of self (b) Maximize dispraise of self
Agreement-	(a) Minimize disagreement between self and other (b) Maximize agreement between self and other
Sympathy-	(a) Minimize antipathy between self and other (b) Maximize sympathy between self and other

Other than the above principles and theories, it is very important for us to comprehend the other key features which help in understanding the conversation better. In our daily conversation with our family members, friends and colleagues we normally observe that one person does not dominate the conversation, but each person makes an equal contribution or gets similar chance to express or contradict the other. Turn-taking is one of the important aspects in this context with regards to the conversation. Equally important is the power relation which exists between two individuals in which one ends up being strong and the other is not so expressive or competent to counterattack. This can be a case of a master vs. the slave, manager versus his employee and the older versus the younger in which the latter is less authoritative. But this does not hold true all the time as in some conversation even when the person who is less authoritative or demanding can also have a higher power relation as in case of the interviewer versus the interviewee.

Sub varieties may be sometimes class determining, class marking class identifying and region identifying and looking at the English, we can make out whether it belongs to a higher class or lower or literate or illiterate class. There are no talks about the proficiency levels as there are fewer cases of code mixing and code switching and there are no exacting sentences used in Hindi or Malayalam but only a few Hindi and Malayalam words are used.

As put forward by Thornborrow and Wareing, "Discourse is also the term used to refer to a person's or a society's belief systems and values; this is the meaning it has in a phrase like the discourse of socialism." (Thornborrow & Wareing 240)

Sunder, the protagonist, is apparently an educated, exuberant and an urban lad who is brought up in Delhi but visits his hometown Kerala for a family holiday. He can be visualized as the object of the English Education in India. Sunder the character is aloof culturally and linguistically from his hometown and the South Indian culture to which he belongs. His visit to Kerala like many of the urbanized *Malayalis* of his generation "was like a world of private inconveniences and mosquito bites, associated with family but not friends." (Tharoor). Kerala for him evoked a feeling of "green paddy fields and unpolluted air, endless card-games, succulent *idlis* and *dosas* that quite never tasted the same elsewhere, laughing girls cheerfully picking lice out of each other's hair, swaying palm trees against a twilight sky." (Tharoor).

Sunder at his village in Kerala meets Susheela and he remembers how at the Delhi University "the term for its members was *behenjis* (respected sisters), an ironic reference to the fact that no one in his right mind would try to flirt with one." (Tharoor) These girls wore floral patterned salwar kameez with nylon *duppatas* and scarlet painting was forever flaking off their nails. They chattered on buses in Hindi or Punjabi and spoke English, if at all, in an accent you could have ground *dal* with. However, in Kerala one had to allow for regional variations of dress and patios, Sunder could easily spot *behenji* at fifty places and though the word did not exist locally in Malayalam, it was clear that *behenji* was what she was. Contextual sensitivity as a part of the discourse analysis can be seen here as it is accustomed to the context in which the language is used and it acknowledges how meanings are constructed within specific cultural and social settings and features and examines the broader environment in which communication takes place.

In his ancestral place he curses for the lack of alternatives, explains that

visiting Kerala was part of renewing their roots. He even received lectures from his father on the dangers of cultural deracination. Sunder was more pertinent in his arguments as home for him was Delhi where he was brought up and not in Kerala. "He had to leave his friends and records and motorcycle behind in Delhi to vegetate with his grandparents in Kerala, eat palate-numbing quantities of coconut chutney and attempt to respond in his insufficient Malayalam to predictable jibes." (45) His father trampling in the countryside in a spotless, cream Mundu and a pair of thick-soled Bata Sandals was only the concession to his urbanity.

Sunder truly was an embodiment of the western urbanized culture as "he was defiantly wearing jeans and fish-net T-shirt." (45) The dress *salwar, kameez* and *duppata* have been regionalized for North Indians whereas Pavadam and Davani for South Indians. They do not have the knowledge of the English language and culture and therefore their dress code reflects that. This can be treated as one of the strategies of appropriation. Appropriation usually refers to the stratagems employed by post-colonial societies and its authors that allows them to use the theoretical, linguistic and academic means by the colonizers to offer their own versions of truth or ideologies to dismantle the colonizer's claim of promoting their language.

Herein we see a clash between the South versus the North and also between the parents and the kids, the usual generation gap of thoughts and upbringing. "His father gave him a shocked lecture on the dangers of cultural deracination. 'When you're our age,' he added you will be grateful we preserved your identity" (45). But as for Sunder as he was raised up in Delhi "Home for him had always been Delhi. Where he had grown up, not Kerala." (45) For Sunder "to respond in his insufficient Malayalam to predictable jibes about the length of his hair. It was altogether unbearable." (45) "When his mother's summons came Holmes and he had not been entirely successful." (45). The perception that Sunder carries about his community was also evident through these lines:

What a lot of delinquents the community had managed to produce, Sunder thought: everyone of the ladies mentioned seemed to have married a bounder, a drunkard, a wife beater, an unemployable idler or a crook unintelligent enough to have been with his hand in the till, with the prize of unfortunate being the Kollengode woman whose husband had managed to combine in his person everyone of these deficiencies. (46)

Sunder is introduced to Narayani Amma's niece Susheela. Relationships in rural areas are explained in the manner in which Susheela is introduced by his mother to him "Her mother's sister's son's daughter." (46) Such

customarily precisions are added to these kinds of relationships to give an extra degree of accuracy which will render the encounter more full of meaning to any person, here Sunder is in context. Again, we see extra degree of accuracy being added while explaining a relation "Gopan Nair's daughter - You know Gopan Nair, Kallasheri Madhavan Nair's Sister's husband, whose brother's son is working for Travancore Chemicals in Madras."

We notice the frequent use of the Malayalam word like *edathi* while referring to Kamala, further we find Narayani Amma using more of Malayalam words while speaking of the other minor characters. She takes a jibe at the younger generations and declaims that "Just as bad as Hollywood, I tell you. Why, in Karanad Chandrika chechi's very street in Chittilamchery a Nair girl had committed suicide" (46) as she had a love affair with an Ezhava boy a common farmhand, who they wouldn't have allowed in their house "the girl found out she was pregnant" (46). In another incident we get the mention by Narayani Amma of Gopan Nair's daughter who also refuses to marry as she was in love with a Rauther fellow in her class a Muslim and how this boy was beaten to quit his relation. This shows the class distinction prevalent in society and the patriarchy that existed.

Another strategy of appropriation used is the use of native/indigenous vocabulary as the writer wants the reader of any origin whether he is Indian or non-Indian, to acquaint himself with the cultural milieu and cultural lexis that a particular situation or context demands. Hindi words *Salwar Kameez* and *duppatas* are not explained. The writer chooses not to translate these words. The Malayalam words also are not explained and translated like *Rauther*, *chechi*, *Achan*, *Mundu*, *Ezhava* boy and *edathi*. These are untranslated lexemes which denote the particular culture that one is speaking about. Only *Etta* has been translated which means elder brother.

We get the experience of Delhi which highlights the difference in the lifestyle, appearance and living pattern between the rural and urban societies: "At least his Delhi, seemed to be on another planet, with its discotheques, its musical festivals, it's fun loving chicks, who modeled, who acted in plays, whose enamelled fingers snaked round his waist to hold him tightly as he raced his motorcycle down Ring road." (47) We get to notice the appearance of Susheela, who is a typically *Malayali* girl brought up in a rural village of Kerala "*Behenji* she clearly was, in her adolescent *Pavada* and *Davani*, the long skirt ensemble with a half- sari -look worn by teenage *Malayali* damsels. Her nails were clipped and unpolished, her face devoid of make-up except for the film of talcum powder patted on by every rural Keralite ---a typically *Malayali* way, all Kohl- rimmed eyes

and dimples and long black tresses that wore the sheen of years of diligent oiling.” (47)

The Indian English writer has several strategies of appropriation of the language, glossing over is one of the strategies used which means the writer gives you the word in the regional language and then he explains the same in the parenthesis bracket. *Behenji* is a glossed word followed by its meaning in bracket. *Pavada* and *Davani* are also explained separately but not in brackets like *Behenji*.

Susheela uses typically middle-class Indian English. She uses simple and short sentences: “It is beautiful”, “I am only seventeen”, and “I’m not, how do you say”. Sunder could imagine her reciting the ‘Yinglish’ sounds from a list of phonemes in Malayalam script “What those flowers are called?” Usually, we do not have a question like that. Normally a question ends with a question mark. Instead, many Indians use the interrogative form put in inverted form. Sunder uses a standard language and is more comfortable with English than with Malayalam.

Susheela is not very conversant in English and is not able to understand the expression when Sunder says: “I’m only nineteen for Christ’s sake.” (48) Sunder explains that it is just an expression for emphasizing something just like God’s sake and both God and Christ are the same and one need not be a Christian as it is just an expression. Also, he explains how the words she uses frequently (Thank you and Sorry) are also words from English. Susheela explains that they do not have any word for sorry and thank you in Malayalam language. In *Malayali* culture one is supposed to show one’s sorrow or gratefulness by normal actions and expressions whereas in English one or two words are enough to pay your debt and that’s quite easy and is the reason why she uses Sorry and thank you more often.

Other than Sunder, Susheela and others use the -ing form indiscriminately with the verbs of perception: ‘it is costing a lot’, ‘I am not knowing’, ‘I am really wanting to know’, ‘offending you, Sunder Etta?’, ‘They are wanting a good homely bride’ and ‘I am becoming eighteen next month’. These are not acceptable in Standard English, but it is a variety of English, and it reflects the regional ethos. This is another sub variety of English. Calques have also been used here as another strategy of appropriation. Star birthday and date birthday are the two calques used. “This is my star birthday, you know, according to our Malayalam calendar, not my date birthday.” (49) We do not have such things usually in English, but they are peculiar to Indian languages, cultures and contexts. Only Indians can understand

these terms.

Susheela is quite drawn towards the western and the English style and enquires "it is very English there, in the city, isn't it? I mean Western. Modern. Like England and America." (50) She adds that: "I can see you are so modern Sunder Etta. Here in the village, I know nothing of the kind of life you are leading in the big city. It must be so different." (51) Susheela has not travelled out of her village not even to Cochin, Madras or to Bombay. As Susheela was soaked in all the wide appreciation of the Delhi city, every answer seemed to elevate him in her esteem and he

was unique in terms of providing access to a world she knew ever existed. "The access he offered was entirely illusory, she even lacked the framework, the knowledge, the vocabulary to translate what she was saying into terms she could relate to evaluate. She had heard, but she had not really understood." (52)

Here, we can aptly see the turn taking concept and how the turn taking part is not equal but is more utilized by Sunder as he was the one who initiated the conversation and also took over the call control due to his exposure to language and the metropolitan culture where he was raised as compared to Susheela who was confined to the traditional values in Kerala. If we look at Grice's Principle of Cooperation, we notice that the Maxim of Quantity and Quality and Relation have been followed. According to Geoffrey Leech's Politeness Principle, in *Village Girl* we observe that Tact, Generosity, Modesty, Agreement and Sympathy aspects have been followed and practiced.

While discussing her qualifications she mentions that she is SSSL pass and has not continued her studies as her father opines that "a girl has to graduate from homework to housework." She opens up saying that she is getting married next month. "She was seventeen, barely out of petticoats." (53) Sunder extends his congratulations wondering if that was another word for which there existed no Malayalam equivalent. This highlights the problem of gender inequality wherein Susheela is not allowed to study but her brother is.

Dowry is another glaring social evil prevalent in the Indian society and because of which girls like Susheela must get ready to be married to a widower with a two-year-old daughter. She requests her father ('look Achan') to allow her to study but her father responds that after four years when she completes her studies she can't be married off. Later in the story there is a special moment between the two of them when "she had sought ad-

mission to his world, and he had taken her body.” (54) Sunder destroys “the illusions of a simple village girl, a nervous trusting young thing who called him Sunder Etta” (54) while Susheela thanks Sunder for turning a nervous girl into a woman who had touched happiness, she had not expected to be hers. Here comes the epiphany of awakening where she realizes her true self and breaks all the stereotypes and transforms into a happy and a contended woman from a coy and prudish girl.

Here, Susheela voices out her liberal feminism approach as for the first time she expresses her equality through her own actions rather than by her parents or society. “Her smile was no longer that of a nervous girl, but of a woman who touched a happiness she had not expected to be hers.” (55) She has surrendered to the colonial culture and is ready to be colonized. Identification of power dynamics and ideologies embedded within language is one of the central precepts of discourse analysis as language used herein reinforces and challenges the existing power structures which uncover the implicit biases, and reveal the dominant discourse. We can notice the Power of representation in this discourse analysis which gives prominence to the role of language in representation. This representation on a broader note examines how language helps in constructing social realities, how it shapes public opinion, and manipulates perceptions by highlighting certain aspects of the marginalized, and the weaker sex.

Language can also be seen in *The Village Girl* as a constructive identity tool as it emphasizes the ways how a language puts up and negotiates individual and group identities which at some or the other level also includes gender ethnicity and social class and at the wider level it contributes to the formation and expression of identity which can be seen in the case of Susheela. In a way it also includes the postcolonial discourse narrative as it highlights how language in colonial-era sphere perpetuates and challenges power dynamic depictions of native and indigenous cultures. It also gives rise to urban discourse and outlines language reflecting different cultural identities and social ambitions within swiftly shifting metropolitan environments as can be seen in Susheela’s and Sunder’s case.

The approach herein is innately qualitative, focusing on comprehending the profundity and degree of language rather than scientific measurements. Discourse analysis in *Village Girl* treats language as a social construct that reflects and shapes reality, emphasizing the importance of context and power relationships. Different types of discourse analysis, including critical discourse analysis, conversation analysis, Narrative discourse analysis and feminist discourse analysis, each with its own centre of attention and practice has been used to explore its different dimensions

as each sort adds a diverse facet to our comprehension of how language operates as a medium for connotation, authority, and representation.

This exploration serves as a brief introduction to the versatile nature of discourse analysis, highlighting its capability to uncover the intricacy of communication and demonstration in various environments. Beyond its instantaneous applications in *Village Girl*, discourse analysis has helped in transcending boundaries and has in many ways underscored the power of language in influencing observations, constructing authenticity, and challenging its status quo. By deep diving into the interchange of utterances, pauses, and visual cues and illustrations, discourse analysis herein *The Village Girl* has showcased its prospective to light up the concealed forces at play in determining cultural standards, public judgments, and even individualistic reflection and deliberation. Finally, discourse analysis has made us cognizant of the fact that words hold and carry enormous weightage and their insinuations gets extended far beyond syntactical and semantic notions. Thus, discourse analysis has helped in shaping the narratives that characterize our lives and brings into light our journey of personal narratives.

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