

Form Content Synchronization with Special Reference to Beau Grande's Textuality in Wole Soyinka's "Telephone Conversation"

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ABSTRACT

One significant observation of new criticism is the form of a text subsumes the content, i.e. the content is inseparably realised in the textual structure. Such a realization is achieved in Soyinka's poem, "Telephone Conversation". This article substantiates such synchronization by applying Beaugrande's concept of 'Textuality'. Such rigorous application of a theoretical structure as textuality, brings out the underlying racial discrimination of the text very effectively.

De Beaugrande and Dressler (1981) have defined 'Textuality' as a set of 'theoretical units' which succeed in making connections wherever communication events occur. They have proposed seven standards of textuality – cohesion, coherence, intentionality, acceptability, informativity, situationality and intertextuality. These principles are constitutive principles of textual communication.

KEYWORDS

Cohesion; Coherence; Intentionality; Acceptability; Informativity; Situationality; Intertextuality.

The general intertextuality makes one think of booking accommodation through a telephone call. The intention and acceptance are typical. The African needs accommodation and uses as polite a language as is possible with the white landlady to persuade her to give him the accommodation

The text type shapes the modest cohesion. The short half and incomplete sentences that are exchanged between the lady and the prospective tenant vouch that it is a telephone conversation. The questions are all left to the dominant voice of the white landlady, printed in capital letters, and the submissive black keeps

answering politely, till he is irritated and blows his top.

What they really exchange in the form of words and sentences is only the tip of an iceberg. It is implicative of an entire social process. The apparent sociability of the participants in the discourse conceals and reveals the racial discrimination. 'This public hide and speak' breaks down when the landlady is upset at the enormous delay at her finding the true identity of her caller and the 'other' – the victim – when he is provoked into the first and last long utterance. The episode itself is narrated to the reader with more details and feelings in

a reporting voice. Even here the language is brief and striking and precise, characteristic of the electronically mediated discourse. The introductory verses would serve as an illustration as to how the writer packs a lot of information in a brief span.

'The price seemed reasonable, location Indifferent. The landlady swore she lived Off premises. Nothing remained But self-confession.'

The coherence centres on the topic of intercultural relations in the fifties of the previous century. The words dark and light are euphemism for black and white; brunette and blond are other synonyms to refer the same. The narrative voice is equally conversational bringing out the urgency of sharing with the reader his excitement of his encounter with the white landlady.

The words: self-confession, caught, shamed, surrender, and pleaded indicate the black voice's self-conscious inferiority complex. Pressurised good-breeding, revelation, clinical assent, truthfulness changed her accent – these expressions associated with the white landlady indicate the tonal variations in the lady as she is led on to know more about the 'other'.

After an elaborate ritual of socialised 'talk' the landlady places the receiver back with a bang marking the denial of accommodation to the black. Only

the process of the electronically mediated discourse helps conceal the social attitudes. So the informativity is a process of defamiliarisation of what the readers already know. For all the sophistication and 'impersonality' of the transaction the truthfulness of the attitudinal clash appears at the end.

The situationality is the feeling of helplessness experienced by the black. This social point can be supported by specific intertextual reading. Blake's 'Little Black Boy', Longfellow's 'Slave's Dream' and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* will reveal the unresolved dilemma of modern democratic societies with their inclusive theory and exclusive practice.

The contemporary relevance of Soyinka's poem becomes apparent from a recent article in *The Hindu* dated March 23, 2014. In Hasan Suroor's article "A Black and Non-white Issue", the writer quotes a familiar scene that renders the subtext that a non-white person -- even if born and brought in Britain -- cannot be truly British. Dressed up as 'friendly banter' the racist remark explains all:

So, where are you from?

I am British.

No, I mean from where?

From Manchester

No, where are you from originally?

NOTES

Cohesion – connections among linguistic forms like words or word-endings

Coherence– connections among the 'meanings' or 'concepts'

Intentionality – covers what speakers intend

Acceptability – what hearers engage to do

Informativity – concerns how new or unexpected the content is

Situationality – concerns ongoing circumstances of the interaction

Intertextuality – covers relations with other texts, particularly ones from the same or a similar 'text type'.

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