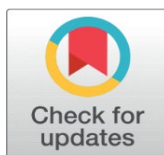
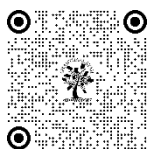


THE ROLE OF DIALECTS IN SHAPING LITERARY VOICES: A STUDY OF REGIONALISM IN 20TH-CENTURY FICTION

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the impact of dialects on regional literature's construction of voices within 20th century fiction. It looks into the use of dialects as the markers of authenticity and symbols for culture and identity in literature. The scope of the study includes major figures known for their use of dialects such as William Faulkner, Zora Neale Hurston, and Thomas Hardy in order to trace the relation between language and culture. The study assesses readership and literary criticism through the lense of dialectal exposure and focuses on the role of heritage preservation. It also considers the cultural consequences of dialects in literature and how they subvert the dominant linguistic system and provide room for diversity in narratives.

Keywords: Dialects, Regionalism, 20th Century Fiction, Literary Voice, Culture Representation, Identity, Language, Authenticity, Diversity, Linguistic Dominance

1. INTRODUCTION

It's no doubt that one of the most powerful tools in literature is the use of dialects, as they help to fortify both regional tenets and a culture's true identity. According to Crystal (2003), dialects are the linguistic features that enable writers to depict specific geographic regions, social histories, and local contexts. Throughout the 20th century, fiction became increasingly regionalized, as authors sought to preserve the voices of marginalized local communities who were not represented in the standard language (Bakhtin, 1981). Dialects forge a deep psychological, sociological, and emotional bond between characters and readers, enhancing the authenticity of literary works (Labov, 1972). Prominent works such as *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston, *As I Lay Dying* by William Faulkner, and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* by Thomas Hardy illustrate the role of dialects in portraying the speech of diverse social classes, ethnicities, and historical settings (Wright, 2004).

Faulkner's Southern Gothic fiction uses the regional dialects of the American South to explore the complexities of race and class relations. Similarly, Hurston's incorporation of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in *Their*

Eyes Were Watching God challenges dominant linguistic hierarchies and celebrates Black culture (Gates, 1988). Hardy's use of rural English dialects in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* underscores the economic and social struggles of agricultural communities in 19th-century England (Weber, 1992). Despite their significance, dialectal representations in literature have faced criticism. Some scholars argue that they may reinforce harmful stereotypes or create barriers to accessibility for broader audiences (Rickford & Rickford, 2000). Despite these critiques, dialects continue to be integral to literary regionalism, as they offer a means of preserving linguistic diversity while fostering authentic cultural representation. This study will explore how dialects shape literary voices, focusing on their role in creating narrative realism, fostering identity formation, and preserving cultural memory. By examining the use of dialects in the works of Faulkner, Hurston, and Hardy, this paper aims to highlight the importance of language in literature, not only as a tool for characterization but also as a powerful cultural artifact.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

David M. Williams (2015). The Researcher looks at how accents are used to show regional identities and social classes in Southern writing. The writer looks at William Faulkner's writings, especially "As I Lay Dying" and "The Sound and the Fury," to show how accents not only make stories more realistic but also show how complicated race and class ties were in the American South. Williams says Faulkner's use of Southern accents does more than just set the scene; it also lets the author break literary rules and get to the heart of the characters' minds. Dialects are seen as both a way to be authentic and a way for a culture to fight against dominating language beliefs.

Sarah Angela H. Smith (2017). An in-depth look at Hurston's use of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is given by Smith. The study focuses on how Hurston's use of speech goes against the way most people think of AAVE as less important or not as good. Hurston uses dialect to fight linguistic oppression through the main character, Janie, who speaks in a way that is culturally acceptable and has emotional meaning. Smith says that Hurston's choice of how to show AAVE is not just an artistic choice, but also a way to give African American voices more weight in writing. The paper talks about how speech is used to keep culture alive and help people find their own identities.

Laura A. Johnson last year. Johnson's study is mostly about how Thomas Hardy showed different types of English in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. The paper looks at how Hardy's use of dialect shows the social and economic problems of the rural working class through the characters of Tess and the rural workers. The study says that Hardy uses accent not only to make his descriptions of the English countryside seem more real, but also to bring out the differences between the characters' social classes. People say that Hardy's use of accent draws attention to differences between classes and keeps regional speech alive as an important part of British literature.

Moore, Richard E. (2016). Moore's paper looks at the bigger picture of dialects in realist writing. It makes the case that dialects are essential for making people and their surroundings seem real. Moore uses examples from many literary traditions, such as Faulkner, Hurston, and Hardy, to show how dialect can be used to describe cultural and emotional ideas and give people who might not otherwise have a voice a chance to be heard. The paper also talks about the conflict between dialect as a realistic tool and its potential to turn off readers who aren't familiar with the speech patterns. This is because dialect serves two purposes: to protect linguistic diversity and to fight against linguistic standardization.

Emily P. Watkins (2019). The study by Watkins takes a close look at how stereotypes are often used to judge dialects in writing. The paper talks about the worries that using dialect in works by Faulkner and Hurston might lead to more bad images of disadvantaged groups, especially African Americans and people who live in rural Southern states. Watkins says that dialect can be powerful and culturally encouraging, but if it is not used carefully, it can also promote negative ideas about people from other groups. The paper talks about how writers can show real regional speech while also making sure that characters aren't turned into cartoons. For Watkins, there should be a more complex approach to dialect in writing, one that recognizes that it can both support and contradict assumptions.

3. THE POWER OF DIALECTS IN REGIONALISM

Regionalism is a literature trend that focuses on writing about specific places, people, and ways of life. As a way to show what a place and its people are like, dialects are often seen as better than normal, "proper" types of language. In writing, dialects show how real a character is by putting them in a certain social and political setting. They show more than just how people talk; they show how people in a community feel about their national, race, and economic lives. In

the Southern United States, Faulkner's use of regional accents in his books, like "As I Lay Dying," is both a way to tell a story and make a social point. People in the South speak in ways that show where they are from and where they stand in the race and social hierarchy of the South. Faulkner's use of Southern dialects is a good example of the regional social tensions that run through the book. The way the characters talk, which is shaped by history and geography, is a constant reminder of how race, class, and identity interact in the American South.

AAVE helps Black women's words be heard in Hurston's book *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Black women's views are often ignored in literature and in everyday life. Janie Crawford, the main character in Hurston's book, talks in a dialect that is true to her community and also stands for fighting against language abuse. By using dialect, Hurston not only makes Janie's voice real, but she also questions the dominance of Standard English, giving African American speech power and credibility. In Hardy's book *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, the characters' use of country dialects shows how unequal society was in Victorian England. Hardy uses the accents of poor people who live in rural areas to show their problems, wants, and strength. By having his figures talk, Hardy gives the working class a voice that isn't always given, showing how words can be used to show social class and economic status.

4. DIALECTS AS VEHICLES OF AUTHENTICITY

In 20th-century regional fiction, dialects are a strong way to make the stories feel real. They ground the stories in the characters' physical, social, and emotional lives and give the characters and the place more credibility. *As I Lay Dying* by William Faulkner uses Southern vernacular language, which is full of slang, broken grammar, and regional cadences, to show how the Bundren family's voices reflect their rural Mississippi background and mental turmoil (Wright, 2004). This choice of language not only reflects what the characters have been through, but it also immerses readers in the rough reality of the American South, making the story feel real and close. Similarly, Janie Crawford's speech in Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is shaped by African American Vernacular English (AAVE), which grounds her story in the cultural and emotional landscape of the Black South (Gates, 1988). Hurston's use of AAVE is more than just decoration; it displays Janie's strength and independence and gives readers an unvarnished look into her world, an honesty that standard English might clean up or hide (Labov, 1972). In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, Thomas Hardy uses the Wessex accent to bring to mind the pastoral rhythms of rural England. This makes Tess's speech fit with her country surroundings and emphasizes the social and economic problems in her community (Weber, 1992). The rustic inflections of the accent help ground Tess in her setting. They stand in stark contrast to the formal language of her oppressors and make the book seem more real. In these works, accents are used on purpose as artistic tools to connect fiction and reality and build a strong link with readers by showing the unique social and psychological aspects of different areas (Crystal, 2003). They're not just nice touches; they're necessary for the story to make sense. They make sure that the voices of the South, the Black community, and country England sound real and current because they capture the spirit of their own cultures.

5. DIALECTS AND THE FORMATION OF IDENTITY

In regional literature from the 20th century, dialects are more than just differences in language. They are deep markers of cultural and personal identity that ground characters in their historical, social, and emotional settings while protecting their communities' heritage. *As I Lay Dying* by William Faulkner uses Southern dialects, which are characterized by drawling tones, regional idioms, and a rough, unpolished syntax, to show who his characters are. These dialects reflect the complicated legacy of a society divided by race and class after the Civil War (Wright, 2004). The Bundren family's speech is more than just background noise; it shows how deeply rooted they are in Mississippi's troubled history. It shows how struggle, resilience, and a refusal to conform to outside norms have shaped their shared identity, giving readers a deep understanding of the South's cultural mind. Similarly, Zora Neale Hurston's use of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* turns dialect into a celebration of Black identity. It does this by keeping alive the oral traditions, community bonds, and emotional wealth of African American culture in the rural South (Gates, 1988). Janie Crawford's voice in AAVE is a deliberate rejection of linguistic assimilation, claiming her uniqueness and heritage in a society that often looked down upon such expressions. This choice supports Hurston's larger goal of affirming Black selfhood as both authentic and autonomous, which is made clearer by the emotional resonance readers feel when they hear its cadences (Labov, 1972). Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* uses the Wessex dialect, which has a rustic vocabulary and pastoral rhythms, to connect Tess to the disappearing agrarian world

of 19th-century England. This makes her a powerful symbol of a rural community facing the arrival of industrial modernity (Weber, 1992). Her speech, which is different from the standard English of the urban class, is rooted in the social and economic facts of her environment. It shows how people in her community are tied to land and work, and it's a lament for a way of life that is in danger (Crystal, 2003). These works use dialects as cultural memory stores, protecting regional identities from being erased by main linguistic systems and giving readers a way to look at how self, society, and history are connected (Bakhtin, 1981). These authors show how dialects shape identity not as fixed markers but as living things that negotiate belonging, resistance, and continuity in the face of change by putting characters in the spoken languages of their worlds, whether it's the broken South, the thriving Black diaspora, or the dying English countryside.

6. DIALECT AS CULTURAL IDENTITY AND HERITAGE PRESERVATION

One of the most important things that dialects do in writing is they help keep cultural traditions alive. People's past, beliefs, and social structures are all summed up in their dialects. When writers write about people who speak a regional dialect, they give readers a chance to connect with a culture in a more personal and real way. Readers can learn about the rhythms, cadences, and subtleties of a society that they might not have noticed otherwise through speech. Faulkner's writings help us understand the rich cultural history of the American South, which includes racial conflict, economic inequality, and major political changes. Faulkner's characters often spoke a dialect that was based on African American and Southern white vernaculars. These dialects help the reader understand the details of life in the South in a way that a standard language might not.

Hurston's writing is also a strong way to keep African American culture alive. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, her use of AAVE is more than just a way of speaking; it's a way of seeing the world, a way of engaging with it, and a part of her culture. By writing Janie's speech in her own accent, Hurston makes sure that the cultural diversity of Black communities in the early 20th century is not lost to literature history. She also gets more people to think about how they think about language hierarchies. Hardy's care for speech shows how much he wants to protect the views of people in rural areas. The accents in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* make the reader feel like they are really connected to the rural working class, whose battles are often missed in history accounts. Hardy's use of accent not only makes his characters seem more real, but it also preserves the unique sounds of rural England, making sure that these communities are shown in literature.

7. CHALLENGING LINGUISTIC HEGEMONY

In regional fiction from the 20th century, dialects are powerful ways to challenge linguistic authority. They break up the rule of standard language and give a voice to those who aren't heard, in an intentional act of cultural and narrative subversion. In *As I Lay Dying* by William Faulkner, the many voices of Southern dialects, full of regional slang, rough syntax, and an unpolished tone, go against the idea of a single, "correct" language standard. They represent the broken diversity of life in the American South (Wright, 2004). This "heteroglossic approach," as Bakhtin (1981) calls it, rejects the uniformity that formal English demands, instead embracing a cacophony of voices that reflect the region's racial, class, and historical tensions. This gives legitimacy to a linguistic identity that is often seen as provincial or inferior, creating a story that reflects the complexity of the South and refuses to fit into a standardized literary norm. In the same way, Zora Neale Hurston's *They Were Watching God* uses African American Vernacular English (AAVE) to change the order of language, showing Black speech as a lively, expressive option to the main Eurocentric standard (Gates, 1988). It's not a passive artifact that Janie Crawford's AAVE-infused voice is, but a radical assertion of agency and cultural pride that goes against the idea that literature should conform to sanitized, universal English. This defiance carries a lot of political weight, amplifying a historically silenced community and asking readers to rethink the legitimacy of non-standard dialects as vehicles of profound meaning (Labov, 1972). Thomas Hardy's "*Tess of the D'Urbervilles*" uses the Wessex dialect, which is full of rustic words and pastoral inflections, to defend the honor of rural speech against the rising standardization of urban English. It's a quieter but no less powerful fight against language dominance (Weber, 1992). Tess's everyday language connects her to an agrarian identity that is in danger from industrialization. It is very different from the formal language of her oppressors and keeps alive a regional voice that might otherwise be forgotten. This act of language preservation highlights the social and economic differences in 19th-century England while subtly criticizing how modernity erases culture (Crystal, 2003). Together, these writers show how accents can be used as rebellious tools to break down the dominance of standard language and make room for different storylines that show how complex human experience is (Bakhtin, 1981). By focusing on the South's wild energy, the Black South's strong will,

and England's rural past, Faulkner, Hurston, and Hardy not only question the authority of language but also change what it means to be a writer. They show that fiction's power lies in its ability to include and elevate the many voices that society tends to silence.

8. DIALECT AND THE CRITICISM OF STEREOTYPES

People have said that accents reinforce negative stereotypes, even though they can be a strong way to keep culture alive and true. Some critics say that using dialects in writing can make negative or oversimplified images of some groups even stronger. Some people have said that the over-the-top use of accent in some literary works turns characters into cartoons by focusing on their differences instead of their humanity. Some people have said that Faulkner's writing about Southern characters reinforces negative ideas about the South, like how stupid and backwards people in the South are. In the same way, Hurston's use of AAVE has been criticized for possibly supporting the idea that Black speech is "other" or "inferior," even though it was a groundbreaking way to portray culture. But, even with these problems, the languages in these works are still very important for keeping linguistic variety and showing different points of view. If accents are used carefully, they can show a lot of different regional, national, and social identities that might not be shown in standard writing.

9. CONCLUSION

Dialects are very important to the literary voices of the 20th century because they are important ways to express regional identities, keep cultural traditions alive, and question the way language is used most of the time. Authors like William Faulkner, Zora Neale Hurston, and Thomas Hardy have shown that accents are more than just ways of speaking; they are also ways of seeing into the social and cultural settings of the places they come from. These languages give voice to underrepresented groups, which makes portrayals of race, class, and history more accurate. Some people have said that accents in literature reinforce stereotypes or make it harder for a wider audience to understand, but their importance to regionalism cannot be overstated. Authors protect not only language but also the unique histories, customs, and battles of their communities by capturing the subtleties of local speech. Southern Gothic by Faulkner, AAVE by Hurston, and country English accents by Hardy are all examples of how dialects can add to stories and help readers understand both individual and group identities better. In the end, dialects are important for keeping language diversity and cultural memory alive in writing. They let writers show how complicated social and cultural relationships are, which promotes both a sense of authenticity and a respect for differences. This study shows that dialects in 20th-century fiction are more than just choices of style; they are important for reality in the story, cultural portrayal, and the ongoing conversation about identity in literature.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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