

Analyzing Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* in Terms of Bakhtin's Notion of "Heteroglossia"

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Abstract—This study aims at investigating the nature of Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia, in Toni Morrison's novel, *The Bluest Eye*, and how heteroglossia is achieved in Pecola Breedlove's interaction with others in terms of beauty and personal aspiration in the novel. Pecola is the protagonist of the novel, *The Bluest Eye*. The study's main argument is whether heteroglossia has a significant role in revealing the hidden and implied intentions and meaning in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* in terms of beauty and personal aspiration. In order to prove the main argument of this paper, the researcher discusses Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia and attempts to apply it to Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. The study illustrates Bakhtin's celebration of the novel as a genre defined by its dimensions to include verified and multiple meanings best expressed in Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye* due to the novel's Chapterization, the narrators' voice, and Pecola's recognition of beauty standards. The paper also shows how Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* is being categorized as a dialogic novel according to its heteroclit structure, and the narrator's voice.

Index Terms—Bakhtin, Heteroglossia, *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison, polyphony

I. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to investigate how Heteroglossia can emerge in the interactions between the characters of different races in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. This study attempts to explore the role of Heteroglossia in Pecola Breedlove's interaction with others in terms of beauty and personal aspiration in the novel.

The term Heteroglossia concerns about the coexistence of distinct varieties within one language. Originally, the term is taken from the Greek language, *ετερογλώσσια*: *hetero* (ετέρο means 'different' and *glossa* means tongue or language). Heteroglossia literally means, 'varied-speechedness'. It was firstly introduced in 1934 by the Russian well-known literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin in his paper [Slovo v romane] that was published in 1973. The essay was edited by Michael Holquist; translated into English in 1981 by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist under the book title *Discourse in the Novel. The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin* (Holquist & Emerson, Trans., 1981).

Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895-1975) was a Russian literary theorist and philosopher of language whose wide-ranging ideas significantly influenced western thinking in cultural history, linguistics, literary theory, and aesthetics. After graduating from the University of St. Petersburg (now St. Petersburg State University) in 1918, Bakhtin taught high school in western Russia before moving to Vitebsk (now Vitebsk, Belarus), a cultural center of the region, where he and other intellectuals organized lectures, debates, and concerts. There, Bakhtin began to write and develop his critical theories (Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopedia, 2022, March 3. Mikhail Bakhtin. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mikhail-Bakhtin>).

Having a remarkable impact by introducing several theories on various levels, Bakhtin was considered an influential 20th-century critic, whose works inspired scholars in many disciplines including linguistics, Political and Social Theory, Philosophy, Sociology, Anthropology, and even Psychology.

The fact that he was born in Orel, Russia, made it possible for Bakhtin to join the Russian Formalists; a school of literary criticism that emphasized the functional role of literary devices. Although Western academic circles have become familiar with the intellectual work of Mikhail Bakhtin only a decade after his death in 1975, his great influence and achievements are still remarkable and considerable even in our present times (Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopedia, 2022, March 3. Mikhail Bakhtin. Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mikhail-Bakhtin>).

According to Rivkin and Ryan, Heteroglossia is the base and the main factor dominating the function of meaning in any utterance. It is an effort to conceptualize the reality of living discourse. Many linguistics believe that heteroglossia plays a great role in systematizing language, regardless of the fact of the reality of things (Rivkin & Ryan, 2004).

Heteroglossia is an attractive and thoughtful literary concept to get to the main heart of the novel. The Russian linguist Mikhail Bakhtin explains the concept of Heteroglossia in his book *Discourse in the Novel*. Bakhtin identifies heteroglossia as "another's speech in another's language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way" (Bakhtin, 1981. p. 324).

The notion of Heteroglossia created critical arguments in many literary works. According to Bakhtin, Language is not a neutral medium that directly goes and matters one's property of the speaker's objectives; it is generalized and over-generalized with the objectives of others. Requisitioning it, forcing it to adopt one's objectives and accents, is a hard and complicated method (Bakhtin, 1994).

According to Bakhtin (1994), Heteroglossia benefits two speakers at the same time and achieves two different purposes: the direct intention of the character who is speaking and the refracted intention of the author.

The main argument of this study is to prove the crucial role of heteroglossia in revealing the stated and implied intentions and meaning in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* in terms of beauty and personal aspiration.

II. QUESTION OF THE STUDY

Q1. How Heteroglossia is illustrated in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*?

Q2. How Heteroglossia is used in Pecola Breedlove's interaction with others in terms of beauty and personal aspiration in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*?

III. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Unlike previous studies that studied the diversity of literary concepts and opinions in Toni Morrison's novels in general and *The Bluest Eye* in particular, this study is limited to analyzing the heteroglossia in Pecola Breedlove's interaction with others in terms of beauty and personal aspiration and how heteroglossia can develop in the interactions between characters of different races in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. Simply, earlier studies investigated the basic ethics: Bakhtin and dialogic identity construction in four Morrison novels (De Voss & Kangira, 2019).

Mankhia and Alhousseini tried their best to simplify stylistically how polyphony is contextualized in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. Jiang (2007) discussed Toni Morrison's Body Beauty in *The Bluest Eye*. Smith (2000) examined Irony, metaphor, and whiteness in *The Bluest Eye* (Mankhia & Alhousseini, 2020).

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

Mankhia and Alhousseini (2020) investigated stylistically some of the linguistic characters and values of Morrison's *The Bluest Eyes*. The central purpose is to consider stylistically contributing a voice to the restrained and controlled reality of depression for both black men and women. Moreover, to explain stylistically how polyphony is contextualized in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*.

According to Mankhia and Alhousseini, the novel's main focus is that black people are useless and worthless because they lack beauty standards. Pecola Breedlove, the protagonist of the novel falsely believes that if she has blue eyes, her life will be better and less complicated. Pecola Breedlove thinks that only the bluest eyes will make her desirable and adorable. She is quite sure that these blue eyes will enable her to be respected and dignified by her family, relatives, friends, and society (Mankhia & Alhousseini, 2020).

De Voss and Kangira studied Bakhtin and dialogic identity construction in four Morrison novels. The value of this article is marked by its studying of Morrison's fiction as an alternative to inequality by testing the self's "self-interest". The main goal of this research is to articulate Morrison's depiction of self's identity creation as an inevitable dialogism that functions as the basic means for a theory that explains the notion of humaneness, arguing that the other is not distinct from, but rather central to the self (De Voss & Kangira, 2019).

According to Rachel, Bakhtin's dialogism arises as a philosophical idea about the nature of meaning rather than as a linguistic concept. Dialogism focuses on the two-sided aspect of meanings, but not in any sense naturally about two people. Dialogism could be perceived differently as a relationship between utterances; the dual or multivoicedness of a single utterance; or a relationship between different intentions, values or ideologies (Rachel, 2008).

Oudija argues that the novel is not restricted by the authority of one language, which is precisely and simply translated into the novelist, but multilingualism is based on the multiplicity of narrative characters and the different points of view everywhere. The levels of linguistic pluralism, in the sense Bakhtinian, are not effective and procedural in the language of the novel, unless they are uttered and spoken in a conversational way and style, i.e. by conveying the voices of others and reproducing the prevailed languages of society. What is active in the style of the novel is when the novel reveals the words of narrative characters, or is interspersed with expressive species, it enables the novelist to complete the narration of the sound, which achieves the narrative of the monologue narration voice and tone (Oudija, 2019).

Zbinden mentions that Bakhtin discusses the different ways in which other 'dialects' have been suppressed. He keeps on believing that centripetal and centrifugal forces are at work within a single natural language. He assumes that the case within one natural language is comparable to and can be characterized by the clash between the various dialects or languages in a polylingual society. Thus a single natural language is not only stratified into dialects proper but also into social-ideological languages. This heterogeneity of one natural language is called heteroglossia. Heteroglossia thus stands both for the common social nature of language as a shared code and for the individual appropriation of language

in use. The notion of speech genres further progresses the concept of heteroglossia and adopts the notion of stability in the language (Zbinden, 2006).

Omari and Jum'ah employ Bakhtin's concept of "Heteroglossia" in Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad*. The results showed how Bakhtin appreciates the genre of the novel for its extent to include documented and variety of meanings, and how Atwood's *The Penelopiad* is a dialogic novel because of its foregrounding of dialogic relations between its heteroglot structure, the narrators' voices and perspectives, and the social reaction of the authorial context (Omari & Jum'ah, 2014).

Toni Morrison is an American novelist and college professor. Her first well-known novel *The Bluest Eye* was firstly published in 1970. Toni Morrison got internationally reputed when was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993. Her *The Bluest Eye* was published at the height of the Black Arts Aesthetic Movement of the 1960s and 1970s (Jimoh, 2002).

Toni Morrison's novels focused on the process of storytelling in establishing the development of subjects. He believes that the competence to relate stories is significant to an individual's survival (Ortega, 2011).

In American literature, the characterization and image of blackness and black people have historically held a marginal and lower status, while the characterization and image of white people and whiteness held a high and upper status. Therefore, Morrison's fiction changes this representation, placing white people in the role of the other. Morrison successfully could present Pecola Breedlove's black issues in light of this shift and transition. Meanwhile, white readers are somehow obliged to witness the consequences of being positioned as others. To place white characters as others, Morrison's fiction employs irony, metaphor, stereotyping, pronoun use, and argumentum hominem (Smith, 2000).

Cabrera evaluated James Joyce's *Ulysses* from a Bakhtinian point of view to bring out the implications of Joyce's wide use of "heteroglossia". The results assured and proved that analyzing all the voices engaged in the narrative shows the different mechanisms and meaningful connotations and implications of the dialogical interaction throughout the text (Cabrera, 1996).

V. METHODOLOGY

The current study adopts an argumentative approach. To achieve the aims of this study, the Bakhtinian notion of "Heteroglossia" will be applied to Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* in a trial to get a clear understanding of the novel depending mainly on linguistic evidence.

VI. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Bluest Eye (1970) is Toni Morrison's first published novel. The setting of the novel takes place in the 1940s in the industrial northeast of Lorain, Ohio, and narrates the story of Pecola Breedlove, a young African-American woman who is ignored and marginalized by her community and the larger society. Wholly and apparently, people regard Pecola and her dysfunctional family as collapsing outside the limitations of what is natural and, thus, as not preferable.

According to Bereuter, in Bakhtin's thought, it is the notion of heteroglossia that characterizes language as intrinsically stratified into various socio-ideological languages. These languages, and, every letter in heteroglossia, definitely target two opposing forces (Bereuter, 2017).

It is worth saying that the context of heteroglossia is accomplished in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* by employing the following criteria: firstly, the characterization of the novel; secondly, the narrators' voices. Thirdly, Pecola's consideration of beauty standards.

The Bluest Eye is divided into four parts; the name of each part is connected with a particular season. The opening chapter in the novel *The Bluest Eye* begins with autumn and ends with summer. Moreover, these four parts of the novel are divided into 11 chapters. The division of the novel into four parts for seasons serves, with no doubt, to build Pecola's tragedy in a year duration. It also foreshadows the cycle that occurred repeatedly in their town: the opening chapter of the novel begins in the Autumn season of the year when Pecola was raped. The MacTeer sisters planted the marigolds the next Fall and it happened that both Pecola's baby and the flowers died and could not survive. This reoccurrence of tragedies may have happened because their community was still respecting and appreciating the beauty standard. The painful circle of self-hate had not been broken. In a heteroglot reading, such kind of chapterization would help the reader to realize the importance of the plot (Gomes, 2016).

In *The Bluest Eye*, the characters associate their message with readers through long conversations regardless of the fact that they may have different attitudes. On one hand, in *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison uses a variety of voices and narrators who collaborate and associate with each other to introduce their life experiences, adding to the novel a kind of real feeling and a good sense of touch. On the other hand, Morrison focuses on the great influence and profound impact of race and sexism on black females through these multiple voices and narrators. Black females in their quest to be acknowledged by white society lose their own identity. Morrison assumes that black females are torn apart between their dissolved and lost black community and the illusion of the standards and values of the whites who overwhelm the blacks and disturb their minds.

The accomplishment of beauty standards is compared and measured by the African American tradition, which is considered a likely healthier alternative. Claudia declares that she did not want white dolls for Christmas, and if anyone had asked her what she really wanted, she would have said:

I wanted rather to feel something on Christmas day". The real question would have been, "Dear Claudia, what experience would you like on Christmas?" I could have spoken up, "I want to sit on the low stool in Big Mama's kitchen with my lap full of lilacs and listen to Big Papa play his violin for me alone." The lowness of the stool made for my body, the security and warmth of Big Mama's kitchen, the smell of the lilacs, the sound of the music, and since it would be good to have all of my senses engaged, the taste of a peach, perhaps, afterward (Morrison, 1970, p. 21-22).

In the novel, heteroglossia is identified as a structure of different planes or layers of narrative that interfere with one another. Claudia MacTeer is the main narrator in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (Claudia is a fighter who stands and rebels against adults' cruelty and violence over children and against the black community's idealization and admiration of white beauty standards). Apparently, other secondary narrators tell readers about their own life experiences of displacement, such as Cholly (Pecola's father), Geraldine (A middle-class black woman), and Pecola (The protagonist of the novel). (Blackledge & Creese, 2014).

Pecola's story is narrated through the eyes of multiple narrators. The main narrator is Claudia MacTeer, a childhood friend with whom Pecola once lived. Claudia narrates from two different perspectives: the adult Claudia, who concentrates on the events of 1940–41, and the nine-year-old Claudia, who tells the events exactly as they happen (Martin, 2020).

According to the various mechanisms, such as a new narrator or a sudden change in focalization, *The Bluest Eye* maintains on changing the point of view of the narration. If the first half of the novel concentrates mostly on Claudia and an omniscient narrator's point of view, the second part of the novel is less inadequate to use these kinds of devices, since we (as readers) are fully aware of both of Pecola's parents' stories (Bakhtin, 1993).

The Bluest Eye is sectionalized and fragmented not only in its structure; but also in its narrative voices. We have the voices of Claudia as a little girl, Claudia's adult insights, and a third-person narrator who narrates stories of the Breedlove family and the community around them. Moreover, we have these characters' points of view, Soaphead Church, Cholly, and Pauline, the presence of Pauline's first-person narration by the end of the novel, a dialogue (or monologue) of a descended-into-madness Pecola and her imaginary friend (Gomes, 2016, p. 29).

Why don't you look at me when you say that? You're looking drop-eyed like Mrs. Breedlove.

Mrs. Breedlove look drop-eyed at you?

Yes. Now she does. Ever since I got my blue eyes, she looks away from me all of the time. Do you suppose she's jealous too?

Could be. They are pretty, you know.

I know. He really did a good job. Everybody's jealous. Every time I look at somebody, they look off.

Is that why nobody has told you how pretty they are? (Morrison, 1970, p. 195).

In such dramatic speech, says Bakhtin, "there are two voices, two meanings, and two expressions" and heteroglossia serves as "another's speech in another's language" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 324).

Two voices are in dialogue: Pecola and an imaginary friend, whose voice is written in italics. The friend harshly rebukes Pecola scrutinizes her face in the mirror closely and regularly, and therefore she cannot stop admiring her new blue eyes. The imaginary friend is always eager to go out and play, and Pecola charges her for being jealous. Then Pecola agrees to go outside, though, brags that she can look at the sun without blinking. Pecola cheerfully tells her friend that now, with no doubt, she has got the blue eyes, no one notices and looks at her, not even her mother (Moses, 1999).

Me neither. Let's talk about something else.

What? What will we talk about?

Why, your eyes.

Oh, yes. My eyes. My blue eyes. Let me look again.

See how pretty they are.

Yes. They get prettier each time I look at them.

They are the prettiest I've ever seen.

Really?

Oh, yes.

Prettier than the sky?

Oh, yes. Much prettier than the sky. (Morrison, 1970, p. 201).

Pecola's conversation with her imaginary friend shows her realization and awareness of what has happened to her. As a result, the novel successfully obtains its dialogical frame in both Pecola's and an imaginary friend's voices, which are divided into two layers, external and internal (Jocuns, 2018).

According to Omari and Jum'ah Bakhtin argues that this type of dialogic conflict is regarded as an extraordinary and valuable feature of the novel. That is what makes the representation of heteroglossia in the novel special and

distinguished, mainly by employing together multiple languages in the novel's capacity. To be a heteroglot, the novel basically depends on both the authorial context and the narrators (Omari & Jum'ah, 2014).

The novel's principal concept is that black people are ineffective and useless because they lack beauty standards. This belief or assumption was inherited by the blacks from their ascendants.

"Adults, older girls, shops, magazines, newspapers, window signs all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured" (Morrison, 1970, p. 20).

In this quote in the novel, Claudia identifies the exact meaning of what is called the ideal beauty for everyone: a white girl with blue eyes and yellow hair. These characteristics and merits are supported not only by commercials but also by Claudia's family and the local community. Frieda and Pecola are both admirers of Shirley Temple and enjoy playing with dolls that come up with this characterization and identity. Accepting such attributes as the only characteristics that define beauty as something rooted in culture leads to the fact that there is no doubt that someone else can be beautiful.

Mankhia and Al-Husseini point out that Morrison assumes that racism is the primary source of domination and its disastrous and harmful effects on black society in general and on black families, in particular, are great. She argues that the black's preoccupation with American standards of beauty leads them to self-hatred and self-prejudice (Mankhia & Al-Husseini, 2020).

Joannou mentions that Morrison has a different concept about identifying beauty and about measuring whether we are beautiful or not. She believes that the idea of concentration on a way of evaluating self-worth is silly and totally white, Morrison declares, "The concept of physical beauty as a virtue is one of the dumbest, most pernicious and destructive ideas of the western world" (Joannou, 2000, p. 167).

One might inquire why Pecola regards herself to be so unattractive, Morrison answers:

"Long hours she sat looking in the mirror, trying to discover the secret of the ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored or despised at school by teachers and classmates alike" (Morrison, 1970, p. 39).

Morrison's mirror reflects white society, which causes her to suffer and feel inferior in front of other attractive young girls. Only one thing will help her undergo and forget her feeling of inferiority:

It is "a miracle, she would never know her beauty. She could see what there was to see. The eyes of other people" (Morrison, 1970, p. 40).

At some fixed point in time and space, he senses that he need not waste the effort of a glance. He does not see her, because for him there is nothing to see. How can a fifty-two-year-old white immigrant storekeeper with the taste of potatoes and beer in his mouth, his mind honed on the doe-eyed Virgin Mary, his sensibilities blunted by a permanent awareness of loss, see a little black girl? Nothing in his life even suggested that the feat was possible, not to say desirable or necessary (Morrison, 1970, p. 48).

In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola neither can be seen nor can be heard by the candy seller:

"He does not see her, because for him there is nothing to see". "But her blackness is static and dread. And it is the blackness that accounts for, that creates, the vacuum edged with distaste in white eyes" (Morrison, 1970, p. 49).

What is not seen in this novel, is connected with the importance of sight, it is as important as what is seen. In the case of Pecola, her self-perceived lack of beauty and because others see her as ugly as well, she dreams desires, and even prays, to become absent, to vanish away:

"Please, God," she whispered into the palm of her hand".

"Please make me disappear." She squeezed her eyes shut (Morrison, 1970, p. 48).

As a result, the novel successfully achieves its dialogical model in both Pecola's voice and Morrison's voice within two layers, external and internal. Such a model concentrates on Bakhtin's rare form of discourse called dialogized heteroglossia. In such discourse, says Bakhtin, "there are two voices, two meanings, and two expressions" and therefore, heteroglossia serves as "another's speech in another's language" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 324).

Throughout the novel *The Bluest Eye*, the damaging direct impact of the construct of physical beauty overpowers the self-esteem of almost every character. Pecola's story describes the complex structure of the black community's self-esteem system in the face of dominant white cultural norms. Pecola believes that if her eyes were blue, she would be more attractive and charming and that she would have a new perspective on the world (Coupland, 2007).

Pecola hides behind her insanity. She repeats Claudia's words:

"We were not free... We were not compassionate ... Not good ... We courted death to call ourselves brave, and hid like thieves from life" (Morrison, 1970, p. 203).

According to Jiang, the lie of body beauty colluded by the gender discourse and race discourse in the patriarchal system damages Pecola's fragile and feeble heart and anesthetizes the delicate mind of the black community members (Jiang, 2007).

VII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It's worth mentioning that *The Bluest Eye*, according to both Bakhtin and Toni Morrison, represents language as a social phenomenon rather than an abstract system. The present study has enabled us to have a comprehensive and clear understanding of the nature of Bakhtin's concept of Heteroglossia, in Toni Morrison's novel, *The Bluest Eye*, and how Heteroglossia is employed in Pecola Breedlove's communication with others in terms of beauty and personal objective

in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*. Bakhtin's appreciation of the novel as a genre identified by its extent and scale to add certified and multiple meanings are best expressed by Toni Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye*.

The significance of this study lies in the fact that it opens the door to applying Bakhtin's concept of Heteroglossia in other novels. Moreover, this study recommends that further research is needed to investigate and analyze this novel in terms of other Bakhtin concepts such as polyphony, and chronotope.

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