

DISCURSIVE ETHNOCENTRISM IN MORRISON'S *SULA*: A STUDY OF RACIAL SPEECH ACTS

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Abstract

This qualitative study aims to investigate the role of discursive ethnocentric practices of the white used to exploit the black community in Toni Morrison's Sula (1973), which presents tragic condition of marginalized black living in postcolonial context. The applied theoretical model is based on Judith Butler's postulates about racial speech acts presented in her famous book, Excitable Speech (1997). For the purpose of analysis, relevant excerpts are taken through purposive sampling technique from the selected novel. In the light of the analysis it is found that the racial acts, which are the aftermaths of socio-political determinations, become discursive practices and nurture hostility among different groups in a society. The people, who foresee their benefits and interests in highlighting these differences, try to coin specific terms which help create an environment of ethnocentrism in which the identity is formed or deformed in binaries. The study also underlined some relational speech acts with racial speech.

Key words: Ethnocentrism, Discursive racism, Racial speech acts, Postcolonial context, Exploitation, Black community, Sula.

1. Introduction

There are different practices used to communicate ethnocentric differences to people belonging to marginal races such as representational racism, ideological racism, interactional racism and discursive racism. The categorization of people under different sects, cultures, creeds and ideologies takes place mostly under the influence of power, especially discursive power structures. When racial differences are expressed repeatedly as well as emphatically through hateful verbal expressions by the powerful agencies against people from other races, the hate behind these practices spreads at macro level. Progressively such hateful utterances become discursive practices in that society by developing the discriminative gaps. In response, the psychologically injured people communicate their counter hate to the oppressors, and in this manner the racially provocative speech acts play a significant role in the creation of an environment of ethnocentrism. Hence; ethnocentrism is primarily a consequence of different socio-political and cultural constructions, which categorizes people of similar characteristics into one group and of dissimilar characteristics into another group. There is often a stereotypical partiality observed by the people, who deliberately highlight these differences for various socio-political purposes and to create and maintain a gulf between "Us" and "Them". In this regard people are divided into two major groups: the oppressors and the oppressed. This study aims to examine the capacity of racial speech acts used to create ethnocentric atmosphere through discursive racism between the white and the black presented in Toni Morrison's *Sula*, written in postcolonial context. *Sula* (1973) is a recount of destitutions and sufferings of the black community living in Ohio between 1919 and 1965.

Social discrimination on the basis of racial differences had affected their domestic life in such a manner that they emerged in different subverted roles in their domestic domains. Morrison labelled this novel as "a nigger joke" (p. 10) in the very beginning.

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In the very beginning of the novel, the novelist shares the black's status in the USA, "Niggers was dying like flies" (p. 69). This statement shows the black's worthlessness and their death on large scale. Their death is not only at physical level but it is also at other levels such as social, psychological, moral and economic. The black are seen challenging their existential denial in every walk of life.

The concept of universal humanity believes in equality, brotherhood, peace, justice and welfare for all people. Several leaders such as Abraham Lincoln (1809–1865), Nelson Mandela (1918–2013) and Rosa Parks (1913–2005) declared their thoughts against racial discrimination in their speeches. Martin Luther King (1929 – 1968) who spoke to uplift the status of minorities in the USA in his famous public speech titled, "I Have a Dream" (1999), yearned for days when people would not be judged on the basis of the colour of their skin, rather they would be credited, such as in getting admission in the colleges and job market, on the grounds of their moral standing. Adam Fairclough in his book, *Martin Luther King, Jr.* discussed King's views on racial harmony and reconciliation of people disintegrated into different sects. There would be a time when sons of slaves and sons of slaveholders would sit together around a table in an atmosphere of social justice and equality (Fairclough, 1995, p. 90). His views were termed as policy of colour blindness, (Derwing, Rossiter, & Munro, 2002; Thomas, 2004) which could not differentiate between people on the basis of racism and ethnocentrism.

Judith Butler believes in the performatory aspect of language so firmly that she does not hesitate in declaring that there is no identity outside language. She believes in the powerful role of surrounding environment of people, which plays a very active role in the development of their personality traits by affecting their psyche. According to her, when the speakers in authoritative positions declare someone's status, they activate a series of interpellations by which the addressee is transitively subjectified. She believes in the performatory aspects of racial discourse because according to her the differences are internalized through their performance. Hence speech not only acts as a vehicle to carry thought, it acts as a tool to control the listeners' acts, which are displayed through their behavior in a variety of situations. These speech acts are repeated ritualistically and consequently they generate a social discourse. In this regard the one, who has initiated this discourse, takes the form of an abstract speaker later on: "The power to 'race' and indeed, the power to gender, precedes the 'one' who speaks such power, and yet the one who speaks nevertheless appears to have that power" (Butler, 1997, p. 51). She further illustrates that the subjects' job is not only to constitute the racial differences but to highlight and maintain those differences with repetitions of hate slurs.

In *Excitable Speech*, Butler contends that racial speech acts are used to restrict "current notions of universality" and promote the racial differences (p. 89). She terms racial speeches as tools of harassment, which are used to deprive the target people of their fundamental rights. Many researches such as (He, 2017) (Ton, 2018), (Morgenroth & Ryan, 2018), and (Jenkins & Finneman, 2018), etc. explored Butler's notions about gender construction, racial matters and subjectification of the masses. Racial speech acts of all possible illocutionary forces are used to categorize human beings into different communal groups. No matter in what manner a racial speech act is performed, it has definite logical form to regulate its conditions of realization as well as to form a relation with hate speech in the same situations. The racist descriptions communicate a message of hate and excite the listener's mind with serious traumatic agonies, and in response to this hatred the victims cultivate the same hatred and repulsion for the speakers. In this way the racist ideologies take roots in the society. Judith Butler, in this regard

quotes Kendall Thomas(2002), who assumes that subjects are transitively racialized by agencies in power.

Toni Morrison also believed in the performatory aspects of language by demonstrating them in her novels. She contributed to the painstaking enterprise of upgrading the social prestige of the black community through literary texts of her novels. The language she uses clearly reflects her conflict with the social, political and cultural hold of the white Americans who had mortified the basic human rights of her community. At the socio-political levels the black were deprived of all those benefits by the powerful agents, which promise good fortune to people in any society. Under different slogans, raised by the ruling class, they were ranked as inferiors in every field of life. In Afro-American society, presented in Toni Morrison's novels, the black seem to be fighting for their social esteem and recognition against the duress of the white. She does not like to offer clear situations in her novels rather she imposes this task on her readers, whom she prompts to participate equally in the meaning making process. In an interview with McKay, she declares: "I don't want to give my readers something to swallow. I want to give them something to feel and think about, and I hope that I set it up in such a way that it is a legitimate thing, and a valuable thing" (1983, p. 421).

In *Sula*, Morrison has presented the destitution of the black community between the two world wars. She excited the black leaders to raise their voice to condemn racial discrimination in the USA. The success of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and The Voting Right Act of 1965 owes greatly to the efforts of the black writers such as Alice Walker, Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, Alex Haley and Toni Morrison, etc. In their novels, many of the black characters find themselves desperately alone. This feeling of nothingness formulated by societal values of race, class and gender are also found in other black female writings, such as in *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker. In another novel, *Black Misery*¹, Hughes (1969) presented racial prejudice against the black. In *If Beale Street Could Talk*² Baldwin (2006) highlighted problems of oppressed minority. In the same manner, in *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*³ Haley (2016) recounted the hardships of the black during the slavery period, when they were bought and sold in the slave markets. In order to rescue her black characters from their pessimistic approach towards life Walker likes to invoke in them an optimistic belief of a spirit inhabiting them, which promises everything to them. In a TV interview with Charlie Rose (January 19, 1998), Morrison claims, "Living with aids is easy than with racism" because according to her the badge of ugliness hurts. In spite of all these hurdles the black are strong enough to strive for their identity and recognition on individual merits. In this novel, this desire of social recognition is more visible in the female characters such as in Nel and Sula. In their process of self-discovery they have to fight a battle inwardly as well as outwardly. Inwardly they feel themselves tied to different types of responsibilities to their family members, especially to their children, while outwardly they have to resist social injustice due to racial prejudice against them by the powerful agencies.

1.1. Research Questions

¹ Originally published in 1960

² Originally published in 1974

³ Originally published in 1976

1. To what extent racial speech acts are used to establish an ethnocentric atmosphere to exploit the black community in different sectors such as socio-political, economic and military in *Sula*?
2. To what extent, it can be said that the intention behind the racial slur is to highlight differences in order to deprive the weaker communities of the privileges, the stronger hold.
3. What possible speech acts can emerge from the practice of racial speech acts?

2. Research Method

2.1 Theoretical Underpinning

In this qualitative study, Judith Butler’s observations on racial speech acts, presented in her famous book, *Excitable Speech* (1997) are used as the methodological framework for the purpose of analysis of the selected texts. In all the racial speeches, there is a transfer of hatred, which has been historically transmitted against the targeted racial groups in a society. It is the job of the powerful agencies to constitute, establish and then maintain power relations between the strong and the weak, majorities and minorities, oppressors and the oppressed, and exploiters and the exploited, and so on.

2.2. Data Collection

The data were collected after purposive sampling from Toni Morrison’s *Sula*, in which the white authoritatively deprive the black, who are forced to obey the decisions imposed upon them. The research criterion in choosing this novel and subsequently in selecting appropriate extracts is based on their relevance with the aim and objectives of the study. In this regard, the criteria of the selected excerpts are pre-defined, hence purposive. According to Adler and Clark (2014, p. 121), “In purposive sampling, the researcher selects sampling units based on his or her judgement of what units will facilitate an investigation”. The research of such a study tends to be subjectively largely due to the fact that it is done in accord with the researcher’s own practices and relations. However; the mode of racial speech is defined by the perspective of the words which agree to adequate impartiality to the researchers to designate and appraise the speech acts and their special effects. The data were collected to study ethnocentric exploitations in three major sectors: economic, social and army as is represented in the figure below:

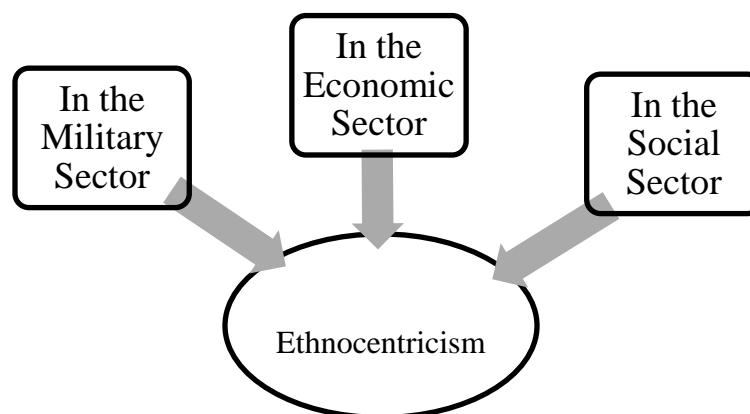


Figure 1: Analysis Design under Racial Speech Acts in *Sula*

3. Analysis and Discussion

In the contexts of Morrison's novels all the black are perceived as archetypal representations of wickedness. Being Negroes, they are represented at the bottom of social hierarchy. The hateful racial slur used by the powerful agencies establishes a variety of social standards in the society to deform the image of the weaker in order to justify a variety of exploitations. Once these constitutional norms are established then literary texts, art and social media, etc., all work together to project these images. The identity of the masses and their assigned social roles interpellate their psyche and they act and behave accordingly. In this regard, the concepts like blackness, whiteness, ugliness, beauty, racism, gender, civilization and savagery, etc. are not biological and physical traits rather they are socially constructed beliefs and tags, which have been established rhetorically by the powerful agencies with the help of discursive racism in specific socio-political contexts. For instance, in the contexts of the selected novel, the oppressed black have lost their capacity to describe a sense of "me" or "I" in a socially categorized environment. Their identity is shaped by dominant discourse, which is used to situate them at the level of subjects. Their poor marginalized position puts before them many questions, such as Who am I? What I have to do? How I have to act, and what I have to be? These questions spread through the length of the oppressed people's entire life.

a. Ethnocentrism in the Military Sector

The feelings of having no sense of identity and nihilism are represented in *Sula* effectively. For instance, after the First World War, Shadrack a black soldier, becomes aware of the emptiness in his life. Although the soldier archetype appears in films and literature as a warrior, a leader, a commander and a savior, etc., yet this black soldier is afraid of life. His situation is just like the poor orphan, Cholly, in *The Bluest Eye*, who, wrapped in newspaper was left all alone. The slaves after freedom in *Beloved* also share the same feelings of social rejection. Shadrack, is ready to encounter unexpected threats in the battlefield, is unable to face the terrible outcomes of racial discrimination in his surrounding environment. His slogan "National Suicide Day" (p. 7) shows heroic qualities in his character. Like a true rebellious leader, he calls other nationalists to commit suicide as a revolt. This act of collective death shows his resistance to racism. Although he is a subverted image of a soldier archetype, yet he is able to look beyond the confinements of time and space by thinking of a collective death at national level.

Excerpt 1: "Twenty-two years old, weak, hot, frightened, not daring to acknowledge the fact that he didn't even know who or what he was... with no past, no language, no tribe, no source, no address book, no comb, no pencil, no clock, no pocket handkerchief, no rug, no bed, no can opener, no faded postcards, no soap, no key, no tobacco pouch, no soiled underwear and nothing nothing nothing to do... he was sure of one thing only: the unchecked monstrosity of his hands" (p. 17).

Analysis

This text describes a black soldier, Shadrack who returns from the World War 1, but fails to get any reward for his services. After he is released from the hospital, he feels as if he has no self-recognition, no identity, no home, no family and no sense of belonging. This text is the representation of authorial attempts to highlight the issues of victims of racism in America, who are destined to nothingness in their life, a perfect example of *other-eliminating* acts. In March, 1988, Toni Morrison described the myth of nothingness in an interview with City Limits

magazine: “We live in a land where the past is always erased and America is the innocent future in which immigrants can come and start over, where the state is clean. The past is absent or it’s romanticized”. In the present text, she tells her readers about the feelings of a black soldier, Shadrack, who feels devoid of everything including the ordinary possessions of everyday life, sense of belonging to some habitation, individuality, desire, and motto. The phrase “no language” indicates his speechless situation. His voice has been suppressed. In all of her silent cries there are inherent desires of social acceptance by becoming an individual participant without markings of racism. This internalized suppression causes him to realize the societal differences, which is reflected through *self-recriminatives* leading to *self-formulation* and then subversion in the archetypal image of a soldier.

The feeling of having nothing in life triggers the semantic field of nothingness. It prompts Shadrack of other useful commodities, such as a comb, a handkerchief, a note pad, a tobacco bin and cloths, etc. Among all the depravities, the most horrifying ones are related to his feelings of being homeless on a land of foreigners, the USA. He starts considering first the possible tokens of his identity and recognition, which are necessary for one to endure in a society and then he thinks about the basic needs of life. The repetition of the modifier “nothing” with “to do” indicates that being jobless is the worst condition, since one can re-build and re-gain everything by virtue of work. This situation refers to those American policies under which the black are denied jobs on the basis of the demerits of their colour of skin, which is another example of *other-eliminating* acts by the centralized white.

There is an inconsistent fusion of multiple objects. All the adjectives, used to describe Shadrack’s physical features as “Twenty-two years old, weak, hot, frightened” show his feelings of helplessness, since he is incapable of facing hatred due to racism. He is not alone to face the horrors of life rather he is the representative of all the black, who share the same lot in the hostile environment categorized in racial boundaries. He is a citizen of a democratically progressed republic, but he has “no past”, because he feels that his roots are in Africa, and he with other black people has been brought to serve the white, to fight in the war at the front and to live a homeless life after that.

Shadrack, after bearing in mind his shortcomings shifts to acknowledge “the unchecked monstrosity of his hands”. Generally hands are associated with dignity of labour but in this context, when they are empty and have nothing to do, they become symbol of sin and cruelty, which is a perlocutionary effect of feelings of socio-economic exploitation under racial discrimination. The traits of subversion are quite visible in this character. Morrison has related the feelings of being monstrous with the feelings of self-rejection.

Shadrack’s character is a subverted archetype of a soldier. At the universal level, this archetype is associated with the images of being bold, strong, courageous, savior, ready to accept challenges, etc., but this soldier who is a psychological victim of racial discrimination is “weak” and “frightened”. He declares to celebrate “National Suicide Day” (p. 7) in order to overcome sudden threats in life. Due to such fears he tries to console people in pain by uttering only one word, “always” (p. 146). He as a soldier can be used as fuel in the artillery, but he lacks those traits of soldier, which are collectively shared by people in all the societies.

b. Ethnocentrism in the Economic Sector

The powerful people are in an authoritative position to shape the identities of the weak in order to justify their exploitations at socio-political and economic levels. For instance, in *Sula*,

the direct communication between the white and the black is very rare. However; communicative events between them reveal that the former appear to be very diplomatic, but on the other hand the latter are extremely incapable to argue. The analysis of *Sula* under Judith Butler's notions of racial speech acts shows how the black characters are victimized at the hands of the white oppressors. In the novel, the black are confined within the valley called "Bottom", ironically, the bottom of heaven. It is a less fertile land, which is allocated to the black to cultivate it. This text represents treacherous and wicked nature of a "good white farmer" (p. 11), who promises his slave to award him a piece of land at the bottom. When the slave is able to complete hard ordeal assigned by his master, and when the time comes to fulfil his master's words, the latter deceives him by allocating him barren and mountainous land. The slave gets the hilly land, where irrigation is not possible even after killing physical labour.

Excerpt 2: "The master said: "Oh no! See those hills? That's bottom Land, rich and fertile". "But it's high up in the hill," said the slave. "High up from us," said the master," but when God looks down, it's the bottom. That's why we call it so. It's the bottom of heaven- best land there is" (p. 11).

Analysis

This text presents socio-political positioning of the black in comparison to the white. The speech acts here are *self-celebratives*, since they reflect the white master's self-celebration of his political and economic power. Contrarily *existential-eliminatives* because the white master expresses his illocution to deprive the black slave of economic gains. A major factor behind black's destruction is whites' greediness for wealth. Although the black slave definitely knows that it is an infertile land, he is not in a position to raise his voice against this economic injustice. The master is so wicked that he blends two contradictory terms "hills" and "bottom" together in order to prove mischievously the hills and valleys equally important. The slave objects because he gets confused between fixed binaries with opposite meanings: top and bottom.

Additionally, in this speech event the master believing in linguistic vulnerabilities of different terms, intermixes top and bottom with each other. In a very clever manner, he subverts the archetypal images of high mountains and fertile valleys. He wants to go back from his promise of awarding the slave land on the "bottom" near the Ohio River. Use of the rhetoric of religion by the white master indicates that he has no faith in religious truths and ethical moralities. In order to convince the slave that it is a "bottom land", "when God looks down" from the above, he generates ethical link with materialistic hunts.

The use of metaphor "It's the bottom of heaven" implies that the black will be rewarded only in heaven, since on the American land they will not be able to get economic benefits as a reward for their services. In response to all their depravities in this world they are destined to get the "best land", but in heaven. For their worldly benefits, the white are ready to establish a relation between the black and the heaven. Otherwise in all other situations, they perceive the black as inherently evil, sinners, and criminals. Toni Morrison describes this unfair distribution of land, which shows that the black are destined to meet failure after their killing efforts on the land, which will never allow the black flourish: "the nigger got the hilly land, where planting was back-breaking, where the soil slid down and washed away the seeds and where the wind lingered the winter" (p. 5). The repetition of "where" by the novelist has intensifying effects on her readers. Due to such unfair distribution of resources, the black do not trust the white. These feelings are described by Jude, who while talking to Sula communicates his hate for them:

“White man running it—nothing good” (p. 96). Additionally, the whites’ greed for wealth and power shows that they are ready to bargain the heavenly bliss with the black. In this regard all the positive traits of the white being civilized, moral, refined are merely an eye wash. Their speech acts as well as their physical acts are aligned for the exploitation of the weak by constructing different discursive practices such as race, black, uncivilized, etc.

c. Ethnocentrism in the Social Sector

In *Sula*, lives of the black people have been drastically affected by the stereotypical racial behavior of the white Americans. The whole society of America depicted in the novel is shown as divided into two groups, just like two separate and quite different compartments of the train. According to Butler (1993, p. 181), all racial speech acts not only work to highlight differences among groups of people, rather they establish their identities as “white”, “black” or “brown”, etc. The book titled, *Telling a Tale Untold-Brookfield, Twenty*, gives such accounts from Morrison’s life at Howard, “She had to sit in the back of city buses and would have been refused services if she had tried to eat at white restaurants. The district had separate drinking fountains for “Whites” and “Coloured” and separate public libraries” (2002, p. 30). This treatment makes the black realize that the white in question could not tolerate the placement of black at the spaces specified for them. Morrison also remembers a little Italian boy, who made fun of her by addressing her “Ethiopian, hee hee hee, you Ethiopian, you.” Morrison asked her mother, “What is that?” Her mother told her that it is an African country.

The existence of both the communities is realized in relation to drastic environment of ethnocentrism, which is pervasive. The novel presents many accounts to project racial oppression. One such account is related with the train compartments which brings shame to a black female passenger, Helene Wright. Helene, with her young daughter travels to New Orleans to attend the funeral of her grandmother. She by mistake overlooks the plate, which contains “COLORED ONLY” (p. 20), and gets to the apartment, fixed for the white people. The White conductor appears and in a very humiliating manner rebukes her publicly for this offense. He abuses her by using humiliating words such as “gal” in order to make her realize her inferior socio-racial rank. She in response accepts her denigration, makes apologies and hence confirms her subservience. The Black people standing around are quite helpless to protect a woman of their own community.

Excerpt 3: “The conductor let his eyes travel over the pale yellow woman and then stuck his little finger into his ear, jiggling it free of wax. “What you think you doin’, gal?” Helene looked up at him. So soon. So soon. She hadn’t even begun the trip back. Back to her grandmother’s house in the city where the red shutters glowed, and already she had been called “gal.” All the old vulnerabilities, all the old fears of being somehow flawed gathered in her stomach and made her hands tremble. She had heard only that one word; it dangled above her wide brimmed hat, which had slipped, in her exertion, from its carefully leveled placement and was now tilted in a bit of a jaunt over her eye” (p. 25).

Analysis

This text is loaded with bold *derogatives*, commands, and rude gestures of the white conductor and perlocutionary effects of insulting discourse on the victim’s mind. The novelist not only describes the dialogic representation of the event rather she projects the informal and uncivilized manners of the white conductor, when he addresses Helene rubbing her ear with his

smallest finger. His verbal and non-verbal assaults in the form of rude manners as well as his offensive words exhibit the underlying ugliness of the white discourse hidden behind the mask of civilization. There is an overt denigration of the black woman, when she is addressed as “gal”, a badge of severe degradation. In the same manner his bullying acts of moving his eyes on her face and stirring his ear with his finger nail while talking to a female passenger are reflections of his over confidence or a reflection of his superiority complex. Through his act of harassment, Morrison has sarcastically attacked the civilized face of the white community. In her interview, she confronts racism, “If you can only be tall and because somebody is on your knees then you have a serious problem and my feeling is white people have a very serious problem” (December 20, 2015). Collins (2002) quotes Alice Walker, who discovers that in the USA and Europe, black women have been used as pornographic “outlet” for centuries: “We need only think of the black women used as breeders, raped for the pleasure and profit of their owners” (Walker, 2004). These pornographic images of black women as source of pleasure for men and breeders objectify them as having animalistic characteristics. All these images are associated with violence and oppression, which are the basic themes of pornography presented explicitly as well as implicitly by Afro-American writers such as Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and Zora Neale Hurston. These presentations of passive women through pornography have been repeated several times in the events triggered by racism and sexism in the contemporary world. For instance, in *Beloved*, the characteristics of Sethe’s figure as being sub-human are echoed in Hottentot Venus’ exhibition in France: “Her movements had something brusque and capricious about them, which recall those of monkeys” (Qureshi, 2004, p. 296).

In the selected dialogic conversation both the addressor and the addressee are conscious of their social status, which makes the utterances a successful performative. The black develop many types of psychological complexes due to the aggressive behavior of the dominating culture of the white. When they come in contact with the white authority, they readily submit themselves. The knowledge of the self and the other enables the powerful gain confidence and on the other hand, it makes the weaker lose it. In line with the similar notions, Jacques Lacan asserts that the subject’s mind is always under some idea, which brings him down to the subjective position easily. He argues that the powerful discourse successfully identifies the distinguishable positions of the subject and the object: “It misrecognizes its object as the same as its ‘self’” (Campbell, 2004, p. 16). In the present situation, the drastic effects of self-realization as a woman from a weaker community arouse in Helene the feelings of fear and make her hands tremble. The process of fixing identities is not only based on the realization of colour of skin rather a variety of titles is given to people to award one group and to deprive the other. In the same manner, the white conductor in the train insults Helene because she is sitting in the apartment, more privileged and reserved for the white.

Words have great capacity to wound people. In most of the cases they cause the victims feel fear, shame and insult. In this communicative event, the perlocutionary effects of the insulting discourse on the victim in the novel are described by the narrator in an effective manner. The taunting behavior of the conductor makes Helene feel demeaned and helpless since her whole body is enveloped under its effects. The adverbial phrase, “So soon, So soon” indicates her nervousness as well as her quick readiness to surrender before his power. There is a picture of self-deviation of a decent woman after her insult. This one word “gal” is enough to unfix her hat on her head, to unfix her hands, and to unfix her mind, and to lose control over her body and consequently she begins to tremble hard. The metaphorical representation of

displacement of “wide brimmed hat” signifies her humiliated state of mind, since all the head coverings are signs of integrity and decency of people, especially of women. In *Excitable Speech*, Butler quotes Charles. R Lawrence III, who terms racial speech as a “verbal assault”, interpreting its effect as getting a slap in the face, whose damage is prompt, which is sometimes so severe that it provisionally confounds its object (p. 68).

Racial speech acts help sustain and reiterate the hierarchy of power and ideological standards in a society as predominant tools, controlled by powerful agencies. Agency in most of the cases is an abstract concept which occupies a fundamental position in the contemporary political and dogmatic thoughts. In this regard, Laura M. Ahearn explains that “Agency refers to the socio-culturally mediated capacity to act” (Jaspers, Verschueren, & Östman, 2010, p. 28). In the light of these notions, it is assumed that the individuals are framed into discursive subjects under the effects of conforming discursive language. In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (1990) Butler contends that it is quite impossible to study social status of people without analyzing the socio-political framework, which is formulated using racial speech acts by powerful agencies. In this regard not only the socio-political constitutions are framed but the identities of people are also constructed. These established norms modify the collectively shared archetypal roles of people. Furthermore, the psychological torture, they receive in the form of racial slur from their oppressors, degenerate their personalities and they appear to be quite different from the societal notions of archetypes. Morrison in her interview with Charlie Rose on January 19, 1998, claims, “racism hurts and can destroy you”. She acknowledges the injurious effects of racial speech and asserts that these notions are constructs generated through performatives.

Mariangela Pallandino in her essay, *History, Postcolonialism and Postmodernism in Toni Morrison’s Beloved* (2008), states that Morrison wrote her novels not only about the practices and the effects of slavery on African black in America but also addressed these issues at broader level, for all such malpractices of oppression and their evasion all over the world. In an interview with Bonnie Angelo, Morrison affirms this fact as follows:

I thought this has got to be the least need of all the books I’d written because it is about something that the characters don’t want to remember, I don’t want to remember, black people don’t want to remember, white people won’t want to remember. I mean it’s national amnesia (Angelo, 1989).

The following table presents different lexical-semantic features categorized into different sections. A list of emerging speech acts is also given.

	Use of Determiners / Used for surveillance	Deictic Markers / Used as markers of otherness	Use of Adjectives / Used as noun modifiers	Verbal Dichotomy / Used to reflect gestures, irony, similes	Emerging Speech Acts under Racial Speech Acts
<i>Excerpt 1</i>	The, one, his		Twenty-two years old, weak, hot, frightened, daring, soiled, unchecked	No past, no language, no tribe, no address book, nothing to do	self-recriminatives, self-formulatives, subversive
<i>Excerpt 2</i>	The, those, that,	Bottom-top,	Bottom,	Bottom of	Self-celebratives, ,

	it	God-us	rich, fertile, high, best	heaven	other-eliminatives
Excerpt 3	<i>The, all, that, it</i>	<i>He-she, present-old</i>	<i>Pale, yellow, little, red, old, wide, brimmed, leveled</i>	<i>Eyes travel over, It dangled above</i>	Derogatives, self- deviatives, Gestural

Table: 1: Lexical Semantic Features of Racial Speech Acts

Conclusion

It is examined that in *Sula* the victims of racial slur, the black characters lose their trust on the oppressors and try to regain their lost social status and recover their self-identities. The unfair treatment of the white produces the feelings of hatred and suspicion among the people of the black community. There is lack of love, devotion, sacrifice and loyalty towards each other due to the effects of social marginalization at the macro level. In many situations in the novel, it is observed that the black characters suffer mostly at the hands of the white, who have deprived them of their basic rights by manipulating such laws, norms, standards, which could throw them out of the spheres of all the privileges. Although there is a rare appearance of white characters in the novel, because of which there is occasional interaction between both types, yet the speech patterns of the black characters reflect a sense of hatred and social discrimination directed towards the white community. Their bitter experiences with the ruling class make them realize their social position as second class citizens. They are not impressed by the white rather they have anger and complaints against them. They do not trust them, they do not idealize them and they do not consider them superior to them in any sense. Instead they find them treacherous and wicked creatures, who hanker after materialistic pursuits only. In most of the cases, they have to surrender their economic interests and social prestige at the hands of the powerful agencies, but simultaneously they get aware of the treacherous attempts of the oppressors. Some of the black show resistance to the socio-political and economic exploitations and try to emerge as resolute figures and hence shape their personalities under the transformational effects on their psyche, whereas others show subversion in their archetypal roles. The study also examined that the discourse of “the other” cannot be read at the level of language only, since discourses based on the social elimination of minorities or the weaker communities affect the society implicitly at the psychological level. The emerging speech acts in relation to racial speech include *self-celebratives, other-eliminatives, self-recriminatives, self-deviatives, self-formulatives, derogatives, gestural and subversives*, which will pave way for further development of the speech acts theory.

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