

**LINGUISTIC FUNCTIONS OF AMERICAN DIALECTS IN THE FILM ADAPTATION
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În articol se face o analiză comparativă și contrastivă a limbajului operei literare „The Help” de K.Stockett cu versiunea cinematografică a acesteia. Sunt analizate, din punct de vedere gramatical și stilistic, aspectele dialectului afro-american utilizat în ambele variante. De asemenea, sunt comparate formele discursului utilizate în varianta originală a romanului și în cea adaptată. Particularitățile folosirii dialectului afro-american sunt specificate prin evaluarea devierilor gramaticale și structurale în contextul dezvoltării personajelor literare și redării mesajelor ambelor texte.

The indisputable merit of a literary work is primarily its language value and impact upon the reader's perception of the world rendered by a piece of fiction. The linguistic representation of factual or fictitious information is always shaped by the requirements of a literary genre which adopts specific traits to evince both the distinct properties of the narrative and the background of the characters partaking in the plot. Therefore it is a fact generally accepted that the verbal shaping of a piece of literary fiction, novel in particular, can predetermine the process of identifying its overall semantic, structural and hermeneutic aspects in order to avoid preconceived value and other judgments upon the actual meaning of a text.

Since most of the contemporary novels enjoying worldwide popularity are in the majority of cases adapted for the screen, it is only natural that the XXIst century American novel should become part and parcel of the alleged process, as well as its underlying basis. Apart from touching upon and often openly addressing the social and political issues which played and still have their central part in the evolution of the US history with its multicultural facet, the contemporary American novel is often represented as the core component of defining the varieties of the language itself, as well as their social and stylistic value, especially within the boundaries of written discourse. Thus, the diversity of dialectal variations incorporated into a literary piece can be regarded as a merit of the latter, with the capacity of literature to thus generate a broad variety of images and symbols to be considered.

The cinematic adaptation, though commonly understood as only secondary to its literary source and judged by the canonic adepts of literary criticism, can be viewed as an effective tool of further reading into the ideas of a novel, their subsequent revision, reinterpretation and a method of enhancing the reading and evaluation of a literary piece. Therefore, the intertextual links can be more easily established once the adaptation comes into play, alongside the symbolic elements of the work, which are often discarded or taken for granted while dealing with the primary source [Cho, p.1]. Consequently, while the language specifics of the dialects are retained in the adaptation, or enhanced for that matter, they can render the characters' background, ethnicity and social status with escalating intensity, keeping account of the miscellaneous genre of the film version, which naturally makes use of the audio-visual means to achieve the effect desired.

Still, the cultural acceptance of a variant of the language can also vary depending on the general outlook upon the status and roles of its bearers, as well as upon the historical conditions of its formation. Thus, the impact of the African American variety on the General American English language variant, as well as upon the evolution and diversification of literature, remains a disputable matter. The primary reason for that is its overall linguistic status. In many cases it gets a belittling treatment on the part of the American linguists, who often approach it on the reductionist basis. As Ph. Strazny asserts, many names have been attributed to it depending upon the periods of the US history, when terminological distinctions were doomed as either acceptable or not, which may speak for themselves. Thus, the African American variant was termed African American Vernacular English proper, Negro Nonstandard English, Black English Vernacular, and the recent term accepted as generalizing, which comes as a portmanteau of 'ebony' and 'phonetics', is that of Ebonics [Strazny, p.14]. Whatever the term naming the dialect might be, it continues to be attributed to the variety encompassing the variant spoken by the less educated African American ethnicity of the South other than the coastal Georgia or South Carolina. The umbrella term coined by the contemporary scientists to identify the variant is that of an ethnolect, which, out of all aforementioned, appears the most justifiable.

A valuable addition to redefining the status of the African American ethnolect was attributed by G. Pullum, who developed the study on whether it should or should not be doomed to the lower level of only a slang uneducated variety of General American. The assertive hypothesis of the author was that not only is the African American Vernacular a full-fledged variant of the American Language, but it can by no means be given a critical status of a certain substandard, otherwise speaking, slang or taboo contaminator of the standard American English language. The linguist affirms that what is commonly conceived as wrong by a specific community of the language bearers on the one hand can be re-evaluated by another community, and, by 'tacit agreement', be given the status of the standard, as is with AA [Pullum, p.41]. In fact, what may be acknowledged true is that GA relates to AA in terms of a syntactic dialect accepted as the basic one, and what one might deal with coming across the two are merely the speech community sectors with specific divergences accepted as a norm by one variation and as a deviation from the norm by the other [Pullum, p.45].

The genre of the novel thus largely contributes to embracing suchlike categorization and developing the assumption in terms of the contribution to the overall artistic language impact. The semblance of reality, or the strong impression of it can be imparted to a piece of literary fiction once so important a language sector, or an ethnolect, comes into play defining the character imagery and unveiling the social, political or historical issues which are thus tackled from a more critical, linguistically framed angle. If any novel, especially the modern American novel of the present day, is to be considered a form of art easily identifiable and crucial to contemporary literature, its claim to realism can only gain more ground owing to the verisimilitude attributed to the literary piece by the ethnolect which pervades it. As J. Matz states in her treatise on the modern novel, the illusion of reality conferred to this genre nowadays strongly depends on how successful the written piece is in rendering life in action, which it does based on the sets of norms and customs specific of the time span which it covers [Matz, p.32]. Therefore it is only to the advantage of the literary work, if the former pertains to the realistic genre, to make use of suchlike language variety, which will impart specific coloring to the narrative in any case.

Moreover, the language stock employed in a work of fiction may prompt the reader and the analyst to establish a set of the language regularities which help identify the verbal slant of the piece, thus becoming unique owing to its specific ethnolect coloring. It is in such a way that the narrative hermeneutic entities, as the settings, plotlines, characters, symbols and other elements, are decoded [Emmot, p.10].

With these facts considered, it would be of special interest to turn to the analysis of the AA usage in the film adaptation of the critically acclaimed novel "The Help" by K. Stockett, adapted for the screen in 2011 by T. Taylor. The reason for choosing the alleged literary piece resides primarily in the abundance of the samples pointing to the presence of the Ebonics ethnolect, as well as its obvious merit in capturing the narrative existents and representing their imagery in an effective and compelling manner. In the novel a number of instances which point to the presence of Ebonics as the prevailing variant of American English chosen to narrate the events can be found, as can be observed from the following passage of the literary work in question:

"I look down at Baby Girl, see how her forehead's all wrinkled up between the eyes. She studying hard on something. I touch her cheek.

"You alright, baby?"

She say, "May Mo bad."

The way she say it, like it's a fact, make my inside hurt.

"Mae Mobley," I say cause I got a notion to try something. "You a smart girl?"

She just look at me like she don't know.

"You a smart girl," I say again.

She say, "Mae Mo smart."

I say, "You a kind little girl?"

She just look at me. She two years old. She don't know what she is yet. I Say, "You a kind girl," and she nod, repeat it back to me" [Stockett, p.50].

The distinguishing traits of African American Vernacular strike the eye from the very beginning, the first detail being the absence of the copula 'be' in such instances as '*She studying hard...*', '*You alright...*', '*You a smart (little) girl*', '*You a kind (little) girl*'. The ordinary trait of the ethnolect, accepted as a norm in AA, permeates the entire dialogue, Mae Mobley reiterating the words of her nanny with childish precision ('*Mae Mo smart*'). Another feature is the absence of the subject - predicate agreement referring to the usage of the auxiliaries in such cases as '*She don't know (what she is yet)*', '*She nod, repeat it...*'

The script retains the original's dialectal features, the change of the discourse form only contributing to its intensification, which can be noted in the following passage of the script:

"Aibileen: You is kind. You is smart. You is important.

Mobley leans back and repeats Aibileen's words: You is smart. You is kind. You is important.

Aibileen hugs Mae Mobley.

Aibileen: Oh, that's so good. (laughs) That's so good.

Mae Mobley reaches up and touches Aibileen's face" [Taylor, p.3].

The notable departure from the original is the intentional insertion of the copula 'be' in the 3d person singular defining the basic traits Aibileen grants the child she is in charge of with ('*You is kind (smart, important)*'). The copula is also present in Mae Mobley's obedient repetition of Aibileen's alterocharacterization. Contrasted to the novel, the script represented in the form of the dialogic interaction, a natural token of the cinematic scenario, also abounds in the body language indices provided by the remarks of the playwright: '*Mobley leans back...*', '*Mae Mobley reaches up and touches Aibileen's face*'. The autodiegetic narrator's remarks present in the book are thus replaced by the non-verbal exchange which makes the dialogue all the more moving and significant. However, the insertion of the copula into the nominal predicates identifying Mo as '*smart, kind*' and, as the script indicates in addition, '*important*', evince a relevant characteristic of the protagonist. Aibileen's kindness and indiscriminate love of the children she mothers either physiologically or by mere spiritual compulsion reflect in her desire to infuse her soul disciples with self-pride, confidence and consciousness of being, existing and thus appearing relevant despite the circumstances.

In other instances, however, the script might come amiss the elements of Ebonics, in contrast to the initial version, which is noted for the following traits of AAVE:

"I lost my own boy, Treelore, right before I started waiting on Miss Leefolt. He was 24 years old. The best part of a person's life...But it weren't too long before I seen something in me had changed. A bitter seed was planted inside of me. And I just didn't feel so accepting anymore" [Stockett, p.3-4].

The book exposes the narrator's tragedy following the properties of the vernacular, with the absence of agreement in the usage or omission of the copulative 'be', as in '*I seen*', '*it weren't too long*'. As the narratee gradually gets used to Aibileen's manner of recounting her life story, it sounds and reads almost naturally, imparting a melodic effect to the utterance. However, the woman's narrating capabilities are enhanced owing to the employment of the fresh metaphor '*A bitter seed was planted inside of me*', which points to her distinct gift of an endowed story-teller, constituting the core of the chapters in the narrative.

The script version loses some of the dialectal touches in that it avoids the grammatical deviations, as the passage below shows:

"Int. Leefolt Home – Dining Room – Same day.

Aibileen methodically arranges grapes on a platter of chicken salad resting on Elizabeth's dining table. The table has a small L-shaped scratch in the middle.

Aibileen (V.O.): After my boy died, a bitter seed was planted inside of me.

Int Leefolt Home – Living Room.

Elizabeth leans over the sofa and pushes the curtain aside, watching for guests to arrive. The hem on her skirt is still uneven, but much improved from the earlier state.

Aibileen (V.O.): And I just didn't feel so accepting anymore..." [Taylor, p.12]

As in the previous two examples under analysis, the one represented above lacks some of the elements of Ebonics, since the narrating process is in most part disrupted by the scriptwriter's setting identification and descriptive elements pointing to Aibileen's everyday cooking routine, which, as noted above, is also a sample of nonverbal behavior, giving the casual character to the tragedy shared by the voice-over of the protagonist. However, the tragic intensity of the event can immediately be perceived as Elizabeth Leefolt's languid contemplation of the trimmed dress sharply contrasts with methodic and meticulous decoration of the platter performed by the maid. The metaphor '*The bitter seed was planted inside of me*' is retained, turning the informal character of the interaction in the book to the intense episode of a climactic nature, which points to the radical change of Aibileen's outlook upon life and the perspectives it has to offer. Thus, contrasted to the novel's language bearing dialectal touches, the script acquires subliminal delicacy and is raised to the level of the elevated language sample.

Thus, the process of adapting a literary piece containing dialectal elements of American English in the majority of cases retains the grammatical properties and syntactic traits of the original, imparting a deeply intimate and in most cases informal touch to the dialogic discourse of the script akin to the narrative of the book. Still, the intensity of the events may urge for the avoidance of the ethnolect's specifics, with the basic ideas retained and the tonetic coloring intensified by the body language indices that the film scenario exposes owing to the scriptwriter's compliance to the requirements of the film genre. Also, the possibility of keeping close to the original in retaining the character-defining figures of speech in the film adaptation enhances the imagery of the adaptation, maintaining fidelity to the original literary piece.

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