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Dialect Characters Analysis

in Twain's Huckleberry Finn

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ABSTRACT

Huckleberry Finn is Mark Twain's most controversial novel which is a work rich of linguistic variation where seven varieties of language are used. Through dialect employment the author intends to characterize his characters and shape their social traits. To deal with dialect characters speech, an analytic approach is used to dissect the different dialects employed and move later to analyse how is dialect attributed to dialect characters in the novel. The aim of this research is to highlight the function of literary dialect as a means of characterization, and how speech forms authentically describe the social identity.

Keywords: dialect, dialect deviation, dialect characters, social identity.

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INTRODUCTION

Language, with all its varieties, and literature that are mutually complementary and share the capacity of society depicting and communicating human musings. Literature is often inspired by language because it displays language in a portion of the printed page in an artistic manner. By the late 1700s, literary dialect had begun to emerge in American literature through representations of black dialects, such as in John Leacock's *Fall of British Tyranny* (1776). After the Civil War, dialect use became popular, and Mark Twain is one of these writers whose works contain a wealth of linguistic variety, especially in his acclaimed novel *Huckleberry Finn*.

Dialectal literature is a type of literature that combines oral and written forms. As a result, reading dialect is a difficult task that draws a curious audience, especially those interested in the ironic and satirical style. This challenge is not raised only by readers, but also by writers who take the risk of tackling serious anxieties and topics such as life during the Industrial Revolution and slavery.

Accordingly, this study will be held upon four levels; the first part will introduce the book and the critics' response to it. The second part deals with the different dialect linguistic features that manifested in the novel. The next part, then, analyses the dialect deviant structures of dialect characters. And the last one studies the link between dialect and literature .

Thereupon, The study is intends to answer the following research questions :

- 1) Did the book met with criticism? If so, what are the main reasons of objection?
- 2) To what extent was Twain successful in revealing the interconnection between dialect and social traits?
- 3) What motivation behind the use of dialect?

The aim of this study is to see how effective Twain was in achieving his intended goals beyond literary dialect, and to see how he benefited from it as a literary device by exploring the linguistic patterns of dialect used by authors. The study also targets to highlight how language is such a powerful tool not only of communication but also of human's thoughts personification..

2. Huckleberry Finn Book Review

Huckleberry finn is a novel ranging between support and opposition not only because of the author's accusations of racism, but also because of the rich use of language unstandard forms. Yet, this does not preclude the fact that the novel is one of the outstanding works in the history of American Literature.

The story enhances different themes but mainly slavery through which seven different varieties of language are used as Twain mentions in the preface of the book :

A number of dialects are used, to wit: the Missouri negro dialect; the extremest form of the backwoods South-Western dialect; the ordinary 'Pike-County' dialect; and four modified varieties of this last. The shadings have not been done in a haphazard fashion, or by guess-work; but painstakingly, and with the trustworthy guidance and support of personal familiarity with these several patterns of speech. (Twain, 1885, p. xiii)

This heavy use of dialect raised several critical voices who assumed that the novel carries a sense of racism by the repeated use of the word "nigger" throughout the whole novel which has been mentioned 214 times which is considered a "rough" and "impolite" language. Buder assumes that "*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, by Mark Twain, is the most grotesque example of racist trash ever written" (Buder, 1957). Accordingly, there were claims to pull the book from schools after a series of complaints of black students and their fathers. Black Americans had the intention to come out of the frame of slavery and the history of their inferior status the fact that made the novel, for them, unpleasant as it brings their terrifying memories to the scene.

Though there were claims to retrieve the book from schools and libraries because of language used by Twain which was "coarse" and full of "slurs", as it was judged, the story and its language reflect the ugly truth of Blacks in America at the time the story was set on but "black parents naturally want to spare their children the discrimination and gratuitous insults that are too much part of the history of black Americans" (Leonard, Tenney, & Davis, 1992, p. 13).

On the other side, many critics and readers valued the novel and appreciate the writer's spunk to tackle a serious issue of both social and religious ideologies in a humorous style and an ironic discourse. Many scholars have a contradictory opinion in the racism question and believe that the book has been misinterpreted and that it has not a racist accent but is rather an attack on racism and "given the subtlety of Mark Twain's approach, it is not surprising

that most of his contemporaries misunderstood or simply ignored the novel's demystifications of race" (Smith, 1984).

Some scholars praised the book richness of different dialect characters and their establishment of a high level of realism; Anderson writes: "we shall content ourselves with repeating that the book is Mark Twain at his best, and remarking that Jim and Huckleberry are real creations and the worthy peers of the illustrious Tom Sawyer himself" (Anderson, 1971, pp. 120-121).

In the same vein, High believes that the book is masterpiece in the American history and suggests that "many see the Adventures of Huckleberry Finn as the greatest novel of American democracy. It shows the basic goodness and wisdom of ordinary people" (High, 1986, p. 15)

3. Dialect Linguistic Features in *Huckleberry Finn*

As far as language is concerned, Mark Twain is known for his usual use of vernacular dialogue. Most of his novels' language has been described as "unclean" and "full of slang." Nonetheless, the author attempts to give readers the impression of a carefree narrative through satire, which is the dominant literary aspect in his writings.

In an eloqual literary criticism article on *The Adventures Of Tom Sawyer* (2010), Twain's writing style is characterized by his:

Adroit use of exaggeration, stalwart irreverence, deadpan seriousness, droll cynicism, and pungent commentary on the human situation. All of this is masked in an uncomplicated, straightforward narrative distinguished for its introduction of the... vernacular into American fiction that was to have a profound impact on the development of American writing (Grant, 2010).

Indeed, several research studies on the dialects used in the novel have been conducted; among them the linguistic geographer of the 1960s Curt M. Rulon who assumes that only two dialects are employed and points out that Twain was not serious when he spoke of four modified varieties of Pike County speech and that while Twain's language was "authentic and genuine to a certain degree" he meant to demonstrate different varieties of language (Williamson & Burke, 1971, p. 221). Contrary, David Carkeet's article "The Dialects in *Huckleberry Finn*" identifies nine different characters in the speech of white characters only. Carkeet describes the explanatory as frivolous and that "there is nothing rib-splitting about a list of dialects". He adds:

There are hundreds of corrections of dialect in the manuscript (or discrepancies between a dialect form in the manuscript and the final form in the first edition). A just might be corrected to jest in the manuscript, for example, and then end up as jist in the first edition. Such labored revision makes no sense if the “Explanatory” is frivolous. (Carkeet, 1979)

These research on the linguistic perspective used in Huck Finn reveal that Twain is familiar with American dialects and captured them in ironic fiction with the aim of achieving authenticity and truly capturing authentic dialect.

The African American English Vernacular (AAVE) is undoubtedly the most frequently employed dialect in the novel, spoken not only by black characters but also by other white characters, as this speech form was widely used in the southern United States, where the novel is set. Huck's use of the AAVE is due to his intimate friendship with Jim as he was inspired by his language which is linguistically important. Holmes in this respect writes:

Certain social factors have been relevant in accounting for the particular variety used. Some relate to the users of language—the participants; others relate to its uses—the social setting and function of the interaction. Who is talking to whom (e.g. wife-husband, customer-shop keeper, bossworker). The setting or social context (e.g. home, work, school). The aim or purpose of the interaction (e.g. informative, social) (Holmes, 1992, p. 11)

Hence, four dialects are used in the book, with the most common being the AAVE, also known as the Missouri Negro dialect.

3.1. AAVE Grammatical Features

In terms of AAVE grammar, deviant grammatical structures can be found in the speech of dialect characters in the novel, among them the followings:

- a. Non-concord subject-verb
- b. Alternate use of was/were between singular and plural
- c. The use of been as the perfective
- d. The present perfect unstressed *been* stands alone after the subject
- e. The use of past participle done as past simple form
- f. The use of past suffix ed with irregular verbs
- g. Pronouns and prepositions are also exposed to a set of variations as shown in the following table:

Table 1. AAVE Pronouns and Prepositions Used in *Huckleberry Finn*

AAVE Pronoun/ preposition	Number of occurrence	Standar English From
Dis	19	This
Dat	91	That
den	29	then
Er	54	Or
Dey	81	They
'em	64	Them
En	240	And
'f	15	for
Yourn	4	your
Heah	15	here
Whah	10	what
O'	118	of

Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from (Twain, 1885)

3.2. AAVE Phonological Features

The use of AAVE vocabulary cannot be overlooked; reading the dialogue of the diaect character reveals certain terms and phrases that do not belong in Standard English (SE) but rather in AAVE. The following table gathers some of them:

Table 2: AAVE Words Used in *Huckleberry Finn*

AAVE Word/Expression	Number of occurance	Example of Use In the novel	Meaning
Dasn't	12	I dasn't try it	Dare not
bullyragged	1	he went to Judge	Harassed

		Thatcher's and bullyragged him	
Betwixt	7	one stateroom betwixt me and the cross-hall of the texas	Between
Gumption	1	de way dat anybody dat had any gumption would?	Courage
Nation	1	"I'm nation sorry for you	very
Passel	2	March off like a passel of fools	A large number
Druther	7	I'd druther been bit with a snake than pap's whisky.	Rather
Lingo	1	pretended to be an Englishman and couldn't imitate the lingo	A different language/ dialect
Ornery	8	It was pretty ornery preaching	Bad- tempered and combative

Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from (Twain, 1885)

AAVE variants occur phonologically at the level of vowel shift; addition, omission, and consonant variation, as seen below:

a. Vowels' variation:

- Shift of /e/ to /i/. Example: Git (for get) up and hump yourself (Twain, 1885, p. 64)

- Shift of /u/ to /i/. Example: no sense in sich (for such) doin's as dat (Twain, 1885, p. 81)

- Shift of /i/ to /e/. Example: who wuz it dat 'uz killed in dat shanty ef (for if) it warn't you? (Twain, 1885, p. 45)

- Shift of /a/ to /i/. Example : keep 'way fum de water as much as you kin (for can) (Twain, 1885, p. 19)

b. Vowel addition:

- Added /i/. Example : he cain't (for can't) git no situation

c. Vowel's omission.

- Examples: 'bout for about , reck'n for reckon , S'pose for suppose , agin for again

d. Consonants'variation :

- Shift of /th/ to /d/. Examples : de for the , dey for they , with for with

- Contracted /g/. Examples : layin' , nothin' , evenin' , comin' , makin' , runnin'.

4. Dialect Characters

In view of dialect employment in the novel, Twain attributed different varieties of language to a set of his characters to benefit from literary dialect as a tool of characterization.

4.1. Huck's Dialect

Huck is the protagonist of the novel, a young child of thirteen years old formally uneducated but smart and adventurer , comes from St Petersburg, Missouri, a town on the Mississippi River . He is the son of a drunk man and was adopted by the widow Douglass who tries to civilize him and improves his social status . However , this was not welcome by him and he left her for the search of freedom . Throughout the events of the novel he meets Jim and become friend . They conduct a journey together and adventures start .

As far as dialect is concerned, Huck is a Pike dialect speaker which reflects the Pike County, a southern region, he comes from. Huck's speech contains a colourful syntax "riddling his speech with formal errors" (Sewell, 1987, p. 85). To explore Huck's dialect, the following passage from his speech will be analysed :

"Why, my boy, you are all out of breath. Did you come for your interest?"

“No, sir,” I says; “is there some for me?”

“Oh, yes, a half-yearly is in last night—over a hundred and fifty dollars. Quite a fortune for you. You had better let me invest it along with your six thousand, because if you take it you’ll spend it.”

“No, sir,” I says, “I don’t want to spend it. I don’t want it at all—nor the six thousand, nuther. I want you to take it; I want to give it to you—the six thousand and all.”

He looked surprised. He couldn’t seem to make it out. He says:

“Why, what can you mean, my boy?”

I says, “Don’t you ask me no questions about it, please. You’ll take it—won’t you?”

He says: “Well, I’m puzzled. Is something the matter?”

“Please take it,” says I, “and don’t ask me nothing—then I won’t have to tell no lies.”

He studied a while, and then he says:

“Oho-o! I think I see. You want to SELL all your property to me— not give it. That’s the correct idea.” (Twain, 1885, p. 18)

In this passage, Huck established a set of ungrammatical expressions and deviant forms mainly:

- a. Double negation as in “don’t ask me nothing” for standard English form (SE) “don’t ask me anything” and in “I won’t have to tell no lies” for SE “I won’t have to tell lies”.
- b. The negation inversion as in “he says Don’t you ask me no questions about it” for SE “don’t ask me questions”.
- c. The present tense third person *s* is used with the pronoun *I* when he says “No, sir,” *I says*”

Throughout the whole novel, Huck speech was full of instructed expressions and dialectal constructions including verbs conjugation , the present tense third person singular “s” use , pronouns , double negation , done use as simple past form and many others. Some of them are presented in the following table :

Table 3. Variant Grammatical structures Used by Huck

Variant Grammatical structure	SE form
how long you been there ?	How long have you been there?
there warn't nothing left in them	there was nothing left in them
I been setting here talking	I have been setting here taking
He wouldn't ever dared to talk	He wouldn't ever dare to talk
It mightn't be	It may not be
Don't anybody know?	Does anybody know ?
You going	You are going

Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from (Twain, 1885)

4.2. Jim's Dialect

Jim is Huck's friend , a black slave , a good-hearted and suspicious child. Jim is the lave of Miss Wilson who runs away from her looking for freedom and the is the figure of slavery at that time , he meets Huck and travel together. Through his character , it is demonstrated that kindness has nothing to do with race.

Focusing on his language, Jim is an African American Vernacular English (AAVE) speaker; his speak interaction with Huck carries a heavy set of dialect features. To illustrate, the following table presents some of Jim's dialectal expressions:

Table 4. Variant Grammatical Structures Used by Jim

Variant Grammatical structure	SE Form
What you doin' with this gun?	What are you doing with this gun ?
So I done it	so I did it
Chickens knows	chickens know
you goes, de ole true Huck	you go , de oe true huck
I never heard of them	I have never heard about them
our traps was mos' all los	our traps were most of all lost
if dey gwyne to grab a young white genlman's propaty	if they are going to grab a young white gentlman's property

Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from (Twain, 1885)

The examination of the table leads to the result that Jim's speech is exposed to some deviations that does not undego to the standard rules, mainly:

- a. The present tense third person singular "s" is added to other pronouns such as in the sentence *i creeps* .
- b. Ommission of To have when forming the present perfect tense with keeping the past participle as in *I never heard*
- c. Were/was aternate use
- d. Double negation

4.3. The Duke and the King's Dialects

These characters are not real duke and king but selfish , exploitative and greedy duo of con men that Huck and Jim meet and travel with. The first claims to be the Duke of Bridgewater in order to take control of Huck's raft and the other pretends to be the heir to the French throne for the same reason .

Notably, when the duke tries to speak a clear standard English, the king's speech is formed of constracted words and incorrect expressions. An important dialect passage in the novel occur when the king used the term *orgies* for *Obsequies* :

“—they bein' partickler friends o' the diseased. That's why they're invited here this evenin'; but tomorrow we want ALL to come—everybody; for he respected everybody, he liked everybody, and so it's fitten that his funeral orgies sh'd be public.” (Twain, 1885, p. 171)

The following table gathers some of the king's speech deviations:

Table 5. Dialect Deviation Used by the King

Dialect Deviation	SE Form
Bilgewater	Bridgewater
o'	Of
bein'	Being
oncomfortable	Uncomfortable
ain't	Isn't

warn't	Wasn't
'em	Them
This ain't no bad thing	This is not a bad thing
le's all	Let's all

Source: Prepared by the authors based on data from (Twain, 1885)

From here, it is clear that Huckleberry Finn is a strong dialect novel where dialect is embodied in the speech of different characters.

5. Dialect as a Tool of characterization

language, with its varieties, reflects the social traits of the people; one's speech expresses his age, gender, level of education, ethnic group, geographical background and social class. This relationship is manifested by Twain in Huckleberry Finn; the author didn't explicitly define or describe the social status of characters, however, it is implicitly shaped through their dialectal speech as Twain is aware of " how dialect works in the novel we must understand how it fits within the sociolinguistic system constructed by the novel (the ficto-linguistic) as well as how it responds to the sociolinguistic expected by the world outside the novel" (Ferguson, 1998, p.2) .

It is indispensable to the writer to use speech aspects to set and characterize his characters in an authentic way as Serir states:

"It becomes more essentially clear when some of the characteristics of say novels are discussed like characterization or setting which are very essential in use in the development of any told story in a literary genre where events take place; this evokes the call for dialects to cope with different places" (Serie-Mortad, 2012, p. 40)

Examining the dialogues between dialect characters and non-dialect characters in the novel, is it noticeable that characters who use deviant speech forms are of low level education compared to those who use a clear and correct forms. As social class and the level of education are juxtaposed social traits, Twain cleared them up as follows:

- The Land Aristocracy : a prestigious and high-educated family represented by the Gragerfords, who live in a prestigious land. This family members use refined pure speech form and practically make no grammatical and phonological errors . Emmeline Grangerford's good

language is manifested in the poems written by their daughter Emmeline Grangerford which determine her high intellectual level .

- The upper-middle class : a good-educated class represented by The Widow Douglas and Miss Watson using well-structured sentences and make no grammatical mistakes .
- The lower class : a non-educated class represented by Huck and his father Pap whose language is slangy and contains phonological and grammatical deviations.
- The lowest class : an illiterate class represented by Jim and his AAVE use which is subject to any lexical , phonological or grammatical features ; sentences are mis-formed and words are randomly pronounced .

Through Jim's use of African American Vernacular English, which is a variety used by black people, Jim's ethnic group is called up. The character of Jim may be seen by the audience as an inferior character, yet, Twain tried to maintain realism and authenticity of AAVE speakers and "The language of the text and some elements of characterization tend to advance ethnic and racial stereotypes particularly of the black characters, who are repeatedly termed 'niggers' and are represented as superstitious, childlike, and generally insubstantial" (Leonard, Tenney, & Davis, 1992, p. 2)

Hence, Twain enhanced dialect use in the novel to benefit from it as a literary device which serves as a characterization tool and maintain the accurate and authentic social status of characters.

Conclusion

Literary dialect proved to be a good literary characterization tool as shown by an examination of its use in Huckleberry Finn, where the AAVE is used to form the social characteristics of characters and identify social criteria such as ethnicity, social status, and education level. Mark Twain and other authors contributed to the advancement of dialect writing in standard literary works, demonstrating that literary dialect adds to the work's literary and linguistic importance. Twain's linguistic competence was shown by his ability to strike a balance between the use of standard language and dialect while preserving the text's consistency.

Authenticity and characterization are generally the main headings of the stratification of the non-standard linguistic features in literature. Literary dialect as an artistic and stylistic device helped dialect writers to shape several social and regional traits of their characters including geographical origin, social class, level of education, age and ethnicity

The study of the linguistic characteristics of the dialects leads to the conclusion that the dialect is not dissimilar to standard English. Phonologically, some words are undoubtedly new, while others are simply pronounced differently due to the absence or addition of a few letters. Since they are not bound by conventional grammatical rules, dialect features are often referred to as "mistakes" in grammar.

The importance of dialectal literature is demonstrated in the analysis of the chosen novel. Many people may be perplexed and think that texts written in dialect are populist, but they are actually useful standard documents.

The information, interpretation, and findings provided in this paper are intended to encourage future research since it includes several materials relevant to literary dialect study, such as clarification of key concepts and dialect analysis of case novel.

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