ABSTRACT

TURNBULL, CADWELL W. Vernacular Third Person and the Politics of Accessibility. (Under the direction of Professor Agnes Bolonyai.)

Norman Fairclough in his book *Language and Power* defines *naturalization* as the process by which a dominant discourse “appears to lose its connection with particular ideologies and interests and becomes the common-sense practice of the institution” (1989). In written discourse this is done through *formality constraints* on how language is used that have, over time, become accepted as natural when they actually represent prejudicial linguistic ideologies. Formality, Faircough says, “is one pervasive and familiar aspect of constraints on access to discourse.” It is “a common property in many societies of practices and discourses of high social prestige and restricted access.”

Fiction, as part of the body of written discourses, also struggles with naturalized ideologies about language. In the English third person narrative tradition, vernaculars are marginalized in texts, relegated to the character dialogue, while the rest of the text remains the arena of Standard English. Bakhtin says, “there are no “neutral” words and forms—words and forms that can belong to “no one”; language has been completely *taken over*, *shot through with intentions and accents”* (1989)*.* Using this logic, the chosen formality constraints of fiction represent ideologies of language in practice.

Vernacular third person (VTP) is a literary form that uses vernacular (non-standard) varieties in third person prose, not just in dialogue, but throughout the text. This challenges the established linguistic ideologies of fiction as a discourse, breaks the formality constraints of the genre, and establishes *heteroglossia* within text that more wholly represents the diversity of speech in the spoken world. VTP is very important when considering how discourse genres can evolve to be more inclusive and less hierarchical in terms of language. Christian Mair says, “if literary Creole serves as a general medium of narration, we are either dealing with vernacular or dialect literature…or with a modernist attempt to dislodge standard literary English from its privileged position” (1996).

In my paper, I examine how VTP manages this feat of subverting privilege, through looking at the discursive strategies it employs to codeswitch along the continuum of Standard and Vernacular speech. Using Myers-Scotton’s MLF model (2005), Musken et al.’s Structural Variation in Codeswitching framework (2008), and Bhatt and Bolonyai’s Optimal Grammar of Bilingual Use (2011), I analyze the structural and functional codeswitching practices in three novels: *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* by Junot Diaz, *Midnight Robber* by Nalo Hopkinson and *The Lonely Londoners* by Samuel Selvon. I also use Koven’s framework on Speaker Roles in Narratives (2012) to examine how different roles within a narrative text alter codeswitching practices.

Through examining VTP, we gain a blueprint for looking at how other written discourses can challenge linguistic hegemony and allow for greater diversity in their texts.