Lexical Choice and Social Context in Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*

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Abstract

Taking into consideration the sociological implications of spoken or written words, the paper attempts to critically evaluate the lexical choices the characters were allowed to use in Shashi Deshpande's **That Long Silence** to picture the Indian social context.

Shashi Deshpande has presented the abstract feelings and complex experiences through appropriate English lexical items in her novel**.** Mind goes through complicated thinking process as it is affected by varied conflicts a human being faces in his/her life. All the characters of Deshpande go through this kind of struggle either in marriage or in other relationships.

This study brings out the stark realities of social contexts by assessing the words used in the fiction. A few relationships and conversational situations are taken up from the novel to evaluate the expressions of the social context in the light of characters' lexical choices.

Introduction

It is said that language and mind style, and language and society are related and impact each other. Human existence and interaction in social situation chiefly depends on language. The survival and success of the relationship among human beings depend on the effective use of language.

The interaction in society has both formal and informal situations and has both spoken and written mode of expressions.

Every language has a specific structure and it gets modified in accordance with situation or people. Since men and women are emotional beings, they tend to add something to the language to show their 'distinctiveness' in their expression, to be understood in a better way. By applying the Mind Style technique a language analysis is made to project the social context portrayed in the novel.

Mind and Communication Process

Mind is everything – it makes or mars a communication. Man's expression often proclaims his mind, especially creative mind. According to Roger Fowler, it is the stylistic choice of a language that reflects the mental attitude of a speaker and the world created by him (Linguistics

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and the Novel, p.103). Hence the application of mind style is possible in relation with the language use of the fictional characters to identify the complications of social context. The author of a novel always projects a particular mind style since "there is no kind of writing that can be regarded as perfectly neutral and objective" (Leech and Short,1984: 188).

The writer's portrayal may appear to be distinct and deviant from the mundane reality. However a deeper study of the subject matter of the fiction betrays the reality that revolves around the social contexts only. According to Mark Turner, mind follows the basic cognitive principle of projecting the stories of a person's ideas, experiences and thinking as parables. In this way mind is always at work expressing stories, projecting one onto another. He also feels that "Narrative Imagining" is inseparable from our past and our future experiences. "It also appears to be a fundamental target value for the developing human mind". (1996:25).

The story line is very simple as the novel describes how Mohan, whose job has been in danger, comes out of the crisis and in the process how his wife Jaya traces the status of her own life. The novel is presented in first person narration. The characters in the novel, as they make their own stylistic choices, struggle for words, speak short sentences frequently, repeat specific words and use too many abstract words and when complex situations come, they hardly respond. Thus language betrays the mind patterns of human relationship and the understanding of the world around.

Lexical Choice among Friends

There is one conversation situation between Jaya and Mukta towards the end of the novel, found in the pages from 184 to 187, wherein they share the pain of missing their common friend Kamat and their husbands. The conversation has two aspects, but one leading on to the other. As far as Mukta is concerned both her husband Arun and friend Kamat are dead, but for Jaya, it is a desperate waiting for Mohan to come back. Moreover the story of Kamat is not going to affect Mukta's present in any way, but it is different for Jaya, as her 'marriage is still alive'. There are 28 paragraphs in total with 111 sentences and 934 words. In this Mukta uses more number of words and sentences and also she uses more of complex sentences.

Mukta, in her pursuit to know the reason for Mohan's long absence, tries to link Jaya's past relationship with Kamat for her present strife with Mohan. But, Jaya, in her anxiety to avoid further embarrassment of revealing the secret, tries to justify her action concerning Kamat. During the conversation, when Jaya becomes philosophical only to hide her confused state of mind, Mukta tries to be practical. It is also interesting to find that both of them use "I don't know" and "I don't understand", when they talk about the problem between Jaya and Mohan. Jaya says, referring to the reason for Mohan's leaving home, in various occasion during the conversation.

But their mental attitude to the second aspect of the conversation sharply varies due to their varied comprehension of reality. Jaya's word selection reveals her inconsistent mind. While referring to the story of Kamat, Jaya uses frequently the words of modality and other phrases

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like, 'quite different', matter so much', 'already dead (twice)' 'couldn't', 'Mohan didn't know, 'he knew nothing', 'never told'. On the contrary, Mukta uses words/expressions like, 'alone', 'died (thrice)', 'die' (thrice), 'dead', 'courage', 'desperate', 'helped', 'untidy', 'chaotic', 'heart attack', 'lived alone', 'dying alone' 'frightened (thrice)', 'outlive', 'eventualities', 'death', 'dying', 'afraid', 'being alone', 'you didn't', 'rotted', 'lonely man' and 'terribly lonely'.

Mukta's husband Arun died and after his death "it was Kamat who helped her" and he also died. Now she is left with no one except her daughter and Mai. So she still vividly remembers the dead people and still weeps for them. Jaya is also equally attached to Kamat, but she forces herself to get detached from him, as she is 'still Mohan's wife'.

Finally exasperated Mukta said: " "What does it matter now, Jaya? Let it go", in response to Jaya's "Mukta, why does it matter so much to you?".

The above instance shows more collocations and repetitions used by both of them with regard to their emotions which have abstract overtones.

This situation reveals the restricted life of Mukta than Jaya's life, as there is still hope for Jaya. It also exposes the irony that Mukta appears composed even after all the loss and Jaya appears desperate even with no serious personal loss. This reveals her confused state of mind and the constrained situation of her marriage.

Lexical Choice and Differing Experiences

The main focus here is to evaluate the social context of Jaya and Mukta with regard to their relationship with Kamat. It is found that Mukta's selection of sentences is entirely different from the sentences of Jaya. She remembers the past and recollects the scene between her and Kamat and even reproduces the words of Kamat.

In one stretch she speaks 309 words, describing the value of her relationship with Kamat, whereas the sentence length is impressively averaged at 12.36. Most of the sentences in this paragraph are the words of Kamat, reproduced by Mukta, for the implications of her present mind. Out of 309 words used by Mukta, 133 are the words of Kamat with the word length of 3.5113 and the sentence length of 7.8235.

This reveals 'the restricted and frightened mind' of Kamat and the emotion Mukta attaches to her/his expression. In comparison, Mukta's relationship with Kamat is more profound than Jaya's attachment to him. Moreover the situation in which Mukta reacts is different from Jaya's situations. For Mukta, Kamat was Arun's friend and after Arun's death, she was helped and guided by him whereas it was a secret relationship for Jaya. Mukta uses 'could' seven times, expressing the past possibility, whereas Jaya uses none. Mukta's sentences with 'could' are listed below:

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He joked about it, but I could see he was frightened. You could have been with him, you could have stayed by his side, but you didn't, you just walked away; he could have been lying there for days, he could have just rotted there if he hadn't given me the keys, if I hadn't gone there that day.

'You could have stayed'.

In this conversation situation the mind style of these two characters are distinctly shown through their selection of words and sentence types. Jaya tries to detach herself from the memories of Kamat as it was a secret past and "quite different" from her real life and for Mukta it is both past and present. It is revealed through her reproduction of some of the dialogues between her and Kamat. Though Jaya recollects her conversations with Kamat on many an occasion while she is left alone, she does not say anything at this moment. Jaya appears to be more conscious of the world around her.

Hence the worldview differs between these two people as it is betrayed through the language use of these characters. Jaya's mental attitude is more complicated than Mukta's. Mukta is an amiable and sociable woman, caring for others. Her life is a tragedy as she loses both her husband and her husband's friend, Kamat.

In Indian society, losing a husband or a male support is like losing one's own life. Mukta makes it exposed in her language that she is disturbed but not disillusioned. But in the case of Jaya, who is conscious of social status, the behaviour has been conspicuously contrary.

Lexical Choice between Husband and Wife

The focus here is to find out the mental process of the relationship of Jaya with both Mohan and Kamat. Though Jaya is the main character as well the narrator, she reveals her approach to her own story in the beginning itself. She finds her mind resisting within herself as she attempts to bring her secrets out. Jaya tries a detached mind style, as she attempts to separate her experience from her awareness of that experience. In her endeavour, she becomes highly critical of her own life and the life of others, especially her husband. The Indian context of 'life-time bond' in marriage is considered carrying 'life-time yoke'.

The average length of sentences and words of her narrative passages is 13.9112 and 4.1699, whereas her face-to-face situation with others is averaged at 5.7454 and 3.6221 respectively. She appears innocent and simple while talking with others and more verbose while analyzing in secret the situations and people. Though the fiction is dominated by the voice of Jaya, she speaks minimum in face-to-face situations.

In one of the bed-time conversation with her husband, Mohan, (found in pages 98 and 99), she speaks minimum and remains silent when she is supposed to speak. Out of 165 words, she uses 63 words and the remaining words are used by Mohan. However the length of sentences and words are almost similar for both of them. Their turn taking in conversation is also properly maintained with each person allowing the other to speak.

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However the conversation is a failure as both of them have certain preoccupations suppressing them. Mohan is worried about his job and the possibility of becoming jobless. Jaya is losing self-confidence and she also has "abjured her weekly column "Seeta"" and is hiding it from Mohan.

Their selection of words and sentences reveal their restless mind. Jaya was seriously lost in thought without realizing that Mohan was also not sleeping. So she was startled out her thoughts when Mohan called her and the conversation goes like this. The exposure of restless mind is highlighted in the following passage wherein a considerable number of elliptical sentences are used.

'Jaya?'
'What? I thought you were asleep.'
'No, I can't get to sleep. I've been thinking. **All kinds of thoughts. You know...***'why don't you take up a job?'*
'A job? Me?'
'Yes, **I thought...**'
'But you never wanted me to. That time when I wanted to try my hand at teaching...'
'Oh, that was different. Circumstances were different then. But now, maybe you should try.'
'What can I do? *And who'll give me a job?'*
'A magazine. One of the weeklies. Surely you should be able to get something?'
'I don't know. *You can't get any job just like that.* **And at my age...** *I've no experience, either.'*
'But you've been writing...'
'It's not the same.'
'You can try. You don't lose anything by trying. Suppose, **by some chance, I lose my job?'**
'Thank God you have your column. And your"Seeta" fortnightly. And your stories. That's something. Not much money in it, **but...'** (98&99).

Use of Negative Sentences

In the above conversation, no sentence is complete in itself and every sentence has the 'suppositional connotation', though there is no single conditional sentence. Their undecided thought continues from one person to another. Both Jaya and Mohan use words 'think' and 'thought', drag some of the words and speak one-word sentences which reveal their restlessness. In addition their use of negative sentences exposes their pessimistic point of view. A man or a woman restricted in mind due to social situation, it appears, will speak in broken expressions.

For Jaya, Mohan is the inevitable lifetime 'other bullock' of the family monotony, while Kamat is the driving force for her ever-aspiring lifetime creativity. Jaya presents the life of Mohan objectively. She considers him more disciplined and also tells that he is more concerned of his family. But in his over enthusiasm to make his family life more comfortable, he almost gets caught in bribery and it has led to the present crisis in their life.

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Dejection and Social Code

The instances shown in the text as Mohan talking with someone reveal different emotions attached to his language. He appears either angry, or disappointed or dejected or detached or committed to his family. His language selection reveals his social condition. But her relationship with Kamat was different. Now Kamat is dead but still he is very much invading Jaya's 'thought life' and disturbing her. Even during the heated argument with Mohan, Jaya is reminded of Kamat. It shows, though she is restricted by societal code of conduct, her mind is not restricted.

As it is found in every strong female portrayed in Indian society, Jaya looks entirely different person in the following passage:

"We don't change overnight. It's possible that we may not change even over long periods of time. But we can always hope. Without that, life would be impossible. And if there is anything I know now it is this: life has always to be made possible" (p. 193).

Lexical selection of the above passage is so concrete that Jaya uses words like 'change', 'impossible', 'hope', 'know' & 'possible'. She also uses modal auxiliaries 'can' & 'may' which reveal the 'possibility'. In the beginning she starts with 'frantically' and 'smiling' respectively but ends with 'death' and 'fantasising' respectively. But towards the end of the novel, she starts with 'don't change' and ends with 'possible". Assessing the situation Comparing it is identified that the mind goes through the process of mental metamorphosis and it is exposed in lexical metamorphosis as there is a change anticipated in the conditioned social context.

Conclusion

The beautiful complexity of the fiction lies in the character of Jaya who is not only the narrator and protagonist, but also a professional writer. Her creative writing which has been impeded due to the marriage is finally rekindled in the present crisis. It is also found that the same creative mind which has been projecting on to the negative aspects of life is able to see a ray of hope in the end, though with a hint of "going back to where we were" (p. 193). Jaya finally agrees that Mind is everything. Mind expresses one's life in its own way. Thus it is shocking to unravel the fact that Jaya's observation of her own past comfortable world is 'in the negative'. The language has been complicated because of her 'imagining mind' and the same is revealed in the lexical choices that Jaya made which in turn projected beautifully the Indian social context.

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Colophon:

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