Sociopragmatic Study of Sexim in Alice Walker's The Color Purple And Margret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale

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دراسة اجتماعية تداولية للتمييز الجنسي في " اللون الأرجواني" للكاتبة أليس ووكر، و "حكاية الخادمة" للكاتبة مارغريت أتوود

الباحثة
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Abstract:-

In this study, two American novels are chosen, "The Color Purple" by Alice Walker (1982) and "The Handmaid's Tale" by Margaret Atwood (1985), to scrutinize sexism as a kind of gender-based linguistic discrimination. Sexism, as a social phenomenon, has been studied in classroom discourse, political speeches, popular songs, and other sorts of discourse. However, investigating sexism in American novels has not been conducted, particularly from a sociopragmatic perspective. Thus, the present study attempts to bridge this gap by identifying the socio strategies of sexism and the conversational implicature and its manifestation in the data under scrutiny. The present study tries to answer the following questions:(1) What are the socio strategies of sexism detected in the novels under study? (2) Which tropes are detected in the selected novels that show sexism? thus, the study aims to: (1) investigate the socio strategies of sexism detected in the novels under study (2) identify the tropes used to show sexism in the novels under study. In association with the aim, the study sets out the following hypothesis:(1) overt and indirect sexism are the socio strategies of sexism that appear in the novels under study.(2) several tropes are used to show sexism in the selected novels, such as irony, rhetorical question, and metaphor. Based on the findings, the study concludes that:(1) overt and indirect sexism are the socio strategies of sexism that appear in the data.(2) Overstatement, tautology, understatement, irony, metaphor, and rhetorical question are used, from the highest percentages and frequencies to the lowest, to show sexism in the selected novels.

Keywords: sociopragmatics, sexism, American novels.

الملخص:-

روايتـان امريكيتـان تم اختيارهمـا في هـذه الدراسة " اللـون الأرجـواني" للكاتبـة أليس ووكر (١٩٨٢)، و "حكايـة الخادمـة" للكاتبـة مارغريـت أتـوود (١٩٨٥) لبحـث التمييـز الجنسي كنـوع مـن التمييـز علـى أسـاس الجنس. (١٩٨٥). لقـد تمـت دراسـة التمييـز الجنسـي في النصـوص المدرسية والخطب السياسية والاغاني الشعبية وأنواع أخرى من النصوص، ومع ذلك لم يتم اجراء الدراسة في التمييز الجنسي في الروايات الامريكية، ولاسيما من منظور اجتماعي تداولي؛ لـذلك تحـاول الدراسـة الحالية سد هـذه الفجوة من خلال والتعرف علـى الاستراتيجيات الاجتماعية للتمييز الجنسي والمجازات المستخدمة لإظهار التمييز الجنسي.الدراسـة الحالية تحـاول ان تجيــب الأسـئلة التاليـة: (١) مـاهي الاستراتيجيات المكتشفة في الروايات قيد البحث. (٢) مـاهي المجازات المكتشفة في الروايات المختارة لإظهار التمييز الجنسي. لذلك، تهدف الدراسة الى (١) تقصـي الاسـتراتيجيات الاجتماعيـة للتميـز الجنسـي في الروايـات قيـد الدراسـة. (٢) تحديـد المجازات المستخدمة لإظهار التمييز الجنسي للروايات المختارة. تضـاما مـع الهـدف، وضعـت الدراسـة الفرضيات التاليـة:(١) الاستراتيجيات الاجتماعيـة الظاهـرة وغـير المباشرة ظهرت في الروايـات قيـد البحـث.(٢) تم اسـتخدام مجموعـه مـن المجـازات لإظهار التمييز في الروايات المختارة ، مثل السخرية، والسؤال الاستعاري، والمجـاز. وبنـاء علـى النتائج توصـلت الدراسـة الى انـه تم اسـتخدام المبالغـة، والتكـرار، والتبسـيط، و السـخرية، والاسـتعارة، والسؤال البلاغي، من الأعلى الى الأدنى، لإظهار التمييز الجنسي في الروايات المختارة.

الكلمـات المفتاحيـة: الاجتماعية التداولية، التمييز الجنسي، الروايات الامريكية

1- Introduction

Sidanius and Pratto (2001) define sexism as the practice of treating women differently in a hierarchy of superiority. It is an outcome of the prevailing patriarchal attitudes. Such an act may manifest in actions or habits, with language serving as the best example. Additionally, Anderson (2014) claims that the prevalent patriarchal ideals, which send negative signals about women either subtly or overtly, are the source of sexism.

Novels are selected as the data of the study because literature can be seen as an image that reflects the sincere ideas of a nation or a writer about life. It can be a way for writers to express their thoughts and feelings about the world around them.

2- Review of Related Literature

2.1 Sociopragmatics

Crystal (2008) describes sociopragmatics as the way that social context affects how language is used. In its broadest sense, sociopragmatics aims to illustrate how social factors influence linguistic forms in certain communication contexts. He defines sociopragmatics as a field that examines how speakers employ social norms to develop certain meanings and adopt specific social positions. In other words, norms of speech usage provide a crucial framework for informing and revealing how individual speakers use language. Norms are pragmatic phenomena that may have gained their "social significance on the basis of their distribution" (p.5). Similarly, Lo Castro (2013) asserts that the key characteristic of sociopragmatics is its sociological interface with pragmatics. According to him, a key finding from the study of sociopragmatics is how addressers' presentation of their identities plays a role in transmitting a pragmatic meaning.

The researcher adopts a sociopragmatic approach in the current study for the fact that the social aspects of language use, such as the social norms and contextual factors that influence them, are the focus of sociopragmatics. Sexism, a social phenomenon, is a type of bias or discrimination that is directed primarily at women and girls based on sex or gender, which the researcher aims to study sociopragmatically in the current study.

2.2 Sexism As Social Phenomenon

According to Graumann and Wintermantel (1989, p. 183), discrimination is "a disparity in treatment based on a categorical factor". It refers to the notion that a person or group is viewed as being less strong or inferior because of characteristics like race, religion, power, nationality, or sex. Besides, bias and exclusion are two characteristics of discrimination. Based on Wodak (2009, p. 315), gender discrimination is "one type of prejudice in which one dominating group (often men) targets the other downtrodden sex (typically women and girls)".

The first need for defining an expression as linguistically sexist is that it be aimed at a woman. A man essentially speaks it, making a particular lady or all women uncomfortable. Typically, it is focused on the distinctive nature of women. It is directed at women, about them, or concerns their private lives, and it never upholds modesty or harmony. Some males are said to have an innate belief that they are in charge of women only because they are men, regardless of their status, wealth, or other factors. Men think that because males are seen as the head of the family and society, women should stay at home, powerless, and frequently under the mercy of men (Mills, 2008).

Sociolinguists look at gender as a social variable to explicate sexism (Karlsson,2007). In addition to gender, there are many other social variables that help the sexist person and reflect sexism clearly. Power is one of these social variables. Following Crossman (2021, p.2), "the main factor in gender oppression is power". Tannen (1990, p.474) contends that "the basic reason for the gender difference is a barrier that men and women face when discussing disagreement". To build and sustain strong relationships with one another, women speak to one another about their problems, and they want men to do the same. Contrarily, when males overhear women discussing a problem, they often offer solutions and take quick action to diminish it.

Gender and power are social variables that reflect sexism in different ways. They are important social variables to understand and challenge sexism, as they shape how people are treated, valued, and represented in society based on their sex or gender.

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2.3 Mills' (2008) Classification of Sexism

In her work on feminism, Mills (2008) tries to create a framework with two interconnected strategies investigating sexism: overt and indirect sexism.

According to Mills (2008), overt sexism is a form of discrimination that is intentional, visible, and unambiguous. It consists of deliberate and intentional actions aimed at disadvantaging individuals. It involves harmful and unequal treatment of women based on their gender. Whereas, indirect sexism is less obvious and harder to detect. Mills states that "sexism is very apparent, but it is a form of sexism which has been modified because of feminist pressure and because of male responses to feminism" (p.133). It involves underlying thoughts, beliefs, and biases that contribute to gender inequality, often without the perpetrator realizing it. indirect sexism is usually indirect, hidden, subtle, or unnoticed, and it can be difficult to challenge or criticize, because the speaker or writer can deny or justify their expression by claiming that they were being ironic, humorous, or normal.

2.4 Conversational Implicature

Conversational implicatures have been defined by several pragmatists. Grice (1989, p. 8) refers to these as "non-natural meaning". Schiffer (2017) points out that conversational implicature is an indirect or implicit speech act that conveys meaning beyond the literal interpretation of the words used in an utterance. These implicatures are associated with the comprehension of language and communication. For human communication to be successful, they must adhere to a particular form of engagement. For this reason, Paul Grice created the Cooperative Principle and its maxims, which are based on the philosophy of everyday language, as a way of interaction for effective communication (Lulu, 2019).

2.4.1 Grice's Theory of the Cooperative Principle

Grice (1989) coined the word Flouting to describe the mechanism by which a conversational implication results from a maxim's non-observance. The flouting of a maxim occurs when a speaker disobeys one or more maxims to establish an inference. Disregarding the cooperative principles might lead to the manifestation of figures

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of speech. Figures of speech frequently flout this maxim by employing language in unexpected or nonliteral ways to achieve rhetorical goals. A speaker who employs irony, for instance, deliberately flouts the cooperative principle by stating the exact opposite of what they mean to say to express a specific meaning or emotion. Other figures of speech such as metaphor, tautology, and overstatement can also flout the cooperative principle by departing from the literal meaning to achieve communication objectives.

2.43.2 Flouting the CP and Figures of Speech

Grundy (2019), following Brown and Levinson (1987), asserts that when flouting conversational maxims, the speaker must apply strategies to convey the implicature to the hearer. He proposes six rhetorical strategies, including figures of speech as means of maxim flouting: tautology, overstatement, understatement, irony, rhetorical question, and metaphor. Since these rhetorical devices have the ability to flout maxims based on their definitions and usages, they are categorized as maxim flouting strategies. It is worth mentioning that this classification is adopted in the current study; thus, the related figures of speech are presented in more detail as follows:

1. Tautology

Tautology is the repeated use of words or sentences with similar meanings. Tautology is a term that is commonly employed to simplify a complex meaning (Grundy, 2019). For example: A free gift that costs nothing at all.

2. Overstatement

Overstatement, like exaggeration, takes place when someone expresses something more strongly than the actual circumstance (Grundy, 2019). For example: I would die if I ever met Brad Pitt in person.

3. Understatement

Understatement is the contrast of overstatement as understatement depicts something more weakly than the actual situation (Grundy, 2019). For instance: It's a bit nippy outside, today (when describing temperatures that are 5 degrees below freezing).

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4. Irony

Both the speaker (A) and his listeners (B) can clearly see that what A has said or appears to have said is something (s)he does not believe. When utilizing irony, A thinks B will understand the meaning behind what they are saying (Grundy, 2019). For example: Lucky devil.

5. Rhetorical Questions

A rhetorical question is posed without expecting a meaningful response, purely for impact or to highlight a topic being discussed (Grundy, 2019). For example: can fish swim?

6. Metaphor

The use of a metaphor denotes a relationship between a "metaphorical" and a "literal" expression, whereby the former can alter the meaning of the latter or vice versa (Grundy, 2019). For example: Time is a thief.

3- Research Methodology

The methodology utilized for the current study is qualitative and is supported by frequencies and percentages. Qualitative research is the "study of things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p.2). The most significant aspect of qualitative research is that it is "situationally constrained," meaning that the social context is crucial since it shapes the significance of social actions (Bernard, 2013, p. 17). The qualitative part of the current study is represented by socio-pragmatically investigating the use of implicature in the selected American novels. It is, however, backed up by a range of frequencies and percentages that prevent subjectivity or bias and validate the researcher's assessment.

Only two novels are selected to be the data under the scrutiny of this study with the following criteria to achieve reliability and validity:

a. Both novels explore themes of women's oppression, and subjugation in different contexts, with "The Color Purple" based on events in US history and "The Handmaid's Tale" set in a dystopian future.

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b. Both novels can be considered Bildungsroman, or coming-of-age narratives, as the characters undergo significant personal growth and development throughout the stories.

c. Both novels explore the power dynamics between men and women, as well as the societal constructs that dictate gender roles.

d. Both novels are written from the perspective of their respective protagonists (first-person perspective), Offred in "The Handmaid's Tale" and Celie in "The Color Purple". This allows readers to experience the inner thoughts and emotions of the characters, fostering a deeper connection with their stories.

4- Data Analysis

4.1 The Color Purple

"The Color Purple" was a novel written by Alice Walker and published in 1982. The main character of the book is a fourteen-year-old African-American, Celie, who writes letters to God as her only means of releasing after being raped by her father constantly and having no one to turn to for support or confidence. Later on, she is married off to an elderly widower who still abuses and rapes her.

Extract 1

"**Celie**: She ugly. He say. But she ain't no stranger to hard work. And she clean. And God done fixed her. You can do everything just like you want to and she ain't gonna make you feed it or clothe it. Fact is, he say, I got to git rid of her. She too old to be living here at home. And she a bad influence on my other girls. She'd come with her own linen. She can take that cow she raise down there back of the crib. But Nettie you flat out can't have. Not now. Not never.

Mr. ??? finally speak. Clearing his throat. I ain't never really look at that one, he say. Well, next time you come you can look at her. She ugly. Don't even look like she kin to Nettie. But she'll make the better wife. She ain't smart either, and I'll just be fair, you have to watch her or she'll give away everything you own. But she can work like a man" (p.9).

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The analysis

1- Socio Strategies of Sexism

This extract contains five occurrences of overt and one indirect sexism. The father explicitly devalues Celie by saying things such as "She ugly", "She ain't smart either", "she can work like a man", and "she ain't no stranger to hard work", that based on her look, intelligence, and perceived usefulness, which is an overt form of sexism. In the same extract, the father also praises Celie covertly by saying, "she'll make the better wife", and that she is good at running a house, making her a good wife. This is an example of indirect sexism.

2- Pragmatic Strategy

a- Flouting The Maxims

The narrator's father flouts the quantity maxim. Flouting the quantity maxim manifests two tropes: overstatement and understatement. Overstatement is used twice. The father uses the phrase, "You can do everything just like you want", to persuade the suitor to marry Celie and exaggerate how hardworking she is by saying, "she ain't no stranger to hard work". Understatement is also used twice. The father's phrase, "she ain't gonna make you feed it or clothe It", is one example of understatement. He understates her needs. It implies that he treats her like an object or an animal, not a human being. The second use of understatement is the suitor's phrase "I ain't never really look at that one", which implies that Celie is ugly and does not deserve his attention.

Extract 2

"**Celie**: All my life I had to fight. I had to fight my daddy. I had to fight my brothers. I had to fight my cousins and my uncles. A girl child ain't safe in a family of men. But I never thought I'd have to fight in my own house. She let out her breath" (p.35).

The Analysis

1- Socio Strategies of Sexism

Celie describes the violence and oppression that Sofia has faced in her life by using overt sexism. The extract "All my life I had to fight... But I never thought I'd have to fight in my own house" shows

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how women are oppressed by the patriarchal society they live in, where they are expected to be submissive and obedient to men.

2- Pragmatic Strategy

a- Flouting the Maxims

The quantity maxim is flouted in this extract. Overstatement is manifested once through quantity maxim flouting. Sofia's statement, "A girl child ain't safe in a family of men", is an overstatement of Sofia's experiences of abuse and oppression, as it exaggerates the danger faced by women in male-dominated households. This overstatement serves to highlight the very real threat of violence and abuse that women face in such environments.

4.2 The Handmaid's Tale

"The Handmaid's Tale" is a futuristic dystopian novel by Canadian author Margaret Atwood. It was published in 1985. The main character and narrator of the story, Offred, is one of the Handmaids, or women who are forced to bear children for the Commanders, the Gilead ruling elite**.** Offred struggles to survive in this oppressive society, where women have no rights and are subject to strict rules and punishments. In addition, she looks for information about her daughter and husband, who were taken from her when Gilead was created.

Extract 3

"Offred: "Blessed be the fruit," she says to me, the accepted greeting among us. "May the Lord open," I answer, the accepted response. We turn and walk together past the large houses, towards the central part of town. We aren't allowed to go there except in twos. This is supposed to be for our protection, though the notion is absurd: we are well protected already. The truth is that she is my spy, as I am hers. If either of us slips through the net because of something that happens on one of our daily walks, the other will be accountable" (Margaret Atwood, 1985, p.8).

The analysis

1- Socio Strategies of Sexism

This extract incorporates five instances of indirect sexism. The women are subjected to a rigid and oppressive system that controls

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behavior and speech. The narrator uses the ritualized greetings "Blessed be the fruit", "May the Lord open", and "the accepted greeting among us", to imply that women are valued only for their ability to bear children. She also uses the phrases "this is supposed to be for our protection" and "We aren't allowed to go there except in twos", to imply a lack of trust in the individuals, suggesting they cannot be trusted to be alone, which can be seen as a form of control and limitation based on gender.

2- Pragmatic Strategy

a- Flouting The Maxims

The speaker, Offred, flouts both the quantity and quality maxims. Understatement is manifested once through the flouting of quantity maxim. Offred's statement, "the other will be accountable", is an instance of understatement, as she minimizes the punishment they may face. It implies that the women will face a mild or reasonable consequence when, in fact, they will be killed for any disobedience.

Irony, in this extract, results from flouting the quality maxim. Offer's statements portray two instances of irony. The first instance of irony is "we are well protected already", as it implies that the women are safe and secure when, in fact, they are oppressed and controlled by the regime. The second instance of irony is "this is supposed to be for our protection", as it implies that the rule of going out in twos is beneficial for the women when, in fact, it is a way of limiting their freedom and autonomy.

Extract 4

"**Offred**: It's not the husbands you have to watch out for, said Aunt Lydia, it's the Wives. You should always try to imagine what they must be feeling. Of course they will resent you. It is only natural. Try to feel for them. Aunt Lydia thought she was very good at feeling for other people. Try to pity them. Forgive them, for they know not what they do" (p.16).

The Analysis

1- Socio Strategies of Sexism

Overt sexism and indirect sexism appear in this extract. Aunt Lydia gives one example of overt sexism, as she threatens the

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handmaids explicitly, "Of course they will resent you. It is only natural ", to force the handmaids to accept the reality that they have no choice but to accept their fate and forgive their oppressors. This is a clear example of overt sexism.

In the same extract, indirect sexism appears four times. Aunt Lydia tries to manipulate the handmaids into sympathizing with the wives: "try to imagine … be feeling", "Try to feel for them", and "Try to pity … what they do". She is using emotional language to make the handmaids feel guilty and inferior and to justify the unequal and harmful treatment they receive. Similarly, Offred implicitly conveys that Aunt Lydia is one of the oppressors of that regime: "Aunt Lydia thought she was very good at feeling for other people".

2- Pragmatic Strategy

a- Flouting the Maxims

Both quantity maxim and quality maxim are flouted in this extract. Tautology and understatement are manifested through flouting the quantity maxim. Aunt Lydia repeats the word "try" three times in the phrases, "try to imagine what they must be feeling", "Try to feel for them", and "Try to pity them", to emphasize the same point. This tautology shows how Aunt Lydia tries to brainwash the handmaids into accepting the regime's ideology and logic.

The phrase, "Forgive them, for they know not what they do", shows an understatement that is used to express sexism. This phrase is a quotation from the Bible, attributed to Jesus on the cross, asking God to forgive his executioners. This phrase is an understatement because it minimizes the oppression of the handmaids. She depicts wives as innocent, while in fact, they are complicit and cruel in the oppressive system of Gilead.

The narrator's statement, "Aunt Lydia thought she was very good at feeling for other people" is an irony that shows a contrast between what Aunt Lydia says and what reality is. She claims that she is good at feeling for other people, but she is actually cruel and insensitive to the suffering of the handmaids. She also quotes a biblical phrase to justify the oppression and violence of the regime, which is far from being Christian or compassionate. This irony shows how Aunt Lydia twists and distorts the meaning of words and concepts to suit her authority. Accordingly, the quality maxim is flouted.

5- Results and Discussion

1- Socio Strategies of Sexism

In the data under study, overt and indirect socio strategies of sexism are employed. overt sexism is at the top of the list with 78 occurrences (29.43%), while indirect sexism occupies the last rank with 45 occurrences (16.98%). Frequencies and percentages are shown in Table 1

Table 1

Frequencies and Percentages of Socio Strategies of Sexism in Both Novels

Socio Strategies of Sexism	Frequency	Percentage
Overt	78	29.43%
Indirect	45	16.98%
Total	265	100%

2- Pragmatic Strategy

a- Flouting The Maxims

Six tropes are used to portray sexism in the selected novels. Frequencies and percentages are used to illustrate the usage of the tropes. The results are displayed in Table 2 below for more clarification.

Table 2

Frequencies and Percentages of Topes in both novels

Tropes	Frequency	Percentage
Overstatement	18	23.68%
Tautology	15	19.73%
Understatement	14	18.42%
Irony	12	15.78%
Metaphor	11	14.47%
Rhetorical Question	6	7.89%
Total	76	100%

Overstatement is used more than other tropes in an attempt to achieve the aim of portraying the discrimination and oppression presented in the data. That is why overstatement has the highest frequency with 18 occurrences (23.68%). Followed by tautology with 15 occurrences (19.73%). Understatement comes next with 14 occurrences (18.42%). Irony comes in the fourth position with 12

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occurrences (15.78%). Metaphor takes place with 11 occurrences (14.47%). Rhetorical question has the lowest rank in the Table with 6 occurrences (7.89%).

Conclusions

In the light of the qualitative analyses of the selected data, the study has arrived at the following conclusions:

1- Regarding the socio strategies of sexism detected in the novels under study, the study concludes that overt and Indirect strategies of sexism are employed in the novels "The Color Purple" and "The Handmaid's Tale". First, the high prevalence of overt sexism is most probably a result of how women are portrayed as being severely oppressed and discriminated. Second, because both novels are likely set in settings where sexism is more overt and intentional. Indirect sexism, which refers to hidden types of sexism, occupies the lowest position. Accordingly, hypothesis No. 1, which reads, "overt and indirect sexism are the socio strategies of sexism that appear in the novels under study", is verified.

2- Six tropes, overstatement, tautology, understatement, irony, metaphor, and rhetorical question, are used to show sexism in the data. They are arranged from top to bottom as follows:

i. Overstatement occurs most frequently, most likely to exaggerate the struggles and discriminations of the characters and increase the narrative's effect.

ii. Tautology, repeating a sentence with different words, may be employed to highlight the oppressive beliefs and systems that control societies in both novels.

iii. Understatement can be used to downplay the importance or influence of a situation or feeling.

iv. Irony, which expresses meaning that differs from the literal interpretation, is used to draw attention to the inequalities in society and the subordination of women.

v. Metaphor may be employed to highlight how women are objectified and dehumanized in society.

vi. The authors' stylistic choices and the stories' thematic focus may all be responsible for the novels' limited use of rhetorical questions in both novels.

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Accordingly, the hypothesis 2 reading: "several tropes are used to show sexism in the selected novels, such as irony, rhetorical question, and metaphor", is verified.

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