Language as a Tool for Shaping Identity and Promoting Social Progress in Shaw’s *Pygmalion* and Walker’s *The Color Purple*

Dissertation submitted to the department of English in candidacy for the degree of Doctorate in “Studies in Language and Literature”

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Academic Year: 2018-2019
# Table of Contents

Declaration……………………………………………………………………………………………...I

Dedication………………………………………………………………………………………..…II

Acknowledgements ………………………………………………………………………………..III

Abstract …………………………………………………………………………………………V

List of Acronyms………………………………………………………………………………….VI

List of Appendices………………………………………………………………………………VII

List of Figures ……………………………………………………………………………………...VIII

List of Graphs ……………………………………………………………………………………..IX

List of Maps …………………………………………………………………………………….....X

List of Tables ……………………………………………………………………………………..XI

Table of Contents ………………………………………………………………………………….XIII

General Introduction ……………………………………………………………………………...1

**Chapter One: Theoretical Perspective: Language and the Social Parameters** ........14

1.1. Introduction………………………………………………………………………………….14

1.2. Rhetoric and Stylistics ……………………………………………………………………15

1.2.1. Stylistics …………………………………………………………………………………18

1.2.2. Linguistic Stylistics……………………………………………………………………...23

1.2.3. Literary Stylistics………………………………………………………………………...25
Chapter Two: Corpus and Sociolinguistic Analysis of Dialect Use in Pygmalion and The Color Purple

2.1. Introduction

2.2. Literary Dialect

2.3. George Bernard Shaw

2.3.1. Pygmalion- The Play

2.3.2. The Play’s Summary

2.4. Alice Walker

2.4.1. The Color Purple- The Novel

2.4.2. The Novel’s Summary

2.5. Dialect Use in Pygmalion and The Color Purple

2.6. Dialect Data

2.6.1. Eliza Doolittle

2.6.2. Eliza and the Eynsford Hills

2.6.3. Eliza, the Gentleman and the Note Taker

2.6.4. Eliza and Higgins

2.6.5. Alfred Doolittle

2.6.6. Celie
Chapter Three: Social Transformation and Development of Identity through Language

3.1. Introduction .................................................................148

3.2. Linguistic Markers of Social Status in Pygmalion .................................149

3.2.1. Development of Eliza’s Language ...........................................157

3.3. Linguistic Markers of Character in The Color Purple .........................164
3.3.1. The Power of Writing ................................................................. 167
3.3.2. Development of Celie’s Language................................................. 171
3.4. Eliza and Celie’s Development of Identity ......................................... 173
  3.4.1. Eliza’s Transformation .............................................................. 173
  3.4.2. Celie’s Personal Development ................................................... 185
3.5. Comparison of Dialect Use in *Pygmalion* and *The Color Purple* ............. 195
  3.5.1. Similarities of Dialect Use in *Pygmalion* and *The Color Purple* ........... 196
  3.5.2. Differences of Dialect Use in *Pygmalion* and *The Color Purple* .......... 197
3.6. Stylistic Elements in *The Color Purple* ......................................... 197
  3.6.1. The Epistolary Style .............................................................. 198
  3.6.2. Dialogism ............................................................................. 201
  3.6.3. Polyphony ............................................................................. 203
3.7. Feminist Perspective on *The Color Purple* ......................................... 207
3.8. Conclusion .................................................................................. 210

**General Conclusion** ........................................................................... 212

**Bibliography** .................................................................................. 217

**Appendices** .................................................................................. 238
Abstract

This research work is based on the implementation of an interdisciplinary approach which combines methods of analysis from linguistic and literary stylistics, corpus stylistics, sociolinguistics, dialectology and discourse analysis so that to conduct a twofold analytical study of the language used in *Pygmalion* by Bernard Shaw and *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker. In fact, Shaw and Walker’s linguistic intelligence enables them to craft believable characters whose social standing is revealed in their talk because certain sociolinguistic factors generate variability in their speech production, that is, characters with low ascribed statuses speak types of social dialects while those with a higher status in the social scale speak the standard variety. Hence, this dissertation intends to incorporate into the traditional descriptive approach a quantitative linguistic inquiry in order to investigate through statistical findings, corpora analyses as well as manual and electronic techniques the different dialectal variables of cockney dialect in *Pygmalion* and vernacular AAE in *The Color Purple* that deviate from the standard forms at the phonological, grammatical and lexical levels and then explore the miscellaneous extra-linguistic parameters that impact language use by characters in both literary masterpieces. Moreover, the ultimate goal of the current research is to use sociolinguistic and discourse analysis of the characters’ language so that to determine the extent to which language can be an effective tool for shaping identity and promoting social progress in *Pygmalion* and *The Color Purple*. The findings show that sociolinguistic competence enables the main characters to develop new identities and improve their opportunities for social mobility, i.e., they undergo social metamorphosis by means of learning the verbal skills paving the way for them to join the high society and gain access to their codes of behavior.