

# Sociolinguistic Study Of Inequality In Some Selected Novels

**Prof. Dr. Qassim Obais Al-Azzawi and Seren Majeed**

*University of Babylon, College of Education for Human Sciences, Department of English, Higher Studies, Iraq. [Sereenmajeed38@gmail.com](mailto:Sereenmajeed38@gmail.com)*

## **Abstract:**

The goal of this work is to examine inequality from a sociolinguistic perspective. The issues of gender, race, ethnicity, and religion are highlighted. The study examines the influence of social hierarchy and the legal system on the status of various languages and their speakers. Thus, it emphasizes influential work that disclosed and examined how language is used to make and deepen inequality, with a particular focus on language use in relation to race and gender dynamics.

**Key words:** Sociolinguistics, inequality, selected novel, race, ethnic, gender.

## **I. Introduction**

By using a set of intentionally created symbols, language is a fully human and non-instinctive way of expressing thoughts, feelings, and wants. (Sapir, 1921) Humans develop language in order to meet their social demands. It is an organized kind of communication. Society and language are intertwined. Inequality is a social construct that is influenced by language. As a result, socioeconomic inequality as a component of society is reflected in language. A condition in which there is not equity or fair treatment in the distribution of wealth or opportunities among various groups in society is described as inequality by the Cambridge Dictionary. The purpose of this essay is to demonstrate the connection between language and social inequality at various levels of society and to consider these issues from a cultural perspective (ibid).

Eliminating the notion (at least among professional linguists) that some languages or dialects are inherently "better" than others is one of linguistics' most significant accomplishments of the twentieth century. Although linguists acknowledge that some languages are regarded as superior to others by the general public, they also point out that all languages share certain traits, such as complexity and rule-governedness, and that even the less esteemed languages exhibit an impressively rich set of structural patterns. If linguists were simply shown the grammars of two distinct varieties of a completely unfamiliar language, one with high prestige and the other with low prestige, they would contend that they would not be able to distinguish between the two (Asma, 2021: 67).

Furthermore, the majority of linguists would probably agree with this statement

regarding linguistic variations between specific speakers: if two speakers have different grammatical styles, it is impossible to determine which has a higher social status simply by examining the grammatical differences. Granted, certain people—like young infants, immigrants, and those with mental disabilities—clearly have inadequate grammars by nature, but these exceptions are simple to explain and anticipate, and they uphold the argument that the grammars of all normal people are equal. While there are undoubtedly many differences across grammars, whether they belong to specific people or entire groups, there are no strictly linguistic justifications for placing one grammar over another (ibid).

## **1.2. Social inequality**

Inequality in terms of gender, race/ethnicity, class, and other significant social indicators is a result of unequal access to and utilization of resources across many areas (such as health, education, and occupations). The psychology department at Penn State understands the need of utilizing psychological techniques to learn more about the causes of social inequality and to offer solutions that are grounded in psychological theory to minimize these gaps whenever possible. We think that psychological theories can help us understand and address social inequities in sustainability, education, and public health (differential disease rates among different populations) (differential consequences of climate change for different groups) (George & George, 1987: 54).

We are one of the few psychology departments that approaches social

inequality inequitably and methodically. With this in mind, we build on the department's cross-cutting topics connected to neuroscience and translational research in order to exploit the existing capabilities in our department related to the study of social inequality (ibid).

Social inequality occurs when resources are dispersed unequally within a society, often as a result of norms of distribution that produce distinct patterns along lines of socially defined categories of people. Power, religion, kinship, prestige, race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, and class all play a role in how people access social goods in society (ibid).

Social inequality is typically thought of as the absence of result equality, but it may also be thought of as the absence of opportunity equality. The labor market, the means of support, access to health care, and the freedoms of expression, education, political involvement, and representation are all social rights (Lauter And Howe, 1971: 56).

A widely researched form of social inequality is that which is associated with economic inequality and is typically defined in terms of the unequal distribution of wealth or income. Although sociology and economics often employ different theoretical frameworks to analyze and explain economic inequality, both disciplines are actively engaged in this research (ibid).

However, social and natural resources other than purely economic resources are also unevenly distributed in most societies and may contribute to social status. Norms of allocation can also affect the distribution of rights and

privileges, social power, access to public goods such as education or the judicial system, adequate housing, transportation, credit and financial services such as banking and other social goods and services (ibid).

Many cultures around the world assert that they are meritocracies, meaning that they only allocate resources based on merit. Ironically, the term "meritocracy" was first used by Michael Young in his dystopian essay "The Rise of the Meritocracy" from 1958 to illustrate the social dysfunctions that he predicted would emerge in societies where the elites believe that they are successful solely on the basis of merit. Young was worried that the Tripartite System of education, which was in use in the United Kingdom at the time he wrote the essay, would lead to social dysfunctions (ibid).

Even though exceptional intelligence, talent, or other forms of merit may not always compensate for social disadvantages people face, research shows that the distribution of resources in societies frequently follows hierarchical social categorizations of people to a degree too significant to justify calling these societies "meritocratic." Racial and ethnic discrimination, gender disparity, and other types of social status are frequently linked to social inequality, which in turn is often linked to corruption (Malcolm, 2011: 56).

The Gini coefficient, which measures the concentration of wealth and income in a country from 0 (equitably distributed wealth and income) to 1 (one person possesses all wealth and income), is the most used tool for comparing socioeconomic inequality across various countries (ibid).

Two nations may have identical Gini coefficients but dramatically different economic (output) and/or quality of life, so the Gini coefficient must be contextualized for meaningful comparisons to be made (ibid).

### **1.3. Gender inequality**

Due to differences in masculinity and femininity, women and men are treated differently in society. This is manifested in the division of labor, the assignment of tasks and obligations, and the distribution of social benefits. Social disparity is largely a result of sexism, which is prejudice and discrimination based on one's gender and one's sexual orientation. Even rural communities often have some form of gender-based division of labor, which tends to rise as industrialisation takes place (Isabel & Cummins, 2011: 42).

The growing gap between the roles given to men and women, notably in the economic, political, and educational realms, is what gave rise to the focus on gender inequality. In the majority of countries, both in the Global North and the Global South, women are underrepresented in political activities and decision-making processes (ibid).

The issue of gender discrimination, particularly as it relates to the lower social position of women, has received significant attention from government agencies as well as international organizations like the United Nations. These debates aim to pinpoint and remove pervasive, institutionalized obstacles to access for women in their countries. Researchers who utilize gender analysis attempt to comprehend the social expectations, obligations,

resources, and priorities of men and women within a particular setting by looking at the social, economic, and environmental elements that affect their roles and ability to make decisions (ibid).

The lives of women and girls are badly impacted by artificial divisions between the social and economic roles of men and women, and this can have the result of impeding social mobility.

Men whose outward gender expression is deemed "feminine" within a given country can be impacted by cultural beliefs about women's labor. The gender of transgender and gender-variant people can be expressed by their appearance, their words, or the documents they present in official capacities. Gender normativity in this context is regarded as the cultural and institutional devaluing of trans identities, homosexuality, and femininity. Gender normativity is the social expectations imposed on us when we present particular bodies. Particularly trans people have been labeled as disruptive and socially unproductive (ibid).

#### **1.4. Racial and ethnic inequality**

Racial or ethnic inequality is a product of social hierarchies that exist within a community and are frequently based on physical traits like skin color and other physical characteristics or a person's country of origin. Racism and systemic racism are the causes of racial inequality (Grant, 1998: 88)..

Members of excluded groups may also experience less chances as a result of racial inequality, which can feed vicious cycles of poverty and political exclusion. Redlining in Chicago is a classic example

of this. Redlines were drawn on maps around black areas intentionally to prevent them from leaving dilapidated public housing by refusing to grant loans to black people.

In a society, racial and ethnic groupings are reduced to minorities. In such a society, policies adopted by the majority frequently subject minority members to discriminatory measures, such as assimilation, exclusion, oppression, expulsion, and annihilation (ibid).

For instance, laws in some "battleground states" that purported to address voter fraud during the 2012 US federal elections had the consequence of disenfranchising tens of thousands of voters, predominantly African-Americans. In marginalized populations, these institutional obstacles to full and equitable social participation have far-reaching consequences, such as decreased economic opportunity and output, diminished educational outcomes and possibilities, and diminished levels of general health (ibid).

#### **Practical side**

##### **Inequality in Hard times**

Hard Times is a novel that focuses on the impact of the Victorian era's economic and social state by influencing specific events and character development. Additionally, it embodied a subliminal political reform idea. Hard Times was characterized by Raymond Williams as a creative study of the Industrialism dominating worldview in his book *Culture and Society* (1983), which explored the social novels of the Victorian era. Dickens explored the darker and more perverse aspects of

human nature through his fiction. Dickens' handling of crime was more than just a literary device; it served as the focal point for his intense concern with social issues, which played a significant role in his attempts... additional material.

The book *Hard Times* raised concerns about the weak legal system at the Coketown factory as well as the hard living conditions of the working class. *Hard Times* is Dickens' critique on the system that Hobsbaum thinks "tramples the rights of individual human beings in a general melee." Jónsson (2009): 3 *Hard Times* was given its complicated identity by Charles Dickens' use of language, diction, and vocabulary, which is mirrored in the title choice. *Hard Times* is a novel about the Great Depression (Al-Maliki, 2013:74). When his friend John Foster offered to help him, he made a list of titles, some of which were "Mr. Gradgrind's Fact, Gradgrind Philosophy, Matter," and Charles Dickens chose *Hard Times* as the title.

Through his novel *Hard Times*, Charles Dickens sharply criticized utilitarian concepts and ideals, especially the idea of wealth division that made the affluent richer and the poor poorer (Ibid,7). *Hard Times*, a book by Charles Dickens, is widely read today. He had been writing on the problems of the urban poor, and as he was one of them, he undoubtedly gave English poverty a more genuine portrayal. One of his greatest accomplishments was to use a variety of disadvantaged people to draw readers' attention to the issues and challenging situations of poverty (Ibid,8). While persuading the reader of the harshness of the aristocrats and any other Dickens'

villains, Charles Dickens also created sympathy for his underdog heroes.

### **Inequality in *Wuthering Height***

We see the discrepancy between social classes and how the lower class is most obviously associated to animals in Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*. Nelly's account of Mr. Heathcliff's upbringing and how he met Catherine, Hindley, and Mr. and Mrs. Earnshaw in Volume I is where we see this most frequently. When Nelly initially introduces Mr. Earnshaw, she says that he had traveled to Liverpool and had the dramatic experience of nearly dying while there. He says that because of an incident with another person—something a person of his social standing had never had to handle—"at the end of [his journey], he was to be flighted to death."

He then presents the family with the "dirty, ragged, black-haired child," whom we now know to be Heathcliff, after detailing this episode. The way Mr. Earnshaw initially describes Heathcliff is intriguing because he warns Mrs. Earnshaw not to "accept it as a gift from God, [because] it's as dark nearly as if it came from the Devil" (31). Mrs. Earnshaw is still baffled as to how Mr. Earnshaw managed to bring that "gipsy brat" home. Our understanding of Heathcliff's physical differences from Earnshaw is aided by the terminology employed to describe him.

Heathcliff's origins are never explicitly stated in the book, but we can infer it from the terminology used to describe him, such as "large enough both to walk and talk" and "its face."

Additionally, we see particular language used to describe Heathcliff that would be used to describe animals. For example, when Nelly describes where Heathcliff stayed when arriving in the house, she states "I put it on the landing of the stair, hoping it might be gone on the morrow" (32). The use of "it" to describe the child dehumanizes Heathcliff and shows that he is different from the Earnshaws, while also hinting that they hoped he would leave in the morning like a dog would when unfamiliar with a home. We see a shift in the way they reference Heathcliff after he is christened showing that it was that which allowed for the Earnshaws to finally see him as a person rather than a thing.

The division between socioeconomic classes in the story that I find particularly interesting in these circumstances. It seems that people with lower social standing are compared to animals. I do wonder, though, if other things might lead some people, like the Earnshaws, to compare people to animals. These variables may include religion, race, place of birth, etc. Knowing Heathcliff's past helps us better understand his personality and the reasons behind why he is so distant from most people.

#### Inequality in pride and prejudice

However, the circumstantial evidence suggests that the stage was set during the Napoleonic Wars, specifically between 1810 and 1815. The book's primary character is the charming Elizabeth Bennet, the second oldest of a wealthy family of five daughters led by Mr. Bennet (the patriarch's first name is never mentioned in the book; his own wife refers to him as Mr. Bennet). Elizabeth and her family enjoy the enviable

existence of English country aristocracy, which is characterized by a peaceful idleness interrupted by balls and parties and the ensuing social gossip. Elizabeth is attractive, smart, and unmarried, of course. The annual income of her family is approximately £3,000, which, when divided by the seven members of the family (five sisters and their parents), results in a per capita income of £430 (excluding, as in the rest of the examples here, the imputed value of housing, which must have been considerable).

This level of income places the Bennets in the top 1 percent of the English income distribution at the time, as calculated from Robert Colquhoun's English social table done for the early years of the nineteenth century.

Elizabeth encounters Mr. Darcy, a wealthy suitor who, according to everyone in the novel, earns £10,000. He and his little less wealthy buddy Mr. Bingley are both naturally regarded as very desirable bachelors by Elizabeth Bennet's socially conscientious (and non-sense) mother. With his enormous salary, Mr. Darcy at least falls into the top tenth of one percent of earners. Take note of the enormous disparity between the top 1% and the top 10%, or, to borrow George W. Bush's contemporary jargon, between "the haves and the have-mores." Mr. Darcy's salary is more than three times more than Elizabeth's father's, despite the fact that these English haves and have-mores openly mixed socially (and reportedly intermarried) in the early nineteenth century; translated in per capita terms (since Mr. Darcy does not take care of anyone but himself), the ratio is in excess of twenty to one.

It won't be a narrative spoiler to mention that Elizabeth has some reservations about Mr. Darcy's suitability when he expresses his "adoration," which is a period euphemism that would be expressed very differently in a contemporary book. However, there is another terrible effect if you reject him permanently. The house and successfully running estate pass to Mr. Bennet's annoying cousin, the Reverend William Collins, per English inheritance laws if he passes away without a direct male heir. In that event, Elizabeth will have to rely only on her portion of the £5,000 her mother "settled" into the marriage in order to support herself. Reverend Collins, Elizabeth's ill-fated suitor, therefore estimates her independent riches in a fairly crude manner. This is a rather measly amount, approximately equal to twice the mean income in England at the time. It is an income that a family of a surveyor or merchant marine seaman could expect.

The trade-off between love and fortune appears at this point. Think about the situation from the perspective of Elizabeth's mother, who is concerned about her daughter's happiness. Elizabeth can get married to Mr. Darcy and earn £5,000 a year, on the other hand (we assume that she contributes nothing in monetary terms to Mr. Darcy and that Mr. Darcy shares his income evenly with Elizabeth). On the other hand, she has the option to sink into what Mrs. Bennet would undoubtedly perceive as a world of abject poverty, subsisting on less than £50 a year. The revenue ratio between these two outcomes is almost a hundred to one, which is just astounding. At that price, staying single or even waiting till

your ideal partner shows up is a better option.

## Conclusion

Scenes of misery and social injustice play endlessly on our screens and social networks while inequality grows and intensifies. The spectacle's adherence to the news cycle's rhythm and its draping in facts, figures, graphs, and expert judgments have an indecent air about them. Sometimes inequality is portrayed as the inevitable result of a market-based system, and other times it is used as a chance to elicit fleeting outrage or compassion.

Inequality is found in almost all literary works. This is because generally literary works are based on everyday life scenes and it is found in our everyday life so it is famous in literary works.

## References

1. Afsaruddin, Asma. "Islam's anti-racist message from the 7th century still resonates today". *The Conversation*. Retrieved 27 October 2021.
2. Kirkpatrick, George R.; Katsiaficas, George N.; Kirkpatrick, Robert George; Mary Lou Emery (1987). *Introduction to critical sociology*. Ardent Media.
3. Lauter And Howe (1971) *Conspiracy of the Young*. Meridian Press.
4. "Age Discrimination".
5. Sargeant, Malcolm, ed. (2011). *Age Discrimination and Diversity Multiple Discrimination from an Age*

- Perspective. Cambridge University Press.
6. Ortiz, Isabel & Matthew Cummins (April 2011). "Global inequality: Beyond the bottom billion". UNICEF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC POLICY WORKING PAPER. UNICEF. Retrieved 9 July 2014.
  7. Grant, K.R. (1998). *The Inverse Care Law in Canada: Differential Access Under Universal Free Health Insurance*. Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
  8. World Bank (1993). *World Development Report*. New York: Oxford University Press.
  9. Mankinen, M.; et al. (January 2000). "Inequalities in Health Care Use and Expenditures: Empirical Data from Eight Developing Countries and Countries in Transition". *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*.