

# METODY JEZYKOZNAWCZE W LITERATURZE / LINGUISTIC METHODS IN LITERATURE

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## Racial Identity, Black and White Performance in J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*

**Abstrakt (Tożsamość rasowa, zachowania czarnych i białych w *Hańbie* J. M. Coetzee).** Poprzez analizę jakościową – na podstawie ram teoretycznych i metodologii trzeciej fali socjolingwistyki – w artykule przeanalizowano, w jaki sposób interpretowane są tożsamość, styl i zachowanie w wybranych dialogach i wypowiedziach w *Hańbie* J. M. Coetzee. Artykuł ten analizuje dominację językową i opór ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem budowania tożsamości, stylizacji oraz zachowań czarnych i białych konstytuujących akty polityczne. Wykorzystując koncepcję językowego habitusu Pierre'a Bourdieu, pokazuje on, w jaki sposób ponadstandardowo wysokie (kulturalne) zachowania kulturowe białych postaci zachowują rasowe hierarchie i odtwarzają rasową społeczno-semantyczną wersję dyskursu kolonialnego. Z jednej strony czarne postacie wykorzystują socjolingwistyczne zasoby zachowań, stylizacji i naśladowania do kwestionowania (językowej) dominacji i dyskursu rasowego. Z drugiej strony białe postacie używają antyrasistowskiego języka do krytykowania rasizmu i wyrażania swojej solidarności z grupami zmarginalizowanymi. Artykuł pokazuje więc, w jaki sposób zachowanie jest ucieleśnioną i osadzoną, złożoną i zwyczajną, wysoką i codzienną, spektakularną i nieprzejrzystą praktyką o głębokich konsekwencjach rasowych, politycznych i etycznych.

**Abstract.** Through qualitative analysis – informed by the theoretical framework and methodology of the third wave of sociolinguistics – this paper looks at how identity, style and performance are construed in selected dialogues and utterances in J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*. This essay examines linguistic dominance and resistance with particular attention devoted to identity construction, stylization, Black and white performances constitutive of political acts. Using Pierre Bourdieu's concept of linguistic habitus, it demonstrates the ways in which white characters' superstandard high (cultural) performances preserve racial hierarchies and reenact the racial socio-semantics of colonial discourse. On the one hand, Black characters utilize the sociolinguistic resources of performance, styling and mimicry to contest (linguistic) dominance and racial discourse. On the other hand, white characters use anti-racist language to critique racism and signify their solidarity with marginalized groups. Thus, the paper shows how performance is an embodied and embedded, complex and ordinary, high and quotidian, spectacular and opaque practice with profound racial, political and ethical implications.

## 1. Introduction

John Maxwell Coetzee is a Nobel Prize-winning white South African author. He was born into an Afrikaner family in Cape Town in 1940. Due to their opposition to white nationalism, his close family does not identify as Afrikaner and he did not grow up speaking Afrikaans; his extended family, however, speaks *kombuistaal*, a “slapdash mixture” of English and Afrikaans (Coetzee 1998: 81). In 1999, he received the Booker prize for *Disgrace*, which brought him international renown. Largely due to the unfavorable reception of *Disgrace* in South Africa, he emigrated to Australia in 2002, where he currently resides.

The novel takes place in post-apartheid South Africa, after the dissolution of the apartheid regime (1948-1994), after the democratic state replaced the political system of racist discrimination, segregation and the disenfranchisement of the Black population. The novel's protagonist, David Lurie, is a professor of English and Communications at the University of Cape Town, who is asked to leave after sexual assault allegations brought forward by a student. He admits he is guilty of all the charges brought against him but refuses to express any repentance before the academic committee; consequently, he is forced to resign and start life anew on his lesbian daughter's farm in the Eastern Cape. Soon after his self-imposed exile to the country, three Black strangers rob and assault them, and shoot the dogs she is boarding. His pregnant daughter refuses to report the gang rape or to abort the child of one of her attackers. In return for her safety and ability to stay on as a tenant, she accepts her neighbor's “marriage” proposal: in the spirit of reparations, she gives up her right to the land conquered and stolen by her ancestors. As a result of his “disgrace” and the influence of his feminist daughter, David's perspective on the new South Africa, art and animals undergoes a profound change: he spends his days alone, writing an opera, or volunteering at the local animal clinic, where he helps put down dogs and humanely dispose of their remains.

### 1.1.Linguistic background

The Cape of Good Hope was colonized by the Dutch East India Company in 1652. The English language arrived in South Africa in 1795 when Britain captured the Cape from the Dutch and set out to create a colony “British in character as well as in name” (Kamwangalu qtd. in Orman 2008: 80). Due to language contact between indigenous and settler languages, there is no such thing as a unitary South African English; South African English has many varieties, including Black, Indian and Colored South African Englishes (cf. McCormick 2002). Standard South African English follows the grammar of standard British English but has become a regional variety of English; its phonology and lexicon are deeply influenced by surrounding languages such as Dutch, Khoi, and other African languages (cf. Mesthrie (ed.) 2002).

Apartheid language policy was characterized by institutionalized linguistic discrimination, oppression and segregation. The racial classification (Whites, Blacks, Indians and Colored) of the population was supplemented by linguistically constituted subgroups: “Blacks,” “Indians” and “Coloureds” were classified according to the language of their heritage; “Whites” were divided into English- or Afrikaans-language speaking groups. Mother-tongue schooling prevented Black South Africans from participating in English-language education and bolstered the ethnolinguistic fragmentation of the Black population (Mesthrie (ed.) 2002). Education in English and Afrikaans was reserved for whites – the official languages were endowed with differing functions: whereas English was the language of education, commerce, journalism, economics and the private sphere, Afrikaans was used in politics, prisons and the state apparatus. The emergence of English as the language of opposition and symbol of Black unity was one of the unintended consequences of the language policy of the apartheid regime (Orman 2008).

In spite of espousing equitable multilingualism and linguistic human rights, the language policy of the post-apartheid regime has not evolved beyond apartheid-era linguistic categorizations; in practice, English monolingualism dominates the public arena and elite-closure prevails. Due to a defective education system, extremely negative attitudes towards African languages and the African majority’s inadequate knowledge of English, the African majority cannot participate in South African public life (Orman 2008). According to Myers-Scotton (1993: 148), elite-closure happens when “the elite successfully employ official language policies and their own non-formalised language usage patterns to limit access of non-elite groups to political position and socio-economic advancement.” Instead of ending elite-closure, the apartheid-era white, Afrikaans-speaking elite has been replaced by an English-speaking, mostly Black elite. South African multilingualism remains asymmetrical reflecting racial inequalities: the population is made up of monolingual English-, bilingual Afrikaans-language and multilingual Black speakers (Mesthrie (ed.) 2002).

To this day standard South African English is associated with white speakers, while nonstandard varieties are associated with Black and non-white African speakers. Standard English is the socially prestigious linguistic variety, used in official and educational contexts, characterized by an absence of stigmatized forms and features characteristic of “nonstandard” varieties (Fought 2006: 226). The so-called superstandard variety is in excess of linguistic forms and styles associated with white speakers and is, therefore, associated with more prestige – for example, in terms of pronunciation, grammar or vocabulary – than “common” linguistic forms, e.g., *to whom* (Fought 2006: 117, Wolfram–Schilling-Estes 1998). Using Bourdieu’s concepts, it is a representation of cultural and linguistic capital with which speakers signify and perform whiteness, elite social and educational status. Standard and superstandard varieties cannot, however, be firmly distinguished: on the one hand, the dominant group’s linguistic variety is perceived as neutral or unmarked (Fought 2006: 114); on the other hand, minorities, for example, perceive standard English as a symbol of “white language” and “white identity” (Ogbu 1999: 154). To my knowledge, scholarly attention has not been paid to the social meanings associated with superstandard (white) South African English.

For the purposes of this research, therefore, I will utilize the insights from linguistic studies delineating the attitudes towards superstandard American English. Barrett (1999), Trechter and Bucholtz (2001) have shown that social meanings associated with superstandard forms are: middle- and upper-class, higher education, intellectual orientation and scientific or technical registers (see also Fought 2006).

## 1.2. Theoretical background

The third wave of sociolinguistics conceptualizes style as a set of linguistic features and usages playing an active role in the construction of social meaning and identity. In this approach, the study of stylization/styling, crossing, and performance is foregrounded; ways of actively, creatively, reflexively creating social meanings and identities are centered. Stylization is an “artistic picture of the language of the other,” a polyphonic utterance in which the speaker appropriates, reworks and re-accentuates the language of the other (Bakhtin 1981: 362; see also Rampton 2006, Coupland 2007).

According to the social constructivist approach, Judith Butler's concepts of performance and performativity are means of identity construction and resistance to social norms (Bakhtin 1981, Bhabha 2010). In performative speech acts, speakers reconstruct the social and ideological meanings usually associated with linguistic forms and varieties. In this study, I connect the concept of performativity with Bauman's notion of cultural performance.

Butler's concept of performativity can be connected to Bauman's concept of (high or cultural) performance. According to Bauman (2001: 168–169), performance is typically a public display of communicative competence, distinguishable from other performances on the basis of generic and formal features. High performances are temporally and spatially bound, planned and programmed events (like a theatrical production) endowed with heightened intensity (cf. Bauman 2001, Bauman–Briggs 1990). Coupland (2007: 147–148) expands the characteristics identified by Bauman, arguing that high performance produces communicative *focusing* on multiple levels: *form, meaning, situation, performer, relational, achievement and repertoire focusing*. To a greater or lesser extent, focusing in overlapping dimensions characterizes high performances (see 2.2).

Also important to consider are the culturally specific ways of indexing and coding cultural performances. Whereas the conventional opening – *Once upon a time* – signals the telling of a fairy tale, the announcement – *Ladies and Gentlemen* – heralds another type of performance. In the absence of such codes, the setting, seating arrangement, rituals, linguistic and stylistic features help identify the performance. In order to introduce or mark performance-frames, different communities of practices use different codes (cf. Goffman 1986).

The most important feature of cultural performance is, according to Bauman (1996: 47–48), reflexivity. Cultural performances have the capacity to make audiences reflect upon the socio-psychological, cultural, and formal norms animating the performed event.

Extending Bauman's concept of cultural performance to sociocultural communities, Coupland (2007: 149) refers to the reflexive maneuvers cultural performances set in motion as their metasocial and metacultural potential. Because performances encompass a given community's most memorable, repeated and reflexively accessible repertoires (Bauman 2001: 149), the meanings and identities constituted by these performances reveal the broader system of signification of which they are part and parcel. By embedding linguistic and cultural practices in social relations, performances lay open to scrutiny how identity is constructed and reconstructed.

The sociolinguistic resources of reflexivity and performativity are excluded from Bourdieu's (1991) concept of linguistic habitus which summarizes his view that our ingrained ways of speaking are the product of our (linguistic) socialization into a particular social group. Bourdieu argues that language is a "bodily technique":

specifically linguistic, especially phonetic, competence is a dimension of bodily hexis in which one's whole relation to the social world, and one's whole socially informed relation to the social world, are expressed. There is every reason to think that, through the mediation of . . . 'articulatory style', the bodily hexis characteristic of a social class determines the system of phonological features which characterizes a class pronunciation. (Bourdieu 1991: 86)

The linguistic habitus comprises the normative, acceptable style typical of a social class; these semantically, linguistically and phonetically sedimented ways of speaking preclude choice and awareness (Coupland 2007: 89-93; see also Rampton 2006). I extend the concept to encompass the determining and intersecting influences of given social, ethnocultural/racial, geographic, gendered and sexual dispositions.

## 2. Analysis

### 2.1. White superstandard English style

David Lurie is a fifty-two years old divorcé in decline, a scholar tired of criticism and teaching, finding satisfaction in sex ninety minutes a week. When he can no longer rely on his looks to attract women, he learns to pursue them; "often, in one way or another, to buy [them]" (Coetzee 2005: 7<sup>1</sup>). His identity changes drastically: he goes from womanizer to "a mad old man who sits among the dogs singing to himself" (212). Rural life, the rape of his daughter, and the suffering of animals erode his academic ego, white male identity and style<sup>2</sup> (see 2.2., 2.6).

<sup>1</sup> All quotes henceforth cite the following edition: Coetzee, J. M. 2005. *Disgrace*. New York: Penguin Books.

<sup>2</sup> Space constraints prohibit detailed illustrations of how he uses language and power to seduce, harass and assault women.

On the basis of his utterances, the characteristics of David's white superstandard English style are the following:

- intellectual orientation, e.g., “*He has never been afraid to follow a thought down its winding track, and he is not afraid now*” (76), “*man of the book, guardian of the culture-hoard*” (16)
- rationality, abstraction, e.g., “*What is being asked for is, in fact, **Lösung** (German always to hand with an appropriately blank abstraction)*” (142)
- multilingualism, e.g., “*He speaks Italian, he speaks French, but Italian and French will not save him here in darkest Africa*” (95)
- literary and cultural allusions, quotes, e.g., “*Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires*”<sup>3</sup> (69), “***So this is bliss!***”<sup>4</sup> (5)
- linguistic dominance, e.g., “*I liked the Wonderhorn stuff,*” says Melanie. “*Wonderhorn,*” David corrects him (12–13), “***Demand.** [Soraya] means **command***” (10)
- academic register, specialized, superstandard vocabulary, e.g., *contadina*<sup>5</sup> (181), *luxe et volupté*<sup>6</sup> (1)
- (super)standard grammatical forms, e.g., “*Burned – burnt – burnt up*” (166)
- self-reflexiveness, linguistic/metapragmatic awareness, e.g., “***Wonderful** is not right. Better would be **exemplary***” (171)
- linguistic play, e.g., “*a moderate bliss, a moderated bliss*” (6)
- etymological, historical excursus, e.g., “*Modern English **friend** from Old English **freond**, from **freon**, to love*” (102)

David's white superstandard English style can be associated with the following personality traits:

- (self-)irony, e.g., “*The irony does not escape him: that the one who comes to teach learns the keenest of lessons, while those who come to learn learn nothing*” (5)
- dryness, coldness, objectivity, abstraction, e.g., “*Intercourse between Soraya and himself must be, he imagines, rather like the copulation of snakes: lengthy, absorbed, but rather abstract, rather dry, even at its hottest*” (3)
- supremacy, self-absorption, self-righteousness, e.g., “*As for animals, by all means let us be kind to them. But let us not lose perspective. We are of a different order of creation from the animals*” (74)
- hardness, inflexibility, pride, e.g., “*All right, I'll do it. But only as long as I don't have to become a better person*” (77)
- white male heterosexual privilege and entitlement, e.g., “*My case rests on the rights of desire*” (89)

As mentioned earlier, sexuality is a very important aspect of David's postcolonial masculinity as “he exist[s] in an anxious flurry of promiscuity” (7). His lectures on

<sup>3</sup> Quote from William Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.

<sup>4</sup> Allusion to Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*.

<sup>5</sup> *Contadina* means peasant girl or woman in Italian.

<sup>6</sup> *Luxe et volupté* means luxury and voluptuousness in French; it is an allusion to Henri Matisse's painting, *Luxe, Calme et Volupté* (1904), alluding to the fourteenth line of Charles Baudelaire's *L'invitation au voyage*.

romanticism focus on sensuality and sexuality; his book is entitled, *Vision as Eros, Wordsworth and the Burden of the Past* (4). After the eruption of the scandal, the media calls him Casanova. At the hearing, rather than making amends, he absolves himself by saying, “Suffice it to say that Eros entered. After that I was not the same. . . . I became a servant of Eros” (52). Later, when a journalist asks him whether he is sorry, he replies, “No, . . . I was enriched by the experience” (56).

## 2.2. The high performance of white superstandard English

David’s lecture on book six of Wordsworth’s *The Prelude* can be interpreted as a Baumanian high performance of white superstandard English. Quotes from Wordsworth are embedded and interpreted in David’s academic discourse:

(1) ‘From a bare ridge,’ he reads aloud,  
 ‘we also first beheld  
 Unveiled the summit of Mont Blanc, and grieved  
 To have a soulless image on the eye  
 That had usurped upon a living thought  
 That never more could be.’  
 ‘So. The majestic white mountain, Mount Blanc, turns out to be a disappointment  
 Why? Let us start with the unusual verb from *usurp upon*. Did anyone look it up in  
 a dictionary?’  
 Silence.  
 ‘If you had, you would have found that *usurp upon* means to intrude or encroach  
 upon. *Usurp*, to take over entirely, is the perfective of *usurp upon*; usurping completes  
 the act of usurping upon.’ (21)

David’s lecture embodies the contextual characteristics of high performance with culturally specific modes of indexicality and communicative focusing: the lecture is a planned, temporally and spatially bound event foregrounding stylistic choices, the formal and metalinguistic functions of language. David’s lecture and the poetry he works through display heightened semantic focusing, intensity, and depth. His performance is designed with a particular audience in mind; David and his students are tuned into what is usual and unusual in the performance. Both professor and students are aware of the norms guiding the interaction and the roles they are expected to play. David incorporates questions into the lecture to encourage students to participate and interact with the material (Coupland 2007: 147–148).

In spite of his desire to do so, he fails to engage, impress and inspire his “postliterate” students (32, on the genre of lectures see Goffman 1981). Their stubborn silence, lack of motivation and refusal to respond to his queries may be rooted in the alterity of the literary corpus, David’s interpretive approach or the hierarchical organization of the exchange. “*Where is the flash of revelation in this room?*,” he asks, realizing his failure to pique their interest (21).

To David, the Alps sequence thematizes the conflict between pure thought and sensual experience.

(1) 'The same word *usurp* recurs a few lines later. Usurpation is one of the deeper themes of the Alps sequences. The great archetypes of the mind, pure ideas, find themselves usurped by mere sense-images.'

. . . He pauses. Blank incomprehension. He has gone too far too fast. How to bring them to him? How to bring her?

'Like being in love,' he says. 'If you were blind you would hardly have fallen in love in the first place. But now, do you truly wish to see the beloved in the cold clarity of the visual apparatus? It may be in your better interest to throw a veil over the gaze, so as to keep her alive in the her archetypal, goddesslike form.'

It is hardly in Wordsworth, but at least it wakes them up. Archetypes? They are saying to themselves. Goddesses? What is he talking about? What does this old man know about love?

A memory floods back: the moment on the floor when he forced the sweater up and exposed her neat, perfect little breasts. For the first time she looks up; her eyes meet his and in a flash see all. Confused, she drops her glance. (22–23)

Wordsworth's way toward a balance, according to Lurie, is "not the pure idea, . . . nor the visual image burned on the retina," but the flame of the sense-image as a means toward a "flash of revelation" (22, 21). David connects the perfective form of the verb (*usurp upon*) to the mind's encroachment by sensory images, drawing his students' attention to the metaphorical links between fire, images and eyes, insofar as they relate to the problematic of desire. His reading foregrounds the importance of Wordsworthian revelations, likening these "flashes" to the effect of poetry, pedagogy and love.

David's lectures can be interpreted on many levels, including the problematics of centering the (male colonial) English literary canon in the postcolony. In spite of the violence he had inflicted upon Melanie, he refuses to historicize the usurpation of Mont Blanc as an allegory of colonial and male heterosexual conquest. His interpretation of Wordsworth affirms his view that, by kindling a real fire in him, Melanie had "usurped" him. Invoking the romantic rhetoric of "the rights of desire" (89) aims to justify the perpetration of sexual violence while the displacement and sublimation of "usurpation" erases the history of English and Dutch settler colonialism in South Africa; furthermore, his performance of "phallic domination" in and outside the classroom reproduces and reaffirms imperial white supremacist heteropatriarchy<sup>7</sup>.

Professor Lurie is unaware of his cis heterosexual white male (*habitus*) privilege. His professorial performances of superstandard English perform white masculinity, reproducing and ratifying local interactional and wider racial, gender, sexual and class asymmetries. As a result of his dismissal and expulsion from the academic milieu, his monolithic, impermeable academic superstandard style is eaten from the inside.

<sup>7</sup> It is not an accident that, according to Mbembe (2001: 13), "the form of domination imposed during both the slave trade and colonialism in Africa could be called phallic."

## 2.2. Deconstruction of romanticism and white superstandard English

In the next dialogue, I show how narrative events fragment David's identity and style, changing the dynamic and communication between him and his daughter. Three men attack them on the farm: David is locked and burned in the lavatory, Lucy is raped, the dogs are killed, and their car is stolen. The consequence of the inversion of roles is that the discourse universe of romanticism, David's sociolinguistic repertoire is reassembled:

(3) He speaks Italian, he speaks French, but Italian and French will not save him here in darkest Africa. . . His eyes burn, he tries to wipe them. He recognizes the smell: methylated spirits. Struggling to get up, he is pushed back into the lavatory. The scrape of a match, and at once he is bathed in cool blue flame.

He strikes at his face like a madman; his hair cackles as it catches alight; he throws himself about hurling out shapeless bellows that have no words behind them, only fear. He tries to stand up and is forced down again. . . . His eyes are stinging, one eyelid is already closing. Save for a patch over one ear, he seems to have no hair; his whole scalp is tender. Everything is tender, everything is burned. Burned, burnt. 'Lucy!' he shouts. 'Are you here?' . . .

'My dearest, dearest. . . ' he says, and chokes on a sudden surge of tears. . . .

'David, when people ask, would you mind keeping to your own story, to what happened to you?'

He does not understand.

'You tell what happened to you, I tell what happened to me,' she repeats.

'You're making a mistake,' he says in a voice that is fast descending to a croak.

'No I'm not,' she says.

'My child, my child! He says, holding out his arms to her. When she does not come, he puts aside his blanket, stands up, and takes her in his arms. In his embrace she is stiff as a pole, yielding nothing.' (95–99)

The revelation of "the summit of Mont Blanc" is replaced by a "vision" he is trying to "blank . . . out": "Lucy struggling with the two in the blue overalls, struggling against them" (97). When his hair "catches alight" in the lavatory, the fire "burns" David's eyes: "*One eyelid is swelling shut; his eyebrows are gone, his eyelashes too*" (97). The romantic triad of vision, desire and usurpation expires in David's blindness, embodying the inextricability of suffering and death in the postcolony. David's superstandard romantic lexicon is replaced with postcolonial discourse: the verbs "burn" and "usurp upon" and their perfectives ("burnt," "usurp") take on radically different meanings in this scene: "*Burned. Burnt.*" David is not unaware of the ironies of such semantic usurpation, the division between the two forms is not neat, the "time-lag," the distance in-between constitutes the figure of postcolonial disposability inscribed on the body. In place of the distinction between human and animal language, language becomes something shared between David and the dogs as their "shapeless bellows . . . have no words behind them, only fear" and pain. Rather than signify or construct a particular identity, David's "shouts" foreground the embodied, experienced, and affective qualities of language. The trauma, pain and humiliation actuate the caring,

fatherly register (“*My dearest, dearest*”), the “tenderness” he used to ridicule. But when Lucy announces her intention of not reporting the assault, he is shocked to his core. He tries to alter his daughter’s decision and take control, but his voice keeps failing him, “fast descending to a croak.” In this exchange between two educated middle-class white South Africans, a newfound equality emerges as Lucy steps out of the role of the child and assumes that of an independent woman. In the wake of the sexual assault, Lucy presents herself as the sole arbiter of her choices and repulses him by setting firm boundaries. She controls the exchange, “yielding nothing,” addressing her father in terse, simple and balanced sentences.

### 2.3. Racial habitus

David’s use of violence and racial epithets is a consequence of habitus outside of choice and limits of awareness, activated when David discovers Pollux ogling his bathing daughter. Pollux is Petrus’s intellectually disabled relative, the youngest of the three rapists.

(4) ‘*You swine!*’ [David] shouts, and strikes [Pollux] a second time, so that he staggers. ‘*You filthy swine!*’ ... The word still rings in the air: *Swine!* Never has he felt such elemental rage. He would like to give the boy what he deserves: a sound thrashing. Phrases that all his life he has avoided seem suddenly just and right: *Teach him a lesson, Show him his place.* So this is what it is like, he thinks! This is what it is like to be a savage! (206)

David yells vulgar expletives held in contempt his entire life. Suddenly, he finds himself spouting racial slurs imprinted in white South African speakers’ repertoires. According to Bourdieu’s theory of habitus, social structures are so deeply embedded into the unconscious that it motivates and regulates speakers’ speech patterns. The concept of habitus helps to understand how these ingrained ways of speaking, acquired during socialization, can suddenly pop up in David’s language use. Generally speaking, as a scholar and teacher of communications, David very deliberately, self-consciously and carefully picks linguistic varieties from a wide range of available resources. In this situation, however, he loses conscious control of his language use; his rage calls up hitherto repressed racial speech genres and their associations. The quote above demonstrates that language use learned and enforced during apartheid and settler colonialism is determined by socialization, social experiences and racial identity. In spite of David’s conscious rejection of racism and racist language, the colonial linguistic habitus is activated. It bears no relevance that the basis of racial language is no longer legitimized by the apartheid system, it lives on in the afterlife of apartheid, including the linguistic habitus of university professors.

## 2.4. Styling habitus

After winning a Land Affairs grant, Petrus buys a hectare from Lucy and throws a party. To celebrate his success, Lucy gifts him a bedspread at his party.

(5) ‘Lucy is our benefactor,’ says Petrus; and then, to Lucy: ‘You are our benefactor.’ A distasteful word, it seems to him, double-edged, souring the moment. Yet can Petrus be blamed? The language he draws on with such aplomb is, if he only knew it, tired, friable, eaten from the inside as if by termites. Only the monosyllables can still be relied on, and not even all of them. What is to be done? Nothing that he, the one-time teacher of communications, can see. Nothing short of starting all over again with the ABC. By the time the big words come back reconstructed, purified, fit to be trusted once more, he will be long dead. (129)

Petrus’s use of this “double-edged” word seems to make both Lucy and David uncomfortable. Petrus’s Black South African English performance disturbs David. The “one-time teacher of communications” does not seem to realize that Petrus is not only aware of the double-edged nature of imperial rhetoric, but his stylization serves to expose the delirious project of the white man’s burden. By appropriating the term “benefactor,” Petrus directs attention to the forms of racism inherited from the apartheid-era. Racism has mutated into new forms in the post-apartheid era: life-chances, rights to property and power are racialized, the racial structuration of institutions and privileges subsists (Mbembe 2014). Petrus’s styling of the colonial habitus points out the inequities of the post-apartheid era: Lucy “helps” him buy back the land her ancestors stole from his ancestors.

An alternative way of looking at Black performance and styling is through Bhabha’s (2010) concept of mimicry, built on the Lacanian notion of camouflage. According to Bhabha, since the oppositional possibilities of colonized and enslaved peoples were severely limited, the only form of acceptable resistance was the imitation of whites. Petrus parodies the former colonial culture and language, the social meanings and norms associated with it. When he imitates white supremacist discourse, the resultant counter-performance is “almost the same, but not quite.” By doubling it ambivalently, it reveals its hidden contradictions, for example, its simultaneous performance of intimacy and violence, paternalism and subjection. Through the use of mimicry, Petrus construes a Black identity in opposition to white settler identity.

## 2.5. Racial habitus and Black counter-performance

In the next dialogue, I compare the characteristics of white racist with Black antiracist languaging. I examine the linguistic means of opposing linguistic dominance with special attention to Black performance, styling and mimicry. I show how metaphoric speech imagines new political and ethical affiliations between humans and animals.

It is difficult to characterize the relationship between Petrus and Lucy before he receives the land grant: Petrus used to be Lucy's employee, but after the transfer of land, he becomes a land owner and a neighbor. His role in the gang rape is uncertain: the novel does not unambiguously state whether he had had a hand in it, had known about it in advance, or heard Lucy's cries for help. After the rape, he offers her a deal: security in return for land.

From the point of view of the interaction, it is important to mention that Petrus is no longer Lucy's employee, he is a land proprietor and farmer. In the next dialogue between Petrus and David, we can observe the local interactional dimension of the southern African establishment.

(6) 'You look after the dogs,' he says, to break the silence.  
'I look after the dogs and I work in the garden. Yes.' Petrus gives a broad smile. 'I am the gardener and the dog-man.' He reflects for a moment. 'The dog-man,' he repeats, savouring the phrase. (64)

For David, dark skin connotes manual or migrant laborer, low social status and class. His comment about tending to dogs construes the historically instituted demarcations between whites and Blacks in such a way that it associates Black Africans with animals. This construction of Blacks as inferior beings (animals, property or objects) has a legacy in racial and imperial discourse. In this way, David's colonial habitus comes to the fore through the immediate association of dogs with Black caretakers. David's language use exemplifies two central elements of habitus: firstly, the deep racio-, socio-semantic significance of language as a dimension of social practice; secondly, the embeddedness of racial language in social experiences (Coupland 2007: 90).

At the same time in the southern African context the relationships between Blacks and guard and police dogs is especially loaded, as these dogs were trained against Black South Africans during apartheid. These dogs couldn't be rehabilitated in the post-apartheid era; they had to be killed because they were unable to unlearn racism and to learn to tolerate the Black population<sup>8</sup>.

David communicates his racist assumption in a direct, explicit manner, framing it as a statement. Ironically, the white liberal professor, the author of several metalinguistic treatises, is unaware of his racial bias, white privilege and his performance of whiteness. In his speech, Petrus uses the contextual cues of Xhosa<sup>9</sup>, evident in longer pauses, less interruptions and overlaps than in standard South African English (Gough 1996). The ex-professor is irritated by the conversational norms of Xhosa English; furthermore, he projects his linguistic practice as normative. In his exchange with Petrus, he cannot tolerate the pauses; one motivating factor behind his racist remark is to fill the awkward silence. In a manner consistent with white privilege, he uses social, linguistic, cultural capital to dominate and control the interaction.

<sup>8</sup> *SA police dogs should be killed*. BBC News. November 22, 2000. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/1035390.stm> 2018. January 11.

<sup>9</sup> Xhosa, the first language of Petrus's family, is an official language in South Africa; 17.6% of the population speaks it.

The grammatical and interactional norms of Petrus's Black English differ from those of David's superstandard English. Petrus resists white linguistic dominance and racialism by creating an oppositional Black identity. At first, he parodically repeats David's statement, adding that he also works in the garden. When he appropriates the white man's racial language, he does so ironically. He does not say to David, "I refuse the racial identity you've assigned me," but disrupts David's racial discourse through styling. It is also possible to interpret his stylization as a form of marking, an African American speech genre in which the speaker mimics and exaggerates the style of their interlocutor in order to indirectly comment on it (see Mitchell-Kernan 1972).

Petrus turns the literal meaning of the stereotype into a metonymy, and the racial stereotype into a form of non/being. Interpreting his metonymy as a form of mimicry, he identifies himself as a racialized subject. Whereas David's comment preserves the hierarchies between races and species, Petrus's mimicry creates difference within unity rather than hierarchy. He subverts David's racial hierarchies at the same time that he expresses solidarity with a different order of creation, creating relations as well as affiliations beyond races and species. His counter-performance represents a striving to escape his status as "dog-man" and to imagine a world without racism and speciesism. Rather than aligning himself with an easily categorizable African, national, racial/ethnic/tribal identity, he calls a non-racial<sup>10</sup> identity into being (see Mbembe 2014).

Petrus goes beyond the traditionally constituted community of the continent, nation, race and humanity. The (linguistic) performance reconstructs the resources of more than one language, discourse, culture and genre. Regarding identity construction and stylization, it has no great significance whether English is Petrus's first, second or third language (Pennycook 2003), what matters is that he uses English creatively, reflexively, subversively, stripping it of its inflection by colonial habitus. The performative, insurgent mimicry of the racial settler colonialist apartheid discourse plays an important role in Petrus's identity-acts.

## 2.6. White anti-racist discourse

In the dialogue between father and daughter, I examine how the content and form of the dialogue changes according to the reconstruction of their identities and their relationship. Lucy's linguistic and David's metaphoric utterances reframe their privilege and express solidarity with marginalized groups.

In return for giving up the land and agreeing to a legal marriage, Lucy can stay on Petrus's land as a tenant and enjoy his protection. By accepting his deal, Lucy makes "restitution" and returns the land to its original inhabitants and owners. She believes her right to the land is illegitimate because it is a product of settler colonialism, perpetuated by the apartheid and post-apartheid regime. Lucy reframes her trauma as reparations, paying the price for staying by giving up privileges and protections she benefits from as a white woman.

<sup>10</sup> Mbembe conceives of non-racialism as the dream of a raceless future based on radical universalism and inclusion.

(7) 'Go to Petrus and tell him . . . I give up the land. Tell him that he can have it, title deed and all. He will love that.'  
 There is a pause between them.  
 'How humiliating,' he says finally. 'Such high hopes, and to end like this.'  
 'Yes, I agree, it is humiliating. But perhaps that is a good point to start from again. Perhaps that is what I must learn to accept. To start at ground level. With nothing. Not with nothing but. With nothing. No cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity.'  
 'Like a dog.'  
 'Yes, like a dog.' (204)

Lucy positions herself as a guest, a visitor, a temporary resident in South Africa, and becomes to that extent without a home or a homeland. The status of "*visitorship, visitation*" creates a new foundation for her in terms of starting over, staying on and working the land; it is also the precondition to an alliance between her and her Black neighbors (218). In spite of the 350 year-long history of colonialism, the former colonizers and colonized learn to live together. Lucy with her child and Petrus's family create a community, not organized around race or blood.

To understand Lucy's monologue, it is necessary to bring into play Mbembe's notion of necropolitics. According to Mbembe (2003:40), the South African (post-)apartheid regime is characterized by the power to let live and make die racially designated populations, and the construction of "so-called death-worlds consigning vast populations . . . to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead." While David and Lucy do not belong to these disposable populations, they define what it means to be stripped of the rights to have rights and to have "nothing." With her string of have nots – "[n]o cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity" – Lucy takes ethical responsibility and cares for those without the protections of the state: enslaved, colonized, refugee, im/migrant, LGBTQ+, homeless and animal populations.

In section 2.5, I showed how Petrus's mimicry reinscribes the "dog" sign under which David perceives him while also disavowing it. Even as it mimes radical alterity, the figure of the "dog-man" also insists on escaping the realm of signification and reentering the space of being. At this point, David no longer opposes his daughter's feminist ethics, he echoes K.'s<sup>11</sup> last words, as he is stabbed in the heart with a butcher knife in Kafka's *The Trial*. Reinterpreting Kafka's dog-metaphor, David metamorphoses into (Petrus's conception of) the "dog-man," starting life anew like a dog. He accepts his daughter's decision and assumes responsibility for the sins of his forefathers and his own, as he becomes an ally to unwanted, superfluous (dog-)populations. David cannot fully vacate the rights of the liberal subject, however, the loss of his honor and status alongside trauma and volunteering at the animal clinic reconstruct his identity on multiple levels.

<sup>11</sup> "'Wie ein Hund!' sagte [K.], es war, als sollte die Scham ihn überleben" (Kafka: *Der Prozess*).

## Conclusion

Race/ethnicity, gender, sexuality and class play an important, but not determining, role in the (discursive) positioning and practices pertaining to identity construction. In the novel, (super)standard English signifies white or an elite identity; Black South African English signifies a Black identity.

The social meanings associated with whiteness and blackness are: human vs. animal, rationality vs. irrationality, reason vs. nature, order vs. chaos, being vs. non-being, civilization vs. barbarism, adult vs. child, development vs. underdevelopment and so on. These semantic inheritances from the colonial( apartheid)-era are embedded in the speech habitus of characters, exerting a differential impact on the language use of white and Black characters. The concept of the habitus conceptualizes how and why racialized speech forms, deeply imprinted in the unconscious through socialization, can emerge in language use. Whereas racial language use recodes and reproduces these hierarchies, antiracist and nonracial languaging attempts to reverse and/or transcend them.

The performance, styling and mimicry of colonial racial discourse plays an important role in the critique and deconstruction of its authority, in practices of resistance and identity-acts. Postcolonial characters use and appropriate opposing codes as part of their identity-constituting strategies. The differences and oppositions between these codes allow for the construction of oppositional meanings and identities on the one hand, and complex identity-constructions in a complicated and sometimes contradictory relationship with each other on the other hand.

Black and white performances are embodied and embedded, complex and ordinary, high and quotidian, spectacular and opaque with profound racial, political and ethical implications. Minority performances resist the meanings, norms and dimensions of the dominant discourse, reconstructing the resources of multiple linguistic, cultural and semiotic repertoires (Kandiah 1998, Pennycook 2003).

Against (linguistic) dominance, characters use the sociolinguistic resources of performance, styling and mimicry. The use of these resources enables members of marginalized groups to create not only racial/ethnic, cultural, gender, sexual or linguistic identities, but also to go beyond the boundaries of a given community, embodying political and liberatory stances. Such postcolonial identity formations and alliances are precarious, dynamic, fluid, and context-dependent; their survival and continuity beyond the micro-interactional frame is not guaranteed.

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