

Diction Analysis in Adiga's *Between the Assassinations*: A Socio-linguistic Inspection of Selected Stories

Adhip Jain

Assistant Professor

Department of English

Jagran Lakecity University

Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India

adhip.jain@jlu.edu.in

Dr. K. B. Panda

Professor (Retd.)

Barkatullah University

Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India

Abstract

The effectiveness of any statement hinges on the adept utilization of language by the speaker. When an author selects the appropriate vocabulary, it not only conveys the precise meaning but also encapsulates the speaker's intended mood. The choice of words is a powerful tool that goes beyond mere communication; it serves as a reflection of the speaker's social standing, educational background, ethnic values, and the broader societal context to which they belong, i.e., their speech community. Aravind Adiga adeptly employs socio-linguistic principles in his stories to establish a profound connection with the reader. Adiga deliberately tailors the manner of speaking characters use in their daily lives; from diverse societal backgrounds, professions, educational levels, and ethnic values. This research article delves into the nuances of Adiga's

narrative techniques, particularly in the selected stories from his short story collection novel 'Between the Assassinations,' aiming to discern the conscious choices he makes in portraying the characters' linguistic expressions. The novel unfolds with characters embodying the struggles and emotions of those facing challenging circumstances or predominantly stemming from the lower echelons of society. Consequently, their communication styles are imbued with colloquialisms and vernacular, serving as a poignant mirror reflecting the harsh realities of life.

Keywords: Colloquialism, Nuance, Culture, Speech- Community, Reflection

Introduction

Socio-linguistics is the field of study of language which makes us realize that every region/ every speech community develops their own communication style or manner through which certain meaning gets delivered. As one moves from a region to a neighbouring region, he realizes that language usage alters as the distance between his own speech community and the other increases. William Labov elucidates “sociology of language deals with large-scale social factors, and their mutual interaction with languages and dialects. There are many open questions, and many practical problems associated with the decay and assimilation of minority languages, the development of stable bilingualism, the standardization of languages and the planning of language development in newly emerging nations.” (Labov, 1973, p. p.xi) This raises curiosity about the process of language usage in order to deliver specific meanings, as soon as the region changes language changes its shape, sometimes to deliver a similar sense otherwise some other meaning. Aravind Adiga's 'Between the Assassination,' is a 2009 published novel, which is a collection of 14 short stories. The narratives unfold in the fictional town of Kittur situated in Karnataka, Southwest India. Initially inspired by Adiga's native Mangalore, the setting underwent substantial modifications to accommodate a broader range of plots and characters. Adiga deliberately selects characters from diverse social backgrounds and situations, causing them to naturally reveal the distinctive features of their respective

speech communities. To precisely convey mood and meaning, Adiga extensively utilizes the socio-linguistic concept of code-mixing. This research article centers on Adiga's diction choices, illustrating how contemporary authors strive to accurately portray Indian culture and the psychological states of their characters.

Methodology

This research article integrates qualitative methodology to precisely identify how Adiga incorporates socio-linguistic theories and makes diction choices to systematically represent a character's educational background, situation, etc. Qualitative methodology, as employed in this study, is a research approach centered on delving into and comprehending the intricacies of human experiences, behaviors, and phenomena. In contrast to quantitative research, which leans on numerical data and statistical analysis, qualitative methodology places emphasis on collecting rich, in-depth information through non-numeric data sources such as interviews, observations, and textual analysis.

Discussion

Sociolinguistics studies help us to understand the evolving nature of language which leads to ultimate reflection of culture of the region; as it changes its shape and form region to region or speech community to speech community. Duranti posits that culture is characterized as something acquired within a human community, then passed down from one generation to the next through human activities, often in direct interaction, and all of these activities are facilitated through language as a mode of communication. (Adiga, 2009, p. 5) Adiga's novel unfolds against the backdrop of the tumultuous period between the assassinations of India's former Prime Minister, Smt. Indira Gandhi, and her son, Shri. Rajeev Gandhi. While the stories within the novel do not directly revolve around these political assassinations, they share a common thread through the vivid setting and scenario that encapsulate the essence of that era.

The narrative lens zooms in on the first story, featuring a young boy named Ziauddin, employed at Ramanna Shetty's Ideal Store, a quaint tea-and-samosa haven nestled within the railway station. Ziauddin, affectionately known as Zia, takes immense pride in his community and embraces his ethnic values. In moments of perceived doubt about his integrity, he confidently asserts, "*I'm a Muslim, sir. We don't do hanky-panky.*" (Adiga, 2009, p. 3) Despite his limited knowledge about his own community or ancestral background, Zia develops a profound belief in the greatness and integrity of his cultural identity. This narrative choice by Adiga serves as a captivating exploration of individual identity within the broader socio-political landscape of the times. When Ramanna enters Kittamma Devi's temple and invites all his boys inside the temple Zia refrains saying. "*I'm a Muslim, I can't go in.*" (Adiga, 2009, p. 5) Abstaining from entering temples can serve as a means for Muslims to uphold the uniqueness of their religious customs. Certain individuals may opt not to enter places they perceive as having practices inconsistent with their concept of purity. Those who follow Islamic beliefs might refrain from entering places of worship dedicated to deities other than Allah. Despite the persistent efforts of those around him to dispel the notion that he is a true Pathan, Zia maintains his unwavering belief throughout the narrative. Adiga, through one of his characters, sheds light on the destitution experienced by the impoverished, emphasizing their penchant for derisive banter: "*...We're not all unclean animals, Zia! Some of us are Hindus.*" (Adiga, 2009, p. 10) This statement, directed at Zia, exposes the pejorative stereotype linking poverty to impurity. The use of mockery in this assertion conveys the acrimony and bitterness prevalent among individuals of diverse backgrounds, laying bare the societal tensions and prejudices within Adiga's depicted milieu. Through such instances, the author illuminates the societal discord and discrimination prevalent in the narrative.

Furthermore, Adiga seeks to depict the anguish felt by Muslims due to the historical mistreatment they have endured in various parts of the country: "*...To do the Muslims of South*

India what they are doing to Muslims in Kashmir.” (Adiga, 2009, p. 18) This poignant statement reflects the pain and suffering experienced by Muslims, drawing attention to the injustices they have faced, particularly in the context of regional disparities and prejudices.

In the fourth story of this collection, the focus shifts to the dynamics between a teacher and student. Mr. D'Mello, the teacher, is portrayed as someone who believes in guiding his student, Girish, to harness his skills and talents while shielding him from negative influences. Adiga's adept use of diction not only captivates the reader's mind but also adds a layer of authenticity by presenting words as they are pronounced. A notable example is the deliberate misspelling of the word 'attention': “***...Mr. D'Mello, drawing the morning air into his lungs and shouting: 'A-ten-shannn!'***” (Adiga, 2009, p. 83) Adiga's attempt to deviate from conventional spelling serves to convey the pronunciation accurately, invokes a sense of realism into the story. Similarly, the misspelling of the word 'salute' adds a drop of humor to the story, while still effectively conveying the intended meaning: “***His lungs swelled again: 'Sa-loot!'***” (Adiga, 2009, p. 84) This deliberate play with language adds a layer of amusement to the story. Adiga skillfully portrays the frivolous and mischievous behavior of the students in the narrative, vividly capturing a moment where they attempt to mock their teacher: “***“Ogre,’ the boys chanted as he passed. ‘Ogre! Ogre! Ogre!’***” (Adiga, 2009, p. 91) Employing a metaphorical touch, Adiga introduces a sense of equilibrium in the storyline by referring to the students as little animals: “***To manage a school filled with six hundred little animals... ‘you need an ogre now and then.’***” (Adiga, 2009, p. 93)

In the midst of the narrative, Mr. D'Mello's unwavering efforts to shield his favored student from negative influences are depicted with poignant language choices: “***...if they ever tried that on Girish, he would skin them alive.***” (Adiga, 2009, p. 104) Adiga's deliberate selection of words not only conveys the depth of Mr. D'Mello's protective instincts but also

evokes a powerful emotional response, highlighting the warmth and dedication underlying the teacher-student relationship portrayed in the story.

Another narrative under scrutiny delves into the life of Jayamma, the cook employed by an advocate. Within this plotline, Adiga systematically delves into the intricacies of Indian society, situated within the timeframe encapsulated by the assassinations of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi. Jayamma's discontent is laid bare through her internal struggles, as evident in her contemplation, **“I’m never going to leave the advocate’s house, am I, Lord Krishna?”** (Adiga, 2009, p. 231) Adiga is mindful of portraying an elderly character, ensuring that Jayamma's expressions remain intentionally straightforward and employ colloquial language. In the particular scene where Rosie seizes a rooster and proceeds to slaughter it, Jayamma's emotional reaction is profound, marked by an overwhelming horror and an acute sense of helplessness. Out of disgust, she vocalizes her anguish with the repeated exclamation, **“*Hai! Hai! Hai!... Krishna... My Lord Krishna...*”** (Adiga, 2009, p. 233) The use of the term 'hai' serves as a poignant expression, conveying a spectrum of emotions including grief, horror, and regret. In this moment, Jayamma's invocation of Lord Krishna adds a spiritual dimension to her distress, emphasizing the depth of her emotional turmoil as she witnesses the unsettling act. Adiga strategically employs this term throughout the novel to precisely articulate the emotions of the characters. The novel adeptly depicts the tension between the privileged upper class and the marginalized lower class, skillfully navigating the portrayal in a manner that captures the essence without causing emotional distress.

A poignant example of this is reflected in the narrative: **“*What kind of era is this when Brahmins bring lower caste girls into their household?*”** (Adiga, 2009, p. 236) Here, the choice of words not only highlights societal disparities but also conveys the sentiment effectively, allowing readers to engage with the narrative without feeling overwhelmed by the harsh realities depicted. Adiga makes use of appropriate words to depict the ethnic beliefs of

the characters as well as portrays the disparities among different castes and communities in a perfect manner.

Conclusion Highlights

Adiga's storytelling mastery shines through his adept use of simple diction, creating narratives that are both engaging and thought-provoking. Through the careful selection of names for people and places, he crafts an authentic Indian setting, grounding the reader in the cultural landscape he seeks to explore. The deliberate infusion of linguistic nuances reflects Adiga's commitment to portraying the intricate challenges and complexities woven into the societal fabric he unfolds in his stories. By incorporating colloquial words, Adiga not only enhances the relatability of his narratives but also captivates the audience with a sense of familiarity. This intentional use of everyday language breathes life into the characters and their interactions, making the stories more vivid and resonant. The seamless mix of linguistic codes acknowledges the predominantly Indian audience, showcasing Adiga's awareness and dedication to accurately conveying meaning to his readers efficiently. In essence, Adiga's narrative choices contribute to an immersive experience, where readers can connect deeply with the stories, characters, and the rich cultural tapestry he unveils.

Conflict of Interest: The corresponding author, on behalf of all authors, confirms that there are no conflicts of interest to disclose.

Copyright: © 2023 by Adhip Jain Author(s) retain the copyright of their original work while granting publication rights to the journal.

License: This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, allowing others to distribute, remix, adapt, and build upon it, even for commercial purposes, with proper attribution. Authors are also permitted to post their work in institutional repositories, social media, or other platforms.

References

- Labov, William. (1973) Sociolinguistic Patterns. University of Pennsylvania Press. p.xi
- Duranti, Alessandro. (1997). Linguistic Anthropology. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p24
- Adiga, Aravid (2009) Between the Assassinations. Picador India. p3.
- Ibid., 5.
- Ibid., 10.
- Ibid., 18.
- Ibid., 83.
- Ibid., 84.
- Ibid., 91.
- Ibid., 93.
- Ibid., 104.
- Ibid., 231.
- Ibid., 233.
- Ibid., 236.