

Chapter Two: The Notion of Orality in the African American Literature

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Introduction

All over history, the African Americans have relied on the oral diffusion of narratives, songs and speeches which carried worthy lessons that led them to maintain their history, sustain their culture and support their identities.

First Section: the Cultural and Linguistic Aspects of Orality

The Cultural Aspects of Orality

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The Linguistic Aspect of Orality

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A. The Cultural Aspects of Orality

Orality is expressed in different forms as folk songs, ballads, folk tales, stories, proverbs, sayings, superstitions and dialect. All of these elements are intertwined within its cultural aspects except dialect which is considered as a linguistic aspect of orality. These folklorist elements were used by African American authors for the purpose of reflecting their history and culture and strengthened it within the literary field.

A. Folk Songs

The African slaves have been transported during the 17th century to the land of America where they developed a new culture from their tormented living situation. By time, these generations gradually became African Americans who held a rich culture full of music and folklore. They created a distinct kind of music which tackled their hard experiences in the new world. This music includes different kinds of songs as Spirituals, Blues, Ballads, Gospel Music, Jazz Music, Rap/Hip-Hop Music and Children's Songs.

B. Folk Stories and Folktales

The past is conceived as part of the future. In this vein, oral storytelling has a specific worthy value than a written story since it inspires today's generations with pieces of advice, morals and lessons about their lives. It has also a specific beauty since it retells personal experiences. As noted, folklore is that device which portrays human culture as an amalgamation of both customs and traditions and it thus depicts this human's identity. In addition, all elements of folklore enriched life and culture of its people because they are full of wisdom and knowledge which can be transmitted throughout told stories.

In this sense, storytelling is considered as an art form which can shape the history of a group of people. Hence, these stories are powerful because they create social values that ultimately teach people worthy lessons. In this context, Folktales were

First Section: the Cultural and Linguistic Aspects of Orality

the most common form of storytelling. The African folktales include animals as principal characters. Besides, these versions of stories were considered as both a source of entertainment for the slave owner and a source of information and plan for the enslaved one.

C. Proverbs and Riddles

Both proverbs and riddles are conceived as part of orality and forms of folk literature. On one hand, proverbs have appeared for a long time in the written literature in which they express a vital truth. Besides, they represent observations about the nature of life. More than that, they teach the basic societal principles. On the other hand, riddles are used for the purpose of tricking the listener about their meanings. The riddle of the Sphinx in Sophocles may be considered as a good example within the written literature whereas in oral literature, riddles may be used for geniuses. They are long and they are told for the reason of finding a solution (Mulvey 19). They are ultimately used for the purpose of entertainment. Besides, the contribution of these oral riddles into literature; include some messages which help listeners to discover the values of the target people.

Songs, stories and folktales and all oral elements were used as tools to convey lessons, morals and cultural values. Besides, many authors approved that the oral tradition enriches the African American literature. They used stories which contain lessons and morals, significant to Black people. Moreover, the African American writers of 20th century as Baldwin, Hurston, Ellison and Angelou enriched their novels and poems by these oral elements.

B. The Linguistic Aspect of Orality

Dialect can also be seen as an integral part within orality because all the folklorist elements are told vernacularly including stories, tales, myths, legends, etc. Besides, Ebonics is a term that has been created in January 1973 at George Washington University by Professor Robert Williams who joined the words of "ebony" that means Black with "phonics" which means the science of sounds in an attempt to describe the African American speech as "Black sound". This term appeared in order to avoid the negative connotations of terms like "Nonstandard Negro English".

The table below shows the phonological and grammatical features of Ebonics

Phonological Variations	Example
Cluster Reduction with /θr/	" <u>Thow</u> " for "Throw"
Final Consonant Deletion	" <u>Lan</u> " for "Land"
/n/ and /in/ Alteration	" <u>Singin</u> " for "Singing"
/t/ as /k/ within a /str/ Cluster	" <u>Skreet</u> " for "Street"
Unstressed Syllable Deletion	" <u>Bout</u> " for "About"

Grammatical Variations	Example
" <u>Ain't</u> " as an Auxiliary	"He <u>ain't</u> coming", for "He isn't coming"
Copula "Be"	"He be running all the time," for "He runs all of the time"
Double Negatives	" <u>Ain't nobody</u> got time for that!"
Use of Adverb "There"	"It <u>ain't no</u> class today."
Unmarked Third Person Singular Verbs	"She <u>stare</u> too much" for "She stares too much"

The Phonological and Grammatical features of Ebonics

For a long time, dialect was only used in everyday speech but later writers decided to integrate it within their writings. During the 1970s and 1980s, the Black English has been widely spread within the titles of many literary writings. For example, Mark Twain used heavily dialect within his novel Huckleberry Finn to distinguish between his characters and to bring to life his story. Hence, dialects are often used in literature to distinguish between characters from different regions or classes; for instance to portray the poor and uneducated characters.

Second Section: the Use of Orality in Hurston's Novel Their Eyes Were Watching God

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A. The Analysis of the Cultural Aspects of Orality in Hurston's Novel Their Eyes Were Watching God

For the African American writers, to represent a successful piece of literature; they have to integrate on it some aspects of culture like Black dialect, slave narratives, folklore, folktales, jokes, songs, sermons and epics. In this context, Zora Hurston relied on the anthropological field within her novel; to craft an artistic image of the African American culture in general and of Florida's community in particular.

Hurston's interest on folklore had been derived from her teacher the anthropologist Franz Boas who ordered her to go to the South of the United States and "collect some of this African-American lore, to record songs, customs, tales, superstitions, lies, jokes, dances, and games" (Awkward 16). After her collection of Negro folklore, she admired this heritage and thus integrated it within her novels written in a language as originally spoken.

Henry Louis Gates Jr. classified Hurston's novel Their Eyes were Watching God as a "speakerly text" due to her oral performance of several traditions as narratives, sermons, stories, games, songs and sayings. Hence, she imbued her novel with different forms of folklore and succeeded to invite her readers to live and participate with her community's daily life.

B. The Analysis of the Ebonics Used in Hurston's Novel Their Eyes Were Watching God

Hurston gave a great importance to language and succeeded to amalgamate between both Ebonics and Standard English within her novel. Besides, she employed skillfully her rural southern Black dialect (Ebonics) to shape aspects of her Black culture and picture the life of Negroes. She as well abundantly integrated Ebonics in both dialogues and narrative to depict an authentic vision of the Black community.

She employed Ebonics as a regional dialect and characterized it by some unique grammatical, phonological and lexical features:

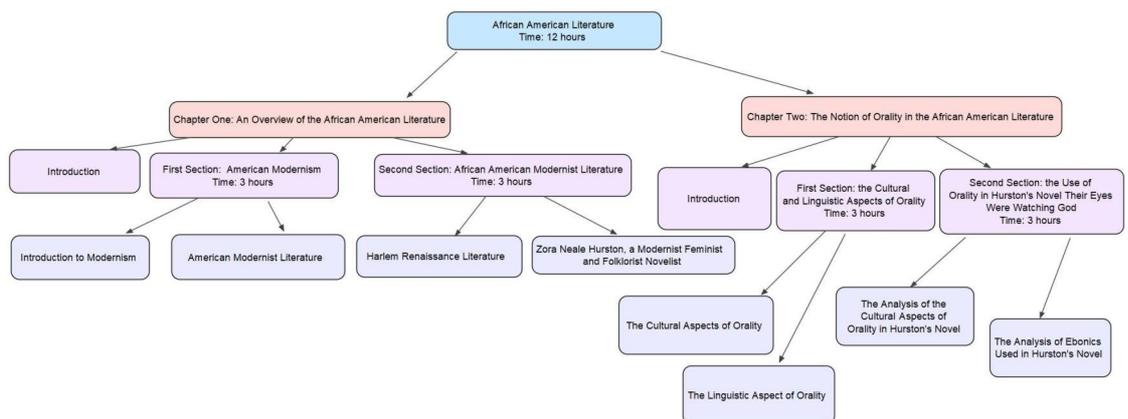
The Grammatical Features	The Phonological Features	The Lexical Features
The use of Multiple Negations, for instance:	The Contracted /g/, for instance:	Hurston's novel comprises a rich lexical variety of Ebonics
Mah wife don't know nothin' 'bout no speech-makin'. Ah never married her for nothin' like that (43).	Mawnin' for morning	Gal is used to mean a woman Naw, Ah ain't no young gal no mo' (Hurston 79).

Due to Hurston's familiarity with the southern dialect, she eagerly introduced it within her novel. She had been admired by her readers for her typical use of Ebonics. She employed a heavy rural Black dialect spoken at the south; rich with vocabulary of localism and crafted a different portrayal of the Black social life by classifying her Black characters within only the middle and upper social classes. She thus endeavored to represent an authentic speech of her Black community.



The Mental Map of the Two Chapters

A. The Mental Map of the Two Chapters



The Mental Map of the two chapters

This image represents the mental map of the two chapters

Quiz: Test

Every dialect is a language but not every language is a dialect. Language and dialect are considered as two overlapping concepts. In this sense, Chambers and Trudgill declared: "language is a collection of mutually intelligible dialects" (03) [Dialectology]. This means that all dialects are related to the same language. A standard language is a dialect which has been standardized in its phonology, morphology, grammar, spelling and vocabulary.

According to this excerpt, write an essay in which you state how dialect is contributed to literature. (Use examples)

Quiz: Exam

Answer the two questions

1. Identify the phonological and grammatical features of Ebonics used within this passage. Well, den! Warn' dat de beatenes' notion in de worl'? You jes' take en look at it a minute. Dah's de stum, dah – dat's one er de women; heah's you – dat's de yuther one; I's Sollermun; en dish yer dollar bill's de chile. Bofeun you claims it. What does I do? Does I shin around 'mongs' de neighbors en fine out which unyou de bill do b'long to, en han' it over to de right one, all safe en soun', de way dat anybody dat had any gumption would? No; I take en whack de bill in tow, en give half un it to you, en de yuther half to de yuther woman. Dat's de was Sollermun was gwyne to do wid de chile. Now I want to ast you: what's de use erdat half a bill? - can't buy noth'nwid it. En what use is a half a chile? I wouldn' give a dern for a million un um. (Twain, 108)[The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.]

2. Define the following terms : Orality, dialect, eye dialect and Ebonics

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