

IDENTITY BORDERS OF LOCUTIONARY ACTS AND ACTIONS in *THE VANISHING HALF* by BRIT BENNETT

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Abstract

Living in the elsewhere looks like being lock in a place, and it conveys ethnic, social, cultural, racial, national, political, regional, and linguistic identities to those persons. The study of migrants' identities is a very vast field. Despite the progress of scientific researches on that issue, the topic can be tackled in the sense of migrants' identities inside the different borders today. But, migrants' living conditions in borders can actually favor the use of Language to express or deny some identities. Similarly, the selected locutionary acts in '*The Vanishing Half*', bluntly shows utterances acts denying or affirming migrants' identities. This analysis is done in the lens of speech act theory. Therefore, the present work aims at showing throughout tangible facts, the performatives actions that influence migrants' life as well as their identities in the novel. The language is used by characters in such way that it fits with their identities in the context of frontiers. These elements are so closely interwoven that words are inscribed with ideological meanings in emigrants' mind.

Keywords: borders, identities, language, performative actions, speech act.

ACTES ET ACTIONS LOCUTOIRES DES FRONTIERES IDENTITAIRES DANS '*DISPARUE DE MOITIE*' DE BRIT BENNETT

Résumé :

Vivre hors de chez soi est semblable à être enfermé dans un endroit où l'on nous attribue une identité ethnique, sociale, culturelle, raciale, nationale, politique, régionale et linguistique. L'étude des identités des migrants est un domaine très vaste. Malgré les progrès de la recherche scientifique sur cette question, le sujet peut être abordé dans le sens des identités des migrants à l'intérieur des différentes frontières aujourd'hui. Mais, les conditions de vie de ces migrants aux frontières favorisent en réalité l'usage de la langue pour exprimer ou nier certaines identités. De même, les actes locutoires sélectionnés de « *The Vanishing Half* » montrent sans détour des actes d'énonciation niant ou affirmant l'identité des migrants. Cette analyse se fait dans le prisme de la théorie des actes de langage. Par conséquent, le présent travail vise à montrer à travers des

faits tangibles l'influence des actions performatives sur la vie des migrants ainsi que sur les identités de ceux-ci dans le roman. Ainsi, les personnages utilisent les actes locutoires de telle manière qu'ils correspondent à leurs identités dans le contexte des frontières. Ces éléments sont si étroitement imbriqués que les mots sont inscrits avec des significations idéologiques dans l'esprit des émigrés.

Mots-clés : acte de parole, actions performatives, frontières, identités, langage.

Introduction

Linguistically, identity is a person's sense of themselves as a discrete separate individual, including their self-image and their awareness of self. People's sense of identity influences how they view themselves both as an individual and in relation to other people. (Longman, 2010, P. 268). Recurrently, young African leaved their homes for Europe and America. Migrants are forced to flee their homes (M. Bronwen, 2016, P.7) because of unstoppable natural and non-natural facts such as conflicts, disasters, or poverty. They might have breached the entry regulations of a country or entered a country legally. As non-nationals in a country for a purpose of settlement, migrants are oppressed, ill-treated, regarded as underground people by landlords. Native and non-native identity is differently perceived in a specific place in the same context. Migrants' identity has necessarily changed in the new place and context due to their fleeing.

Notwithstanding, human rights postulate that all humans are equal. Thus, the rational action is the undeniable consideration of that law. The general situation in contemporary migrants' life is their identity which is constantly hushed up, pull down by native deeds. Knowledge grows daily. Those repeatedly malfunctioning actions led migrants to change deliberately their identity insofar as it can be ascertained all humans have the same identity. The rationality of migrants' actions will be analyzed in the lights of their locutionary acts also called utterances acts. Rational actions are caused by beliefs and desires, and migrants' decision -making situation is triggered off by a set of beliefs and desires as J.R. Searle (2001) and D. Davidson (2001) argue.

Vanishing or the disappearance of the first identity to melt with a new identity is a recursive routine in Europe and America. People (youth from Africa) are moving from their native land to a new place of dwelling more and more and it leads to a battle of identities. Some of them are actually proud of being black whereas the majority denies it and looks for a new identity. Locutionary acts in "the Vanishing Half" (*TVH*) show that the ideal identity in need is the white from the point of view of black. In that novel, locutionary acts put forward migrants' identity

limits. The purpose of the present article aims at describing migrants' identity borders throughout utterance acts.

How do locutionary acts of native people display migrants' identity? How do native distance from other identities? How do migrants' interactions demonstrate their new identity? What implies having a different identity in a context of intolerance and prejudice of a bigot? These are questions that will guide this tripartite analysis.

1- Methodology of the work

The sample of the present work is restricted to passages retrieved from a novel entitled *'The vanishing Half'* used as the corpus. These passages are selected for their fitness to support the migrants' commitment idea of identity change which is put forward. The vanishing half is Bennett's second novel. That novel is more expansive and deeper than other novels because it is a multigenerational family that tackles prickly issue of racial identity and bigotry.

However, utterance acts in the novel show how racism shapes people identity, discriminates gender and social class. In overall, how society affects identity? Therefore, colorism and the overall treatment of Black affects their identities. It points out subtly the question about 'who we are and who we want to be?' People can freely pick and choose how society influences their identity and life. Locutionary acts show the randomness and unfairness of identity perception teases apart in complexity. It deals with the relationship of language and identity in a context of migration. For, white's utterances remarkably demonstrate the difference between identities. That hurtful consideration of black identity hushes them up to freely change their identity. The ground of that change is motivated by beliefs and desires.

Moreover, the speech act theory by Austin developed in *How to Do Things with Words* (1962) shows the straight and deep link between words and deeds. In the opinion of Austin, it might be tempting to think that to say the right words is the same as to do the action at issue. In general, the words have the proper effect only if uttered in appropriate circumstances, and only if people are doing certain other physical or mental things. So, "the uttering of the sentence is the doing of an action" J. L. Austin (1962, P.5). Today, the new state of the theory is stretched by Searle (2001) what he calls the classical model of rationality. According to Searle, all rational activity presupposes free will. For rationality is possible only where one has a choice among various rational as well as irrational options. In addition, Blacks have changed their mindset as far as the identity is concerned because of recursive frustrations. That change consists of a set of rules, and those enable them to have their actions caused by their beliefs and desires. Primary

beliefs and desires were compatible with their preferences. Thence, they have a well -ordered preference schedule and begin to reason, or begin to make rational decisions

2. Locutionary Acts displaying Migrants' Stigmatization and Identity Limit

2.1 Locutionary Acts Showing Blacks' Identity Limit

In the novel (TVH) some locutionary acts display Blacks' identity limit. The identity is commonly referred to as "person, "role and "social" identities types. These three identities are commonly referred to as identities that characterize who we are, motivate our behavior, and influence emotional outcomes in one's social environment according to (J. Stets and P. Burke, 2014a; P.A.Thoits, 2013). Then, (P. A.Thoits and L. K.Virshup, 1997) suggest that social identities could be either individual or collective. The three types of identities form the bases of identity. In Brit Bennett's *The Vanishing Half (TVH)* there are negative examples of such representation of Blacks' identity. Depreciative locutions are mentioned everywhere in the novel. When Mallard inhabitants were talking about Desiree's marriage, they qualify her husband and daughter as follows: 'black as tar.' (TVH:8) "Desiree married the darkest man she could find. (TVH:9)" "Marrying a dark man and dragging his blueblack child all over town was one step too far" "Like she flown direct from Africa." (TVH:9)

So, white American used nouns such as 'tar', "dark" and the adjectives "darkest" and "blueblack" to refer to Black's identity. That identity is perceived negatively, with a connotation of punishment, divine curse, disgrace, disapproval, and indignity as the selected nouns and adjectives meanings show. However, covenant with blacks is not admitted in that place influenced in depth by the idea of lightness as it is welcomed in Africa. But, in America covenant between blacks is forbidden for the new identity to survive. The fact of mentioning Africa and America bluntly displays the separating line as border feature between the two continents. Possible actions in Africa are not allowed in America. The utterance "one step too far" (TVH:9) expresses Desiree's foolishness and people feelings of anger and surprise. It also illustrates the idea of opposition and contrary point of view.

On the contrary, Desiree never wanted to escape her native identity. For her, "you could flick away history like shrugging a hand off your shoulder. You can escape a town, but you cannot escape blood"(TVH:11) Desiree has refused the perpetual performative action of her community which is lightness obsession. And obsession for J. R.Searle (2001) is a firmly action taken by someone. In J.L. Austin's mind (1962) performative actions are thoughts, feelings and intentions which must be appropriate to the performance of an act. One can rightly quote S.

Barry (2014, P.10) “speech acts are acts characteristically performed by uttering expressions in accordance with certain constitutive rules”

In addition, there is an education matter. It is highly seen as one of black identity limit. African American are undereducated than American. Thence, interactions between Adele and her blueblack granddaughter demonstrate that through these locutionary acts:

Jude: “Can I have some water?”, “May I have,” Adele said. (*TVH:39*)

Firstly, Adele is making an identification of a less educated kid on the one hand and she is also giving a warning on blacks’ illiteracy the other hand. Jude does not know the suitable modal in such case. The rules that govern the use of modals ‘Can and May’ and how to discriminate them are unknown. So, Adele (Jude’s grandmother) uses to correct these mistakes. As solution to that problem, Adele would like to enroll down Jude name at school.

“I can take your girl by the school later,” Adele said. “Get her all signed up.” (*TVH:41*)

Secondly, Jude’s grandmother is announcing her intention to sign Jude up for school classes. In the same line, A. L. Miles, (2018, P.7) adds “African Americans have higher rates of poverty, lower rates of education attainment, and are more likely to be employed in jobs that put their health and bodies at greatest risk”. With all of these odds against the African American community, concepts such as code switching become a survival technique. Miles describes blacks’ social, educational and workplace living conditions in America. Only blacks’ schooling can solve the problems evoked above.

Then, depreciative and under-esteemed substantives display the ugliness of dark skin which is also called “undesirables” (*TVH:141*). Whites maintain not only their distance from blacks in the neighborhood. When becoming white, Stella rushes out of her home and snatches Kennedy from the street because she was playing with Cindy a black girl in the neighborhood. But also at the museum “Stella’d gone to the South Louisiana Museum of Art on an ordinary Saturday morning, not Negro Day, and walked right up to the main entrance, not the side door where Negroes lined up in the alley. Nobody stopped her” (*TVH:143*). This utterance is a piece of information about the special day and the alley which is the line of limit of whites’ space and blacks. Hence, a specific day and place are devoted to Negroes’ visit at the museum.

Consequently, Negroes think that a dark-skinned man is incapable of loving a pretty light-skinned woman as these utterances show: “A dark man would trample her beauty. He’d love it at first but like anything he desired and could never attain, he would soon grow to resent

it.”(TVH:39). The utterances hereby demonstrate a dark-skinned man incapability to love a pretty woman. For African American, there is no congruence, no highly likely relation between a dark-skinned man and loving a light-skinned pretty woman. For that reason Adele mows the lawn when asserting “love could never attain”(TVH:39) with a dark-skinned man. This point of view is sustained by Desiree’s departing hastily from her black husband’s household. In this way, A. L Kirk (2010, P.149) says “the belief is not about actions of a particular type, but rather about the particular action performed; this is required to connect the desire for a type with the particular action concerned.”

2.2- African American’s Stigmatization

Stigmatization somewhat can be seen as the process whereby a mark is culturally understood, is recognized in, or applied to, an individual or group of individuals by another more powerful group of individuals. In general, values and beliefs can play a powerful role in creating or sustaining stigma in a specific place.

Whites and light-skinned African American found dark skin ugly and strove to distance themselves from it. Moreover, “In order to understand how a reason of any kind rationalizes an action it is necessary and sufficient that we see, at least in essential outline, how to construct a primary reason. The primary reason for an action is its cause” (D. Davidson, 2001, P. 4)

African American are stigmatized because the causes of primary reasons led to unkind physical actions. A number of locutionary acts demonstrate some of these actions such as “she nudged Kennedy toward the car “(TVH:154), “she’d stormed across the street and grabbed her daughter’s arm, ... she dragged Kennedy back into the house. She was shaking, fumbling to lock the door behind her as her daughter whined about the doll she’d left in the street.” (TVH:159). Action verbs ‘nudge, grab, drag, and lock’ describe Stella’s hatred when seeing her daughter playing with Cindy a black girl. Cindy’s parents are the black in Stella’s neighborhood.

That action hides real causes and reasons. “You a nigger’s nigger.” “(TVH:159) Because we don’t play with niggers,” Stella said” (TVH:159). The reference to adjectives “nigger”, “undesirables” expresses the highest degree of black hatefulness. The best thing to do at that moment is to avoid being in touch with niggers. Whites decide “to stop undesirables from moving in “(TVH:142) the neighborhood. This was the purpose of their association and “to ensure the neighborhood exists precisely as the neighbors wished” (TVH:142). As a matter of fact, Stella goes “on an ordinary Saturday morning, not Negro Day” to the shop (TVH:143).

Any act of stigmatizing is first motivated by an invective and / or an excoriation. Whites have their proper motivations and reasons to hate and stigmatize Blacks. However, African American have their motivations and reasons of hatred too. In both sides conditions are quite different. One solution in this context for light-skinned African is the vanishing of the former identity. The easiest formula for them is to behave as they could in order to convince anyone that they are white. Therefore, a society is a construct of the majority and their ideas, concepts and thoughts. When the majority does not include everyone for their own identity, it became a marginalized group.

3. Vanishing as Identity Change Performative Action

3.1 Code Switching as means of African American Complete Change of Identity

Code switching is a change by a speaker from one language or language variety to another one. Code switching can take place in a conversation. It can be a sign of cultural solidarity or distance or serve as an act of identity (Longman dictionary of English Teaching, 2010, P. 89). Identity change is triggered off by colorstruck excoriation, recursive invective, oppression, violence against colored. The change of identity in the novel is developed in a prickly utterance “lightness” becomes colored’s obsession. “Lightness” should be materialized by people concrete actions. Withal, Austin makes clear his definition of performative utterances as utterances the issuing of which is, or is part of, ‘the doing of an action’ (J.L.Austin, 1975, P. 5). To discriminate the terms ‘act’ and ‘action’, he considers the locutionary, the illocutionary, and the perlocutionary acts, are defined as ‘acts’, but it is also said that they ‘are the performing of actions’ or simply ‘are actions’ (J.L.Austin, 1975, PP.105–106).

For A .L. Kirk (2003, P.148) “actions are what we do for reasons, and so what we do intentionally”. By the same token, Alphonse Decuir, the founder of identity change in the novel (*TVH*) has intentionally “ imagined his children’s children’s children, lighter still, like a cup of coffee steadily diluted with cream”(TVH:10). The will of melting different identities could favor identity change action. Henceforth, the adverb” steadily” in the adverbial phrase “steadily diluted” shows the identity changing process. Thence, the reduplication “children’s children’s children” in the utterance “and he imagined his children’s children’s children, lighter still” highlights the well-done performatives actions. Furthermore, some expressions trace a logical reasoning and set it up as identity change argument. Finally, the actions stay on the fringes of black’s mindset because whites don’t mind that new identity. For them, Black will remain black.

Secondly, the intentional action / reason is perceived through Stella's behavior after being raped by a white old man several times because of her black American identity. From that period on, she hates blacks' identity in order to avoid further hurts and decided to become white. "Stella was jumpy around Negroes, like a child who'd been bit by a dog"(TVH:141). Consequently, she behaves as whites do. Then, she affirms herself as white. "Stella became white" (TVH:143) because of the repeating diluted black's genes action through time. As results, new generation is "creamy skin, hazel eyes, wavy hair" (TVH:11) which was grandfather expectation. Therefore, the use of the action verb 'became' demonstrates the coronation of the process. "There was nothing to being white except boldness. You could convince anyone you belonged somewhere if you acted like you did" (TVH:143).

Although Stella was fully assimilated, she convinced anyone by acting like whites and Blake believed in her white identity. Stella's linguistic identity refers to the way in which her language use and attitudes reflect and shape her sense of self and relationship to white community, cultural, ethnic, and national identity. She tries for a secretary job. This was the first time Stella "acts white" to get the job. Even though Stella acted white, she has refused to affirm herself as black.

Then, J. Reed-Clark (2020) sustains the use of code switching as "In essence, it's the language, mannerisms, and body language we use when in the company of peers from a different class and/or race". Obviously, hurtful actions favored code switching in workplaces and societies. To this regard, T. M. Lewis-Giggetts' daughter told her that "I wish I could paint my skin white so I can blend in and nobody would hurt me" (T. M. Lewis-Giggetts, 2020). In a nutshell, "constitutive constraints of rationality, show that although reasons and actions are part of the causal net, they are not reducible to the network of physical causes and effects" (A. L. Kirk, 2003, P.164). Rational reasons and actions have indubitably their causes. But, that relation does not necessarily exist as causes and effects because "each mental event, each reason, is identical to some physical event, or state, but there can be no strict correlation" (A. L. Kirk, 2003, P.164)

3.2 Anthroponomical Identity Borders

A name plays a key role in the description of its meaning, the deeds, national and cultural identities of a person. In TVH, the issue of the name giving coincides with the role a character plays in the novel. The process of changing an identity under the influence of social factors enables us to glance at characters' name meaning. That fact is relevant in the linguistic, social,

and cognitive aspects. As a result, social motives of name giving process are classified into origin, geographical address, personal quality, and occupational. Characters names show a relation between the meaning, his/her deeds and his/her identity. It allows S. Brendler (2014, P.10) puts “multiperspectivising raise awareness of the richness and diversity of how people see names in various contexts”. The author when naming the different characters, may be sharing her expectation of migrants’ inclusive life in the elsewhere. Their beliefs and desires have caused a particular action, that of society uniformity through identity change. The names like Adele, Desiree, Stella, Jude, and Kennedy are used for main characters with specific role. In the same token, O. Kysel et al (2017, PP. 299-300) point out:

Actualization of social motives of the name giving and their reflection in the meaning of linguistic units, namely in proper onyms, is one of the relevant aspects of personal name semantics, which is expanded by a name giver’s preferences of this or that motive. All motives reflect the reality and have a complex character. On the one hand, they accumulate a cognitive experience of language community, on the other hand, they reflect the evaluation, expressiveness and emotions of an individual to the extra linguistic reality. Social motives change the semantic structure of a personal name, influence the frequency of its usage and demonstrate philosophical preferences of the name giver in a certain period of social progress. (O. Kysel et al 2017, PP. 299-300)

Adele which means ‘nobility’ is the name of the twins’ mother. She belongs to two different cultures. She plays a noble role which might be the origin feature of her name. Adele is obsessed with the new identity that of becoming white and encouraged her daughters to behave alike. Adele is also a name used everywhere as a gender-neutral name in the world.

Desiree meaning “much desired” is a name given to girl. The first born twin is much desired by her parents. And she also much desired ‘black’ identity than the new one ‘light-skinned’. She maintains that way of thinking because she cannot escape her blood as one can escape a town. Bluntly, the name Desiree may mean” a willful child”. Besides, Desiree’s own stubbornness gives birth to Jude who is Desiree’s willful child too. as the name Jude illustrates in its meaning ‘Praised’. For Desiree, Jude’s birth is an appraisal action, a thanksgiving because she had always loved, and really appreciated black’s identity.

Stella is the second girl twin. Her name ‘Stella means Star’. She shines as a star in all domains. Her roots are black but she looks like white and considers herself and behaves like whites. Thence, she is half vanished. Stella leads to change and movement. She behaves and perceives the world differently from Desiree. Finally, her cleverness becomes an ‘ugly head’

when discovering the truth on black identity, she has remorse about her behavior and her disguise.

Jude meaning is “praised” according to is said above. Whites qualify her complexion as blueblack, dark skinned, tar or staring daughter, double-dyed, undesirable’. These nouns, verbs, adjectives, and compound words are intensifiers that highlight the pejorative idea white people attached to black identity. Fortunately, Jude complexion shares her mother’s way of thinking. That of being proud of having black identity. She appreciates the intensively colored,

Kennedy means ‘ugly head’ and it is a gender-neutral name. Kennedy has a real perfectly and wealth white man as father and a light-skinned black woman (Stella) considering herself white. Her mother’s mindset is considered as an ugly action as far as the identity of black is concerned. Kennedy belongs to two different identities. That feature shows Kennedy’s conciliatory spirit.

All motives reflect people reality. They reflect the evaluation, expressiveness and emotions of an individual to the extra linguistic reality. Moreover, social motives change the semantic structure of a name and demonstrate linguistic and social progress. “Beliefs and desires function both as causes and as reasons for our actions, and rationality is largely a matter of coordinating beliefs and desires so that they cause actions” (J. R. Searle, 2001, P.8)

Conclusion

This analysis demonstrates the locutionary acts fitness with social realities. It focuses not only on language (locutionary acts), but also on the forms of social organization. Locutionary acts and native behavior show identity borders constantly change according to the place and the context. Whites consider blacks as an underground, an undesirable and an under-esteemed group. For these reasons, white American signed petitions to protect their neighborhood against undesirable, blueblack, tar, and the colorstruck to maintain their distance from them. That stigmata, ill-treatment and the restricted separating line at home and in public places were actions of frustration on the behalf of blacks. All those hurtful actions were so deep in a way that the light-skinned African American disguised their colorism and identity through the use of code switching. Hence, a group beliefs, desires, and mental act are seen as conditions of satisfaction if and only if they are fulfilled yet and fit with the direction undertaken in real life. Everyone can freely pick or choose his identity as it has been imposed by the society. But, a person’s true identity cannot be hidden forever, even though he disguised it. One cannot escape his own blood. Thus, the notions of language (locutionary acts), boundary and identity are

discussed in that article. But, the work did not settle speech acts and locutionary acts all parameters of identity borders. For further research, can language (s) be used as separating line between identities?

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