

An Examination of the Language Used by Women in Modern Chinese Literature Using the White Deer Plain as an Illustration

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Abstract

The language of each sort of typical female character is analyzed in this paper using Chen Zhongshi's novel *White Deer Plain* as the research object. The linguistic perspective and the traditional classification of "silent, rebellious, and struggling" for female figures in the novel are used. Three key features of the female language in *White Deer Plains* are found to be rooted in the patriarchal rural society's power structure: a direct reaction to the male power field, a strong connection to one's own identity, and the language's "instrumentality" superseding its "expressiveness." The causes behind the development of women's linguistic traits are further examined in this research using the three dimensions of institutional suppression, economic reliance, and educational deficiency. Through a microscopic examination of language, it seeks to investigate the survival status of women in *White Deer Plain*.

Keywords

Linguistics; Contemporary Chinese Literature; Female Language; *White Deer Plains*.

1. Introduction

Women's subjectivity in the social structure has been growing since the establishment of the New China, and academics have been paying more attention to their aspirations for discursive power and self-expression. A literary work's portrayal of language is a crucial textual carrier that condenses social reality, and language itself is a significant carrier of social consciousness. The social evolution of a particular historical time can be inferred from the evolution of its form and connotation.

White Deer Plains by Chen Zhongshi is a prime example of modern Chinese literature. The novel, which has a unique epic quality, vividly depicts the social changes that occurred over half a century from the end of the Qing Dynasty to the early stages of the founding of New China. It is set against the geographical backdrop of White Deer Village in Guanzhong, Shaanxi Province, and centers on the rise and fall of the two large families of White Deer.

White Deer Plains has been the subject of much research, with the majority of the findings concentrating on the macroscopic level of patriarchal ideology and women's fate. However, there is still a dearth of investigation into the microscopic perspective of "women's language." In order to overcome the constraints of conventional picture analysis and offer a resource for comprehending the evolution of female discourse throughout time, this article is dedicated to examining the female language in the work.

This paper's structure is as follows: first, we examine *White Deer Plain*'s male-dominated language ecology and establish the macro-context for examining women's language; second, we examine the novel's female roles, which the earlier authors have labeled as "silent," "rebellious," and "struggling." After classifying the female characters in the novel as "silent," "rebellious," and "struggling," we examine their languages. To finish the systematic discussion, we list their

similarities and investigate their causes from the perspectives of the system, economy, and education[1-7].

2. Article main

2.1. The Ecology of Gender in the Realm of The White Deer Plain: The Location of Male Society's Language

The inflexible framework of male dominance in the White Deer Plains utterly objectifies women as submissive and orderly.

First, "discourse construction"-the direct defining of women through name and other means-is a manifestation of male domination over language. The worth of women's existence in White Deer Plains is entirely decided by men. A woman's joys, sorrows, and pleasures are always covered by the demands of the family, and she never gets the chance to define herself. Bai Jiaxuan's wife, for instance, is named "Immortal Grass," which suggests the instrumental character of "nourishing the family and dedicating oneself to the family." The requirements of the family constantly take precedence over the woman's happiness and sorrows, preventing her from ever defining herself.

"Discursive discipline" is another way that males control language; it is the process by which women's boundaries are set within the parameters of patriarchal expectations through the use of moral language. The core words of discipline in the White Deer Plains discourse system are "chastity" and "womanhood." The idea that "losing one's modesty is a big deal, but starving to death is trivial" permeates every stage of women's development through the lessons of family elders, and in the end, women will be unable to define themselves. Through the teachings of the family elders, the idea that "starvation is not a big deal" permeates every stage of women's development, enabling them to internalize "obedience" into "self-awareness" in the end. The main requirement for Xiancao to be accepted as a "qualified daughter-in-law" when she marries into the Bai family is that she "listen to your father" before she passes away. Men's power over language is more focused on "discourse deprivation," which means that by limiting women's freedom of expression, they force them into "aphasia" to prevent any resistance. The majority of women in White Deer Plains cannot voice their own demands due to the gender discourse distribution, and the majority of everyday Xiancao words are submissive responses like "OK," "Got it," "Listen to you," etc. They have never voiced their opinions on personal destinies or family decisions. They have never questioned the family's choices or their own fate. Even when a woman attempts to overcome "aphasia," the patriarchal discourse totally suppresses her requests. For example, Tian Xiaoe wants to "live a good life with you" with Heiwa, and she begs Lu Zilin, "Don't hurt me anymore!" However, neither a response nor a meaningful consideration is given to these petitions.

The entire language control chain of "discourse construction - discourse regulation - discourse deprivation" is how White Deer Plains' patriarchal society maintains its long-standing dominance over women. The White Deer Plains patriarchal rule is upheld by this unseen dominance based on language.

2.2. Categorization and Linguistic Evaluation of Female Characters in the Novel

Scholar Yang Yiduo's three categories of women in White Deer Plains-the silent type, or those who choose to submit to oppression and even actively identify with the patriarchal system; the rebellious type, or those who dare to push past the confines of feudal traditions and actively rebel against the patriarchal system; and the struggle type, or those who seek a balance in the contradiction between oppression and resistance, which ultimately results in a split personality-are the basis for the analytical framework of this paper.

(1) Silent Women: Using Language as a Discipline Tool

Zhao Bai and Xian Cao illustrate this kind of woman, who views her husband as the main source of support in their lives and does not view patriarchy as oppression but rather as a standard of propriety that must be followed. Within the narrow framework of "husband's wife, son's mother, and grandchildren's grandmother," their duties are tightly constrained, and they feel that issues beyond this framework are unrelated to them.

For instance, Zhao Bai's language is self-contained and mostly uses feudal ethical concepts; "clan rules" and "women's morality" are examples. Her social identity as a "patriarchal law enforcement officer" is an unavoidable decision; it is merely a loudspeaker for the patriarchal system, a typical "instrumental discourse" devoid of any individuality.

She frequently uses judgmental words (e.g., "This is a woman's duty") and straightforward, powerful imperative statements (e.g., "Kneel and admit your fault"). This is a "directive speech act" in the pragmatics sense, meaning that its primary purpose is "doing things with words"-that is, directly achieving the coercion and regulation of the listener's conduct using words-rather than communication or negotiation. This language's "efficiency" and "indifference" are clear examples of its use as a tool for discipline.

Her statements, such as "The rules of the Bai family cannot be broken; if they are broken, you are a sinner to your ancestors!" exhibit a high degree of absolutism in terms of language style. -- This is a classic example of "authoritative discourse": she is not voicing her own opinions, but rather communicating and upholding a set of indisputable patriarchal rules, and her language is a clear expression of power.

(2) The Resistant Woman: Using Words as a Fighting Tool

The statement "Reporting to Army Commander Liao, soldier Bai Ling reporting for duty" not only establishes "soldier" as her new identity, but it also signifies the awakening of women's consciousness, as they are no longer restricted to their families and start to take the initiative to fight for a better future, as well as a better relationship with them. Her self-perception changes significantly as a result of being freed from the constraints of her family and starting to take the initiative to strive for the same rights and social standing as men.

This kind of lady is exemplified by Bai Ling, whose verbal content has completely "revolutionized": They have adopted terms like "freedom," "equality," "revolution," and so on in place of the exclusive terminology that was formerly reserved for the inner sanctum. Phrases like "revolution" and other lofty political terms. According to sociolinguistic theory, language and identity are mutually beneficial. Bai Ling achieves her "identity construction" and shapes herself into a true "revolutionary" by deliberately selecting such words.

Her linguistic approach is intricate and accurate at the level of language structure: First, she employs rhetorical questions as a tool of resistance, such as "Are women inherently subordinate?" After that, she uses lengthy, coherent phrases to express her revolutionary ideology, and lastly, she ends her case with a rallying cry. (e.g., "We have to break out of this cage!"). A rallying cry, such as "We will break out of this cage!" concludes the debate. This collection of "confrontational speech acts" has two functions: it supports modern ideas like "equality between men and women," and it undermines the logic of outdated ones like "women's dependence on men." The first is to disprove the logic of outdated notions like "women's dependence on men," and the second is to defend more recent concepts like "gender equality." Her criticism is never directed at specific individuals, but rather at the conventional male-dominated discursive system that keeps women out of public affairs. She has effectively changed from a "object" in the conventional sense of discourse to a "subject" who actively pursues and masters the power of discourse thanks to this discursive practice.

(3) Women in Struggle: Using Language as a Survival Technique

As a voice for women in struggle, Tian Xiaoe's language is rife with grave hesitations and divisions, reflecting her weak and marginal social identity at the linguistic level. As a survival

tactic under the intense strain of power, she uses submissive phrases like "begging for forgiveness" and "admitting guilt" when she is in front of male authority. When her emotions falter, she uses words of resistance like "why? The foggy subjective consciousness of a "human being" develops when her emotions breach the dike, and she speaks words of resistance like "why?" Her word choice is entirely influenced by the dynamic nature of power.

She frequently pauses, repeats, and utilizes incomplete phrases in her language (e.g., "I..... am obedient, but can you..... not do this to me?"). "Speech disfluency" of this kind is not an issue. This phenomenon of "poor speech" is an external expression of her inner dread and perplexed thinking under the domination of male dominance, rather than just a matter of articulation. She cannot put up a strong and cohesive defense.

According to discourse analysis, Tian Xiaoe's language is classified as a "weak discourse" since it lacks a cohesive style. In contrast to Bai Ling's courageous and assertive "confrontational discourse," her language is passive and broken. The terrible foreshadowing of her "lack of discourse" in the entire discourse system and even her eventual "loss of speech" is that she is unable to govern her own language, and that the dominant masculine discourse drowns out her voice.

2.3. Investigating the Typical Elements and Roots of Female Language in Novels

(1) Typical Elements of Female Speech

The "alienation of language function under the patriarchal system" is the main characteristic of White Deer Plains women's language. Thus, language is no longer only a means of expressing emotions; rather, it is a carrier that engages with power, is linked to identity, and survival aids—three key characteristics that are explicitly highlighted.

1) The realm of male power is directly addressed by language.

The "power discourse" hypothesis states that women's language choices are always influenced by the male-dominated power structure and that there is no "neutral expression" that is independent of the power field. Language is a direct reaction to this power sphere, whether it be through submission, opposition, or struggle: A proactive use of male authority, Zhao Bai's "kneeling and admitting her faults" demonstrates the use of words to impose punishment; Direct reactions to this area of power can be seen in Tian Xiaoe's "I do as I'm told" in front of the male authority figure and her "By what right" outburst. Even Bailing's defiant words like "freedom" and "revolution" are not the same as the words used in the film, but they are used in it. Tian Xiaoe's passive responses, such as "I do as I am told" in front of male authority and "Why?" during emotional outbursts, change with the strength of male power, making language a "barometer" of oppression. Aiming to "break the male power," Bai Ling's phrases of resistance, like "freedom" and "revolution," are fundamentally a reaction to the realm of male authority and are never divorced from the confines of the power structure.

2) A strong bond is formed between language and identity.

The idea that "language constructs identity" holds that women's language and self-identification are very similar, and that language serves as both the "construction material" and the "external sign" of identity. Language is closely linked to Zhao Bai's self-identification, and her status as a "patriarchal law enforcement officer" aligns with the "closed feudal ethical vocabulary field" (e.g., "a woman's duty", "a sinner of the ancestors"). The following illustrates how Tian Xiaoe's status as a "marginalized person" dictates the "brokenness" of her language: The pauses and repeats of incomplete sentences (such as "I..... I am obedient") are indicative of the "brokenness" of Tian Xiaoe's speech. Her identity as a dominated individual is thus exposed by this broken language form; Bai Ling's "political vocabulary" and "confrontational speech" actively construct her identity as a "revolutionary," making her language an identity of

"revolution" and "revolution." The "political vocabulary" and "confrontational speech" that Bai Ling uses to actively develop his identity as a "revolutionary" make language the primary means of establishing one's identity.

3) "Practicality" is given precedence above "expressiveness" in language.

According to the "speech act" idea, women's language is mostly used to "do things with words" rather than to convey feelings, and it is heavily instrumentalized to achieve particular objectives. While Bai Ling's cry ("We have to break through this cage!") is an "agitational speech act," Zhao Bai's imperative remark ("Kneel and admit your faults") is a "directive speech act" meant to compel people to follow patriarchal law. Tian Xiao'e's submissive speech ("But can you not do this to me?") is a "survival speech act" that basically attempts to avoid the oppression of male power; it is a "motivational speech act" that aims to inspire others to join the revolution. The "instrumental attribute" of language is permitted to take precedence over the "expressive attribute" despite their disparate objectives.

(2) Factors Contributing to the Development of Female Linguistic Features

The feudal social order systematically shaped women's language, which is why women's language has many characteristics rather than being the product of haphazard literary invention. The "binding network" of women's language is made up of the three interconnected aspects of system, economy, and education.

1) Institutional Suppression: Discourse Boundaries Are Defined by Patriarchal Masculinity

The "rules of discourse distribution" established the limits of women's language under the medieval patriarchal society. To be more precise, the patriarchal system established who could speak, what could be said, and how. The "right to speak" is monopolized by men in the White Deer Plains, and women's linguistic rights are reliant on their male identity. Women "do not have the right to participate in the public discourse," according to the system, and are only permitted to remain silent or to agree in home conversations and social issues. Women's language is thus totally shut out of the public domain.

2) Economic Dependency: Language Choice Is Driven by Survival Needs

Women's language choice is directly distorted by economic reliance. Traditional women are entirely dependent on men for their survival and are supported by their husbands or sons. Their language will inevitably be reduced to a survival skill due to their complete economic dependence. In order to maintain its existence, it now serves to appease and obey the supplier rather than to express itself. This is the exact reason why the "practicality" of language must be given priority due to its pressing need for existence.

3) Lack of Education: Language Formation Is Restricted by Lack of Knowledge

Feudal society's denial of women's education directly contributed to the extreme singularity of their linguistic resources, preventing them from developing a diverse system of expression. The "vocabulary of public discourse" (such as political and legal terminology) was unavailable to women due to their exclusion from formal education, and their linguistic system was restricted to the "vocabulary of family life" (such as terms about childrearing and domestic duties). It prevented traditional women from entering the household conversation or taking part in society discussions. Conversely, women's lack of knowledge prevents them from coherently organizing their language. In contrast to Bai Ling, who can use lengthy, logical phrases because of her new education, Tian Xiao'e is unable to assemble a coherent retort when she feels oppressed and can only communicate her demands in pauses and repetitious, incomplete statements. The two stand in sharp contrast to one another. Consequently, whether women's language is "broken and passive" or "active and powerful" is directly influenced by education levels.

3. Conclusion

The form and meaning of language, the most significant and direct means of communication in human society, can naturally reflect the social traits and survival environment of particular groups. This paper selects the women's language in White Deer Plain as the primary research object based on the linguistic perspective and previous research findings. It then thoroughly examines the three types of women's language, examining their shared traits and generation mechanism within the framework of patriarchal society. Ultimately, it concludes that the women's language in White Deer Plain is a particular discourse produced within the patriarchal power network of the vernacular. In addition, it is a powerful representation of women's collective fate and personal decisions under institutionalized discrimination, financial reliance, and lack of access to education.

Enlightening the present is the goal of historical preservation. The significance of examining the language conundrum of women in White Deer Plains is to shed light on the underlying reasons for the historical lack of discourse power at a time when women's consciousness is growing and discourse power is growing. It cautions us that achieving economic independence, ensuring equal educational possibilities, and dismantling institutional injustice are all necessary for the true creation of women's discourse power, in addition to the emergence of individual consciousness. For us to keep advancing the advancement of gender equality and women's discourse in the modern era, this realization is a crucial benchmark. The White Deer Plains narrative demonstrates that language is never a neutral medium of communication; rather, it is the most fundamental battlefield and the most profound expression of the power system.

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