

CHAPRA GOVT. COLLEGE

Established-2015



3rd Semester Project Work, 2023

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REG NO - 048429

SUBJECT - ENGLISH

COURSE CODE = ENG-H-CC-T-5

SESSION= 2022-23

TOPIC - 'I Have a Dream' by Martin Luther King(Jr.)

American Literature

"I Have a Dream"

Martin Luther King.

American Literature :

The American Revolutionary Period (1775-1783) is notable for the political writings of Benjamin Franklin; Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Paine, and Thomas Jefferson. An early novel is William Hill Brown's 'The Power of Sympathy' Published in 1791. Writer and critic John Neal in the early mid nineteenth century helped advance America's progress toward a unique literature and culture by criticizing predecessors like Washington Irving for imitating their British counterparts and influencing others like 'Edgar Allan Poe'. He took American poetry and short story fiction of character. Ralph Waldo Emerson pioneered the influential Transcendentalism movement; Henry David Thoreau, author of Walden, was influenced by this movement. The conflict surrounding abolitionism inspired the writers like Harriet Beecher Stowe and by slave narratives, such as those by Frederick Douglass. 'Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter (1850) explored the dark side of American history. Some great writers of America like - Walt Whitman, Anne Bradstreet, William Faulkner, Adrienne Rich and others.

Introduction :

The society we find ourselves, like every other society, has a way of reading meaning to every utterance made by a speaker to his audience. Every utterance is determined by the situation, event or occurrence at given point in time. The study through which meaning in context is derived belongs to the domain of pragmatics. Pragmatics "is the study of language use". It simply refers to how language is used in a particular situation and at a given time. In other words, pragmatics is needed if we want fuller, deeper and generally more reasonable account of the human language. The study of pragmatics, however, has been of great interest over the years, and recently, to scholars in different disciplines such as linguistics, philosophy, semiotics and psychology, because of its role in communication and language use. It has also played great roles in the study of public speech.

The Great titled "I Have a Dream" by Martin Luther King, an African-American pastor, civil rights activist and leader of the then Montgomery movement. He delivered this speech to a large number of over 250,000 civil rights supporters on August 28, 1963, from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, where he called for an end to racism in the United States. The speech is a defining moment of the American civil rights movement, where the speaker tries to persuade and influence the audience to fight for their freedom, as well as end slavery and racism.

Background of the study:

the speech of the great African-American orator, preacher, Humanitarian, ~~oppression and inequality meted out on the blacks~~ by whites in the American society and civil rights activist, Martin Luther King (Jr.), Pays more Attention to the injustice, racial discrimination; oppression and inequality meted out on the blacks by whites in the American society; and shows how those issues can be resolved through a particular ideology. These issues are not aligned with the American dream. The American dream is rooted in the United States declaration of Independence which proclaims that: "All men are created equal" and that they are "endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, including 'life', liberty' and the pursuit of happiness. The dream preaches freedom and equality for all and the opportunity to benefit from the resources endowed in the American society, through hard work.

According to Emery "the American dream states that all citizens have equal opportunity to achieving success through determination, education, and hardwork." But, as at the time King made this popular speech, the blacks appeared as 'Nobody' and evil people, and the tacit conclusion was that nothing good could come out of the blacks. The Africans are usually seen as the descendants of Cain and this conception underscores the idea that the mark God gave to Cain for killing Abel his brother is a black skin. This shows that the American dream, which is for all, is now a nightmare for the African-Americans.

The blacks began to lose hope in themselves, accepting the notion that they were 'nobody'.

However, there was a re-definition of self for the Negro and the need to emphasize self-assertion. This is built on the encouraging speeches of many African-American leaders, and especially, those of Martin Luther King (Jr.) who was like a saviour and pioneer of the American freedom. His speeches are like a brim of hope which promised a better future for the African-Americans and this is aptly portrayed in his most iconic speech, 'I Have a Dream', which was delivered on August 28, 1963. This great speech, however, is the focus of the analysis undertaken in this article - Akwa Ibom Broadcasting Corporation (AKBC) Documentary of 11th January, 2014.

▣ Brief Bio-data of Martin Luther King (Jr.):

Martin Luther King (Jr.) was an American Pastor, Activist and humanitarian leader in the African-American civil rights movement. Born on January 15, 1929 to Reverend ~~David~~ and Mrs. Martin Luther King snr. in Atlanta, Georgia, King attended David T. Howard Elementary school, Atlanta University Laboratory School and Booker T. Washington High School from 1935-1944. He was best known for his role in the ~~advised~~ advancement of civil rights through the use of non-violent civil disobedience, which is based on his Christian belief.

Previously named Michael King, his father changed his name in favour of the

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German reformer, Martin Luther. A Baptist minister, king became a civil rights activist early in his career. He led the 1957, serving as its first president. With the SCLC, king led an unsuccessful struggle against segregation in Albany, Georgia in 1962, and organized non-violent protests in Birmingham, Alabama, that attracted national attention following television news coverage of the brutal police response. King also helped to organize the 1963 march on Washington, where he delivered his popular speech: 'I Have a Dream'. There, he established his reputation as the greatest orator in American history.

In 1956, he was arrested and charged for travelling thirty miles an hour in twenty-five miles an hour zone in Montgomery. In October 14, 1964, king received the Nobel peace prize for combating racial inequality through non-violent means. In the final year of his life, king expanded his focus to include poverty and the Vietnam War, alienating many of his liberal allies with the 1967 speech titled "Beyond Vietnam". He was assassinated on April 4, 1968 in Memphis, Tennessee.

Statement of the Problem:

The American society was ~~so~~ structured along racial line. This problem of inequality has plagued the life of the African-Americans since the declaration of independence by Great Britain in 1776. The whites see themselves as superior to the black race. As a result, the blacks do not benefit

from the economic, social and political life of the American society. During this period, the agitation of the blacks for equality was what inspired the civil rights movement from 1955-1968 which culminated in Martin Luther King (Jr.)'s speech we are considering in this study. This speech brings into the black consciousness the need to come together through non-violent means to fight for their rights as citizens. It could be said that King's speech served as a catalyst for the emancipation and integration of the blacks into the mainstream American society. We are, however, looking at how the speech serves as a milestone in black struggle for equality within the American society. Did it serve as an instrument that projected the black Americans as a force to be reckoned with within the American socio-political establishment? Did it provide the required motivation upon which future American society and ideologies could be re-constructed? These are some of the questions which provide the main focus of this paper.

Significance of the study : This paper is meant to increase the awareness of readers about the American dream and the rate of injustice meted out to the Negroes, and how the speech has been able to come to reality through the dream of Martin Luther (Jr.) which is rooted in the American dream. The study also contributes to scholarship and makes a spirited

for the "fierce urgency of now" - so as to get speedy action of serving the menace of racial segregation. The speech is like an appeal to America as a nation founded to provide freedom and justice to all men, to do so on grounds of racial justice which, to King, is also in accord with God's will. He also noted that the future of the Americans was 'bound' or 'tied up together'.

Furthermore, his symbolic use of Mississippi does not mean a dry or rainless land perse, but it creates the image of water to represent freedom. He also paints a picture that, there is hope for the Negro because of their faith, when he made use of the phrase 'stone of hope'. He also made use of the symbol 'mountain of despair', which is the menace of racial segregation which they will 'hew' through their faith. And America can all work together in harmony and to achieve their dream as one, and great nation, through the use of sympathy orchestra that plays together in harmony. All of them, he maintained whether Jews or Gentiles; Catholics or Protestants, will join hands together to sing the song of the old Negro spiritual that they are 'Free at Last'.

Conclusion: In conclusion, this paper has been able to prove that pragmatics as a discipline and tool for analysis, is very important as long as human beings communicate in their different environment on different occasions, contexts and shared knowledge. The findings of this paper show that the speakers made use of the five stages of the illocutionary

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acts and five structural sentence types to convey his message to his audience clearly. In the speech acts, the most used form is the representative which amount to 43% ~~against~~ 22.2%, 11.1%, 9.1% and 19.4% of the directives, commissives, expressives and declaratives respectively.

Through the excessive use of the representatives or assertive of the illocutionary acts by the speaker, one found that the speaker is able to predict the future of the African American society, that one day, they will live together as brothers and that they will be free at last. He was also able to make suggestions, reports, claims, and conclusions as well as state some facts which point out the reality of injustice meted out on the Negros. These statements guaranteed freedom to future Negros in an anticipated, transformed American society which they hoped to get at last. It is obvious that the directives are used in the speech to spur the audience to action and the declaratives which follows helped the speaker to declare freedom that Negros agitate for, which is in consonance with his ultimate dream.

This paper, therefore, has been able to show how effective the speaker made use of words within the context of their situation and environment to influence the audience towards bringing a lasting solution to their problem. The consequence is the transformed American society, free from oppression, nepotism, racial prejudice, inequality, impoverishment and partisanship; a society where the Negro is now free to vote and be voted for, American society and ultimately the re-positioning of the Negro people in America for a better, more progressive future.

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