

The Psychological Conflict of Jefferson in *a Lesson before Dying* by Ernest J. Gaines

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ABSTRACT

This research is to analyze Jefferson's psychological conflict. It talks about a black teenager who lives in America as a victim of the racism ideology at that time and he gets the death sentence because he is accused of murdering the storekeeper. He gets the judgement unfairly and automatically suffers his psychology until he has no hope to live again. This research question is related to psychological conflict and emotions based on the evidence. We took the review of related literature about psychological conflict, emotions, speech acts, communicative language teaching, language and thought. We used qualitative method to analyze the story of Jefferson. This research is useful for education literacy to know more value of Jefferson.

Keywords: *Psychology, conflict, emotions*

INTRODUCTION

The story of *a Lesson Before Dying* is very interesting because it shows about the story of racism in that time around the 1940s in America. It talks about White and Black people at that time and racism is strong point in this story. This story is written by Ernest J. Gaines. It is a fictional one but considered as a true story. It was started that there was a black teenager named Jefferson who walked alone and met two bad guys on the street. He was a 21-year-old man and he went with them and he got sentenced to death because he was accused of murdering a white storekeeper. The story started with the rubbering action of the two bad guys. They tried to rob the store, but the owner turned the gun on them while Jefferson was standing on the left. The storekeeper was shot by the gun while he was shooting two bad guys and three of them were passing away in that place with a lot of blood on the floor. A moment in time, the people came and pointed Jefferson out as the only murderer and Jefferson did unaware mistakes. The silly action of his, he took a bottle and put it to get some liquid courage and finally he looked at the open cash register and was

helping himself. The evidence seemed to corroborate this situation. Some people were hard to ignore the facts. *A Lesson before Dying* is true story but a little cruel action while showing the real themes at that time. It is just like the real history, these themes resonate today, as racism and inequality are still prevalent. Gaines's story will surely educate students about the bad treatment African Americans endured during this period of inequality and hate. It encourages to get open and meaningful discussion and allow students to express outrage, confusion, sadness, or all the above. It considers reflecting on how readers might have felt differently about Jefferson's situation has not been sentenced to death and only imprisoned or he commits the crime after all. In the judgement, there is no balance condition that the juries at time are white men. It shows that racism.

In this story of *A Lesson before Dying*, we try to understand the psychological conflict which Jefferson condition so far. He is just a victim of unfair in the judgement. The unfairness is absolutely influencing the law and the witness and evidence always point that Jefferson has been guilty in murdering the shopkeeper. From the story, holding communication and openness for the fairness are a must in every condition, for example to make clear every problem and to make sure that everything ran well. Based on Broughton et al. (1980, p 26), communication can be infinitely varied and infinitely complex just because the language is a highly structured system which allows an infinite range of permutations. It means that communication and conversation are needed to prove some evidences but if no evidence mentions Jefferson guilty, it makes unfair of Jefferson's live. He must get the death sentence because of not knowing the law and witnesses with him, unaware of situation which makes him trapped in law and jail. His behavior is noticed that he cannot have a right decline that he is not guilty.

According to Forrester (1996, p. 80), all behaviors which is concerned with communication will be accountable and will follow appropriate conventions for display, signaling, and so on. It means that every communication can be determined by knowing the condition and showing off the condition will be understood for every situation. In this research, there are three research questions; the first is what is psychological conflict faced by Jefferson? And what kinds of speech acts in the Jefferson's character? From the speech acts, we can know what kinds of pragmatic and psychological conflict which Jefferson face and what is important for literacy education in the story of Jefferson' Psychological Conflict in *A Lesson before Dying*. Based on Broughton et al. (1980, p. 30), in the process of communication, every speaker adjusts the way he speaks (or writes) according to the situation he is in the purpose which motivates him and the relationship between himself and

the person he is addressing. Moreover, according to Forgas et al. (2011, p. 139), negotiation is a means of resolving social and economic conflict, which sometimes evokes negative emotions. Conflict can be solved by negotiation to get the win-win solution. In language teaching, especially teaching English for education, the story of Jefferson can implement too many aspects such as, patience, understanding the racism, which means understanding optimistic, know the fairness, willing to learn and how to survive. This research is useful for learning how the racism happened in that time and education literacy which can advantage to know more about psychological conflict.

A Lesson before Dying was true and brutal action because of the very-real themes. It presented particularly about race, prejudice, and death. The deep slavery had been abolished by the 1940s but its effects still lingered through segregation and the unjust Jim Crow laws. It was just like the real history, these themes resonate today, as racism and inequality were still prevalent. Gaines's novel would surely educate students about the horrible treatment African Americans endured during this period of inequality and hate. It encouraged to get open and meaningful discussion and allow students to express outrage, confusion, sadness, or all the above. It considered reflecting on how readers might have felt differently about Jefferson's situation had not been sentenced to death and only imprisoned or he committed the crime after all.

This technique of teaching for us to make understand about the racism ideology, struggle and not easy to be pessimistic. It encourages us to know and to find the best evidence that Jefferson is not guilty. He was just a man belonging to racism age and did not have any witness surrounding him to prove that he was not guilty, and he didn't murder the shopkeeper at that time. Being patient for every problem and trying to get solution are good ways for solving the problem. This story told us that there was a gap between Black and White men because White Man thought Black Man is no useful. From the novel, we learned that Grant had had the school children and many towns people come to visit Jefferson and he was deeply touched by their concern for him. The eve of Jefferson's execution arrived. He had Miss Emma's fried okra for his last meal and was unable to sleep. Instead of describing the execution directly, Gaines includes the reactions of many towns people who did not appear elsewhere in the novel, emphasizing Jefferson's status as a public hero. Reverend Ambrose witnessed the execution, but Grant did not have the courage and instead went to work, told his students to pray at the approximate time the execution would take place. Deputy Paul went to visit Grant after the execution has happened, delivered Jefferson's diary and informing him that Jefferson faced his fate with great strength and dignity. He added that he

hoped to stay friends with Grant, and one day he would like to read Jefferson's diary if Grant thinks it's appropriate. Grant solemnly thanked him and returned to teach his class.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

To complete analysis and to describe what Jefferson thought, we take the theories from Lindner (2009), Yule (1996) about speech acts and Cutting (2002), they are:

Emotion and Conflict

According to Lindner (2009, p. 24), *consciousness* is a person's entire inner experience: thoughts, sensations of the body, emotions, and visions of the spirit, *being* is sometimes called self; the integral state of all aspects of the self; may be cultivated to a higher than usual level of human functioning, *mind* is the part of a person that reasons, thinks, remembers, imagines, feels, wills, perceives, judges, and so on; the part of a person that pays attention, *body* is a person's physical structure and material substance; the body gives bounds to the personality and provides a vehicle for life. *Emotion* is a complex collection of chemical and neural responses forming a distinctive pattern, an automatic response to a stimulus, *feeling* is the perception of a certain state of the body along with the perception. *Spirit* is incorporeal, transcendent aspects of human being; connection with a larger creative source of meaning, the universe, or the divine.

Based on Lindner (2009, p. 4), research on emotions usually focuses on affect, feeling, emotion, script, character, and personality, while larger cultural contexts and an analysis of historic periods in human history are less emphasized. Dialogue with other academic fields and other cultural realms is not easy to achieve even in today's increasingly connected world. Emotions were used as covert tools in the power dynamics of the past. Lindner (2009, p. 6), continues that emotions can be more impervious causes of disaster than the need for survival. Moreover, Forrester (1996, p. 26) explains that there are two general approaches to the mind-language relationship found in the psychology of language; *cognition-dominant* is concepts, cognitive states and categorization processes generally constrain and support thinking and language. *Language-dominant* is language constrains and facilitates thought. Our language determines the order of our experience and the world. According to Waisman (2010, p. 24), the language of emotions, particularly during situations of conflict, is of great relevance to any study that analyzes expressions in multi-ethnic groups. Involvement in conflict evokes various emotional responses, and notably the verbal expression of emotion is not universal. Conflict is the activity between two things which involve the feeling and thought. Forgas et

al. (2011, p. 3) mentions that conflict and aggression appear to be one of the defining features of our species. Human fight, argue, and engage in intraspecies violence at a rate that seems to be unique among species. According to Forgas et al. (2011, p. 144), moods in turn could be described as “low-intensity, diffuse and relatively enduring affective states without a salient antecedent cause and therefore little cognitive content (e.g., feeling good or feeling bad), whereas emotions “are more intense, short-lived and usually have a definite cause and clear cognitive content” (e.g., anger or fear).

Speech Acts

Speech acts have been identified as the people speech and communication such as *representative, expressive, directives, commissive, and declaration*. *Representative* consists of statements and descriptions. Representative mentions about the people’s statement. According to Yule (1996, p. 53), representatives are those kinds of speech acts that state what the speaker believes to be the case. Cutting (2002, p. 17) explains that these are acts in which the words state what the speaker believes to be the case, such as describing, claiming, hypothesizing, insisting and predicting. *Expressive* is the speaker’s attitude, such as congratulating, condoling, or expressing pleasure. It expresses psychological states and can be statements of pleasure, pain, likes, dislikes, joy, or sorrow. Cutting (2002, p. 17) describes that this group includes acts in which the words state what the speaker feels, such as apologizing, praising, congratulating, deploring and regretting. Expressive verbs are thanking, congratulate, apologize, condole, deplore, and "welcome". Notice that in expressive, there is no direction of fit. *Directives* are essentially commanding again; these are more likely to be found within character to character discourse. According to Yule (1996, p. 54), directives are those kinds of speech acts that speakers use to get someone else to do something. Cutting (2002, p. 17) describes that this category covers acts in which the words are aimed at making the hearer do something, such as commanding, requesting, inviting, forbidding, and suggesting and so on. *Commissive* is committing the speaker to some future course of action. According to Yule (1996, p. 54), commissive are those kinds of speech acts that speakers use to commit themselves to some future action. Based on Cutting (2002, p. 17) that this includes acts in which the words commit the speaker to future action, such as promising, offering, threatening, refusing, vowing and volunteering. *Declaration* is a unique form of speech act in that their successful performance depends upon the status of the speaker, and the precise circumstances surrounding the event. According to Yule (1996, p. 53), declarations are those kinds of speech acts that change the world via their utterance. The

speaker must have a special institutional role, in a specific context, in order to perform a declaration appropriately.

English foreign language based on literature

1. Communicative language teaching (CLT)

According to Fedicheva (2011, p. 15), a communicatively competent person must also know how to produce an appropriate, natural, and socially acceptable utterance in all contexts of communication. Fedicheva (2011, p. 15) also continues that communicative competence includes having grammatical knowledge of the system, and knowledge of the appropriateness of language use, such as sociocultural knowledge, paralinguistic (facial and gestural). (Fedicheva (2011, p. 15) adds that the major characteristics of this communicative method are; meaning is paramount, dialogs, if used, center on communicative functions and are not normally memorized, language learning is learning no communicative, effective communication is sought, attempts to communicate are encouraged from the very beginning, translation may be used where students need or benefit from it. Fedicheva (2011, p. 16) continues that communicative competence is the desired goal, teachers help learners in any way that motivates them to work with the language, language is created by the individual often through trial and error, fluency and acceptable language are the primary goal, students are expected to interact with other people, either having hands-on experience, through pair and group work or in their writings that the teacher could not understand exactly what language the students are going to use.

2. Language and Thought

While we are talking about the language, it has some meaning. Literature still related to English literacy. English education will be easy to know first about implementation of literacy. Based on Broughton et al. (1980, p. 27), the best way to regard the relationship is to say that language is a tool in the way an arm with its hand is as a tool and something to work with like any other tool and at the same time part of the mechanism that drives tools, part of us. Broughton et al. (1980, p. 27) also add that language is related to reality and thought by the intricate relationships we call meaning. Language can convey meaning the reality which it has to represent must be segmented.

METHOD

We used data collection for this research by giving evidence or phenomenon of

Jefferson's story. We described the evidence based on Jefferson quotation. It related to English technique teaching. According to Given (2008, p. 190), for qualitative the term data most often was associated with words. Consequently, when qualitative researchers spoke of analyzing data, they meant that participants' words or other empirical evidence were assessed. Qualitative researchers, and textbooks, often focus on making data to the exclusion of concerns about what to do with the data once you have created some. A goal of this book is to overcome this skew, to encourage you to think data records. For the rest of a project, what you will work with is the record of your data.

Data analysis methods

According to Richards (2015, p. 36), data analysis is an integral part of qualitative research and constitutes an essential stepping-stone toward both gathering data and linking one's findings with higher order concepts. Data are the stuff that you work with, the records of what you are studying. Given (2008, p. 186) mentions that there are many variants of qualitative research involving many forms of data analysis, including interview transcripts, field notes, conversational analysis, and visual data, whether photographs, film, or observations of internet occurrences for the purpose of brevity. This entry calls all of these forms of data *text*. The researchers use data analysis method by quoting the evidence of story of Jefferson of *a Lesson before Dying* by Ernest J. Gaines.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This finding is based on the novel or tale of Jefferson in *a Lesson before Dying* which happened in the 1940s, in the racism era. Moral values in Jefferson story are struggling, patient, optimistic, and continually. Here, we can analyze based on literature and language teaching. From the theory, we can take some evidence related to Jefferson's character. His character is also related to English language teaching model. It is worthy for teaching in elementary school. By understanding Jefferson's character and story, we can take some experiences especially learning literary works in education. Here is some evidence to analyze it.

Evidence 1

"Y'all asking a lot, Mr. Wiggins are from a poor old nigger who never had nothing."
(Gaines, 1993, p. 222)

That is *representative* speech act. The explanation shows that Jefferson would like to ask

Mr. Wiggins about his condition. He wants to know about his race can come to him and why racism faces to the poor man like Jefferson. He has such a limited capacity. Even though he is twenty-one years old, this shows us just how much racism can affect whether people can imagine a different life. His mind wondered why racism happened in his age. Teaching technique for English learners is diversity is good, it can make us know each other. But making difference each other is not good. It is same as underestimate something. Jefferson story above teaches us to know more how to learn English patiently. Learning second language takes time, do not waste of time and keep learning.

Evidence 2

"I am a old hog", he said, more to himself than to me. "Just a old hog they fattening up to kill for Christmas." (Gaines, 1993, p. 83)

This is *declaration* speech act. It talks about race. Jefferson has been identified as the hog that the defender compared him to during the trial. In the same way that he does not get too attached to a hog he is going to kill and eat. He will not let himself feel anything because it will hurt to lose himself in the end. In this case, that hog is the synonym of pig. The white man mentions that Jefferson is a hog or pig. He is just the black man and does not have level in the life. Based on the quotation above, the teaching technique is learning English by knowing the meaning well. Conversation is good for new learners. Do not take a risk by studying more detail, learn synonym to add some vocabulary words. Hog is the word of pig, but we can make similarity to human being and animal.

Evidence 3:

"That's how I want to go, Mr. Wiggins. Not a mumbling word." (Gaines, 1993, p. 226)

This is *commissive* speech act. It talks about mortality. At that time, Jefferson talks about the death and what happens after death. He always consults with Mr. Wiggins. He often compares his own death to Jesus. They are both executions, and both happen right around Easter time. Jefferson thinks that his life in the world is not for long again. In his imagination, the things always come to the death and he would like a death happily. Teaching technique for English Learners, while pronouncing the words, should be clear to get the true meaning. Meaning should be delivered well, do not mumble. As for an English learner, literature is a good way to understand more. It has some meaning to catch some definition. EFL stands for English Foreign Language and teach some people in many aspects, learn by syntax and semantic to pragmatics.

Evidence 4:

"Cause I'm go 'n die soon? That make me a man, Mr. Wiggins?" (Gaines, 1993, p. 86)

This is *expressive* speech act. It is religious activity. Jefferson brings up a hope but it would be no easy point. Mr. Wiggins will not pay any attention to Jefferson if he is not sentenced to death. He will just end up like all the other kids that graduated from Wiggins' classes. But his circumstances are extraordinary so that requires Jefferson to be mature extraordinarily. Mr. Wiggins would like to make Jefferson optimistic with his life. He must think that he can survive for everything. Based on the quotation, moral value for English learners is do not be easy to surrender, keep fighting to understand everything. EFL teaches us to know more step by step, do not easy to neglect something difficult. Struggling is a must for English learners.

Evidence 5:

"Me, Mr. Wiggins. Me. Me to take the cross. Your cross, nannan's cross, my own cross. Me, Mr. Wiggins. This old stumbling nigger. Y'all axe a lot, Mr. Wiggins." (Gaines, 1993, p. 227)

This is *commissive* speech act. It is coming to age. Jefferson has become a symbol. It is not just a person anymore and gets a lot of unfair pressure on him. He's just a kid or young teenager who has been wrongly convicted of murder and will soon be executed for it. Why should that mean that he must give hope to everyone he knows as well? It's unfair, just like any sacrifice, but he finds the strength to do it anyway. Mr. Wiggins convinces Jefferson that this is just the unfair judgment and he is sure that Jefferson is not guilty. He is not a murderer. He is just a victim of racism between Black and White men at that time. Moral value or English Learners are believed for the truth, learning so much, reading so much and we will get the important meaning for life.

CONCLUSION

Based on the tale of Jefferson in Lesson before Dying, Jefferson is a young teenager with twenty-one years old who suspected that he is murderer of white shopkeeper in a store. He does not know what he should do at that time. He just would like to make sure that he is not guilty. He is just a man by stander looking at people shot the gun. He is with two bad guys. Unfortunately, the court does not believe with his statement and some witness at that time pointed that Jefferson is guilty and no excuse for him. The racism and slavery age at that time make Black man can not be trusted. Unfair judgement make Jefferson should die without reason and Mr. Wiggins is someone who teach Jefferson to know about the life

before his final death sentences. Based on Jefferson story as literature context, it also teaches the English learners to know more about meaning in English, learning English word is not enough to know more especially meaning, should know more other words or make difference every single word in meaning based on semantics and pragmatics.

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