

VERBAL ABUSE IN JAMES WELCH'S *THE DEATH OF JIM LONEY*: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS.

Dr Selay Marius KOUASSI,
Université Peleforo Gon Coulibaly
lebonselay@yahoo.fr

Abstract: Based on Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis, which holds that people's linguistic productions are linked to their social relations and experiences with the social structures around them, this paper contends that socioeconomic status differences and gender inequality serve as catalysts for verbal abuse in the family. It sheds light on the numerous types of verbal abuse and decodes the linguistic interactions and power dynamics that underpin such abuse. This paper suggests that remedies for verbal abuse between spouses, partners, and parents and children include reducing the gender gap and improving living conditions.

Keywords: *abuse, discourse, dynamics, family, language, power, verbal, violence.*

Résumé : Cet article démontre que les facteurs comme la différence de statut socioéconomique, le rang social et les inégalités du genre servent de catalyseur à la violence verbale dans le cercle familial. Aussi essaie-t-il de mettre en lumière les nombreux cas de violence verbale dépeint dans le roman et de décoder les interactions linguistiques et les dynamiques de pouvoir qui sous-tendent lesdits cas. L'argumentation qui y a été développée a été construite à partir de la théorie d'analyse du discours de Norman Fairclough, qui consiste en un cadre analytique permettant d'étudier les textes et les discours pas seulement en tant qu'entités linguistiques, mais aussi et surtout en tant que pratiques sociales imbriquées dans des structures de pouvoir. Cet article suggère que la réduction des inégalités de genre et l'amélioration des conditions de vie aider à réduire considérablement la violence verbale dans la sphère domestique, notamment la violence verbale entre époux, entre concubins, et entre parents et enfants.

Mots-clés : *abus, discours, dynamique, famille, langue, pouvoir, verbal, violence.*

Introduction

James Welch's *The Death of Jim Loney* was first published in 1979. This novel delves into the intricate dynamics of a disrupted family struggling to reunify. Set in the American West, the narrative centers on the protagonist Jim Loney, a man caught between his native American heritage and the modern world. The novel explores how verbal abuse within the family circle acts as a significant barrier to reconciliation and healing. Loney's strained relationships with his estranged father Ike, his sister Kate, and his girlfriend Rhea, are marred by hurtful language and emotional manipulation, ultimately preventing the family from mending their fractured bonds.

Norman Fairclough's discourse analysis theory, particularly his approach to critical discourse analysis is relevant to conduct this research, given that it is rooted in a desire to understand how language functions as a form of social practice. The essence of Fairclough's theoretical framework is to explore how discourse both reflects and constructs social realities (N. Fairclough, 1995). This approach is intrinsically linked to notions of power, ideology, and social change. Central to Fairclough's perspective is the idea that discourse is not merely a means of communication but an essential aspect of social life, and that language does not operate in a vacuum but is intertwined with societal structures and power dynamics (N. Fairclough, 1992).

Many scholars and writers have contributed significantly to the understanding and recognition of verbal abuse as a critical social issue. Among them is James Welch, lauded by critics for his nuanced characterizations and his ability to convey the intricate family dynamics of Native American communities. His novel *The Death of Jim Loney* (1979) stands as a testament to his literary prowess, offering a compelling exploration of the intersection between verbal abuse, personal turmoil, and broader social issues. Welch's other notable works, such as *Winter in the Blood* (1974) and *Fools Crow* (1986), are further celebrated for their authentic portrayal of Native American life and culture.

This paper is structured into two main sections. The first section sheds light on the various forms and functions of verbal abuse in the domestic sphere in *The Death of Jim Loney*, highlighting, on one hand, explicit verbal abuse such as direct insults and hurtful labels, and on the other hand, subtle but effective verbal abuse such as presupposition, sarcasm, belittling and blaming. The second section unveils the power dynamics underpinning verbal abuse, with a particular focus on socioeconomic status differences and gender inequality. It analyses the intersection of linguistic productions and social practices. Indeed as N. Fairclough (1992, 97) recommends, "critical discourse analysis is analysis of the dialectical relationships between

discourse (including language but also other types of semiosis, e.g., body language or visual images) and other elements of social practices."

1. Forms and Functions of Verbal Abuse in Characters' Conversations

The Death of Jim Loney depicts two primary forms of verbal abuse: the explicit and the subtle. Regardless of form --whether overt or covert-- verbal abuse in the novel functions as a weapon to control, manipulate, and inflict emotional pain. It becomes a tool for asserting dominance, expressing resentment, and undermining the emotional well-being of others.

1.1. Hurtful Labels

Ike's comments on his wife (whose name is not explicitly mentioned) are marked by verbal abuse evidenced by hurtful labels and demeaning terms. One example of verbal abuse is when Ike refers to his wife as a "whore." (p.130) This derogatory term is demeaning and disrespectful, reducing his wife's worth to a negative stereotype. Describing someone as a "whore" can be deeply hurtful and damaging. Such hurtful label can contribute to a toxic and hostile environment within the family dynamic, impacting the emotional well-being of those involved. Ike's choice of this expression reflects a lack of empathy towards Loney's feelings and his mother's memory. Throughout the novel, Ike's tone and attitude towards her convey a sense of indifference and disregard for her well-being. His focus on her perceived flaws and shortcomings reflects a disregard for her well-being and emotional state. This indifference contributes to a harmful dynamic within their relationship, where verbal abuse is used --by Ike-- as a means of control and manipulation. The following conversation between Ike and his son Loney, about Loney's mother, sheds light on the disrespectful language used towards his wife and illustrates a critical pattern of verbal abuse within their relationship (Data 1):

“But his father said, “I don’t know what happened after those first couple of years. She just sort of went to hell. Started drinking, running around, lost her looks...”
“It was because you made her that way. You ruined her if she was as good in the beginning as you say.”
“Like hell.”
“You couldn’t help yourself. You can’t help the way you are.” “Bullshit.”
“Don’t take it personally.”
“Don’t take it personally, he says. Calls me a horse’s ass and says, Don’t take it personally.” (p.133)

Ike implies that his wife's behavior led to her deterioration over time. By suggesting that she “started drinking, running around, [and] lost her looks” (p.133), he casts judgment on her character and actions. This type of language is dismissive and degrading. Painting a woman in a such negative light undermined her sense of self-worth and contributed to a toxic and unhealthy dynamic within their relationship.

This conversation between Ike and Loney is rife with verbal abuse that severely undermines trust between the two characters and creates a barrier to open communication and mutual understanding, leading to a breakdown in trust and a deepening of the rift between father and son. Ike's dismissive and defensive responses to Loney's accusations of his role in their mother's downfall demonstrate a lack of accountability and a tendency to deflect blame. Loney's assertion that Ike played a part in their mother's decline is met with denial, highlighting Ike's unwillingness to engage in a constructive dialogue. The use of derogatory language and insults, such as calling Loney a "horse's ass" (p.133) further exacerbates the toxic dynamic between them. This verbal abuse stifles any potential for understanding and reconciliation and deepens the existing rift between the two characters. The lack of empathy and respect in their communication erodes any semblance of trust, making it challenging for them to bridge the emotional distance and find common ground.

Explicit, demeaning language is often wielded as a weapon of verbal abuse, employed to assert dominance, vent anger, and inflict emotional pain. Throughout the novel, it serves as a tool for emotional manipulation and coercion. Ike's insults directed against Loney reflect a power dynamic where verbal aggression is used to establish control and instill fear in his son. Ike resorts to demeaning language as a means of belittling, demeaning, and intimidating Loney. Such language is not only meant to express anger but also to exert emotional control over his son. Indeed, by resorting to verbal abuse, Ike seeks to undermine Loney's self-esteem and maintain a sense of authority in their relationship. The hurtful expressions used against Loney eventually create a sense of emotional turmoil and instability for him, leading to feelings of inadequacy and powerlessness in his interactions with his father.

There are numerous situations where certain expressions could be interpreted as hurtful. One such example is when Ike refers to Loney as a "bastard" (p.30). 'Bastard' refers to a child born out of wedlock, carrying connotations of illegitimacy and social stigma. When directed by a father at his son, an expression such as 'bastard' often reflects a moment of intense emotional outburst and can be interpreted in several ways. By employing such a derogatory term, the father (Ike) symbolically disowns the son (Loney) or expresses a desire to distance himself both emotionally and socially. This act suggests a perception of Loney as unworthy or failing to meet Ike's standards, thereby reinforcing harmful power dynamics and emotional alienation within the familial relationship. Furthermore, the use of such a derogatory term might reveal Ike's internalized shame or self-loathing, which he projects onto his son. Ike sees his own failings or insecurities mirrored in his son, then the insult becomes a way to externalize and deflect his negative self-perception. Moreover, this verbal abuse can also be

an assertion of power. The father, feeling powerless in other areas of his life, might use verbal abuse to exert control over his son. This reflects a toxic power dynamic where the father seeks to dominate and belittle the son to maintain a sense of superiority. Eventually, the use of an insult such as ‘bastard’, by a father against his son, could indicate that the father is grappling with his own frustrations, failures, or unmet expectations, and the insult serves as an outlet for this pent-up emotion.

Being called a "bastard" by his father can inflict deep psychological wounds on a son. The father-son relationship is foundational, and such verbal abuse can leave lasting emotional scars, impacting the son's future relationships and self-worth. He may internalize the insult, leading to feelings of worthlessness, anger, and resentment, ultimately damaging his self-esteem, sense of identity, and emotional well-being. This trauma can manifest in various ways, including withdrawal, aggression, or a desperate search for validation and approval. Such is the case with Ike and his son, Loney. Several examples in the novel show that verbal violence is not always expressed very explicitly and directly. Sometimes, it is expressed subtly, through presupposition, sarcasm, and belittling.

1.2. Presupposition and Sarcasm

As an aspect of pragmatic or social language use, presupposition entails an implicit assumption about the background knowledge relating to an utterance whose truth is taken for granted in discourse (S. Habibi, A. Ferdows, 2022, 151). Presupposition emerges as a subtle yet powerful form of manipulation and emotional harm within the interactions between characters in the domestic sphere in *The Death of Jim Loney*. The presupposition, “You don’t talk much anymore. Used to be we couldn’t shut you up,” (p.95) reflects a subtle yet impactful form of verbal abuse that contributes to the erosion of trust between Loney and his father Ike. The statement carries an undertone of criticism and belittlement, implying that Loney’s current behavior of speaking less is somehow negative or undesirable compared to his past chattiness. By highlighting a perceived change in Loney’s communication style and framing it as a deficiency, Ike’s words subtly undermine Loney’s sense of self-worth and agency. This form of verbal abuse can lead to feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt in Loney, creating a barrier to open and honest communication between father and son. The implication that Loney’s previous talkativeness was excessive or bothersome further deepens the rift in their relationship, fostering a sense of resentment and mistrust. Overall, this seemingly innocuous comment carries weight in perpetuating a cycle of verbal abuse that hampers the development of a healthy and supportive connection between the characters.

When used as verbal abuse, presupposition involves making unwarranted assumptions, imposing beliefs, and projecting negative judgments onto others. Throughout the novel, Ike uses presupposition as a technique of verbal abuse to convey condescension, judgment, or exert control during conversations with his son Loney. The unwarranted assumptions and judgments imposed through presupposition serve to undermine Loney's sense of self-worth, perpetuating a cycle of emotional manipulation and harm. Ike's habit of presupposing Loney's motivations, emotions, thoughts, intentions, and actions, is not only meant to express superiority, but also to exert control, instill fear, and maintain a sense of authority over his son. Eventually, the use of presupposition as verbal abuse creates a sense of gaslighting and emotional manipulation, leading to a breakdown in trust and communication between Ike and his son. In other words, the presupposition, as verbal abuse, functions as a tool for emotional coercion and power assertion in the novel. So does sarcasm.

Sarcasm is a form of irony where someone says the opposite of what they truly mean, usually in a mocking or contemptuous tone. It is often used to convey disdain, ridicule, humor or to hurt someone's feelings, or to criticize something in a humorous way (S. Habibi, A. Ferdows, 2022, 149). The true meaning is often implied by the context, tone of voice, or facial expressions rather than the literal words spoken.

Sarcasm plays a significant role in shaping the interactions and relationships between characters, particularly highlighting the strained dynamics between, Ike, Loney and Kate, in *The Death of Jim Loney*. Sarcasm, when used as a form of verbal abuse, can be a potent tool for undermining, belittling, and inflicting emotional harm on others. The sarcastic tone and insinuation in Ike's words "Well, something's sure funny here. When I saw you coming out of the liquor," (p.95) imply a judgmental and critical stance towards Loney's actions, specifically his association with alcohol. By using sarcasm to highlight Loney's behavior mockingly and derisively, Ike undermines Loney's autonomy and decision-making, casting doubt on his character and choices. Thus, sarcasm is employed as a means of verbal abuse to convey contempt, ridicule, and hostility in the interactions between characters. Ike's sarcastic remarks towards Loney serve to diminish his self-worth, undermine his confidence, and exert emotional control over him. He uses sarcasm as a weapon to demean, criticize, and manipulate his son, during their verbal interactions. The impact of sarcasm as verbal abuse extends beyond the individual characters to the overall dynamics of their relationships. The toxic language of sarcasm creates a barrier to effective communication and perpetuates a cycle of emotional harm and discord, leading to a breakdown in the emotional connection and mutual respect essential for a healthy father-son relationship. Another example of

presupposition and sarcasm is clearly expressed in the following excerpt culled from a conversation between Loney and Russel (Data 2):

“That’s a dumbass answer if I ever heard one.
I don’t even know why I talk to you.”
Don’t, then, he thought. But he said, “I’m not unintelligent.”
“Well, la-di-da. The man can rub a couple of words together.”
She turned with great wonder to the man next to her and laughed.
But he was not having any of it. He appeared to be sulking about something.
He was an older man and he was wearing a denim shirt and Levi’s.
“I’m not unintelligent,” Loney said. (p.35)

In the above excerpt, verbal abuse is vividly presented through derogatory comments and condescending behavior aimed at undermining Loney’s self-worth. The initial insult, "That’s a dumbass answer if I ever heard one," (p.35) aggressively dismisses his response, immediately setting a tone of contempt. The abusive speaker continues to belittle him with sarcastic remarks and mockery, such as "Well, la-di-da. The man can rub a couple of words together," (p.35) implying that Loney’s ability to speak competently is a rare and surprising occurrence. This not only undermines Loney’s intelligence but also ridicules his attempts to defend himself. The turning to another person and laughing, despite the other person’s lack of engagement, further emphasizes the speaker’s intent to publicly shame and humiliate Loney.

Verbal abuse in this dialogue is not limited to direct insults but is also evident in the dismissive and scornful mannerisms employed by the abusive speaker. The use of sarcasm and laughter serves to amplify the emotional impact, suggesting that Loney's worth is trivial and reinforcing a power imbalance. Despite Loney’s assertion, “I’m not unintelligent,” (p.35) his retort is immediately overshadowed by the abuser's continual belittlement, leaving him in a defensive position. This interaction demonstrates a classic use of verbal abuse: a combination of direct insult, presupposition, sarcasm, and ridicule, designed to erode the target’s self-esteem and assert the abuser’s dominance.

In the excerpt below culled from a conversation between Loney and the drunk woman Clancy, verbal abuse is prominently displayed through the use of derogatory language, humiliation, and aggressive confrontation, highlighting a very subtle but effective use of sarcasm (Data 3):

She looked at Loney as though she might strike him if he gave the wrong answer. She was a white woman but she looked as though she might have some Indian blood. Her eyes were dark brown and she combed her long brown hair the way some Indian women do. “Oh, I get it-what you see is what you get.” She again turned to the sulking man. “What you see is what you get. Isn’t that right, Clancy?”
“Go fuck a dog,” said Clancy.
“Pretty good,” said the woman. She leaned toward Loney and said in a loud voice, “See, he doesn’t even get what he sees. This old boy don’t get nothin’

anymore. You know why?" "I don't want to know."
"Cuz he has a teensy little problem. I believe they call it impotence."
"Go fuck yourself," said Clancy. (p.36)

The woman's demeanor towards Loney is threatening, as indicated by her look that suggests she might strike him if he responds incorrectly. This non-verbal cue sets a hostile tone. Her subsequent phrase, "Oh, I get it-what you see is what you get," (p.36) followed by turning to Clancy and repeating the phrase, is laced with sarcasm and mockery, aimed at belittling Loney. The phrase is delivered sarcastically. Indeed, the woman uses it to mock Loney, implying that he is simple or lacking in depth. Her comment "Pretty good" (p.36) after Clancy's vulgar remark is also sarcastic, as she pretends to praise him while actually belittling him. She further humiliates Clancy by publicly discussing his impotence: "Cuz he has a teensy little problem. I believe they call it impotence." (p.36) Clancy's response, "Go fuck a dog," (p.36) is a crude and aggressive retort that escalates the verbal abuse. The woman continues her verbal assault by loudly declaring Clancy's impotence, a deeply personal and humiliating revelation, intended to shame him publicly. Clancy's final retort, "Go fuck yourself," (p.36) further perpetuates the cycle of verbal abuse which started with more subtle and derogatory language and ended up in direct and explicit insults. This conversation between Loney and Clancy is characterized by a lack of respect, verbal confrontation, and sarcasm, all of which contribute to a verbally abusive interaction, highlighting the intent to demean and embarrass and illustrating a toxic and abusive communication dynamic. The same can be said of the conversation between Loney and Pretty Weasel (Data 4):

She was cold to him. She was cold to all of Loney's friends.
They called her Ice Woman. She couldn't have been more than fifteen at the time.
He hadn't seen her since. "I doubt it very much."
Loney said, "Shithead."
Pretty Weasel took a swallow of wine, then grimaced. "This stuff is real bad for you.
Are you aware of that?"
"Where have you been? Besides pickling your fucking brain with this stuff."
"Where have you been?" said Loney, and he was serious.
Pretty Weasel laughed suddenly and loudly.
In the yellow kitchen the laughter seemed disjointed...
As out of place as Lo they's soundless bird.
He laughed again, this time the bird turning gray in the chill beyond the walls. (p.106)

Pretty Weasel's comment, "This stuff is real bad for you. Are you aware of that?" (p.106) is sarcastic. Indeed, he is not genuinely concerned about Loney's health; rather, he is mocking Loney's choice to drink, implying that Loney is making poor decisions and is perhaps oblivious to the obvious negative effects of his actions. In addition, the follow-up

question, “Where have you been? Besides pickling your fucking brain with this stuff,” (p.106) continues the sarcasm. Pretty Weasel is not sincerely inquiring about Loney's whereabouts; instead, he is ridiculing Loney's apparent preoccupation with drinking, suggesting that Loney's life is consumed by alcohol.

In addition to sarcasm, laughter also serves to highlight the underlying tension and complex dynamics between both characters. Their conversation is marked by Pretty's dismissive laughter, which trivializes Loney's serious inquiry and adds an element of mockery to the interaction. Pretty Weasel's sudden and loud laughter after Loney's serious question, serves to undermine the gravity of the moment. The laughter is described as “disjointed” (p.106) and “out of place,” (p.106) indicating that it disrupts the flow of the conversation and adds an element of discomfort. This laughter can be seen as a defense mechanism or a way to deflect from the seriousness of the situation. The repeated laughter, with the imagery of the “bird turning gray in the chill beyond the walls,” (p.106) further emphasizes the incongruity and the emotional distance between the characters. It suggests a sense of detachment and perhaps a refusal to engage with the underlying issues at hand.

Overall, sarcasm and laughter in this dialogue characterize the interaction as one filled with mockery and emotional evasion. Pretty Weasel uses sarcasm to belittle Loney and laughter to deflect from serious conversation, creating an atmosphere of tension and highlighting the strained relationship between the characters. It is important to point out that the verbal confrontation started with Loney's condescending remarks towards Pretty. Loney's abrupt insult, “Shithead,” (p.106) directed at Pretty Weasel, sets a tone of hostility and disrespect. Pretty Weasel's response, while initially mild, quickly turns abusive as he criticizes Loney's drinking habits with the harsh comment that not only belittles Loney but also attacks his character and lifestyle choices.

1.3. Belittling and Blaming

Belittling remarks or tones, and blaming behavior in the conversations between Loney, his father Ike, his girlfriend Rhea, and his sister Kate indicate a lack of healthy communication and understanding among these characters. There are instances where Ike and Kate belittle Loney, especially when discussing Loney's actions or decisions. This can be seen in the way they question Loney's choices and past behaviors, implying that he may not have made the right decisions as evidenced in the following extract (Data 5):

“And you brought it all on yourself,” said the fourth voice.
“If you hurt, you deserve it.” And Loney recognized the fourth voice.
“That's the way you talk to your father,” said the father. “You deserve it and more,”
said the sister. [...]

“But why? What have you got against me?” (p.26)

The fourth voice's assertion that Loney brought his suffering upon himself, coupled with the father and sister's harsh statements about deserving pain and questioning Loney's worth, reflects a deep-seated animosity and lack of empathy within the family dynamic. The use of accusatory language and the implication that Loney is somehow at fault for his own struggles create a toxic environment where trust and understanding are eroded. The dismissive and critical nature of the conversation perpetuates a cycle of verbal abuse that further distances the characters from each other, making it challenging to foster genuine connection and reconciliation. The interactions between Loney, Rhea, Kate, and Ike reveal a subtle but pervasive form of verbal abuse that strains their dynamic. Their conversations are punctuated by moments of blame, with one character accusing another for past events or current circumstances. This blaming behavior creates palpable tension and conflict. By shifting responsibility onto others, particularly Loney or Ike, without considering the full context, these accusations function as a form of verbal abuse. The following extract exemplifies this dynamic, showcasing the hostility and resentment that characterize Loney and Kate's interactions as they exchange accusations and blame (Data 6):

Loney was combing his hair when he heard the knocking [...]
He opened the back door and Rhea stood with her hands on her hips.
“What’s the meaning of this?” she said, gesturing with her head at the garbage can.
It had been tipped over and a trail of trash led around the side of the house.
He frowned. “Goddamn dogs,” he said.
“You should speak kindlier of them, you beast.” “Turd hounds,” said Loney.
“You’re and ugly one.” (p.14)

Rhea's subsequent retort labeling his brother Loney as a "beast" and "an ugly one" highlights a reciprocation of the verbal hostility present in their exchange. This form of verbal abuse, even in a seemingly casual context, creates a barrier to open and healthy communication and erodes the foundations of family stability.

The overall exchange between Loney and Russell is hostile and filled with verbal abuses, namely name-calling and belittling. These actions are meant to demean and degrade the other person, adding to the toxic nature of the conversation, as exemplified in the conversation below (Data 7):

He opened the back door and Rhea stood with her hands on her hips.
“What’s the meaning of this?” she said, gesturing with her head at the garbage can.
It had been tipped over and a trail of trash led around the side of the house.
He frowned. “Goddamn dogs,” he said.
“You should speak kindlier of them, you beast.”
“Turd hounds,” said Loney.
“You’re an ugly one.” (p.14)

Verbal abuse in this interaction is evident through Loney's derogatory language and dismissive attitude towards both the situation and Rhea's concern. When confronted by Rhea about the tipped-over garbage can, Loney's immediate response, "Goddamn dogs" (p.14), demonstrates a lack of accountability and a quickness to anger. Rhea attempts to moderate his language by saying, "You should speak kindlier of them, you beast" (p.14). However, this is met with further verbal abuse as Loney retorts with "Turd hounds," (p.14) a crude and demeaning term that shows his disrespect not only towards the animals but also indirectly towards Rhea. Rhea's response, calling Loney "an ugly one," (p.14) is a straightforward instance of name-calling. Additionally, when she refers to Loney as "you beast," (p.14) she uses a derogatory term meant to belittle him, implying that he is uncivilized or brutish. This exchange highlights the propensity of both Loney and Rhea to use harsh and offensive language, directly insulting each other. One of the glowing examples that illustrate instances where Loney's relatives use belittling language and blaming to demean or undermine others, contributing to an atmosphere of verbal abuse is the following (Data 8):

Ike had told Painter the whole story during the ride over to the agency hospital, or almost the whole story.
He had left out the best part. He was waiting to spring it on them at the right time.
"And then he took off. Where was it, Mr. Loney, that you said he was heading?"
"I don't know. He said something about the mountains."
Ike felt crafty.
"Doc? Is that goddamn doctor around? I need something for the pain, Doc."
"In a minute," said Painter. "Now could you be more specific, Mr, Loney?"
"Let me think? For Christ's sake?" Ike acted disgusted. He liked this game. He had never been seriously interrogated before. (p.150)

In this excerpt, verbal abuse is subtly manifested through Ike's use of expletives and his dismissive, manipulative behavior. Ike's use of the term "goddamn doctor" (p.150) is a clear example of belittling. By referring to the doctor in such a derogatory manner, Ike shows a lack of respect and diminishes the doctor's professional role and efforts. This language is intended to demean and express contempt. When Ike responds to Painter's request for more specifics with, "Let me think? For Christ's sake?" (p.150) he acts disgusted and impatient. This response belittles Painter's legitimate inquiry, making it seem trivial and bothersome. Ike's tone and choice of words imply that Painter's questions are an unnecessary burden, thereby undermining Painter's authority and the seriousness of the situation. This choice of words not only undermines the authority of the interrogators but also introduces a tone of hostility and defiance. Ike's enjoyment of the situation, as he "liked this game" (p.150) and

felt “crafty” (p.150) indicates a manipulative streak, where he derives satisfaction from frustrating and belittling the officers.

Although not as explicit in this excerpt, the context suggests that Ike is withholding information and manipulating the narrative. By acting “crafty” (p.150) and enjoying the game of interrogation, Ike indirectly blames the others for not understanding or keeping up with him. His behavior implies that any confusion or lack of clarity is due to their incompetence rather than his own evasiveness. Ike's impatience and dismissive attitude when he says, "Let me think? For Christ's sake?" (p.150) shifts the blame onto Painter for pressing him for details. This reaction suggests that the need for specifics is an unreasonable demand, thereby blaming Painter for the discomfort and tension in the interaction.

Overall, belittling and blaming in this conversation serve to create an atmosphere of disrespect and manipulation. Ike's language and behavior are designed to undermine the authority of the others involved, making them feel inadequate and responsible for the difficulties in communication. This verbal confrontation highlights Ike's use of verbal abuse to maintain control and deflect accountability. Belittling, as verbal abuse, also manifests in the dialogue between Big Indian and Pepion, creating an atmosphere of tension and animosity, as the following extract reveals (Data 9):

“Jesus, two drinks and he turns into Superman. Look at the bastard.”
Pepion was pulling himself up by the rungs of a bar stool.
Painter grabbed him by the arm and jerked him to his feet.
“Are you all right?” he said.
“Where is that fucker?” said Pepion. His right eye had closed and his face was red and puffy. His lip was split right under his nose.
Painter turned to the big Indian. “Did you do this?” It was a silly question and Painter almost sighed. [...]
“Goddamn you, Pepion,” said the big Indian. He made a fist and stepped forward. Pepion fell backward over the stool that lay on the floor.
This time he grabbed his left elbow and moaned as though his heart would break.
“Now look at that! You saw it-I didn't touch him. Ain't it, Waker? See what I mean?”
Painter again helped Pepion to his feet. He held him up and turned to the big Indian. “That's enough. Now get the hell out of here. Take that other ignorant bastard with you.”
“But it's a free country,” protested Waker.
“Not for you it isn't. Now go on. You've got five seconds before I run you across the street. Goddamn your hides.” (p.58-59)

The big Indian's initial comment, “Jesus, two drinks and he turns into Superman. Look at the bastard,” (p.58) is dismissive and demeaning, reducing Pepion's struggle to a mockery. The situation escalates as Pepion, visibly injured, demands, “Where is that fucker?” (p.58)

indicating a desire for confrontation. The big Indian's response, "Goddamn you, Pepion," (p.58) coupled with his aggressive posture, further intensifies the hostility. Painter's intervention, while ostensibly to maintain order, also includes verbal abuse as he commands, "That's enough. Now get the hell out of here. Take that other ignorant bastard with you," (p.58) using derogatory terms to address the individuals involved. Waker's protest, "But it's a free country," (p.59) is met with Painter's authoritative and dismissive retort, "Not for you it isn't. Now go on. You've got five seconds before I run you across the street. Goddamn your hides," (p.59) which underscores the verbal abuse with a threat of physical action. Throughout the dialogue, the use of offensive language and threats serves to belittle and intimidate, creating a charged and abusive atmosphere.

Verbal abuse within the family circle is often intricately linked to external socioeconomic pressures, which destabilize family dynamics and exacerbate tensions. Economic constraints such as unemployment, financial instability, and lack of social mobility can heighten stress and frustration among family members. These pressures can manifest in the domestic sphere through heightened aggression and verbal abuse as individuals struggle to cope with their circumstances. Moreover, traditional gender roles further compound this issue, as men may feel an intensified burden to fulfill the role of the provider. Failure to meet these societal expectations can lead to feelings of inadequacy that are projected onto family members, particularly women and children, through verbal aggression. This interplay of social constraints and rigid gender expectations thus perpetuates a cycle of emotional abuse and familial discord.

2. The Dynamics Underpinning Verbal Abuse: Socioeconomic Status and Gender Inequality

Family dynamics often mirror the complexities of broader societal issues. James Welch exemplifies this by grounding its exploration of family crisis in the intersection of socioeconomic status and gender inequality. The novel presents verbal abuse within the family circle as a consequence of these overarching structures. Specifically, disparities in socioeconomic status and gender roles emerge as significant catalysts for verbal abuse within the family. This novel illustrates how these elements of society interplay to shape the characters' lives and interactions, ultimately leading to dysfunctional and abusive familial relationships.

2.1. Socio-Economic Status Fueling Verbal Abuse

Socioeconomic status differences contribute to power dynamics within family relationships in several ways, and under certain conditions, may lead to verbal abuse, as underscored by the interplay between social contexts of power and aggravation strategies in various studies. The relationship between socioeconomic differences and verbal abuse is complex and multifaceted, with varying dynamics playing out differently in each family. However, the common thread is that disparities in economic power and access to resources can create environments where verbal abuse takes root, either as a means of control, expression of frustration, or maintenance of familial hierarchy (N. Dabaghi et al., 2023)

Socioeconomic status differences may catalyze verbal abuse by creating stressful environments where inadequate access to resources and opportunities leads to frustration and power struggles within the family. Individuals limited by their economic conditions might exhibit increased irritability and propensity for conflict, which can manifest as verbal abuse. Those with lower socioeconomic status may face higher levels of frustration. This frustration sometimes is taken out on family members through verbal abuse (J. Hermann, 1997). Conversely, individuals from higher socioeconomic backgrounds may use verbal abuse to maintain control or remind others of their status and power within the household.

Socioeconomic hardship can increase stress levels and exacerbate pre-existing tensions in family relationships. Indeed, chronic financial stress can lead some individuals to express their frustration through verbal outbursts or ongoing negative commentary directed at family members. Financial strain can significantly impact family relationships and the power dynamics within, which can sometimes manifest in verbal abuse. Economic hardship can lead to more frequent conflicts over financial issues. Arguments about finances, particularly spending priorities, debts, and the inability to provide, can foster a hostile environment where individuals may resort to verbal abuse to vent frustration or deflect blame. This dynamic is clearly illustrated by Ike, Loney's father. He seems to be facing financial difficulties. While his employment status is not explicitly stated, several indicators suggest he is jobless or underemployed. He receives a meager \$162 a month in disability payments for a back injury (p.128), implying his reliance on this limited income. Furthermore, his habit of accepting free drinks from his friend Kenny highlights his lack of financial independence.

The difficult economic situation has a profound impact on Ike's mental state and behavior. His bitterness and meanness are highlighted throughout the novel. For example, Kenny observes that Ike has changed from a young rowdy to a bitter man (p.67), largely due to the departure of Eletra and the subsequent responsibility of raising their children alone.

This bitterness is compounded by his economic struggles, leading to a sense of hopelessness and frustration. Ike's psychological state manifests in verbal violence and a generally harsh demeanor towards his children and others. His interactions with his son, Loney, are marked by a lack of empathy and understanding. For instance, when Loney tries to discuss his feelings and past experiences, Ike responds dismissively and with sarcasm. Ike's bitterness and frustration also lead him to reminisce about past grievances and to express a sense of betrayal and abandonment.

Loney's experience also reflects how socioeconomic status can fuel verbal abuse within the family circle or between lovers. Throughout the novel, Loney is described as a character who struggles economically. He cannot even afford a mobile phone, which implies financial constraints. Additionally, his general demeanor and internal monologue reflect a sense of inadequacy and hopelessness, which can be associated with economic difficulties. Loney admits to treating her badly, including verbally abusing her despite recognizing that he needs her and loves being with her. This cyclical pattern of needing her and then pushing her away, often using hurtful language, can be seen as a form of emotional and verbal abuse, driven by his insecurities and the power dynamics shaped by socioeconomic status. According to N. Fairclough (2003, 27), "[the] positioning of individuals as social agents is in part achieved through discourse, and different forms of discourse position people in ways which act as constraints upon them and facilitate or inhibit certain sorts of action." This statement highlights the significance of discourse in shaping social identities and actions. Loney is no exception. His remarks emphasize how discourse shapes social identities and behaviors and show how various discourse forms may both empower and impede people.

Loney's fear of not being able to live up to Rhea's expectations and his sense of hopelessness contribute to a toxic dynamic in their relationship. His inability to communicate openly and without verbal abuse with Rhea and his tendency to push her away reflect the psychological impact of his economic struggles. Socioeconomic status can be associated with certain social expectations for behavior and success. Failure to meet these expectations—whether those of a provider, caregiver, or successful child—can prompt verbal abuse as a response to perceived shortcomings. In summary, Ike's difficult economic situation exacerbates his psychological distress, leading to verbal violence and a strained relationship with his children and women. His inability to provide for himself and his reliance on disability payments contribute to a sense of inadequacy and bitterness, which he projects onto those around him. Likewise, Loney's economic difficulties exacerbate his feelings of

inadequacy, leading to behaviors --including the use of verbal violence-- that are emotionally harmful to Rhea.

2.2. Gender Inequality and Sexism as a Catalyst for Verbal Abuse

Gender inequality significantly contributes to power dynamics within family relationships in *The Death of Jim Loney*, often leading to verbal abuse and derogatory comments. Ike's interactions with women, particularly Eletra, Rhea, and his wife, reflect a deep-seated sense of male dominance and entitlement, which exacerbates the already strained family dynamics. Gender inequality exacerbates these tensions further by instilling a patriarchal family structure that fosters uneven power dynamics. In such a setting, male figures may assert dominance through verbal aggression, while women, constrained by societal expectations, might internalize and perpetuate this cycle of abuse by accepting or endorsing such behaviors as normal.

Ike's recollections of Loney's mother are filled with bitterness and blame. He describes her decline in harsh terms: "She just sort of went to hell. Started drinking, running around, lost her looks..." (J. Welch, 1979, 133). This comment not only blames Loney's mother for her own downfall but also reduces her worth to her physical appearance and behavior, reflecting a gender-biased perspective that holds women to different standards than men. Ike's dismissive attitude towards his wife's struggles and his refusal to acknowledge his role in her difficulties further illustrate the power imbalance. He says, "It was because you made her that way. You ruined her if she was as good in the beginning as you say," (p.133) to which Ike responds with, "Like hell." (p.133) This exchange shows his unwillingness to take responsibility and his tendency to place the blame squarely on his wife, Loney's mother.

Traditional gender roles often create power imbalances within families, and verbal abuse can be a tool for reinforcing these roles and policing prescribed behaviors. As L. Bancroft (2003) notes, men may use verbal abuse to assert dominance over women, viewing it as a means of affirming their masculinity. Conversely, women who challenge traditional expectations may face verbal abuse as a form of punishment or reprisal. Loney's family appears to reflect this dynamic.

The power dynamics in Ike's family are heavily influenced by gender inequality. Ike's sense of male entitlement and his failure to take responsibility for his actions contribute to a toxic environment where verbal abuse becomes a tool to maintain control. His derogatory comments and dismissive attitude towards his wife and other women reflect a broader societal pattern of gender inequality and a patriarchal mindset that devalues women's experiences and

contributions and perpetuates abusive behavior. *The Death of Jim Loney* does reflect gendered assumptions in other characters' attitudes towards women, especially Rhea. For example, Leo Phipps, the physical education teacher, makes objectifying comments about Rhea: "She wasn't much in the tits department and he was a tit man. If you were an ass man or a leg man, she would drive you crazy. From the waist down she was stacked." (p.124) This objectification reduces Rhea to her physical attributes, ignoring her individuality and capabilities. Such comments reflect a broader societal tendency to judge women based on their physical appearance, contributing to a power dynamic where women are valued less for their personal qualities and more for their ability to meet male standards of attractiveness. As N. Fairclough (1995, 79) points out, "discourse is shaped by structures, but also contributes to shaping and reshaping them, to the extent that discursive practices are an important part of the social fabric." This quote underscores the reciprocal relationship between discourse and social structures, advocating for a dynamic understanding of how language and society influence each other.

Societal expectations of masculinity exacerbate Loney's internal struggle with his identity and self-worth. His internal monologue reveals profound feelings of inadequacy and a fear of not being "good enough" for Rhea (p. 37). This insecurity, rooted in gender inequality and power dynamics within their relationship, contributes to verbal abuse and strained interactions. Loney acknowledges Rhea's more privileged background, confessing that he feels like "nothing" in comparison (p. 37). This self-perception stems from societal norms that position men as providers and protectors—roles Loney feels unable to fulfill. This perceived failure breeds frustration and ultimately manifests in his behavior towards Rhea.

Conclusion

Verbal abuse within the family circle emerges as a significant barrier to reconciliation and healing. This paper, grounded in Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis, has explored the various forms and functions of verbal abuse depicted. It reveals that verbal abuse, whether explicit or subtle, serves as a weapon for controlling and manipulating emotions, establishing authority, venting resentment, and causing emotional distress. This paper highlights two primary forms of verbal abuse in the novel: overtly derogatory language and subtle yet potent verbal manipulations, including presupposition, sarcasm, belittling, and blaming. These forms of abuse are not isolated incidents but rather are deeply intertwined with broader social structures and power dynamics. A critical finding of this analysis is the role of external factors, particularly socioeconomic status and gender inequality, in catalyzing

verbal abuse within family circles. Socioeconomic hardships, such as unemployment and financial instability, create stressful environments that heighten aggression and verbal abuse.

These pressures manifest in the domestic sphere as individuals struggle to cope with their circumstances, often projecting their frustrations onto family members. Moreover, traditional gender roles further compound the issue, as men may feel an intensified burden to fulfill the role of the provider. Failure to meet these societal expectations can lead to feelings of inadequacy, which are projected onto family members, particularly women and children, through verbal aggression. The novel illustrates how these elements of society interplay to shape the characters' lives and interactions, ultimately leading to dysfunctional and abusive familial relationships.

The Death of Jim Loney serves as a poignant exploration of the destructive impact of verbal abuse within family circles. By examining the linguistic interactions and power dynamics that underpin such abuse, this paper underscores the need to address external factors like socioeconomic status and gender inequality to mitigate verbal abuse in domestic settings. Reducing the gender gap and improving living and working conditions are essential steps toward fostering healthier and more supportive family environments.

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