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How Muslims Speak: Negotiating Muslimness in Fictional Dialogue

Following the linguistic turn in literary and cultural studies, language has increasingly been understood not merely as a transparent medium of representation, but as a means of creating social and cultural meaning.

Building on previous work on postcolonialism and intercultural fiction (Spivak 1988, Gymnich 2007), this project shifts the focus from linguistic form and metalinguistic reflection towards the pragmatic and interactional organization of character communication in novels. Fictional dialogue is particularly productive for this investigation, as it is not an unmediated transcription of naturally occurring speech. Rather, as Michael Toolan (1985, 193) puts it, it is “an artificial version of talk, partly shaped by a variety of aesthetic and thematic intentions and conventions.” To establish the pragmatic focus of this project, Conversation Analysis is, especially in terms of the mechanisms of turn-taking, “particularly suitable for a detailed, interactionally oriented analysis of fictional dialogue” (Nykänen / Koivisto 2016, 8). However, it is also essential to interpret fictional interaction in relation to narratorial mediation.

This project examines formal aspects of contemporary Anglophone fiction depicting the lives and experiences of Muslims. The thematic relevance of this study is emphasized by Neriman Kuyucu’s (2026) findings. Examining how female Muslim writers “engage in overlapping reconfigurations of Muslimness within contemporary literary imaginations,” she highlights fictional responses to “the realities of the twenty-first century, including the rise of Islamophobia, anti-immigration rhetoric, shifting concepts of citizenship and the destabilization of fixed notions of home” (156). Her conceptualization of the *Muslim diaspora space* foregrounds “the diversity of Muslim subjectivities” (154) and thus provides a cultural framework for examining how different forms of Muslim subjectivity are brought into interaction through fictional dialogue.

The central question of this project is therefore to what extent the formal and interactional organization of fictional dialogue contributes to the construction and negotiation of Muslimness in contemporary Anglophone fiction. A key focus will be the representation and contestation of norms of conversational conduct: How are rights to speak, disagree, interrupt, remain silent, demand explanations, or terminate interactions distributed within relationships structured by culture, religion, gender, and generation? What happens when characters challenge these expectations in their interactions, and what images of Muslimness are constructed in these exchanges? Conversation analysis and pragmatics will provide tools for examining interaction, while narratology will address how conversations are framed and mediated through storytelling.

The project focuses primarily on contemporary Anglophone postcolonial and intercultural fiction. Additionally, it considers how the representation of spoken interaction changes across media. Whereas novels construct orality through written means, audiovisual media can draw on multimodal features such as prosody, facial expressions, and gestures. Selected examples from film, series, and stand-up comedy will therefore help to investigate how fictional dialogue and

constructions of Muslimness are staged through different forms of mediation. The corpus includes Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* and its film adaptation, and Elif Shafak's *Honour*, among others.

Works Cited

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