

## The Play of Codes and Systems in *Pygmalion*: Bernard Shaw and Roland Barthes

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### ABSTRACT

*In Pygmalion, George Bernard Shaw deals with the social function of language (linguistic competence) as one of the markers of social status and as a source of social power. Pygmalion's plot revolves around the linguistic idea of the critical period hypothesis. The linguist in the play bets that the phonetician cannot change the flower girl into a lady by teaching her a genteel language. The phonetician intends to flaunt his power and skill in fashioning a new 'self' for the florist girl through linguistic retraining, even though her 'critical period' is over. Though this acculturation leads to a crisis of personality for the girl, Shaw's play goes against the hypothesis of 'critical period' by showing the possibility of the language retraining of a grown-up girl. Drawing on the theories of Roland Barthes, this article examines the relation between education and the issues of social mobility and cultural codes in the class-conscious society of Pygmalion. Pygmalion could be read as indicating that culture does not come by nature and it is made of codes, which can be taught and learned. Shaw suggests that it is possible to educate lower class people in upper class cultural codes. Moreover, he demonstrates that culture is time-bound and the boundaries between lower and upper class cultural codes were fading at the time so that it was difficult to distinguish a real upper class agent from a fake one.*

*Keywords: George Bernard Shaw; Pygmalion; culture; codes; system of fashion.*

### INTRODUCTION

The point is that “reality” is already encoded, or rather the only way we can perceive and make sense of reality is by the codes of our culture... What passes for reality in any culture is the product of that culture's code, so “reality” is always already encoded, it is never “raw”. (Fiske 1998, p.1089)

As a socialist, George Bernard Shaw deals with the prevailing social problems of his time, with education, marriage, and religion being his major concerns. Sternlicht (1998) maintains that “Shaw was an Ibsenite. He took Henrik Ibsen's concept of the thesis play in which a problem of middle-class society is presented for consideration by the society itself, as represented by the audience and employed it in social comedies that sparkled with wit and wonderful dialogue” (p.65). In relation to Shaw's dramatic style and themes Gassner (1970) remarks that instead of being interested in realistic theater, conventions and plays, Shaw was interested in intellectual and psychological realism (p.294-5). He was against those realists who made a show of superficial reality and accuracy of details with no recourse to reality and truth. Moreover, while the idea of well-made play was in vogue in Shaw's time, he was fond of ‘alive’ plays, plays that were provocative and a drama of ideas (Gassner 1970, p.65).

One of these interesting Shavian ideas was that the English needed their speech to be improved by phoneticians. Hence, *Pygmalion* (1913) addresses the importance of language and its social function; linguistic competence is presented as one of the markers of social

status and a source of social power. *Pygmalion* presents the story of the social transformation of a flower girl into a ‘fake lady’ through linguistic and cultural retraining; that is, though, in the end, the florist girl mimics the conduct and speech of the upper class gentle ladies she cannot slough off her low pedigree and despite her flamboyant appearance she is a vulgar girl. In fact, the final Eliza Doolittle is “a triumph of (Professor Higgins’) art and of her dressmaker’s” (III). Right from the initial act of the play, Shaw states the matter of standard accent versus marginalized ones by introducing a phonetician, Henry Higgins, who is a speaker of standard accent and stands in contrast to the flower girl and other minor characters who speak ‘other’ regional dialects. Being familiar with regional accents, Higgins can recognise each character’s hometown. He meets the flower girl, Eliza Doolittle, and recognises that she is from Lisson Grove. Eliza’s coarse accent annoys Higgins, and he suggests that he can pass Eliza as a duchess if she learns a more genteel speech. The plot of the play revolves around the linguistic idea of ‘critical period hypothesis’, stating there is a time limit for second-language learners to learn a second language like native speakers beyond which it becomes increasingly difficult for them to learn language. Pickering, the linguist, bets that Higgins cannot change the flower girl into a lady by teaching her a genteel language. Higgins accepts the challenge to show his skill in fashioning a new ‘self’ for Eliza through linguistic retraining, even though her ‘critical period’ is over. Higgins is only interested in the process of the experiment heedless of what might happen to Eliza who becomes a toy in his hands. This brings a crisis of identity to the girl, because, to use Pierre Bourdieu’s terms, the girl, in the end, gains linguistic and cultural capitals and cannot return to her own class. She does not belong to and cannot join the upper class either: she dangles between two classes.

In Bourdieu’s conception of ‘cultural capital’ and the relationship between social class and culture, the differences in cultural practices contribute to the differences among social classes. Moreover, this theory asserts that the dominant class has the power to proclaim certain cultural practices as ‘legitimate’ and others as ‘mass’ culture. Thus these classifications of cultural practices serve to distinguish the dominant class from the subordinate classes (Barnett & Allen 2000, p.146-7). Therefore, besides learning a graceful speech, the flower girl must learn the cultural codes and social behavioral patterns of the upper class people if she wants to be an assistant in a florist’s shop. This paper attempts to show how Shaw incorporates literary and cultural codes to convey the dominant and subordinate culture of *Pygmalion*’s society. To show the dominant myth and sign system of *Pygmalion*’s world, Barthes’s five codes and his insights about the system of fashion and mythology are employed. Drawing on Barthes’s semiotics, *Pygmalion* could be read as exemplifying the insight that culture does not come by nature and it is made of codes, which can be taught and learned. In this light, central to the play are issues of the possibility to educate lower class people based on upper class cultural codes, culture as time-bound and the erosion of boundaries between lower and upper class cultural codes. Barthes, in contrast to Saussurean ideas, regards language as the base for semiologists and claims that semiology is a branch of linguistics (Culler 1983, p.59). In *Elements of Semiology*, he argues that every semiological system like cinema, patterns of behavior, and fashion relies on language to convey its message; that is, the iconic message (signifiers and signifieds) should pass through the system of language to become communicable (1968, p.10).

Another significant notion by Barthes is the distinction between denotative and connotative meanings presented in his *Elements of Semiology*, where he points to the denotative quality of sign and states that the signifier names directly an object and it is clear to what it refers. In addition, a sign can have connotative implications; it may refer to cultural or social values (Gottdiener 1995, p.15). To Barthes the semiological signs are compounded

of a signifier and a signified, and many of them are objects of everyday use, utilitarian and functional, like clothes, which are used to protect the body. Such signs are called *sign-functions*. As soon as the sign is used in society, it becomes loaded with meanings, semantized and refunctionalized. A dress may be the marker of the individual's social class in addition to protecting her. This second-order of meaning is connotative (Barthes 1968, pp.41-2).

Influenced by structuralists in the second phase of his career, Roland Barthes opines that the interaction between the writer and the reader is a process involving a complex structure of codes, which modify and determine meaning not objectively, and are imposed on a text as a medium. Therefore, a text does not reflect reality but a multiple image of the outside world (ctd. in Hawkes 2003, pp.88-9). In his *Mythologies* (1972), Barthes applies this insight to demonstrate how the French mass media generates 'myths' by manipulating codes for their own purposes. While they tried to prove that they innocently present the real world, Barthes reveals that their aim is "the generation, confirmation and reinforcement of a particular view of the world in which the bourgeois values emerge, as usual, as inevitable and 'right' at all levels..." (Hawkes 2003, p.89).

By substituting language for the author, Barthes (2000) maintains, writing becomes an impersonal activity in which only language (a combination of signs) speaks (pp.49-50). To make the reading of text-signs feasible, Barthes proffers five codes: The *hermeneutic code* which creates enigmas and suspense in the text (Hawkes 2003, p.94); The *proairetic code* which is "a series of models of action that help readers place details in plot sequences" (Culler 1983, p.70); The *semic code* which provides stereotype models of personality and characters (Culler 1983, p.70); The *symbolic code* which concerns the patterns that are repeated regularly in various forms in the text and finally generate the dominant theme and pattern in the text (Culler 1983, p.70); and finally, The *cultural* or *reference code* which is associated with what is established as the accepted knowledge and public opinion (Barthes 2000, p.168).

Regarding myth in his essay "Myth Today" (1957), Barthes declares that "...myth is a system of communication, that is, a message. This allows one to perceive that myth cannot possibly be an object, a concept, or an idea; it is a mode of signification, a form..." (p.107). The very principle function of myth is to transform history and culture into 'nature', and the idiosyncrasies of culture to social norms (qtd. in Habib 2005, p.640). The 'manipulated' ideology presented by myth forms our unquestioning responses to other systems of sign (like media programs, texts, etc.), and informs our perception of reality, of other people, etc. (Trifonas 2001, p.10-11). Barthes asserts that myth is a second-order semiological system (consisted of signifier, signified, and sign) built on top of the first-order system of language (Barthes 1972, p.113-4). He adds that a sign in language system is arbitrary, while the signification in myth is motivated and non-arbitrary (Barthes 1972, p.126).

In relation to the *system of fashion*, the last concept referred to in this article, Barthes asserts that it is possible to extend the Saussurean idea of language/speech to other systems of sign like fashion. In the case of real clothes as worn, language and speech are separated. Here the language is made, on the one hand, by the contrast between parts of garment, the change of which changes the meaning, and on the other hand, by the association of the pieces among themselves. In this system of fashion, speech is the individual's way of wearing (like the size, color, the degree of cleanliness, etc.). In garment parlance, Barthes uses *costume* for language and *clothing* for speech (Barthes 1968, p.27).

In the following discussion of *Pygmalion* it will be shown how different systems of fashion, language, and behavior can define various classes of culture in a stratified society.

Also discussed is how bourgeoisie imposes its own culture on the lower classes by manipulating a system of codes, say myth, to render itself ‘innocent’.

According to Paul De Man “Literature is said to "represent" or "express" or at most, "transform" an extralinguistic entity or event which it is the interpreter's (or critic's) task to reach as a specific unit of meaning” (1990, p.180). Drawing on Barthes’s idea, no semiological system has meaning unless it enters the system of language, it can be said that literature is a system of sign, which uses language as its base to convey its message. Hence, the interpreter can reach the expressed ‘extralinguistic entity’ of literature through analysing its constructive codes and systems. Literature is doubly encoded, because in addition to language signs, a literary work uses literary devices and codes to create its literary system. Barthes believes that literature's codes are imposed on it by society. In *Mythologies* (1972), he argues that the aim of bourgeois society is to create myths through manipulating codes and signs to generate and confirm its own values and views (Hawkes 2003, p.89).

As a literary work, Shaw's *Pygmalion* is doubly encoded; firstly, it uses language as its medium in its dialogues, secondly it uses the literary and dramatic system of codes like characterization, costume, mise-en-scene, etc. which are informed by the ideology of a bourgeois society. Shaw implies that these ideologies are obsolete, the boundaries between these codes are shaky and it is possible to transgress them. *Pygmalion* depicts a bourgeois society where the binary oppositions of upper class/lower class, high culture/popular culture, lady/non-lady, and language/speech are dominant. In such hierarchical binaries, the first term is privileged. Furthermore, three sign systems of clothing, language and behavior can be distinguished in the play, all loaded with cultural significance. Barthes's five codes; hermeneutic, proairetic, semic, symbolic, and culture, would help to study this play from a socio-semiotic perspective. It intimates that culture is time-bound and there is a dire need, in the British society of the time, for change and teaching new codes. We will probe the structuring codes in *Pygmalion* with regard to Barthes’s idea of the death of the author and the literary system of codes. First, we start with the hermeneutic code which concerns the enigmas and their solutions, and creates mystery and suspense in the text.

The first hermeneutic code concerns the play’s title “Pygmalion” which poses the enigma of the connection between this name and the content of the play. This enigma could not be solved unless we trace the mythological history of the word Pygmalion (discussed later) and read the play itself. Consider the next lexia chosen from the play’s opening stage direction:

Pedestrians running for shelter into market and under the portico of St. Paul’s Church, where there are already several people, among them a lady and her daughter in evening dress. They are all peering out gloomily at the rain, except one man with his back turned to the rest, who seems wholly preoccupied with a notebook in which he is writing busily. (I)

The play begins with the hermeneutic code of identity. The lexia foregrounds ‘a lady and her daughter’ among people and introduces an unknown character busy with note taking. A few moments later in the play, Freddy collides with a flower girl and knocks her down into the mud. Such anonymous presentation of the characters, like the Note Taker, the Gentleman, the Flower Girl, the Daughter, and the Mother, in the beginning act poses an enigma about their identity and creates suspense in the text; the reader wants to know who these characters are. The flower girl is partly characterized through her speech: "There's manners f' yer! Te-oo banches o voylets trod into the mad" (I) and partly through her clothing:

She wears a little sailor hat of black straw that has long been exposed to the dust and soot of London and has seldom if ever been brushed... She wears a shoddy black coat... She has a brown skirt with a coarse apron... (I)

The reader can figure out that she lacks linguistic competence, she is a flower vendor clothed in rags, and perhaps she is lower class. Hence, the enigma is partly solved. The note taker's identity becomes complicated and the play's suspense increases by his ability to place people by their accent. The flower girl's unintelligible dialect assists the note taker to surmise the girl's birthplace; Lisson Grove.

Ow, eez ye-ooa san, is e? Wal, fewd dan y' de-ooty bawmz a mather should, eed now bettern to spawl a pore gel's flahrzn than ran awy athaht pyin. Will ye-oo py me f' them? (I)

In response to people's question about how he does this magic, the note taker says "Simply phonetics. The science of speech. That's my profession: also my hobby!" (I). This lexia contains hermeneutic and cultural codes of science. First, the enigma of the note taker's identity is disclosed - that he is a teacher of phonetics. Second, he is educated and has mastered the cultural code of the science of regional dialects by which he identifies people's hometown. At the end of the first act the note taker solves the enigma completely by introducing himself as "Henry Higgins, author of Higgins's Universal Alphabet" (I). The Gentleman also introduces himself as Colonel Pickering.

*Pygmalion's* second act opens with another enigma and hermeneutic code; Mrs. Pearce informs Higgins that "A young woman wants to see you sir" (I), and adds that she is very common and has a dreadful accent. This attracts Higgins and the reader's interest to know who she is. When Higgins sees the girl, he recognises her; she is the same flower girl. Why does the flower girl go to Higgins's house? In the first act, Higgins tells the girl that her 'kerbstone English' keeps her in the gutter forever while he can promote her condition by teaching her a better English. She goes to Higgins's house for English lessons because she wants to become a lady in a florist's shop instead of vending flowers on the streets. In Act II, Higgins accepts to teach the girl and the enigma concerning the relation between Higgins and the flower girl, now named Eliza Doolittle, is solved too, it is a kind of teacher-student relation.

The merit of Act III is heightened with some enigmas and hermeneutic codes; Mrs. Higgins says "Henry (*scolding him*)! What are you doing here to-day? It is my at-home day: you promised not to come." Why does Higgins go to his mother's house? He goes there to tell Mrs. Higgins that he has invited Eliza to the at-home party to examine her in public. The suspense increases as Eliza enters and the reader's expectations and curiosity are challenged greatly at this stage; what will be the outcome of this party? How will Eliza present herself? Eliza starts well by talking about weather, "The shallow depression in the west of these islands is likely to move slowly in an easterly direction. There are no indications of any great change in the barometrical situation" (III). But gradually she begins to ruin herself by talking about her aunt's death and using a slangy language;

Y-e-e-e-es, Lord love you! Why should she die of influenza? She come through diphtheria right enough the year before... They all thought she was dead; but my father he kept ladling gin down her throat till she came to so sudden that she bit the bowl off the spoon. (III)

In Act IV, the enigma set forth in the beginning of the play is solved; in Act II, Pickering tells Higgins "I'll bet you all the expenses of the experiment you can't do it. And I'll

pay for the lessons." Does Higgins win the bet? Can Eliza perform convincingly? Does anybody recognise that she is not a real lady? Fortunately, Eliza acts out her role faultlessly, and Higgins wins the bet and succeeds in passing Eliza as a duchess at the garden party; Pickering tells Higgins "But you've won your bet, Higgins. Eliza did the trick, and something to spare, eh?" (IV)

The final act starts with a hermeneutic code concerning Eliza's escape: Why has she run away? Where is she? Who wins the girl? Eliza has gone to Mrs. Higgins's house because Higgins and Pickering did not thank her for her endeavors and only thanked God that the experiment was over. This upsets Eliza and even when Higgins asks her to go back to him she does not accept it and decides to marry her young lover, Freddy. She expresses to Higgins, "I'll let you see whether I'm dependent on you. If you can preach, I can teach. I'll go and be a teacher." (V) Then she says farewell to Professor Higgins.

As for the Semic and the symbolic codes in the play, the former is the direct connotation of the words in a lexia while the latter is the indirect connotation of the lexia and may be drawn from the surrounding context. Barthes (2000) states that for commercial reasons society needs a marker to turn a text into a commercial commodity and the title serves the purpose. Moreover, what the title says is linked to the content and the type (for instance a piece of literature) of what will follow. For Barthes (2000), a proper name is a rich signifier with social and symbolic connotations (154-5). Here, the play's name 'Pygmalion' is loaded with symbolic and mythological connotations. First, the name Pygmalion refers to Higgins the male character in the play and foregrounds the idea of masculinity vs. femininity. By this title the character of the male teacher and his power and art of creating a new 'self' for the female character are focused on. With regard to the mythological origin of the name Pygmalion, an artist from Cyprus, who created an ivory statue of a beautiful lady, which was brought to life by Venus, it can be said that this name is a semic code connoting a change from a statue to a live human being and the love relation between the creator and his creation which is evident in the scene of Galatea coming into life portrayed by Edith Hamilton:

He (Pygmalion) kissed her (Galatea's) lips, a long lingering kiss, and felt them grow soft beneath his. He touched her arms, her shoulders; their hardness vanished...And with unutterable gratitude and joy he put his arms around his love and saw her smile into his eyes and blush. (1942, p.150)

Hence, it refers to the kind of relation between Higgins-Pygmalion and Eliza-statue. At the beginning, their relation is teacher-student but gradually Higgins becomes accustomed to Eliza and falls in love with her. Now the initial enigma about the relation between the title and the text of the play is solved.

System of fashion is one of the sign systems dominating *Pygmalion*. Shaw describes his characters in terms of their costume. Generally speaking, clothes are sign-functions and denote protection. However, the individual's act of choice and combination of different pieces of costume, in the context of society, semantizes and refunctionalises these signs. Consequently, for the system of fashion, a second order of meaning is formed with connotative and symbolic signification. According to Barthes, such a manipulated second system of meaning is imposed on the dress code by the capitalist societies to control the agents' decision for the consumption of the products of the fashion industry. In such situations, agents buy a dress not out of need, but because of being fashionable (Gottdiener 1995, 38-9). Consider the following lexia:

Torrents of heavy summer rain. Cab whistles blowing frantically in all directions. Pedestrians running for shelter into the market and under the portico

of St. Paul's Church, where there are already several people, among them a lady and her daughter in evening dress. (I)

This lexia presents a *lady* and her daughter, standing among people, who are clad in 'evening dress', a kind of dress which, according to Brthes's system of fashion, indicates that these ladies are fashionable wearing a specific kind of dress for every occasion. Car and taxi are other cultural codes symbolizing wealth and social class. These two ladies are waiting for taxi, hence, they are wealthy enough to afford the cab fare. In fact, this lexia shows the social typology of the British; by wearing fashionable clothes and riding in a taxi these people are marked as members of the social elites.

The following lexia is Shaw's first description of the flower girl's appearance:

She wears a little sailor hat of black straw that has long been exposed to the dust and soot of London and has seldom if ever been brushed. Her hair needs washing rather badly... She wears a shoddy black coat... She has a brown skirt with a coarse apron... She is no doubt as clean as she can afford to be; but compared to the ladies she is very dirty. (I)

The ladies' and the flower girl's choice of clothing style is regulated by the society's system of dress code. The flower girl's costume consists of a hat, a coat, a skirt and an apron, and boots, different pieces, which might be worn by other ladies too. However, her dress is different in terms of the kind of fabric, color, size, and the degree of tidiness: her hat is a little dusty-sooty sailor one of black straw, her coat is shoddy and black and reaches to her knees, her skirt is brown, her apron is coarse, and her boots are worn-out. The combination of these clothing parts creates a system of signification, which connotes that this flower seller is *vulgar* in comparison to the two women in evening dress who are called *ladies*. In these lexias the word *lady* is a semic code with socio-ethical connotations. First, it connotes the stratified nature of this society since the play talks about a lady in contrast to a flower girl who is not a lady but a vulgar person. Moreover, the lexias define who is a lady and who is not; a woman who wears fashionable dress, takes a taxi and speaks English appropriately is a *lady*. While a woman whose dress is dusty and out of fashion and talks ungrammatically is not a *lady* but *vulgar*.

The system of fashion is dominant in different scenes of *Pygmalion*. At Higgins's house, Eliza appears as a very common girl: "She has a hat with three ostrich feathers, orange, sky-blue, and red. She has a nearly clean apron, and the shoddy coat has been tidied a little." (II) Before going, Eliza washes her face and hands and cleans her dress but the degree of her cleanliness is not accepted by Higgins and he starts his lessons by cleaning her. After taking a bath, Eliza appears with a new look: "When [Alfred] opens [the door] he is confronted with a dainty and exquisitely clean young Japanese lady in a simple blue cotton kimono printed cunningly with small white jasmine blossoms." (II) A clean beautiful dress has so changed Eliza that her father does not recognise her and Higgins and others are extremely surprised by seeing her in this new pose. Eliza thinks she looks silly in this new dress and says if she wears her own hat she will look all right. She thinks so because she is not used to be clean and to wear fashionable clothes like ladies. Now Eliza realizes that taking a bath is a habit and cultural practice for ladies and that it is easy for them to be clean with soap and hot water of which she is deprived. In this new situation, she feels out of place and silly. Again when Eliza returns from the garden party her dress is described as "...in opera cloak; brilliant evening dress, and diamonds, with fan, flowers, and all accessories." (IV) Here, Eliza is dressed up like a lady in evening dress, the kind of dress which according to the dress code of her society is regarded as fashionable. In these lexias then *cleanliness* is a

semic code connoting value for upper class people: to be a *lady* one has to be clean and to wear fashionable clothes.

The system of fashion and its significance in *Pygmalion*'s society can also be studied in the case of Eliza's father, Alfred Doolittle: "an elderly but vigorous dustman, clad in the costume of his profession, including a hat with a black brim covering his neck and shoulders." (II) Apart from protecting his body, Alfred's clothes create a sign system, which connotes his profession and class. In Act V Alfred has become the preacher for Wannafeller Moral Reform World League and has inherited three thousand a year. This time his appearance has changed greatly in a way that Higgins does not recognise him and mistakes him for one of Eliza's 'gentle' relatives, "He is brilliantly dressed in a new fashionable frock-coat, with white waistcoat and grey trousers. A flower in his button hole, a dazzling silk hat, and patent leather shoes complete the effect." (V) The word 'fashionable' in this lexia is a semic code connoting gentleman-likeness and middle-class morality. With this bequest of money, Alfred has entered the middle-class and should follow and learn this class's morality and social codes; he should wear fashionable clothes, speak a genteel language, and marry. Hence, apart from fashionable clothes, 'money' can also make a person a gentleman or a lady. Eliza protests against Higgins's bullying behavior: "I wont be called a baggage when I've offered to pay like any lady." (II) In this lexia, the semic codes of 'lady' and 'money' are juxtaposed, a lady is, among other things, a person who has money to pay for her lessons. It can be said that 'money' is a value in bourgeois culture and only wealthy people are respectable to this class. Talking a genteel language is also a value in this culture - a 'lady' talks gently.

The linguistic system is another paramount system in *Pygmalion*. Drawing on the Saussurean concept of language/speech, Barthes states that in contrast to language that is a system of arbitrary values, speech is an individual act of selection and combination of various codes. In addition to denotative meaning, the signifier in the speech system connotes different social and cultural values, hence it is semic code. The characters in the first act of the play talk in English, but they share little in terms of grammar and diction. The note taker distresses the bystanders and specially the flower girl by writing down her speech. He believes that an Englishman's way of speaking classifies him, hence, the bystanders' speeches become a kind of semic code which signals their level of education and class. The flower girl begins to defend herself hysterically and a general hubbub follows. To solve the enigma of the note taker's identity, one of the bystanders explains to the note taker that:

The Bystander	... She [Eliza] thought you was a copper's nark, sir.
The Note Taker	(with quick interest) What's a copper's nark?
The Bystander	(inapt at definition) It's a –well, it's a copper's nark, as you might say. What else would you call it? A sort of informer. (I)

By the word 'copper's nark' the man simply means a policeman, but he uses a signifier whose signified is not known to the note taker because it is a culture-bound signifier specific to the bystander's culture. Hence, the word 'copper's nark' becomes a semic code connoting the lower-class-ness of the speaker. Each class has its own jargon and dialect, which is not known to other classes of the society. Finally, they realize that the note taker is not a policeman and means no harm.

Another similar occasion happens at the at-home scene. When Eliza is speaking about her aunt's death and uses a slangy language (expressions such as 'to do someone in', which becomes a semic code). In a stratified society, each class has a specific system of jargon and the knowledge of these codes produces power. This is the linguistic capital, which helps Higgins make an ironic use of such cultural-linguistic codes. He says Eliza's slang expression

is a new small talk and pretends that talking like this is smart, while it is not true in fact. Mrs. Eynsford Hill says:

I daresay I am very old-fashioned; but I do hope you wont begin using that expression, Clara. I have got accustomed to hear you talking about men as *rotters*, and calling everything *filthy* and *beastly*; though I do think it horrible and unladylike. But this last is really too much. (III, italics added)

Slang words are signs in the language system for communication. Individuals' use of these codes to articulate their personal ideas is a motivated action marking their class and personal verbal manners. Clara thinks that using words like 'rotters', 'filthy' and 'beastly' is fashionable, while Mrs. Eynsford Hill thinks of it as 'unladylike' and nonsense. Actually, as Pickering remarks, manners have changed greatly and the boundary between a respectable dinner party and a ship's forecandle is blurred, and one cannot tell the one from the other. Therefore, it can be said that gradually the linguistic-semic codes are changing.

Barthes's concept of proairetic code is about the pattern of principal action sequences. The principal proairetic code concerns the plot of the flower girl's acculturation, which occurs at different stages through different acts of the play:

*I) The Statement of the Problem:* The problem as Higgins remarks is that Eliza's kerbstone English "will keep her in the gutter to the end of her days." (I) To settle the problem Higgins proposes that "in three months I could pass that girl off as a duchess at an ambassador's garden party. I could even get her a place as lady's maid or shop assistant, which requires better English." (I)

*II) The Statement of the Request:* Eliza goes to Higgins's house to ask for linguistic lessons: "I want to be a lady in a flower shop instead of selling at the corner of Tottenham Court Road. But they won't take me unless I can talk more genteel. He said he could teach me." (II)

*III) Contract:* Pickering makes the proposal to Higgins that if Higgins can pass Eliza as a duchess successfully, he will pay all the expenses of the experiment (II). Higgins accepts the bet and Eliza is chosen as the subject for the linguistic experiment. Higgins defines his program for this process of acculturation: "you are to live here for the next six months, learning how to speak beautifully, like a lady in a florist's shop. If you're good and do whatever you're told, you shall sleep in a proper bed-room, and have lots to eat, and money to buy chocolates and take rides in taxis. If you're naughty and idle you will sleep in the back kitchen among the black beetles, and be walloped by Mrs. Pearce with a broomstick. At the end of six months you shall go to Buckingham Palace in a carriage, beautifully dressed". (II) Eliza accepts the program and Higgins begins his teachings. This contract sets Eliza and Higgins to go through a process of actions and examinations; he constantly observes Eliza's pronunciation and manners, talks to Eliza, and trains her in different cultural practices like playing music.

*IV) Examination 1:* In the first examination, Higgins tests Eliza at Mrs. Higgins's at-home. Eliza's pronunciation is rectified and she articulates words correctly at this stage, but there is a problem with what she pronounces about her aunt's death: "What call would a woman with that strength in her have to die of influenza? What become of her new straw hat that should have come to me? Somebody pinched it; and what I say is, them as pinched it done her in." (III) Mrs. Higgins believes that Eliza is a fake lady who may ruin herself by every sentence she utters and is not presentable.

*V) Examination 2:* Eliza is taken to the garden party where her performance is acceptable and Higgins wins the bet. Between these two tests the mortification of Eliza's vulgarity occurs as Higgins tells his mother he is always talking, teaching and dressing Eliza in fashionable gowns. Actually, he is "Inventing new Elizas" every day (III) until Eliza becomes presentable at the garden party.

*VI) The Outcome of the Experiment:* The process of Eliza's acculturation is completed in Act IV. Though Higgins is happy about this great triumph, Eliza is not satisfied with her new transformed self; "What am I fit for? What have you left me fit for? Where am I to go? What am I to do? What's become of me?" (IV) Eliza's

dissatisfaction with her present condition makes her run away. Higgins goes after her, but at last, she leaves Higgins.

Barthes's last code, the reference or cultural code relies on commonplace knowledge, knowledge known to people. Shaw opens the play thus "COVENT GARDEN at 11.15 p.m... Pedestrians running for shelter into the market and under the portico of St. Paul's Church..." (I) This lexia specifies the setting of the first act. It takes place in Covent Garden which is associated, on the one hand, with the fruit and vegetable market and, on the other hand, with Royal Opera House which is also known as Covent Garden. St. Paul's Church and Covent Garden contain religious and cultural codes. The fruit and vegetable market have economic implications associated with vendors, while Royal Opera House conveys the idea of high-cultural practices of opera and theatre going.

In a class-conscious society cities and streets are also differentiated hierarchically; some places are associated with the upper and some others with the lower class. Hence, these geographical places are cultural codes with a second order of meaning. When Alfred Doolittle talks about the corner of Long Acre and Endell Street, Higgins immediately names the Public house, where the poor people spend time and drink. Alfred belongs to such low class places. Other geographical places named in the play (the bystanders' birthplace like Selsey, Lisson Grove) are also cultural codes because they refer to a people with specific social and cultural practices and accents, and these names are known to people and are considered as common knowledge.

Another cultural code of the civilized upper class is giving parties. Wearing fashionable clothes in such parties is both semic and cultural code of social custom. Eliza attends different parties like Mrs. Higgins's at-home and the Embassy ball to be examined in the society and learn how to behave in the companion of fashionable people. She is dressed exquisitely for all these balls and learns to mimic the upper class people's graceful manners. Therefore, in *Pygmalion*, the system of fashion forms a cultural code pointing to the social typology of the British.

There are some references to the cultural codes of literature and music in the play too. Higgins tells Eliza "that your native language is the language of Shakespeare and Milton and Bible." (I) The words 'Shakespeare' and 'Milton' are cultural codes of literature and 'Bible' that of religion. Shakespeare (1564-1616) is a playwright famous for his dramas and sonnets, and Milton (1608-1674) is the poet of *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*. By referring to such great literary figures Higgins intends to remind Eliza of the majesty of English language and to teach her that she should respect her native language and uttering what he calls "disgusting sounds" does not become the human who has the divine gift of speech articulation.

In Act III Higgins states "You see, we're all savages, more or less. We're supposed to be civilized and cultured– to know all about poetry and philosophy and art and science, and so on; but how many of us know even the meanings of these names?" (III) The words 'poetry', 'philosophy', 'art', and 'science' are cultural codes of different branches of knowledge. According to Higgins, to be civilized one should know different branches of knowledge like art, literature, and science. It is ridiculous that most of the upper class people think of themselves as being civilized and cultured while they do not even know the meaning of words like art, literature and science. Here, Higgins points to the importance of knowledge as a cultural phenomenon. Higgins also presents a similar idea about music. He tells his mother about educating Eliza in (classic) music: "as if she had Beethoven and Brahms or Lehar" (III) by heart.

Exploring different codes and cultural practices in *Pygmalion*, we can see that these codes and their connotative meanings are almost informed by the manipulated myth system

of a capitalist society. It was mentioned earlier that Barthes, in *Mythologies* (1972), observes that the mythologist “attempts to find again under the assumed innocence of the most unsophisticated relationships, the profound alienation which this innocence is meant to make one accept” (qtd. in Messenger 2002, p.106). Put another way, Barthes points that the ideology advertised by myth is accepted unquestioningly and influences people's perception of the world and their behavior towards others. Higgins is a bourgeois and attempts to orient Eliza toward the manipulated culture and worldview of the privileged class. In the binary opposition of upper class/working class, the first term is the privileged one and the culture of the working class is defined by the upper class as inferior.

Daniel Chandler (2007) contends that “If signs do not merely reflect (social) reality but are involved in its construction then those who control the sign systems control the construction of reality” (p.219). Higgins awakes the desire for promotion in Eliza. Her desire and dreams for a better life sets Eliza on a process of actions and acculturation. Higgins generates and inculcates a particular way of life and worldview in Eliza in which the bourgeois values of wealth, a luxurious life of taxis, and fashionable dresses seem as right and inevitable. The capitalist myth partakes of the hierarchical stratification of streets and geographical places, dialects, parties and individual human beings. Eliza, at first, accepts the upper class myth of a fashionable life and tries to internalize it. After taking a bath, she says

I should just like to take a taxi to the corner of Tottenham Court Road and get out there and tell it to wait for me, just to put the girls in their place a bit. I wouldn't speak to them, you know. (II)

Higgins advises her that "Besides, you shouldn't cut your old friends now that you have risen in the world. That's what we call snobbery." (II) Eliza believes that those girls are not her friends any more because they used to ridicule her and now she wants to take revenge. After the at-home, Freddy asks Eliza if she walks across the Park and she answers "Walk! Not bloody likely. (*Sensation*) I am going in a taxi." (III)

Eliza desires to talk gently, work in a shop, wear fashionable clothes and ride in a taxi, all of which show her orientation toward the manipulated ideology of the myth of the bourgeois life that prescribes this is the best way of life. Eliza says "But if I'm to have fashionable clothes, I'll wait. I should like to have some. Mrs. Pearce says you're going to give me some to wear in bed at night different to what I wear in the daytime; but it do seem a waste of money when you could get something to show." (II) Although she knows it is a waste of money, she desires fashionable clothes only to show to other girls that she is fashionable; a manner displaying conspicuous consumption culture. Higgins entraps Eliza's father, Alfred Doolittle, too, by introducing him to Wannafeller Moral Reform World League which provides him three thousand a year, a fortune which "shoves (him) into the middle class." (V) Previously, he could touch others for money but now all his relatives expect him to support them financially. Moreover, he was free from morality and could have love affairs but now he should marry. He is malcontented with the middle-class myth and morality which for him means; 'to live for others, not for oneself'. (V) The middle-class morality intimidates Alfred and takes away his independence.

To summarize, in *Pygmalion* formal dresses, dialects, and postures are all signs signifying values like authority and class. Shaw implies that the idea that only persons noble by blood know cultural codes and can speak and behave gently is already obsolete. Therefore, smart style is not innate inherited by birth, but acquired and learned by practice. Manners and social codes have changed immensely so that one cannot tell apart the real upper class lady by birth from a fake one who has a lower class origin but wears smart clothes and speaks a standard accent. Eliza's performance at the Embassy ball is so fantastic that nobody doubts

her origin. Therefore, codes are not something fixed but are time-bound. They do not come by birth but should be learned. Shaw demonstrates the role of education system in inculcating the cultural codes of bourgeoisie in working class people in a capitalist society. In this way, the working classes become alienated from their own peer groups and are in limbo until they find their position in society. Eliza's desire for this manipulated myth does not last long. At the end of *Pygmalion* she awakens to the reality of her position and realizes that Higgins's teaching has disqualified her for earning her own living and now she dangles between two classes. She rejects Higgins and by marrying Freddy she turns into a new social subject, a lower-middle-class florist.

In the end, it can be said that semioticians of all persuasions claim that codes are wide-ranging in scope temporally and spatially. Reading works like Shaw's play in terms of these codes could enhance our understanding of factors that affect the operation of culture and social behaviour past and present.

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