

# Trauma and Pregnancy in Lexical Perspectives

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## Abstract

The present study investigates the impacts of traumatic conditions on the lexes of the fictional characters. The researchers have selected text samples from a Victorian English novel *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* written by Thomas Hardy (1840-1928). The study examines that how the traumatic conditions affect the language of the character during her fictional life. The researchers applied close reading and coding strategies to select and analyze the text samples. The protagonist's life is divided into three phases: pre-trauma, trauma and post-trauma. Poyatos (1996) model is applied to test the effects of traumatic conditions on the lexes of the affected character. The study finds a significant difference in lexes of the character in the said three phases of her fictional life.

**Keywords:** Molestation, Physical Abuse, Stuttering, Stammering, Morphological Contractions.

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## Introduction

Mental disturbances, job issues, and social problems etc. are among the major stimuli disturbing humans' minds and state of trauma is an intense and hyper-exposure of such stimuli. The human brain is a dependent organ where external stimuli play a major role in steering brain's internal mechanism and its coordinating functions. Generally, state of trauma is a bodily or mental pain that an individual suffers from. Trauma is a severe stressful experience that scars the mind and appears in form of emotional shock(s) corresponding psychological effects lasting for a prolonged period (Encarta, 2008).<sup>1</sup> Already conducted researches find different conditions/stimuli causing a traumatic condition e.g. roadside accidents causing physical injuries, being an eyewitness of a traumatic incident like watching a person being victim of a severe injury either being present at the site or watching a media report, listening to the account(s) of an individual who has been victim of trauma or reading some scary literature, are some factors that mostly contribute in

hurling feelings of trauma in a normal individual's mind (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Anderson, 1997).<sup>2,3</sup> In trauma literature, researchers have shown keen interest towards the traumatic experiences causing physical and psychological health problems (Alvarez-Conrad, *et al.* 2001; Vrana, *et al.* 1995).<sup>4,5</sup> However, on the contrary, in context of this research paper, the researchers came across the scarcity of research studies addressing the effects of traumatic conditions like molestation and physical abuses (rape) on the life of the characters depicted in fiction, besides, the researchers came across no study discussing the effects of physical abuse on the language of the characters depicted in Thomas Hardy's novel *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. However, On the other hand, the researchers found a study conducted by Dearing and Rogers. This study discusses the role of media in projection of trauma. During a research regarding trauma generated by new media, Dearing and Rogers found more than 350 empirical studies that were carried out since

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1972 on the agenda-setting influence. In the context of contribution and implications of literary and journalistic narratives, in literature, the researchers have found a lofty effect on book lover(s) minds, their psyches, and their moods (Schwab, 1997).<sup>6</sup> Studies carried out by Schwab (1997) conclude that literary texts act as experiences and affect the human moods.<sup>6</sup> Schwab further states the function of literary texts which possess the potential to resonate with such profound intimate experiences. The literary texts can also contribute in facilitating a pure knowledge that automatically appears in certain rhythms and forms, and a common human tendency is that we "translate" into moods rather than thought." The literature can also play a positive role to change the mood experienced by the reader(s). The reader(s) frequent response appears either that the readers build compassion or its severe form empathy with the victim of trauma presented in writing. In the context of trauma literature, the researchers find a plenty of studies have been conducted to assess the impact(s) of media in promotion of traumatic conditions. Similarly, Impacts of media contents and impacts of priming on people's later behavior were highlighted in the literature by Roskos-Ewoldsen, *et al.* (2002) and Bushman (1998).<sup>7,8</sup> These studies show a greater effect of media not only on views, judgments, and ethics but also on the behavior of the masses in general. According to Roskos-Ewoldsen (2002), media priming is the effects of the media contents on people's later behavior or people's judgment related to the contents.<sup>7</sup> The study also points out that "the ubiquitous nature of the media in our lives makes it a powerful tool for priming how we think and behave." The studies of Josephson (1987) and Anderson (1997) concluded that violent media create belligerent feelings and hostile approach in school and undergraduate students.<sup>2,9</sup> Similarly, Cantor & Omdahl (1991) suggest that terrifying mass media presentations infuse fear in children and lead these children to avoid taking parts in activities that are presented in these productions.<sup>10</sup> In general, in context of moods of the audience and the readers, the effects of fiction and movies are temporary whereas the impacts of reality-based narratives and programs can be deeper and long lasting. Cantor (2002) emphasized that "as children get mature, they

develop into more responsive to real life and less receptive to fantastic dangers as portrayed in the media".<sup>11</sup> Another contributing factor is the music that affects human mood. A song with a positive connotation can make us happy by changing our mood, but on the contrary, a song with melancholic connotations may make us gloomy. In trauma literature, the researchers have also studied the roles of songs and their effects on mental health. Weidinger and Demi (1993) found teens with abnormal social or psychological behaviors due to the reason of listening to the music with negative themes and negative lyrics.<sup>12</sup>

Trauma and study of trauma are although the major areas of the disciplines like neurology, psychology, psychiatry etc. but the present study is an interdisciplinary venture where the researchers employ the premises of psychology and psychiatry to evaluate the language sample of a fictional character Tess of the D'Urbervilles. Tess is physically abused and gives birth to a toddler who dies afterward. During her phase of pregnancy, she experiences stiff mental as well as physical stress. During pregnancy, she is deserted by her so-called intimate partner who betrays her and abuses her. Tess is a character facing diverse catastrophes like illegitimate pregnancy, economic abuse and social abuses like lack of moral as well as personal safety. Tess has manifold tensions like running the family by fulfilling their financial needs as well as surviving in rough and tough socioeconomic conditions.

This research paper is a unique contribution in the trauma literature and English fiction. The researchers selected famous literary figure of Victorian literature. The present study adds qualitative data in rape trauma literature and shows that how do the lexes of the victims are affected by the physical abuses. This research paper also provides lexes and thematic references for future studies through elaboration and discussion of language sample of a mother who is sexually harassed, abused and gives birth to a child who is also suffering from poor socioeconomic and psychological conditions. This study shows that how traumatic conditions occurring in the fictional plots have manifestation through linguistic devices. The present study highlights the effects of traumatic conditions affecting a pregnant woman and its

consequences on the language of the victim and its depiction by the author. In this research, the researchers have set the comparison on triangular bases:

- I. Pre-trauma
- II. Trauma
- III. Post trauma

The pre-trauma stage in the selected character Tess' life covers the events of her life when she is a girl living in her native village. Trauma phase in Tess life covers the events when she is chased and physically abused by Alec. During this phase of her life, she experiences worst economic conditions and gives birth to an illegitimate child named Sorrow who dies later on. The text samples collected in this category show that how do these stimuli have been depicted by Hardy and what effects do occur on the lexes of the character when she is going through the severe traumatic conditions. Post-Trauma phase covers the conditions in Tess life when she has gone through this experience. A new phase of her life begins with Angel Clare. The researchers evaluated the selected text samples to assess what changes do occur on the lexes of the character when she suffers from severe traumatic conditions and what changes do occur in her language when she returns to a calm and pacific life cycle after her love and marriage with Angle Clare.

## Research Methodology

The present study is a qualitative research and researchers employed textual discourse analysis techniques to evaluate the effects of the traumatic life conditions on the language of the fictional character.

**Research Design:** In the present study the researcher employed the vivo and vitro coding techniques given by Mats Alvesson & Scoldberg(1987:33). The researchers first did the close reading of the selected novel to extract the pure text samples spoken by Tess, the protagonist of the novel. Later on, the researchers employed the coding strategies to codify the text samples in three codes: pre-trauma phase, Trauma phase, and Post Trauma phase. The study focused only on the lexes of the character in different phases of her fiction life. The subsequent chapter discusses that how one premise has different articulation patterns in the

selected three phases of character's life. The researchers also describe that how Thomas Hardy depicts the psychic conditions of the character through her changing lexes patterns.

### 3.2 Sample

The present study is a qualitative discourse analysis of the text samples collected from Thomas Hardy's novel Tess of the D'Urbervilles. Through the close reading and vivo coding techniques the text samples are selected. For text selection, the researchers employed the framework of Mats Alvesson and Scoldberg ((1987). The collected text samples are further coded in three categories: Pre-trauma, Trauma and post-trauma Phases.

### 3.3 Procedure

To extract the text samples for qualitative analysis, the researchers first employed close reading technique to sort out the text samples purely spoken by the principal character Tess. After close reading and sorting of the text samples, the researcher assigned codes to each text samples. The pre-Trauma phase of Tess' life covers those events of her life when she is living with her parents in her native village. No stress and no hyper conditions exist in her life. The trauma phase of her life covers the events after her seduction, rape and birth to an illegitimate child. The rough and tough social life, the prick of conscience, the bereaved circumstances after baby's death, the hopeless family conditions, the lack of moral and social security are the circumstances termed as Trauma Phase. The third phase of Tess life is the post trauma phase and consists of the circumstances when she has settled against the anomalies of life and struggles to resettle in life. The researchers set a comparison in tabulated form to show the readers what changes occur/ not occur in the language used by the protagonist of the novel in three different phases of her life.

## Results & Discussion

Through careful analysis of the selected text samples the researchers find that Thomas Hardy has employed the variety of lexes to support the changing circumstances of the character's life. In the subsequent tables the researchers have placed the text samples to posit that how do traumatic conditions do affect the language of the victim and

how does Thomas Hardy depict the language of the character being abused by her intimate partner. Three parallel columns of the tables show the reader(s) the changes that occur in the lexes of the character when she is in calm state of mind and vice versa. After careful analysis of the selected text samples, the researchers find a significant difference in language patterns used by Hardy in three phases of Tess' life. Due to the scarcity of space allowed for a research paper, the subsequent tables show some selected text patterns although a huge number is available if readers scan the text of the novel.

Table 4.1		
Lexes in Pre-Trauma phase	Lexes in Trauma Phase	Lexes in Post-Trauma Phase
Had it anything to do with father's making such a mommet of himself in thik carriage this afternoon? Why did 'er? I felt inclined to sink into the ground with shame!"(Chapter I)	"But," said she tremulously, "suppose your sin was not of your own seeking?"(XII)	"How warm 'tis to-day!" she said, almost inaudibly. (XX)  "You are!" she contradicted impetuously."O yes, yes, yes!"XXXI

Table 4.2		
Lexes in Pre-Trauma phase	Lexes in Trauma Phase	Lexes in Post-Trauma Phase
"no—I wouldn't have it for the world!" declared Tess proudly. (Chapter III).	"how very good of you that is!" she exclaimed, with a painful sense of the awkwardness of having to thank him just then". (Chapter: X)	"O, I know you will!" she cried, with a sudden fervour of faith in him. "Angel, I will fix the day when I will become yours for always!"(XXXII)

Table 4.3		
Lexes in Pre-Trauma phase	Lexes in Trauma Phase	Lexes in Post-Trauma Phase
"I don't think so," said Tess coldly.(V)  "Don't try to frighten me, sir," said Tess stiffly.(VII)	"Then Tess went up to her mother, put her face upon Joan's neck, and told."O mother, my mother!" cried the agonized girl, turning passionately upon her parent as if her poor heart would break. "How could I be expected to know?"(XII)	"I am so anxious to talk to you—I want to confess all my faults and blunders!" she said with attempted lightness. (XXXIII)

Table 4.4		
Lexes in Pre-Trauma phase	Lexes in Trauma Phase	Lexes in Post-Trauma Phase
"And so mother said we ought to make ourselves bekown to you—as we've lost our horse by a bad accident, and are the oldest branch o' the family." ( Chapter: v)	"Ah—so have I, very often. This hobble of being alive is rather serious, don't you think so?"(XIX)	"with an oddly compounded look of gladness, shyness, and surprise, she exclaimed—"O Mr Clare! How you frightened me—I—" (XXVII)

Table 4.5		
Lexes in Pre-Trauma phase	Lexes in Trauma Phase	Lexes in Post-Trauma Phase
"I'd rather try to get work," she murmured. (Chapter v) "I suppose I have," faltered Tess, looking uncomfortable again. (v)	"O mother, my mother!" cried the agonized girl, turning passionately upon her parent as if her poor heart would break. (XII)	"I shall give way—I shall say yes—I shall let myself marry him—I cannot help it!" she jealously panted, with her hot face to the pillow that night, on hearing one of the other girls sigh his name in her sleep. "I can't bear to let anybody have him but me! Yet it is a wrong to him, and may kill him when he knows! O my heart—O—O—O!"( XXVIII)

In light of these selected sample texts presented in tables, it is evident to the reader(s) that a variety of lexes is being employed by the author to support the psychological conditions that the character is experiencing in her fictional life. In text samples coded in Table 4.1 the pre-trauma lexical items are simple and ordinary to the life situation but in the parallel column it is evident that a shift occurs from simple words of emotions to overt words of emotion and Thomas Hardy employs the adverb of emotions like *tremulously* to show the psychic state of the character. However, in the post-trauma phase a variety of language is employed where coordination is set between the emotions and the language used by the character. In Table 4.1 third column shows the words that present pleasant mood of the character. The echoing of the lexical item yes yes yes show that how pleasant emotion are projected through lexical items. In the text samples presented above and the through the language used in overall novel, the researchers found a fairly evident change in the language employed in three mentioned phases. The researchers find the frequent usage of



Adverbs of emotions and contractions at morphological level and at the phonological level. When the character is a pregnant mother and is suffering from psychological turmoil, an obvious change occurs in other grammatical patterns as well that appear in form of long pauses, broken text samples, lack of unity of thought, quick switching from topic to topic and less observation of the pragmatics principles of turn taking etc.

The findings of this research paper have close resemblance with the studies done by Alvarez-Conrad et al & Beckham et al., who have the stance that experiencing trauma, can affect the victim psychologically and physically.<sup>4,5</sup> Human language is a byproduct of the human brain and mostly the psychological factors affect the language of the victim(s). Most often, people mark someone as a mentally retarded person through the language used by that person. This study has the similar findings as that of Schwab (1997, p. 5) which show that literary texts can affect human moods.<sup>6</sup> Text samples selected here show that how mood disorder and orderly mood change the language choice of the user. The researchers found a significant change in the language of the protagonist when she faces trauma.

## Conclusion & Implementation

The present study discussed the impacts of the traumatic conditions on the lexes of the victim and their projection by the literary writers. The research finds that Thomas Hardy's use of lexes is well rationalized. The language used by the selected character changes with the changing mental contexts. Tables 4.1-4.5 show that how text samples vary with the varying settings. The lexis turns from simple to overt emotional status when the character experiences the stiff psychological conditions. The present study concludes that impact of traumatic conditions has a significant effect on the language of the selected character and Thomas Hardy has followed the principles that modern psychology demands.

### Implications of the Study

The study has relevance to the physicians to assess the mental state of their patient facing traumatic conditions. The study has wider implications for the

men of letters and media reporters while reporting the traumatic incidents. As a journalist and column writer, the better you deal with the psychic conditions of the reported person, the more effective and responsive you become to your recipients/readers. The present study also suggests that such type of studies can be done on other literary authors as well. A comparative study of the post-war writers like Earnest Hemingway and George Bernard Shaw and their characters in the traumatic state can be better topics for future studies.

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## Further Readings

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