



A Critical Discourse Analysis of Selected Poems of “Maya Angelou” (“Equality”, “Cage Birds” and Other Poems as Examples)

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ABSTRACT

Language users' choices of linguistic forms and expressions are usually guided by their thoughts, feelings, attitudes and their stance in the real world. Language, according to CDA, is never neutral and it always has some implications of the world that surrounds us. Critical studies are concerned with scrutinizing power relations, ideological manifestations and hegemony in social practices. The current paper is a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of selected poems of Maya Angelou, who is an African American poet, memoirist, and civil rights activist. It sheds light on the figurative language of the poems that are selected randomly for the purpose of analysis. The five selected poems: "Still I Rise, Equality, Caged Bird, On the Pulse of Morning and Phenomenal Woman." are analyzed based on Fairclough's model of CDA. The study tries to show the implicit figurative language in the poems and identify different figures of speech that have implicit meaning in the poems. It also examines how figurative language is used to enhance the meaning of the poems and communicating the ideas more effectively.

Keywords: Maya Angelou, Discourse Analysis, Historical Approach, Relational Approach.

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1. Discourse Analysis : An overview.

Discourse analysis is a broad term with many definitions, which “integrates a whole palette of meanings” (Titscher et al., 1998, p. 42), ranging from linguistics, through sociology, philosophy, and other disciplines. It is used in analyzing literary and non-literary texts, and it is frequently used to indicate a certain theoretical sophistication in ways that are vague and sometimes obfuscatory.

The word “discourse” dates back to the 14th century etymologically. It is taken from the Latin word “discursus” which means a “conversation.” In its current usage, this term conveys several significations for a variety of purposes, but in all cases, it relates to language, and it describes it in some way. To start with, discourse is literally defined as “a serious speech or piece of writing on a particular subject” (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, 2001, p. 388). In this general sense, it incorporates both the spoken and written modes although, at times, it is confined to the speech being designated as “a serious conversation between people.” This restriction is also implied in the word when it is used as a verb. Discourse, according to Stubbs (1983, p. 1), is “language above the sentence or above the clause” and “the study of discourse is the study of any aspect of language use.” “As Fairclough states” discourse constitutes three dimensions of society: knowledge, social relations and social identity – and these correspond respectively to three major functions of language . Discourse is shaped by relations of power and invested ideologies” (Fairclough, 1992, p. 8). To embark on defining discourse analysis, one would inevitably tackle two divergent approaches to

language in general and discourse in particular: The formal approach and the functional approach. Schiffrin (2006, p. 170) combines both approaches when designating discourse analysis as “the study of language use above and beyond the sentence.” The first trend in defining discourse analysis is a formal or structural trend. In this paradigm, discourse analysis is seen as the exploration of language use by focusing on pieces larger than sentences. Discourse is merely a higher level in the hierarchy: Morpheme, clause, and sentence; she also explains that the pursuit of discourse analysis is to depict the internal structural relationships that tie the units of discourse to each other: To describe formal connectedness within it. The second trend is functional in perspective: It is not so much concerned with intra-sentential relations as much as with language use. Brown and Yule’s (1983, p. 1) conception seems to be compatible with this paradigm: The analysis of discourse is, necessarily, the analysis of language in use. As such, it cannot be restricted to the description of linguistic forms



independent of the purposes or functions which these forms are designed to serve in human affairs.

1.2. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

Critical Discourse Analysis (hereafter CDA) is a cross-discipline set forth in the early 1990s by a group of scholars such as Theo van Leeuwen, Gunther Kress, Teun van Dijk, and Norman Fairclough. At that time, theories and methods of CDA have been formulated to differentiate this paradigm from other theories and methodologies in Discourse Analysis. Later on, the term has been known under many designations. While, according to their fields of research or areas of study, some scholars prefer the concept Critical Linguistics (CL), others choose to use the

label Critical Discourse Studies (CDS). It follows from this to argue that CDA is an interdisciplinary approach.

According to Van Dijk (1998b, p. 12), CDA is a field that is concerned with studying and analyzing written and spoken texts to reveal the discursive sources of power, dominance, inequality, and bias. It examines how these discursive sources are maintained and reproduced within specific social, political, and historical contexts.

To Fairclough (1993), CDA is defined as a branch of discourse analysis, which is concerned with analyzing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language as he wrote:

- discourse analysis which aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power; and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony. (p. 135)

However, CDA isn't based on a single theory or method which is uniform and consistent. Instead, it involves linguistic and social approaches, which would endorse the idea that language is a medium of

domination and social force in such a way that it serves to legitimize relations of organized power. Weiss and Wodak (2003, p. 6) suggest that "the whole theoretical framework of CDA seems eclectic and unsystematic". Whereas linguistics traditionally focused on the micro analysis of texts and interactions, social science was traditionally concerned with social practice and social change.

From a critical scholarship perspective, CDA essentially stems out from the premise that language is a social and practical construct which is characterized by a



symbiotic relationship with society. In this context, Fairclough and Wodak (1997, p 277–280) suggest principles for CDA summarized briefly in eight points:

- CDA addresses social problems.
- Power relations are discursive.
- Discourse constitutes society and culture.
- Discourse does ideological work.
- Discourse is historical.
- The link between text and society is mediated.
- Discourse analysis is interpretive and explanatory.
- Discourse is a form of social action.

The first principle is that CDA not only focuses on language and language use, but also on the linguistic characteristics of social and cultural processes. CDA follows a critical approach to social problems in its endeavors to make explicit power relationships which are frequently hidden. It aims to derive results which are of practical relevance to the social, cultural, political and even economic contexts.

Chapter Two

Approaches to Critical Discourse Analysis

In spite of the fact that all the approaches to CDA have the notions of ideology, Critique, and power in common, they could be classified into three major ones with respect to the differences in their theoretical foundations and analyzing tools.

2.1.Socio-Cognitive Approach (SCA).

Van Dijk (2009, p. 62-64) favors the term Critical Discourse Studies (CDS), which, he claims, is a critical approach involving, not only critical analysis, “but also critical theory, as well as critical applications.” He asserts Critical Discourse Analysis: Current Approaches and the advent of Multimodality that the critical approach of CDS characterizes its practitioners, rather than the methods they employ. CDS scholars, he claims, are socio-politically committed to social equality and justice, and are typically interested in the way discourse reproduces social domination, that is, the power abuse of one group over another, and how dominated groups might discursively resist such abuse. Central to this particular study is van Dijk’s notion of ‘discursive injustice’. CDS is premised on the belief that “some forms of text and talk may be unjust” insofar as



they violate internationally recognised human rights and/or contribute to social inequality. CDS, he writes, aims to expose and help to combat such

injustices. Also of central importance to this approach is van Dijk's triangular framework of **discourse-cognition-society**. He considers the study of cognition to be of fundamental importance to the critical analysis of discourse, communication and interaction. He is interested in the "study of mental representations and the processes of language users when they produce and comprehend discourse and participate in verbal interaction". This approach examines how cognitive phenomena are related to the "structures of discourse, verbal interaction, communicative events and situations, as well as societal structures, such as those of domination and social inequality"

2.2. Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA).

(Reisigl and Wodak, 2001, 2009) was developed for an interdisciplinary study of postwar anti-semitism in postwar Austria. A distinctive feature of DHA is that it attempts to systematically integrate all available background information in the analysis and interpretation of the many layers of written and spoken text, taking into account four specific layers of context (Fairclough, Muderrig and Wodak, 2011, p. 364). It tries to establish a theory of discourse by linking 'theories of action, genres, discourse and texts', and although it is aligned with critical theory, "grand theories" play a small role compared to the discourse model and the emphasis on historical analysis, as context is understood as being mainly historical (Wodak and Meyer, 2009, p. 26).

2.3. Dialectical Relational Approach (DRA)

Faircloughs belief that "the language is an irreducible part of social life" is the main part of his framework. The dialectic relationship between language and social reality is realized through social events , social practices (orders of discourse), and social structures . Fairclough attempts to uncover ideological and power patterns in texts in his research method of analysis. He is the only CDA scholar who defines the relationship between power and language in his research (Fairclough, 1989). The third main approach in CDA is that of Fairclough whose theory has been central to CDA over more than the past 10 years. Fairclough, in his earlier work, called his approach to language and discourse Critical Language Study (1989, p. 5). He described the objective of this approach as "a contribution to the general raising of consciousness of exploitative social relations, through focusing upon language" (1989, p. 4). Discourse, to Fairclough, has three main functions: an identity function, a relational function and an ideational function. Here, Fairclough draws on Halliday's (1978) functional approach to language.



His tri-dimensional conception of discourse are text analysis, discursive practice, and social practice. The text, as the model argues, is the only concrete level which concerns language forms and their meanings. The analysis of this level may be organized into vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, and text structure (Fairclough, 1989: 136). The second level - discursive practice - is related to the production, distribution and consumption of the text. One needs to consider who has produced the text, for what purpose the

text is produced, to whom the text is aimed at and in what conditions is it read (Fairclough, 1992: 76). Fairclough, here, uses three main headings: the force of utterances (speech act types), the coherence of texts, and the intertextuality of texts. The last is “the property that texts have of being full of snatches of other texts” (ibid: 84).

2.4 Figuratively and CDA

Holmgreen (2006, p. 95) states that “metaphor is traditionally just one of many textual features to be analyzed to unveil discursive constructions of reality.” This reveals the fact that other figurative uses of language can be detected. A metaphor is considered an essential linguistic tool that provides the understanding and manifests ideological representations unequivocally. According to the Oxford English dictionary (2003) cited in Mahmood (2014a, p. 211). In metaphor, a descriptive or explanatory word or phrase is transferred to an object or action different from the first word, but analogous to it, to which it is literally applicable. Another figure of speech beside metaphor is hyperbole, which is an overstatement or exaggerated language that deforms facts by making them appear much bigger than they are if looked at objectively. It may be used to entertain or to describe an incident more seriously. A simile is also a figure of speech that is used to make a comparison between two unlike things using words; like, as, and such as. It creates a clear relationship between two things entities related to each other. Other figures of speech crucial for the analysis can also be distinguished, in the same vein. Personification, for instance, is the representation of a thing

or abstraction in the form of a person or an abstract concept is specified as a human being. According to Charteris-Black (2011, p. 61), personification is a “linguistic figure in which an abstract and inanimate entity is referred to using a word or phrase that in other contexts would be used to describe a person.



Chapter Three

Analytical Framework

3.1. The Preliminaries.

CDA does not provide a ready-made, how-to-do approach to social analysis but emphasizes that for each study a thorough theoretical analysis of a social problem must be made so as to be able to select which discourse and social structures to analyze and which methods of research to adopt in the analysis (Van Dijk, 2001, p. 98). Hence, CDA does not have its own distinct methodology; it integrates linguistic methods with a critical social standpoint. As such, the analytical framework schematized for the analysis of the data under scrutiny depends on Fairclough (2010) model of textual analysis and the social practice, including ideology as well as some additions and modifications devised by the researcher. The textual analysis concerns itself with the figurative use of language. It is broken down into these figures of speech: Metaphor, personification, simile, symbols, repetition, and hyperbole.

3.2. Data Analysis (Analysis of Selected Poems)

Following Fairclough's (1995, p. 14) idea that any kind of text is suitable for CDA, in this paper five selected poems by the African American writer,

Maya Angelou, has been chosen s which are: "Still I Rise, Equality, Caged Bird, On the Pulse of Morning and Phenomenal Woman."

1. Textual Analysis (Figure of Speech)

Figures of speech are commonly used in literary works and especially in poetry so as to beautify it. In this research paper five selected poems by the African American writer, Maya Angelou, has been chosen in order to apply a number of figures of speech. The objectives of this part of the paper were to explain and analyze different kinds of figures of speech namely, metaphor, personification, simile, symbol, hyperbole and repetition in the poems.

1010 Metaphor

Metaphor: it is an important kind of figures of speech that made comparison between two different things without using "like, as". It is used mainly in poetry to explain strong emotions and feelings. Instances from the poem Phenomenal Woman can be the following:



1. *Then they swarm around me/ a hive of honey bees.*

In these two lines the writer compared "they" to "bees". By "they" she means the men, or a man who swarm around her, the woman, the same way bees swarm around honey. In another line taken from the same poem, the writer says:

2. *it's the fire in my eyes.*

Again there is a metaphor in this line. She, the writer, compares her eyes to the fire since according to her beliefs they are the same. Due to, her eyes shine like the fire to display and show her power and ability.

3. *through glass which will not shine.*

.....

4. *But if I'm just a shadow to you.*

In these two lines, the metaphorical expressions used in this poem refer to black people or African American as being the ignored or unnoticed class in United States. The word "glass" refers to black people. In fact, people around the world know that a glass should have the characteristics of shining, but this shining is absent for the black people since the writer emphasizes that they or black people are the ones who never give the advantages to the United States. Moreover, the same explanation can be applied on the word "shadow" since Angelou portrays her class as the ignored one.

2. Personification

This literary device describes things and objects that are not human as though it could live, act or feel in the same way as human beings. Examples from the poems by Angelou are the followings:

5. *A rock, a tree, and a river*

These three words are clear examples of personification taken from the poem *On the Pulse of Morning*. The rock, tree and river once were a home to animals that went extinct a long time ago. Furthermore, she emphasizes that with these three elements the world was full of peace harmony and happiness. Generally, the poet is asking people to change their attitudes towards black people and asks for change in in US environmental policy and to have more reasonability towards the earth and its inhabitants. More instances can be seen in the poem *"Caged Bird"*. In the first stanza the writer uses personification when the bird:

6. *Leaps on the back of the wind*

In this line "wind" is personified when it is given the physical structure of a person.

7. *But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams*

Personification is again used in this line from the poem *"Caged Bird"* since the writer explains how the caged bird's dreams are crushed.



3. Simile.

It is the comparison between two kinds of ideas and things that are unlike. In simile, the use of "like" and "as" are necessary so as to differentiate it from metaphor.

8. But still, like dust, I'll rise

In the last line of the first stanza in the poem "Still I Rise" the writer uses simile to show and explain her hidden feelings. Angelou regards herself as being a "dust" so as to emphasize its power since no person can remove it. Another example of simile is found in the same poem:

9. Just like moons and like suns, With the certainty of tides

In these two lines the writer describes her motivation in continuing her life and as a result, this will help her to survive. In addition to, she compares herself and her power to moon and sun as if she wants to encourage her class to survive and have hope in life.

4. Symbol.

It is another literary device that stands for something else. The writer uses it to show an important idea. Maya Angelou used different symbol in her five selected poems. Instances can be seen in the poem "Caged Bird". The title itself can be a symbol of slavery or a person who does not have freedom in his country. Moreover, the cage may be referring to a white person who does not wish liberty to a black one. The writer tries to clarify that she is just like the bird wants freedom in her country.

In another poem "Still I Rise" by Angelou, more symbols are used in order to understand the implicit meaning. The writer uses the title as a symbol of her power and strength, "the power of black people". She wants to prove the fact that she can remain strong and have the ability to stand among the people who do not like her because of her black skin.

Other instances from the poem "Equality" can be:

10. while my drums beat out the message and the rhythms never change

The word "drum" is used as a symbol. In fact, drum symbolizes instrument of the speaker to show her emotion and feeling like a speech or poem. A woman who asks for right and equality in her country.

5. Hyperbole

This literary device has another name that is "overstatement". It is used in poetry to show more exaggeration on something or for emphasis and humorous effect. Instances from the poem "Phenomenal Woman" are the followings:

11. it's in the arch of my back / The sun of my smile, The ride of my breasts,/ the grace of my style.



These lines above indicate the use of hyperbole or overstatement of speaker's body. The speaker exaggerated when she said that she has arch in her back and that her smile is just like sun. Furthermore, she continued in her exaggeration by saying that her breasts are ride and her style is grace. As a matter of fact, the part of speaker's body is not like this description. However, she tries her best to create stress over her real life.

6. Repetition

As the word implies, it is simply the repeating of a word or line in a poem. This literary device is used in poetry to add musical effects to the lines of the poem and it should be repeated within the same line. Writers use this type in order to increase enthusiasm and put a stress or emphasis on something important in their writing. An example from the poem "On the Pulse of Morning" by Angelou can be the followings:

12. I, the rock, I the river, I the tree.

Another example from the poem "Equality" is:

13. Equality, and I will be free

Equality, and I will be free.

2. Social Practice

Ideology

As Maya Angelou is an African-American writer, it seems natural that her people and their position in American society play an important part in her works and especially her poetry. Much of her writing is based on personal experience, like her autobiography. She was a creative and prolific poet who explored various themes in her poems including issues of women, love, loss, music, racism, discrimination and struggle. As a matter of fact, racism and the differences between the white and black are significant themes in Maya Angelou's poems. The clash or struggle between the two classes continued because the white Americans still believe they are born to be superior. This ideology pushes the white to keep maintaining racial discrimination against the black socially, and historically. The black unfortunately suffers from the white domination because racial discrimination leads to other racist practices such as hegemony, lack of identity, and prejudices. At this stage, Maya Angelou uses her poems to show how the black mentally experience those horrible situations in the United State. Throughout this study, it can be noted that the five selected poems by Angelou has words and phrases that have different meanings from their literal meaning, as it is employed by the writer's own style and techniques. As a result, the words have dissimilar hidden ideas and thoughts within themselves, that is to say; they have both, literal and figurative meaning that carries different interpretations. All through the



analysis, the results confirm that there have been frequency differences among all figures of speech. All together share a significant role in creating a comprehensive meaning of the poems and communicating the ideology..

Conclusion

Having knowledge about the beliefs and ideologies of the discourse composers is one of the basic requirements while Doing critical discourse study . Throughout the study, the language has been used in the poems of Maya Angelou has been analyzed in the light of Fairclough's model of CDA. It can be noticed that the text has words and phrases that have different meanings from their literal meaning, as it is employed by the writer's own style and techniques. Thus; the words have different implicit ideas within themselves, that is to say; they have both, literal and figurative meaning that carries different interpretations. Although the language of poetry is figurative, Angelou has made excessive use of figurative language in her five poems that are the data of the current study. The figurative language has enriched poems with a deep implicit meaning that could provide different ideological meanings for the poems by the reader. Throughout the analysis, the results show that all the figures of speech together have an important role in creating implicit meaning of the poem and communicating the ideology.

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