Critical Discourse Analysis of Figurative Language in the Selected Poems by Langston Hughes

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Abstract— **This research is a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of figurative language in the selected poems of Langston Hughes, who is an African American poet, novelist, short story writer, and an active writer closely associated with Harlem Renaissance. It sheds light on the figurative language of the poems that are selected randomly for the purpose of critical analysis. The four selected poems: "Mother to Son, Dreams, A Dream Deferred, and Still Here" 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.**

Index Terms— **Critical discourse analysis, Fairclough's model of critical discourse analysis, Figurative Language.**

I. 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.

II. CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS (CDA)

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. In a similar vein, Fairclough (1992, p. 135) defines CDA as 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.

CDA is not a fixed rule nor a principle, but at most a shared perspective on doing linguistics, semiotic, or discourse analysis. (van Dijk, 1993, p. 131) The objective is to perceive language use as a social practice. The users of language do not function in isolation, but in a set of cultural, social, and psychological frameworks. CDA accepts this social context and studies the connections between textual structures and takes this social context into account and explores the links between textual structures and their function in interaction within the society. Such an analysis is a complex, multi-level one, given the obvious lack of direct, one to one correspondence between text structures and social and literary functions. The relatedness of the complex mechanism of discursive practice and their literary function is frequently and willingly left opaque, especially when the need occurs to create and maintain differences in interpretation. One of the objectives of CDA is to create a framework for decreasing this said opacity.

According to Gee (1999, p. 8), the approach that pays attention to content is CDA. It deals with the way language and discourses are used to achieve social goals and how this plays a role in social change (Bloor and Bloor, 2007, p. 2). In contrast to discourse analysis and text linguistics, CDA focuses on spoken or written texts with a theorization and description of social processes and structures which result in the production of texts. Moreover, it pays attention to the social structures and purposes within which groups or individuals create meanings in the process of interaction with these texts (Fowler and Kress, 1993, p. 2). It is worth mentioning that in CDA, the word "critical" is used with the sense of "critique" (Bloor and Bloor, 2007, p. 5). This means that the analysis can be directed to a positive outcome to highlight its legitimacy and validation as well as to the negative evaluation, which has the aim of characterizing the negative or figuring it out to resist it and, ultimately, to change it. In the rapidly developing field of CDA, as Bloor and Bloor (2007, p. 12) aver, the aim is to show how "linguistic-discursive practices" are connected to the "socio-political structures of power and domination" (Kress, 1990, p. 85). Language, according to CD analysis, is the medium through which a speaker or writer influences and controls the recipients' minds, creates, supports, strengthens, and legitimizes an ideology or maintains a political power (Rogers, 2004, p. 7). As Pennycook (2005, p. 575) maintains, discourses are the product of ideology and social struggle.

III. CDA of Fairclough

His 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 (texts), social practices (orders of discourse), and social structures (Fairclough, 2003). 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). This aim, in particular, remains in his later work that further develops his approach so that it is now one of the most comprehensive frameworks of CDA (Fairclough, 1992; 1993; 1995a; 1995b; Chuliaraki and Fairclough, 1999).

CDA aims to systematically explore often opaque relationships between discursive practices, texts, and events and wider social and cultural structures, relations, and processes. It strives to explore how these non-transparent relationships are a factor in securing power and hegemony, and it draws attention to power imbalances, social inequities, non-democratic practices, and other injustices in hopes of spurring people to corrective actions (Fairclough, 1993, p. 135).

It should be noted that the relationship is bi-directional. Not only is the language use affected by its groundedness within a certain frame of cultural or social practice but also the use of language influences and shapes the literary and stylistic context it finds itself. It can be concluded that discursive practices are constitutive of literary structures, the same way as the literary structures determine discursive practices. CDA recognizes both directions, and in particular, it explores the tension between these two sides of language use, the literary shaped and textual constitutive. Language is a constituent of society on various levels. A division proposed by Fairclough (1993, pp. 134-136) is that of social identity, social relations, and systems of knowledge and belief. All of these levels are affected, only with a variation as far as the strength is concerned.

In his earlier work (1989), Fairclough called his approach to language and discourse as a critical language study. He explains that this is "to help increase consciousness of how language contributes to the domination of some people by others" (Fairclough, 1989, p. 1). He believes that language and society coexist with each other and affects each other (Fairclough, 2000, p. 26). Discourse, to Fairclough, has three main functions: An identity function, a relational function, and an ideational function.

Based on Haliday's (1978) functional approach to language Fairclough provides a three dimensional framework for the analysis of text and discourse: (1) The linguistic description of the formal properties of the text; (2) the interpretation of the relationship between the discursive processes/ interaction and the text, where text is the end product of a process of text production and as a resource in the process of text interpretation; and finally (3) the explanation of the relationship between discourse and social and cultural reality. Fairclough's (1989) analysis has shown that by studying the

forms of the language, we can discover the social processes and also the specific ideology embedded in them. This leads to the exploration of power relations that exist in the society or community. He believes in a "hidden agenda."

IV. 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."

A rhetorical question that is structurally the same as any other question but which, usually, is not designed or is not expected to elicit an answer. It is also another figure of speech crucial for the analysis Beard (2000, p. 52).

Rhetorical questions do not behave like statements, or even like some special kind of questions, but rather like ordinary questions, they allow the same range of answers as can be ordinary questions embedded, and receive the same acceptability judgments as ordinary questions. They form a natural syntactic class with ordinary questions cross-linguistically. In conclusion, there is no compelling evidence supporting a syntactic and/or semantic difference between rhetorical questions and ordinary questions. They are the same syntactic and semantic objects. However, it is observed that the conditions under which Rhetorical questions can be used and answered are different from ordinary questions Waldmüller (2007, p. 128).

V. THE ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

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 researchers.

The textual analysis concerns itself with the figurative use of language. It is broken down into these figures of speech: Metaphor, personification, simile, and rhetorical questions, symbols, repetition, and hyperbole.

VI. DATA ANALYSIS (ANALYSIS OF SELECTED POEMS)

Following Fairclough's (1995, p. 14) idea that any kind of text is suitable for CDA, four poems are chosen for the analyses which are: Mother to son, Dreams, A Dream Deferred, and Still Here by Langston Hughes.

A. Textual Analysis (Figure of Speech)
Metaphor

Metaphor is a literary device in which two entities are compared without using words like "as, like, such" to contribute to the enhancement of the meaning of the poem, an example can be:

1. *"Well, son, I'll tell you:/Life for me ain't been no crystal stair."*

The above line is taken from the poem "Mother to Son" by Langston Hughes. In this poem, the mother describes her life to her son suggesting a universal message of never giving up despite the difficulties of life. It encourages the reader to stand and survive life obstacles. It also can be regarded as a motivating poem to stand discrimination and show the life of African American people under the supremacy of white people. Many instances are found in the selected poems; here are some examples:

"Crystal stair" is a metaphor in which life is compared to crystal stairs which means that life is not as easy as it is shown. You can't easily reach your goal without obstacles because life is full of ups and downs, and through metaphor the poet tries to show these. Furthermore, "crystal stair" can represent different kinds of success such as financial, educational, and so on.

2. *Life is a broken-winged bird*
   That cannot fly
   ...
   Life is a barren field
   Frozen with snow

These lines are taken from the poem entitled "Dreams" by Langston Hughes, in this short directly recommendable poem, he advises and encourages the listeners to adhere to their dreams because life without dreams is like "a broken-winged bird that cannot fly" or life is compared to barren field or frozen field covered with snow. Here, the poet uses metaphor to denote that life without dream is senseless. It is

empty. It lacks progress and development and lacks goals for future. Hence, it would be hopeless one like a barren field, which is unproductive life and lacks happiness.

   3.   *What happens to a deferred dream/… Does it explode?*

Many examples of metaphor can be found in the selected poems; the above line is yet another example. Here, the speaker compares deferred dream to an explosive bomb. It makes a comparison between the destructive power of a bomb and a delayed dream. It shows how it affects the mentality and life of man and causes depression, and even it may lead to suicide and loss of hope.

Simile

Simile is a literary device in which two objects are compared to each other using words like "as, like, such as "to show the comparison. Here are some examples from the data:

   4.   *Does it dry up*
      Like a raisin in the sun?
      Or fester like a sore-
      And then run?
      Does it stink like rotten meant?
      Or crust and sugar over-
      Like a syrupy sweet?
      Maybe it just sags
      Like a heavy load.

These lines are taken from a poem entitled "A Dream Deferred" by Langston Hughes in which the poet uses a lot of similes to suggest that what could occur to our dreams if we postpone it. He encourages the reader to pursue their dreams, even if it is not achievable easily. The poem suggests that delaying working for your goal results in regret. Here are some examples of the use of simile in the above poem, the poet makes comparison using (like) to indicate that your dream will dry and die like a raisin in the sun which is a kind of dried fruit. When it is dried in the sun, it would be useless or fester like a sore. A dream is compared to a wound that is not treated in time. It festers and leads to infection and death. It is also compared to decayed meat that is disgusting, and it would be useless too. It is also compared to crust and sugar over like a syrupy sweet?

A deferred dream is described a" syrup sweet" that has gone crusty and useless. Similarly, dreams if it is not achieved, it will be like a harsh substance in our mind. It has a hazardous effect on our life. Hence, the dream would be like a heavy load on one's shoulder that makes life difficult for him or her if it is not fulfilled. It might be so heavy on his mind and preoccupy his mind and lead to psychological suffering and lethargy.

Personification

Personification is giving the attributes of human beings to inanimate objects. Instances from the poems by Langston Hughes can be:

   5.   *Hold fast to dreams/for if dreams die…/for when dreams go*

Here, dream is personified as a person since the poet attributes human characteristics like (death, and go) to an inanimate object like (dream) to tell us we should not fancy, but instead, we should work hard to achieve our goals. He

affirms that when dream dies and goes life will be empty like a barren field.

Hyperbole

Hyperbole is an overstatement or exaggerated language that deforms facts by making them appear much bigger than they are if looked at objectively. Instances from the poems by Langston Hughes can be:

   6.   *My hopes the wind does scattered*
      Snow has friz me/sun has baked me

It shows the hardship of the black people whose hope has been scattered by a violent wind. It suggests the discrimination and difficulties that they face. This shows the harsh conditions and circumstances of their lives that were frozen. It means lacked all the rights and "baked" means burned because of different tortures that he has been through, but still, he is there. It denotes the idea of being determined and surviving racism and difficulties in life.

Rhetorical questions

Rhetorical question that is structurally the same as any other question but which, usually, is not designed or is not expected to elicit an answer instead they make a statement or assertion by asking a question.

Instances from the poems by Langston Hughes can be:

   7.   *What happens to a dream deferred?*
      Does it dry up
      Like a raisin in the sun?
      Or fester like a sore-
      And then run?
      Does it stink like rotten meant?
      Or crust and suger over-
      Like a syrupy sweet?
      Maybe it just sags
      Like a heavy load.
      Or does it explode?

The poet uses the rhetorical questions to suggest the answer or to make a statement by asking a question; the questions are full of simile, metaphor, and images that indirectly show the brutal experience as rhetorical questions are inherently indirect. The poet has no intention of eliciting answers or information from the reader in posing rhetorical questions rather wants to make an assertion. It shows the feeling of African American people who are experiencing different difficulties in their lives because of their race.

The poet uses rhetorical questions to show the destructive psychological impact of a deferred dream. The dream also refers to the dream of African American people, in the North, to have a better life in a peaceful land of coexistence without racial segregation. African American people faced the feeling of disappointment, hatred, rage, fear, and alienation and the oppression that they experienced is like the depression of lost dream.

Symbol

Symbol is an object, animate or inanimate, which represents or stands for something else. The word (dream) that is used in this poem symbolizes "hope, goal, and wish," anything that we want to achieve in our life.

8.   *It had tacks in it*
     And splinters.
     And boards torn up,
     And places with no carpet on the floor-Bare
9.   *Snow has friz me/sun has baked me*

Here, snow symbolizes white people, which alludes to mistreatment and discrimination that caused mental and psychological suffering for black people, whereas the sun symbolizes strong power over the black that shows the superiority of white people.

Throughout the lines of the poem, different objects are used to symbolized misery, atrocity, and difficulties of life. The poet uses "tacks" which means sharp nails that were on her road while climbing the stair of life. He also used splinters that mean a small sharp piece of wood or glass to symbolize the difficulties that she faced in her life. Then, she continues and tells us about her life that lacked so many facilities symbolized in words such as "bare floor" and "dark hallways" that she had to go through. It denotes poverty and her social position because of her race.

Repetition

As the word suggests, it is a repetition of a phrase or a line within the text of the poem. It adds musical effects to the poem or text of the poem. It also has a rhetorical effect in the poem. It is used to emphasize the idea and call the reader's attention to the idea. An instance from the corpus can be:

10.   *Hold fast to dreams…*

In the second stanza, the same line is repeated *Hold fast to dreams…*

Another instances can be:

11.   *"Life for me ain't been no crystal stair"*

The poem ends with the same line: *"Life for me ain't been no crystal stair"*

B. Social Practice

Ideology

Social analysis is one explanatory contribution to the discourse. This can be apprehended in ideology. In terms of ideology, one may notice that such poems usually attempt to display some of the ideological perspectives. The African American people are marginalized because of their race they are suppressed and oppressed groups in society. They face discrimination, hegemony, and lack of identity. Therefore, the dream of having equality must not be delayed. The racial discrimination must be ended with the goal of an established society in which everyone enjoys freedom, justice, equality, and fair treatment of African Americans and Americans (Raj, 2018, pp. 6-9). This poem shows the struggle of a mother who represents common people of any race or class or social group, who tries hard to overcome the difficulties of her life. She tries to overcome the difficulties that stand on her road to achieve her goal. Hence, the poem from a universal idea moves to show the plight of African American people since the speaker of the poem using the dialect of that race. The poem shows the struggle of an inferior race who seeks for racial equality in the United States. Their life is described as

a stair full of tacks and splinters along with torn up board that shows the obstacles that the Black people faced especially in the early 20th century when racial discrimination was reinforced by the law of Jim Crow Era. They faced injustice because of their races and the struggle of this mother shows their struggle for equality (Rose and Ruby 1998, p. 180).

In these poems, the brutality of life and emotional suffering is surpassed by determination and cling to life and being optimistic. As the writer suggests in his poems, difficult circumstances and atrocities of life could scar, batter, freeze, cut, burn, wound, hurt, etc., a person. However, when that person is optimistic, energetic psychologically, and a high spirited to overcome the atrocities of life he can overcome and stand such a circumstance. Accordingly, Hugh states that such a kind of perseverance is a sort of "day to after day heroism of work and struggle and the facing of drudgery and insult that some son or daughter might get through school and acquire the knowledge that leads to a better life where opportunities are brighter and work is less drab, less humiliating, and less hard" (qtd. in Harper, 1995, p. 11).

Such a kind of poem with such a kind of strong and hopeful characters is inspirational poems for the whole humanity in general specifically African American people. Thus, his poems address all human beings and highlight the universal theme of being brave and optimistic to overcome whatever man faces.

VII. Conclusion

Doing critical discourse study requires a vast amount of knowledge concerning the beliefs and ideologies of the discourse composers. Throughout the study, the language has been used in the poems of Langston Hughes 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. In this way; 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, Langston has made excessive use of figurative language in his four 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 there have been frequency differences among all figures of speech, the symbol is the most frequently occurring figure of speech. Second; simile then metaphor, rhetoric, and hyperbole, personification and repetition have similar range of occurrences. 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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