



A Critical Stylistic Analysis of the Ideological Positioning in Some Selected Poems by John Donne

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Abstract

This paper deals with the ideological positioning of the English poet John Donne in a selected poems of his i.e *Holy Sonnet X*, as regards the theme of death found therein. The researchers adopt an emerging branch of stylistics, called Critical Stylistics, as proposed by Jeffries (2010) in order to uncover the ideologies of the author regarding the topic concerned and how linguistic choices are used to slant ideas. The model is comprised of ten tools of analysis which, upon being applied to the selected data, have shown how the poet exploits language resources in order to pass his ideology and influence his readers. In this paper, the workings of only one tool are presented as applied to a certain portion of the data.

Key words:

Critical Stylistics, Critical Discourse Analysis, Ideology

1.1 Critical Stylistics: Definition

Critical stylistics is a term that points to the stylistic activity exploring and enquiring into the methods in which social meanings are demonstrated through language. This stylistic inclination is mainly stimulated and shaped



by critical linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis (Norgaard et al 2010: 11). It is largely attributed to Lesley Jeffries' work that builds on work in CDA, which utilizes various methods of analysis in order to help "show up (...) connections between language, power and ideology" (Fairclough 1989; cited in Evans and Schuller (2015:132), but follows on the footsteps of Widdowson's (1998) critique of the discipline. Critical stylistics attempts to reply to the question "what the text is doing" by using an array of linguistic tools of analysis to uncover the ideologies which underlie literary and non-literary texts. It also bases its framework on Halliday's theory of grammar as social semiotic and the critical linguistics which is based upon.

1.2 Background and Objective

The term 'Critical Stylistics' was invented by Jeffries (2007) when she tried to investigate the dominant discourses on the female body within the society in terms of the way language both constraints and enables women to live their lives (Ulrike 2013:75). Critical stylistics sets itself the objective of combining the strengths and merits of both stylistics and CDA for the sake of unpacking the way writers embed their ideologies, as well as other social concepts, into their writing , be it literary or of the non-canonical type. Critical Stylistics attempts to make a connection between CDA and stylistics. CDA claims to display how language is involved in social relations of power and domination, which are non-obvious (Coffey 2013: 30). It is chiefly utilized to examine factual e.g political texts, and most frequently from the media outlets. Stylistics, on its part, which is generally established as 'the study of style', essentially deals with analyzing 'literary language' in order to spell out



the association between language and artistic fiction, even though this could necessitate the illustration of ideologies (ibid.).

Critical stylistics provides remedy for the broken thread between stylistics (textual choices) and CDA, that is to say, ideology. Critical Stylistics was originated at Huddersfield University and initiated by the publication of the book *Critical Stylistics: The Power of English* (Jeffries 2010), on which this current study is based on in terms of its adopted model. Critical Stylistics tries to "assemble the main general function that a text has in representing realities"(Jeffries 2010: 14). It presents a list of tools, which are projected to be more comprehensive than any other account in the available body of work in CDA, even though it is not necessarily wholly complete (ibid.:1).

Roger Fowler (1986) was one of the pioneering advocates of the critical school. Simpson (1993) also has touched upon the connection between stylistics and linguistics in his book *Language, Ideology and Point of view*. Both of these scholars have developed tools for the critical text analysis and Simpson employed his own methods in stylistics, all before Lesley Jeffries published her abovementioned book in (2010) amalgamating CDA and stylistics with a special prominence placed on the actual linguistic manifestation of social meaning, along with the required tools of analysis (Dorpar 2015: 1).

These tools, which are called 'textual conceptual functions' (TCF), set the objective of revealing the implicit ideologies created by the linguistic choices that the text producer makes. They provide a developed and more thorough system of methods, which CDA currently lacks (Jeffries 2010:1-2).



Staying true to stylistic methods, critical stylistics utilizes views and discoveries of formal linguistics as a foundation for the explication of texts; and as with the latest movements, it is defined by a growing concern reaching far off the boundaries of description and canonical literature (Alaghbary 2014: 156). Critical stylisticians utilize the "linguistic features that are already well-described in very many semantic-grammatical theories and models "as an analyzing tool for" the different ways in which texts allow/ask us to conceptualize those topics they are addressing, and to provide some means of accessing this representational practice" (Jeffries 2010:14). They make visible the deceitful ways language is exploited and how ideologies are "communicated, reproduced, constructed and negotiated using language"(ibid.: 5). What also should be mentioned here is that the arena for this thorough investigation is wide, encompassing the media legal, corporate and political texts, all while including in their body of work and interest the traditional stylistic concern with canonical literature.

2. Differences with CDA

One of the principal flaws attributed to CDA is that it contains a lack of a comprehensive, complete account of tools for the analyst to utilize, which can be seen as a drawback of it being a multidisciplinary field. Critical stylistics, in turn, tries to counter this flaw through the introduction of a systemic analytical model which integrates tools from stylistics and critical linguistics, for the sake of unpacking the "linguistic choices of text producers and their possible ideological motifs and implications" (Coffey 2013: 30). It should be noted that the introduction of a more systematic framework improves the linguistic characteristic of replicability of analysis (one of the



most important and required characteristics that a stylistic study should possess as stated in Simpson (2004), which in turn may give way for more objectivity (ibid.:31). This needs to be highlighted due to the fact that one of the most notorious criticisms aimed at CDA (by Widdowson in particular) was that CDA uses subjective methods when it comes to the selection and interpretation of data.

However, critical stylistics does not credit itself with creating the emphasis on texts' ideological underpinning or the diversity of text types. As a matter of fact, during the last two decades of the twentieth century and the first decade of this millennium, many approaches emerged through the linguistic work concerning the language of politics and ideology in the media in particular, all put below the designates of CL and CDA.

Jeffries (2010:12) remarks that CL and CDA have not, however, presented a coherent framework of analysis that can bring to the surface the hidden ideologies found in texts. For this reason, she sets out to introduce a list consisting of ten analytical tools or the sake of the textual examination of ideology in order to recompense for the lack of comprehensiveness found in this area. It should be stressed that this list is not completely new, for it is assembled as an eclectic model of tools, some of which were created by scholars such as Folwer (1991), Simpson (1993) and Fairclough (1989, 1992). What Jeffries does instead, is to “offer functions in the participle form to avoid the technicality of the linguistic features popular in the literature of CL and CDA” (Alaghbari 2014: 158).

As to the question of where the thinner, more accurate demarcation line should be drawn in order to separate or distinguish between critical



stylistics and CDA; the answer is that even though stylistics and CDA share close origins as manifested in the work of Roger Fowler, who is an influential stylistician as well as being the one of the founders of CDA, "the unavoidable basis of all stylistics remains the text itself" (Jeffries and McIntyre 2010:15). From this, one can conclude that critical stylistics, being a strand of stylistics (Jeffries 2014: 408), is mainly concerned with uncovering the ideological underpinnings of texts and the way language is manipulated in order to pass the certain ideological agenda of the language user, be it through literary (poems, novels etc) or non-literary (newspapers, political manifestoes etc) texts, without regard to what happens outside of the text, unlike CDA where the social, historical, visual etc. and such text-external dimensions are placed at the core of the analysis. It should be noted that Jeffries' view that stylistics analysis is "useful and insightful when the data (was) non-fiction as when it (was) literary in nature" (ibid.) is shared by all the prominent practitioners of stylistics such as Verdonk, who goes even further suggesting that literary criticism should be incorporated into linguistic criticism, given the fact that all texts, whether literary or non-literary, can be seen to share the same characteristics in terms of both being "social documents in which ideological positions are implicitly or explicitly expressed"(Verdonk 2002: 74).

Being the main authority on the subject, Jeffries (2010,2014), after acknowledging the debt critical stylistics owes to CDA, contends that what really motivated her in order to formulate the critical stylistics approach is her firm belief that the basis of linguistics' achievements is "its initial insistence on the science foundations that underpinned it" (Jeffries 2015: 1). Evidently, this goes in contrast with the fact that, as she contends, the main



protagonists of CDA "largely adhere to particular form of Marxist/socialist politics"(Jeffries 2014: 408) which eventually made her question whether she is willing to "abandon some of the hard-won scientific credibility by giving up on all attempts at objectivity, rigour and replicability", as pointed out in Simpson (2004: 3-4). This is what Jeffries sees as the point where critical stylistics parts company from CDA, due to the fact that the latter's protagonists think the abovementioned qualities are unattainable. (Jeffries 2014: 410). Another way in which critical stylistics differs from CDA is in it(the former) having "a framework to guide its practice which draws together insights from a number of models, but is unified at the broadest level of metafunctions".(ibid:412). As is known, it is in CDA's nature to advocate the necessity of eclecticism. As Wodak and Meyer (2009: 2) declare: "CDA is (...) not interested in investigating a linguistic unit per se but in studying social phenomena which are necessarily complex and thus require multidisciplinary and multi-methodical approach".

This emphasis on eclectic analytical theses and procedures makes this interdisciplinary field of study invested in through and exhaustive, linguistic examination. That is why there is a clear lack of a comprehensive toolkit for the analysis of texts.

Another subtle but important point is one which pertains to the word 'critical' in critical stylistics. It is a well-known fact that the 'critical' in CDA is hoped to indicate a specifically socialist, and probably Marxist, view of the analysis of language. However, this is by no means intended by Lesley Jeffries as she makes that point clear (Jeffries 2010, 2014). Rather, what is intended by the word 'critical' in critical stylistics only as a procedure of



unveiling the ideology in any text, regardless of one's personal opinions, which are a matter of choice.

3. Ideology

Critical stylistics contends that all texts are ideologically influenced, be it consciously or unconsciously; in other words, it is invested in revealing and uncovering the covered ideologies in discourse and texts (Olaluwoye 2015: 88). It presents a set of analytical tools which enables the analyst to shine the light on hidden ideologies in texts in an objective manner. The major accomplishment of critical stylistics is providing a more encompassing and methodical framework of an analytical tool (when compared to that of CDA)(*ibid.*).

It is of fundamental importance to make it clear that all discourse analysts and linguists (stylisticians) view all discourse as ideologically-packed (Jeffries 2010:8). Therefore, it would not be exaggerated to state that this latter point is considered an inevitable fact of all discourse. This of course does not mean that, like it is taken in political circles and the mass media, that 'ideology' as a term is necessarily associated with politically motivated goals and self-centered intentions (*ibid.*). At the same time, it is crucial to bear in mind that not all ideology is equal; evidently, some ideologies are of damaging potential, others could be moral or righteous, and others could be a matter of cultural confines (*ibid.*). The point to stress is that no discourse can be free of ideas, and thus of ideology. Therefore, one can maintain that ideologies are carried through language and are either explicitly or implicitly expressed.



Subramaniam (2008:40) states that the word 'ideology' is "indeterminate and tricky". He goes on to explain that this is related to what might be understood of it; either as very inclusive or as covering only certain elements (ibid.). He contends that the theoretical constructs which pertain to ideology and ultimately give it its outlook is what he calls "a shared or collective consciousness...a belief system" which attaches members of a particular community together (ibid.). Ideology comes in many forms, some of which are ideology as collective consciousness, ideology related to religion, and ideology as manifested by power and domination which involves the study of ideology as an instrument of domination in society (ibid.:40-41).

4. Adopted Model

Jeffries (2010) proposes a comprehensive model that incorporates work from such authors as Simpson (1993), Halliday (1985) *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* and Short (1996) *Exploring the Language of Poems, Plays and Prose*. In its entirety, it consists of ten tools which are: Naming and describing;

Representing Actions/ Events/ States. (Simpson's Transitivity model 1993); Equating; Exemplifying and Enumerating; Prioritizing; Implying and Assuming; Negating; Hypothesizing. (Modality as in Simpson 1993 which is based on Halliday 1985); Presenting others' Speech and Thought. (Short 1996); **Representing Time, Space and Society** (which will be applied). The lines to be analyzed are taken from the poem *Holy Sonnet X* by John Donne.



5. The Analysis

In this poem, the author places the reader in the viewing position of the consciousness behind the text which is the author himself. The reader is obliged to see himself involved in this address (from the author to the explicit audience; death) and to adopt the stance of the author along with his ideas regarding the poem's subject. The view point used largely remains constant (except in line 14 where the author talks about death in third person reference, before shifting back to direct address). The author uses the personal pronouns: *thou, thee, thy* when addressing death (barring one exception)> while , in order to include the readers in his viewpoint, the poet employs the personal pronouns *me, our, us, we* to talk about the living, making himself as though speaking on their behalf to a direct mutual enemy. When referring to the dead, he uses the demonstrative 'those' and the possessive 'their' in order to create the deictic center which is himself and those he represents.

And soonest our best men with thee do go, (7)

One short sleep past, we wake eternally (13)

Regarding time, the poet uses the time adverbial 'soonest', and the adverbs 'past' and 'eternally' all having the desired contextualized meaning in the point of view of the poet and those he stands for (i.e 'soonest', line 7: immediately; 'past', line 13: preceded by 'one short sleep'; 'eternally' line 13 :everlastingly). When referring to death, the poet uses the adverb 'no more' in order to project the extinction of death in the hypothesized afterlife.

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee (1)

Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me. (4)



And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die. (14)

When addressing death, other than using the personal pronoun, the poet uses the address form (i.e name) of the addressee as the most commonly used in four instances (lines 1, 4, 14). What is worth noting is when the poet uses the adjective 'poor' to modify the noun 'death' in the second instance, so as to demonstrate his evaluation of the object.

As for the verb tenses, the poet primarily uses the present tense (be, art, think'st, overthrow, die, kill, flow, go, dwell, sleep, swell'st, wake) in which the temporal deictic center is made to be of 'all time'. Even if one is reading the poem a month, a year, or centuries after it was written, it still encompasses all, thus expressing actions or states habitually performed of generally exists no matter the time. This goes by without saying that there is a projection to the future as manifested by the use of the adverbs (yet, eternally) and the first person, modal future verb *shall* (and shalt).

It must be said, therefore, that all of this helps create a particular set of effects that construct a mental image of the hypothesized world which will have some or all of the features identical to the one we inhabit in order to rest assure the readers, and poet himself, that death is a mere transitory period before the other world. In the process of using deixis in such a way, the reader is drawn towards the deictic center of the first person speaker (the poet) ,thus making him under the influence of the speaker's ideology, as the reader places himself that point in the deictic field created by the text.

6. Conclusion



The analysis shows that through the tool of *Representing Time, Place and Society*, the poet places the reader in the viewing position of the consciousness behind the text, which is the poet himself, thus obliging the reader to adopt the poet's opinions and stance regarding the subject as the reader is placed in the deictic center of the first person speaker i.e the poet and so influencing the reader by the speaker's ideology. Moreover, generally speaking, The ideological stance of an author in (literary forms) can be unveiled in an objective analysis based on linguistic criteria without having to compromise the characteristics of being objective, rigorous and replicable which are associated with linguistic (stylistic) research.

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Appendix

Holy Sonnet X

Death, be not proud, though some have called thee (1)
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be, (5)
Much pleasure; then from thee much more must flow,
And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.
Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell, (10)
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?



One short sleep past, we wake eternally

And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die. (14)

تحليل اسلوبي نقدي للموقف العقائدي لبعض اشعار "جون دون"

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خلاصة البحث

تقوم هذه الورقة البحثية بتبني دراسة اسلوبية نقدية لتحليل بضعة قصائد مختارة للشاعر الانكليزي جون دون من أجل بيان التمرکز الأيديولوجي لهذا الشاعر في قصائده المختارة بخصوص ظاهرة الموت. يتبنى الباحث هنا في اسلوبه البحثي المنهج الذي طرحته عالمة لزي جفريز (2010), والذي يحتوي على عشر أدوات تحليلية لغوية للغرض المطلوب. وقد اختار الباحث ثمان إحدى هذه الأدوات لغرض التحليل; وبناءً على نتائج التحليل في الدراسة المعنية من الممكن إستنتاج الطرق التي يسلكها الشاعر من أجل تمرير افكاره الى المتلقي وإقناعه بها مما تتيحه اللغة الأنكليزية لمستخدميها.

الكلمات الأساسية: الأسلوبية النقدية, تحليل الخطاب النقدي, الأيديولوجيا

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