Critical Discourse Analysis of Figurative Language inE.E. Cummings's "Crepuscule"

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Article Info	Abstract
Article History Received: August 02,2020 Accepted: September 29, 2020 Published : January 13, 2021 *Keywords* Discourse, Dimension, Context, Text. **DOI:** 10.5281/zenodo.4439440	*This paper uses Critical Discourse Analysis methodology in order to analyze the language use of "Crepuscule," a poem by the American poet E.E. Cummings (1894-1962). The study uses the stipulation that "text within context" creates a textual world as a point of departure to carry out a detailed analysis of Cummings's poem in light of Critical Discourse Analysis framework. The findings of the paper assess the hidden ideological meanings of the poem as well as reveal the fictional world in the text.*

1. Introduction

Discourse is a method of linguistic investigation which seeks to highlight the behind-the-scenes intentions and motives that are encoded in words with the ultimate goal of intensifying, reducing, or enhancing the effect of these words. As one may imagine, such method of investigation is quite broad and applicable to a number of disciplines since it "integrates a whole palette of meanings" (Widdowson, 1995:42), that extend from core disciplines, such as linguistics and philosophy, to broader ones, such as sociology and anthropology. However, for the purpose of this paper, the use of the terms discourse is primarily meant to refer to "data that is liable for empirical analysis" (Titscher et.al. 1998: 44). In other words, The main focus of analyzing discourse in this paper relates to process and action. It follows, then, that discourse in this paper envisages a wider swathe of analysis than "text," since the term discourse may be used to "refer to the whole process of social interaction of which a text is just a part" (Fairclough 2001: 24).

According to Stubbs (1983: 1), discourse is "language above the sentence or above the clause … [and] … the study of discourse is the study of any aspect of language use." Furthermore, as Fairclough (2001:8) 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."

Because of the flowery language with which it is written and the extensive imaginative aspect of its nature, literature has been the primary source of investigation by discourse analysis. However, literature has not been the only field of investigation by discourse analysis. Readers who are eager to unearth further political, social or cultural significance from a literary text have often resorted to discourse analysis to carry out a more systematic endeavor to reach to those meanings. Such analysis is facilitated by the fact the language plays a central role in the production of these literary texts. Of course, language not only plays a central role in these literary texts, it also contributes to the creative artistry of these texts.

In this paper, a literary text, E.E. Cummings's "Crepuscule," is analyzed using the techniques of Discourse Analysis. The paper will show that using Discourse Analysis helps unearth new meanings to certain aspects of the poem. Such revelation is especially important given the already-established significance of the poem in the history of modern American poetry. In addition, applying the techniques of Discourse Analysis on this important poem will exhibit the felicity with which these techniques work when applied to a complex literary text, such as "Crepuscule." Stated differently, the purpose of this paper is twofold: to demonstrate the effectiveness of Discourse Analysis as a method of systematic analytical method; and, secondly, to employ these techniques to learn more about E.E. Cummings's "Crepuscule."

Certainly, these twofold goals are enabled by the very promise and structure of Discourse Analysis. As a method of inquiry, Discourse Analysis goes beyond the surface meanings and the superficial structures of a

text, and digs deeper into meanings and delves further into formal structures in order to reveal newer meanings and provide more novel structures. More importantly, the techniques of Discourse Analysis lay bare the otherwise hidden ideologies, assumptions, or biases that are imbedded in the text in hand.

Critical Discourse Analysis

As an interdisciplinary approach to the study of discourse, Critical Discourse Analysis investigates language as one of the forms of social practice. The practitioners who engage in Critical Discourse Analysis assume that there is an important relationship between linguistic and non-linguistic forms of social practice in that these forms, to a large extent, constitute and inform each other. Using this assumption as a point of departure, scholars working in the tradition of Critical Discourse Analysis study the ways by which power relations in a certain society (and in a defined context) are established, maintained, and enacted in language use. In a finer sense, then, Critical Discourse Analysis differs from discourse analysis in that "it highlights issues of power asymmetries, manipulation, exploitation, and structural inequities in domains such as education, media, and politics" (Mahmood, 2014:67).

However, such stipulation does not imply that Critical Discourse Analysis is a set of fixed or unchanging rules that may be applied blindly to yield anticipated results. Nor is Critical Discourse Analysis, in fact, even a set of defined principles that lead to preconceived conclusions. Critical Discourse Analysis is "at most a shared perspective on doing linguistics, semiotic or discourse analysis" (Van Dijk 2001: 131). In other words, there is an underlying assumption is the analysis carried out by the Critical Discourse Analysis techniques, which explains that users of language do not use language as mere strings of words stitched together in isolation. Language use happens within a context with complex, but palpable, context that has social, cultural, political and economic contours.

This context is equally important for the interpretation of language use. In other words, this human context is important for both the production and consumption of language. On the other hand, however, language use is not necessarily bound by this context. This is so because language use happens not on a simple level of one-to-one correspondence, but rather at a more complex, multi-level framework. This multi-level framework extends to, say, the relationship between textual structures of a literary work and the literary functions of that work.

Certainly, such multi-level framework of reference might imply that there is an opaque relationship governing the Critical Discourse Analysis approach. Indeed, early theoreticians paid attention to this aspect, and Fairclough (1993: 135) explained that Critical Discourse Analysis must be perceived as a way to "systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between discursive practice, events and texts, and wider literary and critical structures, relations and processes."

Such explanation is acutely important because it negates the implication that language use is unproblematic. Jaworski and Coupland (1992:86) say that "our words are never neutral they carry power that reflects interest of speakers." The goal of Critical Discourse Analysis is to unearth otherwise hidden meanings and ideologies that are not necessarily declared by the text. Indeed, fetching hidden messages (and ideologies or ideas) in texts that are otherwise familiar and uneventful was the driving force behind the proliferation of Critical Discourse Analysis techniques which developed as a reaction to the dominant paradigms of interpretation which were primarily formal in the 1960s and the 1970s. At its heart, Critical Discourse Analysis is a form of hermeneutics of suspicion that seeks to unveil ideologies imbedded in written or oral language use.

In order to meet its goals effectively, Critical Discourse Analysis methodology needs to implement a number of prerequisites:

1- Because of its emerging status, Critical Discourse Analysis needs to prove that it reaches research resolutions more effectively that other comparable methodologies. This success will ensure its acceptability;
2- Critical Discourse Analysis must maintain its focus on fulfilling its initial promise, i.e. investigating political issues and socioeconomic problems embedded in texts more forcefully than other paradigms do;
3- Critical Discourse Analysis must maintain its interdisciplinary appeal by celebrating critical analysis that is empirically informed and socially oriented;
4- Instead of merely describing the structures and functions of discourse, Critical Discourse Analysis must strive to explain structures, functions and influences in terms of the relationship between language use and social action;
5- More importantly, Critical Discourse Analysis must remain focused on studying the ways language use enables and is enabled by the social forces or society and the statures of power differentials.

What we can deduce from this layout is, in essence, that the relationship between language use and its sociopolitical context is mutually constituted. Any form of social practice, including style, is subject to certain restrictions and opportunities provided bt language. By the same measure, language realizes its potential and, at

the same time, meets its limits through the parameters of social practice. Indeed, "the use of language influences and shapes the literary and stylistic context it finds itself in" (Wallace, 2015: 54).

Critical Discourse Analysis recognizes these opportunities and limitations. Laybourn (2016:134-136) famously proposed a framework for these opportunities and limitations by distinguishing between social relations, social identity, systems of beliefs and categories of knowledge. All these are at play in any given text. In addition, they are at more intensive play in literary texts because of the metaphorical uses of language and the richness of imagery and allusions in these texts. Simply put, the intertextuality within literary texts, whether to other parts of the same work or to entities beyond the word of the page, both calls for and enriches the Critical Discourse Analysis methodologies.

One point that needs to be addressed here is the "critical" element in the term, Critical Discourse Analysis. The presence of that denomination implies that the methodology of investigation is critical, in the sense that it seeks to reveal causality and connections. "Critical implies showing connections and causes which are hidden; it also implies intervention, for example providing resources for those who may be disadvantaged through change" (Fairclough, 2001: 9).

Norman Fairclough's assessment is especially important, not least because, as Van Dijk reminds us, he "contributed many articles and books that establish Critical Discourse Analysis as a direction of research, and that focus on various dimensions of power." For Fairclough, Critical Discourse Analysis is a "direction of research," and not a rigid analytical model. This openness yields greater flexibility in investigating texts since the results are not know prior to rigorous investigation. Such direction of research makes studying texts both rich and worthwhile. The richness manifests itself in the perspectives that become possible for delicate and covert expressions, and, because of their covert component, "they are elusive of direct challenge, facilitating what Kress calls the retreat into mystification and impersonality" (Batstone 1995: 198-199).

This explanation leaves one important aspect to be investigated: how Critical Discourse Analysis is undertaken in practical terms. One poignant example can be found in Fairclough's excellent work, Language and Power (1989), in which he proposed to "examine how the ways in which we communicate are constrained by the structures and forces of those social institutions within which we live and function" (Fairclough 1989: vi). In this book, Fairclough lays out the methodological foundations of Critical Discourse Analysis, and details his views on the nature of discourse in relation to textual analysis (Ibid.: 24-26).

According to Fairclough, there are three levels of discourse. First, there are the social factors, which are the social conditions of production and interpretation that contribute to the initiation and interpretation of a text. Secondly, there are the mechanisms that facilitate the production and interpretation of a text, i.e., how a certain text was produced and how it was interpreted. Thirdly, there is the actual product of these processes, i.e., the text itself. In accordance with these three levels, Fairclough assigns three stages of Critical Discourse Analysis to correspond to each of the levels paid out above. The stage that deals with the formal properties of the text is called "description." The stage that deals with how a text relates to interaction is labelled as "interpretation." Finally, "explanation" studies the relationship between the social context of the text and the text's interpretation (Fairclough 1989: 26).

Research Methodology

The method of analysis adopted in this research is based on Fairclough's framework of critical discourse analysis (2001), which brings together the analysis of the origination of the text, properties of the text and the context, and investigating social practice and discursive practice with the aim of carving out the relationship among language, power, and ideology.

More specifically, Fairclough's method focuses on eight aspects of a text and context:

1- Critical Discourse Analysis investigates social issues;
2- Power relations remain primarily discursive;
3- Culture and society are constituted by discourse;
4- Discourse carries out ideological work;
5- Discourse has historical roots;
6- The relationship between text and society is mediated;
7- Discourse analysis does explanations and interpretations;
8- Discourse constitutes one of the forms of social action.

The analysis below attempts to synthesize these elements by weaving between the micro and the macro units of analysis proposed by Fairclough, as demonstrated in his work (Fairclough 1989: 97). Such methodology will aid in unveiling unspoken ideologies and hidden meanings that would otherwise remain covert that, according to Kress, "retreat into mystification and impersonality" (Batstone, 1995: 57). The primary analytical tool in this paper is in line with the "three-dimensional method of discourse analysis," introduced by Norman Fairclough, namely the "language text, spoken or written, discourse practice (text production and text interpretation), and the socio-cultural practice." As Fairclough himself characterizes this method, it leads to unearthing the "linguistic description of the language text, interpretation of the relationship between the

117

discursive processes and the text, and explanation of the relationship between the discursive processes and the social processes" (Fairclough 1989: 97).

Data Analysis

The poem being analyzed, "Crepuscule," is creatively written: it is composed of staggered lines without the use of punctuation marks which makes pinning down a concrete meaning quite challenging. Luckily, however, the syntax of the poem is not as confusing as it appears in many of Cummings's other poems. That said, the poem uses paradoxical statements more intensely compared to Cummings's other poems. Such use might be justified if we take into consideration that the subject of the poem is, in fact, a reflection of the impermanence and perplexity of beauty. Still, the poem does not provide any tangible statements. Instead, it reads like a string of possibilities. To read the poem meaningful, that is, one needs to follow suggestions.

That understanding might help decipher the way by which the poem is structured. The poem is rife with symbolism that depends on the succession of monosyllabic descriptors. As with his other poems, Cummings borrows human emotions to describe inanimate objects. For example, flowers are described as "unwell," because they are "sickly" and they appear "poorly" and "sad." These sad and sickly emotions are paired with description of natural phenomena, such as the "howling" storm and the "crimson" horizon.

The rhythm of the poem is technically known as Anapestic Diameter with Substitutions, which allows for reading with double beats. These double beats mimic the beats of a human heart. The rhythm intensifies and augments the relationship between the human condition and object classification that Cummings aims for in the poem. Reading how the flowers appear "poorly" and "sad" in a rhythm that mimics an organic human experience adds a unifying thematic aspect to the poem that makes it structurally alive. Stated differently, the form of the poem, i.e., its structure, is concomitantly encoded in its theme.

This intrinsic unity between structure and subject matter is furthered by the fact that the poem's title "Crepuscule," which is an antique word for the beginning of twilight, alerts the reader to the poem's setting in a border time that is both actual and proverbial. The imagery of the poem alternates between sleeplessness and full awakening. It launches into the depth of dreams and reflects on the more tangible of lived experience at the same time. The poem, Cummings musingly tells his readers, is like this state of "mystery of my flesh," which wants to both sleep and remain awake at the rise of the twilight. The fruits of subjecting a literary text to a Critical Discourse Analysis methodology presents themselves right after analyzing the first few lines of the poem, but it becomes quite important and, indeed, necessary to understand the poem when we get to the twilight scene.

Results

The paper analyzes the poem described above, and it attempts to provide a description to the world inside the poem created by the different rhetorical and non-rhetorical moves within the text. This attempt is carried out using the methodologies and techniques of Critical Discourse Analysis. It is observed that, on the one hand, the poem creates its own world through language and, on the other hand, this freshly-created world resonates with the outside world as we know it, also through the use of language. In other words, the poem creates a world that correspondence to the style and ideology of the writer, but that world still cannot completely escape the poet's actual world. This is one of the manifestations of ideology, i.e., no matter how closely one wants to stick to lived reality, he or she has to escape into other imaginative worlds. By the same measure, no matter how hard one tries to live in an alternative reality of imaginative expanse, he or she will be forced to refer back to real life. Such is the ideological structure of current societies—such as the structure of nations, the way work is structured, how texts are read, etc. The poem shows that there is no complete escape from reality and, at the same time, that there is no complete sticking to lived experience. This is a paradox that can be unearthed primarily by using of Critical Discourse Analysis methodology.

Furthermore, using Fairclough's statement that "meanings are produced through interpretations," we have managed to decipher the framework that governs E.E. Cummings's ideological understanding of the world of "Crepuscule," as evidenced by the use of language in the poem.

1- The results of the first part of the analysis shows that the poem employs a number of key literary templates that alternate in order to produce and invite interpretation to the following themes: loneliness, darkness, tolerance, diversity, unity, and acceptance of other religious views.

2- Analyzing keywords resulted in showing that Cummings used the following prominent words: rose, dark, worm, and life. These words are contrastive, of course. The analysis shows that Cummings represented the worldviews of his compatriots of women using the dark rose imagery, but contrasted that with his ideological understanding of the need to be inclusive through using more lively imagery. He did not state any of these opinions. They have been conveyed through the deployment of language, which brought with it certain ideological undertones.

3- In reference to semiotics, the results show that Cummings's discourse choice was purposeful, namely, it was intended to solidify the view that women should be respected as full and productive members of

society. This ideological stance was coated in a more national drive, i.e., he presented his case that the nation would be netter because of such inclusion. Again, this was not declared in the poem, but rather conveyed through imagery and language use.

    4- The findings ascertain the vitality and validity of Critical Discourse Analysis in unearthing and explaining previously unexplored meanings. In other words, CDA as an instrument of interpreting literary texts has yielded new, primarily hidden meaning, to the text.

    5- The results show the interrelatedness of the discursive structure and the discursive event. They also highlight the relevance and importance of Fairclough's methods and techniques. Both the discursive structure and the discursive event intertwined to become the subject of subjective interpretation within the framework of systematic analysis.

Conclusion

This paper has analyzed E.E. Cummings's poem, "Crepuscule." It has used the techniques and methods of Critical Discourse Analysis in order to delve into the ideological world of the poem through exploring language use. Such analysis has led to a number of findings that were made possible by applying a systematic study of language, within the parameters of Critical Discourse Analysis methodology. These findings prove that a careful and attentive application of the methodology can unearth new meaning and reveal hidden ideology. For instance, the natural imagery in Cummings's poem has been proven to point to his worldview of the place of women in society and their contribution to the prosperity of the nation. The words in the poem continue to have both literal and metaphorical meanings. However, their significance is enriched, in terms of possible interpretation, because of the use of Critical Discourse Analysis methodology in this paper.

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