Critical Discourse Analysis of Figurative Language in the poem "America" by Dunya Mikhail

By

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Abstract

Through the use of language, critical discourse analysis studies hidden connection between society structure and discourse. Poems can be evaluated linguistically, and they can be seen as social practices. The current study looks at how the Iraqi-American poet Dunya Mikhail uses figurative language in her poem "**America**". The current study intends to: recognize the most prevalent figurative language devices present in the chosen poem; find evidence of the poets' ideologies and views in the poem that is being analyzed; identifying the kinds of figurative language devices that are less frequently employed in the poems under investigation and determining whether the identity of the Iraqi-American poet has any impact on the figurative language figures she chooses to use in her poem **"America"**. The present study concludes that Mikhail used "personification" more than other figures of speech, whereas alliteration, hyperbole, metonymy, pun, and litotes are less frequently utilized. The poet's ideologies and identity are clearly revealed in the analysis of the poem.

Key words: Critical Discourse Analysis, Figurative Language, Fairclough's model of Critical Discourse Analysis.

1. Introduction

This study looks at the different forms of figurative language, as well as how the poet uses them to convey meaning in their works. This study will show how to use the text as a discourse as well as the relationship between text, context, and discourse analysis. The use of figurative language by the poet and the reader's comprehension techniques will also be discussed.

"The War Works Hard" (2005) book, includes the poem **"America",** which will be analyzed in this study, and written by Iraqi-American poet Dunya Mikhail. The poems in Mikhail's book were written between 1985 and 2004, at the height of American intervention, which started in 1963 with a military coup supported by the US, when Iraq was experiencing its worst years of conflict and when the Baath party was established in power.

The Fairclough model (1989/1992), and the Maula model (2013) make up the analytical (eclectic) model. The most prevalent model is Fairclough's model, which comprises three levels or dimensions. Textual analysis (Micro-level), discursive practice (Meso-level), and social practice (Macro-level) are the three levels, with "figures of speech" being used as a supplemental model to emphasize the textual level

2. Discourse Analysis

The linguist Zellig Harris introduced discourse analysis as a method for analyzing writing and speaking in 1952. Harris is interested in language analysis that goes beyond sentence-level analysis and the relationship between linguistic and non-linguistic elements (Paltridge, 2012, p.2). Discourse typically combines both written and spoken forms. Cook (1989) describes Discourse Analysis as a technique for examining linguistic texts in light of their social, psychological, and textual contexts. Examination and analysis of spoken and written language are topics that Discourse Analysis examines and analyses (McCarthy, 1991). Similar to how Discourse has multiple meanings that have changed over time, Discourse Analysis has several different conceptualizations (Baker and Ellece, 2011). Some discourse analysts focus on how meaning and structure are indicated in texts, but others—especially since the early 1990s—have utilized Discourse Analysis more critically to investigate issues connected to power, inequality, and ideologies, as Baker and Ellece note in their reference (p, 32).

3. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

The 20th century is where Critical Discourse Analysis, or CDA, first emerged. It analyses language use in relation to the social perspective, which means that "language is conceived as one element of the social process dialectically interconnected with others" (Fairclough & Graham, 2002, p. 188). In order to reveal "the ideological loading of particular ways of using language and the relations of power" that are concealed behind them, CDA analyses instances of social interaction in one's real life that adopt partial or complete linguistic forms (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p.258).

Within CDA, social practices are examined, and these behaviours are based on their own Discourse moments (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999). It focuses on how to utilize and discuss ways in Discourse and "the substantively linguistic and discursive nature of social relations of power" (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 272). With the aid of the CDA technique, texts are examined to determine what "structures, strategies, or other properties of texts, talk, verbal instruction, or communicative events play a role" in the operation of power relations" (Van Dijk, 1993a, p.250).

4. Ideology and power

Mullins identified four key features of ideologies offered by scientists: power is more significant than cognition; they have the ability to influence people's judgments; and they offer guidance through action (Rashid, 2020). According to Fairclough (1995), language is used by ideologies of various platforms in various ways.

Ideologies are both connected to power. Power is "the chance that an individual in a social relationship can achieve his or her own will even against the resistance of others," Wodak & Meyer (2009, p.9). Wodak and Meyer (ibid.) identify three distinct methods of exercising power:

1. 1. The power derived from the unique resources of each individual.
2. The unique characteristic of social exchange in each connection is power.
3. Power as a fundamental component of society and a defining feature.

5. Fairclough's CDA

The theoretical goals of Fairclough (2001a) are derived from sociolinguistic studies and linguistic approaches that emphasize the relationship between language and power and "language in its social context" (p.1). Discourse is viewed by Fairclough as "a form of social practice" (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997, p. 258), indicating that it is an active process

(recognized by Austin, 1962; Levinson, 1983). This demonstrates how speech behaviours like warning, promising, and requesting can be expressed in both speech production. According to Fairclough (2001a), "linguistic phenomena are social," which means that interactions can be determined socially and have social influences, and "social phenomena are linguistic", which means that language activities take place in social contexts as a component of social practices and processes rather than merely as expressions of and reflections on them. The following figure illustrates these three levels from Fairclough's model (1992):
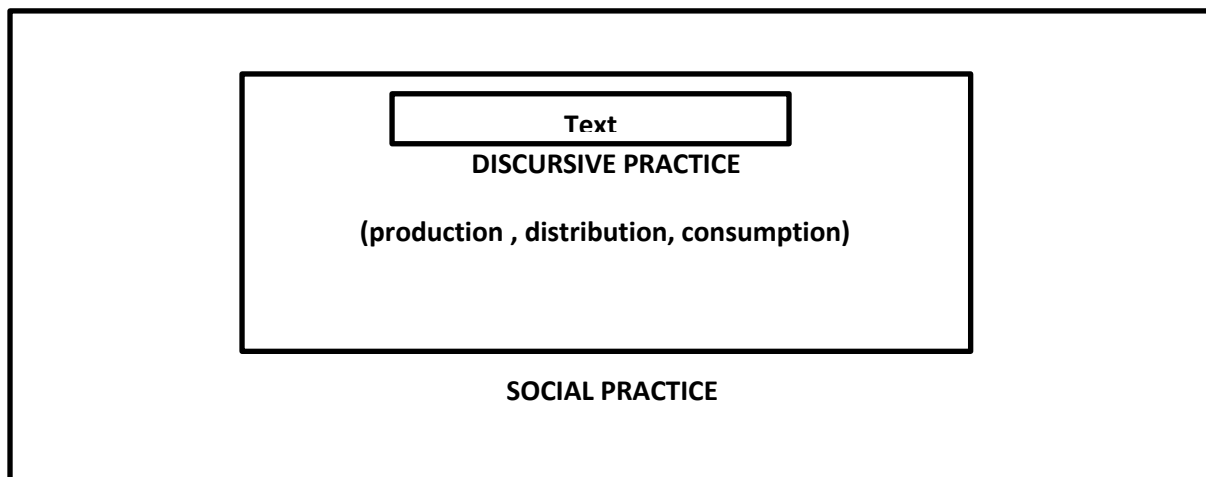

Figure (1): *Fairclough's Approach to CDA (Fairclough, 1992, p.73)*

6. Figures of Language

A figure of speech, according to Gautam (2014), is a way to communicate something that is not literal. Linking one item to another reveals something and gives language greater depth. They are metaphor, alliteration, hyperbole, metonymy, simile, Synecdoche, pun, personification, irony, litotes, paradox, idioms, slang, proverbs, and sarcasm (Maula, 2013). This study will show and explain figures of speech which are used by Mikhail in her poem "America".

7. The Methodology

7.1 The Model of Analysis

To analyze the data, Fairclough's (1989, 1992) model is employed and the Maula model (2013) make up the analytical (eclectic) model. Fairclough (1989, 1992) suggests a CDA structure with three stages:

i. **Textual analysis (Micro level):** This dimension emphasizes the writer's linguistic features and entails a thorough analysis of the text, looking for the text's constituent pieces (ibid, p.72).In this level figures of language will be analyzed.

ii. **Discursive practice (Meso level):** Three processes make up this dimension: text creation, distribution, and consumption. These processes vary according on the type of Discourse and the social context, which is crucial for employing persuasive techniques with the receiver (ibid, p.79).

iii. **Social practice (Macro level):** According to Fairclough (1992, p. 67), this component is linked to ideological and political orientation in social activities as well as speech's effects on the economy and culture. This dimension explores the impact of speech on the audience (ibid, p. 137).

7.2 The data

Dunya Mikhail's poem "America" from her book *The War Works Hard* (2005) will be analyzed in this study.

8. The Analysis of the Poem ''America'' (2005)
8.1 Textual Analysis

A. Vocabulary (Over-wording): Experiential value refers to the writer's use of words in the text to convey her own point of view. Over-wording, according to Fairclough (1992, p.193), is the overuse of repetitive, synonymous, or quasi-synonymous phrases in a domain. These words, since they are over-worded, convey parts of reality. The predominance of statements like "*Don't ask me, America*; *I don't remember''*, it is repeated in lines (1, 2, 6, 7, 23, 24, 28, 29, 34, 35, 38) and conveys that she is so tired of what happened in Iraq. She suffers from the war and exile. Therefore, she does not want to speak or answer others' questions.

Another kind of over-wording is found when the poet mentions "*like a well-cooked fish*," which appears in line (61). This refers to her origin as an Iraqi person. People in Iraq are well-known for eating grilled fish (masgouf fish). This meal is famous near the Tigris in Iraq. So, the identity of Mikhail is revealed in mentioning this unique Iraqi meal in her poem.

Mikhail also repeats the word "tomorrow" around eight times in lines (144, 154, 156, 168, 170, 196,196, and 202). She focuses on the future and rejects talk about the past, because (to her) the past is full of pain and horror. Even though she has lost a lot in her life, Mikhail wants to live in America and to start a new life. She uses the words "future dreams" in line (173),"shining" in line (199),"color" in line (204), and "whiteness", in line (208), in which all express the future.

B. Cohesion: Mikhail's poem is a highly cohesive poem. She employs a lot of conjunctions on one hand to make her poem flow. She employs coordinating conjunctions '*or*' in the lines (5,9,14, 16, 17, 20, 21, 24, 32, 36, 39, 41, 43, 49, 81, 91, 136, 176, 177, 208, 215); '*and*' in the lines (12,45, 56, 59, 64, 74, 80, 83, 106, 115, 120, 134, 160, 161, 184, 187, 188, 189, 192); '*for*' in the lines (64 (87). In her poem, she also uses subordinating conjunctions, such as '*if*' in lines (10, 13, 42, 51, 54, 94, 199, 133, 136); '*that*' in lines (52, 66, 127, 179, 194); and *because*' in line (52, 66, 127, 179, 194). (167). All of these conjunctions form connections to all the parts of Mikhail's long poem.

On the other hand, Mikhail uses reference words to make the poem more cohesive and the meaning more connected. The personal pronouns used in the poem are: *'I'* in the lines (2,7, 10, 23, 28, 34, 37, 84, 96, 100, 102, 110, 112, 114, 122, 126, 127, 129, 132, 171, 210, 217); '*he'* in the line (76); *'we'* in the lines (58, 64, 66, 78, 79, 92, 94, 124, 148, 151, 157, 159, 162, 165, 166, 206); *'it'* (29, 48, 50, 57, 61, 70, 95, 103, 114); *'they'* in the lines (10, 13, 26, 35, 40, 42, 87, 88, 93, 167) and *'you'* in the lines (51, 71, 72, 84, 111). Possessive pronouns in the poem include: '*my'* in the lines (56, 62, 75, 84, 106, 112, 122, 174); *'our'* in the lines (11, 12, 65, 72, 89, 150, 173); '*its'* in the lines (53, 205); *'their'* in the lines (9, 23, 24, 149, 167) and *'your'* in the lines (44, 45, 51, 55, 97, 171, 172, 190). Demonstrative words are used by the poet to create a more cohesive poem which can be linked to the related people or things, as in using '*this'* in the lines (68, 98, 104, 119), '*these'* in the line (71) and *that* in the lines (52, 66, 127, 179, 194). Finally, Mikhail uses the definite article frequently in the poem to give the impression that the vocabulary is more definite and can be easily understood by the reader. She uses *'them'* in the lines (8, 15, 16, 30, 35, 38, 39, 46, 47, 50, 52, 55, 59, 62, 63, 70, 82, 100, 107, 110, 113, 129, 133, 134, 151, 152, 163, 164, 166, 173, 190, 193, 198, 202, 204, 209, 211, 212, and 216). These categories, which are a mix of ideational, personal, and literary meanings and conceptions, are

crucial to investigate because they define identities, social connections, knowledge, and belief.

C- Figures of Language

1. **Metaphor**: A literary technique known as metaphor compares two things without utilizing terms like "as, like, or such" to deepen the poetry's meaning. The poet employs metaphor in this poem in:

i- *People are grass—*
they grow everywhere, America.(26,27)

The poet here compares people's lives with grass. Both can grow everywhere in the world. The poet lives in America after many years of living in her country (Iraq), so, she compares her life to a grass.

ii- *we are two distant, rippling shores*
and the river wriggles between us (59,60)

Mikhail compares America and herself as rippling beaches being far away from each other. Hence, the river wriggles between them.

iii- *I'll look at your eyes*
to see your new wrinkles,
the lines of our future dreams.(171-173)

Mikhail is going to gaze into America's eyes to see whether it has developed any new wrinkles, the lines of our future hopes. Wrinkles are represented as the lines of life.

2. **Alliteration:** The art of alliteration involves repeatedly using a word's initial letters or sounds. Here, the poet employs alliteration in:

i. *what time it was,*
what the weather was like,
which language,
or which flag. (30-33)

Mikhail employs alliteration to generate exceptional effects or to convey a specific atmosphere or feeling. She repeats several WH-questions to make the feeling of her unwillingness to answer them.

3. **Hyperbole:** Exaggerated language known as hyperbole distorts facts by making them seem much bigger than they actually are when viewed objectively.

i. *and I have become old,*
older than my father.(75,76)

She exaggerated her age while describing herself. She claims that living in exile affected her severely since she gained several years and grew older than her father!

4. **Metonymy**: In metonymy, anything that is closely related to something else is given a name. The following lines from the poem use metonymy:

i. *One day, we will go*

and sing a song,
translated or not translated,
at the Statue of Liberty.(80-83)

Here the *statue of liberty* stands for America. Mikhail feels that tomorrow will be better than the present. Hence, the present is so hard and full of horror, death, and exile.

5. Simile: The terms "like" or "as" are employed to construct an imagined connection in a simile, which is a figure of speech. Examples include:

i. *and the river wriggles between us*
like a well-cooked fish.(60,61)

Mikhail compares the river to a well-cooked fish that wriggles between America and herself. This is just after comparing America and herself with two shores. Restaurants along the Tigris prepare fish by turning it over a wood fire on a daily basis.

ii. *They come in shifts of shadow and light*
in our dreams
and as shooting stars (89-91)

She is not taking her father to America with her. The dead ripen more quickly than Indian figs, but they never grow. They appear as moving shadows and light, as well as shooting stars, in dreams.

iii. *So I will toy with the freedom*
like teasing a pet cat. (101,102)

Mikhail compares herself to a cat, who is free to do anything she wants. As a result, she will play with her independence as if she were a pet cat.

iv. *we will tumble down like dancer*
taken by the wind (162,163)
Mikhail compares falling down with wind-swept dancers.
v. *The pain will remain inside us*
coy as snow that won't melt. (193,194)

The poet compares the pain, which hangs on to her like snow that refuses to melt.
6. Pun: Puns are wordplays that mix similar sounds or senses from other words used at different times with the same word's various meanings. For instance:

i.*Buy One Get One Free* (117)
Here *buy one* and *get one* is an example of pun. She found that among a stack of advertising leaflets with a special offer: *Buy One, Get One Free*.

7. Personification: Personification is the process of giving non-living things human attributes. The following lines by the poet make use of it:

i. *Please don't ask me, America.* (1)
ii. *Stop your questioning, America,*
and offer your hand (45,46)
iii. *if you lose your soul, America?*(52)
iv. *America, leave your questionnaires to the river*(56)

v. I'll look at your eyes
to see your new wrinkles,(171,172)
vi. As you braid my gray hair (174)
vii. And when the pain in your neck returns, darling,
you will not have time to complain
and won't be concerned.(190-192)
viii. The pain will remain inside us (193)

        'America' is presented as a human whom the poet talks to and asks politely to stop asking her many questions because she cannot remember anything. America is presented as a human being that has a soul, eyes, and neck. America can also be substituted by the poetess using human pronouns: your, you, and us (both America and the poet).

ix. *We will shake the museums*
forever from their sleep,(148,149)

        The poetess personifies the museum as if they are sleeping. They (America and she) will forever awaken the museums from their sleep.

        8. Litotes/Understatement: Litotes emphasizes the truthfulness of an assertion by rejecting the converse. An illustration would be

i. The pain will remain inside us
coy as snow that won't melt. (193,194)

        The pain will remain with us like snow that refuses to melt. The poet denies that the snow can melt! This illustrates that pain is something that last forever and it cannot come to an end.

        9. Questions of Rhetoric: Direct answers are not anticipated in rhetorical inquiries. A rhetorical question almost always seeks to capture the attention or interest of the listener. In "America", there are seven of them as the following:

i. *What good is it to gain the whole world*
if you lose your soul, America? (51, 52)
ii. *Who said that the sky*
would lose all of its stars
if night passed without answers?(53-55)
iii. *Why do you ask all these questions?* (72)
iv. *What time is it now?* (96)
v. *How should I know, America,* (209)
vi. *which of the colors*
was the most joyful
tumultuous
alienated
or assimilated
of them all? (210-215)
vii. *How would I know, America* (216)

        All the previous questions are used by Mikhail not to be answered by the audience but to reveal that she lost everything after leaving her country. All of these questions cannot be answered because she is unable to recall anything, and she simply requires the assistance of

another country (America).

8.2 Discursive Practice
A. Intertextuality

Mikhail's poet "America" is written with a great sense of grief and distress, as well as a love for her motherland. She has struggled with her identity as both a friend and an enemy of both countries. Mikhail regrets the loss of her homeland, which has been dispersed in the middle of war and destruction.

Mikhail claims that all Iraqis are spiritually exiles in their nation since she is an exiled poet. They forsake their country's glitter and glamour. Mikhail emphasizes Said's (1990) quotation that "for the native, the history of his or her colonial servitude is inaugurated by the loss to an outsider of the local place, whose concrete geographical identity must thereafter be searched for and somehow restored"(p.77). As a result, she looks for Iraqis' geographical identities, as they are isolated and distanced from their surroundings. Mikhail paints the Iraqi people living in death in the following lines. As a result, she is unable to identify their names and faces, as well as their flags, languages, and literature. She cannot tell if she is sleeping in their homes or on the streets, on sidewalks, or in airports.

Mikhail refers to the Iraqi people who pass away without giving a thought to their battle for survival or their mortality. Mikhail analyses the foggy Iraqi landscape and the lack of communication between Iraqis and their environment in the following lines, as she is unable to identify whether she will have baggage or not when leaving the country.

Mikhail arouses longing for her homeland in a more depth graphic description that appears remarkable in its broken grammatical structure, which increases the dynamic process of the sensory and intellectual apprehension of Iraqis and their homeland. Mikhail's usage of the kinesthetic imageries along her poem, such as "singing," "writing," "walked" and "carried," produces a dynamic movement, enhancing the perception of the Iraqi people and their land.

Mikhail indirectly criticizes American colonial efforts towards the end of her poem. She disproves their assertions that they are spreading democracy and freedom in Iraq by demonstrating that they are really spreading death and horror. Mikhail wants the United States to respect human rights and lend a helping hand to the underprivileged. She convinces it to accept Iraqi migrants fleeing conflict zones without scrutiny. Mikhail begins to question the advantages of America's conquest of the world while losing its moral principles in the final words of her poem.

B. Power of Utterance

Mikhail's utterances are not very powerful in this poem. She uses face-to-face utterances as if America is standing in front of her, but with "please" as in *"please don't ask me America"* in lines (1, 22). She orders America to stop questioning her in *"Don't ask me"* in lines (6, 27, and 33). She is not directly blaming "America" for what happened to Iraq and its people after 2003, and she is not promoting hate against the country's foreign policy. Instead, she is trying to engage in a responsible dialogue with it (America) in order to express what may appear to be goals that are not linked with those of the United States.

Mikhail uses a unique order of utterances in her poem to reveal power; first, she starts with utterances trying to cut the way against *America* to stop talking and questioning in *"Please, don't ask me America"* line (1); then, she talks about past things that she wishes to overcome in *"I don't remember if they had"* line (10); and finally, she hopes to live a better life in the future in *"Tomorrow, darling"* line (195).

In the following lines Mikhail also reflects her family, traditions, and country proudly as a power factor in her poem.

like a well-cooked fish.(60) She refers to a power of traditional Iraqi meal (masgouf).
He used to tell me in the evenings. (76) "He" means the power of her father.
We will shake the museums (148). She refers to the power of the Iraqi Museum (tradition and country).

C. Coherence: This poem is really well-constructed when seen as war feature poem. It incorporates a variety of genre elements, and the war theme provides a setting for the poet and her subject to go "head-to-head."

8.3 Social Practice

In terms of ideology, poems frequently aim to demonstrate some of the ideological ideas present in the poetry of Iraqi American writers. They may be summed up like this:

i. The poem states the exile. Mikhail would become afraid as the dictator's oppression increased in frequency, until she finally gave up. She could no longer keep her promise to stay in her country and thus fled first to Jordan and then to the United States. The title of the poem implies that America is the exile in which has chosen to live away from her homeland
ii. The poem states war. The poem is full of horror senses about the war, which make the writer unable to speak about them. The war destroyed everything in her country.
iii. The poem states loss. The poem reveals that Mikhail cannot leave the place where she was born and grew up unless she has lost everything. She had lost her father, her home, language and safety.
iv. The poem states the poet's identity. The language unique to Iraqis was frequently used by Mikhail. These expressions describe her way of life, including its culture (such as having two rivers) and writing style (from the right).

9. The Results

The following table lists each figure of speech Mikhail employed in her poem "America," along with how frequently she used each one and percentages. Mikhail uses personification nine times in the poem "America," more than any other figure. In contrast, alliteration, hyperbole, metonymy, pun, and litotes are less frequently utilized:

Table (1*): Frequencies and Percentages of Figures of Language in Poem "America"*

Figures of language	America Frequency	Percentage
Metaphor	3	10.34%
Alliteration	1	3.44%
Hyperbole	1	3.44%
Metonymy	1	3.44%
Simile	5	17.24%
Synecdoche	x	
Pun	1	3.44%
Personification	9	31.03%
Irony	x	
Litotes	1	3.44%
Paradox	x	
idioms	x	
Questions of rhetoric	7	24.13%
Slang	x	
proverbs	x	
Sarcasm	x	
Total	29	

In her poem, Mikhail, she also expresses her ideologies. She considers themes of conflict, loss, horror and exile to be a part of her suffering both inside and outside her

country (Iraq). The poet' Iraqi identity is made clear in the poem. She made extensive use of dialects exclusive to Iraqis. These terms refer to her way of life in terms of food (masgouf), geographic characteristics (such as having two rivers), and writing style (from the right).

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