



RESEARCH PAPER

Ideological Construction of Gender Representation in The Pearl That Broke: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine and analyse the Ideological construction of gender representation in Nadia Hashmi's *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* from the perspective of Critical discourse analysis. The study has been conducted in a socially constructed Bacha Posh tradition which has been practiced in Afghanistan for several generations. To unpack gender representation and ideological construction of gender in the discourse structures, the researcher has used M.M Lazar's FCDA praxis. Lazar's theoretical and methodological considerations offer a systematic inquiry to the researcher to dig out the ideological construction and unequal representation of gender. The current study revealed that gender is a social and cultural phenomenon and central female characters in the discourse structures are represented unequally, socially, culturally politically and economically through linguistic structures. Further studies are required to investigate the effect of polygamy and early marriages on the lives of girls in Afghan society.

KEYWORDS Critical Discourse Analysis, FCDA, Gender, Ideological Construction

Introduction

This paper intends to critically analyse the discourse structures of Nadia Hashmi's novel, *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* to examine gender-related issues. Critical discourse analysis is used as a research tool to probe implicit ideological propositions in gender construction, representation, and discrimination. The study is conducted in the context of the *Bacha Posh* tradition which has been practised in Afghanistan for centuries. It aims to investigate gender representation and ideologically constructed gender in the discourse structures of selected extracts.

According to Wodak and Meyer (2001), CDA is primarily concerned with analysing opaque and transparent structural relationships of power, discrimination, dominance, and control manifested in language use. Thus, CDA practitioners aim to bring about awareness, and they come up with an emancipatory agenda. They attempt to explore the unequal gender representation, discrimination, and identity that is built through socially and culturally intervened language (Imran et al., 2023(a)). Fairclough (2001:1) writes, "Consciousness is the first step towards emancipation". The role of the CDA analyst is to unveil the dominance, control, gender discrimination, and ideological constructions of gender through linguistic structures. Laymen will not understand the power in and behind discourse, the ideological propositional lexical and syntactic items, and the dominance of one social group over others. The role of CDA practitioners here is to identify and explore unequal power relations, ideological assumptions, and social wrongs in socially

constructed discourse. In this regard, Fairclough (2017) claims that CDA is not an action but a step towards action; it identifies and advocates a line of action.

Literature Review

Critical discourse analysis has recently emerged as a research tool worldwide to analyse language in a social and political context. It is presumed that because of the strong influences from other disciplines make CDA an interdisciplinary approach. Van Dijk (1988) argues that critical discourse analysis is an interdisciplinary field of study that emerged from many other disciplines of social sciences and humanities, such as linguistics, sociology, literary theories, anthropology, psychology, applied linguistics, text linguistics, sociolinguistics and semiotics, and speech communication. In his major work, Van Dijk defines CDA as a "type of analytical research that primarily makes inquiries about the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequalities are represented, reproduced, and resisted in a social and political context by text and talk" (as cited in Schiffri, Tannen, & Hamilton, 2015, p.252). This definition specifies that CDA is a problem-oriented approach. Wherever it sees dominance, inequalities, and power abuse enacted by language, it will focus on those who are being oppressed by the oppressors. Flowerdew & Richardson (2017) define critical discourse studies as an interdisciplinary approach that analyses language in use. It aims to raise our understanding of discourse and its social process, social change, and social structures. As a layman, we may not understand how the discourse processes and is structured in society. It is CDA, which gives this understanding of the use of language in a particular context. The analysis of discourse is not free from the analysis of the social context in which discourse has been produced. Fairclough adds, "CDA is a form of critical social analysis"(as cited in Flowerdew & Richardson, 2017: 13). To understand the relationship between discourse and other social elements, Fairclough (2017) claims, "CDA offers a better explanatory understanding of relations between discourse and other components of social life" (as cited in Flowerdew & Richardson, 13). By other components, Fairclough means other social elements, like power, ideology, and hegemony. dominance, and gender discrimination.

CDA is mainly concerned with those linguistic structures where inequalities, injustices, and discriminations are enacted transparently. These inequalities are enacted repeatedly so that they do not appear as inequalities and injustices but are taken for granted. With a similar view, Lazar (2007) asserts that gender ideology is embodied with hegemony and often, it does not seem as dominant at all; instead, it appears mainly consensual and acceptable mainly to most people in the community. Zotzmann & O'Regan (2016) examine that CDA is different from other approaches. It is explicitly committed to a critique of those social practices that are problematic, and it tries to transform them for better problematic social practices.

Fairclough (1992, p.87) examines "ideologies to be Significations/constructions of reality (the physical world, social relations, and social identities) which are built into various dimensions of the forms/meanings of discursive practices". He means that the importance of ideology in the construction of social realities of the world and identities is usually found in the discursive practices of text and talk. For Fairclough and Wodak (1997, pp.275-276), "ideology is a matter of representation and process by which social reality and social identities are (procedurally) represented and constructed". Van Dijk states that the notion of ideology is controversial and vague. It means that our claim to define ideology with a single definition would not be appropriate. He adds, "Ideologies are the fundamental beliefs of a group and its members" (Van Dijk 2000, p.7). According to Statham (2002:8), "ideology operates in a close inter-relationship with the interests of social groups or institutions".

Cameron (2014); Gul et al., 2023(a) and Afaq et al., (2022) say that we use the term "language ideologies" when we refer to the representation through which language is imbued with cultural meaning. She argues that in all language ideologies the most, cross-cultural widespread, the most general and historically persistent ideology is gender ideology. She adds that the differences between the language used by men and women are clear-cut and stable. These differences are considered and represented naturally in many versions of this ideology. Similarly, Shezer (1987); Ishtiaq et al., 2022(a); Sabih-Ul-Hassan et al., (2022) and Ishtiaq et al., (2021) put forward her idea that women's and men's linguistic behaviour will be generally represented in a way that is identical to the community's more general view of the natures of women and men.

According to Sunderland (2006), the notion of gender and language can be identified before the second wave of the feminist movement in the 1960s and 70s. She asserts that even the concept of gender and language existed for centuries before language and gender became an area of research for scholars. Researchers studying the feminist language found that men's supremacy was expressed in different complicated ways. (ibid). Spender (1980); Nasir et al., (2023); Afaq et al., (2023); Gul et al.,2022(a) and Gul et al.,2022(b) comment on how men's power has been demonstrated in the control of men over language (as a grammarian, politician, linguistics, orators, philosophers, and so forth), so sexism was encoded by men into the language to merge their claim of men's supremacy.

According to Beauvoir (2010: 707), "one is not born, but rather, becomes, woman". She asserts that no biological, economic, or psychic destiny defines the figure that the human female adopts in society. Beauvoir very beautifully expands on how society and civilisation as a whole define and create a new creature that we refer to as feminine. A woman is the product of culture, not nature. In other words, she is not born a woman but becomes a woman by social and cultural norms. For the first time, she creates a distinction between sex and gender and differentiates gender from sex. She sees gender as a social construction while sex is biological.

Material and Methods

This study is a qualitative analytical investigation of the selected extracts from Nadia Hashmi's novel, *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell* from the perspective of feminist critical discourse analysis. The researcher used Lazar's concept of FCDA which is a newly emerged area in the field of critical discourse analysis. The selected syntactic structures will be analysed with the theoretical consideration of Lazar (2007); Gul et al (2023) (b); Sajjad et al., (2023) and Ali et al., (2022) they discussed five principles(praxis) to analyze and read discourses from the perspective of FCDA (2005,2007 &2018). The five principles of her theory and practice are outlined below:

- The feminist analytical resistance.
- Gender as an ideological structure.
- The Complexity of gender and power relations.
- Discourse in the (de) construction of gender
- Critical reflexivity as proxies

Lazar's second and fourth principles, *gender as an ideological structure* and *Discourse in the (de) construction of gender* will be applied as a theory and method to analyse the selected texts. She says that gender is ideologically structured in discourse. People are divided into two blocs and are treated differently on the assumed notion of sexual differences, which is nothing but naturalness. To investigate how gender has been represented in the discourse structures, the researcher analysed words/phrases and

sentences from the perspective of feminist critical discourse analysis. According to Lazar, gender is ideologically structured. Several practices are represented through ideologies. In the same vein, gender representation is one of the examples of the ideological construction of gender.

Results and Discussion

The inappropriate social status of gender is signalled from the mode of the question of the discourse producer. An interaction takes place between two sisters, and they discuss the destiny of being a girl in male dominant society. Khala Shaima raises the question "*What can a girl do in this world?*" (p.37, ch.7). This rhetorical question is not for the sake of information to be provided to Khala Shaima, but she describes girls' helplessness in the social structures they belong to. It appears that under certain social norms, girls can never be equal to boys. The two sisters take this for granted and think it is something natural, not something created for them by the society in which they live.

The utterance "No, she is not for marriage. She is able-bodied and does the work of a man." (p.63, ch.11). The discourse producer assumes that strength is one of the attributes of men, and if a female is strong enough, she is not perceived as a girl at all. Azizullah thinks that if a girl is strong physically and has muscles like men, she is not for marriage at all. We can assume from this that it is a social convention that describes a woman's status in society. If she is weak physically, she should be married and controlled by men, while if she is able-bodied and does what a man does, she should not get married at all. This ideological construction of gender is evident from the conversation with Azizullah about Shekiba when he says, "*Sometimes it escapes us that she is, in fact, a girl. Her strength makes me marvel. I saw her just a few days ago carrying three pails of water and walking straight as if it were no effort whatsoever.*" The discourse manufacturer presumes walking straight is one of the qualities of men. Women cannot walk shoulder up and straight because they are weak. The discourse unveils that it is unbelievable for men to see women physically strong. The lexical item *marvels*, which means to wander or amaze by something, is used by discourse producers to describe Shekiba's strength. On one occasion, the two interlocutors discuss the strength of Shekiba and compare her with an animal due to her physical strength and her masculine muscles. While discussing Shekiba, Azizullah says to Hafizullah that Shekiba is "*More useful than a mule*" (p.63, ch 11). In response, Hafizullah says, "Good." The discourse structure is that if a woman works physically and looks as strong as a man looks, she becomes a challenge to the men's masculinity. Thus, in this connection, Shekiba is perceived as an animal, even better than a mule. A mule is a kind of hybrid animal that is mostly used for carrying goods. They think Shekiba will be more useful for them to use her like an animal. The discourse producer Azizullah thinks that being strong is the quality of a man, not a woman. Thus, his comparison of Shekiba with a mule is an example of women's discrimination, and they are suppressed and have low status in a society where males are dominant. Even Shekiba is considered more worthwhile than a mule. The response of Hafizullah is not surprising when he says that it is good. It means that Hafizullah will use Shekiba like an animal, and she will be very beneficial for him to do his work. Butler argues that bodies are gendered through continuous practices (for more detail see Butler, (1990) and Gul et al., (2022(c)).

Under the prevailing social conditions, even if a woman is physically strong, she is not accepted as a woman but a man because physical strength is attributed to males alone, not women. The discourse producer takes this for granted and feels no hesitation in calling Shekiba a daughter, or son because no one can go against the established conventions of society. The Lexical item *daughter, son*, is an ideological one. Women are represented and constructed as ideologically weak. It seems that she has no self-identity. Her identity is

transformed into a male if she does physical activities like males. On the other hand, Shekiba's muscular body and labour prove that if women are trained in their early stage of life as boys are trained, they can also be as strong and able-bodied as men. On one occasion, we observe that she does what a male does. For example, "*She had, she slaughtered, and she chopped as any strong-backed son would do for his father.*" (p.21, ch. 2). It appears that in Afghan society, it is unusual to find such kinds of women who do male work. It is taken for granted that they are weak and cannot compete with a male. Hoeing, slaughtering, and chopping are considered fixed features of male personality, while if a woman does such activities, she seems strange and unusual to the community. Such practices are rooted in the social conventions of Afghan society.

The discourse contains a dialogue between the mother and her daughter about the newly assigned role of Rahima. Raisa says to Rahima, "*Listen, Rahim-Jan. You should be out with the boys, playing*" (p.54, ch 10) The discourse producer differentiates boys and girls based on sexual differences. It proposes that if you are a boy, you have a different world, and if you are a girl, you live in entirely different circumstances. It is also assumed from the discourse structure that only boys are allowed to go outside and play games while girls are restricted to home and domestic activities. These different roles are given to them based on sexual differences, which is natural. Even though. In reality, Rahim is a girl, but only she has been transformed into a boy for performing a boy activity as there is no boy in the family. Wienchaw (2011:42) says "The idea that gender is constructed within limits already established by our biology" (for more detail about gender roles based on biology see Wienclaw 2011:42). The use of the imperative structure of Raisa to her daughter is a signal warning and a threat. She says, "*You should be out with the boys, playing.*" (p.54, ch 10) The mother advises her daughter under social conventions and norms which are already established in the society of which they are part. It means that it is a social role that is given to boys and girls by parents, peer groups, and social mobility to adopt the role of a boy or a girl. There seems to be no naturalness in staying home or going outside and playing in the street. In other words, what we perform, we become that. These are social elements that force us to do and what to refrain from. Her mother would hold her back the day before if she tried to go out but giving her a new social role made her entire universe change. We can assume that the discourse is based on an ideological presumption that girls should stay home while boys should not. This very notion is ideological because if it had any link with naturalness, we would find such practices in all societies.

From the discourse form, it is perceived that we are taught how to behave like boys and girls to be acceptable in a social setup. It is presumed that violation of the norms will lead to acceptance of the existing social order. The discourse producer asserts that boys and girls are part of social commitments and cultural agreements and that the life of the two genders has different directions and standards. She presumes the world of boys is distinct from the world of girls. When the discourse producer utters, "*do you understand what I'm saying*" (p.124, ch 23). she is bringing upon and activating her background knowledge of the social conventions that are appropriate in the existing situation. Rahima says, "*I was surprised by her advice, but the look on her face told me she was serious.*" (p.54, ch 10). Her utterance illustrates that she was still confused regarding her mother's advice because what her mother refrained from her till now is advising her to do. It is assumed from the Rahima statement that the social attributions with the gender of a male and female are ideological ones because these fluid features change according to the time, place, and social and cultural setup. This ideological notion is strengthened when her mother says the opposite of what is used to say. This is because of the new gender role Rahima possesses now. Her mother wants her to be fitted according to the new role. "*Here sat my mother telling me the exact opposite of what she'd always said*" (p.54, ch 10). The proposition shows the social change in the perception of Rahima's mother about the new identity Rahima carries now.

Rahima, with a girl's gender identity, was supposed to act and behave differently than the boy. However, having a boy's gender identity, she is supposed to act like a boy.

Conclusion

The current study aimed to explore gender representation and the ideological assumptions that work behind gender representation in the discourse structures of the novel, *The Pearl That Broke Its Shell*. The study showed that gender is an ideological structure that is built into the discourses of major characters in the novel. Strength and power have been attributed to males alone. Women are shown as weak, feeble, and helpless creatures of society. The pervasive ideologies in different social structures shaped women's minds. Therefore, they take these ideologies for granted and do not see them anymore as ideologies. They consider such social norms as natural and permanent dispositions of their genders. Women are perceived as weak; if they are strong, they are unacceptable to men. Women have been represented with some fixed features. They are discouraged and unacceptable if they are found doing male activities, such as farming. The dichotomy between boys and girls has been shown in sexual differences. Due to biological differences, both genders have been represented distinctly. The social construction of gender is rooted in Afghan social structures. Boys and girls have been given different roles and based on those roles are treated as different and deprived of society. Hashmi very beautifully depicted gender as an ideological phenomenon and gender as the product of social and cultural norms.

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