Discourse Analysis of Power Relations among Actants of Stories Written for Iranian Children in Persian Language from a Cognitive Point of View

Masumeh Kheirabadi

Ph.D. Student in Linguistics, Tarbiat Modarres University

masumekheirabadi@modares.ac.ir

Ferdows Aghagolzade

Professor of Linguistics, Tarbiat Modarres University

aghagolz@modares.ac.ir

Arsalan Golfam

Associate Professor of Linguistics, Tarbiat Modarres University

golfamar@modares.ac.ir

Aliye Kord Zaferanlu Kambuziya

Associate Professor of Linguistics, Tarbiat Modarres University

akord@modares.ac.ir

Introduction

In most of communicative situations, power relations among actants influence the way they select speech acts. Like all other discourse situations, power relations are traceable in children's stories and determine the way characters interact with each other. Children's stories are represented based on the authors' mental patterns which

influence the forming of personal, social and cultural identities of their readers. Therefore, the elements of stories such as the characters, the events and the atmosphere can have an influence on children's behavior.

The research problem of this study is to identify various types power relations amongst characters and their discursive purposes in stories written for Iranian children in Persian language. The main objective of this study is to explore mental models that play roles in producing these texts and are relevant to power relations. To achieve this objective, linguistic strategies regarding power relations among actors are analyzed from Critical Discourse Analysis approach. The socio-cognitive discourse analysis of Van Dijk (2000) and mental models theory have been selected as the theoretical framework of this research. Power is considered a key term in various approaches of CDA analysis. The purpose of CDA is studying social inequalities through discourse; as such, many theorists of CDA consider language as a means to construct hegemony and social forces shaping power relations.

As Van Dijk (2015) believes, in order to consolidate the power relations and hegemony by those who hold power, it is highly probable that the voice of weaker actors in discourse be marginalized or even rendered totally silent. Controlling the situations and textual structures or speeches are the most prominent ways to apply power; therefore, controlling the minds of others by such discourse can be considered as an indirect but fundamental way to reproduce hegemony and domination. In other words, controlling the discourse means controlling ideas, concepts, programs, attitudes, ideologies and actions of the

receivers. Consequently, socio-cognitive approach in CDA tries to evaluate social structures of power through analyzing the relations between discourse and cognition.

Methodology

This is a descriptive-analytical research in which a body of 100 stories published by children's publication houses in the age groups of A, B and C are studied. The criteria for selecting the books were high circulation and nation-wide distribution. From this body of data, 30 children stories were selected and power relations among them were analyzed. In this article, macro and micro structures of five stories have been represented as a sample.

Discussion

In all of the analyzed texts, the authors have used polarization strategy to make unequal social situations. The opposite poles have shown different speech acts due to their access to different levels of power. Those in more powerful situations are relegated to the «other» pole and are dominant over other actants in the story because of their access to such elements as possessions and bigness which give them higher levels of power. The element of power has no direct relation with gender and in most of the cases, the characters were gender-neutral. The actions of those in power were egotistic, harsh, abnormal, brutal and annoying. Their voice is dominant but they themselves are the minority by number.

On the other side, the weaker characters are relegated to the «self» pole and are the majority by number. They are oppressed by the

powerful characters and experience fear and anxiety. Their actions are polite, unselfish and according to social norms. Their voices are low or silent and ignored by the powerful.

The findings show that in most cases, the weak are passive against the powerful and do not show any resistance against them, whether verbally or nonverbally, because of their fear. However, by banning the powerful and creating solidarity among themselves, the weak are able to overcome the powerful. The ultimate destiny of the powerful characters is regret and loneliness. In other words, as the weak characters are in majority, they do not use verbal tools to act against the powerful characters; instead, they prefer to use their solidarity and unity as a weapon against their enemies and defeat the other group.

Another finding of the research is that making heroes by the use of such cliché's as intelligence and bravery is put aside; and the analyzed texts use the following pattern to reflect power relations among the characters: bigness or possession > abusing the power > dominance > (verbal / nonverbal) violence > being banned from the society > loneliness, failure and regret. The authors have made a clear connection between power and oppression and have classified the characters into two categories of the oppressed and the oppressors. Since there are preconceptions against those in power, the most prominent characters in this group are identified with negative features [+violent, +threatening, +abnormal, +annoying, +horrifying, +dominant, +ignorant].

In these stories, personal and superficial kinds of power are doomed to defeat since power is associated with interaction, politeness, wisdom and observing social norms. This understanding of the concept

of power in children's stories can be interpreted as a reflection of the norms and values of the society in which these stories are produced; but on the other hand, one can surmise that there is a kind of idealism and ignoring the reality in these texts in order to control the minds and social behaviors of children. In other words, although the power hierarchy has influenced verbal and nonverbal acts of the characters, the authors have tried to reflect ideal and favorable normal relations among members of the society.

Conclusion

The findings reveal that in children's stories, social relations are tailored down based on educational clichés, realities are ignored by the authors and no practical way is presented to resist and terminate the dominance of those in power by the weaker members of the society. The stories are produced according to a grand-structure which always regards domination as doomed to fail. In other words, the mental model used in the production of Persian children's stories follows the clichés of flat power relations, solidarity and equality among the actors and marginalizes the upper-class/lower class relations. This cliché represents Persian speakers' social attitude toward those in power. Educational managers, authors, translators and editors of children books may find this article and its results useful.

References:

Aghagolzade, F. (2016), *Applied linguistics*. Elmi Publication.

Alipur, P. (2012). *A kind little one*. Madreseh Publication.

Alipur P. (2017). *A new birthday*. Madreseh Publication.

Beeman, O. W. (1986). *Language, status and power in Iran, advances in semiotics*. Indiana University Press.

Binazir, N. (2018), Power Discourse and its process in school institution case study: *Majid Stories* by Hoshang Moradi Kermani. *Journal of Children's Literature Studies*, 9 (1), pp. 21-48.

Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical discourse analysis*. Longman.

Fairclough, N. (2001). *Language and power* (2nd Edition). Pearson Education Limited.

Foucault, M. (1980). *Power, knowledge: selected interviews & other writings, 1972-1977* (C. Gordon, Ed.). Pantheon.

Fowler, R. (1985). Power. In T. A. van Dijk (ed.). *Handbook of discourse analysis: Discourse analysis in society* (pp. 61-82). Academic Press.

Habermas, J. (1988). *On the logic of the social sciences* (S. Weber, and A. S. Jerry, Trans.). Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Hart, C. (2010). *Critical discourse analysis and cognitive science*. Palgrave, Macmillan.

Johnstone, B. (2008). *Discourse analysis* (2nd Edition). Blackwell Publishing.

Lakoff, R. T. (1990). *Talking power: The politics of language*. Basic books.

Lehtonen, S. (2007). Feminist critical discourse analysis and children's fantasy fiction: modelling a new approach. Access: www.researchgate.net

Locke, T. (2004). *Critical discourse analysis*. Continuum.

Mahmoudi, F. (2012). A new historical study of discourse, power and language in Behrangi's Stories. *Literary Criticism*, 5 (17), 9-110.

Mohammadi, M. H. (2016). *The cat and the leopard*. Center for Intellectual Development of Children and Adolescents.

Nair, R. & Talif, R. (2010). Lexical choices and the construction of gender in Malaysian children's literature. *Kajian Malaysia*, 28 (2), pp. 137-159.

Purgiv, F. Zekavat, M. (2011). A study of gender patterns in the story of Aunt Cockroach. *Journal of Children's Literature Studies*, 1 (2), pp. 27-43.

Rahmani, H. (2015). Looking through the lenses of (im)politeness at power and gender in Persian- speaking youngsters' novels. *Language and Linguistics: Journal of linguistics society of Iran*, 10 (20), pp. 31-56.

Taghdis, S. (2017). *The big big cow*. Madreseh Publication.

Teymurian, A. (2015). *The kind Sara*. center for intellectual development of children and adolescents.

Van Dijk, T. A. (1996). Discourse, power and access. In Caldas-Coulthard, C. R. & Coulthard, M. (Ed.). *Texts and practices: Readings in critical discourse analysis* (pp. 84–104). Routledge.

Van Dijk, T. A. (2000). Ideology and discourse: a multidisciplinary introduction. In Giles, H. & Robinson R. P. (Ed.). *Handbook of social psychology and language* (pp. 163-183). Wiley.

Van Dijk, T. A. (2008). *Discourse and power*. Palgrave/Macmillan.

Van Dijk, T. A. (2015). Critical discourse analysis. In Tannen, D., Hamilton, H. & Schiffrin, D. (Eds.). *Handbook of discourse analysis* (2nd Edition) (pp. 466-485). Wiley Blackwell.

Wodak, R. (1989). Introduction. in Wodak R. (Ed.). *Language, power and ideology* (pp. i–ix). John Benjamins.

Wodak, R. & Meyer, M. (2009). Critical discourse analysis: history, agenda, theory, and methodology. Access: www.researchgate.net.