

Critical Discourse Analysis of Shakespeare's "King Lear"

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Abstract

William Shakespeare is considered one of the greatest playwrights, poets, and actors in English history. In the light of Shakespeare's "King Lear," which shows the greed of power and wealth, the goal of this research paper is to examine different forms of language expressions used in this play. One of the most crucial aspects of every civilisation is language. It is how individuals interact with one another, develop relationships with one another, and foster a feeling of community. For this research, the play's content is examined using a research method called critical discourse analysis. The use of discursive linguistic features is exposed using the 3D model of Fairclough. Additionally, the text is examined on each of the three levels of this model: descriptive, discursive, and social practices — independently. The results indicate that the play

contains the discourse of wealth and revenge, which makes it a tragedy.

Keywords: CDA, Wealth, Power, Revenge, Fairclough's 3D Model

I. Introduction:

The literal meaning of the word Discourse was considered as speech or conversation. However, in today's era, we can see discourse as an important and large discipline in linguistics that encompasses many aspects of human life. Text and Discourse are two larger units, different linguists distinguished both of them in different ways. Fairclough (1989) creates a distinction as text is a product while discourse is a process of social interaction. According to Hodge and Kress (1988), the text is a framework for a message. Still, discourse is "the Social process in which texts are embedded.

Discourse analysis was more of a useful tool than a formal "theory" for many years. In the 1970s few linguists proposed a Literary theory that was concerned with Critical Linguistics. After this, the field of discourse, which was very limited till then, got much expansion. Critical Linguistics was a collection of various techniques that could be applied to a text in order to discover the hidden cultural and ideological implications. With the writings of Fairclough, Wodak, and other authors, CL finally gave birth to Critical Discourse Analysis. In general, CDA is an analytical study method that looks at how social power is abused. CDA is an extensively used theory in educational research nowadays.

CDA has a much wider scope. It deals with historical and social order, individual social order, hidden ideologies, power relations, people's social behaviour, individual and social position, and the relation between text and society.

Generally speaking, discourse is used whenever someone utilises language to communicate. According to Cook (1990), "discourse" might refer to novels, short conversations, or groans. As mentioned before, Discourse Analysis is a process of analysing the produced text in a society, similarly, one of the basic language production phenomena out of all is creating literature. Literature could be any type of novel, poetry, or play. Cook's opinion makes it clear that the literature could utilise the Critical Discourse Analysis theory.

In conclusion, when employing CDA, one should also be conscious of the plot's components. Plot is the order of events in which each occurrence influences the next through the cause-and-effect principle.

1.1 Research Objectives

- To analyse the power dynamics and discourse structures present in "King Lear" using Critical Discourse Analysis.

- To assess the influence of political and social context on the linguistic choices in the play through the application of Critical Discourse Analysis.
- To examine the ways in which Critical Discourse Analysis can reveal power struggles and hierarchical relationships among characters in the play.
- To investigate how Critical Discourse Analysis enhances our understanding of the intersections between language, power, and ideology in "King Lear."

1.2 Research Questions

- What are the different forms of language expressions used in the play, and how do these forms have discourse?
- How does language serve as a tool for negotiating and manifesting power dynamics in the play?
- How does the play "King Lear" contain the discourse of wealth and revenge?
- How do characters construct and negotiate their identities through linguistic means in the play?

2. Literature Review:

The term "literature review" refers to the study conducted by other authors on "King Lear" by Shakespeare. Shakespeare wrote King Lear around 1605-06 and had it published in a quarto edition in 1608. It is a tragic play with five acts. Shakespeare's play was first performed in any known form on Saint Stephen's Day in 1606. A mythological king of Britain serves as the primary protagonist of the story.

John F. Danby (1949), in his work *Shakespeare's Doctrine of Nature: A Study of King Lear*, claims that the play contains the phrases "nature," "natural," and "unnatural" more than forty times. In the play, there are two opposing views of human nature: those of the Lear party, which represents the philosophy of Bacon and Hooker, and those of the Edmund party, which are similar to later philosophical theories by Hobbes. The psychoanalytic interpretations and character analyses in "King Lear" establish the framework for a more detailed examination via the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis. Coppélia Kahn's psychoanalytic interpretation, which especially addresses the absence of legitimate mothers in the play, paves the way for prospective discursive analyses of maternal roles and representations (Kahn, 1992). Furthermore, the Freudian perspective on Cordelia as a symbol of death and Lear's rejection of it provides a thematic entrance point for comprehending the characters' discourse on mortality (Freud, 1913). The Adlerian theory's proposal of the King's fight for control over Cordelia adds another dimension of discourse inquiry (Adler, 1956). Harold Bloom's portrayal of Edmund as Shakespeare's most original character deepens perspective discursive studies into the reasons and language used by various characters (Bloom, 2008).

2.1 Distinction of the study

This study shows distinction because there is not any comprehensive previous research on the CDA of this play; our study on "Critical Discourse Analysis of King Lear" stands out from other studies in this field. CDA of other literature and political speeches exists, but there is no CDA of King Lear.

3. Theoretical Framework:

The theoretical framework of this paper is based on two analytical levels, i.e. lexical and pragmatic. The first level of analysis is the 'Lexical level', which deals with the importance of lexical items for the reflection of power in relation to discourse, careful choice of lexemes and the role of lexis in shaping responses or attitudes. A few strategies support the lexical level. These strategies include positive self-representation and negative other-representation. Next, the 'Pragmatic level' is the second level of analysis dealing with strategies of power as control and mind control. The pragmatic level focuses on strategies that show some relation to conversational discourse.

3.1 Lexical Approach to CDA

For studying language critically on lexical bases, Fairclough proposed his three-dimensional model. This model emphasises the importance of vocabulary while analysing a text. It consists of three stages: description, interpretation and explanation. Description concentrates on the formal aspects of textual analysis, interpretation follows the process of text production and explanation is used to relate that text with social practice. Lexical discourse is exercised in this play to control or gain power by using different lexical strategies, including Euphemism, Myth-making positive self-representation and negative other-representation.

3.1.1 Positive Self-Presentation and Negative Other-Presentation

One of the best methods to examine rhetorical power is to present oneself positively and others negatively. According to Van Dijk (2005), the texts serve as ideological representations of the "self" and "others" or the division between "us" and "them." Here, the term "us" refers to being a part of the group and "them" as remaining out of the group. This division is obviously societal, which is used to shape ideologies. The good or negative portrayal of a person, a group, or a political party aims to alter the public's behaviour toward certain topics.

3.2 Pragmatic Approach to CDA

The term 'pragmatics' is defined by George Yule (1996) as the study of "intended speaker meaning." He emphasises the fact that pragmatics is strongly concerned with the speaker's and author's intended meaning. Pragmatic approach to CDA deals with the analysis of verbal exchange in relation to context. As Mey (1993) says pragmatics is the field which studies language in connection to its users. The evaluation of this paper will use power as control and mind control as strategies that this approach offers to the study of power relations in speech.

4. Data Analysis

The dialogues from Shakespeare's play 'King Lear' are the main focus of analysis. Power relation to discourse is the subject matter for the study of chosen dialogues. In analysis, the use of language, the speaker's intention and the impact of conversation on the hearer are briefly discussed.

Results

Plot: Lear is an aged king who wants to retire and divide his kingdom among his three daughters, but before doing so, he takes a test of his daughters: Tell me, my daughters, how much you all love me. Lear gets a good response from Goneril and Regan, the eldest daughters, but Cordelia, the youngest daughter, is constantly silent and does not express her love for her father. Cordelia's behaviour frustrates Lear, and he disowns Cordelia. The king of France proposes to Cordelia that he wants to marry her even though she has no property, and Cordelia accepts his proposal. Lear soon realises that he has made the wrong decision as the behaviour of Regan and Goneril changes. This incident gradually pushes Lear to be mad, and he, along with Kent and Fool, starts wandering in thunderstorms at Heath. At the same time, Gloucester, a noble man, is facing some family problems. Gloucester's illegitimate son, Edmund, convinces him that his legitimate son, Edgar, is attempting to kill him. Gloucester is infuriated by this, so Edgar hides as a beggar at Heath. Gloucester tries to help Lear after learning about his illness, but as a result, Regan and her husband, Cornwall, rip out his eyes. Gloucester then passes away in agony and finds his son Edgar in his last moments. Edmund and Goneril prepare a plan to kill Albany, the husband of Goneril, because of his sympathy toward Lear. Meanwhile, Cordelia, leading the French army, attacks the English army, which Edmund leads. The French army was defeated, and Lear and Cordelia were captured. Cordelia is killed in Edmund's captivity. When Lear receives the news, he also dies of shock. Goneril poisons Regan over Edmund and commits suicide as Albany learns of her betrayal. Then, Edmund and Edgar got into a fight, and Edgar killed Edmund. In the end, under a fog of sadness, Albany, Edgar, and Kent are left to manage the kingdom.

Scene I: *[Act I Scene I: When the courtiers gathered in the royal palace's great hall to celebrate the king's final victory, the king announced his retirement and divided the kingdom among his daughters.]*

Cordelia

Since I'm sure, my love is more ponderous than my Tongue.

King

To thee and thine hereditary ever Remain this ample third of our fair kingdom,
No less in space, validity, and pleasure Than that conferred on Goneril, ...
what can you say to draw A third more opulent than your sisters'? Speak

Cordelia

Nothing my Lord.

King

Nothing!

Cordelia

Nothing.

King

Nothing will come of nothing. Speak again.

Cordelia

Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave my heart into my mouth. I love your Majesty
According to my bond, no more nor less.

King

How, how, Cordelia? Mend your speech a little, lest you may mar your fortunes.

Analysis:

The king is dividing his kingdom among his daughters with a condition to express their love for their father. Regan and Goneril express their love, but Cordelia does not. In the conversation between King Lear and Cordelia, the sentence "since I am sure," which refers to something in the context, was found to contain an anaphoric reference. In this assertion, she is trying to point out that as she is sure so, she will not exaggerate her love for Lear, and her sisters are not sure; they are just pretending for wealth and power. Although Cordelia's response is sincere, love is a feeling, and words are not compulsory to express any feeling. When Lear says, "A third more opulent than your sisters", he is not being quite honest at that moment. This statement shows King Lear's inequality among her daughters and as a part of his behaviour. It is shown that Cordelia is the favourite daughter of Lear, so this sentence shows his willingness to inherit the richest part of the kingdom to Cordelia in comparison to his other daughters as he loves Cordelia more. Still, it is Cordelia's response that made him change his mind. Cordelia's response is 'Nothing!' it is a term repeated multiple times and has different symbolic senses. It means I have nothing to say. Similarly, one possible context is that Lear, my father, knew nothing about my love; my love needs no words. When Lear wakes up from nothingness, he finds that Cordelia is his only daughter who truly loves him. Lear's reply is, 'Nothing will come of nothing.' he wants to make clear that if you did not speak to show your love for me, I would not give you any favours. If you speak nothing, you will get nothing. However, at the same time, he is trying to give her one more chance by saying 'speak again' as she is his favourite daughter. Thus, Lear wants to hear his praise, but Cordelia does not think it is

necessary to use words for that purpose. However, Cordelia has a relationship based on affection for Lear.

Scene 2: [*Act I Scene 2: Gloucester finds a letter from Edmund in which Edgar is asking to kill Gloucester*]

Letter

This policy and reverence of age makes the world bitter to the best of our times, keeps our fortunes from us till our oldness cannot relish them. I begin to find an idle and fond bondage in the oppression of aged tyranny, who sways not as it hath power but as it is suffered. Come to me, that of this I may speak more. If our father would sleep till I waked him, you should enjoy half his revenue forever and live the beloved of your brother.

Gloucester

You know the character to be your brother's?

Edmund

If the matter were good, my lord, I durst swear it were his; but in respect of that, I would fain think it were not.

Gloucester

It is his.

Edmund

It is his hand, my lord, but I hope his heart is not in the contents.

Gloucester

Has he never before sounded you in this business?

Edmund

Never, my lord. But I have heard him oft maintain it to be fit that, sons at perfect age and fathers declined, the father should be as ward to the son, and the son manage his revenue.

Analysis:

Gloucester finds a letter from his illegitimate son, Edmund. About that letter, they are using discursive language; Edmund claims that this letter is being written by Gloucester's legitimate son, Edgar. But in reality, that letter reflects the beliefs and ideas of Edmund as he wrote it to create a clash between Gloucester and Edgar. Edmund is doing so because the term "illegitimate" has a social practice that is unacceptable to him; society is being disrespectful, creating a distinction between both sons. Edmund is entitled to nothing, while Edgar is entitled to his father's name, his title, and his property. It is the society which makes him do such action. In that letter, Edmund addresses his father by using the word "aged tyranny", a person who seeks to keep

power in order to prevent his sons from inheriting. He means to suggest, in context, that Gloucester should leave his property to his children in almost the same manner that King Lear did. "Reverence of age" shows Edmund's rejection of the law of the state and norms of society.

When Gloucester reads the letter, Edmund uses positive self-representation and negative other representation. As he is the most obedient son who shows Gloucester that letter, and he also respects his brother, as he says, "respect of that, I would fain think it were not" that I have much respect for my brother, Edgar, I would assume that Edgar does not write this letter. But in reality, he is causing a conflict between Gloucester and Edgar by using this fake letter. At the same time, with such a soft selection of words, "It is his hand", he wants to create an image that Edgar is the culprit. The conclusion is that he successfully tricked Gloucester by creating an ambiguous image that Edgar wants to kill you and that I am your loyal son who wants to protect you.

Scene 3: *[Act I Scene 4: A hall in the palace of Goneril. Residing as a guest in Goneril's palace were King Lear and his knights. Goneril walks into the hallway with a disturbing attitude.]*

King Lear

Are you our daughter?

Goneril

I would you would make use of your good wisdom, Whereof I know you are fraught, and put away These dispositions which of late transport you From what you rightly are.

Goneril

As you are old and reverend, should be wise. Here do you keep a hundred knights and squires ... Epicurism and lust makes it more like a tavern or a brothel than a graced palace.

King Lear

devils! – Saddle my horses. Call my train together. Degenerate bastard I'll not trouble thee. Yet have I left a daughter.

Goneril

You strike my people, and your disordered rabble Make servants of their betters.

Analysis:

Many changes occur in a person as a result of the arrival or departure of power and wealth, and these changes impact a person's behaviour as well as the use of language. The same is the case, reflected in the conversation of Goneril and Lear. Lear's statement, "Are you our daughter?" shows his helplessness and self-pity, which is why he is using an interrogative sentence displaying a request or query rather than an imperative sentence. Lear's behaviour has always been authoritative like a king before, such as the case of disowning Cordelia. But now, words show his acceptance of his new status as a father rather than a strong ruler because he is dependent on her daughter and her servants. Goneril's reply is a charge on Lear of failing to regulate his men's conduct and a taunt that you are no longer a king, so you do not need these soldiers. Goneril does not even communicate with Lear in the way a girl normally communicates with her old father; in a normal context old father should be treated with some respect and reverence. But Goneril directly declares Lear an idiot by saying, "You are old and reverend, should be wise". Since the king is addicted to act authoritatively, he tries to respond authoritatively sometimes, neglecting the fact that a ruler without a kingdom has no power. Lear is forced to admit that he is no longer in charge when Goneril's statement "transport you From what you rightly are" answers Lear's regret: "Are you our daughter?". Goneril's language contains the depiction of language with power as a unit. The whole conversation states that Lear's regret would not change Goneril's status, as she is in power. The beginning of King Lear has such strong displays of love from Goneril and Regan for their father, but as power shifts, their behaviour changes because they are just pretending for wealth and power.

Scene 4: [*Act 5 Scene 3: In the royal palace, Regan and Goneril are communicating about Lear's actions and motivations*]

Regan

That's as we list to grace him. Me thinks our pleasure might have been demanded ere you had spoke so far. He led our powers, Bore the commission of my place and person, The which immediacy may well stand up and call itself your brother.

Goneril

Not so hot. In his own grace he doth exalt himself More than in your addition.

Regan

In my rights, By me invested, he compeers the best.

Goneril

That were the most if he should husband you.

Analysis:

Human relationships also play an important part in Shakespeare's King Lear. Regan's attitude toward Lear suggests a degree of arbitrariness. The phrase "as we list" implies that their favour for Lear is based on their preferences. She also thinks that Lear's behaviour or demands could have influenced their goodwill if he had reached out sooner. This point of view of Regan mirrors the power play and manipulation that occurs in the character's relationships. Regan recognises that Lear previously held a position of authority, leading their armies and acting on her behalf. The adjective "immediacy" implies that Lear's actions were swift and important, maybe conveying a sense of urgency. The description of Lear as a "brother" adds depth, implying a familial bond despite the tense connections. Goneril disagrees with Regan's assessment, saying Lear is extremely self-centred. The phrase "hot" refers to intense or vigorous applause, and Goneril believes that Lear values his favour more than the praise and compliments Regan provides upon him. It demonstrates Lear's selfish and self-centred nature in the way they think. Regan maintains her authority, claiming that Lear, whom she has invested in, is the best. The phrase "compeers" implies equality or peer status, highlighting the power dynamics at play. Regan appears to be explaining her decision to give Lear responsibility based on her assessment Of his abilities. Goneril adds a sarcastic twist, implying that the best scenario would be if Lear played Regan's spouse. It lends an element of irony and tension to the dialogue. The discourse analysis reveals the intricate power conflicts, opposing perspectives, and delicate details that exist in the debate. The characters are navigating a complex web of familial relationships, authority, and personal goals, which adds to the play's tragic and tense tone.

5. Conclusion

The inquiry into William Shakespeare's "King Lear" has revealed an extensive web of debate, mostly focused on issues of power and wealth. This popular play tells the tragic story of a royal family tearing apart its relationships in search of authority and order, emphasising the never-ending struggle for power as the root cause of war. The endless hunger for power and wealth causes catastrophic occurrences, resulting in violent fights and battles that destroy familial bonds. Shakespeare's investigation of tragic events through the lenses of prejudice, betrayal, and dishonesty is a profound commentary on the human condition in the post-medieval era. The characters in "King Lear" serve as channels for these societal tensions, representing the repercussions of an unrestrained desire for power. Critical discourse analysis emerges as a useful tool for figuring out the play's layers of meaning, providing insights that support the overriding notion that Shakespeare wants his audience to emphasise familial bonds over the temptation of power. The discourse penetrates the words of practically all of the play's major characters, providing a comprehensive insight into their motivations, conflicts, and final fate. Shakespeare expertly crafts a narrative through a complex web of dialogues and monologues that illustrates the vulnerability of human relationships when confronted with the devastating influence of power dynamics. Furthermore, the study expands its

scope to include a comprehensive examination of the language employed in that era's society, providing a detailed assessment of linguistic intricacies, social hierarchies, and dominant ideologies. By situating the debate within the larger socio-cultural environment of Shakespearean England, the study sheds light on the playwright's acute knowledge of the ambiguities inherent in the search for power and money. Finally, the critical discourse analysis of "King Lear" not only reveals the complex threads of power-related discourse within the play but also establishes Shakespeare as a keen observer and commentator on human nature. The persuasive undertone stressing the importance of familial relationships over the attraction of power emphasises Shakespeare's immortal insights into the conflict between human impulses and moral imperatives.

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