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A Critical Discourse Analysis of ‘An American Brat’ by Bapsi Sidhwa

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Abstract

This paper presents a critical discourse analysis of the novel written by an eminent 21st-century female writer Bapsi Sidhwa. The text was analyzed critically in the backdrop of the checklist developed by the researcher. The findings reveal that a significantly tough language has been used for the depiction of men and women. Roles and responsibilities given to them have been found to be assigned on the basis of gender discrimination. Therefore, it is contended that colonialism still prevails in the form of social, economic and educational disparities in the third world countries as compared to the developed and privileged countries. Similarly, power structures have been found functional in every sphere of life and are decided by the institutions which hold the utmost power. Racism has also been revealed in the text. Ethnicity, race, color, culture and language have been found superiority over all the other ethnicities, cultures, races and languages.

Key Words: Discourse Analysis, Racism, Ethnicity

Introduction

The study intends to analyze and deconstruct the text/novel ‘An American Brat’ by Bapsi Sidhwa in the form of critical discourse analysis (CDA). The text was analyzed considering the linguistic content and its sociolinguistic context. [Baker and Ellece \(2011\)](#) proposed specifications related to content and context analysis. They assert that content analysis helps in extracting meaning from the text because it focuses on anaphoric meanings of the text, what has been written and negates the author’s intention. While context analysis helps in comprehending the social, political, cultural and historical context where the specific communicative event takes place ([Baker & Ellece, 2011](#)). [Baker and Ellece \(2011\)](#) find language a social practice and highlight the ways through which ideologies and power relations are

expressed through language. At the same time, they argue that critical discourse analysts adhere to the issues pertaining to inequalities.

[Van Dijk \(2011\)](#) also believes that CDA is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. With such dissident research, critical discourse analysts take an explicit position and thus want to understand, expose, and ultimately resist social inequality. This study also intends to trace out a link between the theory of Postcolonialism and Critical Discourse Analysis. [Sabido \(2016\)](#) also points out that Post-Colonial Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis both have an inclination towards resisting

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social structures that are based on unequal relations of power. The connection between language and social structures are also discussed in this research. Hence, both theories underlie complete independence on each other, but they are concerned with the concept of power and through their own specific ways to expose oppression and power inequalities. In addition, CDA deconstructs discursive strategies to reveal the manners in which ideologies, perspectives and power relations are expressed through language. The focal point of Post-Colonial Theory is power imbalances that have been extracted out from post-colonial practices, situations, conditions, and structures that are prevalent and perpetuated in contemporary society. Thus, Post-colonial theory imparts a helpful and useful theory of meaning to contextualize the application of CDA. Post-Colonial theory, along with Critical Discourse analysis, examines the discourses which have been produced in post-colonial contexts and settings.

Literature Review

Language use is linked with power operations. Social structures of power come into play through the use of language. Language is exploited in societies to achieve vested interests. [Mahmood and Shamim \(2020\)](#), in their research, put forward their point of view in relation to the theory of politeness. They consider politeness as a social phenomenon based on the social context of a society. Speakers indicate their own perception about their own selves and others through politeness. Colonizers deem themselves as more powerful and superior, so they make use of direct and dominating politeness strategies to oppress the people who belong to the 'Third World Countries' ([Mahmood & Shamim, 2020](#)). On the Contrary, colonized are expected to show their subordination through the use of higher-order politeness strategies while interacting with their Masters or colonizers. The character *Zareen* makes use of polite expressions to show her desire and to seek permission from *Manek* about *Feroza's* sending to America. However, *Manek* is straightforward in his speech, and his direct speech indicates Americans' direct way of speaking. He debases *Feroza* and her country without any fear and shame. *Manek's* satirizing conversational manner also indicates Americans' prejudices against the Third

World Countries. The materialistic approach of Americans is also evident from his conversation.

Disclosure of social inequalities and oppression is the prime purpose of carrying out a critical discourse analysis. The selected novel suggests inequalities at multiple levels. Gender discrimination and gender inequalities have been observed throughout the novel in oriental and western societies. [Imtiaz \(2011\)](#) conceptualized femininities in the novel and considers that literature that has been developed on migration has little or no involvement of women of colour (women experiencing multiple layers of marginalization with race or ethnicity as a common issue) and their lived experiences. Their experiences are distinctive because transnational perspectives and gender perspectives help them in reflecting and depicting the process of alienation and assimilation. 'An American Brat' helps in unveiling the experiences of *Feroza*, a Pakistani girl who belongs to the Parsee community; her parents send her to America to modernize her approach towards life. This novel has given rise to debate in Pakistan because of the issues related to the representation of the protagonist, *Feroza*, who possesses multiple identities which challenge and question the representation of a fixed identity and roles related to the woman of colour.

Role of Culture in Shaping Identities

Culture upholds one's identity, norms, values, behaviors related to that specific culture and specific ideologies. Culture impacts all the spheres of life. In a multicultural context and societies, the clash between different cultures, ideologies and perspectives can be seen easily. [Bhuvaneswari \(2018\)](#) believes that culture is never fixed, and that is proven through the crossing of ideologies and thoughts. This crossing of ideologies occurs through the systems of discourse. Speakers from different cultures talk about various issues in multiple ways in different speech communities. Topics, incidents and problems are considered while keeping in mind different aspects, and it involves different codes of behavior. Language is not isolated from culture; it is linked with culture. Language follows social and linguistic patterns which are derived from cultural norms. Language, non-linguistic activities and settings which give rise to discursive context (how certain people discuss

certain things) also need consideration. This promotes the continuation of discourse and shared experiences through listening and speaking. Common knowledge is established for cross-cultural understanding to continue. Many aspects can be included under the term cross-culture other than language only. Individuals get affected by other culture because they are living in that location and scenario. Cross cultures affect individuals' way of life; they start adapting themselves to the other culture. They suffer because they do not know the other language and start forgetting their own culture (Bhuvanewari, 2018)

Research Methodology

The present research is qualitative and analytical in nature. The textual/content analysis and thematic methods have been used for meticulous investigation of the text under study; methodically, the researcher observed and carried out a critical discourse analysis of the novel and 'An American Brat' by Bapsi Sidhwa. The findings of the analysis are presented in the form of tables. In the first column, the parameter has been mentioned, in the second column, the evidence from the text has been provided, and in the third column, categories have been generated.

Analysis and Findings

The findings are presented in the table below.

Table 1.

| S. No | Parameter | Written Evidence | Theme Generated |
|-------|------------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| 1. | Adjacency pairs | <p>"Dutch Man when he asked about Bhutto: 'And Bhutto what d'you think of him? Zareen: 'He's my hero. The champion of the poor. Of women, of the minorities and underprivileged people----- of democracy'" (p. 167).</p> <p>1. "Mike: 'If you don't give me your car keys right this minute, you will be sorry!' Mike shouted. Mike was drunk. Jo wondered how he'd managed to conceal it so well. 'Get outta here,' she shouted, and Feroza, who had heard most of their conversation, barged into the living room to stand by her friend. 'I know what you want the car for,' Jo yelled, drawing courage from Feroza's presence" (p. 181).</p> | Indicates political discourse |
| 2. | Women's language | <p>2. "Her repertoire had recently expanded to include 'Hockey -stick' and 'Shuttlecock.' She sometimes wished that her mother would use really foul language instead" (p. 113).</p> <p>"'You have become a Mike?' Manek remained calm. 'The people I have to deal with at work find it hard to remember Manek. It's too foreign; it makes them uneasy. But I'm one of the guys if I'm Mike. 'In America, be---and Aban added her voice to Feroza's as they both chorused, 'American!'" (p. 253).</p> | Exploitation through language |
| 3. | Accommodation | <p>"'You know what we do when a proposal is received, Zareen continued, ignoring the change in her daughter's regard, warned though that she must be guarded in her choice of words. 'We</p> | Cross cultural effect/ Adaptation |
| 4. | Social Status | | Social disparity/Power structures |

| S. No | Parameter | Written Evidence | Theme Generated |
|-------|---|--|--|
| 5. | Phonemic Variation/Syntactic Variation | investigate the boy's family thoroughly. What is his background? His standard of living? His family connection?" (p. 270). "In Pakistan.' 'In Pack-iss-tan! Ben pronounced the word the American way, obviously surprised and hugely amused" (p. 122). | Language varieties |
| 6 | Anaphora | "Manek, who had never prepared even a cup of tea in Lahore, astonished Feroza by the culinary prowess necessity had brought forth. Not that he cooked anything as fancy as prawn patia or Dhansak lentils" (p. 106) | Linguistic Unit/Feature/ Reference technique |
| 7. | Dissociation | "Don't yell, Manek said. You are puncturing my eardrum. Why do you Third World Pakis shout so much? 'Everybody's not deaf.' Feroza directed a bloodcurdling shriek into the receiver. 'Stupid girl. D' you know how much your screeches are costing your parents?' So? You're not paying. And what do you mean, 'Paki'? What are you, some snow-white Englishman?" (p. 18). | Adapting other cultures; distancing themselves from their own culture |
| 8. | Use of Argot | "Feroza showed her ticket, and as she went past the uniformed men Cyrus's last message----in English except for one Gujrati word. ----rang out: 'I've sent Manek enough doria for you. Take it from him.' Few in Lahore understand Gujrati, so Parsees use it as a secret language when the occasion demands" (p. 42). | Use of words from one language in a multicultural context as a secret language |
| 9. | Racist discourse | 1. "You are not eligible to enter the United States. You and your 'uncle' have concealed the truth" (p. 55). 2. "They are Americans. They will not waste their time on uss. Only illiterate natives like you, from Third World counties, waste time..." (p. 69). | Application of Theory of critical discourse analysis |
| 10 | Language Variation/Linguistic Variables | "Hi', Feroza said and added: 'there was a man in the washroom. Two men. Just a little while ago.' 'You tell the management, honey. There sure are creeps hangin' around. They might dirty, too. Now, you take care, honey.' Her drawing southern accent and syntax were hard to follow, but Feroza picked up enough words to understand the drift of what was said" (pp. 62-63). | Variations in accents and dialects |
| 11. | Speech Community | "The moment Manek opened his mouth and spoke, the Atlanta Patels could tell from his distinctive accent that he was a Parsee. Their well meaning interest in a stranger who shared their language irked Manek" (p. 192). | Sense of Identity |

| S. No | Parameter | Written Evidence | Theme Generated |
|-------|---|--|--|
| 12. | Back Channels | “Oh God! I’m going to hang up or throw up!” ‘Okay. Okay... As I was saying. Cyrus jee was full of his usual foolishness” (p. 215). | Conversation analysis |
| 13. | Principles of Cooperation | “Zareen started weeping. ‘I don’t know what to do,’ she said between her sobs. And pulling herself together, she expressed her anxiety and feelings. Manek listened to her with growing impatience. ‘Couldn’t the matter wait till evening? Do you know how much this call is costing?’” (p. 283) | Content/Context analysis |
| 14. | Discourse Marker | “The man sat up straighter and looked briefly but politely at Zareen. ‘Well, what d’ you think?’” (p. 168). | Value of discourse markers in relation to semantics |
| 15. | Theory of Politeness | “After she had collected the receipt and the parcel, Jo said to the saleswoman, ‘You got a problem with your attitude. You have to do something about that.’ The saleswoman pursed her mouth and grimly turned her face” (p. 143). | Face saving act |
| 16. | Code mixing | 1. “She sought her ayah and hugged her until the old woman thrilled. ‘Stop it. bus kar----you’ll squash my bones and ribs” (p. 19). 2. “Do you want a treat or not?’ ‘Not if we are going to live on dal and rice for the next two weeks” (p. 134). | Multicultural/Multilingual context |
| 17. | Operation of Power structures/ social/economic/inequalities | “Why is Pakistan so backward? He asked. Feroza knew better than to answer. ‘Are we stuck in the Middle ages because we were colonized? Because we were illiterate? Because we don’t have enough technology to make atom bombs?’” (p. 68). | Post-Colonialism |
| 18. | Political discourse | “‘What brings you to Lahore, jee?’ ‘Bhutto’s hanging’ The room, buzzing with the usual political and business chatter, suddenly became very quiet. ‘No, I’m not’, Khushwant Singh looked surprised that they should find the news so unexpected. ‘I was sent a message from the top that something was to happen. What else can it be?’” (p. 114). | Political discourse; an element of the theory of critical discourse analysis |
| 19. | Gender inequalities | 1. “Even men are warned against marrying out of the community, but then the attitude of the society is flexible: All I can do is pray he won’t marry some white tart. But he’s a man; he can get away...But who will marry a girl who’s been... Our elders used to say, keep the girls buried at home” (p. 113). 2. “When Feroza gets enrolled at the University of Denver and finds herself short of money, she starts to think of possible solutions to the problem: | Related to critical discourse analysis |

| S. No | Parameter | Written Evidence | Theme Generated |
|-------|-----------|--|-----------------|
| | | Feroza considered waitressing, working in a bar, becoming a salesperson or selling tickets at an amusement park. These jobs were within her range—if she took the chances the other foreign students took—and was prepared to work for less than minimum wage. Feroza found the very concept of these jobs breathtaking, beyond the compass of the possible in Pakistan” (p. 208). | |

Discussion

Adjacency pairs were found used where both of the speakers take their turns to perform certain related functions. For instance, invitation-acceptance or rejection, request-acceptance or denial. Question/answer. Zareen and Dutchman are seen indulged in a conversation based on some questions and answers. They were having a conversation related to Pakistani politics and Bhutto’s political career and imprisonment.

Issues related to gender discrimination can be widely seen in the novel. Male members are given preference over female members in a society. Some roles and responsibilities are based on gender discrimination. There is a differentiation in the roles and responsibilities which are assigned to men and women, which is based on gender inequalities. Social inequality is the key component of discourse analysis.

Individuals try to make their speech more like a speech of other speech groups, which is having socially high status and urban dialect. In accommodation, speakers change their language and make it more similar to that of the other group. In the given example (see section 3 in the table), Manek can be seen using language in such a way that he tries to sound like American people so that they start accepting him and may not consider him a stranger.

Social status is operational here. Individuals are given privileges on the basis of their economic background, education, social status, and ethnicity. In the given an example (see section 4 in the table), it can be seen how people are judged on the basis of their social status. People look for those proposals for their sons and daughters who are financially stable. Rich people are considered more honorable than the people who belong to the low class.

Phonetic and Phonological variation can be observed when non-native speakers of any language start using that language. The way American Policeman pronounces Pakistan does not alter the meaning, but there was a slight difference in sound, so it was phonetic variation.

Anaphora has been involved while carrying out a conversation. One term is indicative of another term that has previously been mentioned. This is executed by using pronouns or determiners. In the given an example (see section 6 in the table) of Anaphora can be seen where the pronoun ‘he’ has been used in place of Manek.

When speakers try to make their speech more different from the group from which they are trying to distance themselves, this change in language is called dissociation. In both accommodation and dissociations, learners are unaware of the changes which they create in language. It can be seen in the given examples (see section 7 in the table) that Manek is trying to dissociate himself from the Pakistani and Oriental way of communication and use of language. He tries to sound more like Americans. He no more needs to be called Pakistani or a resident of any third world country. He makes fun of his niece when she speaks in a more *desi* way.

The use of Argot is observed in the novel. An argot is a secret language used by various groups to prevent outsiders from understanding their conversations. Parssees who are living in Pakistan use the Gujrati language as an argot to communicate so that people outside their speech community cannot understand their language and intentions.

This novel can be seen as a racist discourse because it refers to different ways by which people are constructed biologically different, and they deserve

to be treated in derogatory and dehumanizing ways. Racism is established on stereotypes where one ethnic group may be viewed as less generous or intelligent than the other group. Portrayal of Americans, their economic power, their life style, their culture is perpetuating their superiority over other countries.

The correlation of linguistic variables with social features has been deeply studied by linguists. One of the investigated items is the variable (ng), alternating between [n] and [ŋ] in many varieties of English. If class differentiation is associated with a linguistic variable, speakers of all social group will adhere to the higher status variant in a formal setting. We see different varieties of American English in this novel.

A speech community is a group of people who share a set of linguistic norms and expectations regarding the use of language. Different speech communities have also been highlighted in this novel. For instance, Parsee community and as a group possess distinctive language, culture and norms.

The technique of BackChannels has been used to indicate that the listener is attentively listening to the speech of a speaker. It is like feedback that can be given in both verbal and non-verbal forms. Verbal forms include words like yeah, right, okay. Non-verbal forms include nods, gestures. The use of BackChannels has been traced out in the conversations between Manek and Feroza.

Linguist Paul Grice stated that when participants are involved in the conversation, they follow certain rules called as "cooperative principle". Grice posited that utterances convey sense no matter whatever is uttered. In the given an example (see section 13 in the table), we see flouting of the maxim of relation when Zareen called Manek to share her with him, and he said in return that this call is costing too much money instead of giving any relevant answer.

Discourse markers have been used throughout the novel. Discourse markers or pragmatic markers refer to words or phrases that seem to have no grammatical or semantic function, such as *you know, Oh, well, I mean, actually, basically*. Most discourse markers were ignored because of having empty

meanings or being fillers, but they were acknowledged later.

The strategy of politeness has been used by some characters, but some characters did not show politeness in their conversation.

Code mixing is frequently used by the characters in their conversation. Code mixing refers to the attachment of linguistic units such as phrases, words and morphemes of one language into an utterance of another language.

The operation of power structures and social and economic inequalities can also be seen in the selected novel. People who belong to Less Fortunate countries or Third World countries are getting settled in the developed and privileged countries to have better opportunities and a better way of life. It can be seen that in the name of enlightenment how most of the countries were colonized, and still, the previously colonized countries are going through the aftermath of colonialism.

There are some instances in the novel which are related to political discourse. These instances indicate that how political upheavals are dealt with by the government or top authorities, how power is limited within specific hands to decide the destiny of the country.

Men and women in the novel were found using a different language during their conversation. Gender inequality is easily established through the use of language. Linguist Robin Lakoff suggested that men use language to dominate women, and as a result, women's language is polite, hypercorrect and concerned with ensuring that conversations run smoothly. In the given an example (see section 19 in the table), women; Feroza and Joe can be seen using language to protect themselves against men, and they are trying to resolve the matter. In the second example, women's use of language is more refined and sophisticated as compared to men.

It was tried in the discussion to create cohesion between CDA theories, generated themes and categories in the analysis. Therefore, it is notable that the notion of dominance, power abuse, inequalities operational in the spheres of politics, society and economics have been found dominant. Power abuse is practised where one race is given superiority over

another, and one speech community is given preference over another. Thus, social inequalities and injustice have also been prevailing when a number of people are deprived of basic necessities and other opportunities because of their social class and background. Gender inequalities, political upheavals and power relations have also been discussed in the novel to put forward different ideologies and perspectives. Through this novel, 'An American Brat', Bapsi Sidhwa has highlighted all the critical issues related to identity, politics, social class, power relations, and gender discrimination that need to be addressed in this post-colonial era.

Conclusion

Critical discourse analysis of Bapsi Sidhwa's 'An

American Brat' reveals the inequalities which are put into practice at the social, economic and political level. This novel has highlighted all the above-mentioned disparities and inequalities which exist in this Post-Colonial world. A critical discourse analysis of the novel has examined and investigated the way the use of language and other discursive strategies are exploited to achieve vested interests. This novel has indicated how specific ideologies, perspectives and power relations are expressed and perpetuated through the use of language. With the help of linguistic content analysis and sociolinguistic context analysis, we can easily trace out the operations of political, social, economic and gender inequalities and injustice in this novel which are the primary features of critical discourse analysis.

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