



Norman Fairclough's Textually Oriented Discourse Analysis in Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*

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Abstract

The present study is an attempt to use "textually oriented discourse analysis" of Norman Fairclough, (1941), to offer a new reading of Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955). The researcher found it quite appropriate to read the chosen work through Fairclough's stylistic and discursive features in order to represent the identities of the main characters. Nabokov's works represent an important portrayal of discursive challenges in the post-war American society that is largely invested in Fairclough's theory. One of the most apparent aspects in Nabokov's works is that of social identity and subject formation. As discourse theory denotes, a subject 'misrepresents' the world in ideology because he wants to do so, because there is some reward or benefit to him in doing so. Similarly Humbert Humbert in *Lolita* is looking for an imaginary world by which he can hide his suppressed identity. He fakes a new identity for himself through fiction. Considering the style of narration in *Lolita*, some reader consider Humbert as an unreliable narrator, he sometimes makes up some events and in some parts of the story he seems insane and uncertain. In *Lolita* Nabokov tries to show that each individual creates his/her reality and do not reflect reality. Humbert narrates his personal story from his point of view which might be different from people around him. Reality in Nabokov's perspective is subjective and mixture of memory and imagination.

Keywords: Discourse Analysis, *Lolita*, Social Identity, Subject Formation

1. Introduction

This study will use Norman Fairclough's CDA as the theoretical framework for analyzing style and identity. The researcher will identify the discursive features in the chosen novels according to Fairclough's framework and then relates them to the representation of identities of main characters in the selected text. CDA is concerned with how power is exercised through language. CDA studies discourse; in CDA this includes texts, talks, videos and practices. CDA brings the critical tradition in social analysis into language studies, and contributes to critical social analysis a particular focus on discourse, and on relations between discourse and other social elements such as power relations, ideologies, institutions, social identities, and so forth. (Wodak, 2000)

Lolita, (1955), is a tragicomedy narrated by Humbert, a European intellectual who is protagonist and the unreliable narrator of the story. *Lolita* is a fictional memoir and a classic example of postmodern literature. The protagonist of the story narrates the novel from subjective point of view and uses vast variety of linguistic devices. In this novel Nabokov highlights American society's tendency to exclude violent or immoral behavior in media while remaining absorbed by it in reality. Through *Lolita* Nabokov pictures human nature in relation to cultural practices through representations of textual media.

Lolita is regarded as one of the chief achievements in 20th century literature. It is also among the most debated books. In 1962, the novel was adapted to film by Stanley Kubrick. *Lolita* is in the list of the 100 best English-language novels from 1923 to 2005 and it is also a significant cultural text in the U.S. (Toffler, 2014)

The story begins with Humbert's autobiography. It starts with present time and the narrator talks about what happened up to that time. The way that the narrator presents his thoughts is different from techniques used in realistic novels, the narrator expresses his experiences from an external point of view. For example he talks about himself in terms of the widower as a replacement for I.

Nabokov's use of language, points of view and perspectives is analyzable. According to Fairclough "any sentence in a text is analyzable in terms of the articulation of these functions" (Fairclough, 2003) which he labels as *representations*, *relations*, and *identities*. *Lolita*'s narration is in first person or according to Cohan and Shires "character-bound" (2003). The ambiguous nature of Humbert's narration in *Lolita* has been argued by critics ever since its publication.

Lolita is the story of Humbert Humbert, a middle-aged European scholar and his obsession with his 12-year-old stepdaughter, Lolita. The story is presented as Humbert's prison diary, written while he is awaiting trial for the murder of Clare Quilty. Clare Quilty is a middle-aged playwright with whom Lolita runs away. The origin of Humbert Humbert's attraction to Lolita goes back to the time that he is at age of 13. At that time he fell in love with a girl his own age, Annabel Leigh, and after the end of summer Humbert learns that Annabel has died.

In his adult time Humbert marries Valeria and the marriage ends in divorce when Valeria leaves him for another man. Eventually Humbert immigrates to America. Upon his arrival in Ramsdale, he is directed to the home of Charlotte Haze, who is a widow. When Humbert sees her 12-year-old daughter, Dolores, he is immediately attracted by the girl and nicknames her Lolita.

Nabokov's description of his writing technique suggests that the motivation for his characters and his plots comes from a deeply rooted subconscious. The themes that persist in Nabokov's work obviously mirror his understanding of different societies and norms. According to Field "Vladimir Nabokov's emigration from his birthplace in Russia, throughout Europe, and finally to the United States offered him a unique perspective on many different cultures and a broad understanding of societies, norms, and cultural practices." (Field, 1967)

1.1 Statement of the Problem

This thesis attempts to analyze discursive challenges which exist in Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, (1955) and *Pale Fire*, (1962) through 'textually oriented discursive' theory of Norman Fairclough that can be considered as one of the most update and applicable critical theories. This theory is one of the most active theories in textual, social, cultural and political criticism of today and is based on Mikhail Bakhtin and Michael Halliday on the linguistic field, and ideology theorists such as Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu on the sociological one. By using Michel Foucault and Louis Althusser's political criticism, it moves beyond limitation of formalism and new criticism.

Nabokov's novels are appropriate cases for the application of this theory. The study of his works from a 'textually oriented discursive' perspective would be interesting and also there is a vast room for argument about language and discourse in his novels. Nabokov's distinguished style of writing and development of his characters is definitely of great importance in order to make clear understanding of his novels. Therefore, the purpose of the present research is to investigate the identity of the main characters through Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse.

The researcher is on the opinion that the dexterity Nabokov uses in developing Humbert Humbert and Lolita in his novel *Lolita*, requires a more close attention in order to prevent ambiguities and make a full understanding of Nabokov's novels and to that end the researcher has chosen Fairclough's CDA framework to introduce a new way of analyzing style and identity in these novels. In respect of the mentioned points a number of leading questions are broached:

1. Is "textually oriented discourse analysis" of Norman Fairclough applicable to Nabokov's selected works?
2. How does Nabokov's background affect his writing?
3. How can the effects of Media be traced in Shaping the Identity of Characters in *Lolita*?
4. How does Nabokov depict new cultural movement in post-World War II America?
5. How the identity of the characters are represented in the style of narrative?

2. Method

Norman Fairclough's field of study called, *textually oriented discourse analysis*, is concerned with the mutual effects of "formally linguistic textual properties, sociolinguistic speech genres, and formally sociological practices". (Hesmondhalgh, 1997). He is interested in how social practices are discursively shaped.

CDA studies discourse is concerned with how power is exercised through language as a form of social practice. According to Fairclough "Scholars working in the tradition of CDA generally assume that (non-linguistic) social practice and linguistic practice constitute one another and focus on investigating how societal power relations are established and reinforced through language use." (Fairclough, 1995)

Fairclough combined micro, Meso and macro level interpretation. Micro level is a kind of textual/linguistic analysis, like use of metaphor and rhetorical devices. Meso level is a kind of discursive practice, "involve studying issues of production and consumption. For instance, which institution produced a text, who is the target audience" (Barry, 2002). Macro-level analyses intertextual and interdiscursive elements that affect the text.

CDA is analysis of the dialectical relationships between discourses, including language, body language or visual images and other elements of social practices. Discourses include representations of how things are as well as representations of how things might or should be.

For Fairclough the issue of access to media is important. Fairclough believes there are many individuals and social groups who do not have an equal access to the mass media in terms of writing, speaking or broadcasting. Fairclough maintains that this is because "media output is very much under professional and institutional control, and in general it is those who already have other forms of economic, political or cultural power that have the best access to the media" (2003).

For Fairclough another important property of media to discuss is its economics, according to him “the economics of an institution is an important determinant of its practices and its texts” (p.40). He believes like other profit making institutions, the media have a product to sell and their product is the audience of interest to advertisers (p.42). The subject of the effects of the economic aspects of media has been the center of much discussion in critical media studies.

For Fairclough another important issue is the politics of media. He believes that media discourses “contribute to reproducing social relations of domination and exploitation” (Fairclough, 2003). In Fairclough’s perspective the commercial mainstream media works ideologically and is in the service of the “powerful, the elite, and the state.” (p.40)

Fairclough sometimes observes the interests of the media in conflict with the state, for example in the case of war, television, by showing images of the war turns the public opinion against the war. Chomsky believes that periodical criticisms of the state or major corporations by the media are a part of the doctrine of dominant elite groups to “aggressively portray themselves as spokesmen for free speech and the general community interest” (53).

According to Howarth the mainstream media are “agents of hegemony” (Howarth, 2000). He believes that no power could last forever through imposing force. He maintains in democratic countries where the public is mostly literate, the ruling class needs to achieve the public’s approval in order to maintain its domination, and the mass media is one of the essential elements in manufacturing this approval.

According to Fairclough Discourse Analysis is based upon a view of semiosis as an intricate element of all material social processes. It can be said that in Fairclough’s perspective social relations, social identities, cultural values and consciousness are in part semiotic. But that does not mean that we theorize and research social relations in the same way that we theorize and research language.

Social practices networked in a precise way constitute a social order, the discourse/semiotic aspect of a social order is what Fairclough calls an order of discourse. It is the way in which different genres and discourses and styles are networked together. An order of discourse is a social structuring of semiotic difference that makes meaning in different discourses and genres and styles.

3. Discussion

3.1 Discourse, Social Identity and Characters Reliance on Media

The politics of media plays an important role in Fairclough’s analysis. He believes that media discourses “contribute to reproducing social relations of domination and exploitation” (Fairclough, 2003). In *Lolita* Nabokov offers a criticism of pictorial media in daily life, as manifested in advertisements and entertainment businesses. In Fairclough’s perspective the commercial mainstream media works ideologically and is in the service of the “powerful, the elite, and the state” (p.40). In *Lolita* Nabokov highlights American society’s tendency to exclude violent or immoral behavior in media while remaining absorbed by it in reality.

In this novel Nabokov portrays how magazine ads and Hollywood inspire childhood. Nabokov considers America as a landscape of signs and semiotics, as Fairclough discusses social relations, social identities, cultural values and consciousness are in part semiotic. In Nabokov’s *Lolita*, the role of American media in shaping the identity of characters is undeniable. As Booker claims “this landscape shapes the characters encounters” (Booker, 1990). In Keith Booker’s perspective Humbert is a character who “takes advantage of the media’s effect on others” (p. 84)

During the course of the novel, the effect of media on Charlotte’s reliance on ads is visible. In different parts of the story her dependence on homemaking manuals and advertisements irritates Humbert.

The novels I had found her reading when I moved in were now replaced by illustrated catalogues and homemaking guides. From a firm located at 4640 Roosevelt Blvd., Philadelphia, she ordered for our double bed a “damask covered 312 coil mattress” — although the old one seemed to me resilient and durable enough for whatever it had to support. (*Lolita*, 1997)

As Dana Brand points out “not only does Humbert notice early on Charlotte’s dependence on the media around her, but he uses the language of the media to control Charlotte so that he may possess Dolores (Brand, 1987). In Fairclough’s perspective every practice is an articulation of diverse social elements within a relatively stable configuration, always including discourse. Humbert elegantly uses media’s impact on the other characters to dictate his discourse.

In Humbert and Dolores first meet, he recognizes the effect of media and Hollywood on her as a modern child. As Booker points out “Humbert assumes that because of the media education of a modern child, Dolores learned her part from Hollywood and will respond to his advances” (Booker, 1990). He notices that Dolores cuts pictures out of magazines and posts them on her bedroom wall.

I came out of my daze and found myself still in Lo’s room. A full-page ad ripped out of a slick magazine was affixed to the wall above the bed, between a crooner’s mug and the lashes of a movie actress. It represented a dark-haired young husband with a kind of drained look in his Irish eyes. He was modeling a robe by So-and-So and holding a bridgelike tray by So-and-So, with breakfast for two. The legend, by the Rev. Thomas Morell, called him a “conquering hero.” The thoroughly conquered lady (not shown) was presumably propping herself up to receive her half of the tray. (*Lolita*, 1997)

Humbert knew that these ads teaches Dolores to identify with those desirable characters. The male models in that magazines had a look similar to Humbert. Humbert used the media to control Dolores and shape her identity. *Lolita*’s values have been shaped by advertisements and entertainment magazines that project worldly values that minimize

other values concerning to sexual moralities or personal truthfulness. As a result Lolita desires to achieve the fashionable celebrity lifestyle. Her love affair with playwright Quilty shows this fact.

3.2 Discourse, Cultural Clash and Subject's Identity

In this part the researcher will explore how Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Lolita*, pictures the society of the time and mirrors post-war America and the conflict between Old World European values with New World American ones. In reading any of Nabokov's novels, one can undergo the centrality of the function of language and discourse in shaping of the identity. As argued, conformity is achieved through the objectivity which is created through discursive practices, yet those who do not conform, are doomed to remain as 'the others' and marginalized. The concept of 'the other', as distinguished in cultural studies, has a key function in the formation of many theories as well as Fairclough's discourse theory. As a result, set of different theories in philosophy and various approaches to literary analysis, aims at revealing the textualization of events, beliefs, traditions and languages of different communities. For instance Nabokov's works refer to the literature written by 'the Other' as he is a Russian émigré and in his works he portrays the reality of American society at best.

With the intention of highlighting the cultural clash between the Old World of Europe and the New World of America, Nabokov makes use of word play and clichés from different European cultures to mock the American multiculturalism as illustrated in characters such as Charlotte. Nabokov's works represent an important portrayal of discursive challenges in the post-war American society that is largely invested in Fairclough's theory. As Brown believes *Lolita* is a novel that:

“Perfectly represents the spirit of life in the United States at the time of its publication. It is often presumed to be written by an American author who is knowledgeable about the state, culture, and perspective of the common American citizen” (Brown, 1953).

In 1945 Nabokov gained U.S. citizenship. Nabokov believes America presents itself to the Old World through idealized pictures and advertisements. The novel's structure is made of Humbert's confession, who is representative of Old World émigré. Nabokov uses the narrative form of a first-person point-of-view to offer a confession in order to influence the reader. Humbert's confession provides insight into ethically two-faced characteristics of the culture which rejects him. Alfred Appel calls *Lolita*:

a burlesque of the confessional mode, the literary diary, the Romantic novel that chronicles the effects of a debilitating love, the Doppelganger tale, and, in parts, a Duncan Hines tour of America.”

(Appel, 1970)

Humbert's narration portrays cultural weaknesses of mid-twentieth century of America from an alien viewpoint. After World War II, mass media and communications technology have had the strongest influence on the other levels, including literary products. Therefore, during the course of time, literary products are influenced by a changing set of social levels.

3.3 *Lolita's Identity as the Ideological Product of Her Society*

Ideology and ideological subjects are the inevitable realities of being in a society, it “leaves no room at all for autonomous, non-ideological thought and action” (Bertens, 2001). Worth noting is the idea that it is impossible to hold some ideological belief and to know that they are ideological; the moment this recognition happens, ideology ceases to be ideological because “ideology never says I am ideological” (Eagleton, 1991). One of the central problems argued by Nabokov in *Lolita* is that of identity, and the anxiety people have over knowing exactly who they are and what their purpose is. Dolores is the ideological product of her society. In this novel, Nabokov portrays a frightening picture of the human being pressured by the forces of society to the point wherein he/she loses his/her individuality and becomes under the influence of popular culture. Humbert refers to Lolita as an object, in his description he always focuses on the nymphet qualities of Lolita which he finds so thrilling and he never addresses her inner mind or feelings.

And I looked and looked at her, and knew as clearly as I know I am to die, that I loved her more than anything I had ever seen or imagined on earth, or hoped for anywhere else. She was only the faint violet whiff and dead leaf echo of the nymphet I had rolled myself upon with such cries in the past; an echo on the brink of a russet ravine, with a far wood under a white sky, and brown leaves choking the brook, and one last cricket in the crisp weeds... but thank God it was not that echo alone that I worshipped. (*Lolita*, 1997)

Humbert loves an image of Lolita but not herself. Far from Humbert's imagination, Lolita is just a stubborn child and even Humbert himself sometimes comments on her skinny arms, freckles, vulgar language and behavior. She is an ordinary twelve-year-old girl who admires popular culture and similar to most teenager girls, has a tendency toward the dramatic. But during the course of story she changes thoroughly. At the beginning although she is sexually experienced but is innocent and Humbert forces her transition into a totally sexual creature. As the story goes on Lolita changes from a girl to a woman, from a hapless innocent to apparently a pitiless creature. At the beginning of the story Lolita represented the idealized loved one, but step by step she represents the femme fatale and a decisive character type. She seduces Humbert into trusting her only in order to betray him.

Lolita is both usual and entirely unique at the same time. It means most of its elements are easy to recognize and understand, but the relationships between those elements are difficult to pinpoint. Regarding Machete's idea about literary texts, he believes that “to get the authentic meaning of the text, the critic should focus on the gaps,

contradictions, and other logical flaws in the text, thus to produce it more based on the margins, areas of incompleteness or sub-plots” (qtd in Ferretter, 2006). In *Lolita* words are used not to tell the story, but to suggest that the story is hidden. In this story Nabokov tries to make people conscious of the possibility of going beyond everyday verbal communication conventions and communicating more realistically. One of the dominant themes of the novel is to emphasize the importance of refuting the imposed identity as well as resisting against the strict pressures of the power which cannot stand individuals’ autonomy.

The effort of the author is to portray a negative picture of media to prove that it is the society’s dominant power which seizes people’s individuality and forces them to conform to all norms of social formation. This novel should be considered not only as a creation of an individual’s mind, but also as a product of conflicting social and historical factors.

3.4 It is Power that Creates our Objectivity

Discourse is a way of seeing and thinking about the world. Bounded by ideology, culture, education, politics, and a variety of other influences, discourse refers not only to speech pattern but also to a particular mindset secured by philosophical assumptions that predispose a person to interpret the world in a particular fashion. (Bressler, 2007)

Novel is a social phenomenon, is something that is produced in a society based on social struggles. Fairclough believes any human phenomenon is the product of a system of conventions and that the meanings given to the world are historically and socially determined as a construction of discourse. The concept of power in Fairclough’s approach is closely connected to their concepts of politics and objectivity and also it is similar to Foucault’s concept of power, it is power that creates our objectivity, our identities and how we relate to one another as groups or individuals.

Lolita is a character who wishes to define her own objectivity as something different from what Humbert tries to impose on her and have her own discourse and identify outside of the discourse of Humbert. She does not want her stepfather to be her master any more. Most of the time Humbert tries to take the control of Lolita. He uses different ways of controlling, as an example he warns Lolita not to talk to strangers. Lolita is annoyed by Humbert’s touches and she feels confused and unhappy. Even she warns Humbert that she should tell the police that Humbert raped her.

“Drive on,” my Lo cried shrilly.

“Righto. Take it easy.” (Down, poor beast, down.)

I glanced at her. Thank God, the child was smiling.

“You chump,” she said, sweetly smiling at me. “You revolting creature. I was a daisy-fresh girl, and look what you’ve done to me. I ought to call the police and tell them you raped me. Oh, you dirty, dirty old man.”

Was she just joking? An ominous hysterical note rang through her silly words. (*Lolita*, 1997)

After their first night together, Lolita becomes bad-tempered. Her regular references to rape and incest shows that she realizes the impropriety of their relationship. She is profoundly affected by her first sexual encounter with a grown man who is her stepfather. Although all through the novel the struggle between Lolita and her mother, their conflicts and tensions are clear, after her first sexual encounter with Humbert she understand that there is something wrong and wants to call her mother.

She appeared at last. “Look,” she said in that neutral voice that hurt me so, “give me some dimes and nickels. I want to call mother in that hospital. What’s the number?”

“Get in,” I said. “You can’t call that number.”

“Why?”

“Get in and slam the door.”

She got in and slammed the door. The old garage man beamed at her. I swung onto the highway.

“Why can’t I call my mother if I want to?”

“Because,” I answered, “your mother is dead.”(*Lolita*, 1997)

Due to the role of the mother in the formation of the child’s identity as the only caregiver and comfort provider, whenever the child encounters any hardship in life, it longs for the lost unity with the mother. Although Charlotte is not a kind mother, her presence does protect Lolita. After Charlotte’s death Lolita is annoyed by such senses as alienation, frustration, pain, and aggressively that consequently force her to run away. Lolita’s struggle in this part is to separate herself from Humbert.

During these two years Humbert has never understand that he does not exist for Lolita, that there is a profound emptiness in their relationship. Humbert fails to keep his beloved, as there is hardly any emotional bondage between them. Humbert’s speeches and behaviors depict his desire for being master. He repeatedly tries to gain the authority for being pure master. In this novel Hmbert is presented as a condescending and demanding man he wants Lolita to satisfy his sexual desires.

Lolita desires to regain autonomy by asserting her identity in her own way. She refuses to submit to a man who forces his rules on her and her attempt to escape is a desire to prove her identity. Throughout the novel Nabokov focuses upon the sufferings and the confusions that Lolita experiences between her inner and outer selves and how both these debated

selves try to suppress each other. By depicting Lolita's problems Nabokov reflects on the patriarchal forces that lead a child to the point of extreme anxiety that forces her to escape.

3.5 *Lolita as an Object of Desire*

One of the most significant discursive challenges in *Lolita* is about gender. From the beginning of the novel, the reader deals with gender discursive challenges between men's discourse and women's discourse. It is clear that masculinity is considered as superior to femininity in the established discourses of the text.

The novel provokes us to think about the existing social systems, influences and realistic consequences. *Lolita* reveals to what a great extent, an individual's life is influenced by the society. As a Female character she is controlled by a male-centered society. Lolita is isolated in Humbert's hands. Consequently she is denied from her identity and must accept the identity constructed for her by Humbert. Lolita represents a group of women who are fading up with their bitter life and insist on defining their identities by resisting oppression. Lolita, finds in escaping with Quilty a way to have control of her life. Lolita idealizes Quilty as her lover but he is even more evil than Humbert and leaves her after she refuses to play a part in child pornography.

Both men Humbert and Quilty try to use Lolita as the object of their desires. Lolita as a young girl has a powerless position. She is less powerful than her stepfather and her objectivity is created by her stepfather who is a representative of hegemonic power of the society. Humbert as a member of male-centered society treats her as an object and also has several expectations. Lolita's stepfather, who is in the position of power, defines and creates the objectivity of her life, and tries to naturalize it as something normal.

Humbert uses different ways to control Lolita. He frightens Lolita into staying with him by threatening her with reform school, then continues with bribery, a method he knows that corrupts Lolita's morals. Lolita does not enjoy their relation, Humbert hears Lolita's sobs at night but it does not make him to reconsider his plans for her. Humbert doesn't concern himself with whether Lolita enjoys their relationship or not. He only fears about losing Lolita to another man.

Moreover, Lolita could not refuse the master's sexual affairs, so she is powerless and even has no right to protest. This sexual abuse again indicates that, man as power, forces his desire to woman and reduces her choices which lead to more exclusion of woman. Since man is in the position of power, this position let him to create the objectivity and woman is doomed to accept this created objectivity of her life.

4. Conclusion

Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Lolita*, pictures the society of the time and mirrors post-war America and the conflict between Old World European values with New World American ones. In reading any of Nabokov's novels, one can undergo the centrality of the function of style, language and discourse playing in shaping of the subject's identity. With the intention of highlighting the cultural clash between the Old World of Europe and the New World of America, Nabokov makes use of word play and clichés from different European cultures to mock the American multiculturalism as illustrated in characters such as Charlotte.

Novel is a social phenomenon, is something that is produced in a society based on social struggles. Fairclough believes any human phenomenon is the product of a system of conventions and that the meanings given to the world are historically and socially determined as a construction of discourse. The concept of power in Fairclough's approach is closely connected to their concepts of politics and objectivity and also it is similar to Foucault's concept of power, it is power that creates our objectivity, our identities and how we relate to one another as groups or individuals.

Lolita is a character who wishes to define her own objectivity as something different from what Humbert tries to impose on her and have her own discourse and identify outside of the discourse of Humbert. She does not want her stepfather to be her master any more. Lolita desires to regain autonomy by asserting her identity in her own way. She refuses to submit to the man who forces his rules on her and her attempt to escape is a desire to prove her identity. Throughout the novel Nabokov focuses upon the sufferings and the confusions that Lolita experiences between her inner and outer selves and how both these debated selves try to suppress each other. By depicting Lolita's problems Nabokov reflects on the patriarchal forces that lead a child to the point of extreme anxiety that forces her to escape and takes away her innocence and youth.

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