



Discourse Analysis of a Gender as Representation of Femininity and Power in Children's Literature in "Snow White"

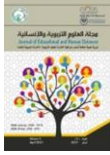
Hind Abdulameer Abd Oun Al-Kinani
Email : hind.a@s.uokerbala.edu.iq

ABSTRACT

This paper consists of three sections. The first section talks about introduction of the research. Section two deals with literature review of discourse analysis, gender and power. The last section deals with discussion and result of the paper. The findings suggested that school children gave conflicting accounts in relation to gender discourses and identities.

This paper sets out to investigate how children make sense of negotiate and non-traditional gender discourses promoted through the feminist version of the fairytale "Snow White". Finally, it could be said there is a strong indication that girls of this age are more prepared than boys to challenge traditional gender discourses.

Keywords: Discourse Analysis, Gender as Representation, Femininity, Children's Literature.



1. Introduction

Since the early 1960s, when feminists raised concerns about gender stereotypes in children's stories, researchers have particularly troubled by the negative impact that the anachronistic representation of masculinity and femininity in children's literature has on their perceptions of gender roles. Traditional folktales that promoted gender biases in perceptions of masculinity and femininity, such as Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, and Cinderella, were the subject of the inquiry (Lieberman, 1972, p. 78).

In reaction to conventional folktales, feminists created new narratives with female characters who were shown as physically strong, energetic, and independent (Barchers, 1990, p.76). Many feminist fairy tales depicting powerful heroines who challenge established power structures and social norms had been created since the early nineteenth century (Zipes, 1986, p. 61).

According to the paper, changing the substance of current children's books is insufficient to change children's views on gender roles since doing so assumes a passive learner or reader (Walkerdine, 1990, p. 83). Additionally, feminist post-structural studies portray readers as active meaning-producers. When feminist fairy tales contest traditional gender discourses, it is still impossible to predict how these tales will effect on the students' conceptions of gender (Davies 1989).

2. Literature Review

2.1 Discourse Analysis

“Discourse analysis is defined as (1) being concerned with language use beyond the confines of a sentence or utterance, (2) being concerned with the interactions between language and society, and (3) being concerned with the interactive or dialogic properties of everyday communication” (Stubbs, 1983, p.1).

Discourse analysis is a fairly vague word. In this work, this term is mostly used to indicate to linguistic study of spontaneously occurring linked speech or writing.

To study the organization of language above the sentence or above the phrase, and



examine bigger linguistic units, such as conversational exchanges or written texts, this is what is often meant by this term. As a result, discourse analysis is especially interested in how language is used in social circumstances, particularly when speakers are interacting or speaking to another one.

Discourse analysis does not discriminate between the study of written or spoken language. In actuality, the monolithic character of the categories of speech and writing is increasingly being questioned as analysts' focus changes to multi-media texts and activities on the Internet. Similarly, despite the fact that this reduction reveals a lot about how particular examples of the discursive have been supported and constrained by hierarchical reasoning patterns that are specific to the discipline's history, one must ultimately object to the reduction of the discursive to the so-called "outer layer" of language use. (For example, discourse analysis is a response to and a level of analysis above the clause-bound "objects" of grammar and semantics that examines "utterances," "texts," and "speech occurrences"). Another step toward the creation of a discourse viewpoint goes even farther in the direction of being utterly at odds with linguistics "proper" concerns.

Here, the emphasis is on how language usage is located and how it is inescapably social and dynamic, even in written communication. As a result, the fundamentally dislocates of the sentence or phrase as the primary analytical unit, and "going beyond the sentence" becomes a means for criticizing the philological tradition that has reified the written word as a model of language use in general.

Discourse analysis in this style emphasizes language usage as social action, situated performance, related to social connections and identities, power, inequality, and social conflict, language use as primarily a matter of "practices" rather than merely "structures," etc.

Discourse analysis as a tool for understanding the social reaches a point when, predictably, it transforms into a theory that is entirely divorced from practical engagement with language usage analysis. Please take note that the latter scenario is



not what is aimed to be refuted. By doing so, one would be missing out on several significant post-war debates and advancements in philosophy and social theory.

Studying discourse analysis involves several academic disciplines. Its "lender disciplines" can be found in many branches of the human and social sciences, where there is substantial cross-fertilization and an immense heritage of history. The sophisticated connections and dependency among the many traditions should not be mistaken for "compatibility," though. Consequently, it is not always desirable to aim for compatibility; rather, one can benefit greatly from utilizing theoretical tensions and challenging and important boundaries. Customs and crossover events are best understood historically, in opposing terms, and as internal changes.

There are a few examples of separated parallel progress in academic fields that have nothing to do with one another. For example, literary studies developed frameworks for story analysis at the same time. In conversation analysis, where narratives are understood less as structural elements, a narrative must at the very least contain "an orientation," "a complicating action," and "a resolution"; it may also include one or more "evaluations" in between, and it may also come before "an abstract," followed by "a coda." W. Labov's work on the fundamental components of spoken narratives is based on a functional classification of utterance kinds (ibid).

But keep in mind that the discipline of borrowing has occasionally contributed to the success of particular thematic advances. For instance, linguistic pragmatics advancements have greatly contributed to the popularity of speech act theory, which has its roots in analytical philosophy. It has been received differently in linguistic anthropology than it has in European linguistics. There is further lineage. Speech act theory was first brought into literary criticism by academics like Marie-Louise Pratt and has since played a significant role in discussions concerning performance and the creation of social connections (e.g., in the work of Judith Butler).

The fact that many current research projects cannot be neatly categorized within the recognized academic disciplines (such as linguistics, sociology, psychology,



anthropology, etc.) and that researcher affiliations are frequently determined more by accidental employment circumstances in a particular academic unit than by a specific disciplinary orientation within the research that is done should not be surprising.

2.2 Power

Various theories of power have offered a variety of tactics and power structures that might be highlighted in connection to CDA. No language used in CDA can ever be "neutral" or "objective," and no discourse can ever be devoid of power and the exercise of power (Fairclough, 1989). (Watts, 1992, p. 103). language can be employed to question authority and offer a well-articulated mechanism for power disparities in social hierarchical systems but it does not produce power. Although language alone is not a powerful tool by its own, words can be: according to Deborah Cameron (2001) (in Muralikrishnan 2011, p. 23), the institutional authority to categorize individuals is frequently inseparable from the authority to do things to them, and it gains power by the use that powerful people make of it. Muralikrishnan (2011), following Cameron (2001), observed that a significant amount of power and social control in the modern era is exercised through the actions of "experts" who are permitted to define, describe, and categorize things and people—not through the use of harsh physical force or even through the use of even more subtle methods.

Individuals are the power's vehicles, not its application, according to this viewpoint (Foucault, 1980). Power is not simply restrictive and preventive; it may also be fruitful. It creates new discourses, new categories of knowledge, and it molds new institutions. It is present everywhere and cannot be explained by the idea that one group possesses a monopoly on power, merely exercising dominion over a subordinate group from above. Within its circuits, both the dominant and the dominated are present. Power circulates, according to Foucault (1972), and both the powerful and the helpless are entangled in it. Everyone is involved in its field of operation. In other words, we are all, to some degree, caught up in power and its circulation—oppressors and oppressed.



According to Fairclough (1995), power may be thought of as the uneven ability to direct the production, dissemination, and consumption of texts in certain social settings as well as the asymmetries between participants in discourse events. Ideology, the knowledge that enables people or organizations to carry out their will or influence others in spite of their opposition, is the primary source of this form of power (Fairclough, 1989).

What are the characteristics of power that can shed light on its true nature now that the issue of what is power has been changed?

What are the various power relations, and how do players use them?

The scope of CDA involves the study of power (Fairclough, 1989 and van Dijk, 1995) and may be affected by various types of power and may use them in its critical analysis.

In order to make the point that attaining power and upholding one's ideas may be done in a variety of ways, the most obvious of which is through direct physical force or indirect coercion through the legal system, Muralikrishnan (2011) provided several examples of power. But, it is frequently far more effective to encourage others' voluntary action, i.e., to utilize power by securing their consent or at the very least their readiness to accept it. To achieve this, an ideology must be established. Someone who makes the concepts they want others to accept appear like "common sense," making it more difficult for them to dispute the dominant perspective.

2.3 Gender

In contrast to sex, which is considered a biological category, gender is thought of as a social category. The two genders are often categorized as feminine and masculine in modern culture, and there is typically a distinction between the sexes as well. While sex is typically viewed as a stable, biological category, a lot of discussion and study has focused on the constructedness of gender. Yet, this view of sex may be contested because the idea of biology is also socially created (Nicholson 1994, p. 199-201). Depending on one's culture or upbringing, what it means to be a male or woman



"biologically" might be interpreted in several ways. Among some indigenous communities, For instance, in America, a person with male genitalia can identify as both male and female, and is recognized as such by others, which is an option that does not exist in contemporary, western countries (Nicholson 1994: 212). Those who don't conform to our society's idea of what it means to be male or female, such as transsexuals, are met with at least uncertainty if not outright rejection.

As a result, male and female are seen as the two possible sexes that represent the norm in our society. The duties that come with being male or female have an impact on how a person lives their whole life. Men and women are said to have different qualities. The "biological" woman is expected to have all the traits that society considers appropriate for women, whereas the male must have masculine gender traits.

Femininity and masculinity are "characteristics" that are taught by society and "must" be learned from an early age rather than being inborn traits that cannot be changed. Being a particular gender, such as "being" feminine or masculine, is something we choose to do or exhibit (Cameron 2001:171). Infants and newborns are unable to determine their gender on their own, thus parents, caregivers, etc. must do it for them by clothing them in specific colors or naming them according to their gender. Those who don't know the newborn will frequently inquire about their sex or gender if there are no other clues (ibid.).

People are socialized from an early age; they are instructed by parents, schools, friends, and the media to act in particular ways and hold specific beliefs. Daughters help their moms wash the dishes, while sons help their fathers wash the automobile. Instructors quiz students on the finest types of chores that their moms enjoy doing and the kinds of jobs that their men have. In commercials, a male voice-over justifies Mrs. X's usage of washing powder Y. In movies, the heroic "heroine" rescues the stunning but defenseless and insecure "heroine."

The experts on TV debates on subjects other than health care, women's concerns, birth



control, etc. are disproportionately men. The semantic feature analysis for men is given as [+male], whereas that for women is [-male] in a linguistics course. The list of cases that are comparable to this one might go on for several pages. All of these illustrations convey the idea that women are "minus masculine," which results in a certain comprehension of the "world order." Language and speech in our culture reflect the lowly position that women hold in comparison to males.

3. Methodology

3.1 Results

Gender dualism: reproducing the binary construction of masculinity and femininity

Heroic femininity

Most kids accepted a sharply polarized binary definition of gender and femininity while discussing Snow White's unusual occupations (jewelry maker and diamond mine worker). Children's gender had a critical role in their understanding of non-traditional gender discourses, which is in line with Westland's (1993) results. Boys in third and fourth grades in particular exhibited a tendency to associate femininity with weakness, which led to the reproduction of polarized and binaristic views on the gendered nature of the workforce.

Theodore: 'I didn't like that she [Snow White] was working in a mine. This is not a job for a woman because women are not as strong as men'.

The rhetoric of female weakness aims to uphold patriarchal views of gender roles in the workplace, which hold that women's performance is inadequate to withstand the pressures and complexities of the marketplace. Boys' ideas of masculinity and femininity were mostly governed by the strong/weakness binary since the majority of them rejected the idea of a physically fit lady and questioned Snow White's career choices (diamond-mine worker and jewellery maker). The majority of boys thought that a physically fit lady had abandoned her femininity and looked more like a man.



Snow White transforms into a "Snow Whiteman," as one of the youngsters pointed out.

Antonis: 'She was working out a lot and didn't look like a woman and the seven dwarfs called her Snow Whiteman'.

This "metamorphosis" is related to the tangible negative somatic impacts that physical power has on female bodies, which serve as nothing more than commodities to attract males. Traditionally, patriarchal attitudes have dominated the cultural production of femininity and have positioned women's bodies as objects to be objectified (Foucault, 1975).

In the feminist retelling of the story, Snow White assumes a number of subject positions that highlight her valiant nature. The focus of the conversation with the students regarding Snow White's heroic deeds was how well they could recognize the quality of heroism regardless of the character's gender. The research reveals some of the difficulties and paradoxes that young people encountered when playing the role of the story's heroine. Most of the students in my research were able to reject the conventional discourses that associate masculinity with heroism and saw Snow White as a heroine, in contrast to the participants in Davies' (1989) study. Boys and girls in the fourth grade from both institutions, in particular, were unable to replicate any of her unorthodox postures in the narrative, unanimously believed that Snow White is a heroine.

Achilles: 'She is a hero because she is smart, she didn't become a princess and she contradicted the Queen'.

Cleopatra: 'She is a hero because she was brave'.

The majority of third-grade males, on the other hand, had equated bravery with acts of violence, therefore the absence of discursive depictions of actual combat or murder in the story prevented most of them from viewing Snow White as a hero. This implies that third-grade boys' cultural conception of heroism was constrained by the discourses they could access. This is evident from Nikolas' response:



Nikolas: 'She is not a hero because she didn't kill anybody'.

Prior research has emphasized the importance of the combat/violence narrative, which also serves to promote heroic masculinity, in the formation of young hegemonic masculinities (Francis 1998; Renold 2005). Strong preconceived notions among third-grade boys regarding the categories of masculine-feminine and prince-princess, as well as their association of femininity with docility and weakness, limited their capacity to recognize the trait of heroism regardless of the character's gender. Because of this, Snow White's agency in the story was at odds with how they saw heroic masculine discourses and appropriate gendered behavior, which had a catalytic effect on how they saw heroism.

It's quite intriguing how most third-grade guys processed Snow White's role as the story's heroine differently from fourth-grade males. Due of their older age, the fourth-grade boys may have had a more expansive concept of heroism, which allowed them to view Snow White as a heroine. On the other hand, the majority of girls questioned dominant discourses about gender and acknowledged Snow White's heroism within the story. Girls highlighted femininity and gave themselves more power by disembodiment.

...And they lived happily ever after

The feminist retelling of Snow White does not conclude with a kiss and a "lived happily ever after" conclusion, in contrast to conventional folktales. Snow White decides to remain in the diamond mine with her friends rather than marry a charming prince. On the basis of this, I urged students to expand the plot and provide a different resolution.

The extent to which girls' perspectives of gender were structured inside the heterosexual matrix is evident from their narratives. Most girls elaborated on the marriage discourse while developing an alternative fairy tale conclusion, including a wedding between Snow White and her prince/dream partner.

Maria: 'Later, she met a Prince and they got married'.



Most girls (Walkerdine 1984) place a strong emphasis on the value of romantic heterosexuality, which can be seen in discourses about the prince, princess, and marriage. This emphasizes the part that "idealized and compulsory heterosexuality" (Butler 1990) and discourses of romance play in limiting girls' imagination and the way they define femininity.

Boys, in particular, were nearly universally of the opinion that Snow White's life would change radically after marriage because she would give up her career for the sake of her family and assume her family's position as a wife and mother.

Christopher: *'She wouldn't work; she would be busy at home'.*

Even the males who predicted that Snow White would keep working after her wedding because they predicted she would do so from home made the link between femininity and domesticity. Boys therefore leaned on hegemonic masculinity discourses that emphasize the father as the family's primary provider of income.

The majority of boys' opinions on gender roles in the home may be somewhat explained by the fact that few of them had moms who worked. Also, the convoluted conversational flow that involved the kids, myself as the researcher, and the tale may have had an impact on what they stated. It's probable that guys played a game of domineering masculinity one-upmanship with one another.

Particularly in the anthologies, married women are kept out of the workforce and the house is portrayed as a woman's domain and the pinnacle of safety and affection (Kostas 2014).

Just a few males were able to significantly alter how women are typically positioned in families through discourse.

Achilles: *'In the mornings she would go to the diamond mine and in the afternoon she would return home to cook and play with the kids'*

Achilles was one of the few boys who somewhat questioned the role of women in the home since he placed Snow White in a traditionally male-dominated sector of the workforce. Nonetheless, he also emphasized the value of motherhood and positioned



Snow White as a devoted mother and housewife in the home world.

The majority of girls, on the other hand, exhibited more gender-neutral attitudes, telling me that Snow White would carry on working after she wed the prince. Several girls even proposed that Snow White may work from home and visit the diamond mine sometimes.

Medea: *'She would make jewellerys from home and she would go sometimes to the diamond mine to help her friends'.*

A few girls expressed the opinion that Snow White wouldn't work after getting married, for in their perception married women, especially princesses, do not have to work.

Anna: *'She wouldn't work...she would go to the mine to see her friends'.*

Catherine: *'She would become a princess and she would not have to workbecause she would be very rich'.*

Catherine and Anna supported traditional family structures and reinforced emphasized femininity discourses that position females in the domestic sphere.

3.2 Discussion

Even though Snow White was reimagined in a feminist manner, most children, especially males, were frequently hindered from understanding the story in a feminist context. This was because traditional narratives' pre-existing structures were still fairly strong. The findings demonstrate that texts are polysemous spaces, opening up a range of interpretations and points of view for readers. Boys and girls presented conflicting accounts of femininity and masculinity that were impossible to reconcile. These various responses confirmed observations of competing subjectivities at the individual and group levels. Students' thoughts on Snow White's responsibilities and actions in particular ranged from complete acceptance to complete rejection.

Most kids believed that the only sexual manifestations that were acceptable were those of marriage, motherhood, androphilia, and gynephilia. These opinions demonstrate how the heterosexual framework shaped the students' conceptions of



gender. Many kids used inflexible gender binaries to understand gender because they were constrained by prevailing discourses that emphasized femininity and hegemonic masculinity. Children contested Snow White's positionings in the story and engaged in "category maintenance activity" in an effort to identify with the "proper". Girls appeared to be better equipped than boys to contest typical gender discourses, which may be a result of the discourses that are available to females.

Girls probably had more to gain than lose by doing this, since they questioned the limitations placed on them by competing discourses that place an emphasis on femininity. The results also imply that moms' level of education and employment have a major impact on children's agency and their ability to shape gender.

It was specifically noticed that students with educated moms who actively engaged in paid job had a stronger capacity to challenge conventional gender discourses. Notwithstanding the obvious similarities between my research and Davies' (1989) findings, my study adopts a novel epistemic tack. The geographical, cultural, and temporal dimensions are the first important distinctions between my work and Davies'. Moreover, research indicates that children begin to form and improve these conceptual understandings by the age of 5, at which point they are eager to exhibit their awareness and knowledge of belonging to the "correct" gender.

Girls were more adept than boys in challenging conventional gender discourses, according to my research. Also, it was shown that there is a causal link between parents' educational attainment and their children's likelihood of being able to question gender norms. In essence, the likelihood that their children would repeat gender egalitarian discourses increases with the moms' higher professional level.

A notable disadvantage of the current study is the omission of parental perspectives on gender roles. In order to better understand how children navigate traditional and non-traditional gender discourses, future researchers may find it interesting to investigate how parents see gender. The impact of ethnicity might also be investigated and analyzed.



4. Conclusion

In conclusion, feminist fairy tales alone are not a magic bullet for changing young children's conceptions of gender roles, but educators may use them to introduce young children to gender-equal discourses since young children can "be taught to read critically."

The present study has a fundamental flaw since it does not take into account parents' perspectives on gender roles. An examination of parents' gender perspectives might yield insightful information that will help a future researcher better comprehend how kids navigate conventional and unconventional gender discourses. Moreover, the impact of ethnicity might be investigated and analyzed.

Female viewers of Snow White could also be able to relate to the ambitious, conceited Queen rather than the somewhat unreachable kindness embodied by the figure of Snow. Even if the Queen is ultimately punished, spectators can find her representation of deviant womanhood intriguing. Consequently, rather than being an inevitably repressive aspect of the narrative, the importance of love discourses in the films under analysis may be enjoyable.

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