

The role of linguistic devices in representing modern Pakistan in “Are You Enjoying?”

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the complex nature of both genders in the urban Pakistani society with the help of linguistic devices like foregrounding, backgrounding, deletion, presupposition etc. based on the agenda of Critical Discourse Analysis. The research was conducted through Huckin's analytic tool of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to investigate how the author manipulated the text to carve out his motive in writing. It was qualitative research along with an assistance of quantitative research in the form of Corpus Linguistics, in which selected quotes and text were taken from the short story book “Are You Enjoying?” by Mira Sethi. The results of the study revealed that Mira Sethi's short stories showed strong and progressive younger women playing roles in different settings who are quiet opposite to the traditional concept of women hood in Pakistan. The portrayal of men revealed how Pakistani men gel in together their religious upbringing and the sexual implications towards opposite sex. This research will help readers in developing analytical thinking while attempting to decode literary texts.

Keywords: Critical discourse analysis, Linguistic devices, Huckin's framework, literary texts, short fiction

1. Introduction

‘Are you enjoying?’ by Mira Sethi is the debut collection of short stories published in 2021. The short story book is based in the backdrop of contemporary Pakistani society. It deals with portrayal of young men and women. Sethi has crafted even male characters, enclosed in a society where religion is inherited and men will be doing all sorts of immoral activities by continuously indulging in the references of Quranic verses and never forgetting to Insha ALLAH, Ma sha ALLAH etc in their everyday discourse. “The scattering of religious terminology is something I did very consciously,” says Sethi. “In this conservative Muslim landscape, people have secular hopes and dreams – and by secular I don't mean irreligious, I just mean modern and aspirational. In a country like Pakistan, we have three tiers of rules: the abstract laws of the state, the often-burdensome imperatives of family and then the young people who are navigating all of this, possibly with smartphones in their hands, improvising their own rules as they go along,” says Sethi (2021). So, these visuals of Politics, patriarchy, and personal lives have been interwoven perfectly in Sethi's stories. In the contemporary Pakistan, many notable women writers are seen writing about the role of females. Perveen & Qadir (2019) analyzed the work of Qaisra Riaz's *A pair of blue jeans & other stories* (2013) and concluded that these stories do not produce the typical idea of womanhood, in fact there is a considerable departure from the stereotypical role of women and they are shown as confronting male dominance and finding progressive identities for them. Her research is important in understanding the changing dynamics of Pakistani households with respect to gender roles they play. In the present research, however we have analyzed the progressive and urban Pakistan but the major focus of the study was to attempt a linguistic analysis of the work which was never explored before.

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I analyzed the linguistic devices used in the text of the book “Are you enjoying?” to explore how the writer has actually manipulated those linguistic devices in particular social context. Critical Discourse Analysis (Huckin, 1997) has been applied for the purpose of interpretation of the text of the short story book “Are You Enjoying”.

CDA can be defined as a technique used by a writer to write with a certain point of view to influence the thinking pattern of the reader. An important function that is associated to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is to paint such a scenario by the writer of the text, so the reader can find a link between the discourse and social power (Aljarallah, 2017). Hence finding CDA suitable to be applied on such a work which reveals a society or gender roles, I chose CDA to be applied on this study as it aims to apply CDA for the textual dissection of the text.

Linguistic devices on which the building of a text resides play a central role in bridging a connection between the writer and the reader in natural communication. These devices are adopted to control the flow of knowledge, belief, narration, and assertion during both planned and unplanned discourse. By using analytic tools of CDA, it can be made visible the way in which literary pieces and their discourse shape the mind of the reader (Shah, K 2013).

CDA critical discourse analysis is a methodology that attempts to perform literary criticism and helps researchers in analyzing literary texts from new angles, giving way to new thoughts. The analytic tools of CDA have been selected to apply on the text of the book. By using these analytic tools of CDA, it can be understood that how a discourse of a literary text can shape or influence the mind of reader.

The current study aims at finding the linguistic features of the text of the book “Are You Enjoying?”

The following table shows the detail of all seven stories published in her debut short story book “Are you enjoying?” which is selected as sample for this research paper.

Table 1:Detail
“Are You

of Stories in
Enjoying?”

Are You Enjoying? (2021)		
Mira Sethi		
Sr. no.	Title	Pages
1	Mini Apple	1
2	Breezy Blessings	29
3	A life of its own---Part One	49
4	A man for his time	75
5	Tomboy	97
6	A life of its own---Part Two	121

7	Are you Enjoying	139
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The current research was conducted to answer the following questions:

1.2 Research Questions

1. How are the various kinds of women characters manipulated in the book *Are you enjoying?*
2. How are the male characters represented in the short stories in “Are You Enjoying”?
3. What are the motives of the writer in representing a modern and progressive picture of Pakistan in the book “Are You Enjoying”?

This study will pave the way to develop a critical thinking in the mind of readers by enabling them to decode literary texts. Further this study will be helpful for future researchers in the handling of texts of short story, novel, drama, through the application of CDA.

Table 2: Methodological Framework of CDA by Huckin’s (1997)

Huckin’s model of CDA (1997)		
Sentence Level	Text as a whole Word level	
Topicalization	Framing	Register
Presupposition	Foregrounding	Metaphor
Transitivity	Backgrounding	Connotation
	Presupposition	

According to Thomas Huckin's article Critical Discourse Analysis in 2002, by concentrating on language and the rest of the aspects of the discursive practice, CDA analysts want to demonstrate how the highest powers in a social structure constructed perceptions of events that favour and satisfactory for the preferences of those equal influences, and by revealing those practices, CDA researchers hope to endorse the perpetrators of the mistreatment. According to Huckin (2002), the primary goal of CDA is to grasp the way individuals are influenced by public discourse and therefore vulnerable to abuses of power, as well as to demonstrate the way public discourse routinely favors the agenda of strong forces against those of lesser privileged. Huckin's (1997) CDA analytical tools are used, and the study is carried out on the following levels: 1. Text framing: Foregrounding and Backgrounding, Deletion, and Presupposition. 2. Sentence Level: Topicalization, Deletion, and Presupposition 3. Nouns, Pronouns, Adjectives, and Metaphors.

2. Methodology

In the current study, the research problem was to investigate how the linguistic devices have been employed to represent the picture of a modern Pakistan with respect to gender roles. Huckins analytic tools of CDA were employed to dissect the text of “Are You Enjoying”.

2.1 The Procedure of Research

In the current research, by using Huckin’s (1997) analytic tools of CDA, the analysis has been conducted on the following three levels:

- 1) Framing of text as a whole: Foregrounding & Backgrounding, Deletion, Presupposition
- 2) Sentence Level: Topicalization, Deletion, Presupposition, Transitivity
- 3) Words Level – Nouns, Pronouns, Adjectives, metaphors, connotation, Register,

3. Analysis

3.1 Analysis of text as a whole

3.1.1 Framing

Framing is the tool which is used to report an interpretation or offers new vistas of meaning into the mind of the reader. In the current study, the framing of the text has been analyzed as a whole. It has been observed how the text of the book represents different perspectives of young men and women about life, relationships, patriarchy. The analysis of the book provided the data which has been used at both levels that are macro level and micro level to look into bigger picture and to explore the role of linguistic devices.

For instance, in the second story of Sethi (2013) ‘s “A life of its own” presents a story with feudal settings, in which a poor girl is being marched naked through the streets on the pretext of a feud between two families, and that incidents is being viewed as a minor incident when reported to the feudal lords who keep running in elections but sound so insensitive when discussing the incident. The writer has presented their conversation on the matter like this:

“It was nothing to worry about, Mansoor said, for the matter was between two small families. The Chief Minister was indeed on his way, but he was going to the paraded girl’s home, for a photo op. The matter would die down within hours, Mansoor said, as ZB could very well grasp. The girl was back in her parents’home, recovering, eating, well. Her father had apologized to the Chief Minister for his actions. Everything, Mansoor offered with a thin smile, was under control”.

The writer ironically starts the paragraph “It was nothing to worry about.....” reflects that she is giving a certain insight into the behavior of people, society and the politics as well. The discourse of short story also reveals that status of women in feudal families is powerful as compared to other women in the country. SyedaZareena Bokhari (ZB) is shown as an empowered women who runs her husband’s constituency, and seen as a symbol of affection towards the poor people, but actually had no feelings for the people.

3.1.2 Foregrounding and backgrounding

These two techniques are used to explore the motives of the writer sethi (2021) in writing the book. The linguistic devices of Foregrounding and backgrounding have been used successfully by the writer in exploiting different themes of urban Pakistani culture. Following are some of the instances of foregrounding and backgrounding.

- 1) In the story “are you enjoying” the male protagonist “Asher” after having an illicit relationship with “Soni” returns back home and on his way to dropping the girl, he says *“Don’t fight with your father,” he said. “Ignore if you have to. Just smile. It is sunnah.”* At another point in the story it is stated as: *“Soni was looking at Asher when his mouth began moving in a prayer. “Shh.” He continued to mutter and when he finally blew on her, he said, “Three prayers: one to keep away depression, one to keep away the evil eye, and one for safety. Now my love can go.”* (Story no. 7)

The above excerpt from the story reveals that how the male protagonist nuanced the scene of sexual activity ends by blowing prayers at her and telling her to adopt sunnahs whenever she has a brawl with her father. It means religion is inherently present in the personality of Asher despite continuing with all sorts of illicit activities. Repetition of the same reference of religious connotation in story no. 7 gives a good example of Foregrounding.

3.1.3 Presupposition

Presupposition is a technique used in the fiction at the sentence level by giving a reference from history. Presupposition is the device with which the writer can talk about anything which will be accepted without any argument. For the purpose, the writer talks about how usually men think about women when in the story A life of its own, Mansoor says “Because she is a woman, so she is half his worth. Here patriarchy has been shown that how men think about women in rural settings.

3.1.4 Omission

Omission is a technique which is used to keep few aspects out of the text in order to create an impression deliberately by the writer. It is a striking feature of written text which compels the reader to see through the lens of the writer. Following are some of the examples

Framing of the character of Kashif in story no. 3 “A life of its own”

The writer has portrayed the character of Kashif very different from all the other men in story which shows intentionally generation gap. SyedaZareena Bokhari (ZB) (the mother of Kashif is shown as navigating feudal politics through helping poor people but her son finds this hypocritical behavior protests despite being a product of that feudal class. It shows the generational gap between the mother-son and Kashif openly disagrees with his mother, and at one point when a poor village girl has been forced to march through streets naked, and sees his own mammoun (maternal uncle) with the mob of people watching the girl. Kashif on seeing this says “What the hell is going on?” said Kashif, holding the phone in his palm. “The poor child is obviously being made to avenge somebody’ s honor. For something or other. But what is Saleem doing just standing there?” What the hell is he doing just watching?”. Kashif has been portrayed as a young man disgusted over his mother and mamoun on being insensitive towards the plights of village people, especially women. The generation gap is visible in the framing of the character of Kashif.

Framing of the character of Director in story no. 2 “Breezy Blessings

The writer has framed the character of director in story “Breezy Blessings” as a lusty fellow who manipulates young girls for taking sexual favors in return of leading roles in the projects. The writer has forced the readers to look into that character as bad by exposing his personality while depicting not a single good trait of him. In this way she implied that in media or show business men can not view as women of repute, no matter how respectful they are from family background. In an interview Sethi has said that “It took me five years to write this book. I wrote *Breezy Blessings* after doing my first drama serial in Karachi. I flew back to Lahore, opened up my laptop, and feverishly wrote down a few lines that would later become the heart of the story”. This shows that she has framed that by seeing certain things herself so deliberately want to show the drama industry such that if you want you make a career in it then you must be ready.

3.2 Analysis of sentence level

3.2.1 Transitivity

Transitivity is the relationship between the agent and the patient in a sentence. The agent refers to the powerful while the patient refers to the weak or rather who is helpless. When in one of the story “a life of its own” a girl was being marched naked on the road, the ladies of the feudal family decide to visit her to console her by saying that “The three of us should go,” said Farah. To make sure the girl is not harmed in the coming days. In these lines the victim girl is the patient and the feudal ladies are agents.

In another story the young actress is shown as a patient and the strong producer is shown as agent.

3.2.2 Presupposition

Presupposition is that linguistic tool which helps in making the ideas more acceptable by constructing reality according to the wish of the writer. Sethi has used the technique of Presupposition very successfully, below are few examples from the short stories. The situation is best explained when the girl returns home after walking naked through streets and the feudal ladies visit her home. “*If anyone tries to harm you, I am going to string them upside down,*” said ZB. *She stood in the center of the room. Don’t you worry, my child. I will not let anything happen to you.* It is revealed through this conversation that the girl was living at a vulnerable place, this presupposes that the girl Rukhsana is weak and does not have any control over her own life. It also reveals that the feudal of the village had the control of their lives.

3.2.3 Topicalization

Topicalization is a form of foregrounding which occurs at the sentence level. This form of sentence make readers realize the importance of certain sentences more than others.

For example, In the very first story, “Mini Apple” topic sentences are as follow:

- 1) “**Amreecans** live here. Security is outstanding.”
- 2) When Javed didn’t hear from her the day after, he curled under a cotton sheet and **watched his most-viewed clips on You Tube.**
- 3) **He smiled as he highlighted the word “Divorce”** in a Saturday profile of Marianne.

In another story of the book, for instance in the story “Are you enjoying” look at the following sentences which are placed at topic position.

- 1) Soni 's father, a **real estate tycoon**, was in Islamabad for a meeting: they could snatch a few hours at her home.
- 2) And you' re my **Xanax**.”

3.3 Analysis of word level

3.3.1 Register

The writer has used the register of Urdu to show the true picture of urban Pakistan. By using the Urdu register the writer has truly depicted the Pakistani society. It also creates an air of informality and realism in the text. The frequency of urdu words used in the text is mentioned in the table below.

Table 3:*The frequency of the Urdu words*

Sr. No.	Urdu Word	Frequency
1	Mamoun	6
2	Ma sha Allah	8
3	Allah	7
4	Haveli	4
5	Chaadar	7

In order to check the frequency of Urdu words through Corpus analysis toolkit *AntConc 3. 2. 4w*, the textual data of the book was converted into word files and stored as an electronic copy for the application of software. The text of the book was thrice checked and compared with the paperback original book in order to make sure that there was no discrepancy between the original text and typed text. After proof reading, a final E copy of the data was saved.

3.3.2 Metaphor

The use of Metaphor is an important and interesting feature of descriptive writing.

- 1) There is a metaphor when Mehak is compared to moon and called moonface. The beauty of Mehak is shown us that she can be a good successful actress.
- 2) Roshan was that flirt man who looked every woman with interest and always showed lack of interest in his own wife. At one point in the story he said “*My wife wore maroon on our wedding. Stupid cow. You must wear silver.*” He was describing metaphorically his wife as cow in contrast to Mehak whom he called “moonface” because being a man he thinks he has a license to evaluate women.

3.3.3 Connotation

There is a connotation of modern Pakistan in which women and men are living and searching for their own identities. In the last story “Are You Enjoying” a rich urbanite woman who tastes sexual liberty because of her belonging to super rich class yet suffers from a psychological turmoil because finds different rules and obligation for men and women.

4. Conclusion

The study of linguistic features of Sethi (2021) s short story book “Are you enjoying” reveals a considerable departure from traditional character sketches of both genders. The struggle of the women have been shown in the stories that how they are liberating themselves from the traditional roles imposed on them and making them strong. Though in this process they suffer from psychological and emotional trauma which leave behind the idea of depending on men. On the other side, the male characters have also been shown as carrying the strong influence of religion from childhood but getting away with all kinds of immoral activities. The analysis has shown that the study of linguistic features of text help us in understanding the structure of the text. The linguistic tools have an important effect in making a story successful thus we can say that the writer has successfully manipulated the tools of language to show us a glimpse of progressive urban Pakistan with respect to both genders.

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