



Naming and Describing as Textual Conceptual Tool in Dahl's *Matilda*: A Critical Stylistic Analysis

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Abstract in English

Language is not merely a means of communication but also a powerful tool that shapes ideology and influences perception. The study investigates the ideological significance of Naming and Describing as a critical stylistic tool in Roald Dahl's *Matilda* (1988). The study explores how noun choice, noun modification, and nominalization contribute to uncovering hidden ideologies. The study tries to uncover ideologies related to child maltreatment, emotional abuse, bullying, and underestimation.

The data consists of selected excerpts from *Matilda*. These excerpts are analyzed through Jeffries' critical stylistic framework. The findings indicate that noun choice is the most frequently used technique (57.16%). This sub-tool reflects an ideological bias in character portrayal. Noun modification (35.70%) further enhances the ideological positioning. Nominalization (7.14) subtly embeds the ideological meaning.

The study confirms that naming and describing is an effective tool in revealing the ideological perspective in literary texts. This finding supports Jeffries' claim that critical stylistics can uncover implicit meaning and social biases in discourse.

Keywords: Critical Stylistics, Naming and Describing, *Matilda*, Ideology, and Roald Dahl

Paper Info

Keywords

Keywords separated by commas, in Times New Roman, font size 12

1. Introduction

Language is not merely a means of communication, but also a powerful tool that shapes ideologies and influences perceptions. Jeffries provides a systematic framework for uncovering texts' ideologies. One of the key tools in

this framework is naming and describing. This tool examines how the selection and modification of nouns encode implicit meaning and ideological biases. Previous studies have explored critical stylistics in media and political discourse. This study applies a critical stylistic approach to investigate literary texts, more

specifically, children's literature. The study seeks to fill this gap by analyzing Dahl's *Matilda* (1988) to reveal the hidden ideologies of child maltreatment and bullying.

The papers' novelty lies in applying critical stylistics to children's literature. In this area, ideology is often subtly embedded within linguistic choices. This research provides empirical evidence of how *Naming and Describing* functions as an effective critical stylistic tool in exposing ideological positioning. The study hypothesizes that Dahl's use of naming and describing in *Matilda* is ideologically motivated. Besides, it hypothesizes that Dahl shapes the reader's perception by enforcing power dynamics and exposing issues like; child abuse and emotional neglect. The researcher seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How does naming and describing contribute to the construction of ideological meaning in *Matilda*?
2. What are the dominant ideologies revealed by naming and describing?
3. How does Dahl's linguistic presentation of characters reflect social and cultural assumptions about children?

2. Literature Review

Critical Stylistics is an approach that combines stylistic analysis with critical perspectives. It seeks to uncover how texts construct ideologies and power relations. Moreover, it builds on traditional stylistics but integrates elements of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). This integration helps examine how linguistic choices shape meaning in socio-political contexts (Jeffries, 2010). Critical Stylistics seeks to expose

underlying assumptions and ideological structures embedded in texts.

Critical Stylistics emerged as a response to the limitations of classical stylistic approaches. These approaches focus only on literary aesthetics rather than social implications. Jeffries (2010) proposed a set of analytical tools to investigate textual meaning systematically. These tools reveal how writers subtly influence readers' interpretations and reinforce particular viewpoints.

The recent advancements in Critical Stylistics have expanded its application beyond literary texts. It includes media discourse, advertisements, and political rhetoric. Stylisticians use computational and corpus-based methods to analyze large datasets. These techniques enhance the precision of ideological analysis (Hart, 2014). The interdisciplinary nature of Critical Stylistics allows it to contribute to fields such as media studies, sociolinguistics, and discourse analysis.

Critical Stylistics remains a growing field in addressing contemporary challenges in digital communication and media representation. It continues to provide valuable insights into how language functions as a tool for persuasion and ideological reinforcement.

3. Model of Analysis

Jeffries created a set of different textual conceptual tools. One of the most important tools among this list is '*Naming and Describing*' which will be applied in the analysis. This textual conceptual tool seeks to uncover the ideologies in the text by analyzing how the text producer describes the names characters. Additionally, *Naming and Describing* is presented by the whole

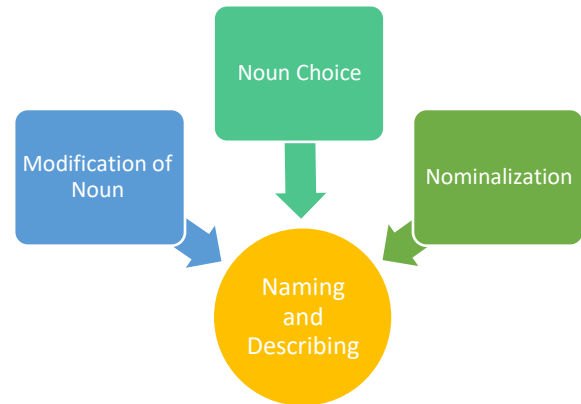
nominal element of the clause. (Jeffries, 2015).

This tool has a close relationship with the nature of the data under the scrutiny (Novel). Narratology has an essential role in revealing the events of the novel, therefore Naming and Describing can uncover the text's embedded ideologies by discovering the way the text producer constructs the narratological world. *Naming and describing* includes a range of linguistic choices:

- A- The choice of a noun from a group of alternative nouns which has specific stylistic significance.
- B- Modifiers with noun phrases that determine the nature of the referent used in the context.
- C- Nominalization construction, which is the process of turning verbal elements into nominal ones. This construction has significance ideological implication (Jeffries, 2014).

The following figure (1) shows the linguistic realizations of *Naming and Describing*.

Linguistic Realizations of Naming and Describing



4. The Data of the Study

The data under the investigation consists of literary work specifically, the novel *Matilda* by the British writer Roald Dahl. This novel is 'Matilda' which is related to Juvenile literature. This novel is considered one of the most important novels in the English literature. Besides, it is still widely read today. Thus, the reason behind choosing this work is its importance in British history till now. The novel belongs to the juvenile literature.

5. The Nature of the Study

The study employs a mixed methods approach which integrates qualitative and quantitative analyses. This approach examines the ideological implications of

Figure (1)

naming and describing in Dahl's *Matilda*. The qualitative component involves a critical stylistic analysis based on Jeffries' (2010) framework to uncover the implicit ideologies. Meanwhile, the quantitative component consists of the frequency analysis of the three sub-tools of naming and describing. The study provides empirical support for the prominence of each technique in reinforcing the novel's ideological stance.

A mixed methods approach is suitable for critical stylistic studies because it bridges the gap between interpretive textual analysis and empirical findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Therefore, integrating both qualitative and quantitative dimensions makes the study comprehensive and systematic in examining Dahl's linguistic choices.

6. The Analysis of the Study

Applying *Naming and Describing* on the data, the following examples show the use of this tool.

Naming and describing is a critical stylistic tool that is based on the text producer's choices. Accordingly, the choices made by the text producer are ideologically orientated rather than haphazardly selected. The following examples show the use of this tool.

- (1) "They had a son called **Michael** and a daughter called **Matilda**, ..." (Dahl, 1988, p. 10)
- (2) "The parents looked upon Matilda in particular as **nothing more than a scab**." (Dahl, 1988, p. 10)
- (3) "**Mr. and Mrs. Wormwood** looked forward enormously to the time when they could pick their little daughter off **and flick her away**." (Dahl, 1988, p. 10)
- (4) "...but it becomes somehow a lot worse when the child in question

is **extraordinary**." (Dahl, 1988, p. 10)

- (5) "Matilda was both of these things, but above all she was **brilliant**." (Dahl, 1988, p. 10)
- (6) "Her mind was so **nimble** and she was so quick to learn that her ability should have been obvious even to the most **half-witted** of parents." (Dahl, 1988, p. 10)
- (7) "But Mr and Mrs Wormwood were both **so gormless** and so wrapped up in their own silly little lives..." (Dahl, 1988, p. 10)

In the above examples (1- 4) Dahl uses '*Choice of Noun*' to name the characters, actually the selection of these names is ideologically motivated. Dahl tries to send an implicit message by making the characters believable with suitable names to reflect the world and the nature of those characters. Dahl names his protagonist as 'Matilda' this name's origin goes back to Teutonic language and means '*might*' and '*strength*'. Therefore, Dahl intentionally and ideologically chooses this name for his heroine. Another interesting fact that is revealed by this tool, is that what Dahl calls the parents. Being 'Wormwood', Dahl chooses this name for describing the character of the parents and comparing them to 'Worm' because they always do bad deeds like worms. Thus, this tool is used to highlight the ideology of '*Underestimation*'.

Regarding '*Noun Modification*', Dahl reveals the Matilda features through this technique as in examples (5-7). Dahl describes Matilda as being '*extraordinary, brilliant, and nimble*' all of these features are positive ones and give the character of Matilda the superiority over her parents. While, he describes her parents as being '*gormless*' to give the reader negative indication about them. *Child Maltreatment* and

Child abuse appears clearly in example (2) when Matilda's parents call her as '*nothing more than scab*' this shows clearly the mistreatment that Matilda receives from her parents.

The above examples demonstrate clearly the importance of this tool in shaping and figuring out the implicit ideology. Dahl selection of the names is ideologically oriented, besides noun modification is also used to enhance Dahl's ideological point of view. Therefore, this tool helps to discover the ideology of '**Bullying**'.

Choice of any noun in the text is ideologically motivated, thus this tool concerns mainly with the noun choice and the modification of the noun. The following examples present this tool:

- (1) "That's because you're **an ignorant little twit**," the father said." (Dahl, 1988, p. 24)
- (2) "You're just an **ignorant little squirt** who hasn't the foggiest idea what you're talking about!" (Dahl, 1988, p. 24)
- (3) ." "It's **dirty money**," Matilda said. "I hate it." (Dahl, 1988, p. 24)
- (4) . "Who the heck do you think you are," he shouted, "**The Archbishop** of Canterbury or something, preaching to me about honesty?" (Dahl, 1988, p. 24)
- (5) "His speech was never very **delicate but Matilda** was used to it." (Dahl, 1988, p. 24)
- (6) "You couldn't," the father said. "You're **too stupid**." (Dahl, 1988, p. 24)
- (7) "**Ignoring Matilda**, he turned to his son..." (Dahl, 1988, p. 24)

This critical stylistic tool has three techniques. The first technique is the '**Choice of Nouns**', Dahl uses this technique in examples (1-4). In examples

(1 and 2), Dahl shows how Matilda's father calls her with negative names like '*an ignorant little twit and ignorant little squirt*', this technique works effectively in showing **Child Maltreatment** to the reader. Besides, Dahl chooses these negative words to reveal to the reader the mistreatment that Matilda experiences from her father. In example (3) Matilda announces that her father's money is dirty because he uses to cheat the people whom trust him. Dahl is trying to show the reader the human nature of Matilda since she refuses the negative act of her father. Example (4) proves empirically how Mr. Wormwood mistreated his daughter. When Matilda refuses her father negative act of cheating people, her father telling her not to act like the '*Archbishop*' who is trying to preach the people. This shows **Child Emotional Abuse** that Matilda experiences from her father.

Another technique of naming and describing is '**Noun Modification**', Dahl uses this technique in examples (5 and 6). This technique is adopted by Dahl to prove the **Child Maltreatment** clearly due to the negative adjectives that Mr. Wormwood uses with his daughter like '*too stupid, and how speech was never delicate with Matilda*'. The third technique of this tool is '**Nominalization**', which has the potential of packaging certain ideological content in the head of the noun. Dahl uses this technique in example (7) by starting with the head of the sentence which carries the ideology of **Child Maltreatment** in the form of **Child Emotional Abuse** because Mr. Wormwood accuses Matilda as being an ignorant, whereas the reality is the opposite she knows anything about everything.

7. Results of the Study

Based on the analysis of the data above the coming table and figure show the result of the analysis.

Table (1)

Naming and Occurrences Percentages Describing Tool		
Noun Choice	8	57.16 %
Noun Modification	5	35.70 %
Nominalization	1	7.14 %
Total	14	100 %

According to the above table (1) ‘Noun Choice’ as a sub-tool of Naming and Describing scores (8) occurrences with (57.16%) percentages. Thus, this sub-tool is regarded as the most common sub-tool of Naming and Describing due to its importance. Noun Choice has an important ideological significance in shaping text producer’s ideological viewpoint. This sub-tool figures out the text’s hidden ideologies by showing the way text producer presents the characters.

Having discussed the highest sub-tool in the paragraph above, Noun Modification scores the second highest frequencies in the analysis. Noun Modification reserves (5) occurrences with (35.70%) percentages. This sub-tool is sued to enhance text producer’s implicit ideologies. Regarding the last sub-tool of Naming and Describing which is ‘Nominalization’. This sub-tool scores the lowest occurrence with (1) and (7.14%) percentages. The following figure show clearly these sub-tools of Naming and Describing.

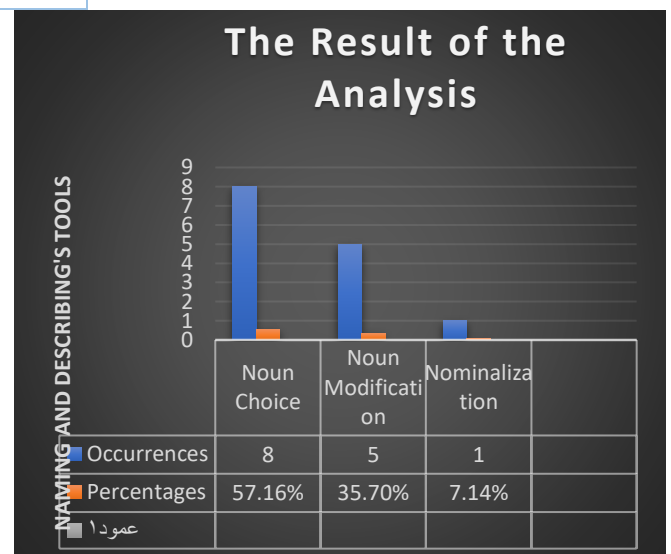


Figure (2) The Result of the Analysis

As shown in the analysis above ‘Noun Choice’ is used to discover the hidden ideologies of the text like ‘Child Maltreatment’, ‘Child Emotional Abuse’, and ‘Underestimation’. Regarding the sub-tool of ‘Noun Modification’ which is sued to figure out the ideologies of ‘Child Abuse’ and ‘Bullying’. Finally, regarding the sub-tool of ‘Nominalization’ which

reveals the ideology of 'Child Emotional Abuse'

5. Conclusion

The analysis of the study reveals different important facts about critical stylistics and its tools. First, the analysis proves empirically that critical stylistics can be used effectively in analyzing literary text as claimed by Jeffries. Second, the analysis shows the importance of *Naming and Describing* as a critical stylistic tool in revealing the text's embedded ideologies. Third, the analysis reveals that the sub tool of 'Noun Choice' is the most common sub-tool of *Naming and Describing* which can be used effectively in discover the text producer's ideologies. Forth, the study shows that *Naming and Describing* in the previous analysis reveals the ideologies of 'Child Physical and Emotional Abuse', 'Bullying' and 'Underestimation'. Thus, *Naming and Describing* is proved to be an effective critical stylistic tool in discovering text's implicit ideologies. .

6. References

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Abstract in Arabic

اللغة ليست مجرد وسيلة للتواصل، بل هي أيضاً أداة فعالة تُشكّل الأيديولوجيات وتؤثر على الإدراك. تحاول الدراسة الكشف عن الأهمية الأيديولوجية للتسمية والوصف كأداة أسلوبية نقدية في رواية ماتيلدا لرولد دال (1988). تكشف الدراسة كيف يُسهم اختيار الاسم، وتعديله، والتحويل إلى أسماء في كشف الأيديولوجيات الخفية. تحاول الدراسة الكشف عن الأيديولوجيات المتعلقة بإساءة معاملة الأطفال، والإساءة العاطفية، والتتمر، والاستخفاف.

تتكون البيانات من مقتطفات مختارة من رواية ماتيلدا. خلّلت هذه المقتطفات من خلال الإطار الأسلوبي النقدي لجيفريز. تشير النتائج إلى أن اختيار الاسم هو الأسلوب الأكثر استخداماً (57.16%). تعكس هذه الأداة الفرعية تحيزاً أيديولوجياً في تصوير الشخصية. في حين استعملت الأداة تعديل الاسم بنسبة (35.70%). بينما استخدمت أداة التحويل إلى أسماء بنسبة (7.14%) من المعنى الأيديولوجي. تؤكد الدراسة أن التسمية والوصف أداة فعالة في كشف المنظور الأيديولوجي في النصوص الأدبية. كما تدعم هذه النتيجة ادعاء جيفريز بأن الأسلوبية النقدية قادرة على كشف المعنى الضمني والتحيزات الاجتماعية في الخطاب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الأسلوبية النقدية، التسمية والوصف، ماتيلدا، الأيديولوجيا، ورولد دال
