

A Critical Stylistic Analysis of Readers' Ideological Repositioning in Bolaji Abdullahi's *Sweet Sixteen*

Isah Adamu-Latiko
Department of Languages,
The Federal Polytechnic, Bida, Niger State
isahlatiko1984@gmail.com/ isahlatiko@yahoo.com
08034817823

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Hafsah Opaluwa Zakari
Department of Languages,
Alazhar School Kano, Kano State
zakarihafsa@gmail.com
08036044601

Abstract

Texts of any kind are usually constructed from certain ideological positions in which language provides a vital resource for such representations. This paper examined the ideological positions and repositioning constructed in Bolaji Abdullahi's novel, *Sweet Sixteen* using critical stylistics as an approach. The study particularly adopted the Lesley Jeffries' (2010) critical stylistic tools to analyse the selected aspects of ideological negotiation in the text in order to show how linguistic resources were used to that effect. The analysis of the study revealed how the writer attempted to reposition his readers' position on certain issues of importance through the eyes of a female character by presenting a different understanding. It particularly exposed how the writer used negation and contrast to represent and downplay some social notions; prioritising to reposition some of these notions or ideologies and hypothesising to create different kinds of world possibilities or persuasive forces. Thus, the study re-established the importance of linguistic and stylistic resources in the representation of writer's ideology and hegemonic power in shaping the thinking and attitude of the readers towards certain position in the society.

Key words: Ideology, Hegemony, Repositioning, text and Critical Stylistics

Introduction

Ideology is a complex concept which can be used to refer to a particular kind of ideas, assumptions, perspectives or positions, understanding or consciousness identified by a person or group of people (Eagleton, 1991, Van Dijk, 1998; Blommaert, 2005). Hence, according to Baker and Ellace (2011, p. 58), "ideology can generally be thought of as the set of ideas, beliefs and aims that a person or group holds". Textually, it can mean the production of meaning or the representation of an aspect of reality in the exercise of power, domination or exploitation (Fairclough, 2003; 2014). Ideology

in a text can manifest in the choice of words, structure, content and perspective or approach used in such constructions. In other words, it can also inform the selection of one textual feature or perspective against the other (Jeffries, 2010; Fairclough, 2014). Thus, it is a matter of linguistic, textual and contextual features built on a particular understanding or notion. In fact, every text production and consumption are shaped by certain ideology.

However, ideology, as a concept, is not fixed because it can be changed, negotiated and promoted. In this paper, the process through which a particular idea or perspective is negotiated and transformed is referred to as ideological repositioning. Hence, ideological repositioning is taken to mean the reshaping of an existing understanding of an issue, be it on marriage, love, education, age, agenda, etc. to a more presumed favourable one. Such repositioning can be constructed ideologically in terms of good, best, preference, right, appropriate, standard and proper ways of thinking and acting, which implies that the existing ones are out of significance, norm or fashion.

Meanwhile, the power or force of any ideology or ideological repositioning is to create consent, hegemony, influence, conviction, acceptance or belief in a certain way through the persuasive or manipulative use of language and its resources (Fairclough, 2003). By this, a text can help to position its readers to accept the writer's position as the right or normal way of thinking, seeing and acting. This is, according to Fairclough (2014) and Ibrahim (2018), part of the ideological or persuasive effect, and hegemonic power of texts. The significance of this is that the text can be seen as a way of creating hegemonic influence on its readers in certain ways which can be actualised through the manipulative use of linguistic and textual properties. However, this may vary from one text to another, depending on the purpose or the audience addressed. Thus, this study examined the ideological positions and repositioning constructed in the novel, *Sweet Sixteen* using critical stylistics as an approach.

Theoretical Framework: Critical Stylistics

Critical stylistics is one of the linguistic methods for text analysis and interpretation which is drawn from critical discourse analysis and stylistics. It is a new theoretical approach to textual analysis formulated by Lesley Jeffries in his book, *Critical Stylistics: The Power of English* that was first published in 2010. Jeffries' theoretical approach is an attempt to fill in the gap that is mostly missing in the critical discourse analysis approaches which is the inadequate linguistic tools for textual analysis. According to Jeffries (2010), language use is a critical medium for effecting a desired influence on the readers, and this is achieved by the exploitation of linguistic and stylistic features of the text. By this token, Jeffries considered texts to be ideological or selective in its production, distribution and interpretation.

Jeffries, therefore, provided a list of linguistic and textual tools or features through which the ideological workings of language are possible and realised in texts. Jeffries identifies ten (10) of such tools to include naming and describing; representing actions/events/states; equating and contrasting; exemplifying and enumerating; prioritizing; implying and assuming; negating; hypothesizing; presenting other's speech and thought; and representing time, space and society. All these features identified are capable of presenting reality, narration or experience in a particular perspective or ideological position (Jeffries, 2010). Hence, in this study, Jeffries' linguistic tools are applied into the analysis of the novel, *Sweet Sixteen* in order to uncover the ideological positions and repositioning constructed in the text around some certain thematic considerations. This approach is appropriate to the study because of the fundamental consideration it gives to the

analysis of linguistic and textual choices in digging out the ideological positions and how they affect the readers.

Method

This is a descriptive study that provides the linguistic, stylistic and textual analysis of the selected aspects of the text. The data for this study is taken from the content of the novel, *Sweet Sixteen* published in 2017 by Masobe. The text was considered significant to the study because of its selection by Joint Matriculation Board (JAMB) for national reading for students sitting for Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) in 2019 and 2020 respectively. In the selection of the aspects of the text, consideration was given to some themes/issues purposively considered important to the text and the author. Thereafter, Jeffries's critical stylistic tools were applied in the analysis.

Presentation of Data

The following excerpts were selected from the novel based on their thematic significance to the text.

Theme One: Identity		
Ideology	Aspect of the Text	Linguistic and textual tools
Ideological Positioning	My name is Aliya (p.1).	Representing space, State and Naming
	You are a child (p.11). Many people thought she was snobbish (p.2).	Representing space, Equating, Naming and Description of action and Representing Other's thought.
Ideological Repositioning	I am the only child of my parents (p.1).	Representing space, State Describing, and prioritizing
	I am not a child. I am a lady (p.11). But I knew she was a nice and generous person (p.2)	Negating and Contrasting Representing one's thought

Theme Two: Celebration of Birthdays		
Ideology	Aspect of the Text	Linguistic and textual tools
Ideological Positioning	The very day I <u>turned</u> 16, I was still in school. Even if I was home, I knew better than to expect any parties (p.1).	Description, Representing space, Action and State. Hypothesizing
Ideological Repositioning	My father believed that the only thing worth celebrating was a major achievement. In his eyes, a birthday was not an achievement at all (p.1). Birthday parties were no just our thing (p.2).	Representing space and Other's thought, State and Hypothesizing Describing and Negating

Theme Three: Love		
Ideology	Aspect of the Text	Linguistic and textual tools
Ideological Positioning	I love my parents, no doubt about that (p.4).	Representing space, Action and Description
Ideological Repositioning	But I was particularly close to my dad (p.4).	Negating, Representing space, Action, Prioritizing

Theme Four: Career selection		
Ideology	Aspect of the Text	Linguistic and textual tools
Ideological Positioning	<p>But a boy in my class, Sogo, said his father wants him to be a lawyer like himself, but he did not want to.</p> <p>It is normal for parents to want their children to follow in their footsteps, I suppose (p.22).</p> <p>Daddy, I don't think I want to be a doctor anymore. I think I want to be a lawyer (p.18).</p>	<p>Negating and Representing Other's Action</p> <p>Exemplifying</p> <p>Implying and assuming</p> <p>Representing space, Action and Negation</p>
Ideological Repositioning	<p>However, it is important that parents allow their children to choose (p.22).</p> <p>My dear, it does not really matter what career you choose, he said (p.21).</p> <p>The most important thing is that you must do only that which has your heart in it (p.21).</p> <p>It is important also that whatever you do, you should strive to be one of the best in it, if not the absolute (p.21).</p> <p>As a father, I can only guide you. I cannot choose your career for you (p.21).</p>	<p>Prioritizing, Assuming</p> <p>Hypothesizing</p> <p>Prioritizing and negating</p> <p>Prioritizing, Assuming</p> <p>Hypothesizing</p> <p>Prioritizing, Assuming</p> <p>Hypothesizing</p> <p>Prioritizing, Assuming</p> <p>Hypothesizing and Negating</p>

Theme Five: Parenting		
Ideology	Aspect of the Text	Linguistic and textual tools
Ideological Positioning	<u>Implied</u>	Implying and assuming
Ideological Repositioning	<p>I mean, your mother and I also have a duty to guide you, but we cannot be monitoring you all the time (p.15).</p> <p>As a father, I can only guide you (p.21).</p>	<p>Representing space, Action, Prioritizing and Negating</p> <p>Prioritizing, Assuming and implying</p> <p>Hypothesizing</p>

Theme Six: Obedience		
Ideology	Aspect of the Text	Linguistic and textual tools
Ideological Positioning	But I thought you said children should obey their parents (p.22).	Negating and Representing other thought
Ideological Repositioning	<p>Yes, it is important that children should always obey their parents because the parents have more experience about life and they would always want what is best for their children.</p> <p>However, we, parents also have a duty to listen to our children (p.22).</p>	<p>Prioritizing, Assuming</p> <p>Hypothesizing and Exemplifying</p> <p>Prioritizing, Assuming</p> <p>Hypothesizing and equating</p>

Theme Six: Sex		
Ideology	Aspect of the Text	Linguistic and textual tools
Ideological Positioning	<u>Sex is everywhere these days</u> , sad to say, he lamented (p.14).	Describing and Exemplifying
Ideological Repositioning	You see, Aliya, your mind is like a beautiful room. You have to be careful with what you let in. And I am not just taking about sex. You have to avoid them (p.14).	<p>Hypothesizing, Exemplifying and Equating</p> <p>Representing Action</p>

Theme Seven: Dating		
Ideology	Aspect of the Text	Linguistic and textual tools
Ideological Positioning	Okay, I mean now that I am 16, <u>I am old enough to date, right</u> (p.30)?	Describing, Hypothesizing and Assumption.
Ideological Repositioning	<p>You see, Aliya, dating, boyfriend or whatever you call it, are not bad in themselves.</p> <p>You see, Aliya, there is time for everything (p.34).</p> <p>Relationships come with a lot of emotional issues that you may not be able to deal with at your age (p.34).</p> <p>If you are to be the best, you have to stay focused (p.34).</p>	<p>Hypothesizing and Exemplifying</p> <p>Negating</p> <p>Representing Action and Hypothesizing</p> <p>Hypothesizing and Exemplifying</p> <p>Hypothesizing and Exemplifying</p>

Theme Eight: Beauty		
Ideology	Aspect of the Text	Linguistic and textual tools
Ideological Positioning	Physical beauty, however it is defined, is very important (p.49).	Prioritizing and Equating
Ideological Repositioning	<p>Beauty is total. But you see a truly beautiful person is one who is beautiful in character and comportment (p.49).</p> <p>But physical beauty alone is not enough. A truly beautiful person is someone who is a real human being (p.49).</p>	<p>Hypothesizing, Exemplifying, negating and Prioritizing</p> <p>Hypothesizing, negating, equating and Exemplifying</p>

Theme Nine: Knowledge		
Ideology	Aspect of the Text	Linguistic and textual tools
Ideological Positioning	I think I now understand why you sound like you know everything (p.23).	Hypothesizing
Ideological Repositioning	Aww, c'mon, Aliya, nobody knows everything (p.23)	Hypothesizing and Negating

Theme Ten: Technology		
Ideology	Aspect of the Text	Linguistic and textual tools
Ideological Positioning	Implied	Implying and assuming
Ideological Repositioning	In that case, we cannot blame technology (p.24). We can only blame people who use it in the wrong way (p.24).	Hypothesizing and Negating Hypothesizing, negating, prioritizing and Assuming

Analysis of the Data

Naming and Describing

This is the first linguistic (stylistic) tool identified in Jeffries' theoretical framework and it is usually the most common features in every text (Jeffries, 2010). Naming and describing deal with the identification and description of subjects or objects of representation. In textual and social contexts, naming identifies the participant subjects of interaction or reference. It is often identified in texts in the noun choices, noun modification and nominalization through which the referential, attitudinal and ideological evaluations are made. In the text studied, the central character is identified with proper name: "My name is Aliya (p.1)"; and describes and positions, as thus: "I am the only child of my parents (p.1)"; "I am not a child. I am a lady (p.1)", etc.

Representing Actions/Events/States

This tool is the second common feature of the text. It is constructed around the verbal structure of the text. It involves the representations of activities or states of being. It is identified in the transitivity structure of the texts together with the voice, tense and modality system of choices that allows the construction of situation in certain ways. In the text, it is demonstrated in both static and dynamic verbs, e.g.: is/was, are/were am not, love, like, wanted, know/knew, turned, believe, think/thought, cannot be monitoring, don't think, have to, etc.

Equating and Contrasting

Equating and contrasting are textual features of the texts that allow the equation or juxtaposition of one entity against the other. They can be used to hide or reveal differences. They can be built around synonyms, antonyms, simile, metaphor, relational structures, etc. In the text, such features are demonstrated in the structures like: “You are a child (p.11)”, “Sogo, said his father wants him to be a lawyer like himself, but he did not want to” (p.21), “I am not a child. I am a lady (p.11)”, “You see, Aliya, your mind is like a beautiful room (p.14)”, “However, we, parents also have a duty to listen to our children (p.22)”, etc.

Exemplifying and Enumerating

This tool enables the writer to set a list of instances for similarities and differences. It also makes it possible for the writer to indicate or complete a point. Hence, they are used to prove or illustrate an argument or perspective. Some clear instances of these are demonstrated in the text as thus; “But a boy in my class, Sogo, said his father wants him to be a lawyer like himself, but he did not want to (p.22); “You see, Aliya, your mind is like a beautiful room (p.15); “Relationships come with a lots of emotional issues that you may not be able to deal with at your age (p.34); “If you are to be the best, you have to stay focused (p.34); and “Beauty is total. But you see a truly beautiful person is one who is beautiful in character and comportment (p.49)”. By these instances, the readers are made to think and see reality from a particular perspective. So, in the former instance, the readers can think of a true beauty in terms of a person's character and comportment.

Prioritizing

This is the way the writer emphasizes or downplays the content of his message or viewpoints. Prioritizing is one of the ways writers influence the readers (Jefferies, 2010). As a feature of the text, it can be achieved through lexical choices and textual construction. Hence, in the text, it is achieved through conjunction words such as but, however, etc. and structural constructions such as it is important, the most important, truly, only, etc.: “But I was particularly close to my dad (p.4); the most important thing is that you must do only that which has your heart in it (p.21); yes, it is important that children should always obey their parents because the parents have more experience about life and they would always want what is best for their children. However, we, parents also have a duty to listen to our children (p.22); A truly beautiful person is someone who is a real human being (p.49), My father believed that the only thing worth celebrating was a major achievement; and We can only blame people who use it in the wrong way (p.24). etc. Meanwhile, the writer also

uses negating to downplay some societal notions, as in: My dear, it does not really matter what career you choose, he said (p.21); In that case, we cannot blame technology (p.24); But failure is not always a bad thing (p.21), etc.

Implying and Assuming

Implying and assuming allows the writer to foreground certain information or idea in the text as assumption, common knowledge or norm. For instance, the expression in the text: “In that case, we cannot blame technology (p.24)” implies that some people do blame technology. Likewise, in the expression, “I mean, your mother and I also have a duty to guide you, but we cannot be monitoring you all the time” (p.15). Negation is used in these expressions to imply what the society believes.

Negating

By negating, the writer can deny the existence of certain proposition, idea, fact, or notion. Thus, the expressions below show instances or structures of negation in the text: “I am not a child. I am a lady (p.11)”; “No one likes to fail, he continued (p.21)”; “Aww, c’mom, Aliya, nobody knows everything; In that case, we cannot blame technology (p.24)”; As a father, I can only guide you. I cannot choose your career for you (p.21)”, etc. Thus, the writer uses negating not only to show the non-existence of certain proposition but also to make hypothetical statements and assumption about certain reality or possibility.

Hypothesizing

This tool enables the writer to present their view from a particular point of view or hypothetical condition. This tool is usually located in the system of modality (Ahmed & Abbas, 2007). Hence, its structure helps the writer to create different kinds of world possibilities or persuasive forces. These are demonstrated in the text in the structures, as thus: Even if I was home, I knew better than to expect any parties (p.1); If you are to be the best, you have to stay focused (p.34); In that case, we cannot blame technology (p.24); I think I now understand why you sound like you know everything (p.23); You have to be careful with what you let in. And I am not just taking about sex. You have to avoid them (p.14); and We can only blame people who use it in the wrong way (p.24).

Presenting Others’ Speech and Thoughts

Texts are usually interdiscursive (Fairclough, 2003). This tool enables the writer to bring their perspective and other people’s voice into a particular discourse. In this text, the writer used such tool to set a background or make assumption on general societal notion. For instance, in the expressions below, the writer reports the kind of notion people hold about others’ identity and on forcing career on young ones: “Many people thought she was snobbish (p.2)”; and “But a boy in my class, Sogo, said his father wants him to be a lawyer like himself, but he did not want to (p.22)”. Likewise, the writer used the tool to support his argument on certain issues: “My father believed that the only thing worth celebrating was a major achievement (p.1)”; and “In his eyes, a birthday was not an achievement at all (p.1)”.

Representing Time, Space and Society

This tool of analysis deals with how the text producers construct the world in space, time and society dimensions (Ahmed & Abbas, 2007). Jeffries (2010) locates this tool in the application of deixis such as time, place, personal, etc.: “I am not a child. I am a lady (p.11)”; “In that case, we cannot blame technology (p.24).; “As a father, I can only guide you (p.21)”, “My dear, it does not really matter what career you choose, he said (p.21), etc. These instances enable the writer to locate the particular context of interaction in terms of the participants and their relationships. Thus, the text studied is located within the context of father-child(daughter) kind of relationship.

Discussions

In the analysis of the text, there are traces of certain stylistic or textual choices for the expression of social meaning and the ideological negotiations from which the writer attempts to re-direct the readers’ position on certain issues. Instances of Jeffries’ (2010) textual tools are clearly demonstrated in the text. However, some textual features are privileged over the others in order to legitimate the writer’s stance on those social issues and to persuade the readers to accept and to work with. Hence, in the text, the writer uses negating and contrasting to represent and downplay some social notions; and prioritizing to reposition some of these notions or ideologies. For instance, the writer positions and repositions the character’s identity as thus: position- “My name is Aliya (p.1)”, and reposition- “I am the only child of my parents (p.1)”; position- “I am not a child”, and reposition- I am a lady (p.11), etc. Thus, in the text, repositioning is formed basically through prioritizing, negating and contrasting in order to affect the readers’ mind. For this, textual resources are manipulated ideologically. This aligns the study with Jeffries’ (2010) position that “recipients of texts are potentially influenced by the priorities of the producer” (p.94). Hence, the study justifies Fairclough’s (2003, 2014) and Jeffries’ (2010) position that texts of any kind are usually constructed from certain ideological positions in which language provides a vital resource for such representation.

Conclusion

This study reveals that in order to reshape or reposition the reader’s perspective on certain issues of societal significance, the writer utilized different kinds of linguistic and textual choices which reflect Jeffries’ stylistic tools of ideological construction of social meaning in texts. Significantly, it shows how certain ideological positions are downplayed or negotiated in order to emphasize and naturalize the other. Hence, the study re-establishes the notion that texts have ideological basis in terms of production and interpretation. It also stresses the importance of linguistic and stylistic resources in the representation of writer’s ideology and hegemonic power in shaping the thinking and attitude of the readers towards certain position or an issue of understanding.

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