

A Critical Analysis on the Non-equivalence Between Bertha's Identity and Discursive Power

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Abstract: *Bliss* is one of Katherine Mansfield's masterpieces, which is a short story containing a large number of discourses, i.e. speeches. Previous scholars analyzed this classical novel from many perspectives, among them the discursive power is less mentioned and is worth discussing. This paper applying critical discourse analysis theory on discursive power and the interrelation between discourse and power, discusses the non-equivalence between the identity and discursive power of the heroine, Bertha, aiming to provide a new perspective to appreciate the novel and unveil the power in discourse of the novel.

Keywords: Critical discourse analysis; Discursive power; Non-equivalence; *Bliss*

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1. Introduction

Bliss is one of Katherine Mansfield's masterpieces, which describes a small dinner party with abundant verbal processes. Previous scholars studied this novel mainly from the perspectives of writing artist, (bi)sexuality, images, feminine, theme, etc., that is, in terms of literature discussion, and among those perspectives the discursive power is rarely studied. In order to understand the term "discursive power", we need to figure out the interrelation between power and discourse at first. Foucault views power as "bio-power," that is, born in nature and discursive in form^[3]. Critical discourse analysis (CDA for short) scholars, such as Wodak^[6], adopting discourse-historical approach for study, states that language indexes power, language expresses power and van Dijk^[5], using social-cognitive approach, claims that power has a great attachment to control, and if power abuse happens, people may have no freedom to make discourse. Fairclough^[1-2] views power in terms of hegemony and domination, and power is in discourse and behind discourse. Despite their small differences viewing the relation between power and discourse, those linguists all agree that power is closely related to discourse, and they are inter-impacted, more power means more dominating and controlling discourse, and in turn more dominating and controlling discourse means people with more power. Power can be replaced by some synonyms, like control and domination. In short, power is discursive and discourse has power.

CDA is an analysis requiring attention of both micro level of language, including textual form, structure and organization at all levels; phonological, grammatical, lexical (vocabulary) and higher levels of textual organization in terms of exchange systems (the distribution of speaking turns), structures of argumentation, and generic (activity type) structures, and macro level of language, which is structured by the three functions of language in terms of systemic-functional linguistics (SFL for short), that is, the ideational, interpersonal and textual functions, since the view of language as social semiotic^[4] incorporates an orientation to mapping relations between language (texts) and social structures and relations. Fairclough

proposes a critical approach to discourse analysis, demonstrated by his three-dimensional model ^[2].

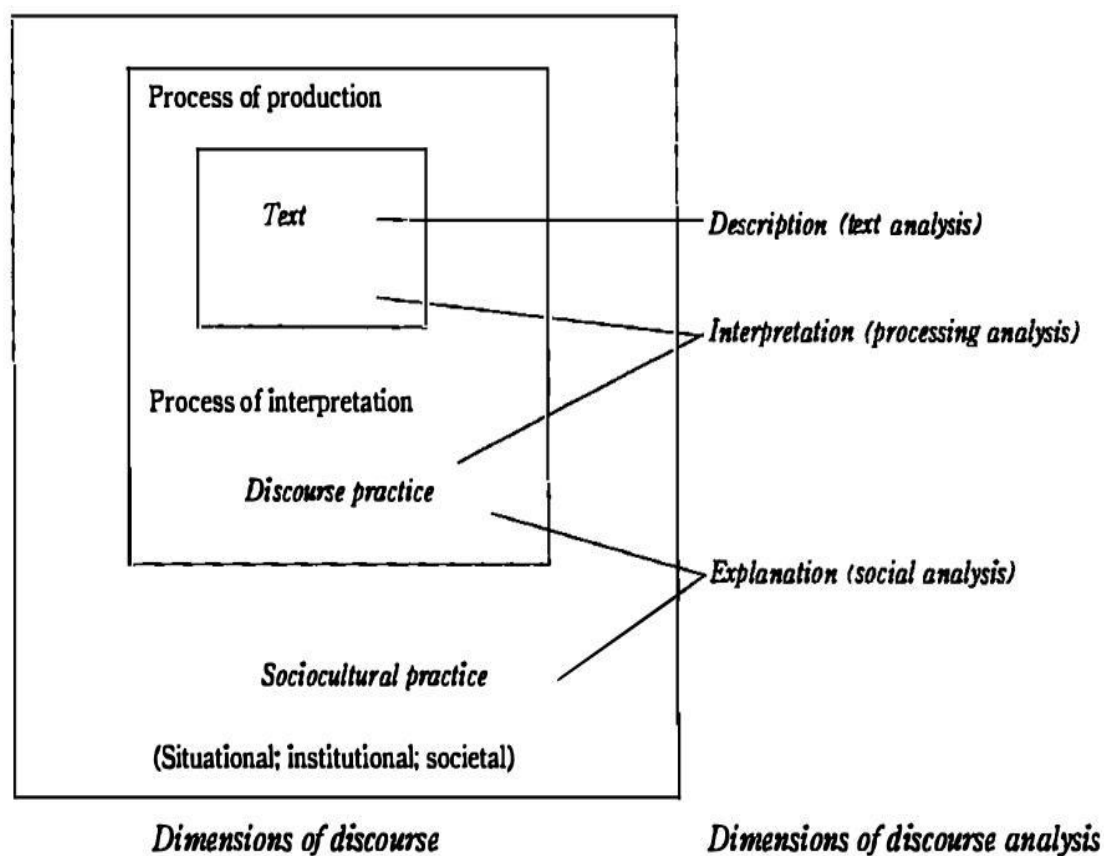


Figure 1. Critical approach to discourse analysis: Three-dimensional model

After we introduce his three-dimensional model, we need to understand how Halliday’s systemic-functional grammar (SFG for short) relates to this model. We first present Fairclough’s conclusion about the relation between power and discourse, which is that he ^[2] claims that there are three types of constraint which powerful participants in discourse can exercise over the contributions of non-powerful participants: constraints on contents, relations, and subjects, and those constraints can have long-term structural effects on the knowledge and beliefs, social relationships, and social identities of an institution or society correspondingly. According to Fairclough, ^[2] language use is always simultaneously constitutive of (i) social identities, (ii) social relations and (iii) systems of knowledge and belief (the three structural effects mentioned above)- though with different degrees of salience in different cases. We therefore need a theory of language, such as Halliday’s, ^[4] which stresses its multifunctionality, which sees any text as simultaneously enacting what Halliday calls the “ideational”, “interpersonal” and “textual” functions of language. In brief, discursive power has constraints on contents, relations, and subjects of discourse, and in return those constraints have effect on language use (i.e. the knowledge and beliefs, social relationships, and social identities), which enacting what Halliday calls the “ideational,” “interpersonal” and “textual” functions of language.

In this paper, we will adopt Fairclough’s three-dimensional model as an analytical procedure. At first stage, we describe speaker’s knowledge and beliefs, social relationships, and social identities at discursive level to reveal contents, relations in it and subjects mentioned at meaning level; at second stage, we apply Halliday’s SFG (using mood as a specific tool) to interpret the non-equivalence between Bertha’s identity and discursive power; at third stage, we will explain the social issues behind the non-equivalence in this novel.

2. Non-equivalence between Bertha's identity and discursive power

2.1. Brief introduction of *Bliss*

Published in 1918, *Bliss* talks about the things that a thirty-year woman named Bertha experiences from a late afternoon to evening ^[3]. Bertha seems childlike not only seen from her behavior but her discourse as well and she feels happy with everything in her life. Bertha believes she has a happy marriage with a husband in love and a lovely daughter without worrying about money. In her family, she has a husband named Harry who is hypocritical and indifferent. Marry, Bertha's servant, is a responsible and hard-working woman. Nanny, the nurse of Bertha's daughter, is irresponsible and offensive. One day she and her husband invite their friends for dinner, Pearl Fulton is one of them. Bertha thinks Pearl is a beautiful lady, and she falls in love with her and to some extent, she is bisexual. However, her husband Harry seems to hate Pearl in so many ways while he is having an affair with her secretly. Apart from Pearl, Mr. and Mrs. Norman Knights are also guests and they pretend to be wise and smart, but in fact, they are ignorant and full of vanity. Another guest, named Eddie Warren is a poet with a sorrowful face and full of mysterious color. After the dinner, Bertha founds her husband and Pearl is cheating on her, they hug and have love affairs. This phenomenon has broken Bertha's bliss. This story demonstrates the hollowness of her life.

2.2. Non-equivalence of discursive power and the identity between Bertha and Nanny

Selected dialogues between Bertha and Nanny (only dialogues without descriptions):

"Has she been good, Nanny?"

"She's been a little sweet all the afternoon," whispered Nanny. "We went to the park and I sat down on a chair and took her out of the pram and a big dog came along and put its head on my knee and she clutched its ear, tugged it. Oh, you should have seen her."

(Bertha wanted to ask if it wasn't rather dangerous to let her clutch at a strange dog's ear. But she did not dare to.)

Bertha couldn't help crying:

"Oh, Nanny, do let me finish giving her supper while you put the bath things away."

"Well, Mm, she oughtn't to be changed hands while she's eating," said Nanny, still whispering. "It unsettles her; it's very likely to upset her."....

"Oh, I must!" said she.

Very offended, Nanny handed her over.

"Now, don't excite her after her supper. You know you do, Mm. And I have such a time with her after!" First of all, Bertha is a hostess of the family, and a master of all the servants, including Nanny. That is to say, the position of Bertha is higher than Nanny, and Nanny is supposed to be obedient and responsible for her master and take care of little Bertha. However, in the novel, especially from their dialogues, the identity between Bertha and Nanny is incompatible with their discourse, which is the non-equivalence of discursive power and the identity between Bertha and Nanny.

Table 1. Mood choice in Bertha's discourse

Mood	Subject	Finite	Speech role
INT	she	Has	question
IMP	(You)	do	command
DEC	(I)	giving	statement
DEC	you	put	statement
DEC	I	must	statement

In Bertha’s discourse, the time of “I” as subject equals to the time of “you” as subject, and it is not common for a master with higher power due to “you” would be used more often for commanding the servant to do whatever a master asks. The statements exist more often than command and question in terms of speech role. Since Bertha has more power which also means she has stronger discursive power, she is supposed to make many commands and pose a lot of questions about Nanny’s responsibility and her service. From the perspective of finite, the modal verbs like “shall”, “will”, “need”, “must”, and “ought” is rare in Bertha’s discourse, as a master, she is in a position to make more commands and give orders which fits in her identity. Surprisingly, she only uses “must” once after Nanny doesn’t do as she says, and she is in angry.

Table 2. Mood choice in Nanny’s discourse

Mood	Subject	Finite	Speech role
DEC	She	's	statement
DEC	We	went	statement
DEC	I	sat	Statement
DEC	(I)	took	statement
DEC	a big dog	came	statement
DEC	(a big dog)	put	statement
DEC	she	clutched	statement
DEC	she	oughtn't	statement
DEC	she	's	statement
DEC	It	unsettles	statement
DEC	it	's	statement
IMP	(you)	don't	command
DEC	You	know	statement
DEC	you	do	statement
DEC	I	have	statement

In Nanny’s discourse, the time of “I” as subject equals to the time of “you” as subject, which is also uncommon in a servant’s discourse, while she is supposed to use “I” as subject in her words, and should never or hardly use “you”. And very offensively, she even makes command by making an imperative sentence “don't excite...” and as though “You know you do” is a statement, the accusing tone is not supposed to exist in a servant’s discourse. In a sense, she is very bold.

As we analyze above, the non-equivalence of Bertha’s identity and her discursive power is distinct, so as the non-equivalence between Nanny’s identity and her discursive power. And most outstanding non-equivalence of discursive power and the identity exists between Bertha and Nanny in terms of their dialogues. This is because Bertha is a young woman who believes in every good thing and innocent as a child, she is convinced that she is in great bliss, everything is fine with her. Even Nanny is bully, Bertha, in her childlike mind, thinks that Nanny is still a good person, and because of her cowardice, she does not dare to challenge her. She is in great happiness and getting into conflict will ruin everything. Besides, she lives in upper-middle class, her nurture will be against such violent behavior. On the other hand, Nanny is a servant who doesn’t get much education, so she can be bully as she can, she doesn't feel be bonded. And

she knows that Bertha, her master, is an elegant and nurtured innocent young lady, thus she takes advantage of her master and even offend her. She can do everything she's willing to in the house. To some extent, Bertha may be envy of Nanny for all the restrictions she has but her nurse hasn't.

2.3. Non-equivalence of Bertha's power and identity in her own discourse

Selected discourse of Bertha's own:

She began to laugh.

“No, no. I'm getting hysterical.”

“What creepy things cats are!” she stammered

“I'm too happy—too happy!” she murmured.

“I'm absurd. Absurd!” She sat up

She had to talk because of her desire to laugh.

“I must laugh or die.”

She jumped up from her chair and ran over to the piano.

“What a pity someone does not play!” she cried. “What a pity somebody does not play.”

“Oh, what is going to happen now?” she cried.

Although those discourses above is Bertha's own words, it also shows her discursive power is weaker than we think in that she has no one to turn to and what she says does not fit in her identity as a young nurtured woman.

Table 3. Mood choice in Bertha's own discourse

Mood	Subject	Finite	Speech role
DEC	I	'm	statement
DEC	cats	are	statement
DEC	I	'm	statement
DEC	I	'm	statement
DEC	I	must	statement
DEC	someone	does	statement
INT	what	is	question

Among all those subjects, “I” appears more times than others, which indicates she pays more attention to her feelings and doesn't want to speak out. There are also some other things chosen to be subjects, like her impressions to “cats” and “someone”, but she refuses to share her ideas with others. She is supposed to be a sharing-ideas lady since she is the hostess of the dinner party and even has the responsibility to warm the environment up. Her murmur and stammer do not match her identity as a hostess.

3. Conclusion

The protagonist of Mansfield's novel *Bliss*, Bertha is an educated upper-middle class lady. And as a hostess, her identity does not fit in her discourse and discursive power. She is supposed to show her prestige, hospitality and dignity to others. However, the writer shows her as an innocent, childlike and good-heart young woman, thus her sayings are not equivalent to her identity. Through our analysis above, we can see that in terms of CDA by applying mood analytical methods, Bertha's discursive power is easy to be understood. And it provides a different perspective for readers to appreciate the novel, especially the

character of Bertha, and to understand the reason why her happiness is gone in the end. Since she is understood as a good, innocent lady who believes in things as they are supposed or seem to be on the surface and she cannot see the things underneath appearances, her discourse is unfit to her identity, which is been taken the advantage by others and she is doomed to be an unhappy woman at last.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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