

VOICES OF RESISTANCE: A FEMINIST STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF MALALA YOUSAFZAI'S 2013 UN SPEECH THROUGH SARA MILLS' THEORY

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the intersection of the feminist stylistics and political discourse by applying Sara Mills' feminist stylistic theory to Malala Yousafzai's 2013 United Nations speech. It explores how lexical options; positioning of the subject and rhetorical techniques represents feminist ideologies and resist patriarchal dominance. A qualitative textual analysis method employed in the study shows that Malala's speech incorporates strategic use of inclusive, empowering, and agentive language to break gender stereotypes and magnifies marginalized voices. This paper points out the way discourse can be a strong instrument in the hands of social resistance and advocacy by paying attention to the issue of feminist language use.

Keywords: Sara Mills' feminist stylistic theory, rhetorical devices, patriarchy, gender stereotypes.

INTRODUCTION

Language is an influential medium that constructs, resists, and revises social norms. In the female linguistic theory, language is not an image of thought but a tool of power. The feminist stylistics and especially that developed by Sara Mills examines how the language works ideologically in particular with regard to gender. This paper discusses how language strategies in Malala Yousafzai's 2013 speech during the United Nations' assembly cohere with feminist discourses of empowerment, resistance, and solidarity. Applying Mills' feminist stylistic theory, this research focuses on how Malala uses certain lexical means, subject positioning, and rhetorical structures to speak against the patriarchal and suppressive systems.

Language is a strong medium for construction of social norms, defiance and re-imaging of social norms. Language in the feminist linguistic theory is not just a passive tool for communication, but a field of ideological struggles. Feminist stylistics such as developed by Sara Mills is interested in the ways in which language can express, sustain, or resist gendered power relations. In this paper, Mills' feminist stylistic theory is applied to Malala Yousafzai's 2013 United Nations speech, an internationally known speech of a teenage activist for girls' education and women's rights. Researching the ways in which the speech is stylized – in particular lexical choices, subject positioning and rhetorical structure – this study shows how Malala stylizes language to create a feminist voice of resistance, solidarity, and empowerment.

Problem Statement

Although Malala Yousafzai's UN speech has been embraced by millions all over the world for its vital moral and political message, the linguistic and feminist stylistic properties of this prose piece have yet to be addressed in a scholarly manner. In particular, there is a research gap on studying how Malala's use of language can be understood in terms of female agency, resistance to the patriarchal authority, and unity with the oppressed classes, particularly, through the lens of feminist stylistics. This paper fills that gap as it analyzes her speech by Sara Mills' feminist stylistics, that uncovers how feminist ideology could be incorporated and presented through stylistic word-choices.

Rationale

Malala Yousafzai's speech is a world-known deed of courage and resistance; however, an analysis of its language use allows gaining a glimpse into the discursive construction of gender, identity, and power. The application of Sara Mills' feminist stylistic theory enables us to go beyond the meanings at the surface level and explore how language actually works as a tool of feminism. The paper is a contribution to the feminist study of linguistics because it addresses a non-western female speaker who uses language to challenge terrorism and patriarchy in the world.

Research Questions

- i. What are the Malala Yousafzai's 2013 UN address choices in lexicons to reveal feminist ideologies through a perspective of Sara Mills' feminist stylistic theory?
- ii. How is female subjectivity and agency achieved through the language of the speech?

Research Objectives

- i. To identify and interpret lexical patterns that reflect or challenge gender norms.
- ii. To explore how language is used to construct female agency, solidarity, and resistance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The development of feminist stylistics began with such seminal work *Feminist Stylistics* of 1995 by Sara Mills, who claims language can be ideological and that language choices are inextricably linked to gender politics. Mills asserts here around how certain details like word choice, pronouns or syntactic patterns either support or undermine the patriarchal constructs. As opposed to the traditional stylistics, the feminist stylistics casts the gender identity of the reader and the speaker as significant in textual analysis. Some of the most important contributions to the field have also come from the likes of Deborah Cameron. In *The Myth of Mars and Venus* (2007), she criticizes essentialist opinions on the matter of male vs female speech but emphasizes the fact that language difference is a social vs biological reality. Together, these works emphasize the role of the context, ideology, and gender in language application.

Other theorists who have specialized on the subject of studying of the system of patriarchs include Elaine Showalter and Julia Kristeva who focused on the issue of how women's voice is marginalized or repressed in the patriarchal systems. Although they are more literary than stylistic, they affect the way feminist researchers use the discourse and representation. The overview of the current scholarly research on the topic of Malala Yousafzai as an orator would indicate a literature that, although useful, views her oratory through the prism of other aspects, which leaves a critical dimension unanswered. The subsequent protracted criticism of four prominent studies not only sheds light on their respective contributions but more so on their general shortcomings on a feminist linguistic perspective, thus, clearly outlining the room occupied by the proposed research.

The work by Martens (2015) explores Malala's UN speech and is one of the seminal CDA studies that skillfully uses the framework of coercion, legitimation, and delegation by Chilton. The study is able to illustrate how the UN speech by Malala acts as political persuasion, as a tactic of legitimizing Malala as a voice and delegitimizing the Taliban ideology. When Martens uses the language of framing the audience as an in-group and the opposition as an out-group to demonstrate how the language of Martens has created a clear ideological battlefield, this is the way she demonstrates this. Nevertheless, the main concern of the study is macro-political ideology as opposed to gendered identity. It examines the manner in which she appeals to a cause without unpacking how her diction, her use of pronouns and agency attribution as well as narrative voice, precisely accomplishes a feminist opposition. The analysis does not enter the sphere of the political discourse analysis but rather shifts into the criticism of the patriarchal power structures that are the origin of the conflict itself.

In the same manner, the use of Ethos, Pathos and Logos by Haider (2014) gives a classical examination of the persuasive nature of the speech. The emotional appeal (Pathos) of the personal story of Malala and moral authority (Ethos) that she has created through her life experience is well-captured in the study. It is justly in praise of the emotional and logical form of the speech. However, Aristotelian framework is androcentric in nature as it was constructed without the involvement of female voices in the public oratory. With such a lens, though indispensable in the process of determining more fundamental rhetorical strategies, we run the risk of taking the uniquely feminist and subaltern Malala to be subsumed within a conservative male paradigm of eloquence. It does not raise the question of how her ethos is a radical act of a young woman asserting space in a global and male-dominated political space or how her pathos is uniquely defined by a shared female oppression.

Other than that, the research by Ivascu and Handeland (2014) is a paradigmatic breakthrough as it dwells on non-verbal communication. Their multimodal theory that examines gestures, gaze, and paralanguage makes invaluable contributions to the how of the delivery produced by Malala. Results of iconic gestures and direct eye contact are indicators of a speaker who is not only emphatic but also relating beautifully with her audience in a genuine way. But the linguistic text itself is sidelined by this approach by its very form. Although it informs us of the performative reinforcement of her message, it does not examine the feminist ideologies inherent in the syntax, lexicon and discursive forms of the speech. The analysis clarifies her delivery of her message in a way that is convincing, yet not how the language of her message puts up a feminist worldview.

Together, these studies give us a multi-faceted perspective of the rhetoric of Malala: Martens (2015) emphasizes on its political approach, Haider (2014) on its classical persuasion, and Ivascu and Handeland (2014) on its multimodal performance. The gap that is definitive is hence the gap that exists in the form of the absence of a Feminist Stylistic analysis that connects all these. No existing studies investigate how the language of Malala at the text-level constitutes a female subject position, challenges the discourses of patriarchy, and codes resistance in a systematic way. They interpret the speech as an instrument to a cause, rather than a gendered product in itself.

METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research utilizes purposive sampling technique to choose the sample of the study. After that, employs qualitative textual analysis to analyses Malala Yousafzai's speech at the United Nations using the feminist stylistic theory proposed by Sara Mills. The main source is the official transcript

of her July 12, 2013 speech, which is public. The secondary sources or data are collected from the research papers, journals, articles, related books, encyclopedias, dictionaries, and other relevant sources.

Theoretical Framework

Sara Mills is best known for analyzing feminism with discourse analysis, drawing heavily from Michel Foucault and other poststructuralist thinkers. Her work focuses on how language has created gender biases and how these relations are negotiated, resisted, or reinforced in discourse. Mills stresses the value of word usage and its position as a reflex of positioning in the society. The words attached to doing and leadership, power etc., are used extensively to characterize male subjects in patriarchal discourse. The feminist stylistics is aimed at finding out whether such terminologies are used to empower or marginalize the female voices. Mills is also concerned about the ways in which the speakers and characters are located in the texts. Are women viewed as passive or active characters? Are they key characters or are they in the background? Subject positioning shows how agency is allocated and ways in which readers are called to read gender roles. In addition to that, text structure i.e. use of metaphor, repetition or dialogues can betray ideologies. Mills observes that women's writing and speech often resist established (and, more often, masculinized) narrative frameworks in producing alternative discourses resonant of collective identity, feeling, and revolt. Additionally, feminist stylistics also examines how texts guide readers toward certain interpretations. Mills contends that gendered expectations influence how readers respond to female voices—especially those that challenge traditional roles. Ultimately, Mills' framework treats language as an ideological tool. She emphasizes that language use in any context—literary, political, or everyday—can either reproduce or resist dominant power structures.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Malala Yousafzai's United Nations speech is a strong example of the way in which feminist language tactics may be utilized for countering patriarchal discourse and generating a rhetoric of empowerment. By virtue of the conscious selection of wordings, subject location, inclusive language, and discursive tactics, Malala recasts female subjectivity and claims agency on the global setting. This analysis is based on the research done by the leading linguists and feminist theorists (Sara Mills, Deborah Cameron, Judith Butler, and Pamela Fishman), and examines her feminist stylistics of her language. The analysis of this study has yielded in form of following major findings;

1. Lexical Choices: Constructing Empowerment

As the speech by Malala continues, one can find abstract nouns like "rights", "education", "peace", "dignity", and "equality" being used repeatedly. These words demonstrate moral authority and carry with it a feminist ideological belief in justice and structural change. Abstract nouns tend to have ideological functions, and according to Sara Mills (1995), they allow the speakers to form themselves as ethical subjects suitable for larger political movements. Similar to this, Deborah Cameron (1998) notes that the feminist discourse tends to employ lexis of moral inflection to bring systemic oppression to the fore and challenge social inequality. Instead of emotional or subordinate language that is assigned to women, Malala's assertive and activist-gear language strives against the norms of femininity. When she spoke of the fact that "Weakness, fear and hopelessness died", Strength, power and courage was born," illustrates an example of what Mills (1995) refers to as

lexical polarity”—the employment of oppositional terms to build transformation. This juxtaposition alters the female protagonist to be strong and powerful. According to Judith Butler (1990), this would qualify as an example of performative language, whereby Malala uses such language to enact a new identity to challenge the gender norms.

2. Subject Positioning: One Voice Among Many

Malala states: Here I am, one girl of many...standing”. I speak — not for myself, but so that those who have no voice may be heard”. Instead of following the individualistic hero narrative typical for patriarchal texts, she focuses on collective identity and solidarity. According to Mills (1995), subject positioning in feminist discourse has the intention of de-centralizing power and contesting the dominating power structure. Cameron (2006) also observes that feminist texts tend to prioritize the community and interconnectedness apart from the ego or hierarchy. Malala’s subject position is consistent with that approach, rejecting the idea of the sole “heroine,” while instead promoting common efforts and support of each other’s empowerment.

3. Representation and Inclusive Address Terms

Malala’s constant use of expressions like “Dear brothers and sisters” and “Dear friends” is intentional usage of communal and inclusive language. The use of this form of address develops a family relationship that is non-hierarchical between speaker and audience. According to Mills (2008), inclusive language is one in the range of devices that feminist speakers use as a means of thwarting exclusionary or gendered norms. Cameron (1992) concurs with this fact, pointing out that the decisions have gender-neutral spaces in the discourse, and power is more evenly spread. By targeting everyone as a movement, Malala does not reinforce gender binaries and creates unity from among the social divisions.

4. Empowering Language for Women

Malala says: “We will do it by ourselves”, “I am focusing on women to be independent to fight for themselves”. These expressions undermine the usual gender roles in which women are depicted to be reliant on the male advocacy. Pamela Fishman (1983) criticizes the ways in which the traditional discourse tends to establish women as passive in communication and activism. In this, Malala is defying female agency and autonomy which Mills (1995) defines as a rhetorical act of reclaiming power. Butler’s (1997) idea of discursive agency is also applicable as Malala’s language does not only describe empowerment but enacts it through a redefinition of women’s roles in activist discourses.

5. Ideological Positioning Through Lexis: Human Rights and Equality

Malala says: We will do it by ourselves, I am concentrating on women to be independent so they can fight for themselves”. Such expressions discourage the common gender roles in which women are portrayed to depend on the male advocacy. Pamela Fishman (1983) recriminates the ways in which the traditional discourse that aspires to put women into the passive state in communication and activism. Here, Malala goes against female agency and autonomy which Mills (1995) defines as a rhetorical act of repossessing control. The concept of discursive agency by Butler (1997) also applies to Malala’s language as it does not just present the figure of empowerment but performs this role by refiguring the place of women in activist discourses.

6. Lexical Polarities: Weakness vs. Strength

The sentence read; “Weakness, fear and hopelessness died. The potent example of how the binary oppositions are able to reframe a female experience is “Strength, power and courage was born”. Mills (1995) explains that such oppositions contribute to the undermining and reversal of cultural

stereotypes of women as weak and submissive. Cameron (2006) states further that this type of rhetorical framing builds new gender identities through language. Juxtaposing the weakness against the courage and strength, Malala reauthorizes the mainstream cultural script about femininity, providing the counter-story of strength and oppositionality.

7. Challenging Male Authority: Reclaiming Feminine Voice

Maybe one of the most straight-out challenges to patriarchal discourse is Malala's line. Women social activists once sought for the men to stand for their rights. However, this time, we are going to do it ourselves. This is a discursive break, refusing to accept gender dynamics of the past that identify men as protectors or representatives. Speaking beyond the confines of the usual gendered roles is, according to Butler (1997), a central type of performative resistance. Fishman (1983) would also note how this claim breaks the conversational rules to which men hold sway or to mediate discourse in public realm. Malala takes discursive space of women and transforms activism into something that is initiated and for women themselves.

CONCLUSION

While viewed through a feminist stylistic perspective, Malala Yousafzai's UN speech is an extraordinary linguistic act of resisting and empowering. Through the use of inclusive language, placing herself in the human struggle, and contesting patriarchal norms, she creates a discourse that holds feminist values. We can get by Sara Mills' framework howsoever apparently innocent word choices and rhetorical arrangements have deep ideological significances. The language used by Malala does not only demand education of the young but re-appropriates space for women and girls in public dialogue, and this makes her speech a powerful text of feminist examination. Powerful abstract nouns, inclusive language, collectivist subject positioning, and oppositional lexis are some of the ways through which Malala Yousafzai's speech epitomizes feminist linguistic strategies. Based on the theories of Sara Mills, Deborah Cameron, Judith Butler, and Pamela Fishman, we can observe how her language works not only as the rhetoric but as ideological action. Her speech is a deliberate challenge to patriarchal structures, replaces the female subject with an autonomous, agentic agent, puts collective empowerment into the fore—it is a key feminist text.

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