

AN ANALYSIS OF METAPHORICAL EXPRESSIONS IN POSTCOLONIAL NOVEL: *A HOUSE FOR MR. BISWAS* BY V.S NAIPAUL

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Abstract

This research was conducted to investigate the types of metaphor and analyze the illocutionary meaning of the metaphors in the dialogues in the novel of V.S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr. Biswas*. This research aimed to get clear descriptions of the types of metaphor found in the novel, the implied meaning of the metaphors, the author's motive and the possible connection with British colonialism and slavery. Descriptive qualitative approach was used in conducting the research. Meanwhile, pragmatics was applied as the frame of the study. The data used in this research were the metaphors found in the dialogues. The research was conducted by classifying the types of metaphor, describing the context of the utterance, interpreting the illocutionary meaning, and analyzing the metaphors using postcolonial perspective. It was found twenty one metaphors, which were categorized into six types they were: dead, ordinary, cliché, standard, image, and original metaphor. It was also found that some metaphors in the dialogues represented the psychological condition of the postcolonial people, they were oppression, alienation and depression. The research also presented at least three evidences which led to the conclusion that the story was a symbolic representation of British colonialism and slavery.

Key Words: *Metaphor, pragmatics, colonialism, postcolonial*

Metaphor is pervasive in language; it is also reflected in our everyday life from the way we think and act. To communicate something, we do not just speak literally; we also use metaphor to convey our intended meaning. Unlike literal language, metaphor (except dead metaphor) can't be interpreted literally, because it would make no sense and impossible to comprehend. Richards writes 'metaphor is exceptional in the use of language, a deviation from its normal mode of working' (1964: 90). Knowles and Moon (2006: 88) explain the way we think of abstract concept is by means of metaphor, and we draw on the linguistic resources of our language through a process of analogy. In 1980, Lakoff and his colleagues established a new approach in studying metaphor. He suggests that metaphor is a kind of thinking or conceptualization, as he proposes that our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature (2003: 8). Based on the Lakoff's idea that metaphor is the kind of conceptual system, this research investigated metaphorical expressions and interpreted them based on linguistic competence, cultural sensitivity and

knowledge of the deeper meaning of the words. The source of data was the literary text, a postcolonial novel, *A House for Mr. Biswas*, one of V.S Naipaul's masterpieces, which was chosen because of its popularity and controversy. *A House for Mr. Biswas* is rich of metaphorical expressions and ironies which satirize and portray the condition of people from once-colonized cultures. The selection of this novel becomes more interesting because some readers see the novel as a symbolic representation of British colonialism or even modern slavery that still exists until present day (Recep, 2011: 117).

The metaphor found in this novel was used to illustrate sad situations after the colonialism. Metaphor itself is a figurative expression as a means to make an indirect comparison between two or more unrelated subjects (Newmark, 1988:104), which its form can be single or extended words such as collocation, idioms, sentence, proverb, allegory or a complete imaginative text. Likewise, Lakoff (2003: 8) also defines metaphor as a poetic device and a rhetorical flourish—a matter of extraordinary rather than ordinary language. Metaphor found in this novel as mentioned by Newmark (1988:106-113) consists of 5 types, they are 1) Dead metaphor, that is the kind of metaphor which frequently relates to universal terms of time and space, the main part of the body, ecological features and human activities (for example: at the *bottom* of the hill); 2) Cliché metaphor: the metaphor that is used as a substitute for clear thought, often emotively, and overuse (for example: '*become a jewel in a crown*'); 3) Stock or standard metaphor, that is an established metaphor which is not deadened by overuse; 4) Recent metaphor, it is a metaphorical neologism, often coined, which has spread rapidly in the source language (sl), such as 'groovy' for 'good', and 'womanizer' for 'woman chaser' and 5) Original metaphor: metaphor that contains the writer's message, his personality and his comment on life. Beside that this research also applies Kovecses' (2002:43-52) classification of metaphors, such as original metaphor; ordinary metaphor: everyday conventional metaphor that becomes the basic of poets and writers to do their creative work; personification: a figure of speech in which a thing, an idea or an animal is given human attributes; image metaphor: the kind of metaphor which is rich in detail images to describe a thing

or a person and megametaphors, also known as extended metaphors, because they may run through the entire literary texts.

Through the metaphors found in the novel, researcher decides to analyze the novel using two approaches: pragmatics and postcolonial perspective. Later, the metaphorical expressions found in the novel can be used as a valuable source to examine the psychological aspects of postcolonial people. Those expressions also become the evidences to investigate whether *A House for Mr. Biswas* is actually the symbolic representation of British colonialism and slavery.

Naipaul is a quite prominent postcolonial novelist. One of his notable works, *A House for Mr. Biswas* which is enriched with satire and criticism, also addresses postcolonial issues. These issues center on the problems of ex-colonized people relating to political and cultural independence. The term *postcolonial* has been used by literary critics to discuss the effects of colonization on cultures and societies (Sawant, 2012: 120). This theory involves discussion about migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, repression, difference, race, gender, place, and the influence of imperial European culture, ideology and philosophy (Ashcroft et al., 2002: 2). The common issues that often emerged from postcolonial literatures are: 1) Oppression which is deep injustices some groups suffer as a consequence of media, cultural stereotypes, unquestioned norms, habits of bureaucratic hierarchies and market mechanism (Young in Heldke and O'Connor, 2004: 41). 2) Alienation which is often connected with the state or experience of being isolated or being excluded in a community. This concept is seemingly connected with minorities, the poor, the unemployed and other groups who have limited power to make changes in society (Recep, 2011: 116). Seeman (1959: 783-787) gives five alternate meanings of alienation from the social psychological point of view: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation and self-estrangement. 3) Depression which is the feeling of emptiness, loss and helplessness influenced by the differences of cultural values, beliefs, and variation (Gotlib, 2009: 467). However, recently it is also seen as a result of cross-cultural failure as explained by Kleinman and Good (ibid.).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research used descriptive qualitative research design which concerns with describing, recording, analyzing and interpreting the existing conditions. The purpose of a descriptive research is to examine a phenomenon that is occurring in their natural setting (Kumar, 2002: 24). In qualitative research the data are collected in the form of words rather than numbers. According to Bogdan and Biklen as cited in Fraenkel and Wallen (2009:423) in qualitative research any kind of data such as gestures, jokes or conversational gambits are worthy to notice because those data might help to convey the actual words or actions of the individuals. Therefore, this research uses descriptive qualitative research design because it focuses on studying the characteristics and phenomenon of certain group of people, in this case, the postcolonial society. This kind of research method offers very detail and specific way to interpret and investigate the condition of individuals.

The source of data of this research was the utterances in the dialogues of the novel which were performed as primary source of data. Since this novel is an autobiography, therefore the researcher also used Naipaul's biography and his interviews as the secondary source of data. The data used in this research were the metaphors found in the utterances. These data were collected using document review technique. The documents include the novel, the writer's biography and the interview scripts found in the online magazines which later can be used to support the analysis. Using data reduction technique, the dialogues from the novel which contain metaphors are selected and simplified by sorting and discarding the dialogues which contain similar metaphors to avoid redundancy. The dialogues which contains metaphors were classified and given codes. The interpretation of each data was started to understand its illocutionary meaning of the metaphors by using theory of speech act and analogy. The finding was then analyzed further to see its possible relation with the context, that was British colonialism and slavery using postcolonial perspective to find any evidences of the respecting matter.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The discussion below shows the findings of the research. It also answers the research questions about the kinds of metaphors found, their implied meaning, the authors' motive and the possible connection with British colonialism and slavery.

Kinds of Metaphors

From the analysis towards the dialogues between characters in the novel, it was found some kinds of metaphor that were used to express the intended messages. The following is the discussion of the metaphors and the implied meaning of the metaphors.

a. Dead Metaphor

There are some dead metaphors found in this novel which can be seen from this dialogue:

- (D1) From his string bed the old man muttered abuse at Raghu.
 “Shameless, wicked. When I see the behaviour of this man I
 begin to feel that *the Black Age* has come.”

In interpreting dialogue (D1) above, ‘the comparison approach’ proposed by Winner et al (in Mio, 1996: 44) also offers metaphorical interpretation based on comparison approach, this includes literal synonyms (i.e., linked to literal functions), perceptual interpretations (i.e., linked to perceptual features) and psychological interpretations of presented metaphor.

The literal interpretation of *Black Age* is associated with Dark Ages which refer to the period of intellectual darkness and barbarity of European history. Second, the psychological interpretation of *Black Age* refers to period of darkness which often associated to death or catastrophe. From the two alternative interpretations, Raghu's father in law may imply that Raghu's behavior reminded him of the behavior of men who lived in the period of barbarity, shameless and wicked, as if the doomsday might have come sooner.

b. Ordinary Metaphor

In this novel, from 21 dialogues there are two which contain ordinary metaphors. One of the data is presented below:

(D2) “That’s what you and your family do to me. *Trap me in this hole.*”

The perceptual interpretation describes the hole as ‘deep’ so that it can entrap someone inside it, and the psychological interpretation of this dialogue is the arranged marriage. Thus, what Biswas presumably means by saying the metaphor is he felt entrapped to a marriage scheme arranged by Seth and Mrs. Tulsi.

c. Cliché Metaphor

In this novel, the examples of cliché metaphor can be found in the data below:

(D4) “That is all your family do for you,” he said to Shama that evening.
“Marry off the whole pack of you cat-in-bag.”

The literal synonym of ‘the cat in the bag’ is ‘the unknown person’. The psychological interpretation indicates ‘marrying the cat in the bag’ to ‘marrying men without knowing their true characters and appearance.’ Thus, the term ‘*marry off the whole pack of you cat-in-bag*’ (D4) indicates an analogy to a more common term, which is ‘*arranged marriage.*’

d. Stock/Standard Metaphor

From the analysis, there are five dialogues which are categorized into stock or standard metaphors. One of the data can be seen below:

(D6) “You have *got yourself into a real gum-pot,*” she added, more sympathetically.

The literal synonym of gum pot is a container to store a sticky and gelatinous substance which functions as glue. The perceptual interpretation refers to gum pot as ‘sticky and gluey’. The psychological interpretation indicates that Biswas is in a difficult situation. Thus, the interpretation derived from the context is Biswas experiences a difficult situation after his marriage, he feels that he is being attached and glued to the family of Tulsi, just like the other sons-in-law.

e. Image Metaphor

There are six findings categorized into image metaphors which can be seen in Appendix 1 Table V. One of the findings is presented as follows:

(D12) “How *the little gods* getting on today, eh?” he would ask.

The literal synonym describes Shekar and Owad as ‘the object of worship’, the perceptual feature refers to them as ‘young and flawless in appearance’ and for the psychological interpretation shows that they are considered as educated people with superior qualities and perfection that make people respect them. Thus, the intended meaning of the utterance is despite their young age, Shekar and Owad are respected and admired by other family members because of their western style education.

f. Original Metaphor

In this novel, there are at least five speech acts that considered as original metaphor as seen in Table VI in Appendix 1. One of the speech acts is presented below:

(D17) But the midwife said, “Whatever you do, *this boy will eat up his own mother and father.*”

Metaphorical meaning often substitutes another word with a literal meaning. In (D17) the metaphorical meaning of ‘eat’ is substituted by literal synonym ‘*cause bad luck and misery*’. The midwife indirectly implies that the boy will cause bad luck and misery to his family because of the ill omens as predicted by the pundit.

Postcolonial Criticism

The psychological aspects discussed here are the condition of oppression, alienation and depression. From the findings, there are eleven dialogues which represent those conditions.

Table 1: Condition of Oppression

Metaphors	Psychological feature
“That’s what you and your family do	• No decision power

to me. <i>Trap me in this hole.</i> ” (Type of metaphor: Ordinary)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being intimidated • Weakness
“You have <i>got yourself into a real gum-pot,</i> ” she added, more sympathetically (type of metaphor: standard)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of freedom • Experience of social pressure
“And what about you? The <i>barking puppy dog?</i> ” (type of metaphor: image)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharp-tongued yet powerless person
“So you say. But those people are <i>bloodsuckers</i> , man. Rather than work for them, I would catch crab or sell coconut.” (type of metaphor: original)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploits others’ capacity

Table 2: Condition of Alienation

Metaphors	Psychological feature
How <i>the little gods</i> getting on today, eh?” he would ask. He meant her brothers.— (type of metaphor: image)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being excluded from the family • Marginalized • Sense of not belonging
“And how <i>the Big Boss</i> getting on today?” That was Seth. (type of metaphor: image)	
“And how <i>the old queen?</i> ” “ <i>The old hen? The old cow?</i> ” (type of metaphor: image)	
But the midwife said, “Whatever you do, <i>this boy will eat up</i> his own mother and father.” (type of metaphor: original)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being isolated due to the ill omens

Table 3: Condition of Depression

Metaphors	Psychological feature
“I am sorry to correct you, Sumati sister,” Chinta said. “But Message said that <i>he wasn’t right in his head.</i> ” (type of metaphor: ordinary)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental breakdown • Unable to adapt • Feeling of loneliness • Frustration

Possible Connection with British Colonialism and Slavery

There are at least three evidences found in the novel which represent the issues of colonialism and slavery. First, in the expression ‘*Hanuman house stood like an alien fortress*’, the house figure shows a symbol of British imperial system. The organization and pattern of the house is quite similar to the British Empire. The use of words ‘*the old queen*’ to address Mrs. Tulsi also has metaphorical meaning related to British colonialism which refers to Queen Victoria, who is during her reign in 1876 – 1901, British colonialism was at the height level. Meanwhile, the issue of slavery can also be seen from the novel in the form of indentureship. The using of metaphors in *A House for Mr. Biswas* is the way Naipaul narrating the situation of postcolonial society in his homeland. He also used those metaphors as satire to a system called colonialism.

CONCLUSION

From the analysis conducted in the research shows that some of the metaphors and the illocutionary meanings represent the psychological states of the character while producing the utterances. Those psychological states are the condition of oppression, alienation and depression.

Still from the discussion, the research presents at least three evidences which lead to the conclusion that the story is a symbolic representation of British colonialism and slavery. These evidences found from the symbol of Hanuman House, the image metaphor used by Biswas to invent nickname for Mrs. Tulsi, and the original metaphor that shows resemblance of the new slavery system called the indentureship with the Tulsi workforce.

In conclusion, from postcolonial study, by studying the research, there is a message that can be drawn. The message relates to the condition of postcolonial which still exist until present days. Therefore, the researcher wishes to remind people that the condition of oppression, alienation and injustice are always present and always in process although colonialism had vanished a long time ago.

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