



A Critical Discourse Analysis of Abbās Ma'roufi's *Symphony of the Dead* Based on the Van Dijk Model

Sara Hosseini^{1*} - Abbas Ali Ahangar²

1: PhD in Persian Language and Literature, University of Ilam, Ilam, Iran (Corresponding Author):
sara.hosseini42@yahoo.com

2: Professor of Linguistics, University of Sistan and Baluchestan, Zahedan, Iran.

Abstract: Critical discourse analysis is a branch of discourse analysis that deals with the relationship between language, power, and ideology. Teun A. Van Dijk has presented a new model that uses a variety of four-fold strategies: formal-syntactic, content-semantic, rhetorical, and socio-political to help understand the ideological square hidden in the processing of characters. This can lead us to a different understanding of why incidents occur in a story. In *Symphony of the Dead*, the forward progress of the story shows that the death of all the characters, which further enhance the tragic tone of the work, is inevitable. The endless wandering and suffering of the characters in the story, their constant conflict, and the confrontation that clearly places them in the two "insiders" and "outsiders" provide a place to plot a broader confrontation, of course, in political and social dimensions; the confrontation between Iranians as "insiders" and foreigners invading Iranian territory as "outsiders". Also invading the private spheres of people's lives, the "out-group" is the cause of widespread famine, poverty, and hunger among the people. Also, the results show that van Dijk model, by presenting a better image of the true "insiders" and a worse image of the true "outsiders", attempts to display the tragic image resulting from the death and destruction of "insiders" in a more complex way than usual. *Symphony of the Dead* uses sub-strategies such as negative construction, pseudo-cleft and cleft constructions, actor description, comparison, counterfactual, victimization, consensus, norm expression, etc. to develop the four main strategies, each of which is effective in the reader's final understanding of the story.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Ideological Strategies, Van Dijk's Ideological Square, *Symphony of the Dead*.

- S. Hosseini; A. Ahangar (2025). "A Critical Discourse Analysis of Abbās Ma'roufi's *Symphony of the Dead* Based on the Van Dijk Model". Semnan University: *Journal of Linguistic and Rhetorical Studies*. 16(42). 69-106.

Doi: [10.22075/jlrs.2025.37690.2658](https://doi.org/10.22075/jlrs.2025.37690.2658)



1. Introduction

Critical discourse analysis, as a branch of discourse analysis, examines language as a phenomenon or social activity and its connection with power and ideology. Since most literary works contain political and social events of their time, it provides a suitable platform for their examination and analysis based on critical discourse analysis.

The basic goal of critical discourse analysis is to present the ideology hidden in various texts; this is why someone like Van Dijk (2006) designed an ideological square to examine various texts, including literary texts; and in this regard, he believes that understanding the ideology of texts is achieved through understanding how linguistic forms are used. According to Van Dijk (2003), ideologies are a set of beliefs and convictions specific to a society that are produced and disseminated by each of our linguistic choices, that is, the choice of different words, rules, and grammatical structures, when producing discourse. Van Dijk proposed his critical theory under the title of "Socio-Cognitive Discourse Analysis," whose main keywords are the three factors "society," "cognition," and "discourse." One of the most important principles in critical discourse, based on Van Dijk's (2006) model, is the polarization of "insiders" and "outsiders" against each other, and one of the basic needs of ideology for becoming discourse is this very verbal strategy of polarization of "us" and "them." Van Dijk's ideological square consists of four main orientations: 1) magnifying the positive aspects of the insider/us, 2) magnifying the negative aspects of the outsider/them, 3) minimizing the positive aspects of the outsider/them, and 4) minimizing the negative aspects of the insider/us" (Van Dijk, 2006:45). The division of individuals into two groups of "insiders" and "outsiders" is formed based on an ideology that serves power, and Fairclough "considers it as the ways of representing those aspects of the social mechanism that cause the emergence or continuation of unequal power relations" (Fairclough, 2010: 26). These unequal power relations manifest themselves in the context of society through the interaction between individuals and at the level of literary texts, especially novels and stories, where there is inequality among fictional characters.

Van Dijk's ideological square emerges through four main strategies: 1) formal-syntactic strategies, 2) content-semantic strategies, 3) rhetorical strategies, and 4) socio-political strategies.

The present study also seeks to answer these questions: What implicit and hidden meanings are there in *Symphony of the Dead* with respect to Van Dijk's ideological square that the author has tried to represent through the polarization of "insider" and "outsider"? Furthermore, which aspects of

the adventures and qualities of the characters in the story have been hidden or distorted so that the story leads to its final outcome? And also, which of the sub-strategies has the author used to advance the ideological square hidden in the story, which has generally led to the improvement of the situation of the "insiders" and the fading of human and emotional manifestations in the entity of the "outsiders"? The answers to these questions ultimately clarify the author's implicit and ultimate bias and goals.

2. Research Method

The subject of the present study is the critical discourse analysis of *Symphony of the Dead* by Abbās Ma'roufi based on the Van Dijk (2006) model. Having reviewed critical discourse analysis and the Van Dijk (2006) model, the text of *Symphony of the Dead* was examined in light of previous studies. The nature of this research is descriptive-analytical. Van Dijk's (2006) critical discourse analysis approach is adopted by using the four strategies of formal-syntactic, content-semantic, rhetorical, and socio-political. Furthermore, the study examines the connection of these strategies with Van Dijk's (2006) ideological square, which causes the image of "insiders" to be repaired and the image of "outsiders" to be distorted even further. All of these strategies were examined and analyzed in *Symphony of the Dead*.

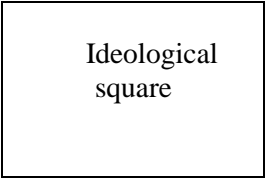
3. Van Dijk's (2006) Theoretical Concepts and Principles

Van Dijk (2006) believes that the creators of a text use strategies to advance their ideological goals that are generally divided into four categories: formal-syntactic, content-semantic, rhetorical, and socio-political. The first category, formal-syntactic strategies, includes subcategories or sub-strategies such as known and unknown construction, negative construction, and pseudo-documentary and documentary construction. Content-semantic strategies, which have the largest subcategories, include strategies such as describing the actor, burden of responsibility, comparing, counterfactual, presenting evidence, relying on reliable figures and institutions, giving examples, word choice, presupposition, and victimization. The third group of strategies, namely rhetorical strategies, includes four subcategories of exaggeration, irony, metaphor, and playing with numbers and figures. Finally, the strategies of the fourth group, called socio-political strategies, include the subcategories of consensus and expression of norms. Van Dijk believes that each individual, in the process of knowing himself and achieving a specific identity, divides the world into two parts, "insiders" and "outsiders," based on his ideology. As a result, the individual always has an ideological image of "insiders" and "outsiders," which is accompanied

by an always positive assessment of the “self” and an always negative image of “outsiders” (Van Dijk, 2006:44). From Van Dijk’s perspective, discourse has four main orientations for building an ideological relationship, which are conceptually shown in the ideological square below. The conclusion of the research examines the relationship and connection between ideology, power, and language; what emerges from this study in literary texts, especially fiction, is a new understanding of why the events of the story occur and how the fictional actors act. Van Dijk (2006) presents his ideological square, which seeks to affirm and create a positive understanding of “insider” and disapprove of “outsiders” and present a negative image of them, looking at the story and its characters from a different perspective. Van Dijk has presented four strategies for a more detailed explanation of his ideological square: formal-syntactic, rhetorical, content-semantic, and socio-political. An examination of the novel from this perspective shows that in Jaber Orkhani's family, the parents, with their great affection or lack of approval and companionship with their children, have created two groups of “insiders” and “outsiders” in the family, which, in addition to family members, have also drawn other people into this category, such as Ayaz Pasban or Surme, Aydin's lover and wife. In addition, on a larger scale and at the level of society, we are faced with a society in turmoil and crisis that is being violated by foreigners, and is suffering from poverty, famine, and hunger. After their deaths, the parents' quarrels turn into a power struggle between Orhan and Aydin, which leads one to madness and wandering and the other to the trap of death. In fact, the tragedy of this family's life stems from the same category between “insiders” and “outsiders” and the power struggle between them. Among the four strategies introduced by Van Dijk, subcategories such as negative construction, irony, attributive and quasi-attributive sentences, playing with numbers and figures, and describing the actor are the most frequent, and tools such as victimization, exaggeration, assumption, and expression of norms are the least frequent. The narrative form of the story, as well as the attempt to avoid directness, justify the existence of the tools of describing the actor and irony, and attributive and quasi-attributive sentences also seem necessary for attributing specific verbs, actions, and adjectives to sentence entities. On the other hand, the extensive use of negative constructions is very consistent with the cold, soulless, and tragic atmosphere of the story. In fact, by frequently repeating negative constructions, the author provides the basis for creating a story of fratricide, madness, and death.

Magnifying the positive qualities of insiders

Magnifying
the negative
points of
outsiders



Minimizing
the negative
points of
insiders

Downplaying the positive aspects of outsiders
The ideological square (Van Dijk, 2006:45).