

IDEOLOGY STRUCTURES IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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Supervision

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Abstract :

The theme of this thesis is ideology and more specifically, the relationship between the adult and the child in relation to the power of the adult over the child. The aim of this thesis is to examine whether Roald Dahl's children novel, Matilda, represents a departure from the dominant ideological relationship between the ideology of the adult and the power of the child in Western children literature. The thesis begins with a critical analysis of Western ideological attitudes towards children and childhood and how these attitudes are typically portrayed in (western) children literature. After this, the focus shifts to Dahl's identity as a children writer and his style of writing. Finally, the analysis of Matilda's representation of the relation between the adult and child in relation to power is conducted through a critical discourse analysis. The outcome of this analysis is that Matilda represents a reversal of this ideological balance of the power between the adults and children in relation to each other, thus departing from the dominant ideology of the power of the adults over children in western children literature.

Key words: Roald Dahl, Matilda, children's literature, ideology, power, critical discourse analysis, Chilton

Introduction

The academic field of critical linguistic study in children's literature has gained significant recognition only recently. Scholars are increasingly acknowledging that children's literature has the potential to influence readers on an ideological level. According to Keyes and McGillicuddy (2014), children's literature can transform, indoctrinate, and empower its readers. It can be assumed that children's stories, like other forms of discourse, are largely influenced by the personal values and beliefs of their authors. In other words, the linguistic structure of these stories may reflect the ideological stance of the author to some extent (Simpson and Mayr, 2010). Additionally, ideology in children's literature not only mirrors the authors' own ideological positions but also that of the society they belong to. However, authors may also use their writing to resist the dominant ideology of their society. Critical discourse analysis serves as an effective tool to uncover ideology and power relations in children's literature, as written and spoken discourse can directly express and convey ideology (Van Dijk, n.d.).

This thesis aims to analyze the representation of ideology, specifically the power dynamic between adults and children, in Roald Dahl's children's novel *Matilda* (2013) using critical discourse analysis. Roald Dahl, a British writer, has faced criticism for the perceived 'subversive' elements in his children's literature, despite being widely beloved by young readers. The contrast between adult disapproval and children's admiration reflects a recurring theme in Dahl's works: the struggle for power between adults and children, often resulting in the triumph of the younger generation over adult authority.

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I will analyze the linguistic techniques used by Dahl to develop and portray his child and adult characters and their interactions in *Matilda*. According to Simpson and Mayr (2010), an author's choice of language is always meaningful, as it can uncover the author's political or socio-cultural perspective (p. 5). Hence, I will investigate how these linguistic devices shape the dynamic between adults and children, as well as the power dynamics in *Matilda*, and evaluate the implications for Dahl's ideological standpoint.

In my analysis of *Matilda*, I examine three linguistic strategies or devices utilized in the text. The initial two strategies fall under the strategic functions of discourse proposed by Chilton (2004): coercion and legitimation/delegitimation. Is Dahl attempting to compel his readers to adopt a specific viewpoint on the characters and events in the story? Is Dahl striving to establish a dichotomy

between positive and negative (or good and bad) that aligns with his own perspective? The third linguistic device I investigate is the process of naming. How do the names given by Dahl to his characters in Matilda shape the readers' perception of them as either positive or negative?

Legitimation and delegitimation

In Matilda, Dahl utilizes the narrator as a means to either validate or invalidate himself and the characters within the story. The narrator's perspective plays a pivotal role in Matilda, as they are intrusive and all-knowing, exerting complete control over the events and shaping the readers' perception of the characters. Dahl employs the narrator to actively engage the readers in the story, offering advice and directly addressing them, thereby establishing his alignment with the children. Consequently, the narrator's (i.e., Dahl's) interpretation of the events and characters is influenced by his own values, morals, beliefs, or, in simpler terms, his ideological standpoint. To analyze Dahl's use of legitimation and delegitimation, I delve into how he, through the narrator, asserts his credibility and portrays the characters in Matilda in either a positive or negative light. Through this process, Dahl creates an in-group and an out-group, representing the group he aligns with and desires his readers to join, while condemning the group he disapproves of and wants his readers to condemn as well.

Conclusion

In this Research, I have aimed to identify the linguistic portrayal of ideology, specifically focusing on the adult-child power dynamic in Roald Dahl's children's novel Matilda (2013). I have also delved into whether Dahl's depiction of this relationship deviates from the prevailing representation in (Western) children's literature. Initially, I have clarified my interpretation of the term 'child' within the context of my study and examined the prevalent Western ideological perspectives on children and childhood through a sociological lens. Subsequently, I have analyzed various critical perspectives on ideology and the adult-power dynamic in (Western) children's literature. Lastly, I have scrutinized Dahl's role as a children's author and his portrayal of the adult-child power dynamic in several of his works. By conducting a critical discourse analysis of Dahl's children's novel Matilda, I have investigated how Dahl utilizes Chilton's strategic methods of coercion and legitimation/delegitimation, along with the process of naming, to communicate his ideological stance. The findings of my research have demonstrated Dahl's critique of the assumed adult-child power dynamic and his inclination to challenge and overturn the conventional roles of power between adults and children.

In my view, Dahl has left behind a remarkable literary legacy for future generations of children. He skillfully crafted witches, giants, and children with magical abilities with unmatched ease. His stories provide readers with an escape from the mundane realities of adult life. Despite some critics' reservations about Dahl's subversive style, many mature individuals find just as much delight in his tales as children do. As Nikolajeva (2011) eloquently states, "Reflecting on our childhood reading, we, as rational adults, occasionally recollect the sense of empowerment we felt alongside our beloved characters; the joy of laughter shared with them and directed at their adult foes." As a responsible and rational adult, I have thoroughly enjoyed conducting this research. Although Dahl passed away in 1990, the sparkle in his eyes lives on through his enchanting children's stories.

References

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