
Affect-Discursive Practices and Pre-Service Teachers' Engagements with Literary Texts

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Abstract

Both affect theory and critical discourse analysis have been used by scholars as tools to interrogate a wide variety of texts. Thus, for this paper, I draw on intersections between Norman Fairclough's linguistic analysis of the "constructive effects of discourse" (Fairclough, 1992a) and Sara Ahmed's "cultural politics of emotions" (Ahmed, 2004b) to investigate the connections between discursive practices and affective responses. To explore these relationships, I analyse two Caribbean texts used by two groups of year three students of the University of Trinidad and Tobago (Centre for Education Programmes). One is *The Impossible Situation* by Cicely Waite-Smith, a one-act play that pre-service primary school (generalist) teachers choose for drama, while the other is *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys, which is favoured as a prose text by the pre-service secondary school (specialist) teachers. An analysis of these texts shows how discursive practices facilitate distinct performative acts of emotion of the various characters, which in turn are able to evoke parallel emotional responses in the students as recorded in their journals. I argue that students' interactions with the texts simulated imagined and/or actual experiences of power relations, supported by the (unconscious) influence of "past histories" and characterized by notions of "community" and "other" (Ahmed, 2004b). The pre-service teachers in the study examined their own assumptions and emotional responses through journal entries to begin developing their critical language awareness.

Keywords: affect theory, discursive practices, circulation of emotions, critical language awareness, pre-service teachers

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Introduction

Affect theory allows us to explore the links between human emotions and narrative universals. It posits emotions as all at once invoked, imagined and ideological (c.f. Hogan, 2016, pp. 6, 23). Affect theorists generally define “feelings” as personal and biological; “emotions” as social (which, unlike feelings, can be genuine or feigned); and “affects” as prepersonal (Shouse, 2005; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Affects are non-conscious and abstract, and they do not only have the ability to prepare a subject for an emotional response to a given circumstance, but can also transmit between bodies and subjects. For example, fear can not only prepare a subject for a flight or fight response, but can also transmit the need for that same response in others even if the object associated with that fear is not evident to them. It is a central argument in Sarah Ahmed’s seminal work, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* that “emotions shape the very surfaces of bodies, which take shape through the repetition of actions over time, as well as through orientations towards and away from others” (2004b, p. 4). She draws from Tomkins “model of emotional contagion” to show that emotions are not simply located in the individual, but also objects of emotion that circulate between bodies, sticking as well as moving. In relation to literary and other texts, Ahmed identifies metonymy, metaphor and other figurative devices as crucial to the emotionality of texts, as is the act of naming emotions. She argues that in texts emotions are “performative...and they involve speech acts, which depend on past histories...and at the same time generate effects” (Ahmed, 2004b, p. 13).

Discourse is defined by Norman Fairclough as “... an ideological practice [which] constitutes, naturalizes, sustains and changes significations of the world from diverse positions of power relations” (Fairclough, 1992a, p. 67). He acknowledges the “constructive effects of discourse”, for example, in the constructions of social identities, construction of social relationships between people, and constructions of ideologies (Fairclough, 1992a, p. 64). Thus, Fairclough posits a three-part model for analysing a communicative event or interaction; that is, the text, the discourse practice, and the sociocultural practice. Additionally, he argues that readers come to a text equipped with “members’ resources”; that is, the values, beliefs and ideological assumptions the readers have in their heads which they draw upon to interpret texts (Fairclough, 1992a).

For this paper, I draw on intersections between Fairclough’s linguistic analysis of the “constructive effects of discourse” (Fairclough, 1992a, p. 64) and Sara Ahmed’s “cultural politics of emotions” which situate the affective not only as psychological states, but also as cultural practices (2004b, p. 4). Both theorists discuss performative acts of emotion in a text through figurative language as well as through the political and cultural implications of these linguistic cues. To explore these relationships, I analyse two texts used by two groups of year three university students who identify these texts as “more enjoyable/relatable” from among others on the reading list. One is *The Impossible Situation (TIS)* by Cicely Waite-Smith, which is a one-act play that pre-service primary

school (generalist) teachers choose for drama, while the other is *Wide Sargasso Sea* (WSS) by Jean Rhys, favoured as a prose text by pre-service secondary school (specialist) teachers. Both these texts were coincidentally published in 1966, but they are still able to evoke strong emotional responses in young adults in the 21st century, as evidenced by their journal writing throughout the duration of their introductory Literature courses.

Analysis of Discursive Practices

In relation to the semantics of lexical choices in both texts, we can look at the use of figurative language, speech acts, intertextuality, and the treatment of gender. The Jamaican landscape in WSS becomes a metaphor for transient feelings of safety and love for the Creole protagonist Antoinette, but this same landscape represents all that is fearsome, extreme and deceptive for her British husband. He confesses later to Antoinette that he feels the place is an enemy and only on her side (Rhys, 1967, p. 82), and he describes the landscape as excessive: “Too much blue, too much purple, and too much green. The flowers too red, the mountains too high, the hills too near” (Rhys, 1967, p. 42). These negative evaluative descriptors cross-over to his feelings towards the people and their personified personal objects, creating a condition Ahmed refers to as the “sticking of signs to bodies,” making these objects “sticky” with affective value (Ahmed, 2004b, pp. 11,13). Thus, Antoinette’s husband thinks of the servant girl as, “A lovely little creature but sly, spiteful, malignant perhaps, like much else in this place”; the older women as “sombre people in a sombre place”; the language as “debased;” and the house as “more awkward than ugly, a little sad...”. The clear intertextual link: “Our garden was large and beautiful as that garden in the Bible - the tree of life grew there” (Rhys, 1967, p. 6), is made to relate Antoinette’s initial positive connection to this object (the garden/landscape) which, when it circulates to her husband and the shape that his feelings take after his contact with the landscape, alters her own impressions and feelings. The landscape has not changed, but the circulation of contact has affected Antoinette. Thus: “I loved this place and you have made it into a place I hate. I used to think that if everything else went out of my life, I would still have this, and now you’ve spoilt it. It’s just somewhere else where I’ve been unhappy...I hate it now like I hate you...” (Rhys, 1967, pp. 94, 95). In this intense emotional exchange, the husband also becomes designated as an object of hate by his new bride, reciprocating this feeling he has for the landscape.

In *TIS*, after the cook Bernice is accused by Mrs Channing of stealing her earrings, she is informed that the police went to her rented room and took her trunk for Mrs Channing to inspect for stolen items. The metonymic trunk represents the whole of Bernice’s worldly possessions – items deemed by Mrs Channing as “not worth stealing anyway” (Waite-Smith, 1966, p. 7). The trunk becomes a shared object that denotes the economic and social differences between the upper and lower classes. Fear and shame are juxtaposed as emotional states that Mrs Channing occupies during the short Act, the object of both being her upper-class status. She tells her husband she is

tired of “All this suspicion and lying and hatred. Being afraid all the time... You don’t know what it’s like. Locking up every single thing... knowing how they despise you for it... And you can’t trust them. God, they’re so poor they’d steal the soles off your shoes if they got a chance. I don’t know what the answer is... It’s hell” (Waite-Smith, 1966, p. 13). The lower class is feared by Mrs Chandler on account of stereotypes she assigns to this subject: they are “all thieves” who are likely to “murder us all in our beds” (Waite-Smith, 1966, pp. 10, 12). This fear also prevents her from telling Bernice that she has found her earrings intact. The speech act of apologising would bring her much shame and put her in “an impossible situation” (Waite-Smith, 1966, p. 13). On the other hand, all illocution attempted by Bernice to defend herself is either mocked or stalled by Mrs Channing, so Bernice has to resort to sulking and other body language to filter her feelings.

The treatment of gender in both texts demonstrates the construction of social identities and ideologies and the circulation of emotive expressions specific to gender assigned roles (c.f. Fairclough, 1992b). For example, almost all of Mrs Channing’s stage directions are signs of her emotional states: “smouldering with resentment”, “furious”, “bitterly”, “incoherently-searching to express her inner anger”, etc., while all of Mr Channing’s stage directions are mainly kinetic: “shrugging”, “turning to go”, “coming in”, “sitting”, etc. He even chastises his wife for her changing feelings with a male stereotypical assertion: “I don’t understand you women”. In *WSS*, the husband notices the mournful expression of one of the servants and reflects: “How old was I when I learned to hide what I felt? Six, five, even earlier. It was necessary I was told, and that view I have always accepted” (Rhys, 1967, p. 64). Other characters describe him as “hating scandal”, wanting to do “everything quiet like the English” and “young but already hard” (Rhys, 1967, p. 98). However, when Antoinette tells her husband that she learned to hide her hatred and fear of her mother’s friends, he immediately contradicts her, saying she has not learned to do it properly, positioning himself as an expert in taking control of his emotions, as opposed to his wife who (in his view), inexpertly allows her emotions to take control of her. These discursive practices assign men and women into the stereotypical metaphoric roles of softness for women (i.e. showing emotion) and hardness for males (keeping it in). As Ahmed points out though, “hardness is not the absence of emotions, but a different emotional orientation towards others” (2004b, p. 4).

The role of history and context can simulate imagined and/or actual experiences of power relations for readers of a text. Indeed, the famous opening lines of *WSS* foregrounds this dichotomy: “They say when trouble comes close ranks, and so the white people did. But we were not of their ranks” (Rhys, 1967, p. 5). The opening stage directions for *TIS* do much the same by describing the living room as belonging to people who have “arrived” (Waite-Smith, 1966, p. 5), and throughout the play, the Channings refer to the lower class as “these people”. In *WSS*, it is the manipulation of the spatiotemporal point of view that weaves the years of slavery and post-slavery with constant references by the locals to “ole-time” or “long-time”, and these histories carry affective value for Antoinette. For example, post-slavery she feels fearful because “my father, visitors, horses, feeling

safe in bed- all belonged to the past”, and, contrastingly, content: “No more slavery - why should anybody work? This never saddened me. I do not remember the place when it was prosperous” (Rhys, 1967, pp. 5-6). Other characters, though, do not have similar emotional responses to the past and this causes heightened tensions and conflicts, resulting in the burning of the family home, the death of Antoinette’s brother and her mother’s descent into madness.

One contentious lexical item appearing in both texts that demonstrates these tensions is “nigger”. After Antoinette arguably loses her money in a bet to her friend Tia, she lashes out, “Keep them then, you cheating nigger.” Tia responds, “Old time white people nothing but white nigger now and black nigger better than white nigger” (Rhys, 1967, p. 9). When Antoinette’s family home is set on fire, one of the arsonists shouts: “But look the black Englishman! Look at the white niggers!” (Rhys, 1967, p. 22). In *TIS*, Mrs Channing asks Bernice, “Do you think I’m going to be taken in and lied to and stolen from by a damn nigger?”; to which Bernice replies: “You don’t damn me Mum, you don’t call me no damn nigger... The day will come when things will be different and when brown woman like you will have to suffer for them wickedness” (Waite-Smith, 1966, p 9). By semantic association, “nigger” is equated with cheater, liar and thief, and these “sticky words” circulate along the white-brown-black continuum, creating narratives of distance and distrust, and evoking negative emotions which shape the very surfaces of these bodies.

Student Reflections

This community of “us” vs “them” extends to the classroom with students of literature as well. As the students interacted with both texts, a “cultural politics of emotions” emerged, characterized by notions of “community” and “other” (Ahmed, 2004b, p. 5). They come equipped with “members’ resources”, that is, the values, beliefs and ideological assumptions they have in their heads, which they draw upon to interpret texts (Fairclough, 2001, p. 57). A good example of this is their emotional response to the characters in *WSS*: they generally sympathise with Antoinette, admire her housekeeper/friend, Christophine, and detest the husband, Mr. Rochester. In their journal entries, students were usually critical of his position of power over Antoinette, his arranged marriage to her for money, his disdain for the Caribbean landscape and people, and his willingness to believe Daniel’s damning stories about Antoinette above her own recollections. For example:

Mr. Rochester, I hated. Maybe hate is too strong a word. But I had negative feelings towards him, what he did was unnecessary, unkind and spiteful. He was an outsider who stripped Antionette’s identity away. He did not understand what Caribbean life would be like, he himself should have been locked in an attic, but we don’t have those here, so instead he should have been locked in a storage shed behind a house...in the heat that he hated so much. (S1)

While students were aware of the husband's arranged marriage, his feelings of alienation on the island, and his confusion over the competing narratives about Antoinette's past, their emotional responses to him suggest that they do not relate to him as a complex character but as the "other", a villain. This is also constructed in the text through lexical choice (he is the "outsider"); *verba sentiendi* (he does "not understand" Caribbean life); and the sarcastic use of deixis (attic as nonrepresentational, outside of his experience, not "here"). He represents the colonizer, both by virtue of ancestry and his power over Antoinette's body and her wealth. Students draw on what Ahmed refers to as "the absent present", the history and context that shape the discourse, and so emotional contact "involves the subject as well as histories that came before the subject" (Ahmed, 2004b, p. 6). One student reflected thus:

I became very negative towards Antoinette's husband (Mr. Rochester). At first, I believed him to be a victim of Antoinette's stepfather's greed. I admired him for attempting to love Antoinette, or at least showing her some affection. I disliked how he judged her from the start, and letting what others said affect how he treated her. I disliked that he sent her into madness and then isolated her from her home, then provided her with only the bare necessities needed to live. To me he became somewhat of a provoker, a creature of meanness because he thought he had to, and was coned into it. He didn't try to understand that Antoinette was just as much a victim as he was; because of his selfishness and clouded judgment I will forever dislike him. (S2)

For *TIS*, students not only read the play, but one group of students enacts the text while the other students comprise the audience. This play is usually well performed and received primarily because it is a one-act play which employs both Trinidad Creole and Standard English. Its brevity allows students to learn the lines easily and the ebb and flow of emotions of each character occur quickly and intensely. The role playing also acts as a kind of "simulation" which, according to Hogan (2016, p. 3), is a "key operation of the human mind" and "has an adaptive function because it allows us to evaluate scenarios 'off-line', thus without actual risk." From their initial journal writing, students mainly view the characters as flat, that is, as good (e.g., Bernice) vs. bad (e.g., Channings). However, after the enactment by their colleagues, some are able to empathize with Mrs. Channing:

I saw my colleagues act this play. It was very funny but wonderfully played by the actors. I felt it was good especially with the drama occurring between the maid and the woman of the house. Overall, it made me understand the characters well and was an enjoyable play that made me feel keen to keep watching. (S3)

It is only through seeing a good actor portray this fear that some students began to feel an attachment to the emotions of Mrs. Channing. The actors for this play were successful with the

simulation in as much as they were able to cause the audience to experience the usual emotions associated with particular events through the perceptions of the character – in this case fear of the other, and the hopelessness of not being able to control the object of that fear.

Several students expressed empathy towards Bernice not only because she is wrongfully accused by her employer, but also because they were also in similar situations:

The character I connected most was the maid because even though she was genuine and gave her best to her employers she was still mistreated and accused of theft. The reason why I connected with her was that because even though you are a kind-hearted person, there will always be someone who will mistreat you. This is similar to events in my own life which I have faced. I was not accused of theft, but I was accused of doing something I didn't. (S4)

Ahmed argues that “emotions are not only about movement, they are also about attachment or about what connects us to this or that...emotions accumulate over time, as a form of affective value” (Ahmed, 2004b, p. 11). It is easy for these students to emotionally connect with Bernice because they approach the text with a prior attachment to at least one person who works hard, lives from pay check to pay check, and is underappreciated, either through a familial history of struggle or from their own personal experiences as employees and/or university students. However, for them to connect with Mrs Channing's fear of crime perpetrated by the ‘other’ is a stretch, even though this fear is one that they too commonly articulate:

I kind of understand why Mrs Channing is so scared. It's true that people come for what you have. But first she accused Bernice without any proof and then when she found the earrings she didn't even tell Bernice. That was really low. (S5)

Literature courses at the Centre for Educational Programmes (CEP) are designed not just to cover necessary literary content, but also to encourage critical discourse analysis as well as emotional responses to texts. Students were thus guided to revisit their perceptions of characters and events by discussing their own social relationships and ideologies of power structures, which constitute their “members' resources” (Fairclough, 2001, p. 57). Their journals reflect the beginnings of their interrogations and the resultant shift in the “constructive effects of discourse”:

Being a lover of reading, I never thought that I would be so closed minded to every character in the novels that I have read, except towards the protagonist. This course opened my mind to see the views of every character in any and every novel I read. It allowed me not only the advantage to question why something was done to another character, but try and understand the reasoning behind it. It also allowed me to know the type of narrator telling the story, and to understand how the narrator fits into the story and why. This course

has truly taught me a more fulfilling way in which to read and understand any novel I read. My love for literature was intensified even more because of this course. (S6)

I see literature relating to feelings/emotions/the affective because it can be associated with an individual's real-life experience. For example, just like I was able to relate to the maid in the play, "Impossible Situation" due to a similar life experience, someone may be able to relate to literature in the same way. This can help an individual to connect with their emotional side more easily. (S7)

In *Affective Economies*, Ahmed argues that feelings of fear and hate are both economic and mobile, and she makes the case that "it is the emotional reading of hate that works to bind the imagined white subject and nation together", in relation to black bodies as well as immigrants and asylum seekers who also occupy/seek to occupy assumed 'white' spaces. The economies of fear and hate are further perpetuated by "past histories that stick to the present" especially those that "operate by concealing [their] own traces" (Ahmed, 2004a, pp. 118-126). A similar argument can be made for societies that share histories of oppression within which fear and hate are endemic and where there can be misrecognition of the objects, bodies and signs that circulate these emotions. The recorded history of the Caribbean is one shaped by the trauma of colonisation, slavery, indentureship, and post-colonial consequences of social inequities, foreign economic and political interference, and violence. Caribbean peoples have also attempted to engage in socially reconstructive aspects of education, self-analysis (e.g. through their writing of fiction and non-fiction), self-governance and social justice movements. These "past histories" are part of the constructions of social identities, social relationships and ideologies for students, as much as the constructive discursive practices in the texts that they study (Fairclough, 1995, p. 16). Thus, it is imperative that students keep being exposed to Caribbean texts that address these past histories even as they unpack their affective responses to the texts. This can be illustrated in the summative reflections of four students below:

I liked the experience of engaging with older and more contemporary writers. As I have stated before older writers were essential in opening the door for future writers. Moreover, older writers challenged the status quo at the time and wrote back to the centre to challenge the west's views on the colonized "other," of the Caribbean. Modern Caribbean writers now have a globally recognised voice and an opportunity to challenge the issues of our modern day, modernising and adapting existing western literary forms to our needs and tastes. (S8)

Honestly, UTT has exposed me to the most Caribbean Lit ever. In lower Secondary I only read *Green Days by The River* and that was so surface level that at that time I could even tell what the plot was or identify themes of the novel. I feel as though Caribbean novels have been ignored for so many years. I barely knew Caribbean writers as a child. Maybe I was a bad student, but my teacher didn't seem interested in the novel either. I don't even

know if we finished at the time. In UTT I developed an appreciation for Earl Lovelace and Sam Selvon. “The Dragon Can’t Dance” and “The Lonely Londoners” were just perfect. I enjoyed them so much the themes, language and characters. I still think and laugh at situations from the novels. I still laugh when I think about the time we acted out a scene from Lovelace’s then I actually met Lovelace once. I think what I love most about the Caribbean novelist is the language then humor and reflection of reality, while I know it’s the past, I think that makes it so much better for. The language is just so wonderful in Selvon’s novels and stories. I’ve come to love and appreciate Caribbean dialects so much and in learning the power of communication I now understand how why these novels mean so much to me. I don’t have to double and triple read to understand what is being conveyed, but I do double to laugh and enjoy. I love a good story and the topics it brings up. (S9)

To be quite honest, I liked all of the Caribbean writers I came across in my courses, be it old or contemporary ones. Some of the older ones would focus more on issues such as colonialism, but that is only expected considering the context of their writings. I strongly believe there is immense value to be found in both types of writers. (S10)

Engaging with works from both older and contemporary Caribbean writers was a necessary exercise, not only as a student of literature but also as a prospective teacher. Seeing some of the same concerns of race, identity, culture and representation addressed in older novels repeated in those from contemporary writers, is a testament to the destructive and enduring nature of the effects of colonialism and colonial attitudes and the hold that remains on the Caribbean person’s psyche. This knowledge can assist teachers in effectively recognising and navigating classroom issues that stem from residual colonial mind-sets. (S11)

Conclusion

From my investigation of the connections in *TIS* and *WSS* between discursive practices and affective responses, relying largely on the insights of Fairclough and Ahmed, as well as the emotional responses by some of my university Language and Literature students (from their reflections of *WSS* and *TIS* to their performance of *TIS*), I have demonstrated the value of having students examine their affective responses to texts to determine whether they are solely personal or in fact shaped by contact with other circulated emotions. This self-analysis would prepare them for their professional practice as critical teachers of Language and Literature across school levels. Additionally, they would be able to appreciate literary texts as ‘objects’ that manipulate emotions through identifiable linguistic mechanisms. They would also develop their critical language awareness as they undertake textual analysis as part of critical discourse analysis. This new way of looking at texts would transform the pre-service classroom itself into a site of personal

interrogation as well as affective sharing; a parallel to the kind of classrooms we want to develop for students at primary and secondary schools.

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