

Power Dynamics and Critical Discourse Analysis of a Select Indian English Short Film – ‘Life UnNoticed’

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Introduction

Cinematic Discourse & Discourse Analysis

If we proffer a short definition limiting ourselves to the domain of socio-linguistics, discourse is that unit of linguistic analysis which goes beyond a sentence or the text.

Cinematic discourse pertains to the analysis and discussion of film as an effective medium that communicates meaning, thoughts, emotions and ideas through audio-visual elements. Interestingly, short films have become one of the most powerful media for discussion on discourse. We have long back put aside the cinematic genre of long movies of more than two-hour long. The ‘Gen Z’ has even come down to a reel of thirty seconds!

Cinematic discourse felicitates research enthusiasts, scholars, and critics to have a deeper understanding of films, and share their perspectives, observe cultural aspects, elucidate the artistic features along with the other purposes like narrative technique, Characterisation, cinematography, sound, editing, and thematic exploration. It encourages critical discussions on how films communicate the human experiences and societal aspirations and achievements.

The aspects of cinematic discourse in the short film in the context of power dynamics has an important space in the present analysis. There is great connection between discourse and the interplay of dialogues that try to control one another’s power of making choices. In this

particular context, it would be pertinent to discuss certain core concepts viz. discourse, cinematic discourse, language beyond text, and aspects that affect holding and imposing of power.

Power dynamics is a key concept in critical discourse analysis (CDA). It is a framework that studies how discourse, characters, language and communication shape and are shaped by social power relations. CDA explores the way these relations influence the construction and interpretation of texts, and most importantly, how they strengthen and challenge existing social structure and norms.

Research Methodology

The film is the primary source of data. However, methods discussions, interviews, observations, surveys and questionnaires have much more scope. Data has been collected from the film which has visuals, movement, music, colour combinations, live characters, their body language and above all, the most authentic source, language i.e. dialogues.

The source of data in this research is script of the film 'Life UnNoticed'. Reviewing the script helped watching the movie multiple times and analysing it.

The utterances that contain power relation discourse among all the characters.

Data Collection

- a) Watching the film 'Life UnNoticed' to identify various aspects CDA.
- b) Reading the film script many times to identify implicit meaning.
- c) Selecting various aspects for the analysis.

Data Analysis

- a) Dividing data into different aspects for analysis.
- b) Making an interpretation or meaning of the data.

- c) Collecting some data and supporting information to analyse the meaning of the data (such as books, internet, articles and any other information that was relevant to the researcher's study).
- d) Analysing the data using critical discourse analysis with the theory from Woffitt (2005) and Van Dijk (2009) focuses on power relation discourse.
- e) Drawing conclusion based on the analysis of the data.

Power Dynamics

Power Dynamics is invariably one of the most dominating elements of Critical Discourse Analysis. Power dynamics in its natural environment means attempt to influence or take control over the other person's capacity to make free choices. There are three key components of power dynamics. The first component deals with power holder and power receiver where both try to manipulate each other. The second element corresponds to the attempt to attain selfish goals at the expense of others. The third relates to the depletion of physical and mental health due to power dynamics.

If we analyse closely, the core theme of the short film 'Life UnNoticed', it moves around the concept of power dynamics and follows all the three components in more or less effective way. The power dynamics in the story oscillates between the two main characters. Though the domination remains at the protagonist, the hero, it is certain that she is right and invariable the pendulum of power will shift to her side. Of course, family, friends and other factors in the story help the action being taken towards the desired denouement. Both the main characters in the story are power holder and receiver at particular points of time. The second element is also present as the heroine tries to achieve her desired goal at the expense of the adamant behavior of the protagonist. As for the third component, we can see that there was a depletion of the mental health of the hero. Both the characters, with their turn taking, try to establish and challenge the authority.

In this way, the power dynamics operates throughout the film and dominates.

Core Concepts Concerning Power Dynamics in CDA

Discourse, Language and Text

There are certain key aspects we will be focusing on and discuss in detail, especially in the context of cinematic discourse, language and text.

- Impact of Power Dynamics on discourse and text in cinematic discourse.
- Contribution of '*non-linguistic language*' and Non-linguistic methods to discourse analysis and cinematic discourse (short film).
- Dominance of linguistics in a multimodal analysis.
- Discourse beyond language.
- Role of the Speech Acts in the Critical Discourse Analysis of a Short Film.

Use of Cinematic Discourse and Power Dynamics

'Life UnNoticed' carries out the use of Power Dynamics in a Cinematic discourse in the best possible way. It displays how power balance swings from one character to the other in the most effective way. Cinematic discourse is the study of social and cultural communicative process characterised by the complex combination of lingual and non-lingual structural elements in the cinema. Cinematic discourse contains heterogeneous systems like verbal (dialogue), non-verbal (facial expressions, postures and gestures) and non-lingual cinematic presentations (music, cinematography, etc). Cinematic Discourse is the culmination of an integrated design of these semiotic systems. Each element has its own inseparable place and unique contribution in interpreting the cinematic theme or meaning. We have all these elements present throughout the film.

Multi-modal Discourse Analysis

Multimodal discourse analysis anticipates an approach to discourse which mainly focuses upon how meaning is derived at through the application of multiple modes of communication as against the use of language

alone. Through 'Life UnNoticed' this task becomes all the more effective and easier. Most of the time during their non-conversational state, their body language is what speaks to us. The core purpose of the present research is to analyse how short film in today's digital era serves as the best way to understand power dynamics and Critical Discourse Analysis. The 'text' in a short film shapes the social sensibilities and arrives at a direct or indirect message. The application of multi-modal approach will help us more with the understanding.

Non-linguistic Language

Non-linguistic language, along with other features such as proxemics, paralinguistic features-tone, pitch, volume etc. clothing and appearance, use of objects and props, and other technical devices, plays a pivotal role in the study of discourse analysis. These elements of the non-linguistic language contribute enormously in bringing about meaning to the characters' verbal expressions and establishing power relations. It would rather be appropriate to say these factors of the non-linguistic language help enrich the verbal communication. The looking of both the lovers in extreme earnestness but saying nothing, the style, their facial expressions, the choice of the colours of dresses, their sitting arrangement and reactions given to the other character's dialogues all are significant features of non-linguistic language in the power dynamics through cinematic discourse and add flavor to the overall impact.

Discourse beyond Language

Discourse analysis, in a conventional sense, studies the 'text' of the discourse, however, as Allen and Barbara Pease in their book 'Body Language' claim that 53% of what we speak is perceived through the non-verbal clues rather than the verbal expressions. If this is to be considered true, we must say that to critically analyse a short film we must go beyond the 'text' of the film. Hence, we must say that discourse goes beyond the language part and helps critically bring out the desired explanation.

Role of the Speech Acts in the Critical Discourse Analysis of a Short Film

Speech acts function at an interesting and important level in the critical discourse analysis of a short film.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an interdisciplinary approach to the study of texts, which views “*language as a form of social practice*” (Fairclough 1989: 20). Speech acts and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) are both extremely significant linguistic devices in linguistics in general and the cinematic discourse analysis in particular. They can be usefully and effectively applied to different forms of discourse, including short films. Following is the explanation of how speech acts and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) can be used together to analyse the relation between and relevance to cinematic discourse and power dynamics.

Speech Acts

Speech acts, as defined by the philosophers like J.L. Austin and John Searle, refer to various actions performed through language. These speech acts are categorized into three main types:

Locutionary Act: Locutionary Act speaking plainly, refers to the literal meaning of the utterance.

According to the Speech-act Theory, “a locutionary act is the act of making a meaningful utterance”, J. L. Austin, ‘How to Do Things With Words.’ (1962). While American philosopher John Searle offered the ‘propositional act—the act of expressing a proposition, “Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language” (1969).

Illocutionary Act: According to Austin in Paltridge’s book, The Illocutionary act is hidden meaning that is connected with the speaker’s intention (2006:55). It is matched with another view of Austin in Searle’s book that ‘Illocutionary act is the utterance of words which has certain force’ (2007:3). This act refers to the intended meaning or purpose behind the utterance (e.g., asserting, questioning, commanding).

Perlocutionary Act: This speech act refers to the effect or response the utterance has on the listener.

Every conversation is, at conscious or subconscious level, an attempt to dominate the other partner. The context may be professional, social, personal and so on. In our day to day communication we refer to certain expressions where the intended meaning is altogether different from the literal meaning. In cinematic discourse the illocutionary force is more significant and dominant as it has limited length and it tries to express more in shortest possible words. Figurative language and sarcastic expressions come handy and are used effectively. They also include non-verbal acts, gestures, and expressions.

Before the actual implementation of the application of speech acts it would be pertinent to discuss the theme of the short film 'Life UnNoticed'.

The Theme of the Film 'Life UnNoticed'

'Life UnNoticed' is an enlightening and interesting short film. Though it does not provide anything novel or unique in its theme, it certainly gives a great amount of material for intellectual social discussion—food for thought! The theme of the movie revolves around themes relevant to today's youth.

The short film has two main characters and other minor ones. The physical setting of the film is primarily the office of a corporate company and partially Aadhya's home. Most of the action takes place in the office. The exact designations of the employees are not known. Apart from being in a professional relationship, they are in love relation as well. Spoorthi, the girlfriend, works in the same office. Aadhya is a young man who is excessively committed to his work. The story starts when it is Spoorthi's birthday and Aadhya forgets it. She was on leave but has specifically come to meet him. The tension and conflict are built up slowly but gradually as there seems a deadlock after his denial or inability to spend time with her that day due to being overburdened. The beginning hints at the indifferent attitude of the hero towards human

relations and more inclination towards work. Slowly but gradually their relationship reaches at a point of breaking up. He does not notice it and thinks Spoorthi is being adamant as usual and ignores. However, he does not realise that the same thing is being repeated in all his relationships. His mother, father, sister and even friends realise it except him. A point comes in the story where he finds himself unnoticed! At the end when he realises it, he thinks he has lost it all. It is his birthday and Spoorthi turns up with gift and flowers. The irony lies in the fact that it was her birthday and not only he had forgotten but also didn't take out time to spend with her she desperately wanted. He admits his mistakes and things are on track now.

Aadhya was lucky enough to have people who would hold him intact Everyone may not be.....! The lesson we learn is that if you do not notice life (people), life will 'unnotice' youand life unnoticed is worst living.....!

Application of Speech Acts in Critical Discourse Analysis

Study of various Societal Aspects

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) focuses on the social contexts, power dynamics, and ideologies, within which the discourse occurs. It aims to reveal the hidden meanings, power structures, and social norms encapsulated in the text. It focuses more on the real emotions, feelings, intentions, meanings and whatever is in mind which can be known from the socio-linguistic perspective.

Every society has certain social norms that are expected to be followed for the smooth social conduct and to be considered a sane individual. The most important aspect of human life – human relationships is hampered. The central action of 'Life UnNoticed' is dominated with this aspect. The definite conclusion at the end of the film offers us so many aspects to ponder over. The most dominant of them is the social angle of interpersonal relationship. If a relationship is mutual, it requires reciprocity of love and care. Another significant aspect is the choices, compromises and decisions that both the characters have to make.

Irrespective of being mutual, the relationship has different aspects like power dynamics, man-woman relationship, cut throat competition and so on.

Dialogue Analysis: The core of any cinematic discourse analysis is the analysis of the dialogues. They are the agents of action. The dialogues of 'Life UnNoticed' are so subtle and relevant that they create the desired impact over the audience. There is a lot of sarcasm in the 'text'. Interestingly, the dialogues are as per the demand of the situation and follow all the perlocutionary effect. There is assertion, there is questioning and demanding, making requests and we have commanding as well.

For example, the very first scene when Spoorthi suggests to go out he says,

"Calm down Spoorthi why are you getting upset for such small things, I just said we'll have the same plan on the weekend."

Her Sarcastic remark is very emphatic and marks the core difference in the ideologies, she says,

"Life is just not on weekends. You have to laugh when you feel like laughing and cry when you feel like crying. You can't just say this moment I am busy I will make time to cry later or maybe I will laugh later. Remember happiness should be by situations and not by schedules" There is sarcasm, irony and emotions in the expressions.

As the very base of the theme is conflicting perceptions of life, the most dominant part is the questioning and demanding. However, the questions go beyond being formal and take a turn towards rhetoric and helplessness. Following questions by Spoorthi indicate the same:

'Now that you're done with your meeting can we go out?'

The dialogues, *'we will surely go after ...'* And *'can we have the same plan on the weekend Spoorthi?'* by Aadhya are nothing but promises.

Apart from these, the very exchange of expressions is full of requests and denials.

Non-Verbal Communication: The impact of semiotics is most important in communication and especially in a short film as it complements the verbal expressions. It includes non-verbal cues like body language, facial expressions, and gestures. The characters in the movie display various gestures, postures and facial expressions along with certain actions that are extremely meaningful and add to the overall effect. The disinterested eye movement by Spoorthi, the indifferent looks by Aadhya, the intermittent looks by both, his lack of interest in anything at home and the final monologue all contribute greatly to the theme. The facial expressions, eye movements and the hand gestures of all the characters contribute to the action and justify it.

Social Context and Ideological Analysis: Though 'Life UnNoticed' deals with emotional turbulences and conflicting beliefs, it closely deals with the social and cultural ideology and succeeds in making us think deeply over social values and personal ethics. The love relationship, staying together in spite of differences, the socio-cultural acceptance and trying to attain personal but non-selfish motives from both the ends acquaint us with the socio-ethical base.

Conclusion

Power Dynamics: Critical Discourse Analysis unavoidably studies power dynamics. Power dynamics in its natural environment means attempt to take control over the other person's capacity to make choices. There are three components of power dynamics. First, there is a power holder and power receiver where both try to manipulate each other. Second, trying to attain selfish goals at the expense of others. Third, depletion of physical and mental health due to power dynamics.

If we analyse closely, the core theme of the short film 'Life UnNoticed' moves around the concept of power dynamics. The lover in the story is the power holder and the beloved is receiver and at another point the situation is reverse. While Aadhya tries to manipulate through his taken for granted attitude, Spoorth uses the power of persuasion to achieve her love relationship. At the end when the situation doesn't seem

favourable, Spoorthi proactively but successfully makes last attempt. Both the characters, with their turn taking, experience depletion of mental health and try to establish and challenge the authority.

In this way, the power dynamics operates throughout the film and dominates.

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