

Resistance through the Language of Palestinian Poets

Nora F. Boayrid

Riyadh, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Copyright©2019 by authors, all rights reserved. Author agrees that this article remains permanently open access under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 International License.

Abstract This study analyzed the language of resistance in the poems of three Palestinian poets, namely, Samih Al-Qasim, Mahmoud Darwish, and Tawfiq Zayyad. The analysis incorporated Van Dijk's (1997) approach to Political Discourse Analysis (PDA). The elicited linguistic features from PDA were analyzed against Van Dijk's (1993, 2005) Ideological Square Model and Johnson's (1987) Containment Schema. From the perspective of Van Dijk's (1993, 2005) ideological square model, the study found that the poets' expressions of resistance can be presented under the positive self-representation and negative other-representation with varying referents (i.e. Palestine, Palestinians, or Israelis). The analysis from Johnson's (1987) containment schema showed that the poets' political position has an influential role in their expressions of resistance and their views of themselves in relation to Palestine, Palestinians, and Israelis.

Keywords Resistance, Palestinian Poets, Politics, Discourse Analysis, Cognitive Linguistics

1. Introduction

Within the first half of the 20th century, the term *literature of resistance* has emerged among poets in occupied Palestine as a result of their witness of the need for a new literary mode to express the political issues and to promote changes (Mir, 2013). The term is essentially called (Adab Al-Muqawmah) that is coined by the Palestinian writer Ghassan Kanafani (Hassan & Omar, 2011). Cudjoe (1980) defined *resistance* as "any act or complex of acts designed to rid a people of their oppressors" (p. 19). According to Slemon (1995), *literary resistance* "can be seen as a form of contractual understanding between the text and the reader, one that is embedded in an experiential dimension and buttressed by a political and cultural aesthetic at work in culture" (p. 7).

Palestinians' literature of resistance manifested in different forms of arts have caught the eyes of critics and researchers (e.g. Boullata, 2008; Darraj, 2008; Said, 1986). The resistance in the poetry of Samih Al-Qasim, Mahmoud

Darwish, and Tawfiq Zayyad specifically, has been approached differently by researchers. Researchers mainly approached resistance as a discourse in the literary texts of the poets through incorporating either stylistic analysis or ecocriticism theory (e.g. Ahmed & Hashim, 2015; Khezri, Ballawy, Poorabed, & Behroozi, 2018). The first approach was through the use of stylistic analysis, according to Short (1996), stylistic analysis "is a linguistic approach to the study of literary texts" (p. 334). Ecocriticism theory is a newly developed critical approach that examines the incorporation of environmental elements in literary texts usually to show social justices (Marland, 2013). Thus, as explained by Ahmed and Hashim (2015), the movement is a "new way for expressing human resistance via nature" (p. 14).

Some researchers in Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) that is concerned with analyzing political texts critically (see Fairclough & Fairclough, 2013; Van Dijk, 1997) called for an incorporation of cognitive linguistics frameworks that can aid analysts identify forms of language manipulation which is a core aim of PDA (e.g. Hart, Rymes, Souto-Manning, Brown, & Luke, 2005). In line with this, this study aimed to critically analyze how Palestinian poets, namely, Samih Al-Qasim, Mahmoud Darwish, and Tawfiq Zayyad expressed their resistance in their poems and how their expressions were influenced by their political positions. The analysis was done through incorporating Van Dijk's (1997) PDA and two cognitive linguistics models: Van Dijk's (1993, 2005) Ideological Square Model and Johnson's (1987) Containment Schema (see the Methodology Section for more information about the two models).

2. Statement of the Problem

Palestine has long been occupied by the Israelis and the Palestinians showed resistance to the occupation through different forms including arts (e.g. the Palestinian Shammout's paintings series called 'Palestine: The Exodus and the Odyssey'). Most researchers who analyzed the use of resistance language in Palestinian poetry from a linguistic perspective included a simplistic analysis of texts

(e.g. Ahmed & Hashim, 2015; Khezri et al., 2018). Hence, this study aimed to critically analyze the poems of Samih Al-Qasim, Mahmoud Darwish, and Tawfiq Zayyad from the perspective of Van Dijk's (1997) PDA and cognitive linguistics models. The cognitive linguistics models were used to unfold the relationship between the poets' political positions and their expressions of resistance and view of themselves in relation to Palestine, Palestinians, and Israelis. Thus, the present study aimed to explore the following questions:

1. How do the poets express their resistance?
2. Do the poets' political positions influence their expressions of resistance and view of themselves in relation to Palestine, Palestinians, and Israelis?

3. Literature Review

Theorists and scholars from different fields contributed to explaining the concept of resistance in relation to social and political issues (e.g. Foucault, 1978; Grinberg, 2013; Weber, 1978). Foucault (1978) links the concept of resistance to power by stating that power exists everywhere; subsequently, as he puts it "where there is power, there is resistance" (p. 95). Grinberg (2013) explained the closeness of resistance and power as concepts in relation to the Israel-Palestinian case. He demonstrated that power is manifested through violence that can come from the dominant group 'Israel' and dominated group 'Palestine'. According to him, the dominant group can exhibit power through physical or symbolic violence; the former can be through coercion and harm, and the latter can be through preventing political recognition of the dominated group. When violence comes from the dominated group to call for rights and/or to stand oppressive acts, then it is called resistance. Which is defined by him as "the collective action of dominated groups in reaction to the physical and symbolic violence exerted on them by the dominant groups." (p. 210). Main figures of the dominated group have a role in provoking actions against the dominant group this is according to Weber (1978). This can be explained from the perspective of *symbolic power theory* proposed by Bourdieu (1991). Which means that social elites are capable of influencing the behaviors of others without acts of force but through soft power. In the case of Palestinians, influential artists used art to protest and to motivate the Palestinians to persist in the face of the occupation of land (González, 2009). In the words of Duncombe (2007), such kind of battle in art is "armed with culture instead of guns" (p. 1). According to Al-Jazari (1967) and Mir (2013), the Palestinian poets Samih Al-Qasim, Mahmoud Darwish, and Tawfiq Zayyad were among the main figures who used their writings to show resistance and to move the Palestinians to persist.

Many studies have been done to analyze the use of the language of resistance in the poetry of Samih Al-Qasim,

Mahmoud Darwish, and Tawfiq Zayyad. Khezri et al. (2018) analyzed the use of literary style as a way to show resistance in Samih Al-Qasim's poetry "Persona non-Grata". The study found that Al-Qasim used an interrogative style for several purposes but mainly to draw the readers' attention to the Palestinians' struggle, to express his resistance, and to deny the struggle. The researchers found that Al-Qasim used the direct questions to draw the readers' attention to the Palestinians struggle as in "Are you listening?". They also found that Al-Qasim used rhetorical questions to express his resistance "you will go, will your darkness be intensive?". To deny the struggle Al-Qasim, as found by the researchers, used direct questions to ask about issues that he knew about as in "what is your name bride? Have you forgotten me? Yabous?". According to the researchers, Al-Qasim used those questions to deny and resist the new name of Jerusalem city which was known as 'Yabous'.

Mahmoud Darwish has received criticism from Darraj (2008) and Boullata (2008) for his inability to connect his poetic devices to the discourse of resistance. Mattawa (2014) justified Darwish's struggle to show the connection of his poetry to the discourse of resistance to his preservations to keep sensibility alive in his poetry. He further added that it is through this process of keeping sensibility that he contributed to the discourse of resistance. Langley (2012) demonstrated that Darwish used imagination and sensibility to elevate Palestine and its people from the eradication of their identity in reality. In line with this, Sazzad (2016) analyzed how Darwish portrayed his resistance towards the occupation of land in many of his poems. In his analysis of "A Poem Which is not Green, from my Country", he demonstrated that Darwish linked his resistance to the reaction of the land as being silent which will eventually win as in "It will sing, it will cry out". Sazzad (2016) also showed that Darwish expressed his resistance by showing how tragic the situation is as in "you were as beautiful as earth". According to Sazzad (2016), by unfolding the tragedy, Darwish was trying to protect the land from eradication.

Ahmed and Hashim (2015) analyzed selected poems written by Palestinian poets, among them is Tawfiq Zayyad. The analysis incorporated ecocriticism theory to uncover how the poets demonstrated their resistance. In their analysis of Tawfiq Zayyad's poem "The Impossible", they showed that in Zayyad's view, the Palestinians' resistance is parallel to nature. According to them, he used animals in specific to show the steadiness of their resistance as in "To push an elephant through a needle's eye".

The reviewed studies showed that Palestinian poets displayed resistance through the use of language. That is, by raising rhetorical questions as in Al-Qasim's poem "Persona non-Grata", by using tragic language as in Darwish's poem "A Poem Which is not Green, from my Country", and by using metaphors to present the Palestinians' persistence as in Zayyad's poem "The

Impossible". It is shown that each poet uses different linguistic features to contribute to the larger concept of the discourse of resistance. In the words of Edward Said, "one has to keep telling the story [of Palestine] in as many ways as possible, as insistently as possible, and in as compelling a way as possible, to keep attention to it, because there is always a fear it might just disappear." (Said & Barsamian, 2003, p.187).

4. Methodology

4.1. Data

The study analyzed three poems written by Palestinian poets. The first is "A Speech in the Unemployed Market" by Samih Al-Qasim published in 1992. The second is "Silence for Gaza" by Mahmoud Darwish first published in 1973. The third is "Here We Will Stay" by Tawfiq Zayyad published in 1966.

4.2. Theoretical Framework

Van Dijk's (1997) approach to Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) was employed in the current study to examine the use of language for political functions in the selected data. The elicited linguistic features from PDA were analyzed against Van Dijk's (1993, 2005) Ideological Square Model and Johnson's (1987) Containment Schema. Van Dijk's (1993, 2005) Ideological Square Model comprises the linguistic features that emphasize positive self-representation and negative other-representation. Similarly, they de-emphasize negative 'us' and positive 'them'. That is, by employing the Ideological Square Model, the researcher aimed to see how the Palestinian poets showed resistance by means of using positive self-representation of Palestine and the Palestinians and negative representation of the occupiers.

To examine the relation of these linguistic features to the poets' political positions, the elicited linguistic features were studied from the perspective of cognitive linguistics. Specifically, from the point of view of Containment Schema proposed by Johnson (1987). In his book *The Body in the Mind*, Johnson (1987) illustrated that containment schema is a cognitive image about a physical or a metaphorical spatial position manifested in the use of language. According to Hart et al. (2005), containment schema is threefold structured consisting of an interior, an exterior, and a container. Hart et al. (2005) illustrated how this can apply to political discourse analysis; in the case of immigrants as exemplified by them, the land is the container, and immigrants being interior or exterior is defined by physical or mental boundaries. This can be realized in the English language by means of using spatial prepositions such as 'in' and 'out'; when using 'in' one is physically or mentally involved, while by using 'out' one is

detached (Hart et al., 2005).

4.3. Procedure

To achieve the aim of the study the analysis was as follows: 1. Language use in each poem was analyzed according to Van Dijk's (1997) PDA. 2. The elicited linguistic features were examined against Van Dijk's (1993, 2005) ideological square model and Johnson's (1987) containment schema. 3. To answer the 2nd question, the results of Johnson's (1987) containment schema analysis were related to the poets' views of the political situation in the land and their political positions.

5. Analysis

This section provides an analysis of the three poems against Van Dijk's (1993, 2005) ideological square model and Johnson's (1987) containment schema. From the point of view of the ideological square model, in "Here We Will Stay", Zayyad employed the positive self-representation of Palestinians including him by means of using metaphorical images that have positive connotations, specifically being strong and steady. This 'we' as a mean of resistance was also manifested through the use of other linguistic and stylistic features. Zayyad used repetitions and fronted some words, according to Van Dijk (1997), both strategies have political functions; either to emphasize or to draw attention to a certain semantic role. Following is an extract from Zayyad's poem "Here We Will Stay":

هنا .. على صدوركم , باقون كالجدار
وفي حلوقكم
كقطعة الزجاج , كالصبار
وفي عيونكم
زوبعة من نار
Here we stay
As a wall upon your chest
And in your throat
As a splinter of glass, as a cactus
And in your eyes
A storm of fire

Zayyad fronted the word 'Here' in many instances in the poem, including the title. In this context, 'Here' refers to Palestine and Zayyad used it to display the firmness of Palestinians. By fronting 'Here', Zayyad is employing its two political functions; that is, he both draws attention to the persistence of Palestinians and emphasizes their firmness. Similarly, 'Here' was repeated throughout the poem which emphasizes his idea of resistance. The Palestinians' resistance, including the poet's, was transmitted through uses of metaphorical images that showed strength; 'a wall', 'a splinter of glass', and 'a storm

of fire'. This sheds light on the idea of positive self-representation.

From the perspective of Johnson's (1987) containment schema, in Zayyad's poem, there are a container and an interior. Surprisingly, Israelis are the container and Palestinians are the interiors. This is shown in instances such as 'upon your chest', 'in your throat', and 'in your eyes' where 'your' refers to Israelis. The uses of prepositions such as 'upon' and 'in' uncover Zayyad's undeclared belief; he is aware that Israelis have strongly settled in the land and Palestinians are remaining in spite of that and are being interiors.

In "A Speech in the Unemployed Market", Al-Qassim emphasizes negative other-representation by means of using verbs that suggest violence. The syntactic structure of his sentences shifts between passive and active voice. Van Dijk (1997) proposed that the use of active and passive sentences in political texts works to emphasize either agents or victims. That means when using an active sentence, one draws attention to the agents of the action, whereas when using a passive sentence, one's aim is to draw attention to the victims of the action. Following is an extract from Al-Qassim's poem "A Speech in the Unemployed Market" that shows the use of active sentences:

ربما تسلبني آخر شبر من ترابي
ربما تطعم للسجن شبابي
ربما تسطو على ميراث جدي
..من أثاث.. وأوان.. وخباب
ربما تحرق أشعاري وكتبي
ربما تطعم لحمي للكلاب

You may steal the last foot of my land
And feed my youth to the prison
You may seize my grandfather's inheritance
Of furniture, rags and dishes
You may burn my poems and my books
And throw my flesh to the dogs

In this extract, Al-Qassim uses active verbs that suggest violence from the occupiers 'steal', 'feed' (i.e. shows violence in this context), 'seize', 'burn', and 'throw'. Through the use of active sentences, attention is drawn to the doer 'Israelis'; Al-Qassim's way of resistance is to unfold the damaging acts performed by the Israelis. To draw attention to the victims, passive voice is used as in the following line 'Maybe I get withhold from my mother's kiss'. This shifts the readers' attention from focusing on the oppressors to the victims.

From the perspective of Johnson's (1987) containment schema, in Al-Qasim's poem, there are a container and an interior. This can be explained from this line taken from his poem, 'You may dwell as a dream of horror over our village'; the container is Palestine and its people 'our village' and the interiors are Israelis 'over our village'. The container-interior relationship is manifested through the

use of the preposition 'over'. This shows that, in contrary to Zayyad, Al-Qasim believes that Israelis are the ones who are interiors.

In Mahmoud Darwish's poem "Silence for Gaza", there are positive self-representation and negative other-representation. However, it is not the Palestinians who are positively presented, it is the land 'Gaza'. In his poem, negative other-representation comprises 'Palestinians' and 'Israelis'. This is shown in the following line, 'Gaza was born of fire and we were born of waiting and crying over homes'. Israelis are described using verbs that suggest being terrified and hateful; to him, the enemy 'hates', 'fears', and wishes to 'drown' Gaza as in 'The enemy hates her up to killing...Fears her up to murder....And into the sea they wish to drown her'.

Darwish detaches himself and the Palestinians from the land; thus, to him, there is Gaza, we, and them. This is best illustrated in this line, 'She does not want, and neither we do'. The detachment is further drawn from the analysis based on Johnson's (1987) containment schema. In his poem, there are a container and an interior. Gaza is the container and Israelis are interiors that Gaza wishes to get rid of. Which can be explained from this line taken from the poem, 'She wants to eject the enemy from her clothes'; Palestine is the container 'clothes' and Israelis are interior 'eject the enemy'. This revolves around the preposition 'from' which shows this type of schemata image. Darwish does not see himself neither the Palestinians to be involved effectively in the resistance, it is the land that fights and resists in itself.

6. Discussion

The analysis showed that Palestinian poets employed different lexical and syntactic features that generally contributed to the discourse of resistance. Under the umbrella of Van Dijk's (1997) ideological square model, the Palestinian poets manifested different uses of positive self-representation and negative other-representation. While Zayyad emphasizes the positive self-representation of Palestinians by means of using metaphorical images that have positive connotations, Al-Qassim emphasizes negative other-representation by means of using verbs that suggested violence. Darwish, however, emphasizes both positive self-representation and negative other-representation; unexpectedly, negative other-representation comprises 'Palestinians' and 'Israelis' as shown in the Analysis Section. In time around the 60's-70's where Palestinians were faced with eradication that led many to choose immigration to other lands, Zayyad's poem "Here We Will Stay" had a powerful role in moving the Palestinians to persist (Rijke & Teeffelen, 2014). The discourse of resistance in his poem manifested in the use of positive metaphorical images of Palestinians and Palestine fostered many to persist as stated by Rijke & Teeffelen (2014), "the olive tree with its deep roots in the

land, bearing fruits only after several years of growth, became a widely used metaphorical expression of sumud” (p. 87). This shows, as explained by the symbolic power theory by Bourdieu (1991), the power of elites in moving people to act through uses of soft power, in this case through art. Johnson’s (1987) containment schema showed that the poets’ political positions have influenced their expressions and view of themselves as Palestinians. Darwish who was in exile showed detachment from the land in many instances in the poem. This is in contrary to Al-Qassim and Zayyad who showed great attachment to the land.

7. Conclusions

The study analyzed how the Palestinian poets expressed their resistance through language. The analysis incorporated Van Dijk’s (1997) PDA, Van Dijk’s (1993, 2005) Ideological Square Model, and Johnson’s (1987) Containment Schema. The findings suggested that Van Dijk’s (1993, 2005) Ideological Square Model was employed by the poets differently by means of different lexical and syntactic elements that served the political function of resistance. The poets’ political positions influenced their expressions of resistance and their view of themselves in relation to Palestine as revealed by the analysis based on Johnson’s (1987) Containment Schema.

REFERENCES

- [1] Ahmed, H., & Hashim, R. (2015). Greening of resistance in Arabic poetry: An ecocritical interpretation of selected Arabic poems. *The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 21(1), 13-22.
- [2] Al-Jazari, M. (1967). Resistance by the word in Tawfiq Zayyad’s poetry. *AL-muqawmih bi alkalmat fi shar Tawfiq Zayyad. Arts journal*, 15(10). 18-22.
- [3] Al-Qasim, S. (1992). *The completed works of Samih Al-Qassim* (vol. 1). Beirut: Al-Jeel Publisher.
- [4] Boullata, J. (2008). The concept of homeland in Mahmoud Darwish’s poetry. *Banipal* 33. 63–66.
- [5] Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power*. Harvard University Press.
- [6] Cudjoe, S. (1980). *Resistance and Caribbean literature*. Chicago: Ohio University Press.
- [7] Darraj, F. (2008). *Transfigurations in the image of Palestine in the poetry of Mahmoud Darwish*. In Mahmoud Darwish: Exile’s Poet, edited by Hala Nassar and Najat Rahman, 57–78. Northampton, MA: Olive Branch Press.
- [8] Darwish, M. (1973). *Journal of an ordinary grief*. Palestine: Palestine Liberation Organization.
- [9] Duncombe, S. (2007). Cultural resistance. *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405165518.wbeosc178>
- [10] Fairclough, I., & Fairclough, N. (2013). *Political discourse analysis: A method for advanced students*. Routledge.
- [11] Foucault, M. (1978). *The history of sexuality: An introduction*. Vol. 1. New York: Vintage.
- [12] González, O. (2009). Culture and politics in the visual arts of the occupied Palestinian territories. *Macalester International*, 23(1), 202-220.
- [13] Grinberg, L. L. (2013). Resistance, politics and violence: The catch of the Palestinian struggle. *Current Sociology*, 61(2), 206-225.
- [14] Hart, C., Rymes, B., Souto-Manning, M., Brown, C., & Luke, A. (2005). Analysing political discourse: Toward a cognitive approach. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 2(2), 189-201.
- [15] Hassan, Y., & Omar, N. (2011). Narrating the nation and its other: the emergence of Palestine in the postcolonial Arabic novel. *The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 17(Special Issue). 109-119.
- [16] Johnson, M. L. (1987). *The body in the mind: The bodily basis of meaning, imagination, and reason*. University of California Press.
- [17] Khezri, A., Ballawy, R., Poorabed, M., & Behrooz, Z. (2018). The style of interrogation and its impact on the Samy Al-Qāsim’s poetry of resistance ‘Persona Non Grata’. *Research in Arabic Language*, 18, 21-34.
- [18] Langley, T. (2012). Exceptional states. *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 1(41). 69–82.
- [19] Marland, P. (2013). Ecocriticism. *Literature Compass*, 10(11). 846-868.
- [20] Mattawa, K. (2014). *Mahmoud Darwish: The poet’s art and his nation*. Syracuse: University Press.
- [21] Mir, S. (2013). Palestinian literature: Occupation and exile. *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 35(2). 110-129.
- [22] Rijke, A., & Teeffelen, T. (2014). To exist is to resist: Sumud, heroism, and the everyday. *Jerusalem Quarterly*, 59, 86-99.
- [23] Said, E. (1986). *After the Last Sky*. London: Faber and Faber.
- [24] Said, E. W., & Barsamian, D. (2003). *Culture and resistance: Conversations with Edward W. Said*. South End Press.
- [25] Sazzad, R. (2016). Mahmoud Darwish’s Poetry as Sumud. *International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 18(3), 359-378.
- [26] Short, M. (1996). *Exploring the language of poems, plays, and prose*. Longman.
- [27] Slemon, S. (1995). Unsettling the empire: Resistance theory for the second world. In B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths & H. Tiffin (Ed.). *The post-colonial studies reader*. London: Routledge.
- [28] Van Dijk, T. A. (1993). *Elite discourse and racism* (Vol. 6). Sage.
- [29] Van Dijk, T. A. (1997). What is political discourse analysis. *Belgian journal of linguistics*, 11(1), 11-52.

- [30] Van Dijk, T. A. (2005). Discourse analysis as ideology analysis. In *Language & peace* (pp. 41-58). Routledge.
- [31] Weber, M. (1978). *Economy and society: An outline of interpretive sociology*. Vol. 1. University of California Press.
- [32] Zayyad, T. (1966). The collected poems of 'I Hold Your Hands'. Haifa: Al-Itihad Press.