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**Asst. Prof. Dr. Gülşen TORUSDAĞ**

Van Yüzüncü Yıl University, Faculty of Letters Department of Linguistics, Van / TURKEY



**Assoc. Prof. Dr. İlker AYDIN**

Ordu University, Faculty of Education, Department of Turkish and Social Sciences Education, Ordu / TURKEY

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## **THE POWER OF DISCOURSE, CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS ON NASREDDIN HODJA ANECDOTES**

### **ABSTRACT**

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a research study, which critically analyzes the relationship between language, and society considers language as a social practice and understands discourse as relatively stable uses of language in the service of the organization and structuring of social life. As a spoken text, an anecdote is a short story, which is narrated in order to explain any thoughts or situations by giving an example and to convince the listeners to it, which includes humour, criticism, and satire. Based on a short and intense narrative technique, anecdotes reveal a worldview and teach people while making them laugh. This study aims to analyze Nasreddin Hodja anecdotes which are worldwide famous as discourses that have shaped the values, beliefs, thoughts, and lifestyles of the people, in the frame of CDA. According to it, discourse is an opaque power object in the societies and it aims to make it more visible and transparent. This is a description and interpretation of a wise man's discourses through CDA. Nasreddin Hodja anecdotes seem as a corpus reflecting of peoples of the period, their lifestyles, and cultures with their customs, habits, worldviews, and value judgments. The structures of his anecdotes usually consist of an introduction part, a body part containing a thesis and antithesis and a conclusion part containing wit. At the end of the study, it was observed that Hodja's every joke contains a message related to the social situation and the message mostly turned into an epigram/maxim, idiom, fixed phrase, or a proverb. Anecdotes that affect the language and social structure have also undertaken the function of cultural transmission.

**Keywords:** Critical Discourse Analysis, Nasreddin Hodja anecdotes.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Anecdotes are part of the oral culture of the societies. The permanence of the anecdotes over time depends on their transfer from person to person and their laughing feature. Anecdotes are short narratives that tell an unusual event based on life or imagination to strengthen any thought, to convince the audience, and aim to draw a conclusion from what is told, and contain wit, satire, criticism, and humor (Oğuz, 2008: 158).

The communicative purpose of this text is to retell an unusual and funny event to entertain the readers. Like other texts, it also has a structure: Abstract, orientation, crisis, reaction, and coda. In the abstract, the writer introduces an unusual event that is told briefly. In the orientation part, the writer tells when and where that event happened and people related to it. In the crisis part, s/he tells the event in more detail. In the reaction part, the writer tells how the characters solved the problem and usually, the readers or listeners get the funny way to solve the problem. In the last part, coda, that is optional, the readers usually laugh louder (URL 1). This literary type has some characteristics such as brevity, play function, few characters, social character, and surprise effect. The characters of Nasreddin Hodja anecdotes are usually Hodja himself, his wife, his neighbors, and his donkey.

Nasreddin Hodja anecdotes are world-famous and he is one of the wise men created by the Anatolian people with the vast experience and tolerance in the environment of rich civilizations of the Anatolian lands. As an important and inimitable personification of Turkish humor he has an important place in Turkish culture. There are various rumors about who he was and when he lived. Unfortunately, there is

no exact and sufficient information about his life. According to the information that researchers have put forward, Nasreddin Hodja was born in Hortu village, in Sivrihisar (today Nasreddin Hodja village) during the Anatolian Seljuk period, in 1208. In his childhood, he took lessons from Hacı-i Cihan (his death after 1274), Hacı-i Fakih (his death 1221), and Seyyid Mahmud Hayrani (his death 1268) in Konya madrasa. After completing her education, he worked as an imam, teacher, judge, farmer, preacher, and professor of theology in Sivrihisar and Akşehir. Hodja, who married and had children in Akşehir, died in 1284/1285 according to the tombstone that is said to belong to him (Arıcı, 2018: 604-605; Özdemir, 2011: 14).

According to researchers, there are over 10 thousand Nasreddin Hodja anecdotes in printed and written sources but until today neither all of these anecdotes has been compiled and published, nor the sources of the anecdotes that joined his anecdotes in the following centuries have been determined. Events that happened to historical personality Nasreddin Hodja are limited but fifty or sixty of them became anecdote. Over time, many new anecdotes from various sources joined this repertoire so while there was an increase in the number of the anecdotes a number of changes were made in their contents and expressions. From the numerous Nasreddin Hodja anecdotes, it is understood that he was also a Kadi or judge, dispensing justice sometimes sternly and sometimes humorously, but always justly, and he never became rich, and was probably very poor (Çotuksöken, 2003; Özdemir, 2011; URL 2)

This is a qualitative study on Nasreddin Hodja anecdotes. With this study, it is aimed to describe the structure and messages of the discourses while analyzing Hodja's anecdotes according to the CDA. Handling of the anecdotes according to CDA constitutes the importance of the study.

## 2. CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS (CDA)

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is one of the discourse analysis methods that considers language as a social practice and understands discourse as relatively stable uses of language in the service of the organization and structuring of social life (Wodak & Meyer, 2009: 6). As Wodak asserted, the term 'discourse' is often used both for oral and written texts in the English speaking world. CDA is used nowadays to refer more specifically to the critical linguistic approach of scholars who find the larger discursive unit of text to be the basic unit of communication. The roots of CDA go back to classical rhetoric, textlinguistics and sociolinguistics, as well as to applied linguistics and pragmatics. It has never been and has never attempted to provide one single or specific theory. It cannot be viewed as a holistic or closed paradigm because the studies of CDA are diverse, fed from quite different theoretical backgrounds, directed to very different data and methodologies (2002: 6-8). CDA, which sees the discourse as language use in speech and writing, is the study of vague relationships between discursive practices, events, texts, and social and cultural structures (Wodak, 2002).

It is inevitable to consider CDA as the continuation of the pragmatics. Since with the developments in pragmatics, the concept of context has come into prominence and linguistic products have begun to be handled with the context in which they are produced. Pragmatics that studies the use of language in context deals mainly with communicative action and researches questions such as what can be counted as action, and how the action relates to context. CDA approaches are based on theorizing the concept of 'context'. Wodak (2000) summarizes context under four headings: 1- Linguistic context based on the choice of a specific grammar 2- Intertextual, interdiscursive relationships between utterances, texts genres, and discourses (discourse representation and allusions or evocations). 3- The extra linguistic social/sociological variables and institutional frames of a specific 'context of situation'. 4- The broader socio-political and historical context that the discursive practices are embedded in and related to.

As Wodak (2002: 7-8) expressed, "CDA sees discourse – language use in speech and writing – as a form of 'social practice'. Describing discourse as social practice implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s), which frame it: the discursive event is shaped by them, but it also shapes them."

According to Fairclough and Wodak (1997: 271-280), CDA addresses social problems and power relations are discursive. As a form of social action, discourse constitutes society and culture and it does ideological work. Discourse is historical and discourse analysis is interpretative and explanatory.

CDA claims that discourse always involves power and ideologies and, is always historical, that is, it is connected synchronically and diachronically with other communicative events which are happening at the same time or which have happened before. Interpretation is inevitable in discourse analysis so that readers and listeners, depending on their background knowledge, information, and position might have different readings of the same communicative event (Wodak & Ludwig, 1999: 12-13).

CDA aims to explore frequently opaque relationships between discursive practices, texts and events. While studying discursive representations, the analysis focuses on how discourse can contribute to build up, reproduce, maintain, and reinforce social representations, ideologies, and social identities. Ideology, as expressed in Merriam-Webster, is “manner or the content of thinking characteristic of an individual, group, or culture; the integrated assertions, theories and aims that constitute a sociopolitical program; a systematic body of concepts especially about human life or culture” (URL3). For Thompson, “ideology refers to social forms and processes within which, and by means of which, symbolic forms circulate in the social world.” and the study of ideology is a study of “the ways in which meaning is constructed and conveyed by symbolic forms of various kinds.” (Wodak, 2002: 9). As Wodak (2002: 8) asserted, “discourse is socially constitutive as well as socially conditioned – it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people. It is constitutive both in the sense that it helps to sustain and reproduce the social status quo and in the sense that it contributes to transforming it.”

Discourse is powerful since, as Austin asserted, saying something is making certain effects on the feelings, thoughts, or actions of others. So to say something means to do something. A speaker reveals social facts, that is, does something in certain social contexts. Whenever language is used, an action actually takes place (Austin, 1962). Discourse, as a communicative linguistic unit, has an effect on the listener even when only giving information.

In terms of exemplifying the effect of language that shapes social life, Nasreddin Hodja's anecdotal discourses can be mentioned. His anecdotal discourses, which form the basis of the study, also have ideological power guiding society's way of thinking, beliefs, and value judgments, briefly, shaping the social structure. In this context, Hodja's every discourse has a perlocutionary act power over the people who heard him since it has been orientating, educating, and making them laugh, and think so that each of the conclusion sentences of his discourses has become an idiom or fixed phrase such as “don't die my donkey don't die”, “eat my fur coat, eat”, “the quilt is gone, the fight is over”, “cut one's own throat”, “fine feathers make fine birds”, “looking for a needle in a haystack”, “waste not want not”; a maxim, such as “keep your feet warm, cool your head, get yourself a job, don't think deep”, “something is either a shame always, everywhere, or nowhere, never”; or proverb such as “A stranger looks for another's donkey by singing a song.”, “Cut your coat according to your cloth”, “He who pays the piper calls the tune.” etc. These examples can be evaluated in terms of exemplifying the effect of discourse on language.

As a wise man, he expressed the value judgments and taught the subtleties of the art of living and how difficulties can be solved through patient and experience in particular to Anatolian people, in general to all the people of the world through the anecdotes that he beautified with humor. He is a folk-hero with his characteristics such as a counselor, social critic, preacher, and reconciler. His reputation has also spread beyond the Anatolian lands and he has been recognized and loved as a person who makes people laugh and think in both the eastern and western world.

### 3. FORM AND CONTENT IN NASREDDIN HODJA ANECDOTES

In terms of form and content, Nasreddin Hodja anecdotes<sup>1</sup> have the features of classical anecdotes. They consist of a few sentences but few of them are short story size. Nasreddin Hodja anecdotes consist of three parts, which are introduction, body, and conclusion. In the introduction, the place and time of the event are explained and the characters of the event are introduced. Sometimes they may not be introduced. The body part includes a question to Hodja or a case or event narration. Characters of the anecdotes, at the same time readers, wonder Hodja's reactive answer. Conclusion, witty end, is the most

<sup>1</sup> In the literature, in place of ‘anecdote’, ‘joke, story, short story’ can be used, in some sources. For this study ‘anecdote’ was preferred since as explained in Merriam-Webster (URL3), anecdote “is a short story about an interesting or funny event or occurrence.”

crucial part of the anecdotes. In this part, Hodja gives a witty answer to the question posed to him depending on the developing event or case. In both cases, clever humor stands out (Çotuksöken, 2003; Özdemir, 2011).

Nasreddin Hodja's discourse develops on question-answer and case-event narration- reasoned explanation/reactive speech, action. Many Nasreddin Hodja anecdotes include a question to Nasreddin Hodja and his answer. In some anecdotes cases or events occurred between Hodja and anecdote characters and then Hodja's explanation based on clever justifications or Hodja's acting reaction to the case(s)/event(s) are narrated.

#### 4. THESE FOLLOWING TEXTS ARE EXAMPLES OF ANECDOTE

##### 4.1. The Cauldron Gave Birth

One day Nasreddin borrowed a pot from his neighbor. The next day he brought it back with another little pot inside. "That's not mine," said his neighbor. "Yes, it is," said Nasreddin. "While your pot was staying with me, it had a baby." Sometime later Nasreddin asked his neighbor to lend him a pot again. He agreed, hoping that he would once again receive two pots in return. However, days passed and Nasreddin had still not returned the pot. Finally, his neighbor lost patience and went to demand his property. "I am sorry," said Nasreddin. "I can't give you back your pot, since it has died." "Died!" screamed his neighbor, "how can a pot die?" "Well," said Nasreddin, "you believed me when I told you that your pot had had a baby."

**Introduction:** One day Nasreddin borrowed a pot from his neighbor Ali. The next day he brought it back with another little pot inside. "That's not mine," said Ali. "Yes, it is," said Nasreddin. "While your pot was staying with me, it had a baby." Sometime later Nasreddin asked Ali to lend him a pot again. Days passed and Nasreddin had still not returned the pot. Finally, Ali lost patience and went to demand his property.

**Thesis:** Your pot has died.

**Anti-thesis:** How can a pot die?

**Wit:** Well, you believed me when I told you that your pot had had a baby.

**Message:** Emphasis on the falsehood of self-interest.

##### 4.2. Flour on the Rope

His neighbor wanted to borrow Hodja's rope. Hodja went into his house and when he came out after a while, he told his neighbor, "We are using the rope. My wife has laid flour on the rope!"

His neighbor was surprised.

"That is impossible! You can't lay flour on a rope!"

"If you don't want to lend it, then it is possible," Hodja remarked.

**Introduction:** His neighbor wanted to borrow Hodja's rope.

**Thesis:** My wife has laid flour on the rope!

**Anti-thesis:** That is impossible! You can't lay flour on a rope!

**Wit:** If you don't want to lend it, then it is possible.

**Message:** There are many excuses for an unwilling person.

##### 4.3. What if it Happens

When they saw Hodja sitting by the lake and stirring some yogurt into the water they asked him what he was doing.

"I'm adding starter into the lake to make yoghurt" he answered.

"But is it possible to turn the lake into yoghurt?"

“I know it is impossible but what if happens” Hodja replied.

**Introduction:** When they saw Hodja sitting by the lake and stirring some yogurt into the water they asked him what he was doing.

**Thesis:** I’m adding starter into the lake to make yoghurt.

**Anti-thesis:** But is it possible to turn the lake into yoghurt?

**Wit:** I know it is impossible but what if happens.

**Message:** There is no such thing as impossible in life.

## 5. CONCLUSION

CDA, which sees the discourse as language use in speech and writing, is the study of vague relationships between discursive practices, events, texts, and social and cultural structures. There is a dialectical and mutual relationship between particular discursive events and the situations, institutions, and social structures, which frame it. They shape discourse and it also shapes them.

As a literary type, Hodja’s anecdotal discourse is the most suitable type to express his feelings, thoughts, and reactions. Because of its shortness, taking place easily in the memories and spreading in a short time it is an effective type. In Hodja’s anecdotes, wit is the most important element, which reveals the truths of life in a striking way and makes cute its wrongs, normalities and abnormalities. Nasreddin Hodja has a unifying and integrating view of society. There are three types of comic, case or event comic, speech comic, and character comic, in his anecdotes. In every anecdote, in addition to laughing function of the wit, it also has a thinking function. In other words, the anecdote is not an ordinary laugh for the reader. For this purpose, Hodja creates wit with the language games he performs using homonymic and polysemic words and figure of speech. He is exactly a master of words. Hodja’s open-ended sentences make the readers think while making laugh them. He emphasizes that life should not be taken too seriously. In all anecdotes, the basic theme is the material interest of humans in the mortal world.

His anecdotes including wit, common sense, ingenuousness, ridicule, is a kind of humor that reflects human psychology, exposes the shortcomings of society, criticizes even state and religious affairs, and always settles matters amicably. From his anecdotes, it is understood that the main subject is human. His ridiculous sides, wrongs, selfish attitudes, weaknesses, mistakes, clumsiness, and despair are discussed. Some problems in human relations are emphasized. In this process, a hurtful, disdainful attitude is avoided; on the contrary, respect and love for people and other beings are at the forefront. The main purpose of the anecdotes is to make people aware of their mistakes and to guide them. The messages in the deep structure of the anecdotes remain as world knowledge of the Anatolian people.

Nasreddin Hodja anecdotes address many values of humanity. In addition, the messages that are intended to be given in the anecdotes are thought-provoking, laughable, and instructive. In the anecdotes, the uncertainty of time makes feel the universality of the messages. These features of the anecdotes made Nasreddin Hodja known, understood and loved not only in Anatolia but also among all the people of the world.

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