

Received: December 2023 Accepted: January 2024

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.58262/ks.v12i2.363>

A Critical Stylistic Analysis of Encoding and Decoding in Kuipers' Life on the Refrigerator Door

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Abstract

This study investigates encoding and decoding in Kuipers' novel "life on the refrigerator door" It tries to answer the following questions: what are the critical stylistic tools that are employed in the novel? What is the most dominant tool among the suggested tools? How is the ideology of encoding and decoding expressed throughout the novel? Accordingly, the study aims at: setting out the critical stylistic devices used in the novel, identifying the most frequent tool amongst the suggested ones, and extracting the ideology of encoding and decoding throughout the novel. To fulfill the aims, the study follows several procedures: presenting an overview of critical Stylistics, encoding and decoding, the novel and the model of the study. Analyzing extracts selected from the novel then the findings and the conclusions are mentioned. The conclusions are: naming and describing is the most dominant tool followed by hypothesizing. Negating is the least used tool. All the tools are used in different ratios regarding the ideology of encoding and decoding.

Keywords: *critical, stylistics, encoding, decoding, Kuipers, novel.*

1. Critical Stylistics (CS)

According to Jeffries (2014), Critical Stylistics emerged as a response to the growing influence of Critical Discourse Analysis, which examines how ideologies, identity, and inequality are conveyed in texts within social and political contexts.

Although both Critical Stylistics and Critical Discourse Analysis were established by Roger Fowler, they have become increasingly distinct from each other over time (Jeffries,2014).

Critical Stylistics, a branch of applied linguistics founded by Lesley Jeffries, is concerned with analyzing the relationship between textual choices and ideology. It aims to reveal the implicit ideologies conveyed through language to better understand the role of language in reproducing social identities and inequalities. Critical Stylistics offers a more developed theory and methodology than Critical Discourse Analysis, providing a comprehensive set of tools for analyzing the linguistic choices made by text producers (Jeffries, 2010).

Tabbert (2013) notes that stylistics, which analyzes both literary and non-literary texts using linguistic techniques, is at the core of critical stylistics.

According to Jeffries (2014), at the heart of CS is the idea that there is a level of meaning between the formal meaning of Saussure's "langue" and the other meaning of language in use,

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that is referred to as "parole." At this level, texts utilize language to give certain view of the world or a fictional nature, and the analyst needs to understand how the text constructs this world. The main items used in Critical Stylistics analysis are "textual-conceptual functions," which aim to understand how a text creates meaning in different ways. These functions are crucial for understanding the conceptual framework of a text and how it presents the world or fictional world in a specific way.

Jeffries (2014) suggests that there is no any relation between linguistic form and meaning, and textual-conceptual functions are an essential part of the stylistic way to critical language study.

So, CS is a method of analyzing the use of language in communication that combines stylistic analysis with a critical perspective on language and society.

2. Ideology

Ideology is a concept that refers to a set of organized ideas, beliefs, or values that are expressed and reproduced in discourse. According to Kress and Hodge (1979) and, ideology is a systematic group of thoughts that are set from a certain point of view, which makes it inherently subjective.

To van Dijk (1995, p.21) "ideology is not only as a system of ideas but specific basic frameworks of social cognition with specific social structures and specific cognitive and social functions".

Ideologies become most influential when they are naturalized and accomplish the state of commonality, according to Fairclough (1992). Common-sense ideologies enable ruling by acceptance, which is at the core of a critical method to ideology (Mayr, 2008).

as Fairclough (1992) and Jeffries and Walker (2012) note that all texts carry ideology, whether consciously or unconsciously influenced by ideology.

The operational definition is that ideology is the set of beliefs, values, and attitudes that underlie the use of language in communication and how they shape our understanding of the world.

3. Encoding and Decoding

Encoding/production and decoding/perception are involved in the process of communication, which encompass acoustic, physiological, and psychological mechanisms. These processes are responsible for conveying complex ideas, including linguistic, metalinguistic, and pragmatic aspects, through perceptive, visual, and other cues such as body gestures and texts (Peter and Elliot, 1993 cited in Li (2015)).

In everyday conversations, we often employ discourse markers like "uhm" and "ng" as simple functional words (Yin et al., 2008). Although these signs lack specific lexical meanings, their intonation and acoustic cues allow them to convey various types of communicative information along three perspectives: doubtful-confident, unacceptable-allowable, and negative-positive (James, 1884; Sagisaka, 2012; Sagisaka et al., 2005 cited in Li (2015)).

4. The Novel

Alice Kuipers' debut novel, "Life on the Refrigerator Door," has garnered international recognition, captivating readers in 28 countries. The book is compelling narrative and poignant exploration of the relationship between a mother and her daughter have earned it numerous accolades, including being named a New York Times book for the Teen Agers. In this clever and heartfelt portrayal, the novel highlights the daily rush of our lives, emphasizing the importance of making time for those we cherish. It beautifully underscores the significance of expressing our feelings in the limited moments we have. "Life on the Refrigerator Door" is an intimate and unique story, told through a series of notes and letters exchanged between a mother and her fifteen-year-old child during a challenging family troubles. Claire, the young protagonist, resides with her mother, and their mode of communication revolves around these heartfelt messages adorning their refrigerator. Although her parents are divorced, they maintain a stable and supportive relationship. As Claire navigates the ups and downs of her teenage years, she finds herself growing distant from her mother, with face-to-face conversations becoming rare. However, a pivotal note from her mother catches her attention, revealing her vulnerability and a secret she has been carrying. Claire's world is shaken as she realizes her mother's battle with breast cancer. Filled with a sense of unease, she realizes the urgency to spend more meaningful time with her mom. Through the exchange of poignant notes, Claire reflects on the cherished memories they shared, expressing her pride in her mother's strength and resilience during these tiring times. "Life on the Refrigerator Door" serves as a powerful reminder of the love and appreciation we often fail to express until faced with profound circumstances (web source).

5. The Model of the Analysis

The tools of the analysis are based on Jeffries (2010). They are as the following:

5.1 Naming and Describing

Naming and describing, referred to as "naming" hereafter, focuses on the linguistic mechanisms that enable a text producer to describe a referent (Jeffries, 2010). According to Jeffries (2007), the choice of names to refer to entities is one of the most influential decisions made by writers.

Jeffries (2010) acknowledges that the noun phrase, beyond the head noun itself, has the potential to convey additional information about the referent. Text producers can encapsulate opinions and assumptions about the referent through pre- and postmodification of the head noun. By presenting these assumptions and opinions as inherent to the referent, they become harder to challenge (Jeffries, 2010).

In this chapter, our focus lies on the side of the sentence that typical "names" an entity, which is the noun names or nominal words. The noun phrase often functions as the grammatical subject or object of a verb and carries semantic roles such as the initiator of an action (referred to as "Actor") or the recipient of an action (known as "Goal") (Jeffries, 2010).

Naming encompasses various linguistic constructions, including the selection of a noun to denote a referent, the practices of a noun phrase with modifiers to provide further details about the reality of the referent, and the decision to use a specific "name" instead of expressing it as a verbal process.

Note: The concept of naming and describing explores the ways in which language allows us to categorize and characterize entities. By investigating the choices made in naming and the additional information conveyed through the noun phrase, we gain insights into the complexities of language use and its impact on communication.

I. Choice of Nouns

In accordance with Jeffries (2010), the process of naming things involves three distinct types of choices. Firstly, there is the representative and regional choice, where speakers encounter other dialects that serve as sources of prejudice or discrimination. Secondly, there is the choice of names with ameliorative or pejorative connotations, which holds greater ideological potential compared to other types. These names reveal the speaker's opinions and attitudes. Lastly, there is the choice of metaphorical expression, which requires the hearer/reader to engage in more cognitive processing to comprehend its meaning. This type of choice can also carry ideological implications.

II. Modification of Nouns

Jeffries (2010) elucidates that noun modifications play a crucial role in the formation of sentences and clauses. Through morphological and syntactic techniques, these modifications enable the naming of referents and create ideological effects. Rather than directly forming sentence propositions, the nominal component assumes the occurrence of something. Consequently, the sentence assertion revolves around the relationship between the named entities. While verbs play a central role in establishing this connection, noun modifications hold immense potential for ideological packaging. They fill the noun phrase with a wealth of diverse information, facilitating the presentation of ideas and encouraging agreement.

In summary, the nominal part of clauses tends to be less subjected to questioning. The recipients (readers/hearers) are discouraged from suspecting or challenging the relationship between elements within the noun phrase, as its ideological implications are skillfully packaged to deter scrutiny (Jeffries, 2010).

5.2 Negating

Negation, as a conceptual practice, extends beyond simply negating a verb, according to Jeffries (2010). It serves as a powerful linguistic device that draws attention to the absence of something while simultaneously hinting at its possible presence (Nahajec, 2012). In a sense, it creates a hypothetical replica of reality (Jeffries, 2010).

Braber et al. (2015) propose that negation enables readers to comprehend the range of alternatives through both negatively and positively mind imagery. For example, the sentence "This is a rabbit" conjures an image of a rabbit, while "This is not a rabbit" may prompt the reader to mentally envision a crossed-out picture or even make it vanish. This hypothetical perspective possesses persuasive power, facilitating more effective conceptualization by the text's recipients.

According to Jeffries (2010), negation in texts can carry ideological and/or narrative significance. It can reinforce a narrative by highlighting what is absent from it, persuade others ideologically, or imagine a desired alternative world. Jeffries focuses on the capacity of negation to shape the reader's mental representation, presenting a case that starkly contrasts with the one asserted in the given text.

Jeffries (2010) identifies several triggers for negation, including:

- *Syntactic triggers: These involve the addition of a negative particle with an auxiliary verb or a dummy verb.
- *Pronouns: Words like "no one," "none," "nobody," and "nothing" function as triggers.
- *Lexical triggers: Certain words carry negative connotations, representing broad categories such as nouns (absent, lacks), verbs (rejects, excluding), adjectives (scared, absence), and adverbs (seldom, rare.)
- *Morphological triggers : Negated adjectives can be formed by adding a prefix (e.g., irrational, unprofessional), negated verbs by using specific forms (e.g., dislike, deactivate), and negated nouns through the addition of a prefix (e.g., inability, inactivity).

In summary, negation plays a vital role in textual discourse, exerting ideological and narrative influences. Through various triggers and linguistic mechanisms, it invites readers to consider alternative perspectives and shapes their mental representations of the text's content (Jeffries, 2010).

5.3 Hypothesizing

Jeffries (2010a) highlights the role of modality in detecting ideologies within texts, particularly through its engagement with hypothetical situations. Modality is a functional system extensively used by Halliday (1985) in his language description, and critical approaches have made significant use of it. Modality manifests in various features within texts, such as modal auxiliaries, lexical verbs, modal adverbs or adjectives, and conditional structures (Jeffries, 2010).

Simpson (1993) explains that modality conveys the expressed certainty or uncertainty related to propositions, distinguishing between epistemic, deontic, and boulomaic modalities, which refer to confidence, obligation, and desirability, respectively. Additionally, Jeffries (2010) notes that modality not only emphasizes the perceived authority of the speaker/writer but also enables the reader/hearer to envision hypothetical situations, whether desired or undesired.

To examine the contribution of modality to textual ideology, we explore the hypothetical situations introduced by modality. Similar to negation, while we might suppose many texts reflect the world as it is, many actually reflect the one who speaks or writes perspectives on how the world is or could be, how it should be, or how they wish it were. This range of meaning falls under the category of "hypothesizing," as even a modal sentence like "I wish it would rain this Christmas" creates a fancy world where the clichéd rainy Christmas of Hollywood movies occurs (Jeffries, 2010).

Modal forms encompass two main categories of meaning. On one hand, they relate to the likelihood or unlikelihood of something being the case. For example, "she might come" implies the speaker's doubts, while "I am sure she'll come" expresses certainty. This type of meaning is known as epistemic, encompassing a range of certainty levels, from strong to weak (Jeffries, 2010).

The other main category divides into two subcategories: the desirability of something being the case, which further splits into deontic modality (obligation), as in "You should have more exercise," and boulomaic modality (desirability), as in "I wish you would phone your father ." Modality, in its various forms, can create a hypothetical or substitution world/situation conceptually for the readers/hearers. This alternative really can potentially have ideological effects on the text's recipient (Jeffries, 2010).

Simpson (1993) categorizes modality into three types:

- I. Epistemic modality, which refers to confidence and reflects the text producer's view of doubt and certainty. The certainty can range from strong to weak, as seen in the use of modal auxiliary verbs like "will," "shall," "may," and "might."
- II. The second type pertains to the desirability of something happening. It can be expressed through deontic modality (obligation) or boulomaic modality (desirability).

Modality contributes to the creation of textual ideologies by introducing hypothetical situations and portraying different aspects of how the world is, should be, will be, ought to be, might be, and so on. The employment of modality draws upon Halliday's (1985) model of systemic functional grammar. By presenting ideas hypothetically, modality invites the recipient to believe or not believe.

The aspects of hypothesizing may take on various forms, including:

- I. Modal auxiliary verbs: would, shall, should, will, could, may, might, mustn't, ought, dares, need.
- II. Lexical words: thinks, supposes, wish, hope, etc.
- III. Adverbs: probable, maybe, definite, of course, etc.
- IV. Adjectives: probably, possibly, sure, definite, certain, obligatory, forbid, etc.
- V. Conditional sentences: (if...then...)

These textual triggers can be categorized as epistemic, boulomaic, or deontic, signifying doubt/certainty, desire, or obligation, respectively.

6. Data Analysis

The texts are chosen randomly from the novel to extract the ideology of encoding and decoding.

6.1 Extract 1

Mom! I can't believe you'd leave me a note telling me something like this! How are you feeling? How was the doctor's? Should I be worried about you? Is it anything serious? You NEVER go to the doctor's . . . I have to babysit but I won't be late. Love and hugs, Claire

Claire, I hope I've made you feel better, darling, and you're not so worried. As I told you, the doctor was very nice. I'm going tomorrow afternoon to have the mammogram, just to check that everything's fine—the chance of the lump being anything serious isn't very high. I suppose being a doctor myself I forget to take my own health as seriously as I should. Anyway, everything will be fine, so please stop worrying. There's really nothing to worry about. Love, Mom.

6.1.1 Naming and Describing

Claire tries to express her sympathy and interest to her mother's situation and sickness by writing love and hugs. At the end of the letter, the mother calls her daughter with darling and love to show her feelings.

6.1.2 Negating

The writer utilizes negation as a tool to reveal what the character thinks about each other. The models are used in Claire's letter like "can, would" and the lexical negation as well. The same

thing is in her mother's letter the models are used in addition to the lexical negation with "nothing and forget."

6.1.3 Hypothesizing

To show care and concern to be near her mother, Claire uses "would, should and will". She determines not to be late.

Hypothesis with Lexis is more obvious in Elizabeth's letter "hope and suppose" are mentioned once each as in "I hope I've made you feel better". She wants to comfort her daughter saying "everything will be fine".

6.2 Extract 2

Mom????? Where are you???? I waited for ages and I thought you'd be home. I called the hospital, but they said you hadn't come back to work after your appointment. I even called Dad to see if he knew anything. Not that he ever knows where you are. I'm worried. Should I be? I looked up breast lumps on the internet and realized I wasn't sure what I was looking for, and I suddenly thought that maybe I should have been taking all this more seriously. If you were home, I'd probably be less worried.

OK. I'm going crazy just waiting for you here. Dad called—he's taking me for some food. I'll be back soon. I found my key.

Hi Claire-Bear, Sorry to worry you, darling. I went for a long drive. I'm going back to the doctor's at the end of the week. Hopefully we'll find out that everything's fine and I'm worrying over nothing. I love you. I should be home at around eight. Someone named Michael called. Love, Mom.

6.2.1 Naming and Describing

In this extract the real issue is clear by saying (breast lump) and (your appointment) and (the doctor's). The expression (long drive) is a sign to the long journey of her mother with her healing of the disease. In the mother's letter, she mentions (Claire-beer) and (love), she expresses her love and concern to her daughter.

6.2.2 Negating

Negation is often showed in Claire's letters with exaggeration with "ever and never". The mother tries to have some hope and she uses negation to make her daughter feel hopeful as well.

6.2.3 Hypothesizing

Hypothesizing through models and adverbs is handled carefully by the writer as well as the hypothesizing with the conditional if. The writer passes her ideology with this tool.

6.3 Extract 3

Claire, Last night was dreadful. You're so overwrought, I can't talk to you properly. What's happened to my sensible girl? I didn't say that I didn't like Michael. I haven't even met him—and that's a concern in itself, by the way. I was saying that I was worried about you jumping back in when he seems a little unpredictable. I was saying that I don't like the way he's treated you, which is a reasonable thing to say.

Try not to come home not too late tonight.

Mom. I came home and you weren't here, Mom. Nothing strange there then, because you're never home, right? Then I get your note on the fridge. If you were here, I'd say this to you, but because you're not here, I have to write it down! Michael's great. He's funny and smart and cute and he's there when I need him, which is more than I can say about you. Or Dad. And talking about Dad, I don't think I need relationship advice from you, Mom! I'm sick of being sensible. I'm going to stay the night at Emma's. C

6.3.1 Naming and Describing

Elizabeth modifies the last night as dreadful and described her girl as sensible girl. She is worried about the way that her girl makes relationships with young men. Claire does not want to take advices especially from her mom about relationships because her parents are divorced. She does not want to be that sensible girl again.

6.3.2 Negating

A clear appearance of negative models in both letters as well as the morphological negation as in "unpredictable". Negation expresses the rebellion side of the girl and the mother does not agree about a lot of things in her daughter's life.

6.3.3 Hypothesizing

(Can't, have to, need) are used to express the responsibilities of the mother and the needs of the teenager. Claire utilizes the conditional if and the verb 'would' to reveal her thinking and her wishes.

6.4 Extract 4

Mom, I just found your letter to me in the garbage. Why did you throw it away? Why didn't you tell me what was going on? Is it really bad? I'm sorry that we've been fighting so much. Are you OK? Claire.

Claire, I'll be home at around 6 tonight. When you get this note, perhaps you could just wait for me. How could I tell you? I've hardly begun thinking about getting better and other things start going on. It doesn't normally happen like this—I know, I've seen women go through it. And then you weren't here because we were having a stupid disagreement. Oh, Claire, I've been so foolish about this whole thing. Your note the other week, the one when you told me you'd just watched the DVD for families of breast cancer sufferers, do you know that I wept for an hour after reading that? Do you know that this is the first time I've really admitted to myself that I have breast cancer? Me, I have breast cancer. I really do. And it's not getting better.

6.4.1 Naming and Describing

In the above extract, the appearing of the negative forms reveals the very low state of both characters. Claire and her mother, because of the harmful side of disease. Words like (sufferers, stupid argument) can show that easily. We find the first appearance of the word (breast cancer) which means that they start to face the real condition of their lives with the disease. They cannot ignore it anymore, they cannot be hopeful anymore. Claire mentions (the garbage) and (your letter) which reflect that her mother throws the letter in the garbage. She does not want her daughter to read what she writes. She cares about her feelings. She does not want to tell her everything about her disease and about her real state.

6.4.2 Negating

One morphological negation (disagreement) and more than one grammatical negation with not are used by the writer. Elizabeth seems panicking about her disease. Until this moment, she lives in denial but starts to figure things out. The use of negation is the best to show this meaning up.

6.4.3 Hypothesizing

In the above extract especially in the mother's letter, the mother is almost begging her daughter to get some attention from her. The writer exploits hypothesizing to help the mother express her thinking and tells her daughter that she needs her. She uses (perhaps) and (could) twice.

Table (1): The Distribution of the Tools.

Tools	frequency	percentage
Naming	36	47.36%
Negating	19	25%
Hypothesizing	21	27.63%
Total	76	100%

Conclusions

Based on the qualitative and the quantitative analysis of the selected data, the following conclusions have been arrived at:

1. Naming and describing is found to be the most frequent used tool in the analyzed data since it aids in revealing the writer's ideology of in the text.
2. Hypothesizing is employed throughout the data in the second place since it makes communication between the characters easier and helps passing their thoughts and feelings.
3. Negating comes in the last place but with a little difference from hypothesizing.
4. All of the suggested tools are employed throughout the novel to clarify the encoding and decoding processes.

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