The Representation of Amy Tan's Background in Her Novel the Joy Luck Club

Mardliya Pratiwi Zamruddin[1]

[1] tiwinsight@gmail.com

Abstract

Discourse stylistics focuses upon the largely implicit and highly ideological 'background' of the text. Mind style that is one of the traits of stylistics is going to be taken into account of doing the analysis since this research aims to find out about how the mind style of Amy Tan is shaped by her background in her way of writing and producing the novel The Joy Luck Club. The term 'mind style' (Leech and Short, 2007) is particularly appropriate where the choices made are consistent through a text or part of a text. This research is questioned whether or not Amy Tan's Chinese background have influenced the novelist's style as represented in her novel, The Joy Luck Club. This research describes the novel with a focus on the characters' mind style in a stylistic and narrative approach. This research aims to attain the influence from the backgrounds of the novelist and the way the background affect the novelist's style in producing literary work. The descriptions and explanations of scrutinizing the novel are hoped to provide examples of doing discourse stylistics to literary works. The specific use of Chinese words, the repetition use of pronouns, the presentation of Chinese superstitions have put so much contributions in shaping Amy Tan's style in her works. Through her literary works, the novelist is able to show her readers linguistic journey through her wordplay style.

Keywords: Amy Tan, The Joy Luck Club, Mind Style, Discourse Stylistics

1. Introduction

It is understandable that the study of prose style, a writer's style has all too frequently been reduced to one feature, for example a specific word choice, or a handful of features, such as factors that are related to the certain grammar used. The reason for this tendency is that the volume of prose writings put pressure to linguistic analysis that is more adapted to a smaller portion of interpretation like a lyric poem. Like the one that has been done by Yeibo (2011) in an article entitled *A Discourse-Stylistic Analysis Of Mood Structures In Selected Poems Of JP Clark-Bekederemo* investigated the critical analysis of poetry belongs to JP Clark-Bekederemo, a poet of contemporary Africa, through the realm of linguistic perspective. In specific sense, stylistics is the field of study or the study of the style of language used by someone or an author in expressing thoughts, ideas. In the style of language, language forestry is increasingly visible to influence readers (Rahman & Weda: 2019).

---

[1] **Mulawarman University, Indonesia**

The foregoing researches in discourse analysis and literary stylistics over the past decades revealed the possibility of approaching these analyses in more productive ways. Since any discourse has its unique framework, or organization, one way of showing the individuality of a discourse is by analyzing its organization as discourse. Discourse stylistics focuses upon the largely implicit and highly ideological 'background' of the text. It deals with the ideological undercurrents of discourse.

Leech and Short (2007) defined the word 'style' has a fairly uncontroversial meaning: it refers to the way in which language is used in a given context, by a given person, for a given purpose, and so on. Saussure (1959) distinct between *langue* and *parole*, *langue* being the code or system of rules common to speakers of a language (such as English), and *parole* being the particular uses of this system, or selections from this system, that speakers or writers make on this or that occasion. Style, then, pertains to *parole*: it is selection from a total linguistic repertoire that constitutes a style.

Leech and Short (2007: 12) provides a cyclic motion whereby linguistic observation stimulates or modifies literary insight, and whereby literary insight in its turn stimulates further linguistic observation. This motion is something like the cycle of theory formulation and theory testing which underlies scientific method. The cycle is represented in Figure 1.
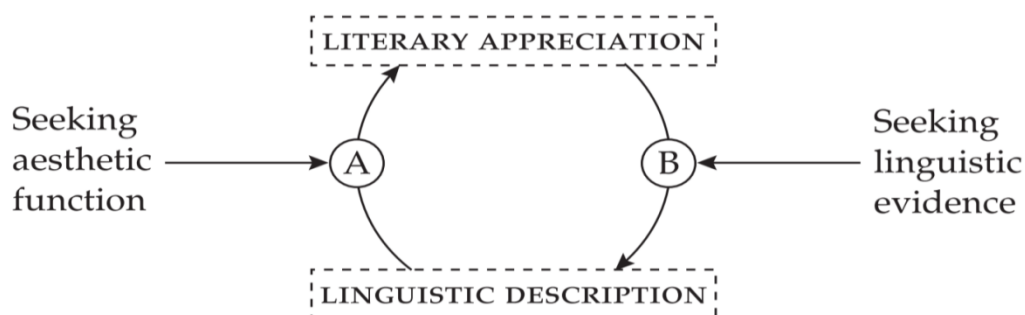

Figure 1. Cycle of Theory Formulation and Testing (Leech and Short, 2007)

In Stylistics there is no logical starting point, since it brings to a literary text simultaneously two faculties, however imperfectly developed: our ability to respond to it as a literary work and our ability to observe its language. According to Leech, the task of linguistic–literary explanation proceeded by the movement to and fro from linguistic details to the literary 'centre' of a work or a writer's art (2007).

Discourse stylistics aim to introduce readers to a procedure of observation which trains to critical reading. The point of principle of discourse stylistics is that there is no linguistically identifiable distinction between literary and non-literary texts, and that literature is a culturally defined notion. As explained by Opara (2005), the double-barreled model is a new area of research with great potential for the researcher, as it explains the relationship between language and literary studies. The scholar explains:

Discourse Analysis and Stylistics are broad-based disciplines which deal with the functional aspects of language. While D.A. analyses what is communicated in Discourse, Stylistics analyses how it is communicated. The two disciplines often interact with each other. Thus Discourse-Stylistics is concerned with the analysis of communication to reveal its function, using various tools of interpretation including textual peculiarities.

Van Dijk (1996) stated that language users are not only social members, but also persons with their own personal history (biography), accumulated experiences, personal beliefs and principles, motivations and emotions, as well as a unique personality that defines the overall type or orientation of their actions. Beliefs about contrasts in the traits of groups of people are consistent with contrasts in linguistic features, and these correspond to stylistic selections when traits are expressed by individuals (Ervin-Tripp, 2001: 44).

Mind style that is one of the traits of stylistics is going to be taken into account of doing the analysis since this research aims are to find out about how the mind style of the novelists with different backgrounds shaped their way of writing and producing the considered postmodern literary work. The term 'mind style' (Leech and Short, 2007) is particularly appropriate where the choices made are consistent through a text or part of a text. Such a consistent choice of a particular stylistic variable might be on the part of a novelist, a narrator, or a character. In other words, it is not just preference for certain kinds of linguistic expression which is typical, but also the mind style which this represents, abstractness and complexity of syntactic embedding are well-known characteristics of the style. There is a range of possibilities where the action can appear to be performed automatically or non-automatically, and with or without some form of conscious effort (Leech and Short, 2007). In this research, this can be seen from the regularities of style used the novelist in her literary work.

This research analyses a novel by Amy Tan entitled *The Joy Luck Club*. Amy Tan is a Chinese-American novelist whose work explores mother-daughter relationships and what it means to grow up as a first generation Asian American. *The Joy Luck Club* tells about mother-daughter relationship. The conflict between Chinese cultures with American culture among the mothers with their daughters built the plot of this novel.

It is hoped that by taking into account of the background of the novelists this research can show the depiction of the background of the novelists as is represented in the novel. This research also reveals the expressions of language used in the novel. This research hoped to be helpful to provide the analysis of the influence of the background of the novelist that is conveyed through the linguistic properties from the novel.

This research is questioned whether or not Amy Tan's Chinese background have influenced the novelist's style as represented in her novel, *The Joy Luck Club.* This research describes the novel with a focus on the characters' mind style in a stylistic and narrative approach. This research aims to attain the influence from the backgrounds of the novelist and the way the background affect the novelist's style in

producing literary work. The descriptions and explanations of scrutinizing the novel are hoped to provide examples of doing discourse stylistics to literary works.

2. Scope and Objective of the Study

This research analyzes a novel written by Amy Tan, a Chinese American novelist entitled *The Joy Luck Club* published on 1990 by Ballantine Books in New York. The novel is scrutinized by using Leech and Short's stylistic categories and is applied with Leech and Short's mind style. The objectives of this research are to find out how the backgrounds of the novelist affect her literary work and to present how the connection is pictured in the novel.

3. The Biographical Sketch of Amy Tan and Her Work

Born in the U.S. to immigrant parents from China, Amy Tan grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area in a succession of twelve homes by the time she graduated from high school. At age 15, she lost her older brother and father to brain tumors. After this tragedy, her mother, fearing a curse, impulsively took Amy and her younger brother to Europe to see the world. After several missteps, the three wanderers settled in Montreux, Switzerland, where Amy fell in love, nearly eloped, played an unwitting role in the drug bust of friends, and still managed to graduate from high school one year early. (http://www.amytan.net/about.html)

The Joy Luck Club is one of Amy Tan's literary works that succeeded to take the heart of literary enthusiasts and critics. The novel brings up the theme of mother-daughter relationship and their struggle to understand each other. The characters that are created by Amy Tan are described as the first generation of Asian that is trying to survive in America after leaving China because of World War II. The combination of the mother-daughter relationship and the life struggle in America creates a strong plot story of the novel. Amy Tan is no doubt hold her Chinese background in spite of her life in America by creating this novel that covers her own experience as a Chinese that lives in America.

4. Research Method

This research is a descriptive qualitative research that involves interpretative, naturalistic approach to the subject matter (Emzir in Muhammad, 2014). Qualitative method is a research procedure that resulting descriptive data in a form of written and/or spoken words from the object being observed. Qualitative research tries to understand phenomenon through scientific point of view with descriptive data to be analyzed. Discourse stylistic is used in this research to analyze Amy Tan's novel, *The Joy Luck Club,* in a descriptive qualitative way. This research is qualitative in order to be able to answer the questions on how Amy Tan's Chinese background affects her style in producing her literary work, *The Joy Luck Club.* The analysis is done under the guide of stylistics categories and theory of mind style by Leech and Short (2007).

5. Finding and Discussion

5.1 Finding

This research finds that Amy Tan represents her Chinese background in her novel *The Joy Luck Club.* According to the theory of mind style by Leech Short (2007), there are data found in this novel that shows how the mothers' mind style is

different from the daughters' perspectives. This happens because of the different background that the mothers and the daughters live with: the mothers bear strong Chinese while the daughters are Chinese born in America. By using Leech and Short's stylistic categories (2007) it is found that under lexical category there are words found that are categorized into Food and Dining Category and Miscellaneous Category and also the characters' names that are using Chinese.

5.2 Discussion

Amy Tan in her novel *The Joy Luck Club* serves a combination of unique narrative from the conversation and relationship of mothers to their daughters. The uniqueness can be seen from the different perspective of seeing things as simple as how to choose a proper fish to cook for dinner to the complicated point of view of selecting a husband and living a marriage life (Table 1). This happens because the mothers in the novel are described to be hold up so much on their Chinese values, while the daughters, who are happened to be born and raised and made a living in America, are seem to slowly lose their Chinese background.

Table 1. Mother-Daughter's Different Perspectives

No	Decontextualization of the Data	Page Reference
1	Now the woman was old. And she had a daughter who grew up speaking only English and swallowing more Coca-Cola than sorrow. For a long time now the woman had wanted to give her daughter the single swan feather and tell her, "This feather may look worthless, but it comes from afar and carries with it all my good intentions." And she waited, year after year, for the day she could tell her daughter this in perfect American English.	5
2	"It's not show off." She said the two soups were almost the same, chabudwo. Or maybe she said butong, not the same thing at all. It was one of those Chinese expressions that means the better half of mixed intentions. I can never remember things I didn't understand in the first place.	6
3	On Stockton Street, we wandered from one fish store to another, looking for the liveliest crabs. "Don't get a dead one," warned my mother in Chinese. "Even a beggar won't eat a dead one." "Put it back," whispered my mother. "A missing leg is a bad sign on Chinese New Year."	117
4	She learned these things, but I couldn't teach her about Chinese character. How to obey parents and listen to your mother's mind. How not to show your own thoughts, to put your feelings behind your face so you can take advantage of hidden opportunities. Why easy things are not worth pursuing. How to know your own worth and polish it, never flashing it around like a cheap ring. Why Chinese thinking is best.	151
5	"Finish your coffee," I told her yesterday. "Don't throw your blessings away."	151
6	"Don't be so old-fashioned, Ma," she told me, finishing her coffee down the sink. "I'm my own person."	151

Mothers-daughters relationship is the theme that runs in the novel is the main issue as well in the different culture of Chinese and American. The different situation of social, economic, cultural and neighborhood shapes the different way of thinking and perceiving things among the characters in this novel.

Table 2. Mother-Daughter's Different Culture

No	Decontextualization of the Data	Page Reference
1	It's my fault she is this way. I wanted my children to have the best combination: American circumstances and Chinese character. How could I know these two things do not mix?	150
2	And I think, How can she be her own person? When did I give her up?	151
3	She is looking at Mr. Rory in the mirror. He is looking at me in the mirror. I have seen this professional look before. Americans don't really look at one another when talking. They talk to their reflections. They look at others or themselves only when they think nobody is watching. So they never see how they really look. They see themselves smiling without their mouth open, or turned to the side where they cannot see their faults.	151
4	I smile. I use my American face. That's the face Americans think is Chinese, the one they cannot understand. But inside I am becoming ashamed. I am ashamed she is ashamed. Because she is my daughter and I am proud of her, and I am her mother but she is not proud of me.	152

Another background of the novelist that can be found in the novel is about World War II theme. Although war is not mention regularly and sometimes not specifically used as a word, the chapters in the novel are mainly run under the theme of war.

Table 3. The Theme of World War II

No	Decontextualization of the Data	Page Reference
1	When they arrived in San Francisco, my father made her hide those shiny clothes. She wore the same brown-checked Chinese dress until the Refugee Welcome Society gave her two hand-me-down dresses, all too large in sizes for American women.	6
2	Joy Luck was an idea my mother remembered from the days of her first marriage in Kweilin, before the Japanese came.	6
3	So you can see how quickly Kweilin lost its beauty for me. I no longer climbed the peaks to say, How lovely are these hills! I only wondered which hills the Japanese had reached. I sat in the dark corners of my house with a baby under each arm, waiting with nervous feet. When the sirens cried out to warn us of bombers, my neighbors and I jumped to our feet and scurried to the deep caves to hide like wild animals. But you can't stay in the dark for so long. Something inside of you starts to fade and you become like a starving person, crazy-hungry for light. Outside I could hear the bombing. Boom! Boom! And then the sound of raining rocks. And inside I was no longer hungry for the cabbage or the turnips of the hanging rock garden. I could only	7

	see the dripping bowels of an ancient hill that might collapse on top of me. Can you imagine how it is, to want to be neither inside nor outside, to want to be nowhere and disappear?	
4	So when the bombing sounds grew farther away, we would come back out like newborn kittens scratching our way back to the city. And always, I would be amazed to find the hills against the burning sky had not been torn apart.	8
5	An army officer came to my house early one morning," she said, "and told me to go quickly to my husband in Chungking. And I knew he was telling me to run away from Kweilin. I knew what happened to officers and their families when the Japanese arrived. How could I go? There were no trains leaving Kweilin. My friend from Nanking, she was so good to me. She bribed a man to steal a wheelbarrow used to haul coal. She promised to warn our other friends.	9
6	When I turned sixteen on the lunar new year, Huang Taitai told me she was ready to welcome a grandson by next spring. Even if I had not wanted to marry, where would I go live instead? Even though I was strong as a horse, how could I run away? The Japanese were in every corner of China.	29
7	"The Japanese showed up as uninvited guests," said Tyan-yu's grandmother, "and that's why nobody else came." Huang Taitai had made elaborate plans, but our wedding was very small.	29
8	She had asked the entire village and friends and family from other cities as well. In those days, you didn't do RSVP. It was not polite not to come. Huang Taitai didn't think the war would change people's good manners.	29
9	But the week before the moon arrived, the Japanese came. They invaded Shansi province, as well as the provinces bordering us. People were nervous. And the morning of the fifteenth, on the day of the wedding celebration, it began to rain, a very bad sign. When the thunder and lightning began, people confused it with Japanese bombs and would not leave their houses.	29
10	I heard later that poor Huang Taitai waited many hours for more people to come, and finally, when she could not wring any more guests out of her hands, she decided to start the ceremony. What could she do? She could not change the war.	30
11	She said it was so unfortunate the way the rest of the world was, how unpopular the Vietnam War was.	66
12	I was so much like my mother. This was before our circumstances separated us: a flood that caused my family to leave me behind, my first marriage to a family that did not want me, a war from all sides, and later, an ocean that took me to a new country.	153
13	They are all dead, your grandparents, your uncles, and their wives and children, all killed in the war, when a bomb fell on our house. So many generations in one instant.	162
14	"Japanese in Kweilin?" says Aiyi. "That was never the case. Couldn't be. The Japanese never came to Kweilin."	167
15	"Yes, that is what the newspapers reported. I know this because I was working for the news bureau at the time. The Kuomintang often told us what we could say and could not say. But we knew the Japanese had come into Kwangsi Province. We had sources who told us how they had captured the Wuchang-Canton railway. How they	167

	were coming overland, making very fast progress, marching toward the provincial capital."	
16	Aiyi looks astonished. "If people did not know this, how could Suyuan know the Japanese were coming?"	167
17	"An officer of the Kuomintang secretly warned her," explains my father. "Suyuan's husband also was an officer and everybody knew that officers and their families would be the first to be killed. So she gathered a few possessions and, in the middle of the night, she picked up her daughters and fled on foot. The babies were not even one year old."	167
18	Finally, there was not one more step left in her body. She didn't have the strength to carry those babies any farther. She slumped to the ground. She knew she would die of her sickness, or perhaps from thirst, from starvation, or from the Japanese, who she was sure were marching right behind her.	169

Chinese vocabulary is found regularly in the novel *The Joy Luck Club*. The words that are found can be categorized into Food and Dining and Miscellaneous categories. In The Food and Dining Category, there are Chinese words found in the novel in which they are a specific Chinese cuisine and there is no equivalent translation in English for the food name.

Table 4. The Categorized Words into Food and Dining Category

Words	Translation/Meaning
Dyansyin	Special foods
Wonton	Chinese dumpling
Chow mein	Chinese dumpling soup
Chaswei	sweet barbecued pork cut into coin-sized slices
Ching	please, eat
Syaumei	a little dumpling
Zong zi	the sticky rice wrapped in lotus leaves, some filled with roasted ham, some with sweet lotus seeds
Houlu	a small stove for burning coal
Ywansyau	sticky sweet dumpling
Houche	Eat

Another category of list of Chinese vocabulary that is found in this novel is the Miscellaneous Category. In this category, there are words and clauses in Chinese that are used to utter Chinese expressions, Chinese value, and overall Chinese culture. The Miscellaneous Category can be seen in the following table (Table 5).

Table 5. The Miscellaneous Categories

Words	Translation/Meaning
Li	Measurement of length
Mah jong	Chinese board game
Chabudwo	Almost the same
Butong	Not the same thing at all
Aii-ya	Exclamation expression
Chiszle	Mad to death
Pung	A voice made in mahjong when a player spreads her tiles out
Shou	Respect for ancestors or family
Ni	A traitor
Nuyer	Daughter
Pichi	Temper
Chang	Necklace
Shemma bende ren!	What kind of fool are you?
Dajya	All the family
Syin yifu!	Your new clothes!
Yidafadwo!	Everything, all over the place!
Show buchulai	Words cannot come out
Shemma yisz?	What meaning?
Mei gwansyi	It does not matter
Nengkan	Ability to do anything one's put one mind to
Dangsying tamende shenti	Take care of one's siblings
Yiding	Obligation, must
Nale!	There!
Ni kan	You watch
Chunwang chihan	If the lips are gone, the teeth will be cold (one thing is always the result of another)
Choszle!	Stinks to death!
Jrdaule	I already know this
Hulihudu	Confused
Hemongmong	Dark fog
Waigoren	Caucasians
Nala	Take it
Swanle!	Finished!
Yi tai	First wife
Sz tai	Fourth wife
Koutou	Bowing with deep respect
Lihai	Wild and stubborn
Kai gwa	Open the watermelon
Chuming	Inside knowing of things, senses
Kechi	Too polite
Chr fan	Train
Gwan deng shweijyau	Close light sleep
Mai dong lou	Wheat east building

Syaujye	Miss
Mangjile!	I knew!
Aiyi	Aunt
Jandale	So big already

From the two categories above, it can be seen that Amy Tan shows her style of writing which puts into account her Chinese background. Her idealistic of Chinese values are poured into the point of views of the characters in her novel. Amy Tan shows the importance of food for Chinese through the mention of Chinese meals complete with how the meals are prepared and served. Chinese vocabulary is also appeared especially when the characters are experiencing or intersecting with moral value in society. Amy Tan shows that despite the fact that the characters live in American context and situation they still attach to their root as Chinese people. This is mainly shown by the mothers character since the reason they live in America is to have a better life due to the war happens in their home country.

Amy Tan is carefully chosen the names for the characters of her novel. She keeps her idealistic of showing strong Chinese root yet at the same time exposing the will of the characters in the process of adapting their life in America.

Table 6. The Combination of Chinese and American Names in the Daughters' Names.

The Mothers	The Daughters
Suyuan Woo	Jing-Mei Woo
An-Mei Hsu	Rose Hsu Jordan
Lindo Jong	Waverly Jong
Ying-Ying St. Clair	Lena St. Clair

For the name of the mothers characters Amy Tan maintains the usage of Chinese names. On the other hand, for the children characters Amy Tan shows the compliance process of Chinese background with American background that is shown by the combination of Chinese names and American names in the daughters' names.

Amy Tan put so much of her Chinese background into this novel. It can be seen from the settings in the novel that are expressed through direct description by the narrator or through description from a characters' point of view.

> "I dreamed about Kweilin before I ever saw it," my mother began, speaking Chinese. "I dreamed of jagged peaks lining a curving river, with magic moss greening the banks. At the tops of these peaks were white mists. (Tan, 1990: 7)

Another influence of Amy Tan's Chinese culture background can be clearly seen from the culture showed throughout the novel. About *The Joy Luck Club* itself, that is a club of *mah jong,* which is a Chinese board game and words in Chinese to describe the game: *Hong mu, mah jong pai,* '*Pung!*', '*Chr!*'. Also from dishes cooked like a black sesame-seed soup, or a special region dishes like *dyansyin* foods. The strong influence of Chinese culture are also showed when Tan writes about mother-daughter relationship through conversation about superstitions.

Table 7. Chinese Superstitions

No	Decontextualization of the Data	Page Reference
1	The East is where things begin, my mother once told me, the direction from which the sun rises, where the wind comes from.	14
2	On Stockton Street, we wandered from one fish store to another, looking for the liveliest crabs.	117
3	"Don't get a dead one," warned my mother in Chinese. "Even a beggar won't eat a dead one."	117
4	"Put it back," whispered my mother. "A missing leg is a bad sign on Chinese New Year."	117

Another influence of Amy Tan's background is seen from the introduction part of the novel. The mother character begins with a monologue about her story when she first comes to America.

When they arrived in San Francisco, my father made her hide those shiny clothes. She wore the same brown-checked Chinese dress until the Refugee Welcome Society gave her two hand-me-down dresses, all too large in sizes for American women. (Tan, 1990: 6)

As it is mentioned in her biography, Amy Tan grew up in the San Francisco Bay Area, and this childhood background is mentioned in the first part of her novel to indicate that it is how her life also begins in the same place as the character in her novel *The Joy Luck Club*.

6. Conclusions

Through her literary works, Amy Tan is able to show their readers linguistic journey through her wordplay style. The specific use of diction, the repetition use of pronouns, the presentation of Chinese superstitions have put so much contributions in shaping the novelist's style in her works. The way Amy Tan pours her idea of Chinese living in America with WW II background with chronological order that follow on Amy Tan's life also shows the deep influence of her life in her novel *The Joy Luck Club.* The occurrences of connection between Amy Tan's Chinese background and her life experience in America that are poured in *The Joy Luck Club* shows that there is a big influence on the novelist's background with her literary works. The way she opts to use Chinese vocabulary strengthens the connection. At the same time the use of Chinese when the characters of this novel talk about Chinese culture also shows how mind style works. The way Chinese perceived life is pictured by Amy Tan as not as simple as American and thus the Chinese words is the perfect words to explain about the Chinese values in the novel.

References

Ervin-Tripp, S. (2001). *Variety, Style Shifting, and Ideology*. Eckert, P. and Rickford, J. R. *Style and Sociolinguistic Variation*. Cambridge: CUP.

Rahman, F., & Weda, S. (2019). Linguistic Deviation and The Rhetoric Figures In Shakepeare's Selected Plays. XLinguae, 12(1), 37-52

Leech, G.N. and Short, M. (2007). *Style in Fiction*: *A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose*. London: Pearson.

Muhammad. (2014). *Metode Penelitian Bahasa*. Yogyakarta: Ar-Ruzz Media.

Opara, S. C. (2005). Discourse-Stylistics of Speech in Buchi Emechela's Prose Fiction.An Unpublished Ph.D Thesis. University of Ibadan.

Tan, A. (1990). *The Joy Luck Club*. New York : Ballantine Books.

Tan, A. n.d. http://www.amytan.net/about.html

Van Dijk, T. (1996). *Ideological Discourse Analysis*. University of Amsterdam. Retrieved from http://discourses.org/OldArticles/Ideological%20discourse%20analysis.pdf

Yeibo, Ebi. (2011). *International Journal Of Humanities And Social Science. Vol. 1 No. 16; November 2011.* A Discourse-Stylistic Analysis Of Mood Structures In Selected Poems Of J.P. Clark-Bekederemo (197-203). Retrieved from http://www.ijhssnet.com/journals/Vol_1_No_16_November_2011/22.pdf