

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The chapter briefly introduces the current study investigating iconicity in Morrison's three novels, *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula* and *Beloved*. This chapter consists of the background of the study that provides an overview of the term iconicity besides contextualising Morrison's selected novels. Additionally, the problem statement is also outlined in an attempt to bridge the gap of previous studies. Finally, the objectives, significance, and limitations of the study alongside an overview of the structure of this dissertation are provided.

1.2 Toni Morrison's Fiction as Iconic Text

Toni Morrison was a leading literary figure in African-American literature where her works represented the African-American's voices. She exploits the use of language to vividly present her readers the traumatic life experienced by African-Americans under the rule of White authority. Rigney (1991) argues that Morrison employs her theory of language to create literature that extends beyond the zone of White Western authority, highlighting and addressing African-American's subject matter. One of the recurring strong themes of Morrison's works involves depicting the issues regarding socio-cultural and socio-economic independence amongst people of her race.

These issues can be dissected and addressed via a thorough study of her works from the iconic perspective by specifically scrutinizing iconicity that results from metaphors and

metonymies. Metaphor, metonymy and iconicity share a mutual. Interdependent relationship since all three aspects rely heavily on sameness. The term iconicity is often achieved when there is an analogy between the code and the coded, while metaphor and metonymy tend to result from the similarity between two codes. In other words, the former concerns the contrast between two forms of different linguistic domains while the latter occurs in the same domain. The study does not view metaphors and metonymies as mere aesthetic tools in Morrison's text but also accounts for how they reinforce cultural, emotional, social and economic meanings in context. It establishes the intertwining relationship between metaphor and iconicity in elevating multi-level interpretations when it comes to the lives of African-Americans. Thus, this research capitalises on two common linguistic processes / rhetorical figures namely, metaphor and metonymy in Morrison's selected novels by making sense of how these two components cooperate to create iconic interpretations of her text.

Furthermore, the research also attempts to explore how these two processes are exploited in her language use to suggest iconicity out of the similarities manifested in the different tropes. While both processes display semantic and ontological similarities in events (Friederike, 2013, p. 46), they do not only reflect the aesthetic levels in language since they also shape the ways in which how one perceives the world around them. Therefore, metaphor and metonymy are different methods of expressing ideas which can also reflect how our worldview through language. The research elaborates the consideration of similarities between the two forms at the level of interpretation of metaphoric objects that exemplify iconic interpretations. In other words, how metaphorical interpretation enacts iconic meaning. Since iconicity is not solely the result of metaphors but also metonymic meaning as the latter can deliver partial iconic interpretations despite suggesting similarities between two related entities belonging to

the same semantic field. Wilcox et al. (2004) theorise that metonymy is quite significant in delivering richer iconic potential.

The study draws on the Lacanian theory that treats literature as a product of the unconscious mind, strikingly resembling the two processes or tropes of language, metaphor and metonymy, which often co-occur in literary texts. The term 'unconscious' refers to the complex activities in the mind of literary writers. In some contexts, the formation of metonymies is considered the basis of metaphors where the former creates a context for the readers to understand the latter. Metaphors tend to be conceptualised in literary text because they co-occur with specific metonymic relations. It is observed that in the field of cognitive linguistics, metaphor and metonymy are not only concepts used in language for aesthetic purposes but these concepts are also considered linguistic processes that bind human thinking and are anchored in social and cultural structures of daily experiences. Lakoff and Johnson (2003) theorise that the coherent metaphorical systems link daily experience via metonymies, reflecting religious, social and cultural symbols.

Additionally, Hamilton's (2016) research entitled *Color in English from Metonymy to Metaphor* theorises that an expression begins as a metonymy where meaning is then metaphorically mapped onto another domain. Both concepts interact to form a rhetorical figure of speech to deliver particular ideas. Due to the similarity in their forms, it is difficult to differentiate between metaphor and metonymy as some metaphoric expressions are metonymic and some metonymic relations can suggest iconic potential. The ground breaking research by Guziejewski (2015) theorises those metaphors and metonymy are interconnected and that they function as a single element. Thus, using these two rhetorical figures in Morrison's novels suggest two levels of linguistic realities; the first reflects the similarities between different domains while the

second represents the sameness within the same domain, contextualising the issues of African-American lives. By focusing on these two levels of domain, the current study attempts to explore the iconic dimension of her text, delving into the rich insights surrounding the African-American group.

1.3 Background of the Study

The study investigates the term *iconicity* as a salient rhetorical feature in Morrison's fiction *The Bluest Eyes*, *Sula*, and *Beloved*. The author's use of imaginative and sinuous poetic style demonstrates her creative ability in producing a wide range of rhetorical devices such as metaphor and metonymy. These devices hold similar underpinnings where the former involves mapping between concepts from different semantic fields while the latter maps two concepts within the same semantic field. These two processes are not merely linguistic facts but can reflect and influence our day-to-day lives. These rhetorical or poetic devices possess the ability to influence the structure of our thoughts as well as our attitudes (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). Metaphors and metonymies are also viewed as cognitive processes in language. The idea of cognition has been supported by several scholars which will form the methodological and analytical framework of this study.

Among these scholars is Lacan, a modern psychoanalytical scholar who theorises that all literary works are products of writers' unconscious mind depending heavily on two processes: metaphor and metonymy. Lacan views these two processes as signifiers in which meaning cannot be ignored without cognitive effort. On this basis, he postulates that a signifier may refer to multiple signified triggered by the deferral process which will be extensively elaborated in the methodology chapter. Gibbs and Tendahl (2006) view metaphorical referents as requiring more cognitive effects to

communicate since they fix referents and attribute properties to these referents. This notion of cognition corresponds with Lacanian notion of signifier functions. Furthermore, Lakoff and Johnson (2003) argue that most of the things we express in language are metaphorical. For these scholars, metaphors are not merely linguistic units used for embellishment but also involve cognition to decode and convey social, cultural and moral values. They add that metaphors are contextualised alongside metonymic relations. Therefore, metaphors and metonymies are not merely language processes but also constitute various thoughts as well as moral, social and cultural values.

The setting of Morrison's novels centres on the African-American experiences in a predominantly White society during the timeframe of the pre-civil war era in the 1880s to the conclusion of these wars in the 1960s. *Beloved* (Morrison, 1987) is written based on the real story of an enslaved African-American woman, Margaret Garner, who murdered her newborn daughter to protect her from slavery. On the other hand, *The Bluest Eye* (Morrison, 1970) and *Sula* (Morrison, 1973) discuss the status of African-Americans in the 1960s. Conner (2000) states that the works of Ellison depicting the ill effects of social issues faced by African-Americans receive many critiques in the 1960s. Ellison (1991) wrote a book about African-Americans, using various metaphorical tools that allows writers and readers to access African-Americans consciousness. Ellison (1991), for instance, makes reference to Blues as a kind of African-American music that originated in the South, reflecting their suffering and painful experiences. It serves as a cultural icon offering insights into African-American lives by reflecting corporal realities and moral truth. Such context is often reflected in the language use of her selected novels that addresses the characters' struggle to find their disconnected personal and cultural identity. These issues are manifested in Morrison's use of informal style and jargon of the African-Americans to visualize their colonial trauma and how they

negotiate the concept of identity, which are important themes in these novels. Spolsky (2010) theorizes that while the use of jargon functions to label new concepts, it also reinforces the tie between members of a group and widen the gap for outsiders, creating exclusivity. In this sense, language can be viewed as a significant representation of identity. For instance, *The Bluest Eye* (Morrison, 1970) visualises the nature of African-American community via language. For instance, Morrison uses a kind of language is characterized as strange, countering white tendency of writing. We notice, from very beginning of the novel, Morrison's writings is without punctuation marks. This might describe African-American unconscious which expose racial self- contempt. The image of African-Americans is also portrayed in the simplicity of the language used in her novel which may reflect the simplicity of her characters and their silenced voices; simultaneously, as one of Morrison's strengths, reflecting the difficulties they have faced throughout their lives. Morrison (1970) uses conversational and colloquial language to reflect the African-American culture, illustrating their pain that results in silence. As it will be observed in *The Bluest Eye*, there are various linguistic markers, such as simple sentences repeated specifically without punctuation, which are deemed significant in analysing Morrison's work from an iconic perspective since the similarity in texts may suggest similarity in meanings (Morrison, 1970).

These three novels were selected because they share the same central theme of racism towards African-Americans, elaborating different perspectives of racial issues among African-Americans. For instance, *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* discuss issues faced by African-American women in a predominantly White and patriarchal Black community while *Beloved* deals with a resurrected murdered child, alluding to the history of slavery during the pre-civil war era (Ahlawal, 2013). In a broader sense, Morrison sheds light on the complex structure of the African community and directly

tackle the effects of White monolithic cultural hegemony. Khan (2013) discusses the concept of racism involving the belief in racial differences that acts as a justification for non-equal members of the race. In *The Bluest Eye*, the protagonist, Pecola, is treated badly within her community because of her dark skin, while Maureen Peal, another African American, is treated by the same community as if she were superior to them because she is light-skinned. Tyson (2006) comments that *The Bluest Eye* is a novel that depicts the effects of internalized racism that often results in self-contempt on the part of Black characters and a projection of that self-hatred towards other members of their race. He adds that internalized racism often results in intra-racialism, which refers to the discrimination within the Black community against those with darker skin and who have more African features. In the novel, Pecola searches for love and acceptance in a world that denies and devalues the people of her race. The novel shows how racism can affect familial relationships, community interactions, traditions, perceptions, behaviour, selfhood, and worldviews. Khan (2013) states that in *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison created a racialized community in which the African-American community is seen as an effect of the oppression and racism their members were subjected to by the Whites and their protest against them. *The Bluest Eye* (Morrison, 1970) examines the tragic effects of White American beauty ideals on the development of the female identity (Khan, 2013). Similarly, *Sula* (Morrison, 1973) deals with race and womanhood, unveiling how White patriarchal society overpowers women's voices as well as that of men of the female protagonist's race simultaneously, prompting her to break social conventions by reacting against these racial persecutions. Nassief (2019) argues that *Sula's* rebellion against social behaviour is an attempt to prove her existence and that the situation of being neglected and isolated is because of her race. On the other hand, *Beloved* (Morrison, 1987) negotiates history as a narrative combining the concrete fact

of human existence as well as abstract human relationships. By embodying the past and the exclusion of African-Americans from history, Morrison creates metaphors which are very crucial to delineate the history of her people. The use of particular metaphors is significant to inform about history and how race matters in the writing of history" (Chang, 2004, p. 108). Thus, the selection of these three novels also significantly focuses on the persecution of women who are essential stakeholders in creating a prosperous and dignified community.

Morrison exploits language metaphorically in her text to illustrate the status of African-Americans under racism. The structure of her text brings to fore the gaps and fragments experienced by the Black community from being treated as invisible. Pambo and Diaye (2012) argues that in Morrison's text, the loss of signifiers participates in the process of metaphorication. The construction of the main 'ingredients' (metaphor and metonymy) in Morrison's text is significant, elevating her work and making them worth scrutinizing from an iconic perspective. These three novels are also selected because they represent the two phases of Morrison's writing process. Duvall (2000) states that Morrison started with biographical material and then shifted to a newer style of African-American historiography. *The Bluest Eye* and *Sula* stand for the first phase (biographical material) while *Beloved* reflects the second phase and is a representation of African-American historiography. Accounting for these different phases is necessary to analyse the significance of Morrison's literary products leading to a variety of iconized themes that result from various types of metaphors and metonymies.

1.4 Statement of the Problem

This study explores Morrison's literary texts from a linguistic perspective by focusing on the two processes, *metaphor* and *metonymy* which remains underexplored

in previous studies where it was observed that the term 'iconicity' in Morrison's three texts has not yet been fully addressed. Moreover, no study has been reported to merge the Lacanian theory alongside Lakoff and Johnson's (2003) classification of metaphor as a methodology to study Morrison's selected novels from an iconic perspective. Therefore, this current study investigates how Morrison's rhetorical devices are employed to convey iconic power to provide a fuller appreciation of her work by explaining how discursive forms interact with representational content in the selected novels. Research on *Beating Back the Past: Toni Morrison's Beloved* mentions that Morrison regards literature as another arbitrary discursive system that uses a narrative to construct and interpret the world (Lopez, 1999, p. 177). Therefore, the study also focuses on how Morrison uses discursive form and exploit language to represent African-American voices through her characters.

Iconicity is an important principle in human language upon the emergence of the modernist movement in arts and literature, which views language as a reality in its own right rather than a mere mirror of reality. Literary language does not merely refer to emotions and memories but is a tool to simulate memories of readers by reconnecting their experiences. Modernists view that the form of literary language is an object for humans to experience (Thornborrow & Shan, 1998, p. 170). This argument on the form of language adds weight to study language from an iconic perspective. Iconicity is also a remarkable aspect of rhetoric that writers employ artistically at the figurative levels of language to persuade readers about their message. Butler (2008) argues that the use of rhetoric is important to inform, persuade and produce knowledge. Iconicity is a phenomenon in textual rhetoric when there is a sense of sameness between the referent and the object. It is observed that iconicity is achieved when textual form and content are combined, creating texts with iconic dimensions. Leff and Sachs (1990) argue that

within rhetorical works, iconicity is yielded when discursive form interacts with representational content where the work is going to focus on two rhetorical elements leading to iconicity in the literary text.

In cognitive linguistics, iconicity is crucial especially concerning the rhetorical figures they contain. One of the prominent scholars who studied iconicity is Hiraga (1994) who classifies icons into three types: image, diagram and metaphor. The image imitates the code by sharing some of its qualities while the diagram shows an analogy between two structures, highlighting the relational analogy between two structures. On the other hand, the metaphor suggests a similarity by associating two or more entities. Hiraga's work is inspired by the Peircean theory who identify sign as an icon, index and symbol. The first two types, icon and index, do not possess arbitrary nature and are motivated by signified while the symbol is fully arbitrary and unmotivated.

Morrison's style reinforces her stories with great strength and texture by teasing apart the socio-cultural and socio-economic independence of African-Americans. Morrison's style can be seen as "combining a modernist style with diverse literary traditions in a way that is both acutely culturally specific and universally competing" (Edward, 2010, p. 2). Moreover, Morrison's works significantly defy the confinements of literary traditions based on particular ideological norms dominated by Western authorities in elevating African-American voices. This study investigates the simplicity of Morrison's simple style in embedding the complex issues of her race and how her works are considered a representation of iconicity. Hence, this study may also defy some of the many socio-cultural intricacies, including segregation, persecution, and systematic discrimination that are represented via metaphorical manifestations and metonymic relations.

The study is an attempt to examine the concept of iconicity as a rhetorical study in Morrison's selected novels, *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula* and *Beloved*. Many studies have been written about these three novels concerning feminist elements of African-American, metaphor, Morrison's language from post-structuralism view and Morrison's themes and folklore. However, to date, the application of iconicity studied across Morrison's three texts has been left untouched. This evidence will be articulated as a gap in literature review section in which there are few studied on iconicity of literature but none of them has explored Morrison's three novels from iconic perspective using metaphor and metonymy as various sources of iconicities. On this basis, the current study explores the three novels from an iconic dimension by capitalizing on Hiraga's model as a frame of analysis, viewing texts as a semiotic system as signs can gain iconic power. Literary text can be considered *mimesis* or imitation, which may refer to the new perspectives of human experiences. It is theorized that "a code is that imitates, in its signals or textual forms, the meanings that they represent" (Leech & Short, 1981, p. 233). For instance, Morrison uses non-standardized English by omitting auxiliaries such as "why don't it come?; You forgetting how little it is" which represent the community. The reduplications and repetitions in these conversations can also reinforce the notion of imitation that may result in semantic iconicity. Thus, metaphor and metonymy are very significant linguistic tool iconically reflecting the issues of African- Americans.

1.5 Research Objectives

In the current study, the following research objectives were outlined:

- 1- To explore how literary texts consisting of various semiotic systems suggest iconic notes within the principle of imitation.

- 2- To examine how metaphor and metonymy enact iconic interpretations of Morrison's novels.
- 3- To explain how iconicity explains the links between rhetoric and socio-cultural issues in Morrison's texts.

1.6 Research Questions

The study attempts to answer the following questions:

- 1- How literary texts consisting of various semiotic systems convey iconic perspectives within the principle of imitation.
- 2- How do the rhetorical figures (metaphor and metonymy) enact iconic interpretations in selected novels?
- 3- How does iconicity explain the links between rhetoric and socio-cultural issues in the selected texts?

1.7 Significance of the Study

The significance of the current study lies in the exploration of the literary text as a sign where imagination and experiences can be represented through textual construction accounting for iconic and indexical dimensions. The principle of chronological sequencing serves to persuade the case of syntactic iconicity impacting the socio-cultural manifestations that reveal strong and straightforward feelings toward widespread problems such as segregation, persecution and injustice.

Thus, this study is an invitation to understand the complex process of reading literary text from a non-traditional perspective, assuming that language has an iconic nature. In iconicity, a writer expresses thoughts and ideas from different semiotic fields,

yielding a manipulative tone at the semantic and syntactic levels to create an analogy between signs and concepts. By doing so, writers aim to enhance the interpretational perspective of literary text by exploring how it is structured. Morrison's novels may offer an exploration beyond the conscious world, bound by social, cultural and ideological conventions, allowing the study to contribute to the analysis of Morrison's text in an area that has not been researched widely by offering a diverse understanding of how Morrison utilises language to convey her messages about African-Americans social and cultural realities.

Morrison's works are considered significant on an artistic, historical, and political level where the abundant use of metaphorical expressions prompts multi-levelled and in-depth interpretations concerning tropes related to racism and discrimination. Her style is a rejection of the binary opposition of Western culture, where, for instance, in *Sula*, the protagonist 'Sula' is rejected by the White community because of her race and also rejected by her community since she defies the norms and the conventions. Morrison's characters are constructed metaphorically to convey messages concerning African-Americans' persecution. Rigney (1991) theorises that Morrison guides readers through a metaphorical jungle as an attempt to visualise the marginalisation of the people of her race. She uses language to create literature that is politically oriented in the subject matter and form held by the African-Americans. Drawing on Peirce's model, Hiraga (1994) mentions that metaphor can entail iconicity because both imply similarities between two entities.

The study of Morrison's novels from iconic angle is very significant, not solely investigate the way Morrison's language is constructed but it also depends on how her discursive text reflects multi-meanings about socio- cultural and socio- economic realities. Moreover, Morrison's use of language to represent people of her race is very

essential. In a broader sense, the linguistic choices are an attempt to establish a kind of a tendency counter to a white tendency. Such a style in writing may occur unconsciously in reaction to traumas experienced by African-Americans. So, her texts are noteworthy to be discussed from the iconic dimension. Thus, in Morrison's texts, the metaphorical construction inspires readers to explore her novels from the iconic perspective to understand the context surrounding African-Americans, giving fuller interpretation about African-Americans' socio-cultural and socio-economic issues.

1.8 Limitations of the Study

The research focuses on one of the resilient concepts in rhetoric, which is *Iconicity* as illustrated in Morrison's selected novels *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula* and *Beloved*. It focuses on two processes in cognitive linguistics, *metaphor* and *metonymy*, through exploring how these figures function in the selected texts to render iconic interpretations or multi-levelled meanings. The study will shed light on iconic values of Morrison's fiction by giving an insight about how text imitates meanings. There are a few limitations in the current study. Since this study focuses on iconicity, the phonetic and phonological constructions to deliver iconic notes were not focused upon in the current study as it is not salient in Morrison's work. Additionally, this study will not include the perspective of traditional psychoanalysis which centres on human behaviour and family conflicts. However, it does adopt the Lacanian non-traditional psychoanalysis where the importance of texts in displaying family conflicts in the early stages of adulthood is highlighted. While this study excludes African-American feminism, it will project African-American psyche under the pressure of White authority and a patriarchal society. This study also does not cover hybridity since this area is well-researched whereby Fraile (2003) wrote about "*Hybridity: the 'City' upon a Hill*" in Toni

Morrison's Paradise" debating post-colonial and individual identities. Furthermore, Gema (2011) wrote "*Writing Hybridity: Identity, Dialogic and Women's Narratives in the Americas*" discussing the concept of hybridity in Morrison's texts.

1.9 Definitions of Terms

Arbitrariness: It is a term in linguistics in which the natural relationship between signifier and signified is absent depending on conventions (Denton, 2007).

Cognitive linguistics: It is an interdisciplinary field studying language and is used to classify and interpret the world around us by merging mind and socio-cultural experiences (Schenkelberg, 2004).

Discursive text: In literature, discursive style means that a writer combines several ideas and facts, whether relevant or not to his/ her work to achieve certain ends (Cited in Verdonk, 2002).

Intertextuality: The term is coined by Kristeva in 1969 who argues that there no text is free of other texts. The term functions as a significant 'Frame of Reference' which facilitate the interpretation of texts (Cited in Allen, 2000).

Literary imitation: In rhetoric, it is a characteristic of the literature in which a text imitates another text by style, using certain symbols or a way of writing. It can be interrelated with the term 'intertextuality' (Bogue, 1991).

Motivation: The term is associated with the works of Peirce and Saussure. It describes the natural relationship between signs or signifiers and signified. This relationship is achieved when two or more regions of the brain become activated in processing information (Kecskes, 2013).

Metaphonymy: In figurative language, particular linguistic expressions contain both metaphor and metonymy simultaneously (Dirven & Porings, 2009).

Rhetoric: In modern linguistics, rhetoric concerns the relationship between code and coded, focusing on the properties of literary expressions (Pietarinen, (2008).

Racism: The term used to magnify the difference between White people and Black people in Europe and the United States where the White race is superior to the Black race in terms of biological and socio-cultural qualities (Seraman, 2013).

Semiotics: It refers to the signalling system. It studies signs and their meaning within a particular sign system (Peeters, 2019).

Semiotic Square: It is associated with the work of Greimas who is affiliated with the field of narrative semiotics. This square refers to a semantic model of narrative with deep and surface level meanings, involving complex semantic features (Hebert, 2006).

Unconscious: This is defined as stored thoughts, emotional impulses, memories away from the reach of conscious awareness (Khan, 2014).

1.10 Overview of the Dissertation

The dissertation consists of six chapters, Chapter One introduces the background of the study, objectives, significance, and limitations of the study. Chapter Two reviews past literature by exploring previous studies on Morrison's three texts and explaining the stylistic elements that serve as tools to analyse Morrison's three texts. Chapter Three sheds light on the contextualization of Morrison's three texts, offering the context on how Toni Morrison' works have flourished under circumstances of slavery, civil war, Great Depression and women's rights while Chapter Four outlines the methodology of

the study. Chapter Five elaborates on the findings, elaborating on how metaphors and metonymies create a text with discursive features, resulting in iconic interpretations. The chapter discusses discursiveness as a product of using typology, myths, and colours as demonstrated in Morrison's text which are examples of iconicity. Moreover, this chapter also elaborates how different types of metaphors (structural, ontological and orientational), theorised by Lakoff and Johnson (2003), enact particular types of iconicities (magic, diagrammatic, and metaphoric). Finally, Chapter Six recapitulate the findings of previous chapters, highlighting the importance of the study and providing recommendations for future studies simultaneously concluding the dissertation.

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