



Effects of Trauma on Language: A Psycholinguistic Analysis of “Terrorist” by John Updike

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Abstract- The current research is a psycholinguistic analysis of Updike’s novel “*Terrorist*” (2006): a novel written in backdrop of Islamophobia. Trauma is a tense psychological state affecting different functions of human body including language reception and language production. A person experiencing blue thoughts and suicidal orientation should be presented with a different language as compared with a normal human being. The premise behind this research is to evaluate the impacts of traumatic conditions on the language of the protagonist and its depiction by the novelist. To set a comparative psycholinguistic analysis of the novel, the researchers apportioned the novel in three phases: Pre-trauma phase, trauma phase and post-trauma phase of Ahmad’s life as depicted in the novel. We applied theoretical framework of Cathy Caruth (1996) which accentuates the impacts of trauma on human language. Although, Trauma is the subject matter of psychology but the analysis of language under traumatic conditions builds an interdisciplinary relation between language, literature and psychology. Through textual analysis of the selected texts the researchers found the novel as a fit trauma narrative and discovered the utilization of the devices as suggested by Cathy Caruth (1996) like traumatic figurative language.

Key Words: Psycholinguistic Analysis, Trauma Theory, Traumatic Experience, Pre and Post-Trauma Phases.

I. INTRODUCTION

Trauma is an existing pervasive psychological state of a person. Trauma as a mental state has been commonly used since 1980’s when trauma was diagnosed as an ailment for which a proper medical treatment was required. Generally Trauma is known as a reaction to an intensely troublesome event that governs an individual’s ability to cope with it by generating helplessness in him/her. It also declines the sense of self and the capacity to detect full range of emotions and experiences in its victim. American Psychiatric Association (2005) has defined trauma as “the experience of an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury; threat to one’s physical integrity, witnessing an event that involves the above experience, learning about unexpected or violent death, serious harm, or threat of death, or injury experienced by a family member or close associate” (p. 463).

Trauma is the subject matter of psychology but literature is the tool addressing human experiences in different forms and natures. In this paper, we have collected textual data form an American novel *Terrorist*; a novel which has been written in the backdrop of 9/11 incident in America. The plot of the novel spins round the life of a Muslim named Ahmad who is victim of inferiority complex caused by his family issues and poor brought up. Ahmad is an 18 years old confused feral child, having mixed racial parentage and suffering from the negligence of his parents and consequently withdrawing from his classmates and the rest of the American society . Ahmad is experiencing a tense psychological state of affairs stimulated by diverse psychosocial factors e.g. in school Ahmad is a nonconformist student while after school hours he is led by a local masjid imam who has extreme interpretations of the society and also inculcates the same in Ahmad. Ahmad is a victim of dual mentality and is experiencing dilemma analogues to Shakespeare’s Hamlet as to be or not to be because he thinks suicidal attack as a terminal solution and wants to get free from this trauma by blasting himself and having a martyrdom.

Keeping in mind the plot setting of the novel, the researchers evaluated the impacts of traumatic conditions on the language of the character in light of Cathy Caruth (1996) perspectives who propounds the impacts of trauma on human language. To check the elements of trauma and its impacts on the language of the character, we collected textual data and carried out its psycholinguistic analysis. This research paper addresses the following questions:

1. How far is the Updike’s “*Terrorist*” a trauma narrative?
2. How does the author use the variant lexis and other linguistic devices to present the traumatic theme?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Initially, the term “trauma” was restricted to medicine and psychotherapy but today it is used in everyday language, for any sort of painful and frustrating experience. Trauma studies started in 1860’s when the clinicians analyzed the prolonged and unusual reaction of the victims of the railway accidents extending beyond their physical injuries. In 1880’s the clinicians psychologically examined those women who showed odd behavior for no apparent reason (Showalter, 1985, p.130). Felman and Laub’s “*Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature*” (1991) dealt with trauma in Holocaust literature. Herman in “*Trauma and Recovery*” (1992) studied the forgotten history of psychological trauma and carefully examined the effect of trauma on human psyche. She also investigated various forms of trauma originating from incest, rape and the domains which were unexplored before 1970. In “*Unclaimed Experience*” (1996) Caruth argued that a traumatic experience repeats itself, exactly and constantly, through the unconscious acts of the survivor and against his will. Her trauma theory submits the impacts of trauma on the linguistic features like grammar and lexis. Horvitz, Whitehead and Vickroy identified some common features of a trauma narrative in her book “*Trauma and survival in Contemporary Fiction*” (2002) and defined trauma narratives as “fictional narratives that help readers to access traumatic experience”. Leys (2000) and Luckhurst (2008) tried to explain trauma process with its historical development. Balaev (2008) attempted to define the “*trauma novel*” as a literary work that conveys a sense of intense fear or extreme loss on individual or collective level (p.150). Visser (2011) established a link between trauma theory and the postcolonial literary studies. He has explored the core concepts and the tenets of trauma theory (p.271). Barker (2012) studied traumatic figurative language in multicultural American poetry in order to collect the common elements across cultures centered in America. He presented an in-depth analysis of the language of trauma inscribed in the poetry through some elements of trauma like unhomeliness, abjection, isolation and traumatic figurative language (p.3). Douglass (2016) has explored the influence of trauma in the language and the grammar of “*The Unnamable*” by Samuel Beckett (p.1). Varma (2018) has observed trauma in Kashmir and mentioned its effects on Kashmiris’ language in her research. Liebig (2016) has made a significant contribution in the language of trauma. Azmi (2018) has measured trauma in the poems: “*August 6th*” by Sankichi Toge, “*Home Burial*” by Robert Frost and “*Still rise*” by Maya Angelou. This measurement is done through the traumatic figurative language used by the selected poets. Dalley (2013) has employed trauma as a paradigm to interpret Nigerian civil war literature by analyzing Chris Abani’s “*Song for Night*” (2007).

The formal qualities of the novel, repetition, temporal disjunction, and communicative ambivalence signify an inter-textual engagement with trauma theory (Dalley, 2013, p.447). He explored the defining symptoms of trauma to be the breakdown of linear temporality, as subjects enter a repetition compulsion and lose their ability to distinguish past from present. Bağlama (2019) studied the sufferings of refugees’ through the linguistics perspective as represented in the modern literary fiction “*Exit West*” by Mohsin Hamid (p. 149).

This research is a novel contribution in trauma literature with reference to Updike’s “*Terrorist*” (2006). In earlier studies the researcher like Sadoon and Othman (2019) have studied Updike’s “*Terrorist*” from an oriental perspective through the application of three pertinent concepts of self-other relationship, the concept of hegemony and the concept of Islamophobia (pg.1552). Aziz (2015) has evaluated the “*Terrorist*” through the lens of imaginary and symbolic identification by the theory of representation in order to present the image of American Muslims, their identification and representation. She has written against the stereotypical image of Muslims (pg.19). M Alosman, Raihanah M.M. and Suliza Hashim (2018) have studied “*Terrorist*” by presenting Muslim other in America as an “imperfect version of the perfect non-Muslim America” (2018, pg.69). Awan (2010) has examined the stereotypical representation of Islam and its followers in 9/11 American cultural production in some pieces of literary fiction particularly “*Terrorist*”. He has noticed that Updike has given misrepresentation of Islam and Quran in “*Terrorist*” as Ahmad gets inspiration for his suicidal terroristic attack from Quran and the teachings of the imam at his mosque. The present research focuses on the depiction of trauma, and its effects on language in various psychological or mental states as this study explores the ways in which the language of Ahmad gets effected by his traumatic experiences.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is purely a qualitative research where we carried out textual analysis and interpretations to find out impacts of trauma on the language of the principal character Ahmad. We collected textual data through close reading techniques and analyzed data by applying Catherine Belsey (2005) "Textual Analysis" method. Belsey asserted that in order to interpret a text some extra textual knowledge is required.

IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In her book *"Unclaimed Experience"* Caruth describes trauma as "an overwhelming experience of a sudden or a catastrophic event in which the response to an event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other uncontrolled phenomenon" (Caruth, 1996, p.11). Trauma occurs in response to some "unexpected or overwhelming violent events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena" (p. 91). She has studied the traumatized individual's psyche and discovered that trauma is not directly perceived by the survivor but is realized by the exposure of some other traumatic events later on. This exposure generates repetition as the person rethinks about his own traumatic experience that is the basic characteristic of trauma theory. She believes that flashbacks are the repetition of trauma which re-traumatize a person. Caruth had attempted to read trauma and traumatic experience in literature by presenting vocabulary that shapes trauma. According to Caruth, the level of trauma depends on the coherence of the narration. One of the basic effects of trauma on the narration is the fragmentation which causes "destabilization of the self" and is "read as a metaphor by a trauma theorist" (Balaev, 2008, p.151). She has claimed that the impact of trauma is never captured by a direct reference. It is paradoxically literature's very indirectness, gaps in speech, its figurative language, and linguistic particularities which transmit the force of a traumatic history. The theory suggests the effects of trauma on the victim's language in the form of repetition, long sentences, syntactic fragmentation, punctuation or grammatical errors and through traumatic figurative language.

V. DATA ANALYSIS

The researchers carried out textual analysis of 50 textual samples excerpts from Updike's novel *"Terrorist"*. The rationale behind sampling was to select those samples of the novel in which the protagonist is experiencing severe psychological traumatic conditions. Keeping in mind the plot of the novel, the researchers apportioned the sample in three phases: Pre-trauma phase that is basically the make-up state of Ahmad mind when he is not very much stressed. During this phase of Ahmad life he is inspired by the local imam and intends to follow the latter's instructions. This phase is the breeding phase of his psyche when new ideas are engendering his old ideas. This phase covers the life span of Ahmad from his early school age, sowing stage when hatred against the people is perpetrating in his brain due to satiric criticism of his school mates. This phase is followed by the topping phase of his psyche when he is overridden by stringent mental conditions. This phase has been termed as Trauma phase which covers the life events of Ahmad life when he is experiencing blue thoughts and planning to put his life to an end by blasting a bomb in retaliation to kill western "infidels" & "Kafirs" whom he thinks as the enemies of Muslims and his God. This phase of the novel is the very crucial part of the novel full with suspense and horror. The post-trauma phase (recovery phase) starts when he quits his suicidal plan and actually returns to God by not harming innocent Americans who have done nothing wrong to him and his religion. It represents his journey from non-being to being. The researchers have evaluated the novel in light of Caruth Cathy (1996) framework that states as how trauma affects the human language and how should it be presented in literary texts.

According to Balaev's (2008) definition of "trauma novel"; a trauma novel delivers a sense of extreme fear and intense loss either on individual or at collective level. Ahmad's sufferings start from his childhood when he is trying to find his self-identity because as being of a mixed racial parentage. He fails to adjust with his American classmates and teachers. He suffers from the father's absence and mother's negligence. The scenario of fear prevails in the novel when Updike writes about Ahmad's commitment to his suicidal plan and his religious extremism that compels him to take revenge from thousands of innocent western "infidels". Ahmad's assertion that "four tons of explosives would slay and inconvenience many unbelievers" (p.212) arouses the element of fear in his Counselor, Jack as well as in the readers of the selected novel. Moreover, Ahmad is seen as losing his linguistic pattern due to his exposure to trauma. The researchers found that Updike has used some words and sentences which fulfill the requirement for the novel to be a trauma narrative. For example: "Dead-eyed", "killer gestures", "careless scornful laughs"

(Updike,2006, p.4), merciless blind atoms”, “Hell’s boilers” (p.5), “torments in the furnaces of Jahannam”, “crushing fire”, “gnawing” (p.6), “irresistible onrushing” (p.7), “wounds” (p.8) are the instances of trauma lexis used in Updike’s “*Terrorist*”.

The subsequent tables show how the language has been used by the author in three different phases:

Table 1. **Repetition** as an Effect of Trauma on Ahmad’s Language

Pre-trauma Phase	Trauma Phase	Post-trauma Phase
<p>“Why? Why should I, Joryleen?” (Updike, 2006, p.8)</p> <p>“Tylenol, Tylenol. How close are you, may I ask....?” (p.49)”</p>	<p>They tell us, they tell us that God loosed flocks of birds, hurling them against stones of baked clay ...” (p.76).</p> <p>“But, but Paradise must be real...” (p.78).</p>	<p>No repetition found during this phase as the influence of trauma on Ahmad’s language is very much less or almost disappeared.</p>

Repetition compulsion is a major effect that trauma leaves on the language of its victim. The trauma experienced by Ahmad (either it be very mild or intense) affects his lexical selection. Table (4.1) shows repetition in Ahmad’s speeches caused by the trauma. The phrases, “why”, “Tylenol”, “they tell us” and “but” are repeated by Ahmad in his pre-trauma and trauma phase which reflects that trauma (both, at its initial stage or at intense level) has left repetitive effects on his linguistic selection. While in the post-trauma phase no repetition is seen as the author hasn’t given much depiction of Ahmad’s narration during his post-trauma phase.

Table 2. **Unspeakability** as an Outcome of Trauma on Ahmad’s Linguistic Pattern

Pre-Trauma phase	Trauma phase	Post-Trauma phase
<p>“His name was—is; I very much feel he is still alive—Omar Ashmawy, and hers is Teresa ...” (p.26)</p>	<p>“Sir, you say ‘supposedly... ‘Have you not seen?’—as if the Prophet...” (p.75)</p> <p>“I still hold to the Straight Path; Islam is still my comfort and guide. But —” (p.163)</p>	<p>As trauma generates unspeakability so after Ahmad’s having experienced trauma, he is not seen much communicating or is seen silent most of the time.</p>

Caruth (1996) asserted that the use of long and fragmented sentences in a narration manifests trauma suffered by the speaker which often leads to unspeakability. The researcher has explored this feature of trauma theory in the dialect of Ahmad. When Ahmad introduces himself to his guidance counselor and argues with his imam, his mild and severe traumatic experiences are seen to be influencing his language as repeated pauses are seen in his dialect during pre-trauma and trauma phases (as depicted in table 4.2).

Table 3. **Latency or delay**, as an Influence of Trauma on Ahmad’s Dialect

Pre-Trauma phase	Trauma phase	Post-Trauma Phase
<p>“He—” “His name was—</p>	<p>“But ignorance can also kill. If I am to</p>	<p>Ahmad is not seen much</p>

is; I very much feel he is still alive—Omar Ashmawy..." (p.25-26).	deliver, I should know what I am delivering. Where does the money come from?" "And what are the recipients to do with these funds?" (p.142-143)	speaking after his having survived from severe trauma.
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Ahmad experiences latency in recalling things as shown in table (4.3). He memorizes the image of his absent father during his pre-trauma phase which hinders the natural fluency and linearity in his speech that serves as a fit example of an effect of trauma on the linguistic standard of Ahmad. After having realized the uniqueness of the mysterious nature of his job at Excellency, Ahmad consciously questions his co-conspirator, Charlie about the material he is delivering and the purpose behind it.

Table 4. **Extensive use of Comma**, as an Indicator of Ahmad’s having Encountered Trauma

Pre-Trauma phase	Trauma phase	Post-Trauma phase
"I would like, someday, to find him. Not to press any claim, or to impose any guilt, but simply to talk with him, as two Muslim men would talk" (p.27).	"Yeah, I know, but it’s interesting, it turns out. I wanted to learn it all, while I’m at It". (P.57). "Mom, I’m not gay, if that’s what you’re implying" (p.104). "Oh, no, sir, it does not" (p.78).	No extensive use of comma is explored in this phase of Ahmad’s life.

Although in the pre-trauma phase of Ahmad he uses commas in his speech but in trauma phase the researcher has discovered an excessive use of comma. These speeches of Ahmad (as given in table 4.4) show his extensive use (misuse) of comma which works as a clue for the researcher to know that Ahmad has encountered trauma which effects his linguistic standard. When Ahmad says "Mom. I’m not gay..." (p.104) he makes incorrect use of punctuation marks as comma is used at the completion of a sentence or question rather than joining some similar items.

Table 5. **Long and Fragmented Sentences**, in Ahmad’s Language Patterns

Pre-Trauma phase	Trauma phase	Post-Trauma Phase
"I attend Central High. I am on the soccer team in the fall—indeed, I scored five goals this past season, one a penalty shot—and do track in the spring. For spending money, and to help out my mother—the freckle-faced mick, as you call her—" (p.50). "I am the product of a white American mother and an Egyptian" (p.25). "My father well knew that" (p.26).	"My mother—she has always supported herself" (p.171). "Mother—I wanted to thank you, for putting up with me all these years" (p.173). "Sir, are you suggesting that the version available to us..." (p.76) "Now that I work, I neglect the	"I don’t want to go back into any tunnel with you and this thing, thanks" (p.223). "We’ll take the George Washington Bridge" (p.22)

"As the two of you evidently call her....." (p.50)	Qur'an" (p.167).	
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During pre-trauma phase Ahmad's language is influenced by the mild traumatic experience that are witnessed if not all the time then found rarely. Fragmentation in a narration is the illustration of trauma suffered by the narrator which often leads to un-speakability generated by trauma. The extensive use of "em dash" (—) shows the fragmentation in Ahmad's language which reflects the broken or fragmented self of Ahmad after his having experienced intense trauma in his life specifically the trauma of having survived from a suicidal attempt. The effect of Ahmad's trauma is also discovered in the form of long and complex. Ahmad's traumatic experiences lead him to speak in long sentences as he tells Levy: "My father well knew that marrying an American citizen....." and as is obvious from table (4.5).

Table 5. **Phonological Contraction**, Caused by Ahmad's Traumatic Situations

Pre-Trauma Phase	Trauma Phase	Post-Trauma Phase
"Now you have made me sad, Joryleen, "If you don't take your religion seriously, you shouldn't go" (p.9).	"They're Lebanese. Charlie's been raised pure American. He's not exactly my boss, he's the son of the owner, and we deliver furniture in a truck together" (p.157).	"I don't want to go back into any tunnel with you and this thing, thanks. We'll take the George Washington Bridge (p.223).

Phonological Contraction is one of the basic indications of trauma in a narration. And this element is witnessed in all the three phases of Ahmad's life which shows the influence of trauma on Ahmad's narration.

Updike's use of Figurative Language to deal with trauma

To Caruth (1996), trauma in a write-up, is measured through the author's depiction of it by the use of figurative language. As trauma is too violent to be discussed or dealt with directly that's why many authors have used trauma lexis and figurative language to depict trauma in their writings.

Technique of Flashback

In "Terrorist" (2006), Updike has used the technique of flashback that allows the researcher to measure trauma and its impacts on the language of its characters. Ahmad tells Levy about his parentage he says: "I am the product of a white American mother and an Egyptian exchange student; they met while both studied They married well before I was born...." (p.25-26) which gives the depiction of the past

happenings which serves as a hint to the researcher that the author has used the device of flashback to give a look back to the past.

Use of Metaphor

While giving the physical description of Ahmad, Updike has used the tool of metaphor as he writes "the boy blinks and nods. His eyes seem round black lamps above the stark white shirt; they burn into Levy's memory and return at times like afterimages of the sun at sunset" (p.31). Ahmad says "what are we? Smelly animals, really, with a little bunch of animal needs, and shorter lives than turtles." (p.163) which shows Updike's use of metaphor to deal with Ahmad's trauma as he calls himself and the people around to be the smelly animals.

Simile

The author has also used the device of simile while explaining the scenario prevalent in Joryleen's church. Ahmad takes the setting of the church to be like a movie theatre rather than a holy place as: "The receding rows of seated and sexually mixed people, and the stagy confused area grimy triple window showing a pigeon about to alight all seem to Ahmad more like a movie theatre before the movie starts than a

holy mosque" (p.36). Moreover, Ahmad takes Joryleen's teeth to be like "Half-buried pearls which reflects the use of simile made by Updike in *"Terrorist"*.

Use of Irony

Updike has used the device of irony to depict trauma in the selected novel. The imam says to Ahmad: "I trust you will not be returning to the kafir church in the center of town." While Ahmad has already indulged himself in western ways as he has visited the church and spent some private hours with Joryleen, the girl for whom he retains sexual impulses.

VI. DISCUSSION

The present study conforms to the previous researches done by Barker (2012), Douglass (2016), Varma (2018), and Isaksen and Vejling (2018). Barker (2012) studied traumatic figurative language in multicultural American poetry by presenting an in-depth linguistic analysis of trauma in poetry and found elements of repetition. Douglass' (2016) study is very much similar to our research as she too has investigated the signs of trauma in the language and the grammar of a literary fiction by Samuel Beckett named as *"The Unnamable"* (1953) but we explored modern and contemporaries fiction by evaluating the impacts of Updike's *"Terrorist"* (2006). Varma (2018) has observed trauma in Kashmir and has mentioned the impacts of trauma on Kashmiris' language in her research. She has diagnosed trauma and its impacts on her clinical practices. Isaksen and Vejling (2018) have worked on the trauma of refugees in contemporary literature and have found the loss of language as the outcome of trauma suffered by refugees. Whereas, the researchers has dealt with the trauma of the minority group (Muslim) in America by evaluating trauma and its influence on the language used during different phases of the victim's life.

VII. CONCLUSION

Current research was conducted in backdrop of Islamophobia and the consequent post 9/11 written literature. Research was in context of psycholinguistic analysis of the protagonist who plans to blow himself to retaliate from the people whom he thinks infidels and gives no right to live. This research spins round the fictional life of the principal character who has suffered discrimination from his early childhood. In school he is not well treated by his fellows on the racial reasons. In his family life he is victim of pent up feelings and loss of identity due to his hybrid parents. His meeting with a Muslim cleric changes the current of his life and he is motivated for a suicidal attack. Purpose of this research was purely scientific aiming to evaluate the impacts of traumatic conditions on the language of the victim because with reference to the study of psychology a major shift occurs on the language when a person is experiencing blue thoughts. We used Cathy Caruth (1996) framework to analyze the impacts of trauma on the language of the character. We collected data through close reading techniques and further divided collected textual data in further three categories: pre-trauma, trauma and post trauma phases. Through analysis of the textual samples the researchers found a clear impact of trauma on the language of the selected character and thus we conclude that Updike has artistically handled the subject matter and the language used changes its patterns with changing psychological perspectives of the principal character. This research concludes that Updike's *"Terrorist"* is a trauma novel. The basic aim of the current research was to investigate the impacts of trauma on human language and its depiction in the selected literary work. By using the Cathy Caruth theoretical framework, the researchers found a significant impacts of trauma on the language of the protagonist and found a dexterous use of language by the author while handling with the theme of trauma. The researcher has discovered repetition, sentence fragmentation, unspeakability, latency, irregular use of punctuation marks and sentence structure as some influences which trauma leaves on the linguistic pattern of its victim, Ahmad.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

This research was in backdrop of the language used by the selected author with reference to the selected novel. However, the vista of research can be expanded by using other genres of literature to have interdisciplinary ventures like this. The current study can be used for the medical students of psychology and psychiatry to teach them how trauma affects human language and how can we use these techniques in real life settings.

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