

# Motivation of Language in Literary Text: A Study of Toni Morrison's Sula

Mohammad Muzhafar Bin Idrus, Mehdi Abbass Mohsin

**Abstract:** *The current study aims to clarify the concept of motivation in literary language applied on one of the prominent novels in African- American literature which is Morrison's Sula. Motivation is considered as one of the prominent principles in language system in which there is a similarity between form and concept. The study of the concept has become significant after the emergence of modernist in arts and literature whereas prior to that, motivation was considered as salient characteristic of poetic language only. The problem of the study will explain how Morrison's text constructed to decline from the concept of arbitrariness and to meet the concept of motivation. By achieving the objective of the research, the study will focus on two important tropes which are metaphor and metonymy and how they co-occur in literary text to serve as ingredients of motivated language. After taking a journey in the analysis of Morrison's Sula, the research will come up with some recommendations for further studies.*

**Index Terms:** Metaphor, Metonymy, Motivation.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Sula is Morrison's second work which was published in 1973. It is noticed that Sula is projected as independent character lives in Medallion predominantly inhabited by African- American people. It envisions the image of African-American female from non- traditional perspective, putting it differently, her behavior is a revolt against orthodox traditions set up by her community. Rigney [1] argues that Morrison's style is considered as a rejection to binary oppositions of Western culture. The central theme in Morrison's Sula is the relationship between her and her friend Nel and the concept of death which both are expressed metaphorically throughout the novel. Morrison's text is a fertile source to meet with the requirement of solving the research problem because the construction of her works renders a jungle of metaphorical expressions which challenges the process of interpretation. That leads to create motivating language. ", all of Morrison's works, subvert concepts of textual unity and defies totalized interpretation" (Ibid).

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## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Semiotics:

Semiotics is an important term referring to how communication systems work whether written or spoken. Its pioneers Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Peirce. Semiotics studies the sign as element of the signifying system. It exists when it is recognized as a signifier by all members of linguistic community [2]. It concerns with signaling system in language, and exploring the process of communication in language in which meaning can be obtained in the structure; in a broader sense, it concerns with how sign system functions in a community. It also studies the relationship between signs and the things to which they refer. Signs are considered as communicative instrument and can be classified into verbal and non- verbal; the former are expressed as a combination of sounds organized according to certain rules enacted by phonologists. The latter are expressed as paralinguistic signs such as motions and gestures. It is thought that signs connect between the mind of a person and objects. Peirce defines it as "... something which stands to somebody for something in the same respect or capacity" (Buchler, 1958). Sign consists of signifiers used as a referent and signified as objects in the world. Tyson [3]elaborates that according to semiotics signs= signifier+ signified. People uses signs to refer to various things around them and make sense of the world. Every meaning – making practice make use of two elements: a signifier and a signified [4]. The relationship between signifier and the signified is described by modern linguists as not natural, but arbitrary as noticed by Saussure. The relationship between signifier and signified, Saussure observed, is arbitrary (3). That means the sound of words do not give any mental picture about objects to which they refer .

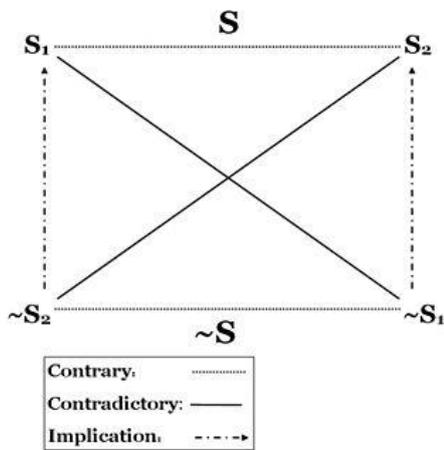
Greimas has developed a structure of semiotic square in narrative which provides an interpretational insight of literary text by analyzing the relationships among its signifiers. It has taken a different route in the explanation of language system. The square explains the overlapping of several semantic levels. The visual manifestation of the square clarifies that there is vertical relationship between S1 and S2; and horizontal relationship between S and ~ S. These relationships can be exploited in literary works and supports the notion that meaning is embedded in these relationships not in sole signifier. Lacan states "no meaning is sustained by anything other than reference to another meaning" [5].

The complexity of signifier which does not merely indicate what is signified; however, it also indicates to opposite of what signified. The square shown below refers to three kinds



of relations: contradiction, relation and contradictories. It marks off the oppositional logic that is at the core of narrative progression and semantic, thematic, or symbolic content [6].

Greimas Semiotic Square



Wales, (7)

Greimas's view point does not contradict the notion of arbitrariness between the signifier and signified. He gives Saussure's theory an explanation deeper than what it seems to be; in which the arbitrary nature may be attributed to sign itself rather than relationship only. Putting it differently, sign might gain motivated properties because it is inclined from the concept of arbitrariness. Saussure himself applies the concept of arbitrariness not to the signifier alone but also to the sign as an inseparable whole. The Saussurean notion in its original version does not contradict motivated sign formation [8]. The term of arbitrariness expressed by Saussurean theory interpreted by Greimas's square from non-traditional perspective in which he expresses the sign itself has arbitrary nature with other signs but they do not have arbitrary relationship with what they refer. Semiotics does not only concern signification processes in ordinary language. However, there is a kind of what is called literary semiotics concerning with signification processes in literary context, Dictionary of stylistics states "...literary semiotics studies the verbal signs of literary texts as systems in their own right,..." [9]. Therefore, the square concerns the strategies of analyzing textual narratives. Dictionary of Stylistics gives an elaboration of Greimas's semiotic square is that "one of his concerns is to develop a complex semantic model of narrative structure with a deep as well as surface level involving semantic features or semes" [7]. Thus, on light of what is discussed above, the study might contribute to scrutinize Morrison's selected text as a semiotic system rather than communicative system on traditional sense. Perhaps, that can create motivating language and multi-levelled meanings or messages which is a property of iconic text .

**B. Non- Arbitrary Nature of Signs**

Structuralism has assumed that the type of relationship between signifier and signified is not natural but arbitrary. In traditional sense, when a speaker refers to things in the world, there is no similarity between the referent and object. "There is no necessary connection between a given sound- image and

the concept to which it refers" [7]. However, this quality of language is dropped when authors and literary writers use language to convey their messages. It is noticed that the linguistic values has connections with their social referents. A research on Language with an Attitude elaborates "since linguists know, however, that linguistic details have no values of their own (in spite of the "life" they seem to achieve by the virtue of their social associations)..." [10]. Another research finds out that the type of relationship between signified and signifier is determined by cultural convention. She argues that signification is subjective depending on cultural system and differs from per culture and per language [11].

In some context, language does not refer to the world around us; however, it reflects a complex feeling man experiencing about the world man lives in. For modernist writers, the form of language has become a target to be experienced with, and stimulates the experience [12]. In literary text, language is utilized to incline from the notion of unquestionable relationship between signifier and signified. That is done by interference of many factors like feelings, emotions, beliefs, the way of conceptualizing the world around us and the unconscious. "Words have become interwoven with social and cultural texture of people's life. Some native speakers feels that language has non- arbitrary nature" (4).

For modern writers, language must be explored from an angle away from the notion of arbitrariness. They theorize that the belief that old writing is exhausted, but the image in its playfulness offers new forms of expressions and identity [13]When people talk they convey not merely message to express their basis needs; however their emotions, memories and what they desire to get are important factors which may make signs having motivated nature. Putting it differently, signs can be motivated or stimulated socially and culturally because they may suggest similarity or sameness between signifier and signified. Thus, the relationship between the referent and the object become natural rather than arbitrary. "Todorov defines the symbol as a motivated sign. At the same time, he points out that the Saussurean symbol is an icon in the terminology of Peirce" (2).

**III. METHODOLOGY/METAPHOR AND METONYMY:**

Literary texts can gain iconic note because it consists two common rhetorical figures namely metaphor and metonymy, which are two common linguistic processes used in non-literary and literary texts in which speakers or writers address things in terms of substitution and association respectively. Metaphor is a process in language used to make comparison between two things; in a broader sense, a speaker tries to address something indirectly by referring to dissimilar thing. Metaphor is another linguistic process used to make a comparisons between the attributes of one thing/ person and something else Thornborrow & Shan [12]. The reason behind using metaphor is to create an effect on the reader by transferring attributes from a thing to another being addressed.

Metaphor is used when a writer attempts to convey a complex feeling or experience about a person or a thing being addressed by transporting their attributes to something uncommon. The ways in which metaphor is used varies from culture to another. A research is titled Metaphor as Ideological Construct for Identity in Malaysian Short Stories treats metaphor as ideological constructs of identity because metaphors are actual representations of the writes thoughts and ideas because it has a great effect on nationhood. He argues "metaphors are actually representations of writers' thoughts and ideas on the identity and how to relate to the notion of nationhood" [14]. Metaphor is bound with ways of viewing the world. It is one of the important ingredients of iconizing text in which there is analogy between the expressions and forms. A research is titled Metaphor and Metonymy in the Conception of Emotion argues that metaphorical meaning is along matter has a link with iconicity [15]. An influential work, Pietarinen is entitled An Iconic Logic of Metaphor clarifies that similarity between two unrelated entities is not only metaphoric, but iconic as well. Similarity consideration at the level of the interpretation of metaphoric objects exemplify iconic interpretation. Metaphoric iconicity is defined as "Metaphors are metasigns whose iconicity is based on the similarity between the objects of two symbolic signs, the tenor and the vehicle of the metaphor" (2). One of the prerequisites of iconizing text is that there should be similarity not on sensuous level only but also when there is abstract relationship between the expression and form. It is theorized that representing or recalling something by possession of analogous qualities or by association in fact or thought is a mode of iconizing text (ibid). Thus, metaphor is kind of relation where two signs one of them is representative of the other. This process in language can be a source of iconicity.

Metonymy is another linguistic process used as an important figure in rhetoric in which a thing or a person is referred in term of entity or attribute. In the other words, the term can be occurred when the name of a referent is replaced by the name of the name of attribute, or entity related in some semantic way (12). Using metonymy may add an iconic note to literary texts. metonymy is not only treated as a term of linguistics; but it also used in term of semiotics. Dictionary of Stylistics describes metonymy as: "an indexical signs" [9]. Metonymy and metaphor are mingled in a way contribute to present the metaphorical meaning. A study on Metaphor and Metonymy elaborates "One may reasonably conclude that certain metonymies are to some extent a base of a group of metaphor" (Guziejewski, 2015). Metonymies are considered indices and connect between signifiers and another. Muller & Olga (8) argue that iconic signs are linked to their objects by being, in some way or another, similar to them, indices stand in a real relation to their objects. Within the field of semantics, metonymy may collaborate with metaphor to be a source of iconicity or add iconic note to literary text. A research clarifies that metonyms typically are iconically depicted in signed language where metonymy relies on relations within the semantic domain only [16]. Thus, metaphor and metonymy represent two kinds of motivation: the vertical motivation stands for metonymic relation and horizontal one stands for metaphorical relation. "Vertical motivation of a signifier by a signified is a primary form of imaginal iconicity. Horizontal motivation, the influence of

one signifier of the language system on another is largely based on diagrammatic iconicity" (2).

As we shall see, using metaphor and metonymy in literary text is very significant because they function together giving a clear insight about the culture and the core themes in the same time. According to psychoanalytical point of view, the *Verdichtung* is the German term for condensation, which is one of the two processes of the unconscious. It is the structure of the superimposition of signifiers which stands for metaphor; the *Verschiebung*, is the term for displacement, which means veering off of the meaning that is observed in metonymy. Writing literature and dreams are product of the unconscious based on these two processes. A research about Metaphor and Metonymy argues that the process of referring to feelings and emotion in images is a completely unconscious one [17]. They can be a source of motivation to stimulate readers' fantasies and memories. Thus, within semantic field, metaphor and metonymy can lead to motivating language. It is noticed that lexical or semantic change does not only result in new iconicities including metaphor, but also in metonymies and other forms of modification (ibid).

The use of these very processes of language in Morrison's novels leads to multi- interpretation A dissertation titled *Uncanny objet in Morrison's Fiction* elaborates that Morrison is attracted to themes of darkness, death, silence, sexuality and desire, preoccupied with special area of the aesthetic of ambiguity [18]. Morrison's novels may show the *Sula* is the title of her second novel its main theme is about racism. The instability in *Sula's* character stimulates readers' emotions and fantasies by projecting the traumatic life experienced by African American people. Thus, language is employed in literary product is quite different because it explores man's psychic reactions toward the world he/ she lives in and the way it is conceptualized.

#### IV. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

##### A. The Analysis of Metaphor and Metonymy as Sources of Motivation:

Generally, motivation is a principle in arts in which the relationship between form and concept or form with another form is naturalized. That is patent in figurative use of language in literary works. The study aims to scrutinize the concept of motivation in one of Morrison's novels which is *Sula*. The research exploits two very processes in figurative language which are metaphor and metonymy as sources of motivation. Morrison's text is full of metaphors which lead her readers to get a deep insight about African- American community under the hammer of racism. Rigney (1) states that all Morrison's literary product guide her readers to explore through metaphorical jungle the image of African-American. Metaphors do not come into being haphazardly; however, they are bound to social setting and constrains. Also, they are presented via metonymic relations to contextualize them. Johnson & Lakoff theorize that cultural and religious values are in nature metaphorical and the characterization of culture and religion is achieved when symbolic metonymy link them with every day experience (19).



Thus, by motivation, reader's emotion and feeling are activated and that occur via analogy between two concepts or mapping between source and target domains. In Morrison's *Sula*, the abundant use of metaphoric expressions and metaphors within metonymy that could serve as a source of motivation.

The following extract explicates Hannah's dream symbols presented metaphorically "She dreamt of a wedding in a red bridal gown\_ until Sula came in and work her" (p. 71). The quote shows the symbol of wedding and the red gown as metaphorical expressions foreshadowing something catastrophic will happen to Sula's sister Hannah. That terrific events is manifested in the following extract by which gives an image metaphorically about Hannah's death:

She rolled up the window and it was then she saw Hannah burning. The flames from the yard fire were licking the blue dress, making her dance ... cut and bleeding she clawed the air trying to aim her body toward the flaming, dancing figure (p.76).

The verbs licking, clawing and make her dancing are exploited metaphorically in order to activate readers' memory and give an image about how agonizing death Hannah faced; in broader sense, in the above extract, motivation occurs via metaphors when target domain fire is mapped into source domain red gown and death is mapped into wedding creating a king of analogy. Moreover, dance is mentioned metaphorically referring to painful death or to associate with dance of death in Western culture. Furthermore, death is expressed as sleep. The extract below cantina the word sleep which is exploit metaphorically as stand in for the concept death "Dying was ok because it was sleep and there wasn't no gray ball in the death, was there? Was there?" (p.110). Death as a target domain is mapped into sleep as a source domain via convention frame death is sleep.

Sometimes in the novel, Morrison employs cultural symbols and archetypes to produce cultural metaphoric thoughts via metonymy. Talmantaite argues that some original metaphors displays dynamic features in the context; they reoccur in different places in Morrison's text with different or additional archetypal or cultural symbols. The following extract manifest how some metaphors reflect archetypal and cultural symbols. "Sula was a heavy brown with large quiet eyes, one of which featured a birth mark that spread form the middle of the lid toward the eyebrow, shaped something like a stemmed rose" (p. 50). Here, readers are motivated by a kind of metaphor which is culture- bound; putting it differently, activation occurs via meta- linguistic level. Perhaps, the kind of metaphor is viewed as meta-linguistic function of metaphor. Furthermore, Morrison uses another kind of metaphor articulated via metonymy "Birthmark is rose" which motivate some cultural symbols. A rose is prototype flower with a wide range of cultural conceptual symbolic meanings ascribed to Sula in cognitive process of decoding (ibid). Lakoff theorizes that metaphor does not occur haphazardly but bound by frames manifested via social, cultural and archetypal contexts. The extract shows how metaphors via metonymy echo cultural and archetypal symbols to be a source of motivating readers "She would be facing the black rose that Jude has kissed and look at the nostrils of the woman ..." (p.183). here, motivation is presented when metaphor and metonymy co-occur. Talmantaite [20] state that the phrase "the black rose that

Jude has kissed.." is original linguistic metaphor within metonymy. The above extract shows that because of Sula's bad behavior due to values and morals traditionally set up by the community she lives in. The birthmark turned to be black rose referring to breaking of these morals and values through the metaphors of love and death which collapse the binary opposition between them as one- dimensional concepts. Rodríguez [21] argues that love and death metaphors in *Sula* dissolve and intersect, build and destroy each other showing complexity rather than one- dimensional and straightforward chronology. Moreover, the turning of the rose color into black is archetypal symbol which create motivation on the part of the reader. In Hawthorn' *Scarlet Letter*, black roses are attributed to those who committed the sin of adultery.

### V. CONCLUSION

Thus, the concept of motivation has become very important principle in language which adopts the notion that words or linguistic elements may give mental picture about things to which they refer. In the other words, linguistic tools have connections with the concepts within various social frames. Such connections can be achieved when language is utilized as a semiotic system rather that communicational system. That can be manifested through two linguistic processes which are metaphor and metonymy. These processes cannot occur randomly but they are bound by cultural archetypal and historical frames. Motivation can serve as a source to stimulate readers' fantasies and memories. Putting it differently, the process of motivation or activation of the memory of readers is a product of different kinds of metaphors and metonymy because both are dependent on analogy. For further studied, the concept of motivation can be applied of various genres to explore how a writer uses linguistic tools to stimulate readers' fantasy and memories in order to come up with multi- dimensional texts.

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