

Imperial Ideology and Narrative Complicity in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*: A Postcolonial Stylistic Reading

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Abstract—This research examines how imperial and ideological power is stylistically recorded in Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* (2007) using a postcolonial stylistic framework. The study explores Conrad's critique of empire while simultaneously revealing his inability to escape the confines of imperial ideology. The African characters are not portrayed as fully human, as they remain in the perpetual darkness. The narrative marginalizes Africans by allowing only one European to speak on their behalf. The integration of postcolonial theory and stylistics works to critically interpret the role of language in literature for reflecting, reinforcing, or resisting imperialist ideologies. The research demonstrates how imperialist attitudes are imposed or countered within the text at the level of choosing syntactic structure, transitivity, and metaphorical language. This work offers insight into language as an instrument for creating and maintaining colonial hegemony. The findings suggest that the critical narrative of empire in the story remains intertwined with imperial ideology, thus reflecting both a denunciation of colonial violence and a tacit complicity with imperial discourse.

Index Terms—imperial ideology, power politics, narrative complicity, postcolonial stylistics, marginalized Africans

I. INTRODUCTION

The interplay of language and power has been central to literary and postcolonial studies. Language is not merely a tool for communication in colonial discourse; it is also a powerful form of ideology used to construct, justify, and disseminate imperial domination. Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (2007) is a classic of colonial literature that continues to provoke debate among readers due to its portrayal of Africans and Europeans shaped by imperial narratives and power relations. The novella has also been heavily criticized by postcolonial critics such as Achebe (1977), who condemned it for dehumanizing African peoples and promoting a Eurocentric worldview, and Said (1993), who criticized it for perpetuating and reinforcing Orientalist discourses. Said's concept of complicit criticism reveals that, despite Conrad's moral unease with colonialism, he remained trapped within an imperial mindset. He recounted the inhumane treatment the colonizers inflicted on the colonized, which ultimately served to reinforce European power by silencing Africans without granting them any sense of liberation.

In recent decades, postcolonial stylistics has emerged as a potential field of study that combines stylistic methodology with the racial nature of postcolonialism (Simpson, 2004; Norgaard et al., 2010). Postcolonial stylistics considers the diversity of linguistic and rhetorical decisions in literary works to reveal ideological conflicts and cultural hierarchies. It suggests that language is not a neutral system but is influenced by historical and political context, and that stylistic patterns, which may include lexicon, grammar, metaphor, and pluralism, can be critically analyzed to reveal the power relations inherent in the text (Jeffries, 2010). Martin et al. (2025) illustrate how speech acts and conversational implicatures within the narrative subtly reinforce and undermine imperial authority, illustrating the complicity of multi-layered narrative with imperial ideology.

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In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad (2007) has introduced complex narrative techniques, such as framing, shifts of focalization, and metaphorical ambiguity, to create enigmatic and intricate narratives centered on colonial power. Marlowe's approach to colonialism is expressive yet also subversive, raising certain doubts (Leech & Short, 2007). The recurring use of the lexical fields related to terms like the darkness, wilderness and civilization further contributes to the novella's exploration of colonial and racial dichotomies (Boehmer, 2005). Moreover, the portrayal of African characters as silent and anonymous, and their grammatical marginalization is an indication of the stylistic elimination of the colonized subject, or what is referred to as passive, violent and voiceless subject in the imperial narrative of colonial discourse (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2013).

Therefore, this study aims to illuminate, through the application of postcolonial stylistics, the dynamics of colonial power that can be expressed and reproduced through a range of hidden meanings. The study focuses on the role of language in identifying potential resistances or actions that generate certain contradictions within the narrative. This type of intervention complements our understanding of how the ideological dynamics of colonial literature operate and why stylistic analysis can be key to understanding the structural layers of empire.

A. Statement of the Problem

This paper investigates the issue of imperialist ideology and narrative complicity in *Heart of Darkness* by Conrad (2007). The focus of the study is to highlight the ambivalent nature of imperialism and the Other in a literary text of the colonial period, which has been the subject of greatest scrutiny. The thematic issues as well as the stylistic problems regarding the narration of this colonial project have received a lot of criticism. The problem under study signifies the importance of postcolonial analysis and linguistic structures such as lexis, metaphor, syntax, and narrative voice in criticizing or assisting, creating, and maintaining colonial power and ideology. Conrad's choice of language and theme is subtle, layered and ideologically grounded that articulates Euro-centric perspective and stereotypical representation of the colonized. The challenge of dealing with such a complex narrative from a new angle demands a multidisciplinary approach, which combines the contention of postcolonial theory and the value of stylistics to question or complicit the imperial discourse embedded in the text.

B. Significance of the Study

The research is diverse as it addresses various angles of relevance both in literature and linguistics. This study is significant in bridging the gap between postcolonial theory and stylistics that provides a new way of looking into a classical colonial text. Through analyzing the imperial ideology and rhetorical strategies applied in *Heart of Darkness*, the study aims to help in gaining a better view of the idea that the language of literature can simultaneously resist to imperial mindset as well as can reinforce the colonial ideas in a covert manner. The paper shows that postcolonial stylistics is indeed a powerful method of revealing buried power structures in the text and that it works towards the construction of critical awareness of the role of language in shaping ideology and representations. The findings can also be used to better discuss some other colonial or postcolonial texts, and thus the interdisciplinary discussion between linguistics and literature can be fruitful for future studies.

C. Research Questions

1. How does the exploitative use of lexical items and metaphors in *Heart of Darkness* create and establish colonial ideology?
2. What role do syntactic construct and transitivity patterns play to make power relations between colonizer and colonized visible?
3. What postcolonial stylistic features expose the simultaneous complicity with and critique of imperialism present in the text, and how do these generate a narrative ambivalence?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The critical reception towards Conrad's (2007) *Heart of Darkness* has now changed as compared to the past because in the early years the appreciation of this work was based on its psychological richness in terms of its depth and innovative style of narration (Leavis, 1948). The criticism of the current time has taken a more critical glance at the representation of Africa and the ideology of the colonial project. Achebe (1977) in his trenchant criticism condemned *Heart of Darkness* as a bloody racist work of Conrad, but there was a break-through in the study as the interest of scholars shifted to its imperialist ideology and racial representation. Achebe claims that Conrad regards the African characters as dehumanized and portrays Africa along the lines of metaphysical blank spot, signifying as an inherent Euro-centric stare. This criticism has proved to be awfully significant in the postcolonial studies due to its challenging reassessment of the style and ideological overtones in the novel.

Said (1993) places *Heart of Darkness* in the context of the general discourse of what he terms as Orientalism and extends his criticism on this novel. He argues that though this work of Conrad is ambivalent in relation to imperialism, still it is implicated in the colonial narrative because he fails in describing the agency of colonized people or their humanity. The analysis provided by Said (1993) points out the necessity to study the ways in which linguistic and narrative choices

play the ideological roles. He also defines the first roughly the stylistic approaches to question the relationship between language and power.

Postcolonial stylistics is a useful methodological position of dealing with concerns like ideology, power relations, and narrative complicity. As it has been noted by Simpson (2004) that Stylistics can reveal the ways in which ideologies are textually inscribed especially when such inscription occurs within the linguistic moving patterns, namely lexical field, modality, and transitivity. The use of such method is particularly helpful in the interpretation of such texts as *Heart of Darkness* where metaphor, narrative unreliability, and ambiguity, complicate the ideological message. The fact that a systematic study of the way the colonial discourse is articulated and conveyed by the discursive means of translation as well as grammatical, lexical, and discursive levels are manipulated. It is also what Norgaard et al. (2010) point out with regards to the stylistic tools and power politics. Allin (2013) argues that stylistic features enable a subtle engagement with imperialism, allowing readers to grasp the ideological underpinnings of the narrative while simultaneously reflecting on its critique. Abdurrahman (2025) situates the novel within the postcolonial discourse by analyzing how complex sentence structures, narrative fragmentation, and polysemic language produce effects of uncertainty and ideological tension, reflecting the fractured moral landscape of imperialism.

This approach also addresses how Conrad's narrative resists the overarching logic of imperialism. IM (2019) highlights that Conrad's literature, along with Faulkner's, rejects the idea of accounting as a comprehensive system, thus questioning the imperial project's reliance on rational and bureaucratic justifications for colonialism. This impossibility of calculation constitutes a critique of imperial narratives that seek to impose order and control through totalitarian discourses.

A number of stylistic analyses of *Heart of Darkness* have emphasized how transitivity and agency help to portray colonial relations. The systemic functional grammar (SFG) developed by Halliday and Matthiessen (2013) offers an effective mean of examining how Conrad attributes agency to characters or fails to, when looking at an individual in context, as a whole. An example of passive constructions is the African characters that in most of the cases are built up as passive receivers of action or not being given names at all indicating what Fowler (1996) refers to as a grammatical suppression of identity.

The authors of postcolonial texts, such as Boehmer (2005) and Ashcroft et al. (2002), tend to struggle against colonial language by disrupting dominant discourses. But then again in *Heart of Darkness* the resistance is unclear. Although the text seems to criticize imperialism in the form of the unease increasingly felt by Marlow, it continues to use dehumanizing images to a large degree and there is also the suppression of African subjectivity. So, the text might be seen as complacent with colonial ideology. These tensions can thus be lighted up by a stylistic analysis which can demonstrate how language can sustain as well as undermine the colonial authority. Amireh et al. (2025) frame *Heart of Darkness* within modernist narrative experimentation while emphasizing colonial mimicry and ideological slippage. They argue that Conrad's stylistic choices (irony, fragmentation) align with a postcolonial deconstructive reading in which text and imperial discourse interlock, illustrating how narrative can critique yet remain entangled in the ideological frames it seeks to expose.

Jeffries (2010) and Leech and Short (2007) call for integrating stylistic tools with critical theory to reveal how ideological values operate through grammatical and lexical patterns. Within this framework, Spivak's (1988) concept of "epistemic violence" offers a crucial perspective: linguistic silencing and abstraction, such as Conrad's description of Africans as "black shapes," function as stylistic mechanisms of colonial erasure. It is upon this framework that *Heart of Darkness* can be examined further in exploring that how metaphor, evaluative language and sentence structure influence ideological standpoint of characters and the setting. (Al-Fatlawi & Abu-Krooz, 2025). The metaphors followed in the novel, i.e., darkness, wilderness, emptiness are extensively used and hence serve the colonial binaries that oppose the European civilization as well as the African primitivism.

Narrative theorists have also highlighted how Conrad's framed narrative (the story within a story) produces what Armstrong (2017) calls 'narrative complicity.' The external narrator's composure contrasts with Marlowe's moral unease, inviting readers to identify with multiple ideological positions simultaneously. This layered narrative construction creates what Dannenberg (2008) calls 'ideological echo,' where linguistic frequencies and repetitions reinforce the instability of the moral perspective.

The enduring significance of *Heart of Darkness* in postcolonial studies is evident in its role as a springboard for subsequent literary works and critical engagements. The novella has become a "key benchmark for postcolonial critics," prompting "revisions" such as Ama Ata Aidoo's, which treats Conrad's text as a "general colonial narrative" (Hoeller, 2004). Similarly, Habila's (2010) *Oil on Water* offers another example of an "intertextual reading" that combines contemporary narratives with Conrad's work, demonstrating its continued relevance in addressing the legacy of colonialism (Vazquez, 2020). These postcolonial responses and reinterpretations not only critically analyze themes present in Conrad's narrative but also delve deeply into its "imperial foundations" through stylistic re-evaluation, prompting readers to consider how literary form and content shape the understanding of the historical and ongoing "imperial experience" (Said, 1993).

Despite the abundance of postcolonial criticism, very few studies have systematically employed stylistic tools to analyze *Heart of Darkness* as a colonial text. This discrepancy offers an interesting opportunity to discuss the role of language in the conception of colonial ideology and how stylistic devices can reveal this function. This research has the potential to explore, from a postcolonial critical perspective and within a theoretical framework, the application of stylistic analysis to add a more ideologically sensitive implementation of the literary language used in colonial literature.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of this work is influenced by an interdisciplinary approach to postcolonial stylistics that brings together the particularities of postcolonial theory and the precision of stylistics. According to the Postcolonial Stylistics (Adami, 2025), the following is a synthesized structure of the postcolonial stylistic analysis, framed on the basis of some important concepts and levels of analysis presented in the text. The framework is the combination of postcolonial philosophy and stylistic features of the narrative, which presents a methodological framework for the textual analysis in the postcolonial context. Using this interdisciplinary method, the research explores how language can support or resist the formation of imperial ideology, the silencing of colonized people and narrative ambivalence as highlighted in *Heart of Darkness*.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research methodology proposed in this research is based on the qualitative research involving the analysis of text specifically through the postcolonial stylistics lens that has been used to study how the colonial power and the imperial ideology have been encoded in *Heart of Darkness* by Conrad (2007). The excerpts paid attention for the analysis are limited to the passages with the strongest ideological value, referring to the African characters, the colonial setting, as well as to the thoughts of Marlow on imperialism. The key stylistic elements used for the analysis distinguish the lexical preferences, the use of metaphors, transitivity patterns, and narrator voice. In a systematic examination of such linguistic features, the work attempts to identify how power positions, race hierarchies and colonial binaries are constructed and maintained through language. The analysis is thematic and language based with a particular focus on the ideological meanings and the impact of language choices. This postcolonial stylistic reading of *Heart of Darkness* reveals a complex interaction with imperial ideology, where narrative techniques and stylistic choices, function both to perpetuate and to critique imperialist narratives.

V. DISCUSSION

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (2007) operates within a framework of linguistic and ideological tension that simultaneously critiques and reinforces imperialist ideology. From a stylistic perspective, Conrad's language embodies the instability of imperialist discourse through shifting focus, stylistic ambiguity, and a lack of precise vocabulary. The present study aims to explore and understand how colonial power has been embedded ideologically and stylistically into the text. Selected excerpts have been analyzed, focusing on the ideas of imperial ideology and narrative complicity. Furthermore, postcolonial stylistics are examined in relation to lexical choices, metaphorical language, transitivity, structure, and the narrative voice. The interpretation of the excerpts shows how the use and application of postcolonial theory and stylistic resources either reinforce or critique imperial ideology.

Excerpt 1: "The conquest of the earth... is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea" (Conrad, 2007, p. 31).

The nominalization underlying this passage, however abstract (conquest, idea, pretense), obscures agency and depersonalizes colonial violence. It is the repetition of ideologies that lends greater validity to justification through ideas than through the material reality of the world. The analysis highlights the unequivocal use of the word "idea" both in the title and in the actual text itself. The moral lesson superimposed on the acts of exploitation is suggested by the verbal phrase "redemption," and the semantic ambiguity is produced by the indefinite article, which causes the speaker to relinquish any pretense of morality. The modal phrase, "not a pretty thing" is a euphemism that moderates the brutality of colonization. From a postcolonial stylistic perspective, the linguistic patterns reflect the underlying psychological process by which imperial agents legitimize their goal of cannibalization.

Excerpt 2: "Black shapes crouched, lay, sat between the trees, leaning against the trunks, clinging to the earth, half coming out, half effaced within the dim light" (Conrad, 2007, p. 33).

The language choices of the narrative such as shapes, crouched, effaced and many others render people of African descent into barely recognizable figures. Present participles are used to imply incomplete or passive actions, indicating helplessness: the act of clinging to, or leaning over. The linguistic erasure of African presence and identity is conveyed through repetitive, incomplete, or fragmented structures ("half coming out, half effaced"). Based on the transitivity analysis, the Africans are participants in grammar, but barely in physical roles as an agent; hence, it represents what Halliday and Matthiessen (2013) describe as a grammatical reflection of the social marginalization. A constructed image of obscured silence and darkness in Africa perpetuates the colonial tradition of representing the land of the primitive.

Excerpt 3: "We live in the flicker may it last as long as the old earth keeps rolling! But darkness was here yesterday" (Conrad, 2007, p. 62).

In the light of the above-mentioned excerpt, Marlow juxtaposes the European Enlightenment with an untimely and dangerous African nowhere. Here, the metaphor of darkness, the most important semantic field of this novel, is expounded, representing the unknown and, at the same time, the morally corrupt. The temporal contrasts between yesterday and the flicker identify Africa as a product of a bygone era, in contrast to Europe, which is advancing toward modernity. Such a binary opposition, as Said (1993) points out, is a characteristic feature of the colonial discourse, which, in turn, is stylistically distinguished by the metaphorical construction of the sentence. The conciseness and ambiguity of the

expression “the darkness was here yesterday” contribute to creating a rhetoric of otherness that presents Africa as a backward predecessor of European civilization.

Excerpt 4: “Your strength is just an accident arising from the weakness of others” (Conrad, 2007, p. 45).

This is an outburst of ideological breach. The parallels, in the opposite form, are part of the critique of imperial triumphalism, since the designation of the strength under the category of chance and weakness as under the category of others implies that disposition toward colonial domination is a transitory state that fluctuates within an ethical vacuum. The relational clause, merely accidental, serves to debunk imperial power, undermining its legitimacy. According to the postcolonial parameter of styling, this phrase brings out the element of ambivalence in the narrative- a criticism incorporated in the narrative voice. This semantic inversion disturbs the assumptions of colonialism and reveals the way in which the language of Conrad questions the ideology within which it is inscribed. The analysis endorses Said’s (1993) idea of complicit critique; his nuanced postcolonial reading critically analyses imperial ideology which is more complicit rather than being fully oppositional.

Excerpt 5: “It seemed somehow to throw a kind of light on everything about me” (Conrad, 2007, p. 41).

The prevalence of precautionary expressions such as “seemed,” “somehow,” “a kind of” points to epistemological uncertainty. Modality here encodes Marlowe’s fragile authority: knowledge is filtered through subjectivity and doubt. This linguistic hesitation aligns with postcolonial stylistic theory’s interest in how language reveals the instability of ideology (Simpson, 1993). The metaphor of “light,” diluted by modifiers, becomes self-reflective: enlightenment itself is dimmed by complicity.

Excerpt 6: “They howled and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity” (Conrad, 2007, p. 34).

The coordinated verbs “howled,” “leaped,” and “spun” highlight the physical energy of the Africans, while Marlowe’s qualifying phrase “the thought of their ‘humanity’” re-establishes a colonial hierarchy of knowledge. Human morphology is divided into two parts: physical (primitive) expression and “thought” (European recognition). This division reinforces a linguistic dichotomy, even as it suggests empathy. Bhabha (1994) describes this moment as “meta colonial,” where the recognition of shared humanity destabilizes colonial domination.

In the passages analyzed above, metaphor, transitivity, nominalization, modality, and wordplay are the main stylistic features that contribute to the creation of colonial ideology. The African characters are usually put in the linguistic background or are stripped of their agency, whereas the imperial violence is masked or objectified. However, there are also some moments of ambivalence in the story as the stylistic forms are used to show the moral hypocrisy of the empire. This ambivalence demonstrates the significance of postcolonial stylistics in expressing both complicity as well as criticism in the colonist writings.

Analyzing *Heart of Darkness* from a postcolonial stylistic perspective demonstrates the role of language as both a reflection and instrument of colonial ideology. While Conrad initially appears to perceive injustice in imperial exploitation, he employs a linguistic framework that surreptitiously recreates Eurocentric discourse. Through lexical abstraction, the use of binary metaphors, and transitive structures, the words create an image of Africa as mute, alien, and sexually degrading, depriving the colonized of their agency and diminishing their right to a voice. This situation justifies European intervention. The exclusion of Africans is reflected grammatically, either through their marginalization or metonymic abbreviations that include terms like “forms” or “savages,” consistent with what Fowler (1996) and Halliday and Matthiessen (2013) call the grammatical form of social neglect.

Examining the reflective structure of the text identifies Marlowe’s narrative voice as situated between criticism and complicity. On the one hand, he fails to be disillusioned by the brutality of imperialism, and, on the other hand, his metaphorical use of language is colonial in nature. For example, the frequent use of metaphors like “darkness” and “wilderness” carries both geographical and racial connotations of the symbolical connection between African lands and primitivism. Current stylistic tactics are in accordance with the theory of orientalist representation developed by Said (1993), according to which the world of the colonized is subordinated to the world of the rational West as the irrational and inferior other.

However, the ideological breach is also observed in the text, where the artwork lends itself to critical dialogue on stylistic and postcolonial arrangements. A compelling example of the syntactic and semantic juncture against the imperial discourse is the confession made by Marlow, in which he acknowledges the reality of colonial power by simply characterizing it as a coincidence that occurred as a result of the shortcomings of others. This ambivalence lends weight to the argument put forward by Boehmer (2005) that there are numerous texts from the colonial era which either give a play of endorsement or of subversion in connection to the empire, corresponding to the moralistic as well as psychological ambivalence of the colonial agents.

By integrating postcolonial theory into stylistic tools, this research confirms once again that the concepts of ideology in *Heart of Darkness* can hardly be abstracted into thematic content; on the contrary, their ideological level seems to be rooted in the very texture of the text. The strength of postcolonial stylistics lies in its ability to uncover such subtle layers as how grammatical choices, metaphorical structures, and styles of discourse create, maintain, or destabilize imperial control.

(A) *How does the exploitative use of lexical items and metaphors in Heart of Darkness create and establish the colonial ideology?*

Conrad employs a dense array of lexical resources and metaphor that naturalize and normalize the colonial project while simultaneously presenting Africa as an unknown and primitive Other. The lexical signs like “savage”, “nigger,” “inhuman” and “prehistoric” create a linguistic hierarchy in which the identity of Europeans is constructed as rational, civilized, and enlightened, while that of Africans is constructed as irrational, bestial and backward (Achebe, 1977). The words do not represent neutrality and are consistently used to portray Africans as dark, wild, and voiceless.

The use of metaphors is fundamental to prompting notions about Africans. The narrative that presents Africa as a dark continent, the land of the unknown, the heart of darkness, has succeeded in constructing the image of Africa as a place of European exploration and control. The River Thames is metaphorically associated with civilization, and the Congo is depicted as a menacing, serpentine creature; an image that implies danger, temptation, and chaos. These metaphors carry ideological weight; they represent an image of Africa opposed to Europe, and imperial conquest serves a moral function (Said, 1993).

(B) What role do syntactic construct and transitivity patterns play to make power relations between colonizer and colonized visible?

In a syntactic sense, the passivation, nominalization, and agent suppression employed by Conrad contribute considerably to clarifying the role of the colonizers and to shifting blame for acts of violence and exploitation. The transitive approach patterns of Halliday’s *Systemic-Functional Grammar* and linguistic stylistics reveal that, in most material processes, the colonizers are presented as actors, while the colonized subjects are either omitted or relegated to passive positions. The popular words such as, the land was taken, or the natives were tamed, are used intentionally to conceal the one or the group of people doing the action or taming.

The grammatical effacement conceals the imperial representatives on the one hand and makes the consequences of the colonial violence seem normal on the other hand. Through their linguistic objectification, Africans are not typically represented as subjects of verbal or mental actions (thinking, speaking, feeling). In contrast, European characters-such as Marlow, or Kurtz- are granted space to act, to have a voice and to be conscious enough to narrate, judge and retrospect the happenings. This directional disparity in syntactic representation corresponds to the ideology of imperialism, where the colonizer’s point of view is pivotal and commanding, and the colonized are deprived of both speech and act (Fowler, 1996).

(C) What postcolonial stylistic features expose the text’s simultaneous complicity in and critique of imperialism, and in what ways do they create a narrative ambivalence?

Heart of Darkness has a complex and ambivalent narrative voice, which results from the narrative structure of a narrator (slightly embedded into a frame narrator) telling the monologue of Marlow. Marlow’s entire narrative is imbued with the colors of the imperial language and imagery which recalls the superior colonial ideologies addressing the African characters as phantoms, shadows, or savages. His story is fused with the imperial agenda in terms of content and language. For example, he writes Africa as a bottomless pit of darkness and lack of reason.

But this narrative voice is also already characterized by some elements of self-doubt, irony, and disillusionment, and this creates a room for criticism. In many instances, Marlow challenges the authenticity of colonialism by terming it as a robbery with violence and as an amplified murder. The paradox and ambiguity, like the description of Kurtz as both as an idealistic and a mad man, make the story complex and dilutes the imperial confidence. In addition, this ambivalence is underpinned by the fact that the narrator recounts the story of Marlow, but does not comment on it, therefore, the ideological stand-point of the narrative is unclear to the readers.

The style oscillates between affirmation and criticism, which corresponds to what critics such as Levenson (1991) and Bhabha (1994) have labelled as the ambivalence of the colonial discourse. Consequently, Conrad’s narrator not only participates in imperial ideology but also offers a critique that makes *Heart of Darkness* an important postcolonial stylistic project.

VI. CONCLUSION

This research has shown that the apparent ambiguity with which *Heart of Darkness* is often interpreted as a condemnation of imperialism actually contains a stylistic formulation and a subtle reinstatement of colonial ideology. The metaphor, word choice, and transitivity are analyzed in depth to reveal that Conrad’s use of language supports the binary opposition between the civilized self and the savage other, present in narratives of empire. However, the linguistic ambivalence of the text (the intention to critique the colonial world while simultaneously acknowledging itself as part of it) demonstrates that the authority of imperialists is not entirely solid.

This study contributes to a better understanding of the ideology of literary language from a postcolonial stylistic perspective, particularly in a work belonging to the colonial archive. The results demonstrate the need to study not only the explicit content of a literary work, but also its form of writing; form and substance, together, to generate authentic understanding and meaning. In short, *Heart of Darkness* offers an interesting starting point for deconstructing the discursive mechanisms of colonial power and constitutes a good example of how the stylistics of discourse can enrich postcolonial criticism by simultaneously revealing complicity with and opposition to imperial discourse.

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