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The Power of Language as Metaphor: An Exegesis of Ali Jimale Ahmed's Poem "The Word"

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Abstract: This study presents a theoretical analysis of "The Word," a poem by Ali Jimale Ahmed, a prolific thinker who is, in addition to being an academician, also a highly regarded poet, literary critic, culturologist, essayist, novelist, and a polyglot whose literary production draws on African, Western, and Arabian/Middle Eastern knowledgebases in their classical, medieval, and contemporary eras. Using English as his chosen medium of communication, and controverting the familiar rhythms, metric structures, alliterated sounds, and rhymes known for the poetry recited in his native Somali tongue, the poet Ahmed explores in this sonnet a terra incognita path of problematizing the function as well as limitations of language, rekindling the essential debate over language on the one hand, and use of poetic language on the other, in his unique style of versal discourse in "the word".

Keywords: Culture, language, literature, metaphor, poem, poetry, Somali literature, verse.

I. INTRODUCTION

The versal story entitled "The Word" is a textual illustration delivered in a very highly inventive and thought-provoking nature. It introduces its narration with what is a common description of language and common knowledge: that it is "a tool of expression," as elucidated by the poet Ahmed. Whatever other analyses augment the characteristics, attributes, and implicit and explicit functions of the word, its significance as an instrument for communication is the subject of general consensus among scholars and the general public alike. An eloquent explanation by Mangum (2010) describes it as "a unique type of communication system" (p. 257), while in Williams's (1993) assumption, "the primary and fundamental function of language is communication" (p. 91), a paradigm also supported by Deacon (1997, pp. 11–12, 50), who suggests that it is best called a "unique and complex mode of communication."

The discussion begins with an introduction covering the significance of "the word" or language as elaborated by a section of the scholars. Section two lays out the theoretical framework on which the essay foregrounds its discussive guidance. The third part embarks on the poet Ahmed's introduction of language and its significance as a tool for communication and self-expression. It is followed by a fourth segment which provides five models of how the poet characterizes this very powerful tool for self-expressiveness as actually possessing critical disadvantages that render it impotent, reducing it to a subordinate device at the mercy of other superior variables or phenomena. Part five discusses a terse account of the manner in which "the word" can position an individual while part six deals with how the poet draws out the attention he pays to language beyond metaphor, as a tool for expression even given these disadvantages, but also as a catastrophic, annihilating device. Thence the conversation moves to the conclusion which is the section that closes the discussion.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is benchmarked on a combination of theoretical assumptions borrowed from philosophy, psychology, education and linguistics. It invokes Skinner's analysis of the function of literature from "*Verbal Behavior*" (1972), Booth's (1983) *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, and Luke's (2003) piece entitled Analysis of Poetic Literature Using B. F. Skinner's Theoretical Framework from *Verbal Behavior*, all of which bring new insights into the reflections of the connection between literature and society. The analysis provided by Skinner is distinct in its nature in the sense that it commits an analytical interrogation to the text since it is the essential link that facilitates the social dialogue

between the writer (the originator and presenter) of the text and his audience (the analysts and evaluators) of the same textual material brough into being by the author.

According to Skinner (1957, p. 96) it is "the literary community," with its creativity, criticism, and deeper analysis that indeed "provides sensitive examples of verbal behavior" that engages with their observation of the various aspects of society and its interactions with one another and intractabilities among them. In more specific terms, this essay is influenced by Luke's advice that "Literary analysis would benefit from the addition of theoretical frameworks such as Skinner proposes." (Luke, 2003, p. 114). The study also considers theories of linguistics and language acquisition (Corder, 1967; Hatch, 1983, 1978; Skinner, 1957; Yule, 2006), and philosophical discussions (Descartes, 1985; Gadamer, 2004; Spinoza 2002; Kant, 1991). The study relies on the intersections of these theories in order to demonstrate the interconnectedness of poetry, language, philosophy, and education in our quest to address social issues.

III. LANGUAGE AS A TOOL OF EXPRESSION

To embark on my analytical journey of "The Word," I present the poem with its original text:

The Word
 The word is but a tool of expression
 Without a will it cannot divine
 Without a conscience it cannot ignite
 Without a horizon it cannot unravel
 Without precision it cannot demand
 Without conviction it cannot invade
 For the word to
 Divine
 Ignite
 Unravel
 Demand
 Invade
 It must first hibernate (Ahmed, 2012, p. 1)

The poet's raconteur begins the first stanza with an introduction of what is globally believed to be a factual statement about the function of language as a medium of communication and recites: "The word is but a tool of expression." With that acknowledgment of "the word" as "a tool of expression" does not necessarily allude to the protagonist's denial of language as a "being-in-itself," but that along with that attribute, "it is put at one's disposal in the sense that one can reckon with it—i.e., use it for one's own purposes," (Gadamer 2004, p. 447). Orthodoxically, this first line, "The word is but a tool of expression," presents what appears to be the most generally accepted function of language, or at least the generally perceived principle through which humans domesticate language as a vital instrument that mediates our day-to-day interaction. Viewed from this perspective, language plays an integral role in the shaping of our interpersonal as well as inter-communal relationships.

Despite being "a tool," as the poet states in subsequent lines, much is concealed in it that occurs prior to it being expressed such as the mode in which its expression is produced, the intentions for its production, and the effects and possible implications of "the word" as the final product. From these and other viewpoints, the word is not uttered without a purpose. In his volume *Daybreak is Near*, it is Ahmed (1996) who states in the very first chapter that language, though seen as a tool, "is not neutral or value-free," which sums up the critical assumption that "[n]or is language spoken in vain," (p. 2).

Even so, the magnitude of the consequences underlying the text depends on the hearer's interpretation, critical observation, and analytical genius. That is why conversations and debates between interlocuters—e.g., speaker–listener, writer–reader—prompt people to take different directions of thought, relative to the scope of their understanding of a story or a topic at different dimensions, therefrom expanding the original function of language from "a tool of expression" to an individual's cognitive processing power, multiple modes of interpretation, the depth of their interpretation, the significance given to the interpretation, and the reaction taken against it that we see as a consequence of what had been expressed. Such observation entails deeper insight than analyzing the mere expression as stated, theoretically as well as metaphorically. It demands the expressiveness of the speaker/writer relevant to the meaningfulness of what is being expressed within the context of the subject.

Therefore, as a tool of expression, the word carries not only the implied or explicit functional significance attributed to it as a device and meaning but indeed two or more other imports, forms of significance that are given knowledge and power, which are independent of each other but are also inseparable in many circumstances. Though still a tool, the word potentially communicates the power and authority of the speaker, while as an expression it reveals the wisdom or intentions carried in the information articulated in the message which it is a vehicle. In addition to being a tool or a device for effecting communication, the word can also be described as a double-edged sword that cannot miss the target of the eloquent speaker or writer—be that person a poet or a prosaist. Still, it can soothe pain, mitigate grievance, persuade, raise chaos to unprecedented heights, or add fuel to a delicate situation and set it into flames. The word can be a vibrant instrument for mudslinging, character assassination, ideological infestation, and many other malpractices aimed at contaminating the moral existence of another individual or community, and for various other reasons.

As a tool, and via the expressions it hosts, its nature of communication, context, and ideology, the word can be both a weaponized as well as a weaponizing device. It can pit society against each other, ruin civilizations, annihilate decent humans, or bring people together in harmony and mutual coexistence. In addition to the characteristics mentioned, Ahmed (1996) aptly acknowledges it, as a powerful device and "the medium through which the poet's or the novelist's artifact comes into being" (p. 2). In fact, Ahmed believes that the word, from a critical point of view, can neither be "neutral" nor "value-free" to the extent that a constructive examination of language stocktaking informs the fact that language utilization does not occur "in a vacuum," (Ahmed, 1996, p. 2) as long as it is delivered in a specific context and with an aimful precision, which the purpose of language usually is. Although among the several characteristics and uses of language are the facilitation of human communication, understanding, and cohesion of groups, it can nevertheless be a vital instrument for expressing group identity supremacy (Eno *et al*., 2016) aiming at oppression against and identity submergence of another—hence an instrument for the purposes of power-brokering and power acquisition that causes domination and subjugation of segments of society who are unable to wield these powers.

From the diverse ideological orientations mentioned above, the word holds within itself more powerful dynamics than the oblivious eye or mind can capture. It holds ideological differences that are suited to praise a group comparable to disgracing a rival group by degrading their language and culture as irrelevant institutions. So, observed through this critical lens, one realizes how hosted and hidden in language are an array of other realities that portray the medium not as innocent as the less critical observer, or others with covert reasons, might measure it. This is because language is used as an operative premise, a group platform where communal supremacy and ideological influence are articulated, negotiated, cemented, and effectively motivated to serve the particular purpose of a dominant group, language, or culture (Ahmed, 1996; Eno *et al*., 2016).

IV. LANGUAGE AS A TOOL WITH DISABILITIES: AHMED'S VERSIFIED FIVE-MODEL APPROACH

- **Disability Model 1: "Without a will it cannot divine"**

So much though the word is bestowed with unparalleled power; it is more often than not the articulation of the speaker that drives its potential. The resolve embossed in the gist of its significance barely attracts listeners or interlocutors if the objective behind the word is weak, and somewhat ineffective in prophesizing or bad at delivering the praise-points: hence the poet's analysis that "Without a will it cannot divine." In this conception, Ahmed tells us that the word, as a mediator of discourse, fulfills its appropriate role and

function not necessarily because it is powerful but due to the fact that it harnesses context and ability to penetrate individual and social values, in the Foucauldian sense of constructivism; where temporal, spatial, and mindset interplay interdependently (Foucault, 1972).

A kind of relationship is evident between the ability of a discursive ecology and the power borne in the person from whom the discussion emanates. In any reasonable observation, it becomes irrational to develop a perception that separates the power of language from the power and authority of the speaker in everyday social interaction. The conception under evaluation here resonates well with Wittgenstein (1983) who believes that the role of language is cemented at the heart of social spaces, where social reality is effectively constructed.

We notice the various social relationships from the way the protagonist speaker in the poem chronicles a multitude of activities and functions of language that set the basis for human discourse: dual or multiple pathways of communication. All these descriptions, however, are attached to conditions or restrictions without which the proposed actions or functions cannot come to fruition without a will and resolve on the part of the speaker, the discussant imparting the imagery of and imagination thriving in his or her mind. This is the reason why Jørgensen (2006) suggests that the phenomenon of language "must be seen as part of a whole situation, which is located in specific historical circumstances and in which there are other actors and physical artifacts" (p. 6). Denying the interdependence of these factors, to say the least, amounts to undermining the relativity between language, society, and environment temporally and spatially.

However, to a certain degree and in a certain context, one could argue that Ahmed's character in the poem "The Word" is conscious of these inter-germinating and cross-fertilizing factors and realities, such as those mentioned by Jørgensen.

Because the factors mentioned here, in my opinion, are what the metaphorical character wants to tell us when s/he ties every aspect of the description of "The Word" to its lack of potential unless invigorated otherwise by the associated factors which, as independent variables, make language a dependent variable inefficacious at achieving a goal on its own. Interpreting Humboldt's concept of languages as worldviews, Gadamer (2004, p. 440) admits unequivocally that "language has no independent life apart from the world that comes to language within it," a signification that reverberates with the poet's observation as well as positioning of language as a vital instrument in human interaction but also one with dependency on other elements. These are the independent subjects with a potential to activate the presumed functions of language which we more often than not take for granted without considering beyond

what was said and the worldview, the context, in which it was delivered.

- **Disability Model 2: "Without a conscience it cannot ignite"**

Ahmed illuminates to us that, although language has the potential to "ignite," inform, illuminate, explore, harmonize, or create a thermal atmosphere of dilapidation, it is nonetheless dependent on "conscience," without which its ignition would never occur or lead to a tangible result. Like truth and other morally binding values, conscience remains a pivotal personal property that presents the moral characteristics of the individual relevant to his or her habitat and its surroundings, and as driven by spiritual, cultural/aesthetic, and moral sanity that values humanity by placing it at the center of our axiological domain—in all three spheres. These spheres bring into argument what semantics can offer in everyday societal idealization of contexts. While renowned American civil rights activist Martin Luther King, Jr. (1994, p. 82, quoted in Kapustina *et al.*, 2021, p. 44) explains conscience from a spiritual premise as a person's "religious foundation" and his or her relationship with the creator, King also describes it as "a person's ability to execute moral self-control, independently formulate moral obligations for oneself, and demand oneself to fulfill them, make a self-assessment of the committed actions."

On the other hand, Arutiunova (cited in Kapustina *et al.*, 2021) argues that "Conscience covers all layers of the human psyche from the lowest to the highest. It permeates the human 'I' which forms an individual, irreplaceable, and unique personal property of a person." Arutiunova's examination, as laid out here, is further emphasized in the impression that "[t]houghts, feelings, aspirations, as well as the most important life decisions, are born in [and reflected out of] it," thereby making conscience a guiding principle in a person's "ability to determine moral action," (p. 44). Similarly, therefore, what the poet is elucidating in the stanza is that, with all its power and intentions, discourse remains devoid of the vital atmosphere needed for dialogue when conscience is disengaged or inattentively preoccupied with intruding forces, a reason aptly justified in the sentence: "Without a conscience it cannot ignite."

The effect is not limited only to the relationship drawn between conscience and the action to ignite but it extends further into other realities, external phenomena that activate discourse. For instance, the narrator offers the supposition that there is an evident interaction between conscience and language function in the sense that the way a certain pattern of a lexicalized sound in a discourse remains substantively disabled of meaningful discussion if it lacks a vision to engender that which it was required to disentangle and deliberate on—call it the absence of a "horizon" in the discourse. What is being referred to here means "a boundary between here and away" (Mark & Sinha, 2020, p. 3077), a matter which is very much pertinent to thought cultivation which raises the intellectual bar to a higher zone of conscious foresightfulness.

- **Disability Model 3: "Without a horizon it cannot unravel"**

A logical reasoning of the argument tempts us to consider for a moment that, to corroborate a subject in discourse, one must have an objective, a reason, and a vision, as well as a scope or breadth of the subject under one's discursive aim that is calibrated according to a "horizon": one's current understanding, view, and vision of the world outside of what is here and now—meaning a vision of a worldview whose scope is limned across the visible horizon and the unreachable cosmos beyond the visible horizon. In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer (2004, p. 304) explains *horizon* as a concept that "expresses the superior breadth of vision," which brings into focus deeper philosophical hermeneutics that portray a phenomenon from a mesh of intellectual horizons that are not very clear to the hasty interpreter delving shallowly into what the mind captures in terms of viewing and understanding—hence attributes of the limited scope of reasoning of the viewer who does not carefully hone matters of horizon according to the tensions that create a disequilibrium of the vertical and horizontal predispositions of facts. Keenly observed, opinionating *horizon*, as used here, predicates the poet's aim of connecting the temporal and spatial limitations of history, experience, thought and vision; while on the other hand it involves a cognitive functioning in information processing and, on the other hand, the ensuing interpretation of that information prior to making a conclusive judgment.

The verse draws our attention to the fact that "the word" remains in a situation of helplessness in which it suffers from a state of deactivation that leaves it out of operation—a state of complete inaction as both a subject and a tool. It faces a huge existential challenge that undermines the essence of its significance as an entity, reducing its meaningfulness in the process of interpreting the matter it contextualizes—when approached from the perspective of horizon of interpretation, as elucidated by Heidegger, and as later expanded by his student Gadamer. Whether the reader or literary critic would analyze the term *horizon* from a subjective viewpoint or interpret the verbal expression "unravel" from the perspective of its manipulability by the former (in this case, *horizon*) is left to the discretion of one's own level and depth of observation, as well as the phraseological competence embedded in one's analysis of "conscience", as marked in the second line.

Language and the numerous layers of the explicit discourse it mediates and implicit metaphors it conceals, in addition to "conscience" and "horizon," as illuminated by Ahmed, are also inherently reliant on other abstract phenomena: among them, "precision", the accuracy with which the linguistic expression is

articulated in its contextual premise; the reason why the target is selected; whether the presupposed aim is achieved in the appropriate manner; and how the unraveling of the discourse is rationalized within the "horizon[s]" of logical reasoning. Moreover, it mediates the motifs and metaphors that characterize an opponent as a threat and whose intentions and actions need to be addressed, yet also promptly contained (Gay, 2007; Lakoff, 1992).

- **Disability Model 4: "Without precision it cannot demand"**

The protagonist's argument in the poem, particularly in this line but also in other lines premised on the quantitative method of cause and effect and on dependent and independent variables, is that for "the word" to explore, examine, and produce a reflective imagination of the contextual environment of the discourse under the intellectual eye, it must free itself from hindrances. For "the word" to free itself from factors like the axiological facts it is communicating and the beliefs of the speaker or interlocutor, it needs to have been measured flawlessly to an acceptable degree of "precision," which significantly informs and interrogates the degree of meticulousness, diligence, and conscientiousness perceived in what has been expressed and expected to be made sense of in the social milieu. Hence, the interlaced influences elaborated in the preceding sentence shed light on a factuality: that the poet's usage of the term "precision" can neither be taken lightly nor imagined as "value-free" term, as Ahmed himself argued elsewhere in his critical analysis of the effectiveness and interpretative scope of language (Ahmed, 1996, p. 2).

In this circumstance of deprivation on the part of "the word," the effect as well as effectiveness of "precision" must be focused on above and beyond its habitually used semantic form. An examination into the phrase, however, reveals the manner in which "precision" develops into connotations and entanglements with subtle descriptions—in other words, implicit properties laden with theoretical settings that subvert the intention of the phrase itself. Furthermore, the term *precision*, beyond its ordinary meaning, has deep but rather complicated features that place it at the center of scholarly debate due to its implicit and explicit views of measurement that raise a discussion about it to the realms of the philosophical doctrine of rationalism (Descartes, 1985, 1911; Leibniz, 1989; Spinoza, 2002) and expands it to that of critical rationalism (Kant, 1991). From this view, rationale or rationalism extrapolates how the mind processes information/ knowledge, balances it with reason, and then predicts an outcome of substance that draws comparison to the knowledge acquired by experience. Its reliance on this phenomenal behavior and tutelage of rationalism makes "precision" an important factor in the argument the poet raises in the verse as an independent factor in contrast to "the word"; a fact which makes me believe that the poet's choice of the term is

more deliberate than it can be considered sheerly inadvertent.

The value associated with "precision" in this metaphorical mode cannot be underestimated, as the poet's hero is challenging the reader by directing a specific focus on a discursive codification, an expression hinging on an intellectual contribution that responds to the cognitive functions of information processing and models of its categorization and compartmentalization. Examining "precision" from this angle brings into play a codification of the chunks of facts as stored in their designated faculties and processes that intersect across the interlocutors' intent, subject of discussion, variation of the input, amount of intake, depth of review, strategies of retention, zone of storage, frequency of retrieval, relationship to existing realities, and the interconnection between a successful output and a sufficient outcome (Anderson, 1982; Corder, 1967; Hatch, 1983, 1978; Ritter *et al.*, 2013; Skinner, 1957; Yule, 2006), to invoke theories of education/learning in general and applied linguistics and second language acquisition (SLA) in particular—and as accepted in the theory of learning from the perspective of Neisser's (1976) cycle of Perceive–Decide–Act. Through these intermingling factors, and despite our perceived knowledge of language as a dynamic entity in social relationships and interactions, the poet's imagined hero/speaker wants to tell us that, for all its oft-mentioned attributes of shimmer and shine, language is no more than a dependent variable, an incapacitated powerhouse rendered inactive by the absence of "precision"—the drive that stimulates the purpose of "the word" into action.

The conception of directing purpose into action informs an accurately measured, target-specific delivery: "precision" of "the word," which again refers to the talented poet's ability to dispatch an aptly articulated discourse into a worthwhile social debate that commits the problem in the society to a broader scale of understanding and to the next level of awareness. In that role, object "precision" must deliver "the word" (the effectiveness of the gist of what is said) beyond the hazy imagination of an average speaker or interlocutor. On that platform, "the word" must overcome the burden of intellectual scrutiny of what Krueger *et al.*, (2002) term as "sense-making" (p. 3) and win a revered place in the debate that necessitated the discourse under critical analysis; "a sense-making" that appeals to the establishment of factual sense that justifies the retaliatory power of "the word" when it strikes back at the target.

Krueger *et al.*, (2022) believe that what puts "Sense-making . . . at the core" of disputable discourse and retaliation is prevailed in the fact that "individuals try to infer why another person is opposing them (their motives) and what that person is trying to accomplish (their goals) to determine how to respond," (p. 3). The notion of "motives", "goals" and retaliation surfaces the word's potential in acts of vengeance, it seems to me,

another pivotal argument of the poem and the direction in which the discussion about "the word" and related metaphors are disentangled.

- **Disability Model 5: "Without conviction it cannot invade"**

From another dialogic viewpoint, "the word," as a phraseology, symbolizes humans' pursuit of knowledge and the arduous journey they take through the process of leaning in their quest for truth, fact-finding. For this reason, among all others, language takes a center stage in all the occurrences of conflicts among people and the push-and-pull encounters that condition the nature of deterrence and defiance employed by the parties in a disagreement. The attitude of the disputants is envisaged in the mode of communication between them and the heightening temperature of their disagreement over the discourse, as revealed in the invasive or defensive tenor of the language exchanged between them.

Dependent on the linguistic consciousness and skill level of critical discourse analysis of the concerned party, it becomes the case that, if the targeted party fails to prefigure the danger, it prompts as a consequence the looming verbal invasion intonated in what the poet's allegorical figure chose as the heading of the poem: "the word." In such reluctance or otherwise oblivion on the part of the invaded, it becomes incumbent on the invader to either raise the level of his/her linguistic invasion or let it go due to the lack of response from the invaded, for whatever reason. Observed from another perception, whether an invasion of this or any nature can dissipate the anger that caused the taunting verbal assault can be calculated against the invader's level of conviction—in other words, the gravity of the stimulant of the vexation relative to the invader's values, principles, beliefs, and self-confidence as metaphorized in the poet's term "conviction," the determination behind whether to activate and capacitate "the word" or deactivate and therefore incapacitate it for it to remain effectively inoffensive.

May I note here that, in certain African cultures, attacking with the word is an everyday social practice, particularly in poetry, a genre many consider as a suitable channel for criticizing, taunting, and verbally invading an opponent (Eno, 2017; Eno & Eno, 2014), a likely reason why the character in the poem used "invasion" as an implied allegory for the concrete action of war but by way of words. Unlike prose, constructing an incursive poem requires a terse account of an artistically invented narrative that pronounces a great deal of anxiety but in very few words. In cases like this when it is employed to affect an individual's emotion, it requires extraordinary skills which are bestowed upon gifted poets and related cultural intellectuals with superior talent (Ahmed, 1996; Eno, 2017). It is that unique expertise, in addition to other characteristics, which enables architects of the verse to easily present the affluence imbued in their creative imagination. Hence their exploitation of plot, indifference to grammatical usage, and interplay with or otherwise mastery of the subtlety of their medium distinguishes them from ordinary users of the same language, as well as among themselves—depicting the role of invasive language as a form of waging war against an adversary.

A war of words may begin either as an intentional aggression or inadvertently and does not usually end without revenge by the affected party. At some point, even the invader might expect this revenge sooner or later because of the pain inflicted on the victim of his/her belligerence. Invasion, or war, as "the product of beliefs and ideas" (Moseley, 2002, p. 2) that are effected to harm physically, socially, psychologically, culturally, or morally, neither guarantees a safe haven for the perpetrator nor exempts him/her from retaliation. In fact, the injury incurred because of the revenge may far exceed the damage the retaliator had suffered in the initial attack. The magnitude of harm from retaliation could also depend on the causal explanation offered in the versal agenda and the intellectual depth of the retaliator in order for his/her actions to be considered more seriously than expected or anticipated.

Because the retaliator was struck with verbal salvos evidently discussed in the public domain, the revenger's retaliatory verbal violence follows the same path of inflicting a vengeful injury against the opponent that is orally communicated and circulated in public so that the reaction to the perpetration becomes part of the public discourse. Circumstances of this kind are discussed in the various disciplines where protagonists in tragic stories take for self-gratification the responsibility of retaliating at the cost of their lives and for the sake of settling scores with the aggressor (Barash & Lipton, 2011; Priebe, 2005).

V. THE WORD'S POTENTIAL TO POSITION THE INDIVIDUAL

Ahmed illustrates in the poem the tendency of "the word" to position a speaker or a target, to demonstrate where one stands in a difficult situation of conflict or looming confrontation that may escalate into a confrontation, either a duel of words or, worse, one of war. It can elucidate whether one's language has defensive or offensive inclinations and toward what extreme it stands on each axis. In the same manner, a party's chosen words in such a situation might be playing a pacifist role to calm down a heated conflict headed toward a devastating clash. As a dependent factor, however, "the word" can be efficaciously manipulated to mischaracterize a nemesis by deliberately misinterpreting their intentions, maliciously fabricating a situation of panic and falsehood that misleads society in order to gain its support against the demonized enemy (Galtung, 1987; Macdonald, 2007; Ahmed 2004). More effective than any other non-military aspect of confrontation, a war of words—or a propagandistic

campaign—is an example of a strong tool that enables groups from a diverse range of ethnicities, religions, cultures, races, ideologies, and social and economic backgrounds to join forces under the influence of an ideology communicated not by coercive methods but by influence through sociopolitical frames and persuasions laid out as propaganda (Drąg *et al*., 2016).

The poet's use of the verb "invade" defines the seemingly covert guilty consciousness of "the word" and the catastrophic role it has played and continues to play in the psychological as well as moral life of humans. Correspondingly, it is the medium that facilitates negotiations in which crucial global affairs are conducted, both in military warfare and in a broad spectrum of civilian confrontations, some of which are carried out with elements of military might behind them, despite their disguise as purely non-military endeavors. A careful reading of the discourse on language expounds the culpability of "the word" in political warfare (Arquilla & Ronfeld, 2001; Forest, 2021), psychological warfare (Paddock, 1989; Rodríguez, 2020; Schleifer, 2014), ideological warfare (Maynard, 2019; Mueller, 2019; Sack, 2009), media warfare (Blank, 2017; Khan, 2015; Macdonald, 2007), and information warfare (Kotelenets & Barabash, 2019), to mention a few randomly selected examples among the pool of disciplinary literatures on warfare.

It is by viewing "the word" from its potentially destructive standpoint that the poet Ahmed, through his storyteller, evaluates language as a tool with potential tendency "to invade," an action that depends on another powerful element in war that he calls "conviction." Like military operation in which armies of men and women in uniform are deployed on the frontlines in a war zone and guided by their "conviction" of national or ideological defense, the poet recognizes not just the interdependence between the two but indeed the impotence of "the word" as a toothless device in the absence of "conviction" to propel its ideological force, stimulate one's conscience, and activate its moral and psychological being into physical assault by humans.

VI. "THE WORD" AS A CATASTROPHIC DEVICE
"It [the word] must first hibernate"

The closing line of the stanza is as peculiar as it is both informative and philosophical. At this juncture, when the closing remark of the poem is presented, one may surmise that the poet's protagonist has covered enough ideological ground, in which the hero presented the case, clarified the intentions, argued the inherent point sufficiently, and appeared ready for the submission of the valedictory remarks. But here is also a contrapuntal scenario in which the poet raises, yet again, another condition; this time one that is in turns counter to and harmonious with the five models of conditional disabilities given above. Unlike the other conditions that prevented "the word" from being a sovereign entity on

its own, the current one presents it as an independent unit, one which is solely responsible for its actions. In this last line, the poet associates "the word" with the verb "hibernate" as the mother-of-all conditions that surpasses all the others highlighted prior to it because it is conveyed as the governing factor at the command center of all the other conditions delineated in the previous lines of the poem.

Here, the poet purposefully uses "hibernate" which, by its grammatical use, disrupts the stable ground, the poem's natural flow of the paradigmatic dependency of "the word". Contrary to its counterparts, meaning the other verbs used in the poem, the word "hibernate" stands as an intransitive verb while the others used in the five-model disability sentences or clauses were used in their transitive form, although some of them might be used as intransitive verbs in relevant contexts. But more destabilizing is the manner in which the narrator is suggesting that for "the word" to carry out its assault and all the other actions attributed to it as dependent, and probably to the dismay of all of them, "it must first hibernate." While this style of ambiguously ending a versal story is common in Ahmed's poems, a characteristic unique to this poem is that the hibernation mentioned in the conclusion is in fact where the actions should start or should have been started as a prerequisite for all the other five activities to be executed.

Semantically, *hibernation* sounds as a simple term too easy to understand. However, a keen look at it displays a tricky aspect of the word and as a phenomenon laden with subtlety, complexity and ambiguity as well. The reason is, although from its general description *hibernation* is understood to mean a temporary period of inactive indolence, what is not immediately figured out is the strategic aim behind it as an adoption and adaptation to a situation where an animal experiences low energy in an environment. But the animal's indolent docility or inactivity characterizes its strategic survival—existentiality in circumstances that underpin endurance and resilience.

What differentiates hibernation from perpetual idleness is that it occurs with a purpose: the "preservation of adequate energy" whose aim is "efficacious reproduction" (Boyles *et al*., 2020, p. 91; see also Humphries *et al*., 2003). Therefore, being in a period of recovery and nourishment, the signification of "the word" as a mere tool in hibernation creates a complicated assumption: a scenario that overshadows the strong effect it can have when it strikes as a result of the energy it has accrued and well-conserved over the period of rest and to be emitted in the trade-off between conserving sufficient energy and expending that energy with what Ahmed calls "precision," and "conviction", which respond to the two critical elements of *accurate time* and *appropriate purpose of belief.*

The narrator's metaphor of hibernation envisages a period of silence but one during which one's conscientious contemplation, compilation of resentments, strategic preparation of a suitable response (assault), and restoration of energy are nevertheless in progress and active, despite knowing the need to address the point but remaining patient until such a time when his or her intervention with and by "the word" is impelled by demanding socio-psychological circumstances. The notion of "the word" hitting after hibernation gives the hypothesis of imagining an earlier incident in which someone uttered a word, probably not decent enough in either the context in which it was expressed or the erratic form in which it was employed. It also assumes that, after "the word" had done the damage, the perpetrator felt a sense of backing down from the injury it had caused, hence Ahmed's intervention that, "without conviction" of the speaker and those to whom the word mattered—both subject and object—"the word" would have remained not only utterly futile but indeed also inconsequential. The "conviction", therefore, of the original speaker who caused the damage, as well as that of the narrator of the poem to respond to the lewd language contained in "the word," place the reader in an oxymoron in which s/he must negotiate between being *oxy* (wise) or *moros* (foolish) in the Greek sense of the word, and determine the convictional intent of "the word" and synecdochic paradoxes figuratively etched onto each other throughout the poem.

VII. CONCLUSION

The poem analyzed here presents the dubious ways in which language can function. It evaluates "the word" or coded language from different factors and angles. While appreciating the laudable functions of language as an important form of communication in daily human interactions, the poet Ahmed nonetheless commits the word to various disadvantages that undermine the attributes he gives to it. It is indeed these disadvantages that make the word a dependent factor that cannot reach its factual objective in the absence of the dependent variables the protagonist of the poet associates with language. The analysis portrays the learning we acquire from the interactive negotiation that language perpetuates as an independently potential medium of expression on the one hand, although, on the other hand, Ahmed symbolizes that same potential as an attribute not entirely controlled or possessed by "the word" but by factors more independent and overly more authoritative than language itself and therefore allow it to function within the perimeters they set for it.

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