



## REDEFINITION DISCOURSE AS A TOOL OF EXCLUSION IN ADICHIE'S *HALF OF A YELLOW SUN*

Bi Boho LIZIE,

Doctoral candidate

Université Alassane Ouattara

[biboholizie@gmail.com](mailto:biboholizie@gmail.com)

**Abstract:** Redefinition is an act which consists in giving a new definition or a new posture that triggers a change to an existing thing. This paper describes redefinition discourse as a strategy of exclusion in Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Using a methodology of identification and interpretation, the paper analyses how redefinition discourse is used to divide Nigeria and Biafra. The result reveals redefinition discourse as the representative of divisive language for others and a peaceful weapon for those who use it for the quest for identity and quietness. Thus, by means of the divided subject theory of J. Lacan's (1966) underlied in enunciation, one can see that redefinition discourse is based on language use.

**Keywords:** discourse, exclusion, identity, language, redefinition, strategy, subject.

**Résumé :** La redéfinition est un acte qui consiste à donner une nouvelle définition ou une nouvelle posture qui opère un changement à quelque chose qui déjà existe. Cet article décrit le discours de la redéfinition comme une stratégie d'exclusion dans *l'Autre Moitié du Soleil* d'Adichie. En se servant de la méthodologie de l'identification et de l'interprétation, l'article analyse comment le discours de la redéfinition est employé pour diviser le Nigeria et Biafra. Le résultat révèle le discours de la redéfinition comme le représentatif du discours qui sème la division pour d'autres et une arme pacifique pour ceux qui l'utilisent pour la quête de leur identité et de quiétude. Ainsi, à l'aide de la théorie du sujet divisé de J. Lacan (1966) reposant sur l'énonciation, l'on voit que le discours de la redéfinition est basé sur l'usage de la langue.

**Mots-clés:** discours, exclusion, identité, langue, redéfinition, stratégie, sujet.



## Introduction

Human's perpetual social positionings are modelled in accordance with the multidirectional and everyday language use. With regard to this context, A. Graesser et al., (1997, p. 164) assert: "discourse is what makes us human, what allows us to communicate ideas, facts, and feelings across time and space". R. Wodak and M. Meyer (2001) espousing these views, denote that discourses are institutionalized and regulated because they are linked to action and they can be understood as a unique material of realities.

N. Fairclough (1992), based on his critical approach, advances that discourse analysis is not concerned only with power relations in discourse, but also with how power relations and power struggle shape and transform the discourse practices of a society or institution. On the reverse and at the same time, the domineering discourses can be criticized and problematized when they are analysed. It is in this context, R. Wodak and M. Meyer (2001) contend that discourses' contradictions and hidden expressed realities can be revealed by the use of the same discourse as a means of criticizing and expression of resistance. Consequently, discourse can be likened to a double-edged sword. That is, language can both hurt and heal.

The issuing of Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* is to retrace a fateful event that describes the Nigerian-Biafra civil war. In the quest for new status, Biafrans use redefinition discourse as their counter-discourse in terms of their system of self-defence. In this way, redefinition, which is an act that consists in shaping the existing state of something, this paper puts it forward as a strategy for biafrans to redefine themselves defying socio-political and cultural upheaval. Hence, the study's interest. The motivation of the study is to unfold the dual ability of language to be a tool of division and a device of unity. In other words, the study is interested in showing redefinition discourse as the blueprint implemented by biafrans to shift in position in terms of renegotiating their identities and change in power dynamics. To reach the goal, the exploration of the following questions is requested: What does redefinition discourse refer to? What are the traces and impacts of redefinition discourse in *Half of a Yellow Sun*?

The study is based on J. Lacan's (1966) divided subject theory. It highlights the character of language in framing human subjectivity and posits that human identity is continuously in a position of variability and discrepancy. The work is split into two parts. The first part deals with the description of concepts linked to redefinition discourse and the second one is concerned with the pragmatic scope in the construction redefinition discourse and its outcomes.



## **1. Description of Concepts Related to Discourse of Redefinition**

Exclusion discourse is the interest of several discourse analysts. This confirms that there is a plethora of concepts that determine the nature of exclusion discourse. Some of these are racism, discrimination, ideology, persuasion, and manipulation known as exclusion discourse strategies. Thus, a basic point definition for redefinition being an act of modification operated in something that already exists, it therefore encompasses the idea of transformation. Accordingly, it epitomizes chiefly the dynamics in language, discourse of exclusion in the context of conflict. Hence, its socio-political appellative redefinition discourse.

One can stand in that way that redefinition discourse is a speech that announces a transition of a group from a former status toward a new paradigm. According to T. O. Adesanmi (2017, p. 260), exclusion discourse “encourages ‘separatism’; a group’s desire to separate itself from the state to which it belongs”. In other words, redefinition discourse as a form of exclusion is a discourse that paves a way to a split of a group or a nation. This implies that redefinition discourse stems from many sources that express separation orchestrating a change or a transformation. Hence, revolution model.

### **1.1. Revolution as a Model of Discourse of Redefinition**

A revolution is a usually violent attempt by many people to put an end to the rule of one government and start a new one in a given country or society. In other expressions, it is the overthrow of a government by those who are governed. Following M. S. Kimmel (1990) who combines questions of success, violence, and the object of revolution, a revolution is: “any attempt by subordinate groups through the use of violence to bring about (1) a change of government or its policy, (2) a change of regime, or (3) a change of society, whether this attempt is justified by reference to past conditions or to an as yet unattained future ideal.” (M. S. Kimmel, 1990, p. 6)

M. S. Kimmel (1990) implies by his statement that despite the fact that a revolution may be successful or a defeat, the foundation is the significance of the endeavour and the possibility of its target that is a political and social alteration or a simple substitute of ruler. In this way, whatever the circumstances, it is intentional, bringing about ideological pretexts and probably provoking brutality. However, M. S. Kimmel (1990) underscores that this definition makes reference to a change in the regime. Then, the fact that it can also be the substitution of one ruler by another, it is known as a coup d’état. Accordingly, the revolutionary discursive practices are illustrated in example (1):

- (1) Prof. Ezeka: **The BBC** is calling it **an Igbo coup**, the chin-chin-eating guest said. They have the point. **It was mostly Northerners who were killed**. It was mostly Northerners who were in **government**.  
 Odenigbo: **The BBC** should be asking their people who **put the Northerners in government to dominate everybody**. (HYS, p.158).

Utterance (1) is the report of the British imperialists by the canal of ‘the BBC<sup>1</sup>’. This means that it is their reliable source of information. The two speech participants in a dialogue are indirectly discussing the BBC fresh broadcast that deals with a coup d’état advent. Since most of the dead victims are the Northerners as expressed in “it was mostly Northerners who were killed” presupposes that the coup d’état is performed by the Igbo people as heralded by the BBC in “the BBC is calling it an Igbo coup”. Hence, its revolutionary aspect. At this stage, M. S. Kimmel (1990, p. 5) is realistic when he mentions that a revolution is “the sudden change and violent overthrow of an established political order”.

Through the quotation, two fundamental facts explain the revolution in question in utterance (1). First, the government is actually full of the Northerners who dominate the rest of the country. This is observed in the statement such as “it was mostly Northerners who were in government”. Second, as consequence, it provokes the use of violence by the dominated people to call for change and take new position. The violent aspect of the revolution is thus explained by the massacre of the members of the government.

A revolution far from being a hollow term, it marks the closure of one outstanding period of a history of a group of people and opens a new horizon of another one which is of a major significance. It triggers fundamental change from all levels, that is, from the state of dependence to that of freedom, autonomous, in one word, an independence. This is to be observed in the following excerpt :

- (2) Land of rising sun, we love and cherish, beloved homeland of our heroes; we must defend our lives or we shall perish. We shall protect our hearts from all foes; but if the price is dear for all we hold dear, then let us die without a shred of fear. (HYS, p. 338)

Utterance (2) is the national anthem of Biafra. It means that Biafra displays its own national anthem. Thus, this process accounts for the demarcation of its inhabitants resulting in their revolutionary behaviours, hence the veracity of discourse of redefinition. According to S. Waterman (2019, p. 1), “national anthems constitute a serious business, and that is why they are played at the most solemn moments dedicated to performing a nation’s spirit, as singing and listening to them generates raised feelings of pride and

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<sup>1</sup> British Broadcasting Corporation

patriotism”. In the same vein, F. Onditi (2018, p. 3), but in other words, asserts that “national anthem defines a country’s identity. It is regarded as a symbol of national unity. In Africa, they assert the country’s independence from colonial imperialism”. In a nutshell, a revolution triggers a political and social inversion and in one way or another repairs the wrongness of the oppressed.

## 1. 2. Ideological Language in Discourse of Redefinition

Ideology is described as being a set of ideas and beliefs of a group or a political party or a political orientation that characterizes the thinking of a group or nation. According to A. Heywood (2003), ideology is a coherent set of ideas that provides the basis for organized political action, whether this is intended to preserve, modify or overthrow the existing system of power. A. Heywood (2003) strengthens that:

all ideologies therefore (a) offer an account of the existing order, usually in the form of a ‘world-view’, (b) advance a model of a desired future, a vision of the ‘good society’, and (c) explain how political change can and should be brought about – how to get from (a) to (b)

(A. Heywood, 2003, p. 10)

Like revolution, ideology discourse also leads to the idea of shifting, that is, the will of a group to get rid of an existing social and political organization with a view to undertake their promised adventure. Hence, the epitome of discourse of redefinition. Tantamount to revolution, ideology is entrenched in the form of world perception by its actors and influenced by their common interests. This is the reason why T.V. Dijk (1998) describes ideologies as special form of social cognition shared by social groups. For him, ideologies form the basis of the social representations and practices of group members, including their discourse, which at the same time serves as the means of ideological production, reproduction and challenge. The following excerpts display the ideological consolidation of Biafrans:

(3) **We** launched it this afternoon, this very afternoon. **Our own** homemade rocket. My people, **we** are on **our way**. **We** are a country of geniuses! (HYS, p. 242-243).

(4) **Solidarity** forever! **Solidarity** forever! **Our** Republic shall vanquish! (HYS, p. 243).

(5) Biafra will not betray the black man. No matter the odds, **we** will fight with all **our** might

until black men everywhere can point with pride to this Republic, standing dignified and

defiant, an example of African nationalism. (HYS, p. 467).

The dynamic use of language is a means of consolidation and establishment of collective reliable relation. The root of this collectivity is somehow a creed for the members of the specific social grouping that permits them to pursue their shared beliefs and common interests. Utterances (3), (4), and (5) shed light on the national consolidation and common involvement of the population of Biafra through the use of inclusive markers ‘we’ and its variant ‘our’ that express solidarity as shown in utterance (4).

The attachment to the common goal and the manifestation of national unity help understand their sense of altruism toward one another. This leads M. Azizan *et al.*, (2020, p. 335) to word that “solidarity is also coined with altruism, which signals similarity in idea”. On the same basis, T. V. Dijk (1998, p. 138) highlighting the sense of the functions of ideologies in societies posits: “ideologies positively serve to empower dominated groups, to create solidarity, to organize struggle and to sustain opposition”. Likewise, ideologies not only make sense in order to understand the world from the point of view of the group, that is, they influence their ways of interpretation of the world, but also they set the basis for the social practices of group members.

### 1. 3. Withdrawal Speech as a Redefinition Discourse Pattern

Withdrawal can be defined as an act of moving or taking something away. On the basis of the prevailing idea of the topic, it is conceived as a formal separation from an alliance or a federation. Although G. Anderson (2013) agrees with this definition, however, he goes to the root delving out the etymology of ‘secession’ that lies in the Latin terms ‘se’ meaning ‘apart’ and ‘cedere’ meaning ‘to go’. He indicates that secession equates to moving apart or withdrawing. Therefore, ‘secession’ is the action of seceding or in a formal way, it is withdrawing from an alliance, a federation, a political or religious organization. The following occurrence illustrates how the notion of withdrawal contributes to the elaboration of discourse of redefinition.

(6) We University staff, **demand secession** as a means of security. (HYS, p. 200).

Utterance (6) shows the necessity of the impending birth of Biafra after the failure of Abruti peace agreement. In utterance (6), the University staff are asking for secession. Secession semantically refers to a detachment, which infers their removal and isolation. Sharing such view, G. Anderson (2013, p. 344) depicts secession as “the withdrawal of territory colonial or non-colonial from part of an existing state to create a new state”. Through the quotation, secession is not far from encompassing the idea of divorce in the

sense that it stands out that the people living in their newly territory come from an existing land. This situation is nothing but the truthfulness of discourse of redefinition.

## 2. Pragmatic Scope in the Construction of Redefinition Discourse

Pragmatics is the study of how language contextually functions in interactions. As such, it is the speaker's meaning which is at stake. That is to say, how meaning is manipulated relying on its context. G. Yule (1996) goes beyond and argues that pragmatics is the study of the meaning of utterances which are different from the literal meaning of words or sentences depending on the context. This part uncovers the relevance of speech act to the data analysis.

### 2.1. Discourse of Redefinition as an Affirmation of One's Identity

Identity can be portrayed as the recurring characteristics that enable the recognition of such an individual or group by others or themselves. Language being a tool of communicating, the interaction between language and identity is a preponderant constituent of human nature, that is, language and identity are interrelated. This is the reason why one can agree with D. Watt (2010, p. 76) when he notes: "the language choices we make are a central element of our conception of ourselves not just as members of social groups but as self-contained individuals distinct from all others". It follows that language constitutes the way par excellence the expression of human distinctiveness.

In the context related to redefinition discourse, some key aspects of identities are: national, cultural, and personal. Thus, behind a use of any specific linguistic item encapsulated in discourse there is a design of exclusion or inclusion that characterizes the picture of identification. As advocated by N. R. Bramley (2001), pronouns play fundamental roles in the construction of 'self' and 'others', therefore, they must be thought of in the context of interaction in terms of 'identity work' that they accomplish. This is to be observed in the examples below:

- (7) **We** shall not, **we** shall never move, just like a tree that's planted by the water **we** shall not be moved. Ojukwu is behind **us**, **we** shall never move. God is behind **us**, **we** shall never move. (HYS, p. 201)
- (8) **Our** battalion is made up of field of engineers and **we** use only the mighty *ogbunigwe*. (HYS, p. 433)
- (9) **They** are killing **us** like ants. Did you hear what I said? Ants. (HYS, p.179)

In examples (7) and (8), there are remarkable features of the construction of redefinition discourse by the use of the pronouns ‘we’ and its variants ‘us’ and ‘our’. On the one hand, the personal pronouns ‘we’, ‘us’ and ‘our’ evoke the inclusion of the speaker to the hearer, hence the expression of solidarity. Whereas solidarity alludes to common point and involvement that bring people together. M. Pensky (2008), consequently, infers that ‘solidarity’ is the core idea of a ‘shared sense of the good’, a substantive ethical consensus on how a group must live and have the idea of shared identity. Accordingly, the use of the pronouns ‘we’ and its variants ‘us’ and ‘our’ reflects a particular identity of the inhabitants of Biafra by distinguishing them from Nigerians. Hence, the assertion of their national identity.

One can set forth, on the other hand, that the inclusion of the speaker to the hearer creates at the same time an exclusive group via the use of ‘we’ vis-à-vis the other groups. In other terms, any construction of ‘we’ overtly presupposes the existence of a ‘they’ or ‘you’, which constitutes the oppositional party. Considering the use of ‘they’ in utterance (9), it highlights the exclusionary phenomena that are the trace of opposition between ‘they’ = ‘them’ and ‘us’ = ‘we’. This is seen through the use of the pronoun ‘they’ that represents Nigeria opposed to ‘I’ + ‘you’ = ‘we’ and its variants ‘us’, and ‘our’ representing the population of Biafra in utterances (7) and (8). In this respect, N. R. Bramley (2001, p. 184-185) denotes: “they is used to create an ‘us and them’ oppositional dichotomy”. A. E. Wiczorek (2015, p. 7) retrieving in other words confirms: “the pronoun is thus clearly inclusive of the addressees and exclusive of the adversaries”.

There is another plausible proof of proclamation of self-identification known as a counter-identification. This represents at the same time a personal and cultural identity through Odenigbo’s discursive practices in excerpt (10):

- (10) Of course, of course, but my point is that **the only authentic identity for the African is the tribe**; I am Nigerian because a white man created Nigeria and gave me that identity. I am black because the white man constructed black to be as different as possible from his white. **But I was Igbo before the white man came.** (HYS, p. 33)

Excerpt (10) describes discourse of redefinition in incarnating ethnically self-identification discourse which is a discourse of counter-identification in terms of personal and cultural identity compared with that of a colonial one. In excerpt (10), Odenigbo introduces himself as a veritable tribalist in that he challenges the existing thought of Nigerian identity. To reach his objective, he proceeds by an argumentation that is named according to T. Winans (2019), a divisive rhetoric. This can be observed in the following





terms: ‘the only authentic identity for African is the tribe’ and ‘I was Igbo before the white man’. With regard to divisive rhetoric, T. Winans (2019, p. 3) stipulates that “this kind of language has the distinct intention of pitting groups against each other”.

Odenigbo is effectively rejecting his identity as Nigerian because for him Nigeria is a creation of white people (England), while Igbo is a self-made identity created by God long before the inversion of white people. As a result, for him, Nigeria is white people’s invention, therefore, it is arbitrary and their strategy of domination and exploitation. By taking into consideration the divisive language used through pronominal choices and a discourse of counter-identification, one can put forward that they are pragmatic cues used in redefinition discourse to proclaim one’s belonging, one’s identity and cultural background.

## 2. 2. Redefinition Discourse as a Pledge

Redefinition speeches are motivational, emotive, and exclusive because they are counter-discourses. By the way, they constitute psychological features that arouse an organism to action towards a desired goal. In this outlook, several speech acts are mobilized by speakers, mainly by the leaders in conflict situations to urge their populations to be in the state of alert. This paper deals with mainly two of them. They are commissive and declarative speech acts. Ojukwu uses commissive speech acts to the commitment of himself for his population to some imminent actions. This is evidenced via Ojukwu’s warning message to his population in utterance (11):

(11) **Ojukwu**: If they declare war, **I want to tell you** now that it may become a long-dawn-out war. A long-dawn-out war. **Are you prepared?** Are you prepared?  
(HYS,  
p. 211)

Utterance (11) includes two commissive acts of major substance that are: ‘promise’ and ‘threat’. As a ‘promise’, Ojukwu commits himself by promising to predict his population what they may be confronted with an advent of war because he cares for them. This is performed by the use of the group of words “If they declare war, I want to tell you now that it may become a long-dawn-out war”. The use of the commissive utterance ‘I want to tell you’ implies promising and indicates that the speaker does not want his people to vanish in the aftermath of the war. Therefore, his speech is for their interest. Accordingly, S. Rahmawati (2012, p. 23) explains that promise is “expressing an intention which gives benefits to the hearer”.



As a ‘threat’, Ojukwu also commits himself by threatening them in terms of warning and observing in advance their states of mind concerning the causalities of war. War is not a game. Ojukwu is realistic and calls things by their names when he insists in these terms: ‘Are you prepared? Are you prepared?’. This state of facts goes along with S. Rahmawati’s (2012, p. 23) depiction of threat by positing that in threat “there is an intention from the speaker to give harm or give no benefits to the hearer”. In the same vein, G. Leech (1983, p. 106) propounds: “commissive utterances shows that the speakers use it to insist themselves for some feature actions in the future”.

Another type of speech acts proper to redefinition discourse is declarative speech acts because they announce a change in an existing thing. To put it knowingly, G. Yule (1996, p. 53) mentions that declaration refers to “kinds of speech acts that change the world via their utterance. In using a declaration, the speaker changes the world via words”. This is obvious in Ojukwu’s unmistakable, vibrant male charismatic and smooth speech in excerpt (12) and in excerpt (13) by the declaration of the birth of Biafra by his resolved population.

(12) Fellow countrymen and women, **you the people of Eastern Nigeria**: Conscious of the supreme authority of Almighty God over all mankind; of your duty over posterity; aware that you can no longer be protected in your lives in your property by any government based outside Eastern Nigeria; determined to dissolve all political and other ties between you and the former Republic of Nigeria; **having mandated me to proclaim on your behalf and in your name that Eastern Nigeria be a sovereign independent Republic, now therefore I do hereby solemnly proclaim** that the territory and region known as and called Eastern Nigeria, together with her continental shelf and territorial waters, shall henceforth be an independent sovereign state of the name and title of **The Republic Of Biafra**. (HYS, p. 200)

(13) **Biafra is born!** We will lead Black Africa! We will live in **security!** Nobody will **ever** **again** attacks us! **Never again!** (HYS, p. 202).

Excerpt (12) is an aspect of redefinition discourse via a declarative speech delivered by colonel Ojukwu. In utterance (12), the key idea is the enactment message of the secession. Secession that aims at bringing a new breath of air for the inhabitants of Biafra because it is for them a means of security. Considering the use of the terms ‘having mandated me to proclaim... now therefore I do hereby solemnly proclaim’, the speaker (Colonel Ojukwu) as their leader, uses declarative speech act. In conformity with this context, R. A. Putri et al., (2020, p. 1886) are not wrong when they verbalize: “the declarative speech act is intended by the speaker to create a new thing or change a

condition or status”.

Ojukwu’s speech, indeed, characterizes the split of Nigeria and the new orientation of Biafrans. Hence, the creation of the Republic of Biafra explaining the change in terms of Republic. This creation of Biafra Republic signals their relocation that eventually can bestow their independence and freedom. It also shows and displays their territorial and political exclusivity vis-à-vis Nigeria, which particularly determines their status of being redefined. Biafra is born out of the Igbo ethnic group’s strong desire to escape from Nigeria and found a new country. Utterance (13) is the conventional force achieved in the saying of the utterance as stated by J. Austin (1962). Thus, by the use of the statement ‘Biafra is born!’, utterance (13) materializes the birth of the Republic of Biafra. This declaration highlights their redefinition in terms of reconstruction, reconstitution and renaissance.

The creation of the Republic of Biafra as announced in utterance (12) and emphasised in utterance (13), redefines its inhabitants because it breaks the link with their former social position and gives them a new status, a new identity promising them a bright future. This means that after a long period of suffering, Biafra is going to be a place of security, optimism and a fresh start for them in order to survive and make sense of their new reality. This is expressed in the following groups of occurrences: ‘a means of security’, ‘we will live in security!’, ‘nobody will ever again attacks us!’, ‘never again!’. Commissive and declarative acts are linguistic tools pragmatically used to determine how discourse of redefinition accounts for a change that gives birth to a separation.

### **Conclusion**

This paper describes and explains to what extent redefinition discourse as an exclusion discourse strategy could help grasp the meaning of a wide-reaching change in ways of thinking and behaving of a group. In other terms, it accounts for the need by a group to shift their nature when negotiating their new destination confronted to the advent of war. For this purpose, Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun* is selected as it sets the background of Nigerian-Biafra civil war. In this respect, the different linguistic forms that have permitted to bring light in the discursive strategies used by individual and collective speaking subjects are first, revolutionary model, ideological language and withdrawal speech. Second, via pragmatic purview, the use of grammatical entities and speech acts unveils individual and collective loyalty and psychological preparedness in order to bring a change.



The data collected related to the study epitomizing redefinition discourse and that express the verbal actions show the accomplishment of the separation between Nigeria and Biafra. This is performed by the achievement of Biafrans' secession. Therein, relying on the duality of language in the light of the divided subject theory, it can be summarized that redefinition discourse is dynamic, for it is the incarnation of divisive language for others and a self-defence weapon for those who use it for the quest for identity and quietness. Otherwise, the study shows the role of language in shaping humans' stories in that it reveals how through discourse production, humans can bring a potential change to their socio-political and cultural conditions as best they could. Furthermore, through the corpus, the study shows the many possibilities of the generative historical events and strategies through which individuals and groups have the responsibility to adapt and redefine themselves in periods of crisis.

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