

**PICTURING REFORMULATION IN DISCOURSE: A CASE OF TONY  
MORRISON'S *THE BLUEST EYE***

Dr. Zorobi Philippe TOH  
Université Alassane OUATTARA

**Abstract**

Reformulation in discourse seeks popularization for the sake of an improved comprehension. It can be rightly achieved through various strategies. One can think of rewording, paraphrase, periphrasis, recontextualisation, exemplifications, passivation, metaphor, and generalization. In Tony Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, reformulation appears as a manipulative resource. That is, the choice made by a locutor of one reformulation in a discourse relation over another one that is dispreferred, is not by chance. It is rather highly motivated. Hence, at the inception of the novel, one can see a well-written section. Strangely, the same section is reformulated with neither punctuation nor timing. As if this lack were not sufficient, the begotten text is reformulated anew and without space between words. It can be witnessed with the first line. "Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty. Here is the house it is green and white it has a red door it is very pretty Hereisthehouseitisgreenandwhiteithasareddooritisverypretty".

Far from being a particular way, reformulation as a linguistic phenomenon embedded in pragmatics demands very often reformulation markers so as to assume semantic approximation between the source segment and the reformulated one.

**Key words:** approximation, comprehension, discourse, manipulation, popularisation, reformulation.

**Résumé**

La reformulation dans le discours vise la popularisation en vue d'une meilleure compréhension. Cela peut être correctement accompli à travers plusieurs stratégies. On peut penser à la redite, à la paraphrase, à la périphrase, à la re-contextualisation, à l'exemplification, à la passivation, à la métaphore et à la généralisation. Dans *The Bluest Eye* de Tony Morrison, la reformulation apparaît comme une ressource manipulatrice. C'est dire combien le choix

opéré par un locuteur d'une formulation dans le discours au détriment de telle autre n'est pas innocent. Il est plutôt hautement motivé.

D'où la présentation d'une séquence bien écrite dès l'entame du corpus. Curieusement, la même séquence est reformulée. Cette fois, elle ne contient ni ponctuation, ni pause. Comme si cela n'était pas suffisant, cette nouvelle séquence est reformulée de nouveau et étrangement sans espaces entre les mots. La première ligne en témoigne: "Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty. Here is the house it is green and white it has a red door it is very pretty Hereisthehouseitisgreenandwhiteithasareddooritisverypretty".

Loin d'être une façon particulière, la reformulation est un phénomène linguistique qui relève de l'analyse du discours. Elle nécessite trop souvent des marqueurs de reformulation pour établir l'approximation sémantique entre la séquence source et la séquence reformulée.

**Mots clefs** : approximation, compréhension, discours, manipulation, popularisation, reformulation.

## **Introduction**

Understanding each other in a discourse is not always something obvious. Thus, discourse participants resort to many tricks to be sure that their message is delivered. Among these tricks, one can quote reformulation. D. R. M. Saz and B. Fraser (2003, p.211) define reformulation as a "recharacterization of the message conveyed by the whole previous discourse segment S1, or one of its constituents". In other words, "reformulation is a discourse function whereby the second unit is a restatement or elaboration of the first in different words, to present it from a different point of view and to reinforce the message (Ken Hyland, 2007, P.269).

As such, reformulation is important because it helps avoid communication failure, that is misunderstanding. It is ridiculous to see discourse protagonists thinking that they are on the same diapason whereas in fact, they are but referring to things quite different. The reason is that the referent is not always unique. So, to maximize comprehension in a verbal interaction, one is to take seriously the matter of reformulation.

Much has already been done on reformulation. But, what can be observed is that, through most of these developments, reformulation studied focused mainly on popularization and clarification. In this paper, on the contrary, precedence is devoted to the manipulative dimension of reformulation. The purpose is then to explore some of the most common linguistic features

found in reformulation. It is also targeted to trigger high awareness on the fact that there are valid reasons to use different formulations for different audiences.

Thus, the necessity of answering the following questions: are some formulations of a discourse better than others? What linguistic features are used in reformulation? Does the co-speaker's level or expertise domain affect formulations? Does the speaker's intended meaning manifestly appear through the re-formulation?

The answering process leads to a three-parts development imbedded in pragmatics. The first part deals with reformulation markers and semantic approximation. The second one discusses evasion in reformulation and the last part examines reformulation through figures of speech.

## 1. Reformulation Markers and Semantic Approximation

### 1.1. Sequence Rewording

For A. Partington (2003, p. 177), reformulation is the rewording of a piece of information uttered previously. It can serve a number of functions. It can be divided into two main categories: self-reformulation, the rewording of something you have said yourself; and other –reformulation which is the reworking of someone else's words.

Examples of self-reformulation are:

(1) "Sure", said Frieda drowsily. "Sure **you can**". (B.E<sup>1</sup>:32)

Not only it is reformulated but, chiefly it marks an emphasis. Just to reassure Pecola.

Pecola expecting to be clearer poses:

(2) "How do you do that? **I mean**, how do you get somebody to love you? (B. E: 32)

Clarification is necessitated because of the pronoun 'that' which is meaning-empty. It is a sort of empty pocket which has a meaning only in discourse relying on a context. It can be done another way such as:

(3) "Go on," they said. "**Go on and finish**" (B.E:42)

Moreover, there is lexical simplification defined as follows. "Lexical simplification: replacing difficult words with easier ones" (A. Siddharthan & N. Katsos, 2010, p.1004).

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<sup>1</sup> Tony Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*.

This simplification can be referred to as “the principle of equivalent effect” (E. Nida, 1964, p.159). In the following example, there is another technique:

(4) “Bobby loves Pecola Breedlove! **Bobby loves Pecola Breedlove!**” (B.E: 46)

The first segment amounts to the second one. Such a phenomenon is an example of zero reformulation. But, it is at least a reformulation because never two utterances are equal in discourse analysis.

As witnessed by Quirk et al. (1985, p.1311) “when a reworded concept is placed in apposition to its original utterance. We have a reformulation.”

### 1.2. Background knowledge

As put by Franz Boas (1930, p.1930) “Culture embraces all the manifestations of social habits of a community, the reactions of the individual as affected by the habits of the group in which he lives, and the product of human activities as determined by these habits”. Consequently, one can understand that culture shapes the habits of people.

The characters in the American context are persuaded that beauty lies in the physical traits of Whites. For that reason, Pecola wants to have blue eyes and asks for them to Soaphead who finds her request fair. He thought

(5) “Here was an **ugly** little girl asking for beauty”, (B.E:174).

Their attitude shows that not having blue eyes means not being beautiful. A way to convey that culture involves social standards and a worldview particular to a society.

Race is also an important feature to gain consideration. Black completion is difficult to bear since it is synonymous of disregard and belittlement. Such a fact is noticeable in the behavior of the mother of Pecola’s friend. She expelled her from her house through these words:

(6) “Get out...you nasty little **black bitch**” (B.E: 92).

As can be observed, her words toward Pecola are full of hatred.

This communicative action reflects Jürgen Habermas’s empirical pragmatics.

In addition to the basic modes, we first admit the concretely shaped illocutionary forces that form the culture-specific net of possible interpersonal relations standardized in each individual language. [...] In addition to explicit speech acts, we admit elliptically foreshortened, extraverbally supplemented, implicit utterances, for understanding which the hearer is thrown back upon the knowledge of nonstandardized, contingent contexts. [...] Finally, in addition to communicative action, we include in our analysis the resources of the background knowledge [that is, lifeworlds] from which participants feed their interpretations.

(Jürgen Habermas, 2004, p. 330)

Black American rejected their own race due to the low value assigned to it. One can deduct from that their agreement with the stereotypes toward them. It seems that they have finally recognized their black status to be the lowest one. For Claudia, to be called Black was an insult. She said to Maureen the little White girl:

(7) “**Black?** Who you calling black?” (B.E :73).

For her, she is beautiful because she is White but, Claudia and Pecola are not because they are Black. She said to the Black girls.

(8) “I am cute! And you ugly! **Black** and **ugly**...” (BE.73)

Because of race difference, comments go differently. One can glose it alike, I am white, this is why I am cute. You are ugly because you are black. In the words of M. Gotti, (2014, p.16) “The main criterion is different audiences targeted”.

Another use of evasion is to beat around the bush. That is one can use reformulation to evade.

## **2. Evasion in Reformulation**

B. Meyer (2011, p.148) defines that evasion technique as follows: «Cette méthode permet d’ «oublier» une ou plusieurs idées délicates à réfuter pour ne se pencher que sur celle qui semble la plus facile à contrecarrer»<sup>2</sup>.

It means that reformulation is not a passive task. The one who reformulates has wants and desires. He might disprefer number of things. These things are noticed in the reformulating way. “Thus, reformulating technical writing for lay audiences is a research area of direct relevance to information retrieval” (A. Siddharthan & N. Katsos, 2010, p.1003). But, very often, this process is not deprived from some tricks.

### **2.1.Tricky Reformulation**

In the words of B. Meyer (2011, p.147) tricky reformulation amounts to “reformuler de façon non objective l’idée adverse”<sup>3</sup>.

But, in self-reformulation, one can have different typography as a token of tricky reformulation. Some examples are:

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<sup>2</sup> This method permits « to forget » one or several delicate ideas to refute and focus only on the one that seems the easiest to thwart. (translation mine)

<sup>3</sup> To rephrase non objectively the opposing idea. (translation mine)

(9) Here is the house. It is green and white. It has a red door. It is very pretty. Here is the family. Mother, Father, Dick, and Jane live in the green and white house. They are very happy. (B.E.: 04)

(10) Here is the house it is green and white it has a red door it is very pretty here is the family mother father dick and jane live in the green-and-white house they are very happy. (B.E: 05)

(11) Here is the house it is green and white it has a red door it is very pretty here is the family mother father dick and jane live in the green-and-white house they are very happy. (B.E. 04).

It appears that (9) is different from (10) and (11) as far as the speaker's orientation is concerned. Rightly, N. Fairclough (1989, p.24) observes "Linguistic manipulation of audience is the conscious use of language in a devious way to control the others".

The following example sheds light on such a reality:

(12) Because she danced with Bojangles, who was **my friend, my uncle, my daddy**. (BE: 20)

In fact, through a tricky reformulation, one can plainly observe the transgression of the gricean quality maxim of conversation. It goes like "Do not say that which you believe to be false or for which you lack evidence" (G. Yule, 1996, p.145).

In example (12), it is easy to see that violation. How can a person be at the same time a friend, an uncle and a daddy? At least, one can be true and other false. It is a case of systems of multiple incompatibility. The "truth of one leads to the falsity of the other but the falsity of one does not necessarily lead to the truth of the other" (D. Thakur, 2003, p.23). The deviation of one these cooperative principle is to serve a personal goal such as lying, making information covert or irrelevant in order to deceive the co-speaker and possibly lead him accept fussy information.

(13) ...but had to be content at first with uglying up her name, changing Maureen Peal to **Meringue Pie**. (B.E: 63)

And calling her **Six-finger-dog-tooth-meringue-pie**. (BE: 63)

These are provocative reformulations. In fact, Frieda and others are mocking Pecola.

(14) "Black e mo. Black e mo. Yadaddsleepsnekked. Black e mo black e mo ya dadd sleeps nekked. Black e mo..."(BE : 65)

Writing is advantageous in detecting such tricks through typography because orally, it would not be easy. It is in this line that B. Meyer (2011, p.147) puts that «indéniablement, l'une des

difficultés majeures de l'argumentation orale est la capacité à trouver rapidement l'objection qui fait mouche<sup>4</sup>». Evasion in reformulation can be observed manifestly through rejection.

## 2.2.Rejecting Tendentious Reformulation

The appeal of B. Meyer (2011, p.147) is worth noting : «Bien sûr, tout débateur sérieux aura à cœur de se préparer, mais il reste à la merci de l'argument adverse auquel il n'avait pas pensé»<sup>5</sup>. It means that only the discourse participant makes you realize the clarity of one's discourse. For clarity sake, S. Clayman (1993, Pp.165-166) insists that “in some instances, reformulations appear to be produced straightforwardly in the service of a kind of clarification. The need for clarification can arise when the question is particularly complex”. Definitely, the goal is not to permit the co-speaker to interpret it his/her way. These are some examples:

(15) That's ministratin' (B.E:27)

(16) Noooo. You won't die. It **just** means you can have a baby. (B.E. 28)

(17) “You mean that's when you got old,” China said.

(18) “I ain't **never** got old. **Just** fat”

(19) “Same thing.”

(20) You think 'cause you skinny, folks think you young?

Just Marie is rejecting that reformulation. (52)

Examples (17), (18) and (19) are pretentious reformulations. They want to force a conclusion that is not admitted by the other protagonist. For example, (19) states that being old amounts to being fat. It goes alike for example (16) and (17). Indeed, it is difficult to understand them. As stated by D. Schiffrin (1994, p.295), difficulty is “due to the polysemous meaning of the predicate ‘mean’, and that it is related to the meta-linguistic properties of ‘mean’.

Moreover, “‘I mean’ is also used to reestablish the tone of a conversation by establishing a serious speaker key” (D. Schiffrin, 1994, p.298). “I mean” can also function as a marker of salient information. It is an indicator of information which is highly relevant for interpretation

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<sup>4</sup> Indisputably, one of the major difficulties of oral argumentation is the capacity to find quickly the right and efficient objection. (Translation mine).

<sup>5</sup> Of course, all good discourse protagonist will manage to get ready, but, he remains at the mercy of the other protagonist to whom he had not thought. (Translation mine)

of the speaker's overall message." D. Schiffrin (1994, p.309). In the same perspective, J. Habermas (2004, p. 331) emphasizes that "Here we must take into consideration that not only do illocutions appear in strategic-action contexts, but, perlocutions appear in contexts of communicative action as well."

A similar example of rejection is:

(21) I **didn't** say 'father'. I **just** said 'a naked man'". (BE: 71)

Maureen is rejecting that reformulation as if Pecola's father cannot be the 'naked man' she is referring to.

(22) Pecola shouted "I never saw my daddy naked. **Never**" (BE: 72)

For, D. Schiffrin (1994: p.267) "I mean" marks speaker orientation toward own talk, i.e. modification of ideas and intentions." She goes on quoting: "However, because shifts in speaker orientation have an effect on speaker/hearer relationships, 'I mean' also has interactional relevance." (D. Schiffrin, 1994, p.295).

Reversely, D. Schiffrin (1994, p.299) mention that, 'You mean' allows a speaker to suggest a modification of another's talk". First 'I mean' can be defined as either meta-linguistic or meta-communicative. The former since it focuses on ideas, the latter since it focuses on the speakers' communicative act' [...] These facets of 'I mean' influence the way the expression functions in discourse: it is the narrow meta-linguistic focus of 'I mean' which allows it to be a modifier of speaker's ideas, and the broader meta-communicative, interpretive focus of 'I mean' which allows it to be a modifier of speaker's intentions. (D. Schiffrin, 1994, p.305).

Tendentious rejection can also be noticeable in indicating person.

(23) "You all ready made. **Mammy** made." (BE: 72)

(24) You stop talking about my **mama** ». (BE: 72)

It is a matter of speaker. It is not the mother of Maureen, but, Frieda's. What is striking is that the referent is unique: the mother, but, the way Maureen and Frieda refer to her differ accordingly.

In reverse, Frieda refers to Maureen's father as follows.

(25) Who said anything about your **old daddy**." (BE: 72).

(26) "What do I care about her **old black daddy**?" (BE: 73).

It is a provocative and depreciative reformulation that is used by Frieda as can be witnessed the adjectives 'old' and 'black'.

Maureen simply orders:

(27) “Well, you stop talking about my **daddy**”. (BE : 72)

As one can realize it, it is plain clear that speakers use evasion in reformulation to influence their co-speakers. That is, evasion in reformulation turns into a genuine manipulative resource. Manipulation is the fact for a speaker to hide the meaning of his/her conveyed message either to influence the addressee or to deceive the watchfulness. As A. Asya (2013, p.1) stated, “manipulation is realized when the listener cannot see the speaker’s covered intentions behind what is actually being said”.

### 3. Reformulation through Figures of Speech

#### 3.1. Metaphors and Similes

“This phenomenon is also favoured by the widespread use of metaphor and simile in popularising processes. Both techniques establish a direct link with the public’s general knowledge, which makes the content easier to identify”. (M. Gotti, 2014, p.19).

These are some examples:

(28) Well, somebody asked him why he left a nice good church woman like Della for that **heifer**. (BE: 13)

Peggy is referred to as a heifer. This implied comparison, known as metaphor. Another comparison goes like this:

(29) Mama didn’t know “what got into people”, but the **Dog** Breedlove had burned up his house, gone upside his wife’s head, and everybody, as a result, was outdoors”. (BE: 16-17).

In that utterance, a covert comparison is made. In fact, a human being is compared to an animal. M. Cholly Breedlove (Pecola’s father is the one referred to). Given, his behavior toward his family, and his wickedness, he is compared to a dog, a nasty and dangerous animal. In fact, he is not mindful because a person who is supposed to assure his family’s security will not burn his house.

(30) Bible say feed the hungry. That’s fine. That’s all right. But I ain’t feeding no elephants...(BE:27). Here again, a human being is compared to an elephant. It is about the

hopeless little girl Pecola Breedlove who is outdoors and accommodated by the Mac Teer family. Indeed, an elephant being one of the biggest animal is as a matter of logic one which eats more than other animals. The quantity of food that Pecola consumes leads the host family to compare her to an elephant. As one can see it, greediness is reformulated through that metaphor.

Simile which is a figure of speech stating a comparison using 'like' or 'as' for example shows alike reformulation.

It is the case in:

(31) Love, thick and dark **as** Alaga syrup, eased up into that cracked window. (B.E:12)

(32) Her eyes look **like** snot. (BE: 26)

(33) She was mad **as** a wet hen (BE: 120)

### 3.2. Metonymy as a way of rewording

Metonymy involved replacing the name of something with something that is connected to it, without being the whole thing. According to Damodar Thakur (2003, P.118) it is when "the meaning of an object changes in such a way as to be applicable to another object associated with it". That way, metonymy can serve as reformulation technique.

(34) "What?" Pecola's **fingers** went to her mouth (BE: 27)

'Fingers' and 'mouth' are used to talk about another thing that is the whole body of Pecola. They are used connotatively. The idea is that Pecola has become a woman.

The following example makes it clearer:

(35) China arranged a fingerful of hair into a bang effect.

Then why he left you to sell **tail**? (BE: 55)

(36) She hopes he will not sweat — the damp may get into her hair; and that she will remain dry between her **legs** — she hates the glucking sound they make when she is moist. (BE:84)

The same way tail is used for woman's sexual organ in (35), legs are used for woman genital organ. .

(37) She had explained to him the difference between **colored** people and **niggers**. They were easily identifiable. Colored people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud. (BE: 87). The phrase ‘colored people’ is used to talk of the white people and obviously niggers for African people. Indeed, for the white people American people, it is only the white who is good, kind, and even beautiful. On the contrary, Black people are wicked, untruthful and ugly.

(38) What for? The Maginot Line?

He showed his privates at you? (BE: 99)

In these two sequences, something is associated with something else. In the former one, the word Maginot Line is used for the whores that is the prostitutes. In the other sequence, it referred to the man’s genital organ.

Another case is conveyed in the colour blue.

(39) - I can’t go to school no more. And I thought maybe you could help me.

- Help you how? Tell me. Don’t be frightened.

- My eyes

- What about your eyes?

- I want them **blue**. (B.E: 174)

In this verbal interaction between the old man, Soaphead Church, the Sham magician and the little girl, Pecola Breedlove, the word blue is used to substitute beauty that Pecola has been longing for. This is even illustrated by the following examples:

(40) Here is was an ugly little girl asking for beauty

I can do nothing for you, my child. I am not a magician. (BE: 174)

To put it in a nutshell, the writer has made use of this figure of speech to covertly deal with sexual initiation, racism, and whiteness as standard of beauty.

A. Siddharthan and N. Katsos (2010, p.1004) stated that “Any specific lexico-syntactic formulation among the many possible explicit of a realization can facilitate comprehension” as a matter of reformulation and consequently a dynamic means of persuasion. One can therefore realize that you can’t force people to be persuaded — you can only activate their desire and show them the logic behind your ideas. You can’t move a string by pushing it, you have to pull it. People are the same. Their devotion and total commitment to an idea come only when they fully understand and buy in with their total being.

## **Conclusion**

Linguistic cues of reformulation like sequence rewording, conceptual metaphors, evasion, tendentious reformulations and metonymy, do not interfere in discourse by accident. They rather respond to a specific motivation. They consist in hiding the truth behind their manipulative discourse. Very often, non-specialists and even well-educated people fail to observe that dimension of reformulation.

All these different re-formulations types witness that language is indeed a dynamic fact. It is not static. Pragmatics analyses these different linguistic forms used in interaction among people in society. This process has some important advantages as well as disadvantages. On the one hand, reformulation converts a discourse that initially is tough to understand into a standard discourse becoming thus a popularized discourse. That way, it facilitates lay audiences to comprehend. On the other hand, it is obvious that reformulation is a main factor of pervading the source discourse. That is, at the end of the day, the meaning of the specialized unit is most of the time altered because of some factors such as lexical, grammatical and rhetorical devices.

Any word in political discourse is purposeful; it is used to control mind, to control actions of audiences and the use of linguistic strategies such as reformulations are motivated. A linguistic unit is used by persuader to convey an ideology or to transform a given reality. As mentions M. Pêcheux, (1982) ideology is not just an abstract system of thought but become actualized in a variety of material forms.

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