

The Representation of Hubristic Pride in Theodore Dreiser's "The Financier"

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Abstract: The article examines the verbal representation of hubristic pride in Theodore Dreiser's novel "The Financier", the first novel of his Trilogy of desire. Particular attention is paid to the characters of Frank Cowperwood and Aileen Butler, whose speech, behavior, and self-perception reveal different manifestations of excessive pride and superiority. The purpose of the study is to identify the linguistic means and contextual patterns through which hubristic pride is represented in the novel. The research employs contextual, lexical-semantic, evaluative-axiological, and conceptual metaphor analyses. These approaches make it possible to examine the lexical markers of excessive self-confidence, the characters' evaluation of themselves and others, and metaphorical expressions associated with superiority and social elevation.

The findings demonstrate that hubristic pride is represented through the interaction of lexical, evaluative, and metaphorical means rather than through direct expressions of pride alone. In Cowperwood's characterization, it is primarily manifested through excessive self-confidence, a sense of personal superiority, and the hierarchical evaluation of other people. In Aileen Butler's characterization, hubristic pride is associated more closely with conspicuous self-presentation, confidence in her personal charms, and a sense of social privilege. The analysis also reveals the role of orientational metaphors in representing superiority and arrogance through images of vertical elevation. The study contributes to the linguistic analysis of emotion in literary discourse and provides a framework that can be applied to the investigation of hubristic pride and other complex emotions in literary texts.

Keywords: Hubristic pride, The Financier, Theodore Dreiser, verbal representation.

Introduction: Hubristic pride is a complex phenomenon that combines excessive self-confidence, an exaggerated sense of superiority, vanity, arrogance, and a belief in one's entitlement to social or personal privilege. In literary discourse, it may be represented not only through explicit lexical markers of pride but also through characters' evaluations of themselves and others, metaphorical expressions, and the contexts in which their attitudes and behavior are presented. The analysis of these linguistic features makes it possible to examine how hubristic pride is constructed as a character trait and how different manifestations of this phenomenon are distinguished in literary texts.

Theodore Dreiser's *The Financier*, the first novel of his Trilogy of Desire, provides relevant material for such

analysis. The novel presents hubristic tendencies particularly through the main characters Frank Cowperwood and Aileen Butler. Frank Cowperwood's characterization is associated with excessive self-confidence, a perception of his exceptional abilities, the devaluation of others, and disregard for conventional moral restrictions. Aileen's characterization, in turn, involves vanity, egotism, conspicuous self-presentation, confidence in her personal qualities, and a sense of social superiority. Thus, the novel allows hubristic pride to be examined through both common and character-specific linguistic patterns.

Previous studies have examined hubristic pride from psychological, cognitive-semantic, linguocultural, and

axiological perspectives, identifying its relationship with self-evaluation, superiority, social status, moral values, and interpersonal behavior. However, the specific linguistic representation of hubristic pride in literary discourse, particularly the interaction of lexical-semantic, evaluative-axiological, metaphorical, and contextual means in *The Financier*, remains insufficiently explored. This research gap is especially relevant to the characterization of Frank Cowperwood and Aileen Butler, whose manifestations of hubristic pride differ in their linguistic and contextual realization.

The aim of the study is to identify and analyze the linguistic and contextual means used to represent hubristic pride in *The Financier*. The study addresses the following research question: How is hubristic pride verbally represented in Theodore Dreiser's *The Financier*? The following sub-questions are also considered: 1. What lexical-semantic and evaluative-axiological means are used to represent hubristic pride? 2. What conceptual metaphors contribute to the representation of superiority and arrogance? 3. How do the linguistic manifestations of hubristic pride differ in the characterization of Frank Cowperwood and Aileen Butler?

To answer these questions, the study employs contextual, lexical-semantic, evaluative-axiological, and conceptual metaphor analyses. Lexical-semantic analysis is used to identify linguistic units associated with excessive self-confidence, vanity, superiority, and entitlement. Evaluative-axiological analysis examines the characters' self-evaluation and evaluation of others, while conceptual metaphor analysis reveals metaphorical patterns through which superiority and social elevation are conceptualized. Contextual analysis is applied to interpret these linguistic features in relation to the characters' behavior and narrative situations.

By addressing this research gap, the study provides a systematic account of the verbal representation of hubristic pride in *The Financier* and contributes to the study of emotion and character representation in literary discourse.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pride has been widely studied as a self-conscious emotion associated with self-evaluation, social status, and interpersonal behavior. A key distinction was

proposed by Tracy and Robins (2007), who differentiated between authentic pride, based on specific achievements and abilities, and hubristic pride, associated with global self-evaluation and an exaggerated sense of superiority. This distinction was further developed by Tracy et al. (2009), who linked authentic pride to healthy self-esteem and hubristic pride to narcissistic self-aggrandizement. Later research connected these two forms of pride with different patterns of social behavior. Tracy et al. (2023) related authentic pride to prestige-based status and hubristic pride to dominance, while Yeung and Shen (2019) examined their different associations with leadership behavior. Jenßen (2021) also confirmed the relevance of the distinction between authentic and hubristic pride in relation to self-concept, social comparison, and self-conscious emotions.

Linguistic and linguocultural studies have examined pride as a culturally and evaluatively structured concept. Magomedova and Alivalieva (2021) analyzed pride and pridefulness from a cognitive-semantic perspective and demonstrated that excessive pride is associated with negative evaluation, superiority, and disregard for others. Malakhova (2009) investigated the concepts of pride and shame in Russian and English linguocultures, emphasizing their semantic, figurative, and evaluative components. Popova (2007) examined the representation of pride in British linguoculture as a form of self-reflection and also considered its realization in literary discourse. Bochkarev (2024), using an axiological approach, showed that pride in comic discourse may be represented through such features as inflated self-assessment, superiority, vanity, and social distinction. From a cognitive-semantic perspective, G. Lakoff and M. Johnson (2003) demonstrated that abstract concepts are systematically structured through metaphorical mappings, while Z. Kövecses (2004) further applied conceptual metaphor theory to the representation of emotions and other abstract domains, among them pride too.

These studies provide a theoretical basis for distinguishing authentic and hubristic pride and for analyzing its psychological, social, cognitive-semantic, linguocultural, and axiological dimensions. However, the specific verbal representation of hubristic pride in literary discourse, particularly the interaction of lexical-

semantic, evaluative-axiological, metaphorical, and contextual means, remains insufficiently explored. This gap is especially relevant to the characterization of Frank Cowperwood and Aileen Butler in Theodore Dreiser's *The Financier*, whose manifestations of excessive pride differ in their linguistic and contextual realization. The present study addresses this gap by combining lexical-semantic, evaluative-axiological, conceptual metaphor, and contextual analyses.

METHODOLOGY

The study employs a qualitative linguistic approach to examine the verbal representation of hubristic pride in Theodore Dreiser's *The Financier*. The analysis focuses primarily on the characterization of Frank Cowperwood and Aileen Butler, whose speech, behavior, self-evaluation, and evaluation of others provide relevant material for identifying manifestations of hubristic pride.

Four complementary methods are applied. Contextual analysis is used to examine linguistic expressions in relation to the characters' behavior, interactions, and narrative situations. This method makes it possible to determine how expressions of pride function within particular contexts and how linguistic choices contribute to character construction.

Lexical-semantic analysis is employed to identify lexical units and semantic groups associated with excessive self-confidence, vanity, superiority, entitlement, and the devaluation of others. Particular attention is given to words and expressions that directly or indirectly indicate the characters' perception of themselves and other people.

Evaluative-axiological analysis examines value judgments expressed by or attributed to the characters. It focuses on positive self-evaluation, negative evaluation of others, and oppositions such as superiority/inferiority, strength/weakness, and privilege/lack of privilege. This method is especially relevant to the representation of hubristic pride as a form of exaggerated self-assessment and hierarchical perception of other people.

Finally, conceptual metaphor analysis, informed by Conceptual Metaphor Theory, is used to identify metaphorical patterns through which superiority and dominance are conceptualized. Particular attention is paid to orientational metaphors based on the

HIGH/UP–SUPERIORITY relationship, as well as metaphors that represent other people as instruments or objects of control.

The selected examples are analyzed comparatively to identify both common and character-specific patterns. Cowperwood's characterization is examined primarily in terms of self-perceived superiority, dominance, and disregard for conventional restrictions, whereas Aileen's characterization is analyzed through vanity, conspicuous self-presentation, and perceived social privilege. The combination of the four methods allows hubristic pride to be examined not as a single lexical category but as a complex linguistic and contextual phenomenon.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the selected textual examples demonstrates that hubristic pride in *The Financier* is represented through the interaction of lexical, evaluative, metaphorical, and contextual means. Rather than being expressed exclusively through explicit words denoting pride, it is constructed through the characters' self-perception, evaluation of other people, patterns of behavior, and metaphorical conceptualizations of superiority. The results also reveal distinct patterns in the characterization of Frank Cowperwood and Aileen Butler.

1. Lexical – Semantic Representation of Hubristic Pride

The lexical-semantic analysis identifies a group of expressions associated with vanity, superiority, excessive self-confidence, and the devaluation of others. These expressions provide direct linguistic evidence of the characters' inflated self-perception. A particularly explicit example occurs in Aileen's characterization: "Being intensely conscious of her father's competence, and vain of her personal superiority" (Dreiser, 2009, p.52).

The adjective vain and the noun phrase personal superiority directly encode an excessive evaluation of the self. The combination of these lexical units is significant because superiority is presented not simply as self-confidence but as an exaggerated awareness of one's own social and personal value.

A similar pattern occurs in the description of Aileen as possessing "her airs, her aggressive disposition, her love of attention, her vanity". The lexical items airs, love of attention, and vanity form a semantic cluster

associated with conspicuous self-regard and the desire to be recognized as socially superior. In this context, hubristic pride is represented as a stable character disposition rather than a temporary emotional state.

Cowperwood's characterization contains a different lexical pattern. His perception of other people is expressed through such evaluations as "weak," "foolish," "slow," "small-minded," and "deficient." These lexical choices establish a hierarchical opposition between Cowperwood and those around him. The evaluative vocabulary therefore contributes to the construction of his self-image as intellectually and practically superior.

The lexical evidence suggests that hubristic pride is represented through two interconnected semantic directions: positive self-evaluation and negative evaluation of others. This pattern is particularly prominent in Cowperwood's characterization, whereas Aileen's pride is more frequently associated with vanity, self-display, and awareness of personal and social attractiveness.

2. Evaluative – Axiological Representation

The evaluative-axiological analysis demonstrates that hubristic pride is strongly connected with hierarchical value judgements. The characters do not merely describe themselves and others; they assign different degrees of value to people according to their abilities, social position, appearance, and usefulness. This tendency is especially clear in Cowperwood's description of the people around him:

"Those people were the kind of beings who ought to work for him, and who would." (Dreiser, 2009, p.19).

The expression ought to work for him constructs a clear social hierarchy in which Cowperwood places himself above other people. The subsequent statement that the two men he worked for were "nothing more than characters in his eyes" further reduces their personal significance. His ability to identify their "weaknesses" and "shortcomings" reinforces the asymmetrical relationship between the evaluating subject and the evaluated objects (Dreiser, 2009, p. 19).

A similar hierarchical model appears in Cowperwood's statement: "A real man – a financier – was never a tool. He used tools. He created. He led." (Dreiser, 2009, p.27).

This passage represents one of the clearest axiological constructions of hubristic pride in the novel. The opposition between a real man and a tool establishes a value hierarchy in which independent creators and leaders occupy a higher position than those who function as instruments. The short parallel he used tools, he created, he led reinforce Cowperwood's perception of himself as an active, autonomous, and dominant individual. Other people are evaluated primarily according to their usefulness, while the financier is presented as the person who controls and employs them.

Aileen's characterization reveals a related but socially oriented evaluative pattern. The description of young women who "tossed their heads and indicated ... that they were better-bred and knew it" represents superiority through judgments of social status and breeding. Likewise, the statement that Aileen was "vain of her personal superiority" explicitly links her self-evaluation with a hierarchical perception of herself in relation to others.

Thus, the axiological analysis shows that hubristic pride depends on a contrastive structure: self → elevated value; others → reduced value. In Cowperwood's case, this hierarchy is primarily based on competence, independence, and power; in Aileen's case, it is more closely associated with attractiveness, social position, and personal privilege.

3. Conceptual Metaphors of Superiority and Dominance

The analysis also reveals that hubristic pride is reinforced by metaphorical expressions. Several examples employ spatial imagery in which physical height is associated with social or personal superiority.

For example, Aileen is described as someone who could "hold her nose up" and "put on such airs." Similarly, another description states that she could "carry her head so high." These expressions activate an orientational metaphor in which HIGH/UP IS SUPERIORITY. Physical elevation is thus used to conceptualize an elevated social or psychological position. The metaphorical pattern transforms an abstract quality -arrogance or superiority - into a spatially perceptible image.

A related example occurs in the description of women from "better families," who "tossed their heads" to

indicate that they were “better-bred.” The bodily movement functions metaphorically as a sign of social elevation. Their physical posture communicates an assumed difference in status and value.

Another metaphorical pattern appears in the statement that a person may be “a tool” while a “real man” uses tools, creates, and leads. Here, people are conceptualized as instruments that can be employed by a more powerful individual. The metaphor therefore contributes to the representation of dominance and instrumental control. In Cowperwood’s worldview, the financier occupies the position of the agent, while others become objects of his action.

The metaphorical evidence consequently extends the lexical and axiological findings: superiority is represented not only through evaluative vocabulary but also through spatial and instrumental models of cognition.

4. Contextual Representation and Character-Specific Patterns

Contextual analysis demonstrates that hubristic pride becomes particularly visible when the characters’ attitudes are connected with their actions and social interactions. Cowperwood’s pride is repeatedly manifested through his confidence in his own abilities and his tendency to disregard limitations imposed by other people or by established norms.

For instance, while looking at himself in a mirror, Cowperwood responds to a question about whether he is treating others unfairly by saying, “Not at all. They need me.” His statement is accompanied by the behavior of “straightening his tie and adjusting his coat.” (Dreiser, 2009, p. 19). The verbal expression and physical action work together: he rejects the possibility of wrongdoing while simultaneously presenting himself as a person whose importance is unquestionable. The

context therefore strengthens the interpretation of his statement as an expression of self-importance rather than ordinary confidence.

His declaration, “I’ll never be a grain and commission man. I have other plans in view,” (Dreiser, 2009, p. 21) similarly illustrates an elevated perception of his own professional potential. The statement presents his current occupation as insufficient for his ambitions and implies that he considers himself capable of occupying a more significant position.

Cowperwood’s attitude toward social and moral restrictions is also evident when he observes that people often do not know how to protect themselves and admits that he “had broken it secretly many times.” The contextual relationship between his confidence and his disregard for rules suggests that his perceived superiority extends beyond personal ability to a belief that ordinary restrictions do not necessarily apply to him.

Aileen’s hubristic pride is constructed differently. Her characterization emphasizes self-presentation, vanity, attractiveness, and social privilege. Her conspicuous clothing, desire for attention, “aggressive disposition,” and “love of attention” create a pattern in which pride is externally displayed. Her confidence in her “charms,” “personality,” and “earthly privileges” further demonstrates that her self-evaluation is closely connected with appearance and social position.

5. Comparative Findings

The analysis indicates both shared and character-specific patterns of hubristic pride. In both characters, hubristic pride involves an elevated self-image and a tendency to establish a hierarchical distinction between the self and others. However, the linguistic realization of this tendency differs.

Character	Dominant manifestations	Main linguistic means
Frank Cowperwood	Self-perceived superiority, dominance, intellectual and professional confidence, devaluation of others, disregard for restrictions	Evaluative vocabulary, hierarchical oppositions, contextual behavior, instrumental metaphors
Aileen Butler	Vanity, conspicuous self-presentation, confidence in personal charms, social	Lexical markers of vanity, evaluative expressions, bodily and

	superiority, attention	desire for	spatial metaphors, contextual descriptions
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Overall, the findings demonstrate that hubristic pride in *The Financier* is a multidimensional linguistic phenomenon. Its representation depends on the interaction of explicit lexical markers, evaluative judgments, metaphorical structures, and narrative contexts.

CONCLUSION

The study has examined the verbal representation of hubristic pride in Theodore Dreiser’s *The Financier* through lexical-semantic, evaluative-axiological, conceptual metaphor, and contextual analyses. The findings demonstrate that hubristic pride is not represented through explicit expressions of pride alone but emerges from the interaction of self-evaluation, evaluation of others, metaphorical patterns, and character behavior in specific narrative contexts.

The analysis has shown that lexical markers of vanity, superiority, excessive self-confidence, and the devaluation of others play an important role in constructing hubristic characterization. Evaluative-axiological patterns further reveal a hierarchical perception in which the self is assigned a higher value while other people are viewed as inferior or subordinate. Conceptual metaphors, particularly the HIGH/UP IS SUPERIORITY pattern and the instrumental conceptualization of people as “tools,” reinforce the ideas of social elevation, dominance, and control.

The findings also demonstrate that hubristic pride has different linguistic realizations in the characterization of Frank Cowperwood and Aileen Butler. Cowperwood’s pride is primarily associated with self-perceived exceptional ability, professional ambition, dominance, and the devaluation of others. Aileen’s hubristic pride is more strongly manifested through vanity, conspicuous self-presentation, confidence in her personal charms, and a sense of social privilege. Thus, although both characters share an elevated self-image and a tendency toward superiority, their pride is constructed through different lexical, evaluative, metaphorical, and contextual patterns.

In conclusion, the study confirms that hubristic pride in literary discourse is a multidimensional phenomenon that can be identified through the interaction of

linguistic and contextual features. The findings contribute to the linguistic study of emotion and character representation by demonstrating how a complex emotional and axiological phenomenon can be constructed through different verbal mechanisms within a literary text.

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