

NOVEL & INTERPRETATION

A Pragmatic Approach

By

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**Novel & Interpretation
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Pune

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- Nozar Niazi

FOREWORD

To commit oneself to an area such as pragmatics of literary communication, is always a daunting task. This is so because one is neither working within the clearly defined boundaries of linguistics proper, nor is one able to always defend the linguistics methods with regard to those types of writings, which are the most difficult to analyse: literature. Literary discourse always stretches the boundaries of that which can be said to that which cannot be said. To try and bring this under the scrutiny of conventional analyses of sentences and utterances is to be faced with the most recalcitrant and difficult sort of data. It is therefore extremely creditable that Dr. Nozar Niazi has taken up this challenge in the present work.

The theoretical introduction to the field is presented with clarity and in considerable detail, and subsequently applied to extracts from fictional texts. The main problem with dealing with speech acts in fiction originates from the fact that they are embedded within the narrative intentions, which are not directly recoverable except from the text itself. It is also debatable whether literary speech acts lie within the ambit of conventional rule – bound utterances or not. I believe that they do to some extent; otherwise they would not correspond to any kind of familiar communication, as we know it, and would defeat the purpose of the narrative. But the embedding of these speech acts within levels of context makes them specific and particular, and they escape rule – bound discourse even while being part of it. Here then, is where implicatures and presuppositions play a role, and these implicatures and presuppositions themselves are part of the schematic frameworks brought to the text by various readers. Thus, there is always scope for further interpretation and 'perlocutionary' effect, and the analysis presented here recognizes this. Apart from the intellectual satisfaction provided by this effort, there is a further end to which such analysis can be

directed that is, the teaching and appreciation of literature. I am particularly pleased to introduce this volume as I earlier had the pleasure of discussing the project and the many issues related to it with the author. I am sure that the book will be extremely valuable as an addition to the field and useful for students of stylistics, pragmatics and literature, and for researchers in these areas.

Pushpinder Syal,

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 Pragmatics

Pragmatics is basically concerned with the study of language usage or language in context. It is concerned with the fact that in every conversation more is communicated than is actually said.

It is the study of meaning as communicated by a speaker (or writer) and interpreted by a listener (or reader). It has consequently, more to do with the analysis of what people mean by their utterances than what the words or phrases in those utterances might mean by themselves. G. Yule (1996:1)

Or

It is the study of all those aspects of meaning not captured in a semantic theory. Levinson (1983:12)

Semantics is concerned with sentence meaning and pragmatics with utterance meaning. If we reflect on the semantics, the meaning of the words and sentences taken by themselves, it is clear that such meanings do not convey the full communicative intention of the participants involved. The sentence and word meanings of a language are the coded part of communication. Whereas, verbal communication, as Sperber and Wilson (1995:3) observe, involves both code and inferential process. The following exchange might illustrate the point:

A: Have you seen Jack lately?

B: I have nothing to do with a criminal.

What is encoded by the semantic structure of B's sentence? All B says is that he has no relation with a criminal. As it stands, the content of this utterance isn't sufficient for us to know what B is trying to convey. It appears that coded meaning, the semantics of the language, ignores a big part of what the speaker is actually

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intending to communicate. The point is that the coded meanings of B's sentence are essential but not alone adequate to determine the proposition "implied" in its utterance. It is only through some inferential activities on the part of the hearer that the communicative intention of the speaker could be captured.

The question made by A is a yes-no question and B is normally expected to provide a one-word positive or negative answer. Whereas B violates the basic principle governing the adjacency pair and consequently, on the surface it seems that B has provided an irrelevant answer and is not cooperative. However, B is actually cooperative at some deeper level of communication, the pragmatic level. That is, B is providing the relevant answer via an implicature or non-coded proposition. It is not difficult to infer from B's answer his negative response to the question. The mechanism of this inference is as follows:

B states that he has no connection with a criminal. It presupposes that jack is a criminal. If jack is a criminal and B "has nothing to do with a criminal", then it could be concluded that there has been no attempt on B's part to see jack. Therefore, the answer to A's question is in the negative.

But, in conveying this meaning, B is also performing an action(s). It is precisely here where the concept of speech act, performing action (s) via language, assumes primacy in identifying various actions enacted by the utterance, given the context in which it occurs. By providing an answer to the question, B has performed a linguistic action. It is the act of imparting information to the hearer, an assertive act. Depending on the context in which B has used the utterance he could be said to have performed other acts such as disapproving, criticizing, rejecting etc. if the interlocutors are friends, then B is perhaps disapproving of jack as a criminal. But, suppose A is a police officer interrogating B to see if there is a link between B and jack. In that case, B is not only disapproving of jack as a criminal, through his utterance,

but he is at the same time rejecting the suggested indictment for having any connection with a criminal. Thus, B has performed various actions through his utterance.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

Talking about utterances as linguistic actions is the chief concern of speech act theory. Any consideration of language in context must need be influenced by the pragmatic theory of speech act as first propounded by Austin (1962). Austin believes that people use language to perform actions. Actions performed via utterances are generally called speech acts, and are commonly given specific labels such as threat, compliment, offer, promise, apology, etc. These acts specify speaker's communicative intention in producing an utterance.

The present study will first examine speech acts in the light of speech act theory as developed by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969). Grice's theory of implicature and cooperative principle (1975) will be discussed, too, as a complementary to speech act theory. Austin developed speech act theory from the fundamental idea that there is an intention behind every utterance produced by a speaker addressing a hearer. That is, in producing an utterance the speaker intends to achieve some communicative goals, which is tantamount to performing actions. Thus, according to this view, by identifying the kind of action (s) performed by a certain utterance in a particular context the hearer will be able to see through the intention of the speaker in producing that utterance namely, what communicative goal (s) the speaker intended to achieve with his / her words. Considering this, the present study is intended with the following purposes:

Every utterance in the novel is used with a set purpose in order to serve a function or functions. That is, behind every utterance in the novel there is a communicative goal to be achieved. The speech act analysis of individual utterances in the novel in terms of the contexts in which they are used, immediate context (neigh-

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boring utterances), and larger context (fictional world) can offer a wide range of explanatory possibilities about the intentions and purposes of the characters as well as authorial intentions and purposes in producing those utterances.

A large portion of the impact of the novel is achieved as a repetition of certain speech acts in various parts of the novel that share the same illocutionary point(s) or purpose(s), emphasizing particular themes. Therefore, the present study aims at identify those speech acts in the selected novels which are foregrounded in virtue of their contexts, analyzing them against the contextual particulars as are discussed in speech act theory, thereby exploring interpretive possibilities of the intended messages behind those utterances with an explanation of their significance, both from the characters' as well as authorial viewpoints. By doing so, it will be manifested how the overall impact of the selected novels is created through individual speech acts which are contrived by the author in the structural design of the novels to create a network of intentions sharing the same goals and with the same perlocutionary effects.

1.3 Selection of the Novels

Since the study is application-oriented, some novels have to be chosen for the purpose. Considering the nature of the subject, one could find good potential for application of speech act theory in Hemingway's novels. The selection of the author and the novels is based on certain criterion: First, a large portion of Hemingway's novels consist of dialogue so little diluted with other elements, as to resemble an extract from a play. Among the four mediums of expression at his disposal, namely narration, description, commentary and dialogue, the author frequently makes use of conversation and has developed the themes of his novels mainly with the help of inter-personal rhetoric and as such, there is a lot of scope for analysis of utterances.

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Secondly, in Hemingway's novels examples of indirect speech acts, in particular verbal irony, sarcasm, euphemism, rhetorical questions, etc are innumerable. This is the main concern of this study. A major part of Hemingway's art lies in the fact that he is able to communicate his ideas and visions via implicature.

Thirdly, Hemingway enjoys a lofty position in American literature and has left a tremendous impact on modern writers. He has made a lot of linguistic experiments in his writings and is able to convey a sense of deeply felt issues through a dialogue remarkable for its economy and simplicity. The following exchange taken from *IN OUR TIME* presents a sample of Hemingway's artistic use of language through dialogue.

Why did he kill himself, daddy?

I don't know, Nick. He couldn't stand things. I guess.

Do many men kill themselves, daddy?

Not very many Nick.

Do many women?

Hardly ever.

Is dying hard, daddy?

No, I think its pretty easy, Nick. It all depends.

Despite its simple style and apparently trite expressions, the reader discovers on close examination the largeness of the ideas and emotions implied by the utterances in the exchange.

1.4 Significance of the Study

It would be certainly naive if one thinks that the present study is merely an attempt to apply the theory of speech act to certain novels. It is, in fact, an exploration in the process of analysis, or still better to say, an endeavor to extend the theory and give it more credibility by discussing it in concrete terms. The study is an attempt to add a new link to the chain of research-works made on pragmatics, in general, and speech act theory, in particular. By making an in-depth study of speech acts in the novels, it tries to

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demonstrate how their analysis in the contexts in which they occur can contribute to our understanding of the works. It will be demonstrated that much can be gained, if we keep our mind from thinking that the novel exists in juxtaposition to other uses of language, and if instead we adopt an approach which looks at the novel in terms of its commonality with other modes of discourse, that is, in terms of communication. It suggests that by doing away with the misconception of "literary" and "ordinary" language and by considering literary works as an attempt in which the author's primary intention is a communicative one, the reader of the novel can interpret utterances by adopting the notions of contextuality and cooperation. Of course, one has to bear in mind that utterances in a novel are not located in a similar network of speaker - hearer relationship. Rather, they are located in a different network of implied author - implied reader relationship, which makes interpretation more challenging.

By adopting a speech act approach to the novel, the present study aims at sensitizing students of English to language itself, as literature is the art form realized entirely through language. It tries to encourage them to look at the different utterances in the novel in terms of their functions and intended effects for which they have been designed. The purpose is to provide the reader with a linguistic description of the novel, different from those presently available to him/her. The approach certainly enhances the enjoyment of reading the novel by encouraging the reader to discover the hidden agenda and suggested values in the novel on the basis of the available concrete facts or contextual information and evidences presented in the novel. It also intends to help students to enhance their ability of understanding and appreciating works of art in general.

1.5 Methodology

After laying down the theoretical framework, the highly marked speech acts in the selected novels will be identified. The collect-

Introduction

ed data will be classified into different groups, according to the plan of the study, and then will be analyzed against various aspects of speech act theory.

First, the novels will be analyzed within the framework of the five major speech acts as presented by Searle, namely assertives, commissives, directives, expressives and declaratives. The objective is to demonstrate that each utterance in the novels under study could be classified under one of these major speech acts. The suggestion is that each utterance in the novel performs a major function. The function of each utterance will be discussed in relation to the context in which it occurs, its immediate context as well as its significance in the context of the fictional world.

Then the novels will be analyzed within the framework of direct and indirect speech acts. Here the chief concern is to compare indirect speech acts in the novels with their supposed direct counterparts and see what factors are responsible for motivating indirectness. It will be shown what effects are intended to be achieved by indirect speech acts which otherwise couldn't be attained.

Then examples of miscellaneous speech acts such as ironical statements, rhetorical questions and euphemistic expressions will be picked out from the collected data and will be analyzed against various aspects of speech act theory. Having discussed their functions and significance in the contexts in which they are employed, it will be manifested how the interaction between these individual speech acts actually contributes to the creation of the overall impact of the novels.

Finally, different ideas and points emerging from the preceding chapters will be synthesized in the form of some conclusions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.0 Preliminaries

The major objective of the present chapter is to provide the conceptual setting for the fundamental ideas, distinctions, principles and theories relevant to the concerns of this study, major among them being the concept of speech act, sentence and utterance, Austin and Searle's theories of speech acts, direct and indirect speech acts, Grice's principle of cooperation, politeness principle, Irony principle, context, Deixis, presupposition, and finally turn-taking and adjacency pairs.

2.1 The concept of Speech Act

Austin was the originator of the term "speech act". In his William James lectures, which he delivered at Harvard in 1955, and posthumously published under the title *How To Do Things With Words* (1962), he developed the first systematic theory of utterances as human action. Austin's target (1962) was to demolish the perspective of language that would consider "truth conditions" as central to language understanding. He derived his theory from the basic notion that language is used to perform actions. Austin (1962) defines a speech act as "the act of uttering a certain sentence in a given context for a determined purpose, i.e. an act of communication." Other authors have offered different definitions of speech acts:

Speaking a language is performing speech acts, acts such as making statements, giving commands asking questions, making promises, and so on.

(Searle, 1969:16)

Or

Speech acts are actions performed via utterances.

(G. Yule, 1996:47)