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Pragmatic Study of Speech Act in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot Act - I*

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Abstract

Language is a means of communication and is an essential matter of fact to study the nature of it by the various angles developed by the various scholars of language and literature. Therefore, an attempt is made in this paper to study some of the selected pieces of conversations in Beckett's well-known play *Waiting for Godot - Act I*, by the pragmatic point of view in general and Austin's Speech Act in particular, to draw the implied meanings of it. The present study identifies the unusual language used in the play *Waiting for Godot Act I*, categorizes them in turns of the observation and violation of pragmatic principle Speech Act and offer explanation from the pragmatic point of view following observation of speech act theory, especially focusing on the illocutionary speech act, to find out the implied meaning of the characters' utterances.

Key Words: *Language, Pragmatics, Speech Act, Illocutionary Speech Act.*

Introduction

Speech Act Theory originally developed by the Oxford philosopher J. L. Austin in the 1930s and expounded in a series of lectures which he gave at Harvard in 1955. These were subsequently developed in 1962 as *How to Do Things with Words*. The approach has been greatly developed since by the philosopher J. R. Searle.

Speech act theory deals with the function and uses of language. We might say that speech acts, in their broadest meaning are all the acts we perform through speaking and all

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the things we do when we speak. The underlying idea is that when we speak, we do not merely utter sentences; we also perform acts such as making requests or statements, giving reports, asking questions, giving warnings, making promises, giving approval, regretting and apologizing etc.

In a further development of his theory of speech acts, Austin distinguished locutionary act, illocutionary act and perlocutionary act as follows –

- i) A Locutionary act, which is the uttering of a sentence with sense and reference. The locutionary act can be broken down into a phonetic act (the act of uttering certain noises), a phatic act (the act of uttering sounds that have sense and reference), and a rhetic act (the act of uttering noises that belong to a certain language vocabulary and grammar). A speech act is always the utterance of a phone, a pheme and a rheme.
- ii) An Illocutionary act, which is the action performed by virtue of the force associated with a given linguistic expression. It is the performance of an act *in* saying something, as opposed to the performance of an act *of* saying something (Austin 1962: 99). This level of action depends on the social conventions that allow us verbally to carry out clearly recognizable actions. The illocutionary force of an utterance can be isolated by asking in which sense we were using a given utterance. When we describe metapragmatically an utterance as an order, a request, a suggestion, a statement, a promise, a threat, we refer to its illocutionary force.
- iii) A Perlocutionary act, which is the production of a consequence by the utterance. Contrary to what occurs at the illocutionary level, perlocutions are not directly achieved by the conventional force of an utterance. They can be intentional or unintentional, and they might involve unexpected effects, different from those of an illocutionary act.

Austin mentions the illocutionary act plays the most significant part in communication because it focuses on the speaker's intention of producing utterance to make statements, promises, warnings, requests, complain, commands etc. Generally speaking,

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people have illocutionary act behind utterances, even though the illocutionary act does not mean the proposition of the utterance. That is, every utterance serves certain purpose or is produced to achieve a goal. Moreover, it is expected that the verbal utterance and illocutionary act associated with the utterance would match the non-verbal behaviour.

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The analysis of conversational behaviour on the basis of Austin's theory of Speech Acts shows that characters produce their utterances with certain implicit intention in their mind from the beginning of the play till its end. The play opens with when Estragon was busy in removing the boots. After trying and making a lot of efforts to remove the boots, Estragon gets tired in it. Estragon gets fade up while removing the boots. He, later, requests to Vladimir in removing the boots. Vladimir, instead of helping Estragon, replies him that does it hurts. Though the reply given by Vladimir is not explicit but he wish to ask that is it painful when the boots were trying to remove. Locutionary force in this extract is that Estragon cries for help of Vladimir in removing the boots, as he gets fade up and irritated while removing the boots. Estragon, pathetically, requests to Vladimir to help him in removing the boots. The implicit intention of the Estragon's utterance is that to make a request. Illocutionary act in this extract is to make a request for help. Perlocutionary act in this extract is reply given by Vladimir. Vladimir doesn't give explicit reply to Estragon but instead he replies by asking 'it hurts'. Vladimir could have helped Estragon when he was crying for help but instead of it he answered by asking 'it hurts'. Vladimir wish to ask that 'is it painful or hurts when the boots were trying to remove'. Thus, the example of indirect speech act can find in the beginning of the play through the following conversational exchange between Estragon and Vladimir.

Estragon: (*feebly*). Help me!

Vladimir: It hurts? (*Waiting for Godot 07*)

The first exchange of utterances between Estragon and Vladimir sets a model of interaction for the rest of the conversations in which the characters are alternately following the speech acts as laid down by J. L. Austin. After getting success in removing the boots,

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Vladimir asks the question to Estragon that 'did he read the Bible'. Estragon replied that he has just gone through it. Vladimir asks another question based on Estragon's utterance that does he remember the Gospels from the Bible. Estragon, instead of replying either 'yes' or 'no' answers that he remembers only the maps of Holy Land. He also adds many other descriptions of maps of Holy Land. By knowing his knowledge of Holy Land, Vladimir appreciates Estragon and tells him that he should have been a poet for his knowledge. Locutionary act in this extract is that Vladimir simply tells him that he should have been a poet for his understanding of Holy Land. The implicit meaning of Vladimir utterance is that he praises and appreciates Estragon. Directly, Vladimir appreciates Estragon for his knowledge of maps of Holy Land, which happens very rarely in the play. The perlocutionary act in this extract is the reply given by Estragon for Vladimir's appreciation. Estragon replies positively by saying that he was a poet. Thus, following of speech act can find in the following extract.

Vladimir: You should have been a poet.

Estragon: I was. (*Gesture towards his rags.*) Isn't that obvious? (*Waiting for Godot* 08)

Estragon and Vladimir are co-operative and supportive to each other most of the time in the play. Here is an example in which following of indirect speech act can find through their mutual understanding. Estragon and Vladimir gets confused on the day in which they are supposed to meet Godot. Estragon doesn't remember whether they were present yesterday or not to wait for Godot. After discussing and arguing a lot, Estragon comments that he may be mistaken for what he had said earlier. He also adds that now it is better to stop talking and arguing all these things. By considering the suggestion of the Estragon, Vladimir replies positively by saying 'all right'. Locutionary act in this utterance is that Estragon accepts his mistake for what he was confused and then he proposed to Vladimir that let's stop talking for a while. The illocutionary act in the following utterance can be explained as the suggestion of the Estragon. Estragon suggests Vladimir to stop talking for a minute after discussing about

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the day and their waiting for Godot. The implicit intention of the Estragon's utterance is to suggest Vladimir. Perlocutionary force in this extract is the reply provided by Vladimir. Vladimir, by following what Estragon has suggested, replies by saying 'all right'. Thus, the indirect speech act can be identified through the following utterance of Estragon.

Estragon: I may be mistaken. (*Pause.*) Let's stop talking for a minute, do you mind?

Vladimir: (*feebly*). All right. (*Waiting for Godot 11*)

Estragon misunderstood that Godot arrives when actually it was Pozzo and Lucky had entered. Lucky falls on the ground when he appears on the stage. Vladimir and Estragon turn towards Lucky to help him but both of them have desire to help him as well as have a fear. Vladimir takes a step towards Lucky but Estragon warned him by saying stay where you are. Pozzo, at the same time, also warns to both of them to be careful from Lucky. He also adds that he is wicked with strange people. Estragon, providing in an indirect way, misunderstood that and replies by saying 'is that him'. The locutionary act of the Pozzo's utterance is that he tells to both of them to be careful from Lucky when Vladimir was moving towards him. But illocutionary act of his utterance is to warn Estragon and Vladimir. Pozzo warns by saying that to be careful from Lucky. He behaves wickedly with the strange people. The implicit intention of Pozzo's utterance is to warn both of them before any kind of mischief of Lucky. The perlocutionary act in this extract is the reply provided by Estragon. Estragon misunderstand Pozzo and replies that 'is that him'. The personal pronoun 'him' in Estragon's utterance refers to Godot. Estragon provides the reply by violating the relation maxim of conversational analysis. Thus, the indirect illocutionary act of warning can find in the utterance of Pozzo in the following exchange.

Pozzo: Be careful! He's wicked. (*Vladimir and Estragon turn towards Pozzo.*) With strangers.

Estragon: (*undertone*). Is that him? (*Waiting for Godot 17*)

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Another example of indirect illocutionary act of warning can be observed in the exchange given below in which Vladimir warns Estragon for moving close towards Lucky. Estragon and Vladimir had always a question that why Lucky does hold the bags all the time and why doesn't he put down the bags. They ask the same thing quite a number of times to Pozzo, but Pozzo doesn't provide the satisfied answer to them. Estragon again asks the same thing to Vladimir. Vladimir replied negatively that 'how do I know' and then both of them move close towards Lucky. Vladimir, then, warns Estragon to be careful from Lucky. Estragon, in a reply to Vladimir's warning, suggests that to say something to Lucky. The illocutionary act in Vladimir's utterance is that Vladimir warns Estragon to be careful from Lucky, who might do any kind of mischief. Estragon was injured previously by Lucky. So, Vladimir warns Estragon before going close towards him. Thus, the implicit illocutionary act of warning can find here. The perlocutionary act in this example is the reply given by Estragon. Estragon, understands the warning given by Vladimir so instead of moving close towards Lucky, he suggests Vladimir to say something to Lucky.

Vladimir: How do I know? (*They close in on him.*) Careful!

Estragon: Say something to him. (*Waiting for Godot 20*)

The character of Pozzo is shown as a tyrant in the first act of the play. He used to rule on Lucky when they appear on the stage. Here is an example in which direct illocutionary act of request can find through the conversational exchange between Estragon and Pozzo. Pozzo eats the chicken and throws the chicken bones on the ground. Estragon gets attracted towards the chicken bones. He was about to ask Pozzo about the bones by making a polite request but quickly Pozzo asks him a question by saying 'what is it'. The illocutionary act of Estragon's utterance is that to make a direct request by using 'please sir'. Pozzo suddenly breaks whatever Estragon wish to say. The implicit meaning of Estragon's utterance is to request Pozzo about the bones. Thus, the following of direct illocutionary act of request can find in the following utterance. The perlocutionary act in the following exchange is the reply

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provided by Pozzo. Pozzo breaks the conversation by violating the quantity maxim of conversational exchange and ask him again by saying ‘what is it, my good man’.

Estragon: (*timidly*). Please Sir...

Pozzo: What is it, my good man? (*Waiting for Godot* 21)

Another example of implicit meaning of illocutionary act of request can find in the conversational exchange given below in which Estragon again requests to Pozzo for the requirement of chicken bones. Estragon finds that Pozzo throws the chicken bones on the ground after eating the chicken. Estragon requests politely to Pozzo by saying ‘mister’ and then asks him directly that doesn’t he want the bones which he has thrown away on the ground. By understanding the request of Estragon, Lucky looks towards Estragon, but doesn’t react anything. Pozzo, in a reply to Estragon’s polite request, asks a question to Lucky that does he want the bones or not. Lucky kept the silence; he doesn’t react on whatever Pozzo says. The illocutionary act of Estragon’s utterance is to request politely. The implied meaning of Estragon’s utterance is to request Pozzo for the requirement of the chicken bones. The perlocutionary act of this exchange is the reply provided by Pozzo. Pozzo, in a reply to Estragon’s request, firstly asks to Lucky about wanting of the chicken bones, but Lucky kept silence. Thus, the implicit meaning of request can find in the utterance of Estragon in the conversational exchange given below.

Estragon: Excuse me, Mister, the bones, you won’t be wanting the bones?

Lucky looks long at Estragon.

Pozzo: Do you want them or don’t you. (*Silence of Lucky.*) (*Waiting for Godot* 21)

Estragon and Vladimir used to get tired and bored many times in the play while waiting for Godot. Here is an example in which Pozzo warns both Vladimir and Estragon, when Vladimir suggests to Estragon to go from this place. Pozzo warns Vladimir by saying that think before going from this place. He also adds that their immediate future is depended on Godot. The implied meaning of Pozzo’s utterance is to warn both of them for doing any

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kind of action. Pozzo tries to restrict Vladimir by telling pros and cons if they move away from the place, where they are waiting. Pozzo warns them that their immediate future is depended on Godot and if they go from this place when there is still a day then their future will be destroyed. Thus, the implied illocutionary act of warning can find through the utterance of Pozzo. The perlocutionary act in this extract is the reply given by Vladimir. Vladimir, having some kind of doubt and surprise, asks him 'who told you'. Vladimir gets surprised to know all these information and so asked him a question by saying 'who told you'.

Pozzo: (*having lit his pipe*). Think twice before you do anything rash. Suppose you go now while it is still day, for there is no denying it is still day. (*They all look up at the sky.*) What happens in that case to you appointment with this... Godet... Godot... Godin... who has your future in his hands... (*pause*) at least your immediate future?

Vladimir: Who told you? (*Waiting for Godot 22*)

This study set to examine the dialogue in *Waiting for Godot Act I* in order to indicate how the characters' language cause implied intentions and how their identity expressed by their discourse. To this aim, the characters' underlying meaning and the interpretation of their utterances is provided in relation to the speech act, which specify what participants in conversation, have to do so as to speak in efficient, rational and cooperative way.

The present study analyzed the language used in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot Act I* from the pragmatic point of view, and proposes the pragmatic principle of Speech Acts, and a model of literary interpretation to illustrate how pragmatics is manipulated in literature reading. In this study, it is observed that the illocutionary force produced by indirect speech acts provides more options to the addressees and addressers to interpret the utterances. Therefore, the characters in the plays make an abundant use of the illocutionary speech acts. The study also throws light on the fact that the characters use illocutionary speech acts more frequently to be more polite towards the listener. It is seen that more an utterance is implied,

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the more it appears polite. The same utterance can be interpreted, as a request, as an order or as a complaint, at the time by the hearer. In the play '*Waiting for Godot Act I*', the listener interprets the utterances very skilfully in their proper context and guarantees their cooperation in ongoing speech events.

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