



Pragmatic Analysis of Frances Tower's, the Little Willow

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ABSTRACT

A British writer Frances Tower (1885–1948) is known for her short stories. She often explored themes of relationships, human sentiments, social conventions and the inner lives of her characters. The Little Willow by Tower explores themes of vulnerability, strength and the complexities of human sentiments through precise and refined prose. Pragmatic analysis investigates how context influences meaning in communication by paying attention to speaker intent, implications and interpretations beyond literal language. Speech act theory was developed by John Searle. The study reveals how Tower skillfully manipulates locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts to create tension and emotional resonance. Using Speech Act Theory and pragmatic principles this study examine how language shapes social identities and sentimental connections within the story. The Little Willow is analysed through the lens of pragmatics with particular attention to Speech Act Theory highlighting the nuanced interplay of language and meaning within the story. Pragmatic analysis sheds light on the ways how Tower employs linguistic strategies such as implicature, presupposition and contextual nuances to convey hidden emotional layers e.g Simon's conversational techniques often involve indirect speech acts that simultaneously reveal and obscure his true intentions leaving Lisby and the readers to interpret his words beyond their surface meaning. Lisby's hesitant responses reflect the tension between her inner turmoil and her desire for connection capturing the fragility of human bonds burdened by the weight of unspoken desires. This study delves into the role of speech acts in defining social identities and relationships in the story. By examining dialogues and interactions between the main characters the study contributes to a broader understanding of how literary texts use language to foster comprehension and engage readers in understanding hidden feelings and cultural limitations.



Introduction

Speech Act Theory is formulated by John Searle (1975) declare that language is not just a means of conveying information but also a tool for performing actions. This research paper applies Speech Act Theory to *The Little Willow* by Frances Tower look into how characters use language to perform specific acts and achieve communicative intentions. The study seeks to emphasize the pragmatic components of communication in the story and how these shape thematic structures and character interactions. By applying Speech Act Theory provides a distinct interpretation of the text highlighting how Speech acts influence story development and underlying meaning. By analysing locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts within the story this research highlights the ways in which language is used to influence, persuade, and express emotion. Moreover the connection of direct and indirect speech acts in the text reveals hidden layers of meaning that may not be clearly visible through classic literary examination. This research offers a fresh perspective on *The Little Willow* illustrating how pragmatic elements strengthen the depth and interpretation of the narrative. By evaluating dialogues this research uncovers the underlying social hierarchy and hidden meanings in character interactions. The function of speech acts in shaping the plot is also examined as certain dialogues motivate significant moments and character transformations.

Literature Review

Multiple research studies have applied Speech Act Theory to literary texts illustrating how dialogue serves functions beyond mere communication. Levinson (1983) emphasizes that literary conversations often contain hidden meanings shaped by speech acts. Likewise Mey (2001) discusses how pragmatic analysis reveal deeper layers of meaning in narratives. Speech Act theory has ability to reveal how language develop social interactions and power relations. Pratt (1977) and Culpeper (2011) have shown how speech acts contribute to character development story suspense and how the readers understand the text. Illocutionary Speech Acts on Balinese Hospitality Advertising Discourse in Russian: A Pragmatic analysis study of Speech acts are important in communication, and their success depends on context. Searle (1969, 1979) agrees with Austin that context helps determine whether a speech act is successful (Sbisa, 2002). Leech (1983) explains that context includes mutual understanding between speakers and listeners which helps in understanding speech. In Balinese hospitality advertisements, shared knowledge between advertisers and tourists helps in promoting products effectively. Here is research article review of Cutting (2002) identifies three types of context. The first is situational context where listeners and speakers understand their environment. In tourism tourists and advertiser recognize they are in a tourist landing place. The second is background knowledge which includes mutual understanding about facilities, policies, hotels and prices. The third is linguistics context where advertisers use language effectively to promote their products (Arrosid & Munandar, 2018). Yule (1996) defines speech acts as including compliments and requests. Austin (1962) classifies speech acts into three types: locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts (Witek, 2015). Locutionary acts refer to the verbal communication while illocutionary acts involve the hidden meaning behind those words (Haucsa et al., 2020). For example, Balinese tourism advertisements sometimes only provide information about Bali's geography, weather and culture without trying to convince buyers. Illocutionary acts involve actions such as offering. In hotel advertisements, advertisers use persuasive language to fascinate customers. Hotel advertisements often include details such as facilities, location and pricing to convince tourists. Perlocutionary acts involve the effect on the listener. Applying Speech Act Theory to Ordinary Conversation by Emanuel A. Schegloff (1988), using Speech Act Theory as the theoretical framework. Schegloff (1988) argues that speech act theory fails to account for the temporal and sequential properties of conversation. His analysis of utterances like *"Do you know + [embedded WH-question]"* shows that real-life conversational

meanings differ from theoretical interpretations. The lack of attention to conversational sequencing in speech act theory results in discrepancies between linguistic models and actual speaker behavior. Through conversational data, Schegloff demonstrates that speech acts should be understood within interactional contexts. He highlights *presequences*—preliminary utterances that prepare for main conversational actions. For instance, the question “*Do you know where John is?*” may function not as a request for knowledge but as an indirect information-seeking question. This challenges speech act classifications by showing how meaning evolves in interaction. Jens Allwood (1977) also examines speech act theory arguing that linguistic subfields must be studied as parts of broader communicative actions. He supports a functionalist approach, emphasizing that variation in language use must be analyzed in relation to communicative goals. Schegloff’s outcomes agree with this perspective by emphasizing speech act theory’s lack of capability to fully capture pragmatic flexibility. Schegloff’s research suggests that blending communication analysis with speech act theory can offer a more comprehensive understanding of language use. His findings indicate that speech act meanings are shaped dynamically through interaction rather than fixed categories.

Methodology

This research utilizes a qualitative approach examining dialogues in *The Little Willow* using Speech Act Theory. The fundamental framework consists of:

1. Locutionary Acts (what is said)
2. Illocutionary Acts (the intended function of the utterance)
3. Perlocutionary Acts (the effect on the listener) The analysis categorizes speech acts based on John Searle’s (1975) classifications: directives, commissives, expressives, assertives, and declarations. Selected dialogues are examined to determine their pragmatic function and contribution to the narrative.

Locutionary and Illocutionary Acts

The story contains number of examples where characters employ indirect speech acts to influence others indirectly. For instance the protagonist’s conversations often include indirect requests and underlying commands, reflecting social hierarchies and hidden conflicts. By examining these speech acts we obtain understanding of deeper knowledge of balance of power and character motivations.

Perlocutionary Effects and Character Relationships

The influence of speech acts on characters sentiments and decisions is essential the story. For example main utterances create Uncertainty leading to misunderstandings that drive the plot. Interpreting these perlocutionary effects reveals how language shapes relationships and human emotions.

Indirect Speech Acts and Thematic Development

Tower’s use of indirect speech acts enrich interpretation to the story. The study recognizes examples where contradiction, politeness techniques and underlying meanings contribute to the story's ideas of influence, manipulation, and social roles.

Theoretical Framework

Speech act theory was introduced by J.L Austin and developed by John searle. Speech act theory examines that language is not just a means for communication but also how language functions as action for deeper understanding and conveying the hidden meanings. According to Austin , Speech

acts can be categorized into three types, Locutionary acts which deals with the literal meaning of an utterance. Illocutionary acts which deals with the intended function of the speech like requesting, promising or commanding. Perlocutionary acts which deals how the speech has its effect on the listener. Speech Act theory helps to analyse the dialogues between the characters which shows their symbolic unspoken emotions and deeper connections. Speech act theory analyses the locutionary, Illocutionary and Perlocutionary acts of the characters so the readers have better understanding of character's inner thoughts and feelings which they conveyed throughout the story in an indirect hidden ways. The illocutionary force present in Lisby's character and how Simon's character internalised the Perlocutionary effects. By applying Speech act theory to "The Little Willow" this research which help to explore how language serves its role beyond its literal meaning, how it shapes character's emotional landscapes and interactions. This story is an example of how words acts as performative forces either they are spoken or unspoken, displaying the relationships and how readers interpret those implicit emotions

Research Questions

1. How speech acts help to reveal the internal emotions and unexpressed affections in "The Little Willow"?
2. How does Speech Act theory shapes better understanding of the narrative and character motivations?
3. How does love, regret or other themes can be analyzed with the help of illocutionary acts in the story?

Data Analysis

This theory examines how language performs actions and not just conveying information. There are categorizes to examine the text with the help of speech acts which are as follow, the literal meaning of an utterance (Locutionary acts). What is the purpose of an utterance (Illocutionary acts) and what is the effect of the utterance on the listener (Perlocutionary acts). This theory will help to analyse the "Little willow and examine how characters use language in order to shape relationships, emotions and social dynamics.

Example no #1

"Charlotte dear I have brought a friend. He was at Tobruk comes from South Africa, and doesn't know a soul over here"

Analysis

These lines are taken from the introductory part of the story and a good example to examine Performative and expressive speech acts. Stephen Elyot providing factual details by introducing Simon Byrne to Charlotte in an Locutionary act. The introduction functions not mere as an information but more than a request for hospitality and acceptance. The emphasis of Stephen Elyot on Simon's loneliness indirectly encourages Charlotte to welcome him. When Stephen mentioned that Simon doesn't know a soul over here "is an indirect sign of his isolation and loneliness is an Illocutionary act. How Charlotte respond to Simon can be seen that Charlotte responds very warmly and gently" I am so glad! and extends an invitation, her act of acceptance fulfils Stephen's implicit request of hospitality and acceptance for Simon . Charlotte's response towards Stephen's indirect request is an expressive speech act. It convey emotions and a welcoming attitude. Her warm words and the way of double handed greeting function as an assurance of acceptance and belonging. This is a per Locutionary act.

Example no #2

“So cool, he said ,and watery. Willows and water. I used to dream of them”.

Analysis

Let us take another example to analyse performative speech through Simon’s interaction with Lisby’s willow tree. Locutionary act present in the dialogue is the way Simon commented on the coolness of the willow tree and its water like qualities. The comment of Simon on the willow tree is not just a comment but it functions as a recognition speech act connecting the willow to his past trauma. His words fulfil the function and properties of Illocutionary act. Per Locutionary act is how Simon’s words have its impact on Lisby. She perceives that Simon understand the deeper symbolism of the willow tree. Simon’s words strengthened Lisby’s attachment to him shows the impact Lisby had by Simon’s words .

Example no#3

“Lisby’s eyes fell on the little willow. She seized it and put it into his outstretched hand.”Please take it for luck, she said”.

Analysis

The literal meaning of the statement which serves as a Locutionary act is Lisby’s statement that Simon should take the willow tree for luck. The expressive act bu Lisby which serves as Illocutionary act is her deep emotional attachment to Simon. She is not only giving him a willow tree as an object for his luck but this expression of her shows her love and attachment to Simon which is nonverbal but have a deeper meaning and intention. She by her actions expressed her deeper connection and love for Simon by giving him a willow tree . It is an expressive act which reveals Lisby’s intentions and internal emptions more clearly and effectively. The per Locutionary effect can be seen in Simon’s hesitation as he, touched by the gesture but also feels unworthy of receiving it. His reaction can be seen in his response .Response: “But you can’t give this away, Miss Avery, It’s—it’s...much too lovely”, he stammered.

His response and his hesitation shows that Lisby’s speech act has affected him emotionally or he may not fully understand its depth. The willow tree represents Lisby’s unspoken love, which Simon doesn’t explicitly acknowledge. The speech act highlights the indirect communication between the characters. Lisby’s feelings are implied rather than stated.

Example no #4

“Surreptitiously she changed the place of one. He had been shot down over Hamburg and his place was among the dead”.

Analysis

Brenda’s act of moving a photograph to place it among the dead is a Locutionary act. As a Illocutionary act it is a nonverbal speech act which represents Brenda symbolically acknowledges the young man’s death by changing his photograph’s position. As a per Locutionary act what has her actions impact on the reader that they interprets her internalised grief , rather than to express her emotions through performative expressions of sorrow her silent act hold more emotional weight and a deeper effect on the readers .So they could better under her emotions and internal grief. It is not necessary that speech acts always involve spoken language. Here, Brenda’s reordering of photographs functions as a speech act, declaring the loss and young man’s death without words. The act reflects her internalized grief which she holds inside herself and she organises her losses like books on a shelf. Speech acts in “The little willow” serves as to reveal

suppressed emotions, express love and loss indirectly, highlights the social dynamics. Meanings are not only what is said but how the words are said and how it affects others.

Example no #5

“Lisby seems rather odd these days-sort of strung up,” said Charlotte one day.

Analysis

This quotation is an example of an expressive speech act as it conveys Charlotte’s concern about Lisby’s behavior while sharing her thoughts with Brenda. Through this expressive act, Charlotte is not merely stating a fact but also revealing her emotions and seeking emotional validation from Brenda. The locutionary act in this case is Charlotte making a statement about Lisby’s recent behavior, which serves as the direct and literal meaning of her words. Beyond this, the illocutionary act reflects Charlotte’s deeper intention—she expresses worry and invites Brenda to engage in a discussion about Lisby’s unusual demeanor. By voicing her concern, Charlotte implies that she values Brenda’s perspective and possibly seeks reassurance or guidance regarding the situation. This aligns with the perlocutionary act, as her words may prompt Brenda to reflect on Lisby’s behavior, consider potential reasons for the change, and perhaps suggest possible solutions or explanations. Moreover, Charlotte’s expression of concern could also strengthen the bond between her and Brenda, as it fosters a sense of shared responsibility and mutual support. Brenda might respond empathetically, offering her observations, advice, or even reassurance that Lisby’s behavior is not as troubling as Charlotte fears. In this way, the speech act not only communicates concern but also serves as a means of social interaction, reinforcing the relationship between the speakers.

Example no #6

“Brenda looked down with a preoccupied expression at the ring on her long pale hand , where it lay on a fold of crepe de Chine She had been sewing. “How incredibly lucky we are that out two have come thorough alive!” She said.

Analysis

The Locutionary act present in Brenda’s statement of acknowledging their good fortune. Her words marked here literal meaning of being lucky that their persons have come through alive . It provides the information to the readers about the safety of their loved ones . If we analyze the quotation from the Illocutionary act so beyond the literal meaning of her statement Brenda’s utterances express a deep gratitude and relief. It is also a comparison with the situations of those who have suffered losses , such as family of John. So it is s mark on the arbitrary nature of survival in war time. It is not necessary that in war there will always be peace or loss everywhere ,both co exist in the time of war . Per Locutionary act in the statement which impacts readers’s senses is like Brenda and Charlotte have emotional partners but their Sister Lisby don’t have . It shows her emotional state , She copes with the absence of romantic partner and over shadowing presence of her Sister’s happiness . Brenda’s statement not only reflected the reality of war but also the nature of life that it is not always same for everyone. She felt herself lucky thst their loved one’s survived from the war and they felt relief .

Example no #7

“Brenda—don’t—don’t Lisby cried out soundlessly with s pain like cramp about her heart .”

Analysis

On the mention of Simon Byrne's name, though unspoken but Lisby's internal plea reflects a strong emotional response is an Locutionary act. Illocutionary force behind the intended meaning of Lisby is her deep distress and her desire to avoid the topic it is a silent revelation of her unsolved feelings. As the bond between Lisby and Simon was silent so her grief was also silent conveyed her deeper bond and pain which she felt on Simon's name. She felt acute pain because of her unvoiced love for Simon. The per Locutionary act is although Lisby was not expressing her love for Simon directly but the internalized grief and pain influenced her behaviour which anyone can see and predict her unresolved love life.

Example no # 8

"He was my dear, dear love," whispered Lisby. She bowed her head on her knees and wept soundlessly.

Analysis

This statement provides a Locutionary, Illocutionary and per Locutionary acts. The Locutionary act is how Lisby accepted her love for Simon verbally. The Illocutionary act is her intended meaning of the utterance her acceptance of her love for Simon, her emotional release and acknowledgment of her feelings, possibly for the first time. The per Locutionary act is Captain Oliver felt empathy towards Lisby provided her emotional support and by expressing her suppressed emotions might initiate a healing process. The narrative depth can be seen verbally as well as non-verbally how she bowed her head on her knees, accepted her love for Simon which later on may provide her a little relief rather than to hold her feelings inside and suffer from frustration and anger.

Conclusion

On the whole the story *Little Willow* by Frances Tower highlights the main aspects: what the words literally mean, what the author intends to express, and how it affects the reader. Locutionary acts are included in this story and according to these characters in the story possess strength and hope which is compared to the little willow tree to symbolize their growth. Illocutionary acts are also used in the story. According to this the writer conveys that true strength comes from being flexible like a willow tree, which bends in the wind but does not break. This expresses hope, resilience and courage urging the reader to think positively. The perlocutionary act described in the story highlights the reader's motivation. The reader should reflect on their struggles and face them with renewed strength and optimism. It creates a sentimental effect and emphasizes the importance of determination. This also provides motivation and encourages flexibility in their lives.

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