

A Speech Acts of Contrasting in Harold Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter*:

A Pragmatic Approach

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This study deals with a very vital topic which is speech act of contrast in one of the most famous writers in the theater of the absurd; Harold Pinter in his play *The Dumb Waiter*. The best this theory can be defined with is the title of Austin's book "How to Do Things with Words." This theory is developed by both Austin and Searle whom their own model of classification will be part of the practical side the text will be analyzed by. Grice's four maxims will go hand in hand with Austin's and Searle's to scrutinize the text. In other words, two mixed methods will be adopted to analyze the text: qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative means the way through which the text is analyzed to discover the principal of contrast resulted in the speech utterances. Besides, quantitative deals with the percentage of the data resulted from the qualitative method.

Key Words: Speech Act, Contrast, Grice's Maxims

1.1. Introduction

Much has been written about Speech act theory Since J.L. Austin presented it in his comprehensive published book *How to do Things with Words* – in which he tries to define language as being a social activity rather than just as a means to claim what is true or false. Beside having its quake in philosophy of language, Speech Act has been adopted in literary theory; to cover most of the literary works.

The objective of this paper is to examine how the speech-act theory and Grice's Maxims can be applied to the analysis of contrast, in all its aspects, on one of the most prominent figures in the absurd theatre who is Harold Pinter in his work *The Dumb Waiter*. Contrast has a pragmatic basis and it can be viewed through the way speakers employ their utterance in one way or another to deliver certain messages. (Clark, 1990: 417-431). This study will do its best to investigate contrast, particularly that between the implied and explicit meaning.

Although speech acts traced back to the ancient Greek philosophers including Aristotle, Protagoras, and the Stoics, yet the notion that people perform "various types of Acts" when they utter was clearly claimed by John Austin for the first time in his (1962) *How to Do Things with Words*. Among others, Austin criticizes semantists believe in that "languages are sets of sentences and that sentences are used primarily, if not exclusively, to make descriptive statements." (Lyons, 1995: 234).

The study aims to answer the following questions:

Q1: How does the characters' utterance convey the contrasted meaning if it is affected by indirectness?

Q2: How does the Pragmatics of Speech Act of Contrasting in Harold Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter* convey in Characters' utterance?

Q3: Does Contrasting Speech Act refer to positive or negative meaning?

Q4: How can the audience capture the intended meaning from the contrasting speech acts used by the character in this play?

There are various methods of analysis that scholars have been applied to language, particularly verbal language, in order to set a proper a classification of speech acts. The analysis of spoken language must acknowledge some of the arguments regarding the analysis of speech act theory since "linguistics restricted itself for a generation to a concentration on form," leaving "the study of meaning to linguistic philosophers" (Coulthard, 1977:11). According to Sadock (2004:53) a "Real-life acts of speech usually involve interpersonal relations of some kind. A speaker does something with respect to an audience by saying certain words to that audience. Thus, the study of discourse should be central to speech act theory the matter that led several philosophers and linguists such as Austin and Searle to devote their attention to speech acts.

Austin develops the performative hypothesis that behind every utterance there is a performative verb, such as to order, to warn, to admit, and to promise that make the illocutionary force explicit (Cutting, 2002:16). The fundamental ideas put forward by Austin and developed by Searle are well known. Austin found that some sentences are designed to **do** something, rather than merely to **say** something. Such sentences Austin dubbed PERFORMATIVES, in contrast to what he called CONSTATIVES. He noticed that from the observation that certain sorts of sentences, e.g., *I christen this ship the Joseph Stalin; I now pronounce you man and wife*.

Austin (1962) classifies speech acts according to the illocutionary force into five general classes as follows:

- 1- Verdictive : acts that consist of delivering a finding , e.g , acquit , hold (as a matter of law , read something as etc).
- 2- Exercitives : acts of giving a descion for or against a course of action ,e.g a ppoint , dismiss , order , sentence , etc.

- 3- Commissives : acts whose point is to commit the speaker to a course of action, e.g. contract , give word, declare one's intention etc.
- 4- Behabitives: expressions of attitudes toward the conduct, fortunes or attitudes of other e.g. apologize, thank, congratulate, welcome etc.
- 5- Expositive: acts of expanding of views, conducting of arguments, and clarifying e.g., deny, inform, concede, refer etc.

The most important parameters is what Searle called "Direction of fit". This has to do with whether the words are supposed to fit the facts of the world or whether the world is supposed to come to fit the words. There are four values, Words to word, world to words, neither and both. (Sadock ,2004:65). Searle classifies speech acts according to their illocutionary force into five classes.

- 1- Assertive: an illocutionary act that represents a state of affairs. The illocutionary point of assertive "is to commit the speaker (in a varying degree) to something being the case, to the truth of expressed proposition". The different kinds are: suggestion, putting for word, swearing, posting and concluding e.g. " No one makes a better cake than me".
- 2- Directive: an illocutionary act for getting the addressee to do something. The illocutionary for this point "consist in the fact that they are attempts. (in a varying degree) by the speaker to get the hearer to do something. The different kinds: asking, ordering, requesting, involving, advising. e.g. "Could you close the window"
- 3- Commissive: an illocutionary act for getting the speaker (i.e. the performing the speech act) to do something. The illocutionary purpose of commissive " is to commit the speaker to some future course of action". The different kinds are: promising, planning, vowing, betting and opposition e.g. " I am going to Paris tomorrow".
- 4- Expressive: an illocutionary act that express the mental state of the speaker about an event presumed to be true. The purpose of expressive "is to express the psychological state specified in the sincerity condition about a state of affairs specified in the propositional content. The different kinds are: thanking, apologizing, and welcoming e.g. " I am sorry that I lied to you".
- 5- Declaration: it brings into existence the state of affairs to which it refers. The point of this " is to bring about some new state of affairs solely in virtue of the utterance" e.g. " you are fired, I swear, I beg you (Verchueren , 1999: 24).

Moreover, when it comes to Grice, then utterances make sense no matter whether there are missing or incomplete elements. Addressees can derive meanings from what is unsaid (implicated) depending on drawing related inferences to the particular utterance. What is intended is made reasonable by what Grice calls implicatures or conversational implicatures. Meaning is inferred from the use of some utterance in context. Grice's theory of implicature is concerned with the ways in which meaning can be communicated not only by what is said, but also by how it is said. Grice wants to show the inferential paths that lead interlocutors from what is said to what is meant. Its guiding principle is that " constrains on the use of utterances and the information conveyed by them arise not only from the semantically encoded meaning , but also from the communicative uses to which they are put"(Levinson, 1983:97) .

Grice regards them as universal principles although some researchers , like Abdul-Wahid (278-80) , in his treatment of Arabic , regards them as culture bound ,especially the maxims of quantity and relevance. They are as follows (Levinson, 1983: 101- 02; Akmajian et al., 1995: 382).

Maxim of Quantity

Be informative; make your contribution as informative as required.

Maxim of Quality

Be truthful; do not say what you believe to be false or lack adequate evidence.

Maxim of Relevance

Be relevant.

Maxim of Manner

Be perspicuous, avoid obscurity of expression, avoid unnecessary ambiguity, be brief and be orderly. Grice's conversational maxims jointly express a cooperative principle: "Make your conversational contribution such as required at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk of exchange in which you are engaged" (Grice, 1975: 45).

1.2. Research Design

The study will adopt a mixed method research of both the quantitative and qualitative approaches. Onwuegbuzie and Combs (2011: 2) state that mixed methods research involves "mix[ing] or combin[ing] quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study". Quantitative research approach is mainly described as being scientific in nature. This type of research approach deals with numbers and figures as a means to describe facts. According to (Bryman, 2001: 20) quantitative research approach is the research that emphasizes on numbers and figures in the collection and analysis of data. Statistical data used in this type of research for the purpose of descriptions and analysis can significantly reduce the time and effort which the researcher would have invested in describing his results. Data (numbers, percentages and measurable figures) can be calculated and conducted by a computer through the use of a statistical package for social science (SPSS) (Gorard, 2001: 3; Connolly, 2007 :2-34) which save a lot of energy and resources. This approach allows the reporting of summary results in statistical ways with a definite degree of confidence.

1.3 Research Methodology (Procedure):

The study will use qualitative research model that mainly focused on "written documents". According to Patton (2002: 4) there are three kinds of data collection methods in the qualitative method that "written documents" is its third type. The method will mainly involve using words, quotations, texts from the selected play for the purpose of analysis. Harold Pinter's *The Dumb waiter* will be analyzed thoroughly, and the relevant lines of contrasted speech will be identified.

Qualitative content analysis helps to discover the contrasted meaning resulting from the use of indirect speech or implied meaning in the words and the phrases that give the sense of contrast. According to Best & Kahn (2005: 249) "The content analysis helps to identify the literary style, concepts or beliefs of the writer".

1.3 Data Analysis

A dumb waiter is a tiny elevator manipulated to move objects between floors of a building. It is often used in restaurants. In this play the Dumb waiter, the writer uses a dumb waiter as a plot device. The two main characters, Gus and Ben, receive mysterious food orders from a dumb waiter in their basement room.

The title also refers to the men themselves. They are stuck waiting all day for an assignment from an invisible boss. Their confusion about their assignment and the food orders makes them "dumb" they become waiters in a second sense as they struggle to serve the requested food to the café patrons they imagined upstairs. The title implies the men are trapped in a role of servitude, stuck waiting without knowing what they're waiting for-literal "dumb waiter".

In *The Dumb waiter*, several speech acts techniques are employed by Pinter to show various facts about man's life such as the existence of menace, fear and uncertainty. Pinter illustrates those facts through two powerless gunmen, Ben and Gus, who are getting ready for their mission. According to Sadreddini, (2014:80), "their passive action and their repetitive concept of their communication present them as the obedient puppets to their higher master".

Certain excerpts will be chosen from Harold Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter* to discover the principle of contrast following the model of the mixed methods of speech acts theory by Austin (1962) and Searle(1969), on one hand, and Grice's four Maxims (1975) on the other hand.

Excerpt (1)

Gus : He what ?

Ben : He crawled under a lorry. A stationary lorry.

Gus : No.

Ben : The lorry started and ran over him.

Gus : Go on !

Ben : That's what it says here.

Gus : Get a way.

Ben : It's enough to make you want to puke , isn't it ?

Gus : Who advised him to do a thing like that.

Ben : A man of eight-seven crawling under a lorry.

Gus : It's unbelievable.

Ben : It's down here in black and white.

Gus : It's credible.

(Act1, scene1 : 124)

Here, Ben reads a story of an old man crawling under a lorry. Literary, he does not mean this but he refers to the difficulty of life.

In the above line, the verb "crawl" carries the real meaning of contrast; an old man is crawling under a lorry. The man here is a real reflection of his age and achievements. The reader expects that this man cannot walk or stand, but he crawls under a lorry. This is a surface meaning , but the deep meaning shows the difficulty of life. According to Austin it is commissive because it commits the speaker to do a course of an action, while according to Searle, it is directive because the speech represents a state of affairs that contradicts what one can believe. One can notice that contrast here is applied in the form of metaphor; in other words, the stationary lorry represent life how it is difficult and how time is slow.

The four maxims of Grice are fit for this utterance. It does not violate any of them. It is informative to the question, and so it follows the maxim of quantity. It follows the maxim of quality because the speaker has an evidence of his response. The utterance is also relevant, brief, clear and orderly, and so it follows both the maxims of relevance and manner.

Excerpt (2)

Gus : I've brought a few biscuits.

Ben: Well , you'd better eat them quick.

Gus : I always bring a few biscuits. Or a pie. You know I can't drink tea without anything to eat.

Ben : Well , make the tea then, will you ? Time's getting on. Gus brings out the flattened cigarette packet and examine it.

Gus : You've got any cigarettes ? I think I've run out. He throws the packet high up and leans forward to catch it I hope it won't be along job, this one.

(Act 1, scene1 :125)

Here, Gus does not mean that he has not cigarettes. On the contrary, he refers to the futility of life. Life is boring and futile. This reminds us the main theme of absurdity "Nothing to be done" life becomes a game. By saying that "I hope it won't be along job, this one " , he hopes that the bad situation will get better.

In this line, the verb "throw" holds the meaning of contrast which , in turn, represented by irony. The man expects to find a cigarette inside the packet , but when he did not find, he decides to entertain himself by throwing "the packet high up and leans forward to catch it " According to Austin , it is commissive because it commits the speaker to contrast himself, but according to Searle , it is directive because the illocutionary act urges the speaker to ask to get something. The meaning of contrast can be represented by the word "cigarette" which is a metaphor for life how it is short and ugly.

The utterance here violates the four maxims of Grice because what is said contradicts what they are talking about. It does not follow the maxim of quantity because it is not informative as it should be. Because, it violates the maxim of quality because the illocutionary act cannot be proved or there is no evidence that they have cigarettes. As for the two maxims of relevance and manner, then this utterance violates then both because it is not relevant and it is not brief or orderly.

Excerpt (3)

Ben : (Slamming his paper down) Kaw !

Gus : What's that.

Ben : A child of eight killed a cat !

Gus : Get away .

(Act 1, scene,1 :125)

Because they have nothing to do , but to wait and witness. Ben and Gus are trying to kill silence by trying to give something unbelievable. An example might be claimed is when Ben says " A child of eight

killed a cat!" then, they try to go deeply into this matter. There is an irony here because they are talking about something that does exist, how a child of eight can kill a cat. They go then deeply to say that the child is a girl. The contrast in that they speak about something has no relation with their current situation.

As for Austin, this utterance is commissive because it commits the speaker to contradict himself, first for talking about something has nothing to do with their situation they are in, and second for their exaggeration that a girl in her eight kills a cat. When it comes to Searle, then this utterance is directive because it consists in the fact that it is an attempt by the speaker (Ben) to get the hearer (Gus) to do something he is obliged to believe in.

If the four maxims of Grice are applied on this utterance, then it follows the three maxims of quantity, relevance and manner. While it violates the maxim of quality. It follows the maxim of quantity (because it is informative), relevance (because it is relevant) and manner (because it is brief and clear). On the other hand, it violates the maxim of quality (because the speaker does not believe what he says).

Excerpt (4)

Gus: Why did you stop the car this morning, in the middle of the road?

Ben: (lowering the paper). I thought you were a sleep.

Gus: I was , but I woke up when you stopped. You did stop, didn't you? (Act 1, scene,1 :129)

Because Ben and Gus lose every sense in life, nothing they have to do, but to wait and witness. They want to break silence. Ben spends his time in reading his paper, while Gus in sleeping. When Ben lowers his paper, telling Gus that he thought Gus is sleeping. Gus's response is that he is sleeping, but when Ben stopped reading, he wakes up.

There is a contrast here because when people go to bed, they like calmness and quite atmosphere. However for Gus the matter is different here because he likes noise, so when Ben stops reading, Gus wakes up. This is an irony that depicts the contradictive moments those two characters live.

For Austin, it is commissive because it contradicts the common sense and what is there between Ben and Gus. When it comes to Searle, then it is directive because the illocutionary point is intended by the speaker to get the hearer to do something which to go on reading.

Moreover, the four maxims can be applied on this utterance. It follows the maxim of quantity (because the utterance is informative) , manner (because it is brief and clear), and relevance (it is relevant) However it violates the maxim of quality because the speaker is not sure of what he says and has no evidence for that.

Excerpt (5)

Ben : What's that ?

Gus : I don't know.

Ben : Where did it come from?

Gus : Under the door ?

Ben : Well, what is it ?

Gus : I don't know .

They stare at it.

Ben : Pick it up.

Gus : What do you mean ?

Ben : Pick it up !

Gus slowly moves towards it, beds and picks it up.

What is it ?

Gus : An envelope.

Ben : Is there anything on it?

Gus : No.

Ben : Is it sealed ?

Gus : Yes.

Ben : Open it .

Gus : What

Ben : Open it.

Gus open it and looks inside.

What's in it ?

Gus empties twelve matches into his hand.

Gus : Matches.

Ben : Matches ?

Gus : Yes.

Ben : Show it to me.

Gus passes the envelope. Ben examines it.

Nothing on it. Not a word.

Gus: That's funny, isn't it ?

Ben : It came under the door.

Gus : Must have done.

Ben : Well , go on .

Gus : Go on where ?

Ben : Open the door and see if you can catch anyone outside.

Gus : Who , me ?

Ben : Go on !

Gus stares at him, puts the matches in his pocket, goes to his bed and brings a revolver from under the pillow. He goes to the door , open it , looks out and shuts it. (Act 1 , scene ,1:133)

Still there are waiting for something to change their life. However, they notice something from under the door. They are eager to know what it is, so Ben asks Gus to bring it and they latter does so. They are surprised since it is nothing than envelope and inside it nothing than matches. They laugh because there is no word or anything on it, and so they decide to open the door again and see if there is someone they can catch.

As for Austin the utterance is commissive because it commits the speaker to a course of action. This contradicts the relationship between the speaker and the listener because one can notice that Ben always pushes Gus to do something. The latter may not be eager to do. When it comes to Seale, the utterance is directive since the illocutionary act of this utterance gets the addressee to do something after many attempt. Contrast lies here between there is a gap between their expectation and fulfillment. Contrast is also depicted through the use of metaphor of both “envelope” and “matches”, that is, life is equal in value to an envelope of matches.

Moreover, the utterance follows the four maxims of Grice, quantity, quality, relevance and manner. It follows the maxim of quantity (because it is informative) , quality (because both of them believe in what they say and has evidence of their speech), relevance (their speech was relevant) and manner (because it is brief, clear and orderly).

Excerpt (6)

(slowly in a low , tense voice) why did he send us matches if he knew there was no gas)

(Act1, scene3: 155)

There is a rhetorical question here because the question does not need for any answer because the answer is implied within the question. Here, when Gus protests that the director knows well that there is no gas and he sends matches. This is an irony because there is a gap between what is said and what is meant. The gas for those people represents the source of life. The contrast, what is stated in this statement , is implied under the umbrella of irony.

If one looks deeply into this sentence, he /she will discover that though in form, it is a question, yet in function, it is a statement.

As for Austin, this statement is commissive because it declares Gus's intention concerning their miserable situation they are living in. Moreover, for Searle, the illocutionary act of this statement is directive because there is a sense of involvement, that is, it involves something Gus wants to convey concerning their current situation which he is not satisfied in it totally.

If Grice's maxims are applied on this utterance, then one can find that it follows these four maxims of quantity (because it is informative), quality (because the speaker has evidence of what is said), relevance (because it is relevant) and manner (because it is clear, brief and orderly)

Conclusion

Throughout its quake in the philosophy of language, speech acts theory goes hand in hand with Grice's four maxims to discover the principle of contrast in Harold Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter*.

During the analysis of the text, it is noticed that contrast colours the real form of the text and its content. The speech acts of contrasting is found to be **commissive** for Austin and **directive** for Searle. It is

commissive because most of the speeches of the major characters (Ben and Gus) commit the other to a course of action; while for Searle, it is directive because it gets the hearer to do something.

Moreover, when it comes to Grice, one can notice that most of the excerpts that are claimed they hold the principle of contrast follow the four maxims of quantity, quality, relevance and manner.

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