

Speech Act Analysis to Short Stories

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Abstract—The study of meaning in context is the core of pragmatics, yet to identify or pinpoint what is a context is difficult. In fact, context of the language of any literary work may be felt in the text but not all the time, since understanding literary works may be dependent on cultural contexts which are not found in the text. Hence the paralinguistic and extra linguistic clues of relating meaning to context has to do with the attempt to get at the intended meaning of an utterance. This is clearly explained by Sadosky (1974) and Green (1975) as they claimed that speech act theory which hypothesizes that there should be a one to one relation between surface form and encoded illocutionary force for direct speech acts meets with unsurmountable difficulties. From theoretical and experimental perspectives, there were several studies concerning speech act theory as one of the basic elements for studying pragmatics. Literary texts, novels, and drama have received a quite good pragmatic attention, but not much has been paid to short stories. As such, the present study was carried out with the aim of examining three short stories and analyzes them pragmatically. It has come to the findings that the use of speech acts fluctuate both in quantity and type from one writer to another and from one theme to another.

Index Terms—Speech Act Theory, narrative fictionality, 'Acme', 'Post Haste' and 'The Happy Prince'

I. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A. Preliminaries to Speech Act Theory

Sometimes, when we want to teach our children important factors in life such as "Don't play with fire", "Behave well", "Stop yelling", etc., then, we are using statements that reflect a paradigmatic use of language, i.e., we can make requests, ask questions, give orders, make promises, give thanks, offer apologies, and so on. But, to infer what is said (considering its form and context) is an essential ability for the creation and reception of coherent discourse which would lead to a successful communication. Reaching such ability requires the knowledge of the physical and social world and assumptions about the knowledge of the people with whom we are interacting. Formulating this knowledge is the essence of what is called the *Speech Act Theory*. Speech act theory provides us with a means of digging beneath the surface of discourse and establishing the function of what is said (Cook 1992). In other words, speech act theory attempts to explain how speakers use language to accomplish intended actions and how hearers infer intended meaning from what is said. Although speech act studies are now considered a sub-discipline of cross-cultural pragmatics, they actually take their origin in the philosophy of language:

It was for too long the assumption of philosophers that the business of a 'statement' can only be to 'describe' some state of affairs, or to 'state some fact', which it must do either truly or falsely. (...) But now in recent years, many things, which would once have been accepted without question as 'statements' by both philosophers and grammarians have been scrutinized with new care. (...) It has come to be commonly held that many utterances which look like statements are either not intended at all, or only intended in part, to record or impart straight forward information about the facts (...). (Austin, 1962, p.1)

In 1930s, there was a belief that unless the sentence can be verified, it is meaningless. This was based on the doctrine of "Logical Positivism" where most of the ethical, aesthetic and literary discourses and everyday utterances were simply meaningless. In contrast to this rather limited view, which when actually compared to the full range of utterances in the real world is forced to exclude most of them as simply nonsensical; Austin, particularly his *How to Do Things with Words*, proposes a second category of utterances that are not subject to the truth/falsity conditions of propositional knowledge. Rather, these exist as acts in themselves that is—as Austin dubs them—as *performatives*. The peculiarity of the performative utterance, in contrast to the constative, is that it does not describe a state of affairs independent of itself, but that it is itself the reality it describes. It is therefore a self-reflexive utterance. Austin's archetypal examples of these are the acts of naming, marrying, bequeathing and betting. In other words, as Levinson (1983) states:

Performatives are, if one likes, just rather special sorts of ceremony. And unlike constative, which are assessed in terms of truth and falsity, performatives can only be assessed as felicitous or infelicitous, according to whether their felicity conditions are met or not.

Moreover, Van Dort (1997) argues that utterances such as "I name this ship HMS Hermes," does not describe a state of affairs in the real world, rather it brings a state of affairs into existence by virtue of the utterance. The act of naming is simultaneously the reference of this statement and the performative is therefore, in the most rigorous sense, an act and not a representation of something else, at least not in the preferred constative sense of a representation. Thus, Austin (1962) presented a distinction between two types of Performatives: *Explicit and Implicit*. Austin contended that the

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