Strategic Use of Speech Acts in Fasting, Feasting, By Anita Desai

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Abstract

Linguistic skills of humankind make it superior in the ecological world. It shares a major part of its achievements as a race. Language has contributed immensely in the development and advancement of human civilization. The use of language has been seeking attention of all the scholars over a period as it has been creatively used as per the requirement of a speaker. What makes language so powerful or important? Is it the form of language or function of the language? As we can see that there is no conformity between form and function of the language. The sentence and the meaning of the sentence differ many a times. This feature of language was the focus of Pragmatic scholars. It was called language in context or practical use of language. Scholars like J. L. Austin and Searle made a huge contribution in understanding and studying this phenomenon of the language. J. L. Austin proposed that language works on three levels i.e. Locutionary meaning, Illocutionary meaning and Perlocutionary meaning. Whereas Searle made two parts of language use as Direct Speech and Indirect Speech. This paper studies the use of language at various levels and its obligation of context in the light of Speech Act theory. In "Fasting, Feasting," by Anita Desai The various speech acts performed by the characters, which act as a vital means of expression and communication throughout the story, are an intriguing aspect of the narrative. We can better understand the underlying intentions, feelings, and power dynamics in the relationships depicted in the novel by looking at the speech acts.

Introduction

The importance of speech act analysis in a literary text lies in its capacity to reveal the deeper levels of communication, character motivations, and thematic complexities within the narrative. We can learn a lot about the characters' motivations, feelings, and underlying desires by analyzing their speech acts, which helps us to understand them more thoroughly on a psychological level. Additionally, by highlighting the hierarchies and relationships at play, speech act analysis sheds light on the power dynamics and social interactions between characters. Additionally, it enables a deeper investigation of the cultural context and societal norms that influenced the characters' linguistic choices, enhancing knowledge of the text's setting and themes.

By examining the speech acts, we can identify the characters' use of irony, satire, and narrative devices, which helps us better understand the author's message and social commentary. In any discourse some utterances may seem absurd if they are not studied with the context as single utterance may have various meanings in different situations. Stelmann (1982:279) points out:

Linguistic communication is more than merely saying something; it is saying something in a certain context, with certain intentions, and with the listener's recognition of what is said and of these intentions.[1]

Ultimately, speech act analysis enhances literary interpretation by allowing readers to connect with the text more deeply, appreciate the complexity of character development, and comprehend the minute details that shape the meaning of the narrative.

In "Fasting, Feasting," by Anita Desai, the lives of two different families—one from India and one from the United States—are explored in detail. The novel examines issues of tradition, gender roles, familial expectations, and cultural clashes. The various speech acts performed by the characters, which act as a vital means of expression and communication throughout the story, are an intriguing aspect of the narrative. We can better understand the underlying intentions, feelings, and power dynamics in the relationships depicted in the novel by looking at the speech acts.

We often find that "what is meant is not uttered and what is uttered that is does not mean it at all" when we watch people actually use language. The focus of many academics has been on this intriguing aspect of language use. The term "practical use of language" or "implied meaning of utterance" is how scholars refer to this phenomenon of language. With the aid of pragmatic theories, the study of an utterance's hidden or implied meaning could be conducted.

1. Pragmatics

Pragmatics is the one of the branches of linguistics that finds close connection with writings of some scholars of philosophy. The need of pragmatics was felt when language scholars found that in some situations there is no harmony between utterance and meanings of the sentences. G. Yule, (1996), defined communication as follows:
"Pragmatics is the study of how more gets communicated than is said"[2]

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Charles Morries (1938) came up with the modern term "pragmatics". He claimed that there are two levels at which language functions: semantics and pragmatics. Language is a system of signs in which each word denotes a specific object. By making use of the language's sign-object system, semantics investigates the literal meaning of words.

However, pragmatics examines how the context of an utterance affects the implied meaning of that utterance. It examines what was said, who said it, and the circumstances. This aids the listener in understanding the speaker's intentions. According to pragmatics, an utterance can have various effects depending on the context, felicity, and background knowledge. This occurs because the speaker uses language in a deliberate manner to further his objectives. Speech Act Theory, first put forth by J. L. The study of pragmatics, which sheds light on the use of language for tactical purposes, is regarded as having its core in Austin.

2. Speech Act

The study of pragmatic language use, which considers both the explicit and implicit connotations of utterances, is known as pragmatics. Though pragmatics offers variety a of theories, Speech Act Theory has received the most attention. In his lecture series titled "How to Do Things with Words," philosopher John Langshaw Austin first used the term "Speech Act".

Austin claimed that words enable us to carry out actions. Most spoken words perform an action in addition to imparting information. Each time someone speaks, they are performing a communication act. Such behavior was referred to by Austin as "Speech Acts.".

This viewpoint was very dissimilar from the conventional notion of an utterance. A statement intended to provide information was the traditional definition of an utterance. There are only two possible outcomes for the statement in this instance: either it is true or it is false. The only possible outcomes for a statement like "India is a beautiful country" are true or false. The statement, in Austin's opinion, could be either true or false in addition to both. In some circumstances, it may be a compliment, but if it is said by a foreigner while they are standing in an Indian slum, it may also be sarcastic.

Austin claimed that the speaker carries out specific actions through their utterances. As a "Performative Utterance" and a "Constative Utterance," he divided the utterance into two categories. Those utterances that perform specific actions are referred to as performative utterances.

In some ways, these words alter the physical environment around the speaker.
Ex.
- I pronounce you husband and Wife.
- I hereby sentence you life imprisonment.
- I promise to give you Rs. 1 lakh

In the above example when a judge utters that 'I hereby sentence you life imprisonment', he is performing certain action which will put the culprit in jail for his lifetime. Such expressions are followed by some actions. On the other hand Constative Utterances exhibit the traditional concept of an utterance of a statement. Such utterances can be a statement or assertions. These statement wither can be true or false. These utterances do not perform any actions.

Austin's ideas were expanded upon by John Searle, who further divided speech acts into five categories: assertives (making statements), directives (issuing commands), compromisives (making commitments), expressives (expressing emotions or attitudes), and declarations (enacting change through speech). Searle's framework provided a more thorough understanding of how language is used for a variety of purposes other than describing reality.

3. Methodology

The methodology section will go over the methodology and resources used for the "Fasting, Feasting" speech act analysis. The main information will be gleaned from specific character interactions and dialogue. The analysis will use qualitative techniques to classify and interpret the speech acts in light of the themes and cultural setting of the novel.

4. Application of Speech Act Theory to *Fasting, Feasting* A Novel by Anita Desai (1999)

Language is the basic means of communication. We express our feelings and thoughts through language. Sometimes language serves more than conveying mere facts or information. Many a times a speaker achieves his goals and motives through language use. Such achievements are done through speech acts. Speaker can employ speech acts to seek

someone's approval, to show disagreement and anger. Speech acts also help speaker to save face and avoid adverse effects of communication on the relation with the listener. Some of the speech act motives and purposes have been discussed from the novels *Fasting, Feasting* and *The God of Small Things* are as follows:

5.1 Strategic Use of Speech Acts in Fasting, Feasting

Communication is a process where we share our thoughts and feelings with others, however some time our thoughts may not be liked by others. In such situations the comments we make may affect our relation with the speaker. Especially, negative emotions like Frustration, Irritations, disrespect, doubt and Anger are not conducive for interpersonal relations. Anger is one of the negative emotions that human express. This emotion is not fruitful for development of relations and communication among people. Most of the time when anger is expressed overtly people get hurt and speaker may have to face adverse situations in the future. In such situations where speaker is not in a position to express anger then they employ indirect speech act to express themselves. This helps them to express their feelings and save the relationships as well. In the fictional or literary works characters too take resort in indirect speech cats to achieve two goals i.e. expressing themselves and saving the face. In the novel Fasting, Feasting the central character, Uma, takes help of indirect speech acts to express her anger.

Uma comes to the door where she stands fretting.
'Why are you shouting?'
'Go and tell cook-'
'But you told me to do up the parcel so it's ready when Justice Dutt's son comes to take it. I'm trying it up now.'
(P. No. 3-4)

The above conversation takes places between Uma and her mother. Uma being a girl in Indian family has to look after all the household tasks and obey her parents without questioning. Uma's mother keeps giving her orders. At the same time Uma is asked to pack a parcel for her brother and look after the cook as well, to which Uma gets irritated and expresses her anger and inability to perform two tasks at the same time. She does so by indirectly conveying her mother that she has already given some task to Uma, and she is busy with it. Since Uma cannot disobey her mother but get successful in achieving her goal with indirect speech act.

In one more example form the same novel Uma is mother expresses her dislike for Uma's convent school. Uma's mother believes that convent school has been spoiling Uma. She says,
'Don't you know what brackets are? What did they teach you at the convent?'
(P. No. 128)

Uma's mother believes that the Nun at the convent school is the responsible people for Uma's disobedience. She asks Uma a rhetoric question that what Nuns did teach her at convent school. This rhetoric question is an amazing tool for employment of indirect speech acts. In her statement, the word 'They' refers to the Nuns of the school. This question doesn't seek answer but states that Uma has been spoiled by the school. Uma's mother doesn't blame it directly as she knows that it was her husband's decision that Uma will attend convent school.

In another example Uma's mother uses indirect speech act to blame her husband for sending Uma to Convent. She says,
'See what these nuns do,' she raged to Papa.
'What ideas they fill in the girls' heads! I always said don't send them to a convent school. Keep them at home, I said-but who listened? And now-!'
(P. No. 29)

Being an Indian orthodox wife Uma's mother knows that she cannot blame her husband openly as it will be considered rude and violating social norms. She asks a question to herself and says, '*I said-but who listened? And now-!*' Here Uma's mother indirectly implies that she had already warned her husband about it but he didn't listen to her and now he will have to face the results. She does it indirectly. This helps her to save her face from being a rude wife to criticize husband's decision and express her frustration at the same time.

When Ramu wishes to take Uma out for dinner and he asks for permission from Uma's parent. This idea is not liked by her parents and do not wish to send Uma with Ramu. As Ramu had helped them in the past they do not want hurt him. Here, Parents use indirect speech act to oppose the idea without hurting Ramu.
Then Papa gathers himself together. It is up to him to prevent this situation from getting completely out of control. 'No need. Waste! Kwality's-bah!' (1)
'Dinner has been prepared at home,' Mama adds, also coming to life. (2)
(P. No. 49)

Uma's papa tries to convince Ramu that there are no good hotels in the city. His main motive is to refuse to complain, but it will prove him rude and Ramu may feel offended. So, Papa says that the quality of food is not good and it is waste

of money. Uma's mother as well support Uma's father. She says the food is already, if Uma and Ramu went out the food would get wasted. She suggests Ramu and Uma indirectly that it is better to eat at home. This will serve her motive as she also doesn't want Uma to go out with Ramu. This conversation helps us to understand that how characters use communication strategically to fulfill their motives without proving themselves rude.

In India, orthodox people believe that girls should not oppose their parents' decisions. They are not expected to criticize parents' decision. When Uma's cousin Anamika immolates herself for the harassment of her in-laws, Uma gets a shock. Anamika was a scholar girl and wanted to study further, but her parents got her married. Uma doesn't want to suffocate herself by oppressing her anger over the death of her cousin, Anamika.

Suddenly Uma stirs, puts her hand on Lila Aunty's arm, and asks: 'The letter-the letter from Oxford-where is it? Did you –did you burn it?' (1)

Here Uma reminds Anamika's parent that Anamika was a scholar girl and how she she had an urge to study further. Uma employing indirect speech act expresses her anger and frustration. Uma mentions a letter from oxford which invited Anamika for further studies. She asks her aunty if she had burnt the letter as Anamika got herself burnt. Uma indirectly holds Anamika's parents guilty for her death.

Aruna Uma's sister never treated her well. Aruna is always been jealous of Uma and looks down upon her. Aruna can not take the fact that Uma is going to Bombay, where Aruna had been married off. Aruna cannot directly object to Uma's Bombay visit. She uses Indiect Speech Act to object the visit at the same time saves her being exposed as a jealous sister. It can be seen that Aruna, Uma's sister who has good looks down upon Uma, uses indirect speech acts to keep Uma deprived of good medical treatment.   Aruna objects Uma's visit to Bombay on the grounds of unnecessary expenditure. Aruna says,

'A specialists-in Bombay!' Aruna gave a shriek. 'Do you know what that would cost?'

The above utterance of Aruna seems to be asking a direct question but it is loaded with implied messages. Aruna wishes to convey that consulting a specialist in Bombay takes a lot of money. According to Aruna Uma doesn't deserve such expenditure.

5. Conclusion

Communication helps to develop and maintain relationships; however is not carefully used the same communication may ruin the relationships. To avoid any adverse effect on interpersonal relationships speakers use communication strategically. Indirect speech act helps people to express themselves and save their faces from being proved rude. In literary works characters take help of indirect speech acts to save themselves from any unwanted situations or problems in communication. The study of literary work in the light of Speech Act theory helps readers to understand development of characters their motives and mind-sets.

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