

The Pragmatic Theory of Literature

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Abstract

The meaning of any text is best realized when linguistic competence and pragmatic theory of language are taken into consideration. Novels are best understood in terms of Speech Act Theory since they represent a macro-text act (to use Hatim and Mason's {1990} term). Novels are reflections of the real world with real speech. The real reader is part of the context ,thus, part of the interpretations of the utterance. This is due to the fact that a real reader receives the intention of the real author who wants to achieve a certain perlocutionary effect on a certain socio-cultural context. Consequently, tackling any literary text without pragmatic theory constitutes a real problem. As a result, the present research attempts to answer the following question: Can Speech Act Theory be successfully applied to literature, and can fictional and conversational Speech Act be analysed and established similarly?

1-1 An Introduction

Pratt (1977: 86) provides another way of which SAT (speech act theory) (since its main role is in everyday conversation) is important in the sense that, in addition to the utterances in their surface grammatical features, it discusses these utterances in terms of the context in which they are made, the intentions, attitudes, the relationships between participants and generally in terms of the conventions and the unspoken rules that play an important role when the utterances are made and received.

In addition to this view of speech act, Pratt (Ibid) introduces his view of literature. He states that literary works, similar to all of our communicative activities, are context – bound. Literature, then, is itself a speech context. Therefore, the way people produce and understand literary works depends “enormously on unspoken, culturally-shared knowledge of the rules, conventions and expectations that are in play when language is used in that context”. Hence, as definitions of thanking, explaining and or persuading must include the context unspoken information on which the participants are relying, so must a definition of literature.

For Ohmann (1971), literature corresponds to the traditional category of imaginative literature (novels, stories, poems, plays) which he calls “non-honoric sense”, which includes all such works regardless of quality. His definitions of this category of utterance rests on his observation that the appropriateness condition of Austin (1962) for IAs(illocutionary acts) do not seem to apply to statements made in works of literature because literary utterances do not have any illocutionary force. For example, a declarative sentence in a lyrical poem, for example, one cannot meaningfully ask whether the person making the assertion is qualified to do so, whether he believes what he said and made the statement under appropriate circumstances, and so on. These appropriateness conditions, Ohmann concludes, fail to apply to literary utterances since the latter do not have any illocutionary force. Hence, they are called quasi-speech acts.

Ohmann (1971) argues that the reader, specifically imagines a S (speaker) and a set of circumstances to accompany the quasi-speech act, and makes it felicitous or infelicitous. He,

moreover, comments on the fact that a literary work is a discourse whose IFs (illocutionary forces) are mimetic. By mimetic, Ohmann means imitative. Therefore, a literary work imitates a series of speech acts, which have no other existence in reality, By doing so, "a literary work leads the reader to imagine a speaker, a situation, a set of ancillary events, and so on" (For further details, see Pratt, 1977: 89-90)

Al-Dulaimi (2001: 71) believes that Ohmann's⁽¹⁾ analysis leads him to "the conclusion that the reader of literature is an observer rather than a participant". Ohmann (1971) adds that literary works are acts without consequences of the usual sort, discourses with the usual illocutionary rules suspended and "sayings liberated from the usual burden of social bond and responsibility".

Chapman (1973: 14) thinks that literature may be much more than it would be understood as a style, despite the fact that there is value in attempting to treat it as one. He, furthermore, elaborates on this by stating that "any profitable approach through linguistics must deal with literature as an examinable part of the available realizations of langue". If it is to find any readers at all, it cannot deviate too far from the expectations of the speech community. These deviations, in time, can be decided by methods applicable to more familiar and humbler paroles. Thus, langue and parole work together successfully.

This view, Chapman (1973: 14) continues his discussion, is favoured in some periods and cultures. Literary language in these periods and cultures, has gained such prestige that other styles have been judged good or bad according to their resemblances to it. Non-literary users, moreover, try to incorporate literary features into personal communication. The development of national languages has been affected by the prestige of a dialect used for literature and individual writers have left their mark on common speech. Thus, this kind of influence has had the unfortunate effect of isolating literature from regular methods of investigation.

1-2 Literature In Terms Of Pragmatics

Although linguistic methods of analysis are useful in interpreting literary texts, some problems emerge. This is the other extreme that Chapman (Ibid) refers to. He states that some linguists view literature as too deviant for their attention. Therefore, they dismiss it from their study.

The main problem of interpreting literature in terms of linguistic methods of analysis, Watts (1981: 9) thinks, is that linguistic methods "seldom aim at interpreting literary texts at all, but rather at discovering empirical evidence for the validity of the theories of language on which they are based".

Similarly, Culler's theory (1985) (cited in Al-Dulaimi, 2001: 72) runs the risk of depending on parole for the generation of its langue. He states that:

One need not struggle, as other theorists must, to find some objective property of language which distinguishes the literary from the non-literary, but may simply start from the fact that we can read texts as literature and then require what operations can involve.

Therefore, a need to interpret literature in terms of pragmatics is so needed. Sell (1995) defines literary pragmatics as the field which deals with the pragmatics of literary writing and reading in which context – realization is of great importance⁽²⁾. However, Al – Sulaimaan (1997: 33 – 34) believes that, by referring to a number of literary scholars with their contributions (for example, Rudrum (1987); Bonheim, 1990, Ventola, 1991; Sperber and

Wilson, 1993; Verdonk, 1993; Sell, 1995; and Sell and Verdonk, 1995), and interest in the written medium has increased and research in it has much attracted literary scholars.

Literary pragmaticians are concerned with both language and literature in their linguistic and socio – cultural contexts. Concepts and methods that belong to a variety of twentieth century discipline are made use of by literary pragmaticians (see Engler, 1990; Peterson, 1990; Stephens and Waterhouse, 1990; Carter and Nash, 1990; and Brónnimann – Egger, 1991).

In addition to that, Sell (1995: 30-36) argues that literary pragmaticians as not mainly concerned with linguistic interaction between the characters are portrayed in literary texts, but “between the real writers as speakers of literature and their real readers or listeners”.

The question, however, that may force itself now is how do literary pragmaticians look at both writer and reader (implied by the text) and to the context? Sell (1995: 31) states that the literary pragmaticists look at both writer and reader (implied by the text) “as being aspects of the real writer and reader, between whom there is an interaction in the real world”.

Context for literary pragmaticists is an inference performed by the readers, listeners in their processing of the text (the character’s dramatized inferences are included) or story (Sell, 1995: 36).

Context, however, has been viewed differently in the 20th C. Al – Sulaimaan (1997: 35) states that structural linguists distinguish between language and its socio-cultural context, in other words, the gap between them is made wider by the structural linguistics⁽³⁾, till interest in texts has shown up by some linguists (see Van Dijk, 1976; de Beaugrande, 1980; and de Beaugrande and Dressler, 1981).

Text is defined by Van Dijk (1994) as a cognitive model (content model) as “a representation of knowledge and experience in episodic memory in the form of, perhaps, a mental schema”.

It has been mentioned that literature is viewed as a superordinate langue and every literary work is viewed as a case of parole (see Culler, 1971 and 1975, who is one of the literary structuralists of the 1960s and 1970s). The rapid development of linguistic pragmatics in the 1970s and 1980s witnessed differences of emphasis.

Leech (1983) and Levinson (1983) for example focus on topics such as deixis, implicatures, presuppositions, speech acts, and conversations. On the other hand, Verschueren (1987) as one of the continental pragmaticists deals with wider issues as a result of viewing context in a more multi – dimensional approach including anthropological, linguistic, sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic and the like.

Despite these different strands, all pragmatic activities have a common feature that they make a connection between linguistics, both of the uses of language and the context of linguistic use (Al – Sulaimaan, 1997: 36).

SAT of literature; however, looks at context in a more sensitive way, Hussein (2001: 48) thinks that since Austin makes a distinction between using words to say something and using them to do things, there is a possible relation between a text and communicative context. Text cannot be understood as saying something instead, there is a fact that the S makes use of words in the text to do something. What is important for SAT of literature is “the speaker’s intention behind using his/ her words”. For example, the S’s promising, threatening, intending or predicting when he/ she utters the sentence:

1. I’ll leave you.

Therefore, SAT of literature brings text and context together.

Al – Sulaimaan (1997: 36) discusses the fact that SAT is also an important attempt to bring linguistics and literature clear together. This fact is also adopted by the researcher.

As its name suggests, SAT of literature is directed towards developing the SAT of Austin (1962), Strawson (1964), Searle (1969) and Grice (1975) so as to cover literary texts. Al – Sulaimaan (1997), moreover, suggests that the fullest account in Pratt (1977) and Petrey (1990) has a strong influence on the later literary pragmatics.

Implicatures have the same value in the area of pragmatics as speech act. As a matter of revising the reader's memory, the researcher is going to define them following Al – Sulaimaan's (1997: 37). They (implicatures) are "unstated propositions which a reader or listener conventionally deduces from what is actually said". This notion is best accounted for by Grice's (1975) article "Logic and Conversation"⁽⁴⁾.

It has been mentioned above that the best interpretation of literature is to be in terms of pragmatics. To elaborate more on this fact is to refer to van Dijk (1976: 23) who mentions that a number of literary phenomena, while cannot be treated in the framework of a theory based on current syntactic and semantic generative grammars, they require the relationship between a text structure on the one hand, and the structure of the context and FCs (felicity conditions) for SAT on the other hand. Recent researches in philosophy, logic and linguistics have studied such a relationship under the often differently interpreted labels of pragmatics.

Hussein (2001:48) refers to the fact that Van Dijk "seems to be preoccupied with the specific requirements that a general pragmatic theory must be fulfilled in order to be successfully applied [SIC] in the study of literature". Hussein's view of Van Dijk is a reflection of what the latter himself states: van Dijk (1976 : 36) claims that one must treat literature itself as a specific speech act with its own appropriateness conditions. A more refined version of that approach would be to distinguish between narrative or fictional speech acts, lyrical speech acts, dramatic speech acts. It is the intention of the S to change the system of the H (hearer) that is considered as the basic feature of a pragmatic theory of natural language.

The drawback of such a treatment, according to van Dijk (Ibid) continues his discussion saying that other speech acts, e. g.: assertions, questions, commands, etc., also occur in literature and it seems problematic to have more than one speech act at the same time. However, distinguishing between macro –speech acts and micro – speech acts, the first determines the whole discourse, the second merely characterizes the individual sentences of the discourse does not face this difficulty. Such a proposal, therefore, consists of the more general observation that, for example "a whole discourse functioning as a command may well contain assertions or questions".

Even in criticism, Hussein (2001: 43) states that the pragmatic theory comes to take an essential place. Abrams (1975) (cited in Hussein, 2001) believes that sometimes one can criticize the audience and thus such a criticism is a pragmatic theory. It is called so because it chiefly looks at the work of the act as a means to an end, an instrument for getting something done, and tends to judge its value due to its success in achieving that aim.

To make concluding remarks concerning the relationships between pragmatics in general and speech act in particular and literature, two different points of view are remarked here:

Ohmann who was the first to apply SAT to the situations in his (1971) article 'Speech Acts and the Definition of Literature' shows the first one. It has been mentioned before and it is proper to elaborate in some more detail that Ohmann (1971) believes that a poem or any other work of literature which violates those conventions will violate the FCs that Austin

(1962) has put. For example, if I want to promise that I have no intention of honouring, or if I bid four spades in a chess game,... etc., those and similar circumstances will deviate the illocutionary force of any utterance and render the speech act void and null. Thus, "there is no point in asking whether the author is the appropriate person to utter, or write, that the speech act is not pertinent".

Thus, one may ask: What illocutionary status, Ohmann (1971: 254) suggests a poem for example, does have? Ohmann's conclusion is that the illocutionary force of a poem is mimetic, in other words, "a literary work purportedly imitates a series of speech acts, which in fact have no other existence". Thus, the speech acts in a poem are thus quasi speech acts; the usual application of the FCs is only to allow mimics to take place. The author imitates "the speech acts of an imagined speaker, and the reader imitates or conjures up an imaginary situation that derived by the imagined speaker" (for further detail, see Levin, 1976: 146-147).

The **second** point is hold by Pratt (1977: 88) and other literary pragmaticists such as Kobernick (1985: 62). Both of them agree on the interrelationship between speech act and literature. The former believes that speech act approaches to literature, enable people to describe and define literature in the same terms of describing other kinds of discourse. SAT views a person's ability to deal with literary works as part of his/her general ability to handle possible linguistic structure in specific contexts.

Similarly Kobernick (1985: 62) comments on the relevance of the SAT which is applicable to the analysis of literary texts especially plays, as well as of everybody conversation. Moreover, he comments on the importance of SAT on any or all of the following levels: isolated passages, series of exchanges with topical shifts, character functions and dramatic structure.

These two different points of view represent two conflicting views concerning the status of literary discourse. Al-Sulaimaan (1997: 37-38) comments on these views as follows: These views are formalists and non-formalists: Pratt (1977) and Kobernick (1985) represent language and a work of literature as "an action performed in the real world with real speech acts". Moreover, they believe that both texts, i.e., literary and non-literary texts are "communicative interactions, in a particular context, between participants who, in the case of literature, are fictionalized personae" (similar view is adopted by Culler, 1971; Van Dijk, 1976 ; Pratt, 1977; and others).

To elaborate on this view, let's choose Van Dijk's view. It has been mentioned above that Van Dijk (1976) claims that literary phenomena require the interpretation of pragmatics other than syntactic and semantic general grammar. Moreover, Van Dijk (1976: 48) firmly claims that only via alternative worlds, the relationship between the literary discourse and the real world can best be achieved. For him (1976: 52), literary texts require the speech act with the same FCs as those holding in the real world. Hence, he says:

Actions in some imagined world are represented such that, by non-conventional implicature, in which the reader knows the writer's intention that he, the receiver, should act in the same way in reality. In those cases, the constructed worlds or situations are deontic models of the actual world: They picture, what should be done in the physical world.
(Van Dijk, 1976: 48)

Similar view to Van Dijk is Schmidt's (1976: 168). In his article 'Toward a Pragmatic Interpretation of Fictionality', he concludes that syntactic or semantic levels alone cannot define poeticity. Furthermore, he thinks that no particular class of utterances can describe literary texts as fictional.

Ohmann (1971) is one of those who represent the other view (formalists). Formalists think that in literature, the status of speech acts is problematic since they do not occur in the real context of situation. As a result, literature does deal with pretended speech acts, or imaginary speech acts but not with real ones. In addition to such belief, they state that literature has "its own special language that is systematically different from ordinary, casual, everyday, colloquial language". The same view is adopted by Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969; Levin, 1976; Lyons, 1981 and others.

For more elaboration, let's take Searle's (1979: 63) response to the attempts of the non-formalists. Al-Sulaimaan (1997: 38) states that both Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) "exclude all parasitic forms of communication such as telling jokes or acting in a play or writing a poem". Searle (1979: 63,65) responds, however, to the non-formalists with suspicion. This response is adopted according to the view that a novelist is "not performing the IA of making an assertion, but the IA of telling a story or writing a novel". Searle, instead of the new domain of literary illocution, invokes a notion of pretended act. He concludes that "the author of a fictional work pretends to perform a sequence of IAs, normally of the assertive type".

Al-Sulaimaan (1997: 39) comments on Searle's view as follows: Two statuses of acts are allowed by Searle: Real and pretended, he does not reject any of the standard components of the speech act model. Searle (1979: 74) believes that imagination plays a great role in human life:

The crucial role, usually underestimated, that imagination plays in human life, and the equally crucial role that shared products of the imagination play in human social life. And one aspect of the role that such products play derives from the fact that serious speech acts can be conveyed by fictional texts, even though the conveyed speech act is not represented in the text.

Al-Sulaimaan's comment on Searle's view is further supported by van Oort (1998: 442-43) Searle in his article of (1979) 'The logical Status of Fiction' states that the best way to study fiction is to refer to pragmatics, with particular reference to SAT. In pragmatic discourse, the author or S is held accountable for his/her assertions that match up to reality. The fictional discourse, on the other hand, argues that the author is not held accountable for the truth of his statements. Therefore, Searle chooses a model depending on speech act concept in which "language functions in the context of an overall illocutionary act".

Similarly, Van Oort (1998: 444-445) argues that the problem of fiction is solved due to its departure from pure literature or semantics to the realm of intentionality and psychology that are better studied within the realm of SAT. Thus, in addition to language users, linguistic meaning depends also on the fact that "there exists an independent world to which it can refer". Therefore, language is not "a mere mimetic doubling of the world", but on a separate world, "a world of the imagination that is not answerable to the fundamental ontology of natural science".

Not only Searle believes in the fact that there are two acts: real and pretended but also literary critics denote that the writer conveys a real or serious speech act through the performance of the imaginary speech act or representation of speech acts that constitute the work of fiction (see Searle, 1979: 74-75).

Levin (1976: 141-42), in his comment on Searle's claim, suggests that having an implicit higher sentence in its deep structure of the form: "I imagine myself and invite you to

conceive a world in which...”, determines the illocutionary force of any literary utterance. In this respect, Levin (1976: 154) points out:

A poem is a speech act in which the poet, by his use of deviant language, includes his auditors to perceive as literally true a world for whose properties and existence, this language is the only evidence.

Sell (1995: 129) states that Levin makes imagination, “the imagining of a world in which neither the writer nor the reader really exists, poetry’s definitive and exclusive property”.

Gray (1978: 192) points out that Levin neglects the fact that the poet is irresponsible by doing any act and; therefore, he obviously intends to make his theory to deal with or treat poetry as comparable in import knowledge (for further information concerning the formalists’ view, see Ohmann, 1971).

Watts (1981: 173) in his study of Dickens’ Hard Times presents the following diagram to show the relationship between the narrator and the reader. It is as follows:

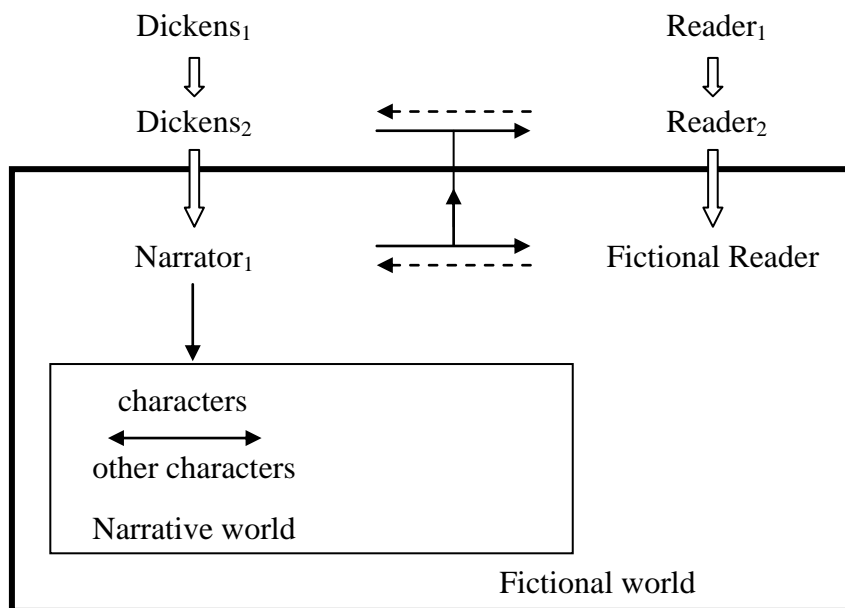


Fig.(1): The Communicative Act in Hard Times

The simplicity of this diagram should not deceive us of not looking into the complexities which can be produced along the axis between Dickens₂ and Narrator₁ and; therefore Reader₂ and Fictional Reader. Many critics of Hard Times appear to ignore the simple fact that their communication with Dickens can only take place within the fictional world. They are unable to recognize their role as fictional readers and thus do not “construct and/or accept a picture of their primacy communicative partner, the narrator”.

On this fact, Watts further elaborates by stating that if the reader recognizes the fictional role he/she is expecting to play, he/she can easily involve himself in a communicative interaction, by an extension with the author, with the narrative personality. However, if he/she does not recognize this role (as in the case of anonymous omnipresent narrator), he/she is in a state of (or about to forget) forgetting that the primary communicative interaction is within the framework of a fictional world. For this reason, many critics are unable to distinguish between Dickens and the narrator (through discussing the structure of the text) (Watts, 1981 and 1992).

As a conclusion, what Watts (Ibid) argues by his words “no adequate theory of narratology should ignore the differences between Author₁ Author₂ and Narrator₁” is that there is no such a theory which simply should claim that there should be an essential direct relationship between the context and the narrative world (the context is within the fictional world) and biographical facts that are known of the author as a historical person.

To close off Watts' discussion, a theory of language in use is best situated to describe and interpret the written fictional narrative text than either a theory of linguistic competence or a theory of stylistics and/ or poetics. Moreover, a fictional narrative text creates a further level of communication within the fictional world between an assumed (non-participation) narrative personality and his/her idealized audience, i.e., communicative partner (or the fictional reader). As a result, an adequate communication can not occur if the latter is not ready to accept and recognize his/her role as the narrator's partner within the fictional world . As far as the choice of this novel is concerned, Watts intends to show how Dickens' **Hard Times**, which is considered as a fictional narrative text with an anonymous omnipresent narrator, can be re-assured by applying the literary theory (Watts, 1981: 43).

conclusions

The following remarks can be concluded : **First:** The distinction between literary and non-literary language is not so sharp since both play a great role in communication. Whatever else it is, a speech act of some kind and hence deserves much attention by literary scholars as well as linguists and philosophers.

Second: A literary text has two realities: Therefore, it is called ‘a multi-layer construct of reality’. On the other hand, it has its ‘psycho-socio-physical reality’. This is done since the literary text (a novel) for example, is produced by a real author who wrote it with a certain intention to be transmitted to the real receiver (reader) to achieve a certain perlocutionary effect with that of socio-cultural context .

The other reality is the fictional (or semi-fictional world) and this reality constitutes the world of the text. This can be applied to novels since the characters of the novel (narrators, readers, fictional readers and/ or other characters) have interest within the fictional world in the same way as the natural dialogues⁽⁵⁾. Moreover, they should follow the same pattern of the social conventions adopted by the real S and/or reader at the time at which the text is produced. The characters, narrators and readers, should interact (verbally or non-verbally) within that world to achieve successful performance of SAT .

Third: The novel or fictional speech act is therefore defined as a ‘macro- text act’ (by adopting Hatim and Mason's {1990} term) which is performed in the real world with real speech acts. The real reader is part of the context and; therefore, part of the interpretation of the utterance.

The following model⁽⁶⁾ may make researcher's view more explicit:

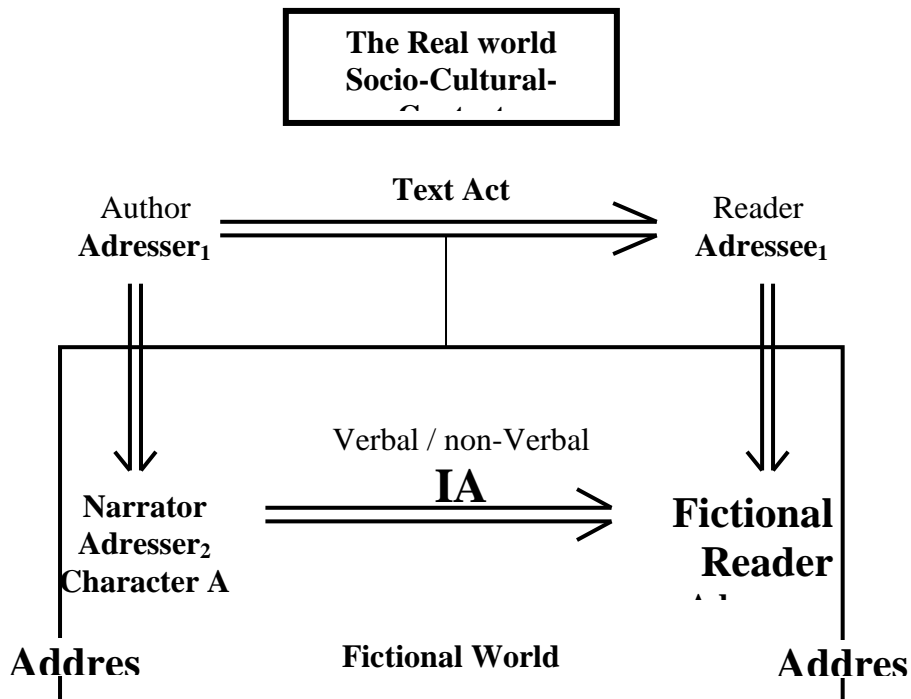


Fig. (2): Our Modified Model of the Communicative Acts in Novels

Notes

- (1) Ohmann has changed his position somewhat in his more recent, but equally important publication, 'Speech, Literature and the Space Between' in **New_Literary History** (1974) (cited in Pratt, 1977: 89).
- (2) Al-Sulaimaan (1997: 50) states that until the mid of the 1980s, most pragmatic analysis was done on spoken language and much less on written language as in the works of van Dijk (1976), Pagnini (1980), Sbisa and Fabbri (1980), Watts (1981), Adams (1985) and Sell (1985a-b).
- (3) Al-Sulaimaan (1997: 50) states that linguistic structuralism was attracted to langue rather than parole in the tradition of Saussure and behaviorists. Behaviorists, following Bloomfield, neglect meaning. Transformationalists focus, on the other hand, on sentences.
- (4) For its application to literature, see Pratt's book of (1977) and Petray's book of (1990). Therefore, a number of theses (MA and Ph.D.) have applied Grice's implicatures to certain literary genre such as Al-Dulaimi's (2001).
- (5) In this respect, the researcher clearly follows the non-formalists' view that has already been adopted by Culler (1971), Short (1981) and others as has already been mentioned before.
- (6) It is a modified model of Watts' (1981: 43) figure.

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خلاصة النظرية التداولية في الأدب

تدرك دلالة أي نص على النحو الأفضل حين تأخذا لكفاءة اللغوية و النظرية التداولية للغة بنظر الاعتبار. إن فهم النصوص الروائية يكون على أفضل ما يكون من زاوية نظرية الأفعال الكلامية بما أنها تمثل فعلا نصيا اكبر (باصطلاح Hatim and Mason (1990) . إن النصوص الروائية هي تمثيل للعالم الواقعي بواسطة كلام حقيقي. إن القارئ الحقيقي يمثل جزءا من السياق اللغوي, و عليه فهو يمثل جزءا من التفسيرات المتعلقة باللفظ. هذا يرجع إلى حقيقة أن القارئ الحقيقي يتلقى عرض الكاتب الذي يروم إحداث تأثير في سياق اجتماعي-ثقافي معين.

و تبعا لذلك, فإن التعامل مع أي نص أدبي بعيدا عن النظرية التداولية يشكل مشكلة حقيقية. و البحث الحالي يهدف إلى الإجابة عن السؤال التالي : هل يمكن تطبيق نظرية الأفعال الكلامية بنجاح على الأدب؟ , و هل يمكن تحليل و إقامة أفعال الكلامية الادبية و الحوارية على نحو مماثل؟