

Communication in Samuel Beckett's *Endgame*

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Abstract

This research deals with communication in *Endgame* written by Samuel Beckett (1906-1989). In this study conversational principles are applied to the dialogues of the play. The analysis indicated that principles and maxims of cooperation are essential but not necessary prerequisites for communication. Violations of one, especially, politeness principles do not lead to cessations of communication. The aim of the research is to show that the context and situation are the most significant variable in determining violation of conversational principles. The research explores the possibility of analyzing, comprehending and enhancing managerial communication skills through the study of drama when examining the dialogues in the selected play.

There is an application of Politeness Principle PP and Cooperative Principle CP and the maxims to *Endgame*. Also a study of instances of adherence to cooperation, politeness and violation of CP and PP was performed and recorded.

Introduction

Drama, as a branch of literature, aids in understanding and analyzing dialogue/discourse. Application of conversational principles and maxims to the written text in drama yields results which can be extrapolated for an understanding of real-life talk. One

may argue against the extension of discourse/dialogue analysis in plays to first, real-life talk and second, real-life talk in management. It is not just syntax and semantics that rules communication. We do not restrict ourselves to syntactic and semantic analysis of dialogue but extend our understanding of communication by closely observing the interplay of the two conversational principles, namely Cooperative and Politeness and their maxims.

Stankiewicz (1960) suggests, when dealing with poetic language, an approach to the study of poets and their analysis. This approach can be extended to drama- all forms of literature, literary dialogue real-life communication;

The student of poetry is in no position to describe and explain the nature of poetic language unless he takes into account the rules of the language which determine its organization. (Burton, 1980, p.5)

Burton (1980) suggests that theoretical framework for analysis and her method is used in this research:

Firstly, using discourse-analysis findings to explain effects in simulated talk, and secondly, using this simulated talk as a heuristic device to suggest modifications and innovations in the analysis of spoken discourse. (p.168)

The Cooperative Principle (CP) and Politeness Principle (PP) are applied to *Endgame* for an understanding of the nature of communication, the manner of approach, and the prerequisites for effective communication/conversation.

A lot of researches may think that choosing an absurd play for this kind of analysis is not the right choice. Absurd plays are generally viewed as distinct from conversational plays in several ways: in theme, in the vision of life project, the organization of

events, manipulation of characters, the use of language, etc. This does not affect the choice of an absurd play because dialogue in such plays corresponds to ordinary conversation in structure, goals, adherence to maxims which means that the special effect of the absurd plays lies elsewhere, in theme, in vision and the like. Another thing is that although absurd plays differ from ordinary as well as conventional plays, the fact that simulated talk in absurd plays yields an effect different from the same that conventional plays and naturally occurring talk yield; it is by no means obvious that the special effect can be located in these specific parameters.

It is important to mention that, while analyzing the dialogue and situation in the play, the perspective of the playwright must be kept separate from that of the characters. To have a full understanding of the dialogue and the intentions of the characters at the time of delivering their lines, the text is to be read devoid of the influence of the playwright.

For the purpose of the analysis in the research, PP and its maxims by Leech are studied. Both CP and PP are applied to the dialogues. The words conversation and communication are interchangeably used to mean dialogue between two participants.

Cooperative and Politeness Principles

Grice (1975) observes that a conversational exchange is a succession of interrelated remarks which are a result of the 'co-operative effort' of the participants who recognize a 'common purpose' or a 'mutually accepted direction'. He further states that:

Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged. (p.45)

He formulated four maxims “quantity, quality, manner and relation” which all conversationalists need to observe, for the interaction to be cooperative. If the flouting of the maxim is deliberate by the speaker in the course of an exchange that generates conversational implicatures, the hearer is then faced with a problem. How should he/she treat the violation? Is the speaker observing the CP and if so when he/she flouts a maxim? For the CP to be operative, it is essential that the hearer should be able to work out the conversational implicatures.

Leech (1983) has argued that there is a close link between CP and PP. Both are to a certain extent dependent on each other. The primary concern of Leech is general pragmatics, which he refers to as a study of “general conditions of the communicative use of language” (p.10). Leech emphasizes the role of rhetoric: interpersonal and textual. In speech situation, these two types of rhetoric are used to produce a certain effect through language in the mind of the hearer. He asserts that the importance of these two principles in any interactions and attempts to spell out the “trade-off” relationship between the two. CP functions to regulate our utterance into making contributions to some “assumed illocutionary and discover goal(s)”. PP however, has a higher role to play in the interaction than CP, it maintains the social equilibrium and friendly relations among interactants.

To put matters at their most basic: unless you are polite to your neighbor, the channel of communication between you will break down, and you will no longer be able to borrow his mower. (82)

The functions of CP and PP are as follows: to secure total support from the participants in realizing the goal of the exchange; and to ensure full co-operation from the speaker and the hearer even

in instances where there is a conflict as a result of adherence to personal goals. This means that, in all circumstances the CP and PP serve the function of maintaining and restoring to conversational equilibrium. Leech maintains that the CP and PP are two separately acting principles, although they are closely linked and dependent on each other.

Endgame

The articulated utterance vs. the actual communication in *Samuel Beckett's* masterpiece one act play was first Premiered, in French, in 1957, at *London's Royal Court Theatre*. There are four characters in the play: *Hamm* the master, *Clov* his servant, and Hamm's father and mother, *Nagg* and *Nell*. The setting is a bare, partially an underground room, serving as shelter for the four characters. *Hamm's* father and mother live in garbage cans. Hamm is in wheelchair and makes *Clov* move him around the room, fetch objects, and looks out the window for signs of life. Outside all seems dead and nothing happens. Inside, the characters pass time mortifying each other and toying with fear and illusion of a possible change, all sensing the inevitability of their end.

The idea of *Endgame* is taken from the game of chess where the concept designates the last, and entirely predictable, stage of a game. The play portrays a universe which is nearing its end but which could continue repeating itself; the end which all seems to be moving forwards is both certain and elusive. Setting and situation suggest an underground bomb shelter, possibly after the occurrence of a nuclear holocaust. Existentialist themes are expressed in awareness of absurdity and meaninglessness of the human condition and also attempt to construct meaning through language and imagination.

The entire play proceeds in the form of disjointed conversation pieces where there are frequent shifts in the topic. The principal characters, *Hamm* and *Clov*, exhibit low emotional attachment towards one another. This is contrasted sharply with the other two characters; *Nag* and *Nell* closed in bins who converse lovingly with one another in the hope that someday will be able to narrow or close the chasm between them.

The play begins with both *Hamm* and *Clov* ruminating on their emotive stance. Almost immediately the scene shifts to an argument between the two where *Clov* rebukes *Hamm*:

- *I can't be getting you up and putting you to bed every five minutes, I have things to do.*

Similar frequent shifts in the topic are evidenced throughout the play for the characters realize that they cannot hold to one topic of conversation for a long time. *Hamm* is the principal speaker with *Clov* either answering or rebuffing his queries. The only binding force in the communication is the reiteration of *Hamm's* query, while *Clov* is threatening to leave him:

- *Is it not time for my pain-killer?*

The speakers keep talking to each other about the approaching apocalypse. They try to take refuge in nonsense like attempting to look out of the window and admiring inanimate things like a three legged dog. The following paragraphs will show the CP and PP in the play.

The Analysis

In *Endgame*, the co-operation between the characters is not dependent exclusively on what they say to one another. It is not important to them whether the other interact was able to grasp what

has been said. Even if conversations in the play continued, it is not in the interest of the characters to make their ideas communicated or not. All the characters are performing a meaningless utterance just to spend time. As *Glov*, at one stage says:

- *All lifelong inanities.*

Interesting enough is, there is very little innovative conversation to take place and whatever little is said is manipulated by one character or one interact. *Hamm* who prevents *Clov* from opting out of the interact by restraining him with the promise of more verbal exchange. In fact when *Clov* questions *Hamm* as to what should hold him back, now that all ties and relationships have snapped, *Hamm* promptly replies:

- *The dialogue.*

At another stage *Hamm* tells *Clov*:

- *You haven't much conversation all of a sudden. Do you not feel well?*

Strangely there is little that *Clov* says to indicate his desire to continue the exchange. , yet, when *Hamm* makes this statement, *Clov* does not contradict him. Their relationship is forced as is evidenced through the repetition of statements like:

- *I'll leave you*
- *I can't leave you*
- *Let's stop playing!*

The relationship between the characters in the play is noticeably strange; nevertheless they find a way to cooperate with one another. The cooperation between *Hamm* and *Clov* can be described as a dull routine in which they have got fixed and from which they feel too old and tired to break loose and form new

habits. The result is often seen in the violation of CP, where habit forces *Clov* to give routine and monosyllabic replies:

- *Hamm: What time is it?*
Clov: The same as usual.
Hamm: (gesture towards window right). Have you looked?
Clov: Yes.

The example is a violation of the maxim of quantity in that it lacks a specific and informative answer. Yet, the response strangely and temporarily satisfies *Hamm*. Monosyllabic replies do not hamper communication which continues despite routine cooperation.

If we observe the following example, we can see clearly a violation of tact maxim:

- *Hamm: (with order). Let's go from here, the two of us! South! You can make a raft and the curtains will carry us away, far away to other...mammals!*
Clov: God forbid!

On the scale of cost and benefit, this statement of *Hamm's* can be read as costing *Clov* a lot more than *Hamm* when one takes into account *Clove's* relationship with *Hamm*. In this situation, it is worth mentioning that *Hamm* is offering *Clov* a holiday abroad. However, without giving any thought to the proposal, *Clov* refuses pointblank. The implicature generated as a result of the violation of the maxim of tact can be read as the speaker is being polite by observing the PP. The fact; the action (of making a raft and moving away from the dead and corpse world) is favorable to the speaker. The action, however, is unfavorable to the hearer. Therefore, the hearer impolitely implicates that though the action is favorable to the speaker, the hearer does not wish the action to occur.

Hamm is able to work out the implicature and is offended by the sudden burst of the animosity for he promptly retorts:

- *Alone, I'll embark alone! Get working on the raft immediately. Tomorrow I'll be gone forever.*

As we can see, *Hamm* would not let his plans suffer because of lack of cooperation on the part of *Clov*. The above example is one of the few found in the text where *Clov* is impolite to *Hamm* and the latter accepts the rude intonations without much ado. Throughout the play it is *Hamm* who is rude, abusive and offensive to *Clov*.

The characters, throughout the play, do not make an attempt to observe the social function. They enjoy being verbally offensive to each other, none of them opts out of the interaction. *Hamm* and *Clov* (the main characters) are very much dependent on each other that they cannot afford to bring their relationship or communication to an end. *Hamm* repeatedly tells *Clov*:

- *Gone from you'll be dead.*

Clov replies:

- *And vice versa.*

This indicates that everything comes to an end like: *Pap*, *Bicycle wheels*, *pain killers*, etc, still the characters are bound together by a **seeming dialogue** directed towards a higher goal than a mere survival.

In *Endgame*, the violation of PP far exceed of CP. This co-operation in spite of violations of politeness is indicative of communication to continue, the interactants need to be bound together by a mutually accepted goal, a common interest, or an urgent need. Some of the maxims of PP namely, *tact* and *approbation* are constantly flouted. Despite the upheaval of social

equilibrium resulting from failure to observe the PP, conversation does not cease or come to a close. *Clov* in more than one occasion is mercilessly hauled by *Hamm* and is subjected to rude and offensive behavior. But *Clov* too is unable to leave *Hamm* because of his need for *Hamm* which is higher than the need for saving face.

The observation of PP in the play is different from the same ordinary conversation. The situation in the play is conducive to violations of politeness in which interaction takes place, leads to violations of the PP which suggest total alienation and isolation of man. It can be argued that politeness as a social phenomenon imposes social binding to man. The conversation in the play is dissolution of polite interaction and all attempts to process it in those terms prove futile.

Co-operation among the interactants in the play is at a different level from that observed in ordinary conversation. Characters in the play co-operate with each other not because of a mutually accepted direction of interaction or purpose, but because of something inherent in the situation or the nature of the interaction in which communication has lost its significance. The characters in the play are destined to live together. It is this deviant situation which, while binding them, forces them to co-operate with each other.

Conclusion

This paper shows how communication can be better understood when studied through simulated dialogue. For the purpose of analysis, two principles governing communication have been selected. A similar process can be followed to analyze and learn more about techniques of effective communication. The play

provides raw data which can be collectively analyzed in depth and robust understanding of the principles that govern communication.

Simulated talk provides multiple situations and communication patterns which can be used as a case in point for a discussion and understanding. A study of theatre-talk is the closest to an understanding of the nuances and principles governing communication.

There are some interesting findings which emerge from this research that can be studied in the context of real life talk in any context. These findings are:

1. The purpose of the talk determines the adherence to violation of the principles.
2. Adherence to and violations of the CP and PP are contingent on the situation or the context.
3. Violations are almost always followed by a repair mechanism which keeps the communication going.
4. The dialogue reveals that the human relationships are extremely unusual, based on symbiotic co-existence and the balance of the different kinds of imperfection.

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الخلاصة

يتناول هذا البحث تقنية تعلم او فهم التواصل و بتطبيق المبادئ الحوارية وماكسيمات قواعد السلوك الحواري في المسرح . و يتم تطبيق هذه التقنيات و الاساليب الفنية على مقاطع الحوار في المسرحية اللامعقولة المسماة لعبة النهاية من تأليف صموئيل بيكت (١٩٠٦-١٩٨٩) . و يظهر التحليل أن مبادئ السلوك التعاوني في الحوار أساسية لكنها ليست ضرورية و بالأخص فيما يتعلق بمبدأ التأدب كشرط مسبق لتحقيق التواصل و التوصيل في الحوار . إذ يظهر أن خرق مبدأ كمبدأ التأدب لا يؤدي بالضرورة الى قطع الحوار و التوصيل بين المتحاورين . و يستكشف البحث إمكانية التحليل و الإستيعاب و التعزيز الإداري في المهارات التواصلية عبر دراسة للمسرح و فحص الحوارات في المسرحية المنتقاة . و يتبين أن في المسرحية حضورا تطبيقيا لمبدأ التأدب و مبدأ التعاون .

يشتمل هذا البحث على خلاصة ، و مقدمة ، و عرض مفاهيمي للمبدأين المعروفين بمبدأ التعاون (Cooperative Principle) و مبدأ التأدب (Politeness Principle) مع تحليل النماذج الحوارية و الخاتمة المشتملة على النتائج .

ثم قائمة المصادر و المراجع والخلاصة باللغة العربية و من الله التوفيق .