

## A Discourse- Stylistic Study of Power, Manipulation, and Self-Assertion in David Mamet's 'Oleanna' in Terms of Speech Act Theory

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### Abstract :

The current study applies the theory of speech acts to David Mamet's 'Oleanna'. The basic premise of speech act theory is that speakers use words not only to present information but also to perform actions such as commanding or requesting. This study argues that the speech acts used can also reflect the social status of the speaker and his/her dominance over the communication in a given discourse context. Drawing upon West and Zimmerman's (1985) concept of "participant identities", the current study explores the (mis)use of power, exploitation, and self-assertion in David Mamet's 'Oleanna'. This play is suitable to investigate since it is about a reverse in power between a professor and his student in an academic setting. Whereas the dominant is supposed to be John, the professor, the unfolding events will show a reverse in power as Carol, the student, gains newfound power. The study proposes that this reverse of power takes place the moment the professor involves in a personal conversation about his private life with his student. This study reaches at the conclusion that dramatic works serve as an ideal field for the investigation of speech acts within literary contexts. In addition, transformation of power is obvious in such a literary work together with the evident use of power, manipulation and self-assertion.

**Keywords:** (Speech Acts Theory; Power; Identity; Accusation(s); Threat).

## دراسة خطابية أسلوبية للقوة والتلاعب وتأکید الذات في رواية "أوليانا" لديفيد ماميت من حيث نظرية افعال الكلام

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### الملخص:

تطبق الدراسة الحالية نظرية أفعال الكلام على رواية "أوليانا" لديفيد ماميت. ان الفرضية الأساسية لنظرية افعال الكلام هي أن المتحدثين يستخدمون الكلمات ليس فقط لتقديم المعلومات ولكن أيضا لأداء إجراءات مثل الأمر أو الطلب. تبين هذه الدراسة بأن الأفعال الكلامية المستخدمة يمكن أن تعكس أيضا الوضع الاجتماعي للمتحدث وهيمنته على التواصل في سياق خطاب معين. بالاعتماد على مفهوم ويست وزيرمان (١٩٨٥) عن "هويات المشاركين"، تستكشف الدراسة الحالية (إساءة) استخدام السلطة والاستغلال وتأکید الذات في "أوليانا" لديفيد ماميت. هذه المسرحية مناسبة للتحقيق لأنها تدور حول عكس القوة بين أستاذ وتلميذه في بيئة أكاديمية. في حين أنه من المفترض أن يكون المهيمن هو جون، الأستاذ، فإن الأحداث التي تتكشف ستظهر انعكاسا في القوة حيث تكتسب كارول، الطالبة، قوة مكتشفة حديثا. تقترح الدراسة أن يحدث هذا الانعكاس للسلطة في اللحظة التي ينخرط فيها الأستاذ في محادثة شخصية حول حياته الخاصة مع تلميذه. توصلت هذه الدراسة إلى استنتاج مفاده أن الأعمال الدرامية تعمل كمجال مثالي للتحقيق في أفعال الكلام في السياقات الأدبية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، فإن تحول السلطة واضح في مثل هذا العمل الأدبي جنبا إلى جنب مع الاستخدام الواضح للسلطة والتلاعب والذات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: (نظرية أفعال الكلام، قوة، الهوية، الاتهامات، تهديد).

### 1. Speech Act Theory: An Overview

Speech act theory is first introduced by Jane Austin in his seminal work *How to Do Things with Words* (1962) and then further refined and developed by John Searle (1969). As a branch of pragmatics, speech act theory provides a powerful approach to study how words are used not only to present information but also to carry out actions. Basically, speech act theory

considers language as an integral part of a comprehensive understanding of how language functions within the broader context of linguistic behavior, known as pragmatics (Bussmann, 1996: 1107).

Searle (1979) indicates that the theory of speech acts is not a minor aspect of language theory consigned to pragmatics or performance. Rather, it should hold a central position within our understanding of grammar, encompassing both semantics and pragmatics (178). This theory holds that when people communicate, they not only convey information but also perform various actions through their utterances. Verbs used to indicate the intended speech act by the speaker are sometimes referred to as performative verbs (Crystal, 2008: 446).

Speech act theory has gained widespread acceptance in linguistics. It constitutes a theory that studies the role of spoken expressions in interpersonal communication, focusing on the behavior of both speaker and listener (Crystal, 2008: 446). In light of Austin's (1962) insights, communication consists of three distinct acts: locutionary acts, illocutionary acts, and perlocutionary acts. Illocutionary acts relate to the grammatical structure and conveyed meaning of an utterance, similar to the act of "saying" something. Illocutionary acts include the speaker's intentions behind the utterance, such as issuing directions or commands, or "doing" something with words. Perlocutionary acts relate to the effects of speech on the listener, whether it stimulates action, arouses emotions, or leaves no noticeable effect.

Speech act theorists focus primarily on understanding the speaker's intentions, especially the illocutionary force of an utterance (Meyer, 2009: 50).

According to Cruse (2006), speech acts include the use of language and can be classified into three basic types: locutionary acts, illocutionary acts, and perlocutionary acts. Locutionary acts involve producing utterances with a specific structure, meaning, and reference, which distinguishes them from mindless speech. Illocutionary acts include actions that speakers perform through their speech, driven by intention and context. For example, saying "I order you to leave now" is an order, regardless of the listener's compliance. Perlocutionary acts depend on the specific effects produced by speech. For instance, successful persuasion requires not only specific words but also the ability to motivate previously hesitant individuals to act accordingly (167-168). However, Searle classifies five main categories of speech acts. Each category represents the intention behind the utterance. These categories are as follows:

**Assertives:** this group commits the speakers to the truth of their statement (e.g., assert, claim, report, etc.).

**Directives:** this group aims at urging the hearers to act in a particular way (e.g., request, recommend, warn, etc.).

**Expressives:** this group expresses the speaker's feelings or attitude (e.g., thank, congratulate, forgive, etc.).

**Commissives:** this group commits the speaker to future actions (e.g., promise, offer, threaten, etc.).

**Declarations:** this group brings about a change in the world (e.g., appoint, sentence, name, etc.).

These distinctions help to understand the various dimensions of communication through speech acts (Cruse, 2006: 167- 169).

## 2. The Relevance of Speech Act Theory in Literary Texts

Although the founding text of speech act theory, J. L. Austin's *How to Do Things with Words*, repeatedly expels literature from the field of felicitous speech acts, some critics emphasize the usefulness of speech act theory in reading literary works. Speech act theory is a valuable framework for analyzing literary texts.

Speech act theory has greatly influenced literary criticism since the 1970s. When applied to the analysis of direct discourse within a literary work, it offers a systematic but sometimes complex framework for uncovering the implicit assumptions, implications of speech acts, and aspects that fascinate readers. Moreover, speech act theory was employed in a more revolutionary way, serving as a model for reshaping the broader theory of literature, especially in the context of prose narrative. In this approach, what an author conveys in a work of fiction, or what an author's invented narrator narrates, is considered a set of "pretended" statements. These statements are intentionally constructed by the author and are understood by competent readers as exempt from the usual commitment to truth associated with speakers in real-life communication. However, in the imaginary world created by the narrative, the utterances of fictional characters, whether they consist of assertions,



promises, or vows, are considered subject to traditional expectations of illocutionary commitments. At its core, speech act theory provides a valuable tool for dissecting the complexities of language use in literature (Abrams and Harpham, 2012: 374).

Jucker and Taavitsainen's *Speech Acts in the History of English* (2008) includes essays addressing how some Old English texts such as Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and Shakespeare's *King Lear* can be analyzed in terms of speech act theory. This volume investigates whether earlier English speakers used the same speech acts as modern speakers and whether their usage and was similar. The book also explores how these speakers manage the values of speech acts in situations of uncertainty. Moreover, Miller's *Speech Acts in Literature* (2001) is a very important book that shows the significance of speech act theory in the interpretation of literary texts. The book highlights the intersection of literature and speech act theory, showing the value of using speech act theory to analyze literary texts. In the introduction of this book, a close examination of Austin's work is introduced, and the subsequent chapters explore how Jacques Derrida and Paul de Man challenge Austin's speech act theory and its exclusion of literature in various ways. Derrida believes that literature cannot be excluded from speech acts. He introduces the concept of "iterability," claiming that any speech act may undertake literary qualities. De Man theorizes that speech act theory creates a plain separation between cognitive and assertive aspects of language, which Austin calls

“constative” and “performative” (for more information see Jucker and Taavitsainen, 2008; Miller, 2001 respectively).

According to Pratt (1977), speech act theory provides a framework for discussing utterances that goes beyond their superficial grammatical properties. It takes into consideration the surrounding context, the intentions, attitudes, expectations and the relationships between participants, and the implicit rules and norms that come into play when an utterance is spoken and received. This approach is very useful when analyzing literature, because literary works, like all forms of communication, depend on context. Literature itself can be viewed as a specific context for speech acts. As with any speech, how people create and interpret literary works depends largely on their shared cultural knowledge of the rules, norms, and expectations inherent in that linguistic context (86). Ultimately, the speech act approach to literature offers a significant advantage by forcing us to describe and define literature using the same terms applied to all other forms of discourse. This approach eliminates potentially distorted and misleading notions of “poetic” and “ordinary” language. Speech act theory holds that an individual's ability to engage with literary works is embedded in his or her broader ability to navigate potential linguistic structures within specific contexts (88).

Examining literary texts through the lens of speech act theory offers insights into character development, thematic contents, and narrative structure. For instance, assertive speech acts can function as a vehicle for characterization. Assertions made by the characters reflect their views and

ideologies, helping readers to delineate specific traits of these characters. Moreover, assertive speech acts are very important in conveying themes such as distinguishing a character's identity. Directives, on the other hand, are very helpful in denoting the exercise of power and the rules that govern personal relations between the characters. The categories of the speech act theory that help to explore power, manipulation, and self-assertion in David Mamet's '*Oleanna*' will be the focus of the subsequent section.

### 3. David Mamet's '*Oleanna*'

'*Oleanna*' is a controversial and highly charged play written by the American playwright David Mamet in 1992. Sauer (2008) indicates that the play "revealed national fears about empowerment of women, political correctness and gender (in)equality in the same way" (6). The play is set within the confines of a college campus, specifically in professor's John's office. It falls into three acts where both professor John and a female student called Carol engage in a tense and evolving interpersonal drama. Bigsby (2004) describes "'*Oleanna*'" as a play that deals with "the clash between a university professor, distracted by personal concerns, a man described by Pinter as "a pretty pompous guy who loves his own authority and his own position," and a woman student initially baffled by her studies and subsequently vindictively determined to destroy her teacher, interpreting a gesture of concern as a sexual assault" (3).

Act I unfolds with Carol seeking John's help to understand the course material, and with the progress of their conversations, the power dynamic



between the two begins to shift drastically. The manipulation of language and John's complete dominance of power become central aspects in this act, leading ultimately to a series of escalating consequences.

In Act II, Carol accuses John of sexual harassment charging John with some accusations which she submits to the Tenure Committee. Foster (1995) states that "the power inherent in the professor's role as controller and purveyor of knowledge (represented in part by his authority over the meaning of words) is ultimately expressed as sexual power over the student" (37). The play goes in this direction, but then reverses the power, so that the student is in control after the first act. Act II shows a gradual transformation in Carol's character and her mastery over the discourse. John tries to have control over the conversation, as he does in Act I, but he fails. The act ends with Carol crying for help just because John hold her to continue his speech with her.

In Act III, Carol comes to strike a deal with her professor that she will withdraw her complaint if John accepts to ban some books from the university including his own book. John rejects this offer asserting that this is against academic freedom. Once again, John tries to reclaim his power as a professor but he fails too, ending the act with John beating Carol after she tells him that he is also accused of attempted rape.

The play addresses several themes, the most prominent of which are power, manipulation, and self-assertion within a complex academic setting. These themes are deeply intertwined with the various speech acts used by the

characters that mirror their struggle to claim power, character development, and self-assertion.

#### **4. Power, Manipulation, and Self-Assertion in David Mamet's '*Oleanna*'**

Power can simply be defined as the ability of some persons or institutions to direct or affect the behaviors of others in a significant way. Power can be used positively or negatively. In the more positive sense, it can be used to empower, for instance, marginalized individuals or groups. Conversely, power can be a way of restraining and disempowering certain persons or a group of persons.

Within the context of Mamet's play '*Oleanna*', power is used to emphasize authority, manipulate, and assert self-identity. The use of power will be best approached from John Searle's categories of speech act theory and West and Zimmerman's concept of "participant identities". West and Zimmerman (1985) introduce the concept of participant identities where they distinguished three types of participant identities: master identities, situated identities, and discourse identities (116). These types adhere to the analysis of the distribution of power between the participants, John and Carol.

Master identities encompass sex, age, and social class. In this respect, John has power over Carol. He is male, middle-aged, and a professor, while Carol is female, young, and a lower class. Situated identities refer to social settings, a teacher-student relation in this context. Also John has the upper hand. Discourse identities denote the shift between participants. These identities are created and determined by the type of speech act the character

uses. In this case, John, the professor, will not necessarily be the permanent dominant figure as the previous two types.

Act One of Mamet's play 'Oleanna' exhibits an abuse of power of John, the male professor, over Carol, the female student. However, the whole conversation in this Act shows a complete dominance of power of John over Carol, using imperatives as he is commanding, instructing, directing, asserting, and frequently interrupting.

The early interactions between John and Carol shows an initial power imbalance. The frequently asked questions by Carol and her requests for meeting her demands demonstrate her lack of understanding and John's ability to drive the conversation for his own benefit. As demonstrated by Searle (1969), some of the propositional functions associated with asking a question would include that the speaker does not know the answer, that the speaker believes that it is possible the hearer knows the answer, and that the speaker wants to know the answer. In the case of request, the speaker believes that the hearer is able to do action, and that the speaker wants the hearer to do action (66). All these propositions are met in Carol's questions and demands.

Carol's questions and requests, in Act I, indicate her lack of confidence and the need for help. Her first turn in the play begins with "what is a "term of art"? (2), which simultaneously implies a question and a request for clarification. Carol's problem lies in her fear to fail which is why she pleads for help "...I have to pass it..." (9), "I *have* to pass this course" (9), No, no, no, no, I have to pass it. (9), *Teach* me. *Teach* me. (12). Moreover, Carol's

ideas about coming to school is different from John's. She believes that the role of teacher is only to teach students things they do not know, to help them understand, to do whatsoever the student is told by the teacher:

CAROL: No. No. There are *people* out there. People who came *here*. To know something they didn't *know*. Who *came* here. To be *helped*. To be *helped*. So someone would *help* them. To *do* something. To *know* something. To get, what do they say? "To get on in the world." How can I do that if I don't, if I fail? But I don't *understand*. I don't *understand*. I don't understand what anything means ... and I walk around. From morning 'til night: with this one thought in my head. I'm *stupid* (Mamet, 1993:12).

Contrary to Carol's views about teaching and educating, John asserts to Carol that his job is to "awake" (26) her interest, to "provoke" and "force" (32) her, to "question" (33) things and then she, as a student, is left to decide.

John employs difficult words to understand by Carol to convey his pedagogical beliefs and expectations to Carol. To impose his authority, John uses assertive speech acts when talking about his career as a professor relying on his expert knowledge and pedagogic expertise. The more he uses terms like the committee will find "index" instead of *pointer* (24) in his badness, "hazing" meaning "*ritualized annoyance*" (28), when showing his opinion about education, and "predilection" (31) instead of *liking*, the more Carol keeps asking what do these words mean?

While Carol's speech is characterized by questions for understanding the course material, requests for passing the course, and assertions that she cannot understand and thereby she may fail, John's speech, on the other hand, is characterized by imperatives. Imperative sentences are used to issue a command or order, make a request or offer advice.

The speech act of an imperative takes the form of a directive which means that it functions as an order or command to direct the addressee to take a specific action. Weatherall (2002) contends that "Men, more often than women, are in a position to issue imperatives. Thus directives are an indirect and non-exclusive index of gender. The use of imperatives forms part of the pool of linguistic resources for constructing oneself as masculine and/or powerful" (87).

John frequently uses directive speech acts to instruct Carol, telling her what to do and how to approach her studies. The use of directive speech act in the context of this play does not only highlight the power of John as a professor, but also denote his power as a male over a female:

JOHN: ...Aha... (*Pause*) Sit down. Sit down. Please. (*Pause*)

Please sit down.

CAROL: Why?

JOHN: I want to talk to you.

CAROL: Why?

JOHN: Just sit down. (*Pause*) Please. Sit down. Will you, please...? (*Pause. She does so.*) Thank you.



CAROL: What?

JOHN: I want to tell you something.

CAROL: (*Pause*) What? (Mamet, 1993: 13)

In the above turns, though John politely asks Carol to “sit down”, it seems that this is interpreted by Carol not as a request but a command as she enquires twice “why”, and “what” does he want to say. This gives the impression that Carol is obliged to sit down due to the power John has over her. Another instance that reflects John’s exercise of power is when he directs and advises Carol of how to think, feel, and act. These directives reflect his position of authority as a teacher: “JOHN: You have to look at what you are, and what you feel, and how you act. And, finally, you have to look at how you act. And say: If that’s what I *did*, that must be how I think of myself. (23)

A notable verb that has been excessively used by John is “look”. In terms of power, the use of this verb in a conversation can have various implications. The use of the verb “Look” which is used several times by John as he is advising, requesting, and commanding Carol, presupposes that John is in a position of authority over Carol as “the authority relationship infects the essential condition because the utterance counts as an attempt to get *H* to do *A* in virtue of the authority of *S* over *H*” (Searle, 1969:66). The following turns show how the verb “look” is used by John:

JOHN: ...Look: (8)

JOHN: ...but look: look... (8)

JOHN: Now, look: I’m a human being, I...

JOHN: ...look:

CAROL: ...everything I'm told...

JOHN: Look. Look. I'm not your *father*. [Pause] (9)

JOHN: Look. It's just a *course*, it's just a *book*, it's just a... (12)

John: ...Look. The tests, you see... (24)

JOHN: Yes. They're *garbage*. They're a *joke*. Look at me. Look at me. The Tenure Committee... (24)

In the above turns, one implication of the use of the verb "look" implies that John has something important or significant to show or discuss, and he expects Carol to pay attention, such as in "Now, Look: I'm a human being, I..." John also says "Look. Look. I'm not your father. [Pause] (9)" to interrupt Carol and to direct the conversation. This usage implies John's level of control and his attempt to steer the dialogue in a certain direction. In turn (24), John uses "Look at me. Look at me" as an attempt to persuade or influence Carol, directing her attention towards his perspective and opinion about the Tenure Committee, describing it as garbage and a joke.

Interruption in conversation is also said to be related to power and dominance not only in institutional contexts but also in heterosexual relationships. Zimmerman and West (1975) investigate how men exercise power over women in various contexts. They found that men use an overwhelming majority of interruptions, suggesting that men use interruption as a way to wield their power over women in conversation and to prevent women from talking. The following conversation between John and Carol

clearly shows how Carol is annoyed due to the frequent interruptions made by John:

CAROL: ...but how can you...

JOHN: ...let us examine. Good.

CAROL: How...

JOHN: Good. Good. When...

CAROL: I'M SPEAKING... (*Pause*)

JOHN: I'm sorry.

CAROL: How can you...

JOHN: ...I beg your pardon.

CAROL: That's all right.

JOHN: I beg your pardon.

CAROL: That's all right.

JOHN: I'm sorry I interrupted you.

CAROL: That's all right. (Mamet, 1993:31)

In line with Zimmerman and West (1975) findings referred to above, the dialogue between John and Carol suggests that interruptions can be seen as a manifestation of gendered power in conversation, with John using interruptions to assert his dominance and prevent Carol to fully participate in the interaction. By interrupting her, John disrupts Carol's flow of communication to which Carol vehemently exclaims "I'M SPEAKING", indicating her wish to convey her thoughts without being interrupted.

Power and authority give rise to manipulation. Both John and Carol use implicit and linguistic modes of authority to their advantage in their interactions. In Act I, implicit manipulation is expressed through John's use of his social status making himself more authoritative. He further uses his highly institutionalized language to assert authority. Being in such a position of authority, John's final manipulation is obvious when he moves far away from the academic principles of his institution as a professor. When Carol asks him "Why would you want to be personal with me?" (19), and "Why did you stay here with me?" (20), John declares that "Because I like you" (21). Moreover, John offers Carol a deal promising her that if she comes back to his office and meet with him, he will change her grade to "A". All these verbal acts of manipulation are evidenced when John finally goes over to Carol putting his arm around her shoulder.

The following conversation will mark the beginning of John's big trouble that will pervade all along the rest of the play. As Murphy notices (2004), "John's assertion of control over the teacher-student relationship, and, through it, over academia, is what leads to his downfall" (129). Getting himself involved in a rather personal conversation with his student Carol, giving relief to his suppressed feelings towards her, will trigger the reverse of power in the subsequent Acts. When Carol asks John but we cannot start the class over, John once again asserts his power:

JOHN: I say we can. (*Pause*) I say we can.

CAROL: But I don't believe it.

JOHN: Yes, I know that. But it's true. What is The Class but you and me? (*Pause*)

CAROL: There are rules.

JOHN: Well. We'll break them.

CAROL: How can we?

JOHN: We won't tell anybody.

CAROL: Is that all right?

JOHN: I say that it's fine.

CAROL: Why would you do this for me?

JOHN: I like you. Is that so difficult for you to...

CAROL: Um...

JOHN: There's no one here but you and me. (*Pause*) (Mamet, 1993: 26-27)

When referring to manipulation, one cannot ignore the aforementioned turns. In the first place, John's double assertions "I say we can" and then "we can break" the rules, despite Carol's preservations that "I don't believe it", "There are rules", "How can we", showcase his manipulative desire to impose his authority forcing Carol to see things from his own perspective. John's references that "what is The Class but you and me?", "We won't tell anybody", "I say that's fine" and finally confessing to Carol that he is doing this because he likes her, all indicate his hidden desires into dragging Carol to his manipulative agenda.



Where Act I shows John's complete dominance of power over Carol, both Acts II and III mark a significant shift in power. Perhaps this transformation seems to have initiated the moment John started to talk about personal issues about his personal life and career as a professor. His confession that he likes Carol and his promise to give her a grade 'A' if she comes frequently to his office, coupled with his physical touch of Carol's shoulder, are all causes for Carol to gain power. Given her need to pass the course and her inability to beat John in his academic conversation, Carol accuses him of manipulation and sexual harassment. Carol pedantically documented all these things in a paper submitted to the committee, but promising John that if he bans some books including his own from the university, she will drop the case.

Carol now shifts from the submissive and defensive position to a more self-assertive and attacking position. The language Carol uses now is entirely different from what she used in Act I. Her language is focused on accusations and at some points giving advice and instructions to her teacher. She no more asks questions to seek clarification of her professor's ambiguous terminologies, no more requests help; rather she only accuses and reprimands.

Act II begins with an extended turn (a three-page speech) which clearly shows John's diminishing confidence. His anxieties about not obtaining tenure, being unable to buy the house, and the looming threat of losing his job are all clear. However, in his speech, John once again uses difficult terms, like

what he successfully did in Act I, but now failing to assert his power over Carol:

John: Now, I was not unconscious that it was given me to err upon the other side. And, so, I asked and *ask* myself if I engaged in heterodoxy, I will not say “gratuitously” for I do not care to posit orthodoxy as a given good – but, “to the detriment of, of my students.” (Mamet, 1993: 43)

Words such as “heterodoxy,” “orthodoxy,” “detriment”, though difficult to be understood by Carol, do not seem to appeal to her. In response to all that John has said, Carol coldly enquires: what do you want of me? (45). This direct question clearly shows the transformation of Carol’s character and her self-assertion. She acquires a new power and from now it is her turn to question, accuse, and threat her professor John. As Murphy (2004) puts it, the events in Acts II and III will take a new path, with both John and Carol becoming “more entrenched in a potentially empowering position.” John’s endeavors to manipulate the academic discourse which is considered as his “accustomed source of power” to force Carol withdraw her complaint against him, fail because Carol now “becomes empowered by the language of her new linguistic community” (129).

Considerations, according to West and Zimmerman (1985), such as *master identities* (sex, age, and social class) and *situated identities* (shaped by social settings), which formerly granted John a comprehensive power, are now of no use in the confrontation between John, the professor, and Carol, the

student. What now takes precedence are the *discourse identities* (the type of speech act each character uses). This transformation in power dynamics places both John and Carol on equal side, with the nature of their current communication becoming the overriding factor of their interaction.

Armed with her new power, Carol uses two noticeable commissive acts in her speech. One entails direct accusations, while the other involves implicit threats. However, both of them are face-threatening acts to John. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), face-threatening acts (FTAs) are acts that threaten a person's (speaker or hearer) positive or negative face. Expressions of complaints, reprimands, accusations, threats, etc. show that the speaker has a negative evaluation of some aspect of the hearer's face. These acts threaten the positive-face want, by possibly indicating that the speaker does not care about the hearer's feelings, wants, etc. (66). However, it should be noted that some acts like threats and complaints threaten both negative and positive face (67).

Trosborg (1995) indicates that a complaint is an instance of the conflictive function, encompassing acts of threatening, accusing, and reprimands (312). The complaint which Carol introduces to the Tenure Committee is full of accusations which simultaneously pose a threat to John's academic career and future life. This official complaint reduces John's previous power giving rise to Carol's aggrandizing power. In this second meeting John says that he is deeply hurt and is shocked when he received the report, and after a pause and hesitation he utters "And, and, I suppose, how I

can make amends. Can we not settle this now? It's pointless, really, and I want to know" (46). Upon this, once again, Carol turns the table and accuses John that he tries to bribe her, to convince her, to force her to retract (46). When John denies that this is not what he means, she replies that "I have my notes" (47).

With the accusations Carol writes down in her report, it has become clear that there is a significant transformation in Carol's identity as she begins to gain more power. In the report, Carol accuses John's actions as being "sexist", "elitist", and "pornographic" (48). Included in the report are also that "“He said he ‘liked’ me. That he ‘liked being with me.’ He’d let me write my examination paper over, if I could come back oftener to see him in his office”, “He told me he had problems with his wife; and that he wanted to take off the artificial stricture of Teacher and Student. He put his arm around me...” (48), “He told me that if I would stay alone with him in his office, he would change my grade to an A” (49). Moreover, with Carol's newfound power, these written accusations are supported by verbal and face to face accusations: “What gives you the *right*. Yes. To speak to a *woman* in your private... You feel yourself empowered ... you say so yourself. To *strut*. To *posture*. To “perform.” To “Call me in here...””, “You love the Power. To *deviate*. To *invent*, to transgress ... to *transgress* whatever norms have been established for us” “But I tell you. I tell you. That you are vile. And that you are exploitative” (52).

In line with the criteria of the speech act of accusation identified above, Carol has a negative evaluation of John's face. She does not care about his feelings and wants anymore when saying, for instance, "What I "feel" is irrelevant", "You see. I don't think that I need your help. I don't think I need anything you have" (49), "I don't *care* what you feel. Do you see? DO YOU SEE? You can't *do* that anymore. You. Do. Not. Have. The. Power", "I don't *care* what you think" (50).

John, on the other hand, realizes that these accusations not only damage his face but also threaten his life. The language he uses in this Act, which is entirely different from that he has been using in Act I, indicates that he fails to seize control over the situation: "But you talk of *rights*. Don't you see? *I* have rights too. Do you see? I have a *house* ... part of the *real* world; and The Tenure Committee, Good Men and True...", "...Please: *Also* part of that world: you understand? This is my *life*. I'm not a *bogeyman*. I don't "stand" for something, I..." (51), "Come on... Sufficient to deprive a family of..." (52). John's hesitations and incomplete sentences as he talks about his rights, house, life, and family, are all indicators of the shift in power between him as a professor and Carol as his student.

Resorting to physical power is frequently used in Mamet's plays. As indicated by Braun (2004), 'Oleanna', one of Mamet's major plays, examines how language could be used as a weapon that is far more dangerous than "guns and knives." Similar to many of Mamet's earlier works, 'Oleanna' uses minimalist dialogues to show how ordinary language can serve as "a potential



door for chaos.” When words prove ineffective, verbal attacks often turn physical. In moments when language starts to obscure rather than clarify, the characters resort to violence in an attempt to recapture control and power (103). When John’s verbal power fails to control the situation, he uses the physical power to restrain Carol from leaving which she interprets as a physical attack and thus cries for help: “LET ME GO. LET ME GO.WOULD SOMEBODY *HELP* ME? WOULD SOMEBODY *HELP* ME PLEASE . . .?” (57). Similar behavior takes place at the end of Act III when John’s beats Carol and “*picks up a chair, raises it above his head, and advances on her*” (79).

With Carol’s growing power based on the charges she has against John, Carol takes an attacking position with John trying to defend himself: “All right. I cannot... (*Pause*) I cannot help but feel you are owed an apology. (*Pause*) (*Of papers in his hands*) I have read. (*Pause*) And reread these accusations” (61). Mamet has craftily shown the distribution and the disparity in the use of power between the professor and his student. This complete change in power coupled with Carol’s assertion of self-identity is clearly shown in the final act of the play. Act III reveals much of the transformation of power, with John, using Braun’s (2004) words, “the knowledge-giving professor” has become the “knowledge-receiving student” (106). In response to John’s question why do you come here, Carol finally asserts that “I came here to instruct you” (67). When John admits that now he hates her, Carol tells him that you do not hate me because you think me wrong, you hate me

“Because I have, you think, *power* over you. Listen to me. Listen to me, Professor. (*Pause*) It is the power that you hate” (69). The power that Carol has now, not only enables her to instruct her professor, but she goes far more that to call her professor “YOU FOOL... You little yapping fool” (71).

Having completely established her own power, speaking on behalf of a group of other students, Carol offers a compromise. She tells John that they can manage to strike a deal, promising to withdraw her complaint if John accepts to sign some banned books including his own: “We want it removed from inclusion as a representative example of the university” (76). At this point John becomes assertive and decisive in taking his last decision by claiming his master identity as a professor belonging to this university:

I want to tell you something. I’m a teacher. I am a teacher. Eh?  
It’s my *name* on the door, and *I* teach the class, and that’s what I do. I’ve got a book with my name on it. And my son will *see* that *book* someday. And I have a respon ... No, I’m sorry I have a *responsibility* ... to *myself*, to my *son*, to my *profession*...  
(Mamet, 1993:76)

In this final confrontation, John appeals not to the power of his academic profession, but to the power of his social position as a professor. Further he describes Carol as being *dangerous* and that it is his job to say no to her demand, telling her finally “Go to *hell*, and they can do whatever they want to me” (76). John, finally finds out that all the possible ways to win the verbal discourse are closed and thus he once again resorts to violence to reclaim his

power, beating Carol and calling her “You vicious little bitch. You think you can come in here with your political correctness and destroy my life?... You little cunt” (79).

## 5. Conclusion

Speech acts theory provides a systematic framework for studying literary works, particularly dramatic works. This is because the nature of dramatic works depends entirely on the turns attributed to each character, with minimal intrusion from the narrator. Since the theory of speech acts is fundamentally built on the interpersonal interaction of spoken words between a speaker and a listener, dramatic works serve as an ideal field for the investigation of speech acts within literary contexts.

Various types of speech acts can denote manipulation, power and control. Through a careful reading of the play, this research has revealed a shift in power between John, the professor and Carol, the student. In Act I, John exercises his power as a professor over Carol by using declarations, directive, and assertive speech acts. In contrast, Carol, as she seeks clarification and help, frequently uses requests, reflecting a lack of confidence. John’s manipulation of his social position is evident in his use of the types of speech acts that denote power and control.

Transformation of power is evident in such a literary work. While Act I shows a complete dominance of John over Carol, due to their master identities and situated identities, Acts II and III exhibit a reverse in power, with Carol acquiring power by submitting a complaint against her professor, accusing

him of sexual harassment. This accusation marks the transformation of power. Carol becomes more self-assertive and using blatant accusatory language. In contrast, John's effort to reclaim power and control meets no success, finding himself on the defensive position to defend his reputation and job.

The shift in power dynamics between characters is clear in the change of their discourse identities. As the play progresses, both characters, John and Carol, engage in accusations and confrontations. The speech act of accusation used by Carol poses a threat to John's face and John's responses to these accusations highlight his waning control over the situation.

The analysis has also shown that John's resort to physical violence, when he finally beats Carol, indicates his failure to reclaim power through speech acts. This further indicates Carol's triumph over the discourse identities.

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