

The Semantics of Garbs in Dramatic Discourse

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Abstract

A critical study of discourse represented in conversational form will reveal many lexical elements which play the role of implicatures and do not convey the exact meaning which the speaker wants to mean directly. It depends on the hearer's/ addressee's capacity to extract the exact semantic value of such elements which the speakers want them to be interpreted. Interpretative failures lead to communication gaps and irrelevant or wrong derivation of meaning. This study will look into the conversational dramatic discourse of William Shakespeare's tragic play *Macbeth*. The aim is to understand and look at how the speakers with their references to clothes and images of clothing in their conversation throughout the play convey messages that are important to the course of the dialogue exchanges that take place. The garbs in the play, apart from their own inherent semantic value of being pieces of clothes meant to cover one's body, have added connotations in tune with the contextual circumstances and speaker's wish to transfer implicated ideas and thoughts to the hearer/ addressee.

Keywords. Dramatic Discourse, Garbs, Elizabethan, *Macbeth*, Conversational Implicature, Semantics, Conversation, Images.

Introduction

The dramatic representation of the Elizabethan society and narration of a social event on stage and in tune with the popular tradition, customs and beliefs of the period is incomplete without the actual use of props and equipment. The tools not only bring a scene closer to real life representation but also add richer and symbolic meaning to the conversations of the participants. A broader semantic dimension is given to the spoken discourse with the aid of such tools without much elaboration of verbal expressions in every context. The tools, therefore, have a language of their own which when deciphered complete the understanding and interpretation of conversation. This study aims to examine the function of such devices so as to facilitate a closer understanding of what is essentially not said but conveyed. In this regard, H.P. Grice's notion of *implicature*

comes into the picture. The part of conversation which is suggestive and not communicated literally must be deciphered by the hearers/addressee for successful communication. The complete meaning which the interlocutor wants to convey is facilitated by the tools and imageries used by the addresser during a conversational discourse in their utterances.

Conversational Implicature

Conversational Implicature addresses two questions that are integral to issues in semantic interpretation of the discourse of communication. First, the way a speaker tries to convey something specific without using strings of lexeme(s) that would have actually represented. Second, how the addressee/hearer deciphers the exact meaning the speaker tries to highlight.

Paul Grice explains in this regard that the speaker/addresser and hearer/addressee are always cooperative with regard to communicative exchanges. The cooperative characteristic is governed by Cooperative Principles based on certain maxims. These maxims of quality, quantity, relevance and manner make any conversation successful and portray the rationality of the interlocutors. The implicatures growing out of conversations are purely pragmatic inferences that are context dependent and in accordance with the communication agreements between the participants. These inferred meanings are majorly predictable and resultant of the understanding of beyond what is 'just said'. According to Grice, any communicative event is ruled by a principle that makes it effective to the maximum capacity and in equation with logic and reason. The principle, as Paul Grice defines, is

'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.'

Connecting Dialogues - Norms of Conversation

A conversational exchange is always guided by certain norms of conversational behavior, which otherwise would lead to disconnected and irrelevant trading of thoughts and ideas between the interlocutors. These norms are always adhered to by the participants of conversation and are mutually known. They prevent the exchange of dialogues from being 'a succession of disconnected remarks.' Moreover, the rules organized by Paul Grice facilitates conversational moves strictly in adherence to the formulated categories, thereby, making the exchange successful. The categories are termed as Maxims of Conversation which can be divided into the following four categories:

i) Maxims of Quality

- Prevention of false statements.
- Avoiding statements which do not have adequate evidence to support the claim.

ii) Maxims of Relation

- Consideration of relevant and connected dialogues.

iii) Maxims of Quantity

- Informative contribution should be made as per the direction of talk exchange.
- Informative contribution should be as per requirement and not excess.

iv) Maxims of Manner

- Avoiding of obscure and ambiguous statements.
- Maintenance of order and chronology in the dialogues.
- Briefness and directness should characterise the speech.

Semantic Interpretation of Device from Selected Dialogues

The semantic interpretation analyses the way the speakers make references to clothes and images of clothing in their conversations throughout the play to convey messages that are important to the course of the dialogue exchanges that take place. The garbs, apart from their own inherent semantic value of 'garments', has added connotations in tune with the contextual circumstances and speaker's motivation to convey certain implicated ideas and thoughts.

The dialogues have been methodically selected which convey ideas and messages beyond what is just said. The chosen dialogues have lexemes semantically related to 'clothes' which do not just convey the perception of a piece of fabric meant to cover one's body but also added multiple connotations which make the conversations complete and appropriate in the dramatic conversational discourse of William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. The following are the selected dialogues from the entire discourse of the play which suit the aforesaid notion. The quotations which are actually in the form of dialogues by participants of conversation are represented here as per their occurrence in the play in the scheme - (Act)X. (Scene)Y. (Line No) Z: '<dialogue>'.

I.III.106: 'The Thane of Cawdor leaves. Why do you dress me in borrow'd robes?'

The images of clothing in the entire course of the play have significant semantic values and not just are lexical items for decorative syntactic presentation. As Ross informs Macbeth about his newly acquired title, he responds back and questions the reason behind attributing the new title to him which is not his. He attaches the symbol of clothing with a specific title of 'Thane of Cawdor' and therefore comments on why Ross is being unreasonable and dressing him in the gown that is not his.

**I.III.143-145: *'New honours come upon him
Like our strange garments, cleave not to their mould,
But with the aid of use.'***

In the very same scene, there is an exchange of dialogues between Macbeth and Banquo. Banquo referred to Macbeth's new title as 'strange garments.' The image depicts Banquo's view that just the way new clothes get fitted to our body with use so will be Macbeth's new responsibility. Though there will be no actual difference in the way Macbeth dresses after acquiring the title but only added responsibility, Banquo predicts a change in Macbeth's outlook towards life and society.

**I.V.63-64: *'To beguile the time,
Look like the time, bear welcome in your eye,'***

Lady Macbeth urges Macbeth to take up the look that suits the purpose and not let others interpret his inner self which is filled with tension and anxiety. By uttering 'look like the time', Lady Macbeth does not indicate the wearing of some dress and presenting oneself in tune with the situation. Rather the imagery is suggestive towards adaptation of a look through facial expression that does not represent the mental state.

**I.VII.34: *'We will proceed no further in this business.
He hath honour'd me of late, and I have bought
Golden opinions from all sorts of people,
Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,
Not cast aside so soon.'***

Macbeth says before Lady Macbeth that he is unwilling to proceed with the plan of killing King Duncan. He declares that he wishes to enjoy his newly acquired honours from Duncan just as one enjoys the feeling of new clothes. Yet again William Shakespeare uses the imagery of garments to convey an idea that is not directly connected to the prescribed notion. Here, he equates honours/ titles as new 'garments' for deriving pleasure of some imperial achievement.

**I.VII.37: *'Was the hope drunk
Wherein you dress'd yourself?'***

Following this, herein Lady Macbeth questions Macbeth's earlier wish to rise to power as a 'hope' that was worn in the moment of drunkenness. Shakespeare skillfully attributes to this

'hope' an image of clothing that Macbeth might probably have put in a state of excitement having heard the evil predictions of the three witches which he now desires to shed off.

**II.II.73: 'Get on your night-gown, lest occasion call us
And show us to be watchers.'**

Having committed the crime and being in a state of anxiety and despair and moral conscience pricking Macbeth, Lady Macbeth comes to the purpose of setting things normal. He urges Macbeth to quickly associate himself with the needs of the situation. Yet again the image of a particular attire 'nightgown' is brought in. The dress actually will indicate the couple's complete unawareness of the heinous crime that had been committed and will portray an outward appearance of innocence.

**V.II.20: 'Now does he feel his title
Hang loose about him, like a giant's robe
Upon a dwarfish thief.'**

Angus accuses Macbeth of taking away Duncan's power unfaithfully by murdering him. He attaches the image of the robe that Macbeth is wearing with kingly power. According to him, such majestic robe of power and responsibility is not suiting him at all, rather hanging loosely on him. Critic Cleanth Brooks in this regard comments,

'The crucial point of the comparison, it seems to me, lies not in the smallness of the man and the largeness of the robes, but rather in the fact that—whether the man be large or small—these are not his garments; in Macbeth's case they are actually stolen garments. Macbeth is uncomfortable in them because he is continually conscious of the fact that they do not belong to him. There is a further point, and it is one of the utmost importance; the oldest symbol for the hypocrite is that of a man who cloaks his true nature under a disguise.'

(Cleanth Brooks (1956). *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the structure of poetry*)

Conclusion

The paper presents the semantic interpretations of dramatic devices which contribute much more than just what is said. It is important for the hearer/addressee to understand such connotations in an utterance that go beyond the conventional direct lexical meaning. A successful exchange of dialogues is therefore chiefly guided by the maxims of conversation and hearer's linguistic, communicative and diverse semantic interpretive competence. The conversational discourse in *Macbeth* has such multifaceted meaning variation through the usage of the imagery of 'clothes.' The study brought out such shades of meaning of a particular device which the speakers used in

his/her utterances and thus wished to convey ideas at various points of discourse that were dependent on the context and direction of talk exchange.

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