

## THE DRAMATIC DISCOURSE

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### Abstract

More than often in the teaching activity we wonder how to better approach a new problem by building the scaffolding of knowledge naturally, but especially attractive and motivating for students. We think of methods, techniques, strategies but these are, after all, abstract concepts to which we must find the appropriate coat to make the concept that we teach meaningful. The coursebook does not always offer you the necessary support to pass the new knowledge which you have had in mind, and then you find in the literary text the help you needed. The dramatic examination of the text reveals a feature, among many others of this type of text, that is, the multitude of meanings that can be learned through interpretation, acting out, accompanied by gestures, movement, facial expressions, intonation, etc. The play exists as text but its being written as text is for staging, for interpretation.

**Keywords:** *context, interaction, text, drama, dialogue, communication.*

### 1. VERBAL INTERACTION

Many studies on discourse analysis start from the basic presumption concerning the communicative properties of language in general and the nature of speech interaction in particular. According to the Romanian Explanatory Dictionary, (2012) the *interaction* is defined as: *reciprocal action (of objects or phenomena); mutual influence; influence, mutual conditioning between facts, events etc. [Cf. fr. interaction].* In the dramatic opera the interaction occurs between characters within the dialogue through which something is transmitted, conveyed. The communication always takes place in, a physical and cognitive environment enabling the relationship between the characters, namely the transmission and reception of the message.

In this regard, D. Schiffrin, in his study *Discourse Markers* (1987) remarks that any interaction occurs in a context. The notion of

context could be divided into three categories that overlap in any interaction:

- *the physical context* refers to the environment in which the interaction takes place - at home, at work, in a public place. Spoken language generally occurs in face-to-face conversations, the speaker and the listener sharing the same physical context.

- *the personal context* refers to the social and personal relations of people/characters who interact. The personal context also includes a group membership, the social and institutional roles of speakers and listeners, and the relative status and social distance that are relevant to participants.

- *the cognitive context* refers to the environment they belong to and the knowledge shared by the participants in the interaction. The cognitive context, which is likely change as the interaction progresses, also extends on past experiences, cultural knowledge and the world perspective of the speaker.

Claire Kramsch in *Context and Culture in Language Teaching* (1993) emphasizes the importance of context in teaching, the variety and diversity of interactive activities in meaningful contexts provide “*food for thought.... If communicative activities are not only to meet the needs of social maintenance, but potentially to bring about social and educational change, then we have to search for ways of explicitly varying the parameters of the interactional context.*”<sup>1</sup>

There are different ways in which can be explained how speech is organized, however all approaches must take into account the importance of context in the study of discourse. One approach is to focus on how the discourse is *structured*, the linear way of organizing it and how the components are linked together. A structural

analysis seeks to explain how the elements of verbal exchanges, the replies are formed. For example, how the questions predict the answers, the statements predict the confirmations, the acknowledgments, how the requirements predict the reactions.

Another way would be the study of discourse in terms of the *strategy*, the attention being focused on how speakers use different interactive tactics in certain moments of the discursive sequence.

In the following example we have three types of discourse with the same structure:

1.- *Open the window. (The other person opens the window)*

2.- *Will you open the window, please? (The other person opens the window)*

3.- *It's so hot in here! (The other person opens the window)*<sup>2</sup> (P. Simpson, 1997)

In all three verbal exchanges we deal with a requirement followed by a reaction, but the discourse strategy is different from a direct addressing, a requirement to be fulfilled (order), example 1, to a less direct requirement, mostly polite, example 2 and in an indirect way, example 3. The three forms of speech are marked both grammatically - imperative sentences as well as concerning spelling - using punctuation.

The speakers use different discourse strategies while speaking, formal/informal language depending on the context, the issuer of a message, the speaker knows what to say, how to say, when to say in a certain context, this knowledge being what Dell Hymes calls *communicative competence*, that is, the adequate expression in a particular context.

Paul Simpson in *Odd Talk: Studying Discourses of Incogruity* states that it is a truism to say that the dramatic discourse differs from everyday speech. Of course, the dialogue in the dramatic text is the interaction between the characters that belong to fiction, they are firstly controlled and directed by the playwright and then by the director of the play. However the principles of social interaction underlie the dramatic dialogue that can not be accessed but for its relationship with the social context outside the play. The dramatic action is meaningful only through the genuine relationship with the daily social life.

The social character of the play is revealed by Edward Bond in an interview published in *Plays and Players*, (1978) where he expresses his opinion about theatre and drama. He states that "*we need to set scenes in public places where are our history is formed, classes and whole societies clash*"<sup>3</sup>. In other words the role of theatre, of the dramatic text is to educate, the norms, the values and the people's conduct organize the linguistic behaviour underlying the basis of interpretation of speech acts and actions of the characters in the drama world. So it is the everyday social organization of the language that creates the common meeting place of the playwright with the audience, the reader. The communicative competence becomes a valuable tool of interpretation that explains the inconsistencies between what a speaker says and what is expected by the personal, physical and cognitive dimensions of the context.

## 2. THE DRAMATIC TEXT

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**Drama**, *n* 1. *Species of the dramatic genre, a feature of modern literature, of serious nature, which renders the image of real life in its contradictory data in powerful and complex conflicts, often in a mixture of tragic and comic.* 2. *Drama, n. Literary creation/writing meant to be represented on stage; (especially) such a creation in which the tragic with the comic mix.*

**Dramatic** *adj.* 1. *on drama, theatre; kind ~ = literary genre that includes written works in dialogue, in which ideas and feelings, leading to the deployment of a conflict between characters are dynamically presented on stage; ~ the art and the theory of interpretation and staging of dramatic works; drama (2). (about voices) that is characterized by colorful sonority and gravity, but with limited mobility.* 2. *(fig. ; about events, situations, etc.) rich in contrasts, conflicts; shattering, impressed. (<Fr. dramatique, lat. dramaticus, gr. dramatikos)* (the Romanian Explanatory Dictionary, 2012)

The definitions of drama and the dramatic highlight the feature of this type of literary work, namely the stage presentation of a real image of life and its dialogic nature.

The dramatic discourse represents the updating of the language of a literary text, whose goal is the representation on stage, it is the updating of the dramatic text in a show. Without

the dramatic text we can not speak about the theatre show as a mode of communication and representation of the world existing in the human consciousness and artistically represented on stage. The play has as final end the representation on stage, in the communication process the triad *author - drama - receiver* the message is mediated by other voices, the voices of the characters, behind which the author's voice is hidden. The written text is assimilated by the characters who within the representation, the dialogue or the monologue, bring it to life through intonation, tempo, amount of words, the work becoming a means of communication where the intentionality of the author in the act of creation is disrupted.

The dramatic text, the play, by switching from the written text to representation, whose mark is the dialogue, is characterized by a set of elements specific to the dramatic genre. If the author of the epic genre is hidden behind *the narrator*, in the lyric genre is hidden behind the *poetic self*, in the dramatic genre the author communicates through the characters. The word of the dramatic text is written for stage presentation, while in the epic and lyric genres the word is for reading. The process of reception is different, being spatial, synchronous, the receiver being the audience in the theatre hall in as far as the dramatic genre is concerned, while the epic and the lyric genres the reception is unique by the individual reader.

The dramatic text includes two modes of existence of the language, namely, the oral one and written one, the text being written in order to be always delivered before an audience so for the purpose of stage presentation. The dramatic text is different from the epic and the lyric texts by the presence, within the text of certain elements specific to the presentation on stage, namely the dialogue and the stage directions. The linguistic way of expression as well as the reception of the dramatic text distinguishes it from the epic and the lyric ones.

Roman Jakobson in *Essais de linguistique générale* distinguishes a series of functions of the dramatic language, functions specific to this form of communication.

- *the emotional function* concerns emitter - the author, the characters.

- *the conative function* refers to the recipient - the characters, the reader / the audience.

- *the referential function* assumes a text referent / reviewer of the dramatic text and of the representation space as well as a reviewer of the text itself which may become a referent for another text.

- *the phatic function* enables within the text the relationship between the characters and in the representation framework outlines the conditions under which communication takes place, as well as the status the receiver has, namely of spectator.

- *the poetic function* is updated in the relationship text-representation where the linear nature of the text takes on a three-dimension forming a wholeness globally perceived.

The prosodic elements that characterize the dramatic language, *the intonation, the melody, the inflection, the emphasis, the stress, the amount of dialogue* can be found even in the ordinary dialogue highlighting the communicative intent of the transmitter, namely the affective state, the purpose of the statement. The dramatic text outlines the actions and the situations through the characters in linguistic communication. The dramatic dialogue is aimed at creating the illusion of a real dialogue through the system of interrogative, exclamatory, presumptive and assertive statements, all of them belonging to the rhetoric of the dramatic language. The intonation is the sound effect of different types of utterances.

### 3. WHAT IS DISTINCTIVE ABOUT THE PLAYS

*However familiar or unfamiliar the world of a tragedy, comedy, farce or melodrama may be, everything that we experience has its source, in the long run, in words. (Gareth Lloyd Evans, 1977, Language of Modern Drama)<sup>4</sup>.*

The plays, their vast majority, if not all of them, are written to be interpreted, represented on stage. In teaching, the dramatic text is a source of development of communication skills in general and of oral communication in particular. The above quote can be a starting point in designing activities and tasks using the features just mentioned.

In this regard think of a play that you know well in English or any other language and ask the following questions in order to trigger the communicative interaction:

- if you have seen it on stage, what examples of sounds, images, noises and silence, movement and stillness do you remember from that play?
- what examples of relationships and answers can you remember?
- if you have read it in those moments of effective reading have you managed to recreate these moments in your imagination?
- how important were the words of the play ?
- could you imagine the play re-written in a different way, style and in this case would it have the same effect?
- what do you think about the connection between the text of a play and its interpretation on stage?

The words, the language used are central elements to the meaning of a discourse to the replies of a play. This is relevant, for example, in an activity of removal of some replies of dialogue, *cloze text*, the students having to fill in the blanks taking into account the context and meaning. What would be the goals of such an activity, particularly from a linguistic point of view? These questions have their answer in the communicative aspect of language in the already mentioned fact that the language of a play is a carrier of meanings, but equally true is the fact that the interpretation of a play can lead to other significance and meanings by using stage movement, gestures, scenery, costumes, sets, etc.

Using the dramatic text in the classroom has as teaching motivational support, the two features of a play, namely that a play exists only by being staged, through interpretation, and it also exists as word-written on a page or as a text. The dramatic text exposes the students to the use of language in real conversation, to dialogue, a specific feature of a play. Through dialogue meanings are negotiated, what someone says, relationships between people, characters are established and in terms of language use, the ordering and sequencing of discourse elements.

**Dialogue, dialog** n. 1. *Conversation, conversation between the characters of a dramatic work; form of writing of dramatic works; passage of a literary work which reproduces the conversation or some characters.*

*Writing drafted under the form of a conversation.. 2. Talk, conversation between two people. [<Fr. dialogue, it. dialogo, lat. dialogus, gr. dialogos].*

**Dialogu, dialog** n. 1. *conversation between two or more people. The form in which the dramatic works are usually written; (in a literary work) passage in which the conversation between two or more characters is rendered (the Romanian Explanatory Dictionary, 2012).*

The play generates an meaningful context for the participants in the dialogue involving memorizing the words, the replies, in other words the acquisition of new vocabulary. Thus the development of speaking skill is achieved by involving and motivating the participation in transmission and reception of messages in an environment that imitates the reality. Working as a group supports the cohesion of its members the development of self-confidence having as immediate outcome the increase of fluency in speech and the correct pronunciation of words.

Since the plays are rich in dialogue, their use in the classroom is a useful way for the teacher and challenging for the student to focus on conversational language. The dialogue in a play obviously differs from the one of everyday life being stripped of some hesitations, pauses, interruptions and unfinished sentences specific to daily dialogue. However it can be used to highlight certain features of the conversational discourse.

Studying the dialogue of a play gives the students a meaningful context for the acquisition and memorization of new vocabulary. Students often learn expressions and ways of expression by studying how they are used by the characters in the play especially if the text is read and interpreted in the classroom. Of course, there are other advantages to using the dramatic text in the class, namely involving students in just reading of the text aloud or to work on a mini-staging, lead to collaboration, cooperation, interaction that promote, encourage involvement by participation, which results in the use of language in communication. The human conflicts, moral dilemmas, political issues conveyed in a play commit the students both intellectually and emotionally and offer, provide a valuable source of discussion.

The student self-confidence improves, increases as the act of communication is

supported by the written text as a basis for the development of the speech skill. Thus the student has the opportunity to improve his pronunciation and intonation experimenting with different models, practicing different sounds. Non-verbal features - gestures, body language, the position the people/characters have when in dialogue, the length of visual contact can also be analyzed and discussed in a drama class. The development of communication may be extended through discussions concerning the extent to which these traits reflect the relationship between the characters of the play and their attitudes towards each other as students as well as their cultural environment.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The development of the oral communication ability, the speech skill, having as support the dramatic text is backed up by the dialogic nature of this type of text, which, preserving the features of daily dialogue, motivates the students' participation in class activities. The dramatic text can always be exploited in various educational activities, relating to the acquisition of vocabulary, proper use of intonation, grammar teaching problems, etc. however, all these, in a meaningful context allowing comprehension and promoting

active participation of students. Removing stage directions in a dramatic fragment, creating situations out of a dialogue, using a common theme of some fragments from different dramatic texts, using a sequence of images in relation to text, etc. are all activities that can develop reading and speaking skills, comprehension, require creativity and innovation but also the proper use of language in communication, listening skill, but especially the understanding of the importance of intonation and fluency in the transmission and reception of messages.

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