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COURSE PAPER

The theme: Stylistic characteristics of the languages of
drama

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Introduction

The vast majority of plays are written to be performed.¹ As a consequence, many modern drama critics tell us that plays can only be properly understood and reacted to in the theatre. For example, J.L. Styan (1971 [1965]:1) says that 'the fullness of music is only heard in performance, so it is with drama' and the Shakespearean critic Stanley Wells (1970:ix) that 'the reading of a play is a necessarily incomplete experience'. Writers and directors have also taken this position. Brecht tells us that 'Proper plays can only be understood when performed' (1964:15), and Stanislavski says that 'it is only on the stage that drama can be revealed in all its fullness and significance' (1968: 115).

But if merely reading a play is truly inadequate, much traditional drama criticism would need an interpretative 'health warning' appended to it, and our common educational practice of reading play-texts and discussing them From dramatic text to dramatic performance 7

in seminars and tutorials would need to be replaced by performance-based theatre studies. However, I want to suggest that the situation is nothing like as dire as this.

In this chapter I want to argue that sensitive understandings of plays

1. Арнольд И.В. Лексикология современного английского языка. учебник для ин-тов и фак. иностр. языка. - 3-е издание, перераб и доп. - М. Высшая школа, 1986. - 295с.

2. Голденков М.А. Осторожно! Hot Dog! Современный активный английский. - ТОО "ЧеРо", 1999-148с

3. Каушанская Л.В. Грамматика английского языка. Учебник для студ. пед. институтов - 4-е издание. - Л.: Просвещение, 1973. - 319с.

4. Расвская Н.М.. Теоретическая грамматика современного английского языка. : Для студентов факультетов романо-германской филологии университетов и педагогических институтов иностранных языков (на английском языке). -К.: Высшая школа, 1976 - 383с.

'recipe for pretence', as Searle (1975a:328) puts it: the author of a play gives 'directions as to how to enact a pretence which the actors then follow'. This position overlaps with that outlined by semioticians of theatre like Elam (1980) and Aston and Savona (1991), which I would recommend as further reading (Aston and Savona is more accessible than Elam). As Aston and Savona (1991:3) remark, studies like Styan (1971 [1965]) and Hayman (1977) 'which still have currency as introductions to theatre, are written in seeming ignorance of the relevance of semiotics to theatre studies, despite the development of this approach

since the turn of the century'.

I should make it clear that I have nothing against performances, and am not trying to suggest that you shouldn't go to the theatre or study performances.

Plays are written to be performed, and going to the theatre is usually an exhilarating and instructive experience. Moreover, theatrical performance is just as deserving of study as dramatic text (indeed, I am wanting to argue a relationship between them which is closer than most theatre critics would have us believe). In any case, I would argue that if you have never been to the theatre and don't know anything at all about the nature of theatrical conventions you probably can't read a play-text accurately enough to guarantee a sensitive.

¹ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_slang

² www.learnenglish.de/slang/money slang

EDITORS' PREFACE

Vimala Herman explores the insights that Conversation Analysis, developed by the ethnomethodologists, might afford the study of drama. In particular, she examines the concept of 'the turn': when someone speaks, they take a turn at speech, and when speech alternates, turns alternate as well. Drama as dialogue is a multi-input form, and this raises the issue of the distribution of turns and their management. After briefly reviewing the work of the Conversation Analysts, Herman considers the contribution that turn-taking patterns make to the understanding of situation and character in plays. She conducts an analysis of an extract from John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, and shows how turn-taking choices (e.g. who speaks to whom, length of turns, pauses, interruptions) affect the reader's interpretation of the characters' speech.

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multi-clause turns, poetic or rhetorical styles, etc. could be mobilized as the 22 Vimala Herman

multi-clause turns, poetic or rhetorical styles, etc. could be mobilized as the occasion demands.

Turns also have a joint orientation to the topic of talk, i.e. what is talked about, which can form a point of focus as participants initiate, develop, close or change topics via the course of talk. The cohesiveness of a stretch of talk is achieved by various means, but the glue of topic is one important factor.

Successive turns and speakers can orientate collaboratively to develop a topic, or negotiate change or closure. Turns in sequence have a projective and a

an answer is given to a question issued in a previous turn, or constrain the nature of the next turn, as when one issues a greeting to another. But turn skips are also possible when one speaker does not orientate to a previous speaker's turn or concerns, but orientates to topics raised in one's own which involves skipping the other's turn. Thus, although each participant takes a turn in alternating fashion, a double strand of talk running more or less independently can also occur. Thus different degrees of co-operativeness and intermeshing of concerns are possible.

The system, as described by Sacks et al (1978) is a general system as well as one that is locally managed by participants themselves within the contingencies of a situation. The local management aspects of the system can exploit the different features and variables for specific functional uses.

FLOORS AND TURNS

The above description of the turn-taking system provides one set of conventions for the conversational 'floor' and the 'rules' by which turns are managed within it. 'The floor' in Conversational Analysis is actually a complex concept and is understood differently by different analysts (Edelsky 1993).

The most usual usage is to conflate 'turn' and 'floor', so that taking a turn involves taking the 'floor', or 'having' the floor. Where 'schisms' occur, and different groupings and participant structures develop more or less simultaneously, as in large dinner parties, and there are different foci for talk among different participants, multiple floors can occur (Shultz, Florio, and Erickson 1982), while the overall situation remains the same. In 'freefor-

is not the one who speaks next, since next speaker self-selects against the rights to speak of the previously selected speaker. Jimmy is the 'dominant' character. Eight of the seventeen turns are Jimmy's and Jimmy does most of the selection. In Turn 1, Jimmy chooses Helena, but Cliff takes Turn 2. Helena self-selects in Turn 5, changing the focus and direction of the talk away from Cliff to herself. After a brief exchange with Helena, Jimmy chooses Alison in mid-turn in Turn 8. But it is Helena who takes Turn 9. After a brief interchange with Alison, whom he chooses, Jimmy's address to Alison again in Turn 14 is returned by Helena. The self-selections are therefore 'turnTurn management in drama 27 grabs' by unauthorized speakers who interpose themselves between Jimmy and his targets.

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her by gaze, and addresses the last part of his turn to her, with the sting in the tail specifically aimed at her: 'It should appeal to you, in particular. It's soaked in the theology of Dante, with a good slosh of Eliot as well...'. Similarly, in Turn 8, having declared to Helena to whom his turn is addressed that she underestimates him, he selects Alison at the end with the challenge for confirmation 'Doesn't she?' In Turn 16, there are swift changes of addressee from Alison to Helena and back to Alison which brackets them, in his perception, as in collusion against him. The content of his turn becomes accusatory and negative. Although all three participants are addressees and part of the interactive

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'floor', Cliff is generally omitted from the scope of the address, as the untargeted addressee, and the conflict and antagonism is directed specifically at one or both of the women.

Turn order

Turn order, too, reveals unequal distribution of turns among those present. The seventeen turns that constitute the extract can be subdivided into basically twoparty

interactions in succession, within the four-party floor. Jimmy is central to all the interactions and the participant structures in force. All present address Jimmy. He is thus the focal point of their speech. They do not address each other, and so no 'free-for-all' floors or 'schisms' via turn management ensue. This is the 'holding forth' 'one-speaker-speaks-at-a-time', linear development of action which single floors encourage (Edelsky 1993), which provides space for the turn-holding speaker and individuates its participatory trials and outcomes.

and contempt for Alison's class, betrays his own 'upward mobility' class split—the literary allusions which pepper his speech to Helena (Dante, Eliot, Wilde) reflect his distance from the class origins he champions. His speech casts him as university-educated middle class, even in rebellion against it. Jimmy is thus a more ambivalent figure than his pro-claimed class stances might lead one to believe, entrapped in, and resistant to, his class position. Although, in the 1950s, the play questioned hallowed myths regarding class, empire, etc., the sting in the social ambiguities of class, it would seem, is not easily overcome. Jimmy also has a more complex speech style—he can be indirect—targeting the women, while

bantering with Cliff; sarcastic, especially to Helena, direct and challenging or expressive of personal outrage, and demanding in his interactions, especially with Alison. Helena is mostly direct in delivering questions, even 'face-threatening'

ones, or answers to Jimmy. Alison's speech style is mostly composed of answers, delivered in minimalist mode, to Jimmy, except for the final long and sarcastic counter-turn.

Topic control is generally in Jimmy's hands, and others' turns orientate to his.

Helena is the exception, since it is she who initiates the topic of his unpleasantness

with which he engages, but the other topics, like his poem, and where Alison is going, are initiated by him. Neither Cliff nor Alison bother to challenge his topics, nor initiate their own. Cliff develops Jimmy's topic of his poem by requesting information about it but then interrupts him with a bantering, half-serious

comment of his own. Alison is the minimal respondent when she is allowed to or bothers to answer at all. Thus both attempt either to opt out, or to stop development of the course they suspect is about to come into existence by aborting it with interruption.

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CONCLUSION

The variables of the system have thus been used in complex fashion throughout the extract to give us cues to interpret both situation and character. The situation is a conflictual one with Jimmy central to the conflict. The situation develops in sequential fashion, with Jimmy interacting with each of the participants in turn. He is the constant participant with all of them, and all the others' turns are addressed to him, which makes him the focus of their attention. The majority of turns are also Jimmy's, and he also initiates the majority of topics. His speech style is varied and complex and adapted to his goals in speech, and he often takes marginally longer turns than the others. The others, given their limited speech presence, relative to his, are mostly short turns, except for Alison's at the end.

Jimmy's control of turn-management procedures awards him dominance, but other factors in the responsive dimension, in the strategies used by recipients, in the turn-by-turn unfolding of action, curtail and modulate his dominance. Next turn rarely passes to Jimmy's selected speaker, so that the turn order that actually comes into existence is outside his control, even if the turn order achieved

centralizes him. He is also the only speaker to be interrupted twice, so that the intended course of his speech is blocked off by others. The breaks on Jimmy's belligerence are temporary, since he proceeds to wrangle with each of the other characters in turn. His belligerence, too, is modulated and strengthens as the episode proceeds. He interacts half-jokingly with Cliff, and then mockingly with Helena, but gets directly confrontational with Alison. The delay in bringing Jimmy into engagement with Alison only serves to intensify the incipient friction between

them, since others' turn-grabs and her own silences had served to hold her at bay and deflect the tension, which then erupts into open conflict when the two are properly face to face. Alison's matching counter-speech at least temporarily silences him, since he is interrupted and given a counter-dose of sarcasm in a long turn which blocks his access to speech, and which changes the contour of the episode by giving her the upper hand.

Helena's strategies portray her as direct and confrontational and as a powerful opponent, equal to Jimmy, a fact that contributes to their sexual attraction and alliance which occurs later in the play. She is self-directed, self-selects more than once and frustrates his turn choices. She initiates her own topic, and holds her own with Jimmy, turn for turn, without either interrupting or being interrupted, but she is bypassed by Jimmy when he turns the course of his talk to Alison. Alison is the most enigmatic and ambivalent of them all—protected but sidelined by the others, but resistant and provocative in her very silences. Jimmy has to try again and again to engage her, before he finally provokes her into speech.

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