戏剧对话的话语结构与人物分析

王虹 著

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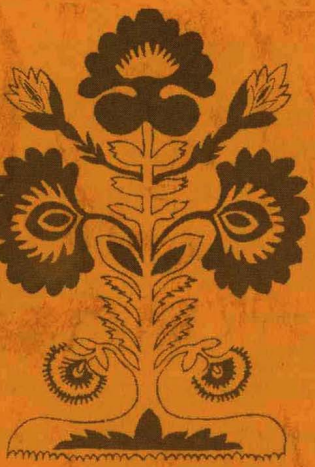

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PREFACE

The main purpose of this study is to explore how a linguistic approach to dramatic dialogue can help understand characterization in drama. The exploration goes into three directions. First of all, I locate the interface between ordinary language use and dramatic dialogue at the level of spoken interaction. For this reason, models developed in the study of spoken interaction will be employed for the analysis. Secondly, dramatic dialogue and naturally occurring conversation must have enough shared ground for the models developed for the latter to be applicable to the former. Because this assumption is at the centre of the approach adopted for the present research, I undertake a rather detailed comparison of data from both sources. This is done with the objective of showing in what aspects dramatic dialogue resembles conversation, and how and why they are different. Finally, a framework is proposed for the application of structural models of conversation to characterization in drama. A special feature of this framework is that it foregrounds the interactional dynamics of dramatic dialogue and views characterization as emergent from the process of interaction. It is hoped that this framework of analysis, which supplements the conversational models with pragmatics and sociolinguistics and narrows down the complex issues related to characterization into three relationships, can be a step forward in linguistic approach to literature, especially to drama.

John Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger* has been chosen as an example to show how the framework works in practice. It is important to state at the outset that it is not the main purpose of this study to arrive at new interpretations of the play. The play is the site for demonstration, showing how the framework of analysis can be used as a tool to reveal the way dramatic dialogue works to create character relationships, which in turn constitute the characters.

The main body of the book, constituted by chapters 2 to 8, is preceded by an introductory chapter in which preliminary issues related to characterization in drama and the study of dramatic dialogue are dealt with. Also covered in the first chapter is a brief discussion of the approach adopted for this study and the drama text and data used.

Chapter 2 is devoted to the comparison of dramatic dialogue and naturally occurring conversation. It is demonstrated that while dramatic dialogue is not a mirror image of conversation, it mimes the basic interactive structure of conversation and retains the orderly and cooperative features of conversation that are oriented to by people engaged in spoken interaction. A tentative explanation is also given to account for the differences between dramatic dialogue and conversation that are uncovered in the comparison. The arguments in

this chapter provide a justification for the application of conversational models to the analysis of dramatic dialogue.

Chapters 3 and 4 introduce the linguistic models to be used for analysis. Chapter 3 concerns the models and contributions from the Birmingham School discourse analysts. Burton's study of discourse structure is selected for this study and modifications to her framework are proposed. Chapter 4 consists of a discussion of the work done by the conversational analysts in turn-taking and turn sequencing.

Chapter 5 defines three kinds of character relationship as fundamental in understanding characterization in drama and brings together the linguistic models and aspects of characterization in drama in an analytic framework. This chapter also deals with preliminary issues in the application of the framework to John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, such as the global context of the play and the reasons for selecting the extracts for analysis.

Chapters 6 to 8 are dedicated to an analysis of *Look Back in Anger* using the framework put forward in Chapter 5. Each chapter is given to the analysis of one extract from the play to demonstrate how the study of the interactive structure of dramatic dialogue supplemented by findings in pragmatics and sociolinguistics can help us understand character creation in drama.

Finally, in the Conclusion, an account of the characters in *Look Back in Anger* is given on the basis of the analysis done through chapters 6 to 8. It is also reiterated that a linguistic approach to dramatic dialogue can be an effective means in furthering our understanding of characterization in drama.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER I
Introduction

1.1 The study of character in drama

In the history of drama criticism, the study of character was rather a secondary enterprise until well into the 19th century when the central concern of drama moved away from the classic and the heroic to the more naturalistic and bourgeois. Indeed, in Aristotle's *Poetics*, it is explicitly stated that tragedy "is a representation, not of men, but of action and life, of happiness and unhappiness" (1965: 39). Champions of Aristotle's view, advocating that actions take precedence over characters, can be found in drama critics from Aristotle's day down to the 20th century.

Aristotle's idea is a reflection of the nature of the Greek and the classic tragedies of later periods which appeal more to the epic and heroic rather than to the social and psychological side of human nature, and in which the dramatic characters are more often types than individuals. The action is by and large propelled by the larger issue of human beings against predestined fate or the will of the gods. Shakespeare's drama, in the early days of its criticism, was sometimes measured against the classical standards and found wanting, partly because the action in his drama is motivated by the more individualized needs of the characters rather than by typified character traits. With the advent of the 19th century bourgeois drama, the interest in character *per se* became more conspicuous both on stage and in criticism.

In Aston and Savona's (1991) view, the psychologically detailed presentation of character in drama came contemporaneous with the rise of the realist novel and later with the development of psychology as a scientific enquiry. This intellectual climate had the consequence of elevating character to the centre of dramatic criticism and of blurring the distinction between character as a dramatic/theatrical construct and character as a real person with a case history beyond the text or performance. The classic example of such an approach to character is A. C. Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904). Bradley's contribution to Shakespearean criticism, especially to character study, cannot be dismissed as inconsequential for many of his observations are insightful. However, it was typical of the critical tradition up to his work that the dramatic character was viewed in the same light as a character in the novel or simply treated as a person in real life, and Bradley pushed this tradition to the limit. He sometimes speculates on not only what is going on in the inner consciousness, but also the

off-stage life of the character. This side of Bradley's criticism has largely been repudiated by later critics who want to put the character back into the dramatic context.

The "post-Romantic 'psychologistic' view of character" is still current in literary criticism (Elam 1980: 131). But a refocusing of critical emphasis has come about with the development of structuralist and semiotic approaches to drama and theatre. Rather than delving into the complex psychological and social traits of the character, such approaches investigate character in the light of its function in the overall dramatic structure. The function of characters has also been investigated from a narrative point of view, i.e. their narrative functions. For instance, how a character's name bears information about his personality, or how a character functions in self-presentation and exposition or serves the function of choric commentary. (For a detailed discussion, see Aston & Savona 1991: 36-46). Conceding that some of the models developed cannot be applied with equal facility to all types of drama, Aston and Savona nevertheless point out that the attention paid to the function of characters is a significant departure from "the negative and misleading approaches encouraged by the method of analysing characters as real people" (40).

While the study of character function looks at how character helps to build up the overall sign-system of a play, the study of characterization is basically concerned with the techniques employed by the dramatist to present the character and character relations to the audience. Pfister (1988) sees the central problem for characterization as "the transmission of information with regard to the dramatic figures" (184). The most important channel for transmitting information in drama being language, it is reasonable to expect that language would play a central role in the repertoire of possible characterization techniques. Indeed, in Pfister's diagram of techniques of characterization, verbal elements appear in all but one category, the non-verbal implicit-figural.

On the basis of the foregoing discussion, the following comments can be made:

1. Character in drama is a construct limited by the time frame and the mode of presentation in the theatre. The dramatist is always aware of the possible length of time available for his presentation of character and action. He would not want to overstep the time limit normally allowed for an evening's production and indulge in lengthy discussions of the motives or the psychology of his character. Furthermore, since the mode of presentation in drama is mainly dialogue, it is unlikely for a dramatist to engage in authorial commentaries in the form of narration. Consequently, to speculate about a dramatic character's past or future or to imagine what the character would have done as if he had an existence outside the dramatic text is a luxury the dramatic critic could ill afford. It is

worth emphasizing that character in drama "has no currency beyond the fictional world of the text" (Aston & Savona 1991: 35).

2. The argument as to which, action or character, should take precedence in the analysis of drama seems to me to be somewhat misplaced. My understanding of the issue is that the argument has been the result of the confusion and the fusion of men and character, the real life entity and the dramatic/theatrical construct. For Aristotle also points out that action is "brought about by agents who necessarily display certain distinctive qualities both of character and of thought, according to which we also define the nature of actions" (1965: 39). We cannot have drama without characters, which constitute dramatic action and are in turn realized by action. My intention is not to advocate the centrality of character over action or vice versa, but to propose a close relationship of the two. In Pfister's words, "the concept of action implies the notion of an active subject and, conversely, the concept of person or character implies the notion of action – whether it is active or passive, external or internal" (1988: 160).
3. It is important to remember that dramatic conventions have not remained unchanged since the day of Aristotle. Because of its theatrical / performative dimension, drama, more than any other literary genre, is susceptible to human society's changing temperament and artistic taste. Different historical periods of drama have witnessed the shifting focus on different elements in drama and varied conceptions of "character". A "character" in Ionesco's play, for example, is inconceivable for Bernard Shaw's audience.
4. One way of looking at character in drama is to analyze how it functions in the overall structure, narrative or semantic; another is to see how dramatic figures are presented to the reader/spectator. While considerable work has been done in the analysis of character functions, a text-based study of characterization is a relatively less explored field of enquiry.
5. It is the norm rather than exception that drama is essentially concerned with human relationships, or with what Elam (1980: 137) calls "the 'interpersonal' dynamics". Although exceptions can be found in experimental and radical theatres wherein the dramatic action involves a single character on stage (e.g. Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape*), a dramatic character is normally presented through interaction with other characters.
6. If theatre is viewed as a sign-system through which a dramatic world is created for the audience to understand and, possibly, to appreciate, then language is an indispensable and the most salient sign. Dramatic characters carry the linguistic sign and are defined by it; therefore the process of characterization is mainly realized by the use of language. To

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quote Pfister (1988: 120):

> [I]t is as a result of what a dramatic figure says and how it says it that it is able to portray itself, whether willingly or unwillingly, consciously or unconsciously, explicitly or implicitly. It is only in this way – assisted by a number of non-verbal devices of self-portrayal – that the receiver is able to regard it as a tangible figure with a distinct personality.

7. Since characters in plays are revealed through interaction, the most significant aspect of the language of drama resides in its interactive property. Apart from drama types which are not truly meant for stage production and despite the fact that soliloquies and asides are used in dramas of certain periods or schools, the dominant mode of language used in drama is interactive and dialogic. To borrow Peter Szondi's (1988: 10) way of putting it, the dramatic character is possible only when dialogue is possible. It follows, then, that the study of dramatic dialogue can be an effective means to the analysis of character.

1.2 Language and dialogue in drama

All literary genres depend on the use of language. What distinguishes drama from lyric and narrative genres is that the language used in drama is rooted in dialogue while the others derive from monologue (Veltrusky 1976a). Yet the study of dramatic dialogue as an interactive activity akin to conversation is more or less a recent development.

1.2.1 Traditional perspectives

Ever since the beginning of drama criticism, plenty of room had been given to the language of drama, sometimes called diction or speech, but not to dialogue as it is understood today. Perhaps as in so many other issues involved in the study of drama, we can turn to Aristotle to explain the neglect of dialogue. Aristotle's six elements of drama did not explicitly include dialogue, nor speech as such; but the importance of speech was manifested by its presence in three elements – character, thought and diction. Character can be revealed by speech. Thought, in his definition, is almost synonymous to the present day definition of communicative competence – "the ability to say what is possible and appropriate in any given circumstances"

(1965: 40). The hopeful link through thought so defined to dialogue in its interactive sense was presently cut off when Aristotle went on to say, "...it (thought) is what, in the speeches in the play, is related to the arts of politics and rhetoric" (ibid). This consideration naturally inclined the critic towards a rhetorical study of dramatic speech, hence the element of diction. In sum, in Aristotle's poetics, dramatic speech is not very much different from poetic language. When critics after Aristotle talked about dramatic speech they mostly concentrated on the rhetoric, figurative aspects or, in the case of comedy, on the combat of wits.

The concept of dramatic dialogue as verbal interaction had to wait for a more suitable climate to take hold of critical attention, a climate in which language is studied in its communicative and sociological contexts. As Aston and Savona (1991) put it, the traditional focus on the aesthetics and thematics of the text was displaced only when the 20th century saw a radical shift in the theory and approaches to literature and language, "the shift crudely recognized as the move from 'what' to the 'how'" (3). What has been true of the approaches to literary texts in general is also true of the study of dramatic dialogue. The study of dramatic dialogue with a recognition of its interactive nature depends on a better understanding of spoken discourse. Unless the critic recognizes the close relationship between the language of drama and natural spoken discourse, the study of dramatic dialogue cannot break away from the confines of the traditional approaches which treat the subject under study more or less the same as poetic or narrative languages. Such a break away is necessary not because the more traditional approaches have nothing to offer or have been on the wrong tracks altogether, but because a new perspective more in line with the distinctive features of dramatic dialogue can help drama criticism to go beyond identifying the dramatic effects to the analysis of how such effects are created through verbal interaction.

1.2.2 The influence of semiotics and speech-act theory

In the 1930s and 1940s, writers associated with the Prague School made significant contributions to the semiotic study of drama and theatre. Influenced by structuralist / formalist thinking in both linguistics and literary criticism, these writers were concerned with the sign-system of both text and performance and how meaning was created through the sign-system. Some writers in their enquiry moved towards a perspective, which took into consideration not only the formal but also the social and psychological aspects of the sign. Jiri Veltrusky, for example, built into his analysis of dramatic dialogue elements essential to pragmatic and sociolinguistic enquiries of language. In his "Basic Features of Dramatic

Dialogue" (1976b [1942]), Veltrusky examined the intense and reciprocal relationship between verbal utterance and the extralinguistic factors that affect the utterances. What Veltrusky called the extralinguistic situation of the dialogue, i.e. "the constantly changing 'here and now'", is equivalent to the context of utterance. Another element discussed by Veltrusky is the psychological situation of the dialogue, which follows from the extralinguistic situation and covers the mental and psychological states of the speakers. Thus Veltrusky has mapped out the three most important components in the study of spoken discourse: utterances, speakers and contexts. The dynamics of dramatic dialogue spring from the inter-play of speakers and contexts.

The speech-act theory developed by the philosopher John Austin and his student John Searle has also been very influential in the study of dramatic discourse. The crossover of speech-act theory into the realm of drama is natural rather than incidental or exceptional. Keir Elam (1988) looks at the etymology of the words "drama" and "pragmatics", which both derive from the Greek verbs meaning "to do" and asks, rhetorically of course, "What more natural object for the science of doing than the art of doing?" And the theory of speech acts is, in Elam's words, "the true Prince of Pragma".

As anyone who knows anything about Aristotle's *Poetics* would readily point out, the connection between drama and action was woven into the fabric of drama criticism almost from the very beginning. In fact, what critics like Elam are interested in is not so much to establish the connection but to take the connection apart so as to examine the mechanisms inside. While speech act theory offers a powerful tool for such an examination, dramatic dialogue has been recognized as the building blocks of the connection. In his earlier work, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (1980), Elam puts dialogic exchange at the heart of dramatic action – it does not merely refer to dramatic action, "but directly constitutes it" (157). Consequently, speech-act theory is central to Elam's approach to dramatic discourse, as is reflected in the following quotation:

> Dramatic discourse is a network of complementary and conflicting illocutions and perlocutions: in a word, linguistic interaction, not so much descriptive as performative. Whatever its stylistic, poetic and general "aesthetic" functions, the dialogue is in the first place a mode of praxis which sets in opposition the different personal, social and ethical forces of the dramatic world.
>
> (159)

Examples of how speech-act theory can shed light on the workings of dramatic dialogue

can be found in Elam's book. A more detailed analysis appears in Stanley Fish (1980). In a chapter entitled "How To Do Things With Austin And Searle", Fish presented a speech-act reading of Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*, which, Fish said, might have been written to illustrate Austin and Searle's theory. Fish's analysis is almost watertight in terms of the fit between theory, text and analysis, but instead of making a claim for the wider applicability of speech-act theory for the analysis of literary texts, Fish warns against the abuse of such a practice. In his opinion, his analysis succeeds simply because *Coriolanus* is "a speech-act play", but he also cautions that speech-act theory should not be used as "an all purpose interpretative key". Fish's warning, it seems to me, was aimed at the claims of objectivity made by many practitioners of linguistic stylistics then. Objectivity built on rules akin to those found in natural science in the analysis of literary text is an illusion and has been treated as such by more recent works in the field (see Carter & Simpson 1989, Simpson 1997, Short, Freeman, van Peer & Simpson 1998).

Among the proponents of speech act, Grice, with his co-operative principle and theory of implicature, has attracted considerable attention from stylisticians interested in the study of dramatic dialogue. His principle and related maxims prove to be an effective tool for the analyst, especially in the study of the theatre of the absurd, since, more than other forms of theatre, cooperation is upstaged by discord in the theatre of the absurd. For example, Guatam (1987) uses conversational maxims to examine the constantly shifting interpersonal relations in Pinter's *The Caretaker*. Bollobas (1981) discusses irony in terms of how the speaker violates the Gricean co-operative principle in general and the maxim of quality in particular, and uses this approach to analyze the uncooperative behaviour in Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*. Rather than using Grice and speech-act theories as a tool of analysis, Cooper (1987) analyses Pinter's *Betrayal* to attack the central notion of speech-act theory – shared knowledge. It is suggested that shared knowledge/belief is not necessarily an essential condition of communication. Instead, participants in conversation are "constantly adjusting their intentions and interpretations based on what they think they know or what they want to know", and "often who knows what is precisely what is at issue in conversations" (102). In a more recent article, Cooper (1998) analyzes Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* in order to demonstrate how linguistic inferences, accounted for by Grice's model, interacts with inferences based on knowledge of conventions of a particular genre and culture to produce differing interpretations.

1.2.3 Discourse analysis and dramatic dialogue

Under the umbrella term "discourse analysis", a wide range of theories and methodologies are now at the disposal of the analyst interested in dramatic dialogue as discourse. Since this approach is the one adopted for the present study, I intend to give it a more detailed treatment in the next section. Here I mention only in general terms some of the most important contributions to this field of enquiry.

An early attempt was made by Deirdre Burton in her book-length study of dramatic dialogue, *Dialogue and Discourse* (1980), which, as its subtitle indicated, tried to bridge the analysis of modern drama dialogue and naturally occurring conversation. After testing the theories of writers like Austin, Searle, Grice and Sacks and Schegloff, Burton settled for the model developed in the analysis of classroom interaction done by Sinclair and Coulthard in 1975 as the basis for her framework[1]. Another example is Vilmala Herman's (1995) study of dramatic dialogue, which came under such headings as the ethnography of speaking, ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, turn sequencing, pragmatics and gender and language. When Mick Short introduced his "stylistician's tool-kit" to his readers in 1996, he devoted a considerable portion of his book to drama, and investigated, among other things, the areas of speech acts, turn-taking, politeness, assumptions, presuppositions and the inferring of meaning.

In 1998, a number of essays devoted to the analysis of dramatic dialogue at the level of spoken discourse appeared in *Exploring the Language of Drama: from Text to Context*, edited by Culpeper, Short and Verdonk. The conviction shared by these writers is that drama text ought to be studied as spoken discourse in the context of spoken interaction, and linguistic frameworks can be employed in the analysis of dramatic dialogue.

1.3 The study of dramatic dialogue as spoken discourse

Depending on aim and focus, the study of dramatic dialogue as spoken interaction can take two directions. One is to use drama text as data to test, refine or extend certain linguistic principles or descriptive models; the other is to apply theories or analytic systems developed in linguistic studies to the analysis of dramatic dialogue for a better understanding of the art of drama. The two directions need not necessarily be mutually exclusive. For when drama text is used as linguistic data, the outcome of the analysis may also be relevant to a better understanding of the play itself and, similarly, application may result in modification of the

linguistic theories and models being applied. Taking this into consideration, the division between "language through drama" and "drama through language" is only relative. As far as this study is concerned, the focus is on "drama through language".

1.3.1 Language through drama

As far as I know, Burton's *Dialogue and Discourse* (1980) is the earliest book-length study of dramatic dialogue as spoken discourse. As has been mentioned in the last section, for a more linguistically informed means of analysis, the author turns to Sinclair and Coulthard's framework originally developed for the analysis of classroom interaction. This framework is described as the "most fully articulated, explicit and systematic descriptive framework for spoken discourse that is available" (95). The author also finds it necessary to modify the original model in order to account for as much of the available data as possible. The revised model is then applied to Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter*. It is suggested that the analysis can be of relevance to both the discourse analyst and the stylistician. For the discourse analyst, keeping in mind the fact that drama scripts are markedly tidied-up versions of talk, they can still be treated as if they were a transcript of naturally occurring talk and analyzed for linguistic purposes. For the stylistician, on the other hand, the descriptive framework taken from linguistics can provide a retrievable and replicable means of analysis which can enable the analyst to discuss talk in drama more efficiently and clearly in comparative terms.

An important aspect of spoken discourse is the strategies employed by speakers in their interaction to maintain relations or manage conflicts. It is suggested by Lakoff and Tannen (1984) that artificial dialogues found in drama and fiction may represent "an internalised model or schema for the production of conversation – a competence model that speakers have access to" (323). The authors conclude from their analysis of Ingmar Bergman's *Scenes from a Marriage* that pragmatic competence, i.e. speakers' abstract knowledge of what is expected of them in a discourse, can be examined through artificially constructed texts. Furthermore, pragmatic structures entail a multi-leveled analysis and the participants' conversational strategies can lead to an understanding of matchings and conflicts observable in both the structure of a single conversation and the pattern of an entire relationship. In Tannen (1990), literary dialogue is regarded as a symbolic representation of human communication and Pinter's *Betrayal* is used as data to illustrate the place of silence in conflict management.

The linguistic analysis of drama can also lead to the questioning of existing theory or models. Brown and Gilman (1989), for instance, investigate Brown and Levinson's politeness

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