

Towards Developing Speech-Act Theory

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Abstract:

Speech act theory is one of the useful and effective tools in interpreting the literary discourse especially fictional discourse. The fact of the matter is that a novelist while writing his or her novel tends to use language suitable to the characters moving in the socio-cultural milieu. Therefore, studying the utterances of the characters using the principles of pragmatics in general and the speech act theory in particular is a novel way of discovering a new meaning and eventually arriving at an authentic interpretation. The present research paper is aimed at studying the selected modern Indian English novels taking into consideration the typology of speech acts as advocated by J. R. Searle. Modern Indian English novels are replete with conversations, which need to be studied from the point of view of certain principles. The Indian Novel in English offers the reader insight into the social, economic and cultural aspects including the interpersonal relationship between the interlocutors.

Key Words: Speech act theory, the socio-cultural milieu, the utterances, the principles of pragmatics, the linguistic expressions, indirect speech acts

Modern writers like Arundhati Roy, Rohinton Mistry, Chetan Bhagat, Kiran Desai and Aravind Adiga have carved their niche on the literary map of Modern Indian writing in English. These are the novelists of the third generation of the writers writing in Indian English giving a new dimension to the existing body of literature in Indian writing in English. The language used by these writers is unique and reflects the elements of modernity and the process of globalization.

Speech act theory deals with almost all the aspects of linguistic communication. When the speaker conveys something, he or she always intends to have an effect on the listeners, so that the listener can recognize the speaker's intention behind the use of the linguistic expressions. People use numerous speech acts in their day-to-day life. From morning up to night we make various attempts to interpret what people are trying to say and what kind of speech act they are performing. In the process of communication, people prefer to use indirect speech acts as to maintain the politeness strategy. By saving 'the face', the image that one has in public, they try to make a favorable impression on their listeners. Similarly, in a novel the author tries to make clear his/her intentions through the utterances uttered by the characters. The best way to interpret and comprehend a novel is to treat the utterances as speech acts. The novels of the modern writers have been selected on the basis of the merit they hold as far as the conversations of the characters are concerned.

The God of Small Things (1997) by Arundhati Roy tells the story of the communist state of Kerala and the forbidden love between two castes, which changes the lives of everyone. *The God of Small Things* is Arundhati Roy's first novel, winner of the Booker Prize in 1997. It is a stunningly lyrical love story that takes place in the communist state of Kerala, India and told through the eyes of "two-egg twins," Esthappen and Rahel. Their recently divorced mother, Ammu, takes her children home to the village of Ayemenem in Kerala where her family does not

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welcome her warmly. Estha and Rahel learn quickly that "things can change in a day" and that "anything can happen to anyone."

Rohinton Mistry's *Family Matters* (2002) depicts a family being torn apart by lies, love, and its unresolved demons of the past. Nariman Vakeel is an aging patriarch who's advancing Parkinson's disease and its related complications threaten to destroy his large Parsi family. When Nariman breaks his ankle and becomes bedridden, his two stepchildren turn his care over to their half-sister, Roxanne, who lives in a two-room flat with her husband and two sons. What follows is each character's reaction to this situation, from Roxanne's husband's struggle to provide for his family without neglecting his conscience to their sons' coming of age in an era of uncertainty. Expertly interspersed between these dilemmas are Nariman's tortured remembrances of a forbidden love and its inescapable consequences.

Chetan Bhagat's novel *Five Point Someone-What Not to do at IIT*, (2004) deals with the three friends who were below average guys among the cream of knowledge. The novel is set against the backdrop of the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, during the period 1991 and 1995. It is about the adventures of three mechanical engineering students (and friends), Hari Kumar (the narrator), Ryan Oberoi, and Alok Gupta, who fail to cope with the grading system of the IIT. The three hostelmates - Alok, Hari and Ryan get off to a bad start in IIT - they screw up the first class quiz. Moreover, while they try to make amends, things only get worse. It takes them a while to realize that if one tries to screw with the IIT system, it comes back to double screw one. Before they know it, they are at the lowest echelons of IIT society. They have a five-point-something GPA out of ten, ranking near the end of their class.

An original and modern aspect of Desai's style in the novel *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006) is the almost poet-like use she makes of different print forms on the page. She uses italics for foreign words as if to emphasize their exoticness and untranslatability and capitals for emphasis when someone is angry, expressing surprise or disbelief (a natural development of the netiquette that to write in capitals is like shouting). She also exploits our modern mania for lists. In an age where our media is filled with top ten and top one hundreds-most voted-for politician, best-dressed woman, richest man etc. Desai produces her own array of matter of fact but quite unnerving lists.

Like many important works of literature, the novel can be read on several levels-as an inventive, fast-moving, delicious tale full of rich descriptions and marvelous comic cartoon-like personalities, but also as a deeper study of the pathos of familial misunderstanding, the ridiculousness of hero-worship, the unpredictability of commercialism and the ineptness of officialdom.

The White Tiger (2008) by Aravind Adiga is a quick-reading thriller, written in the unique voice of its central character. It is written as a first-person narration by one Balram Halwai, a self-described entrepreneur in Bangalore, about how he came to be successful. He grew up in a small coal mining village in Bihar, born to a poor rickshaw-puller, and named only "Munna," "a boy,"

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until his teacher named him "Balram" and gave him a birth date so that he could vote for the landlord. Balram has a sarcastic, cynical, and crude voice, whose wit keeps the pages turning. He refers to the village only as The Darkness as India is two countries in one, an India of Light, and an India of Darkness. Every place on the map of India near the ocean is well-off. But the river brings darkness to India-the black river. We learn first-hand of the terrible conditions in which Balram's family and clan lived in the Darkness, always under the thumbs of powerful landlords. Balram's father died of tuberculosis in a government hospital that was dysfunctional because of endemic corruption. He has had very little schooling. This is a classic tale, retold to the point of cliché, but through Balram's clever voice comes his worldview.

Conclusion: In this paper, an attempt has been made to provide a suitable background for the present study. In the beginning of the paper, the emergence of the study has been discussed appropriately along with the multifaceted tasks of the utterances in the selected novels and the contextual significance under the title of a statement of the problem. Moreover, while discussing the significance of the study, it has also been explained how these multifaceted utterances play a vital role in the interface of the interpersonal relations of the characters and their social relevance. Furthermore, in this paper, some of the major concerns of this study such as the scope and limitations, Arundhati Roy, Rohinton Mistry, Chetan Bhagat, Kiran Desai and Aravind Adiga, as novelists, methodology and techniques, a model for analysis, etc. have been briefly discussed to pave the foundation for the analysis of the selected utterances in the selected novels of the selected novelists.

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