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ROHINTON MISTRY'S *ONE SUNDAY* – DELL HYMES' 'SPEAKING' ANALYSIS

P. SUBRAHMANYAM¹, Dr.C. R. S. SARMA²

¹Research Scholar,²Professor

Dept. of Linguistics, Andhra University, Visakhapatnam

email:¹ prayaga@gitam.edu,²crssarma2002@yahoo.co.in



P. SUBRAHMANYAM



Dr.C. R. S. SARMA

ABSTRACT

Time-tested literary analysis focuses on characterization, theme, plot, and imagery, but there is little scope for the study of language as part of the analysis. Without an adequate analysis of the type of language used, a complete interpretation of the characters of the literary work and their behavioral patterns may not be possible.

Dell Hymes, as part of his ethnographic analysis, proposes an analytical model to study the conversational interactions of the participants. In the present research paper it has been argued that this framework of Hymes can successfully be used to analyze who the participants are, how they are related, what kind of language they use, and why they use it that way. We hope this will spur further intensive study in this direction to yield more number of studies in this area.

Key Words: Literary analysis – interpretation – Dell Hymes – ethnography – conversation.

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Granting that literature, on a realistic plane, is a replica of the world, and a short story is the characterization of real life events between real life characters in a manner that is as realistic as possible, sociolinguistics certainly provides useful tools and insights in the form of narrative analysis, conversational analysis, conversational maxims and so on.

As Fennell and Bennett rightly point out, "Sociolinguistics in general, not just conversational analysis, has much to offer to literary studies...". They further go on to say that 'approaching the social systems which are set up in literary works through the medium of linguistic analysis, rather than looking at the social systems alone, is often a much more concrete and revealing approach'.

A number of scholars including Dell Hymes¹ (1962), Sherzer² (1983), and Saville-Troike³ (2003) worked in the framework of ethnography of communication. Though the studies made by all ethnographers generally focus on the spoken language in a community, it is possible to extend the framework to the analysis of short stories in view of the fact that many short stories are not merely narratives from a third person point of view but involve dialogues between characters. Often the speech patterns, expressions, motivations and the logical

deductions they make are in conformity with the particular society they belong to. In particular the SPEAKING Model evolved by Dell Hymes (1974) is found to be highly adaptable to the analysis of short stories.

He uses SPEAKING as an acronym for the components that he considers to be relevant in understanding a speech event. A brief description of these components is given below

1. Setting and Scene (S)

Setting refers to physical circumstances, that is, the actual place. Scene refers to the abstract psychological setting. Within a particular setting the interpretation of a scene may change, if the level of formality and the occasion change. For example, the conference hall of a company may be used to hold a board meeting or to host a tea party. In each case while the setting remains the same, the scene changes with the occasion.

2. Participants (P)

Any speech event, or for that matter, any communicative event includes interlocutors of various types like speaker-listener, addresser-addressee or sender-receiver. These two roles may be reversible or irreversible. Further, the hearers may be one or many as in the case of a public lecture, or the hearer/hearers may not even be in front of each other, as in the case of a telephone conversation. The sender and the receiver may not see each other. But underlying all these communicative events, there is a mutual expectation and awareness on the part of the roles about the presence or existence of the other role. For instance, when a devotee prays to God, he expects that there is God and obviously the unseen God is the other participant. Similarly, when a poet writes a poem, he does not know who the readers are, but he expects them to be present somewhere. When someone with authority rebukes another person who is in a subordinate position, there will be no change of roles.

3. Ends (E)

Every communicative event takes place with certain objectives or outcomes or even personal goals of the participants. Sometimes these personal goals may be contributory to each other or they may be in conflict with each other. For instance, in a court room, the goals of the prosecution lawyer and those of the defense lawyer are in conflict with each other. But in spite of these personal goals, there may be a common social end for all the participants, namely, to see that justice is done. Similarly, in a lecture, the speaker's personal goal and the audience's personal goal may be different but the common social end is to see that transfer of knowledge takes place.

4. Act Sequence (A)

This refers to the actual form and content of what is said. In other words, in a communicative event, it is important to know the exact words that are used and whether they are appropriate to the topic and occasion. A particular topic or a particular occasion may require a particular act sequence, that is, certain words in a certain way. For instance, in a religious discourse it is highly inappropriate to use slang. Similarly, while giving his verdict, a judge is not expected to change the particular types of words that are appropriate in that situation and resort to colloquial expressions.

5. Key (K)

In a speech event the tone or the manner in which something is said often conveys more than the actual meanings of the words. This is the Key. The listeners often pay more attention to the tone or the intonation of the speaker rather than only to the meaning of the words. When the actual words used and the tone in which they are used are not compatible with each other, the listeners are likely to pay more attention to the tone, that is, the Key, rather than to the actual meaning of the words. Thus the key, if incompatible with the words uttered, reveals the intentions of the speaker inadvertently.

6. Instrumentalities (I)

This refers to the channel of the communication, that is, whether it is oral or written or telegraphic mode. It also refers to the varieties used such as dialect, register, standard variety and so on. For instance, a lawyer during his arguments in a court uses a highly formal, written legal variety, even though he uses it in his normal speech. Any other style or variety would be inappropriate here. Similarly, a cricket commentator uses a

colloquial variety of English, which is full of elliptical sentences and sometimes even slang. A formal variety of spoken English is not an appropriate instrumentality here. People may switch from one instrumentality to another during the same verbal exchange depending on the topic and other social variables.

7. Norms of Interaction and Interpretation (N)

This refers to the specific behavioral norms and practices that each community may have. These specific norms are not normally shared by the other communities. They range from the body language such as posture, gaze return, shaking hands to the way we behave or speak with strangers. Sometimes these behavioral norms may be very subtle but if such practices are flouted by strangers, it attracts attention. These norms reflect in individual behavior as well as social behavior. These norms include even the conversational distance, hugging in public and traditional ways of greetings. For instance, it is perfectly normal in western countries for a wife and husband to hug each other in public, which is not an acceptable norm in India. The conversational distance between two speakers varies from culture to culture, as, for instance, between Indians and Americans.

8. Genre (G)

This term refers to clearly demarcated types of utterance such as whether it is a poem, or a proverb, or a joke, or a riddle, or a prayer, or a sermon and so on. Each genre may be appropriate and relevant in certain situations but not in others. For example, it is highly irrelevant to tell a joke during the course of a prayer meeting. Similarly, if someone sermonizes during a chat, people immediately ask him to stop it. Similarly, in the middle of a friendly conversation, no one says a prayer.

Even though Hymes is speaking of talk in his SPEAKING formula, all these components are applicable to any creative piece of work, where two characters are involved in a conversation.

Summary of *One Sunday*⁴

The story *One Sunday* is set in Firozsha Baag with all Parsi characters, with the exception of the servant Francis. The main character is Najamai, a 55-year-old widow living alone in her flat. She usually leaves the keys of her flat with her neighbors Tehmina and the Boyces. While both the neighbors have the advantage of using her fridge, Najamai makes this arrangement more as a precaution against thieves rather than as an intention to help them. Tehmina thinks that the Boyces are taking undue advantage of Najamai's courteous offer to use her fridge, while she herself does the same. The Boyces think that they are paying Najamai back by lending her the newspaper and receiving Najamai's delivery of milk and bread every morning.

Francis is an orphan who runs errands for all the people in the apartment complex and lives off the leftovers of the apartment residents. While everyone needs his help, nobody is sympathetic to him. During night he takes shelter under the awning of a furniture store.

The two sons of Mrs Boyce, Kersi and Percy, were friendly to Francis which was anathema to Mrs Boyce for it was "not proper for a Parsi boy to consort in this way with a man who was really no better than a homeless beggar, who would starve were it not for their thoughtfulness in providing him with odd jobs".

In the evening Tehmina goes to Najamai's flat to get some ice for her scotch and finds it difficult to open the lock because of her poor eye sight. She finds Francis in the hallway and even though she realizes that she needs his help to open the lock, she abuses him and orders him to open the door. Francis had not eaten anything for two days but no one, even for the sake of courtesy, had a kind word to him. Late in night, Najamai returns to her flat and when she enters her flat, she hears some sounds and concludes that there is a thief and cries for help. Immediately Kersi and his mother rush to her help and guess that it must be Francis. Kersi and Percy set out to find Francis and to apprehend him. Finally they find him in a small street and the crowd that gathers around them thrashes Francis without even bothering to know what he has stolen. Probably Mistry wants to highlight the mindless mob psychology where people want to show their bravery on a hapless victim. Kersi and Percy manage to bring Francis to the apartment complex where everyone gathers and abuses him and blames him for being ungrateful. Taking advantage of the situation, everyone takes a chance to slap him and hit him. A Muslim servant kicks Francis powerfully in the ribs and Francis 'yelps like a dog and keels over'.

What Francis has stolen from Najamai's flat was only a paltry sum as he had not eaten for two days by then. The irony of the situation is that everyone in the apartment complex sought his services as a matter of right but nobody showed any concern even to his basic needs. This shows the utter apathy and selfish attitude of people in general and the unequal relation between Parsis and non-Parsis. Finally, however, Kersi regrets his own ruthless behavior towards Francis and breaks his cricket bat with which he attacked Francis.

Analysis of Conversational Structure

a. Setting and Scene

The story *One Sunday* takes place in Firozsha Baag with Najamai's flat as its setting. The setting remains unchanged but after the departure of Najamai, various characters keep appearing in the same setting and thus alter the scene. Later a theft takes place and the situation turns grave. The culprit is chased, beaten and brought back to the scene of crime. Here the setting remains the same but the scene briefly gets transformed into a veritable court scene where everyone acts like a prosecution lawyer with no one to defend him. The judgement is passed and the culprit is handed over to the police.

b. Participants

The participants in the story are Najamai, the flat owner, Tehmina and the Boyces, her neighbors, Kersi and Percy, the sons of Boyces, and Francis, the orphan boy. Francis is always at the receiving end – right from leftovers to eat to the final judgement. The relation between Francis and all the others is that of a servant and master, and hence Francis is always addressed scornfully. We may say it is the relation of power that finds expression here whereas between the residents of the apartment, it is the relation of solidarity that is seen. Francis who is in an inferior position is continuously exploited and abused. Towards the end, every character assumes the role of a judge while Francis is in the role of the accused with no defense.

c. Ends

Ends indicate some conventional outcomes as well as individual goals. When Najamai allows Tehmina and the Boyces to use her fridge, her individual goal is to protect her flat from possible theft, while the goal of Tehmina and the Boyces is to make liberal use of the fridge. Later, when Tehmina sees Francis at Najamai's flat, the following conversation takes place

"Stop staring, you idiot," started Tehmina "and check if this door is properly locked."

"Yes, bai. But when will Najamai return? She said she would give me some work today"

"Never. Could not be for today. She won't be back till very late. You must have made a mistake"

In this conversation, Tehmina's goal is to use Francis' services in locking the door, whereas the goal of Francis is to earn something for that day. Tehmina, in dismissing him mercilessly, wants to exercise her authority over him.

Later, in the evening, Tehmina arrives at Najamai's flat for ice. There she spies Francis loitering in the hall way. As usual, Tehmina abuses him because she is afraid that he could do some harm to her. The goal of Francis is, all through, to see if he could get some work and some food to eat. Tehmina asks him to help her lock the door and says, "I will tell Najamai that you'll be back tomorrow for her work." Clearly her purpose is to seek his help in locking the door because of her poor eye sight and she has no intention to help him.

When Kersi and Percy start out in search of Francis, the onlookers heckle

"Parsi bawaji! Cricket at night? Parsi bawaji! What will you hit, boundary or sixer?"

Here these words do not have a literal meaning. Rather they are intended to tease them. Kersi and Percy do not respond quite wisely as they fear that it would have provoked a fight. The goal of the onlookers in saying these words is to express their antagonism towards the Parsis, whereas the ends that Kersi and Percy had in mind is to act prudently.

Finally, when Francis was brought before Najamai, the neighbors and other servants hit him and say, "You *budmaash!* You have no shame. Eating her food, earning from her, then stealing from her, you rascal?" The ends of the neighbors are clear here- to assume a high moral stance against a poor orphan boy.

d. Act Sequence

Act Sequence includes certain linguistic forms and certain ways of speaking in preference to certain others. As the story opens, when Tehmina notices Francis at Najamai's flat, her first words are "You idiot..." This is typical of Tehmina and the others when addressing Francis. In return, Francis addresses her, 'yes *bai* (respectful term of address)'. Throughout the conversation Francis' words are pleading and entreating, while Tehmina's words are curt, blunt and uses elliptical sentences and commands. The uneven relationship between Francis and others is brought out very well throughout the story. In their second meeting also Tehmina's words sound very curt and dismissive. She addresses him 'Rascal' and asks him to go away. Francis only responds meekly "I came to see if Najamai had arrived".

Later, in the dark lanes Kersi and Percy are addressed by the onlookers '*Parsi bawaji*!(a derogatory term referring to Parsis)'. Percy asks Kersi to ignore the '*ghatis*(another derogatory term for natives used by Parsis)'.
In the last scene, Najamai only says "Why Francis? Why," while the others say "You *budmaash!*....."

The author very skillfully manipulates the act sequences throughout the story to suit the situation and the characters.

e. Key

As suggested earlier, Key, which indicates the tone or manner in which a particular speaker says something, can be reconstructed from the verbal context and the situation.

Tehmina always addresses Francis 'idiot' and 'rascal'. From the verbal context and the situation, it can be surmised that Tehmina utters these words scornfully and not in a lighthearted manner.

Later in the evening, while Tehmina goes to Najamai's flat for ice to enjoy her scotch, Francis who has been starving for two days comes there to see if Najamai is back. At this, Francis becomes desperate, and he could not tolerate Tehmina's anger any longer, but in his subservient position he could not react. He says 'sullenly', "I came to see if Najamai had arrived". As he prepares to go back, Tehmina realizes that she needs Francis to lock the door and says peremptorily, "Come on Francis".

Similarly, when the people in the dark lanes address Kersi and Percy "*Parsi bawaji*" and ask them whether they are going to play cricket, they are using a mocking tone and when Percy tells his brother to ignore the '*ghatis*', he is using a disdainful tone.

f. Instrumentalities

Different instrumentalities are appropriate to different situations, but it is also possible to use different instrumentalities in a single verbal exchange. When Tehmina speaks, she always uses elliptical sentences like the following

"But no. You never listen"

The following are some of the instrumentalities that are noticed in the story.

i. Code Switching

As the characters are all Parsis living in Mumbai, it is appropriate to show code switching in the conversation of two characters. For instance, Tehmina senses that somebody is loitering in the hall way and calls out authoritatively "*kaun hai?* What do you want?".

ii. Indian Words

The author uses a number of Indian words (Hindi and Parsi) to justify the appropriacy of the situation and the language, i.e., instrumentalities. The characters use an informal spoken language with a great deal of code switching, lexical items from Hindi and Indian vocatives. Some Indian words employed in the story are given here under.
bai, maidaan, paadmaroo, pupeta-noo-goose, dhandarpaaty, madka, budmaash, chor, bawaji, ghati.

iii. Vocatives

'Bawaji' is a vocative word which is used by non Parsi Indians to address or to refer to Parsis in a contemptuous manner.

g. Norms of Interaction and Interpretation

Norms of interaction and interpretation sometimes define the normative behavior of specific social groups and their interaction with other social groups. When Kersi and Percy chase Francis with their cricket bats in hands, the interaction they had with the natives in the dark lanes indicates the incompatibility in the norms of interaction of these two social groups. Parsis consider themselves higher than the natives and the natives envy them. Kersi and Percy consider it beneath their dignity to react and respond to the mocking queries of the natives. Between Tehmina and Francis too, we notice different norms of interaction and interpretation. Tehmina's individual norm is to speak and act superciliously, while Francis is too docile to react sharply. Again when Tehmina ascribes motives to Boyces that they behave as if 'they have a share in the ownership of the fridge', it is her interpretation of her neighbors.

In the present analysis an attempt has been made to apply Dell Hymes' SPEAKING model to the interpretation and critical analysis of Mistry's short story *One Sunday*. We believe that such application of sociolinguistic tools will not only yield better insights but will also pave way for further interdisciplinary research work which would ultimately enable us to arrive at a comprehensive analysis of a literary work.

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