

Linguistic Analysis of William Shakespeare's Plays

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the linguistic characteristics of dramatic texts through the plays of William Shakespeare. The study explores the functional role of language in drama, emphasizing the relationship between dramatic speech, characterization, stage performance, and audience perception. Particular attention is paid to W. Shakespeare's innovative use of dialogue, monologue, rhetoric, polysemy, and expressive linguistic devices. The research highlights how speech acts in W. Shakespeare's dramas not only convey information but also shape dramatic action, reveal psychological depth, and influence the development of events. The article further analyzes lexical, semantic, morphological, and stylistic features of Shakespearean language, demonstrating its richness, flexibility, and enduring influence on dramatic discourse. The findings confirm that W. Shakespeare's dramatic language represents a unique synthesis of literary artistry and theatrical functionality, making his works an important source for linguistic and literary studies.

Keywords: dramatic language, dialogue, speech act, rhetoric, polysemy, theatrical discourse.

INTRODUCTION

Drama is a literary genre whose language is inseparable from action and performance. Unlike novels or lyric poetry, dramatic texts do not rely on narration; instead, characters reveal themselves and the unfolding events

through speech.. This article examines the language of dramatic texts through W. Shakespeare's works, emphasizing the functional and expressive roles of language in drama.

There we will speak of literary and artistic speech, actor's linguistic abilities in transmission of dramatic text and the impact of all these on the development of people's speech culture. At present the theatre and the cinema are among the more active branches promoting the speech culture.

There is usually a complicated relationship between the text of the cinema or theatre and the speech of the actor. The authors who write the text usually base their dialogues of literary language, at the same time they bring rich expressions and words into the artistic and dramatic text. On the screen this text is completed and given back to the people again in the form of oral speech. Thus, the language and speech, though interrelated, occur as two different phenomena that have always attracted scientist's attention. Through the differentiation of these phenomena new linguistic methods appear and new aspects are added to old ones.

The history of the world's theatre has rich facts relating to the preservation of creative relationship between the playwright and the actor.

W. Shakespeare's drama acquired its power from the imitation of reality, but from the poetic expression of reality. His people can express their feelings and thoughts poetically. Their personalities are revealed through their ideas about life, W. Shakespeare's art of speech is achieved

linguistic selection of poetical means to express the feelings of his characters.

Drama is a literary genre whose language is inseparable from action and performance. Unlike novels or lyric poetry, dramatic texts do not rely on narration, instead, characters reveal themselves and the unfolding events through speech.

Scholars have emphasized that dramatic discourse is fundamentally performative and action-oriented, where language functions as a means of shaping events rather than merely describing them (Austin, 1962; Pfister, 1988).

William Shakespeare occupies a central position in the history of drama precisely because of his innovative and flexible use of language. His plays demonstrate how dramatic dialogue can simultaneously serve aesthetic, psychological and structural purposes. (Crystal & Crystal, 2002). Through carefully constructed speech, Shakespeare creates multidimensional characters whose identities are revealed through their linguistic choices and interaction with others (Culpeper, 2001).

Through the poetic role of the word is of great significance in W.Shakespeare's works, the influence of his drama to the audience is not only due to the poetic word. The plays of Shakespeare are full of actions. There are many scenes in every act, and taken as a whole, each play is an infinitive flow by the author's words. "Othello" can be taken as a good example, 12 stage remarks were used only in 40 places, 33 of them are related to scene performances, but the act is very rich itself.

Speech, Performance and Dramatic Action in William Shakespeare's Plays

In W. Shakespeare's plays spoken language determines the course of events. Commands promises and prophecies shape actions and consequences. Speech acts do not merely describe reality, they actively transform it (Austin, 1962). This is especially evident in tragedies, where words initiate irreversible actions.

Rhetoric also functions as a tool of power. Characters manipulate others through persuasive language, conceal intentions behind formal speech or assert dominance through verbal authority. The dramatic tension often arises from the gap between what is intended, emphasizing the performative power of language.

According to a commonly shared point of view, the success of the performance depends on the identity of actors and playwright's manner of thinking. However, this identity is not archived so easily. In some cases, there actor gets success through a continuous struggle against producers, theatrical theorists and philosophers who often see a contrast between the life truth and the theatre art. In modernist performances the real life was demined and the word was subordinated to motions that teased the actor. The actor is only satisfied with his speech when he feels that he speaks what he knows about. Thus, the success of the play simultaneously depends on the playwright.

W.Shakespeare not only wrote but also acted in the theatre like an actor and he kept a close contract with other actors. W.Shakespeare played the part of Horry at the performance of "Henry V at the Globe" theatre established in 1509. He studied the actors of this theatre, the meanings of gestures, intonations and pauses.

Peter Brook now is remembered as a producer who brought unexpected novelty to the world theatre and revived the old European and Oriental theatrical tradition. (McNulty, 2022).

B. Shaw (1900) carried an active work with the actors and theatres of the last two decades of the 19th century. When his plays were staged, he came actually the producer of the performance.

Analogical cases took place in the theatrical history of Azerbaijan. Azeri playwright J. Jabbarli, for instance, had a close contact with the creative company that performed his plays.

German theorist Julius Bab in relation to the contact between the dramatist and the actor

wrote as follows: "All peoples and I - the poet and the actor - were initially united in one person. Later there appeared an artificial labour division and consequently the poet and the actor acquired separate functions: the function earlier fulfilled by one person now is carried out by two persons who do only a part of the action but more exactly and more basedly... Shakespeare and Molyer simultaneously acted as an actor and a poet... The actor and the poet do not usually address separate understandings and thinkings but the identical thinking and society. But in their appeal to the society each of them fulfills their own function. The material used by them differs as well: the material used by the playwright is literary one, while that of the actor is his own body, that is he himself. The playwright creates various characters, one of which becomes animated by the actor. Though the actor is subordinated to the idea and thoughts of the playwright he is not his servant as he is autonomous. The playwright only supplies the actor with material and a string of words while the actor uses it in sewing either a bright or a pale scenery pattern" (Elisabeth, 2002).

The actor can enrich a personage only in a full alliance with the author. He can psychologically enlarge or make more concise any material only keeping the authors idea.

The history of the world theatre has rich facts relating to the preservation of creative relations between the playwright and the actor. However, the playwright's characters are not usually adjusted to the actors in terms of mentality. Playwrights only have experienced in adjusting their characters to the appearance of actors. However, in some cases we also find characters written by the playwright for a concrete actor. It often depends on the genre limitation of the actor and the specify of his appearance, though this case is not universally adopted.

Language Control and Expressive Means in Shakespearean Drama

W.Shakespeare's drama acquired its power not from the imitation of reality, but from the poetic expression of reality. The playwright's artistic mastery is particularly evident in his extensive use of figurative language, semantic ambiguity and rhetorical devices (McDonald, 2001). His characters express emotions and thoughts poetically, while their personalities are revealed through language and worldview.

Despite the sufficient role of poetic word W.Shakespeare's drama also contains a number of live motions. However, these motions in his drama are not described by the authors word. As a sample we can make an allusion to his "Othello". In the first act of the drama the limited author remarks were grouped in the following proportion: (Shakespeare, 2006).

Scene 1. Venice. A street and the like – in 3 positions.

1. Enter/ enter below/ re-enter – in 10 positions.

2. Appears above at a window – in 1 position.

3. Exit/ exit above at a window – in 5 positions.

4. Exeunt – in 5 positions.

They draw — in 1 position.

Sitting at a table — in 1 position.

Within — in 1 position.

To Brabantio/To Othello — in 3 positions.

That is all. There is no more author's remark in the first act of "Othello".

In the third act where events reach the culmination point:

Scene — in 4 positions.

Enter/Re-enter — in 12 positions.

Music — in 1 position.

Exuent — in 7 positions.

Exit — in 8 positions.

Going — in 1 position.

Returning — in 1 position.

He takes her handkerchief from him and she drops it — in 1 position.

Snatching — in 1 position.

Kneels — in 2 positions.

Aside — in 1 position.

Giving her Desdemona's handkerchief — in 1 position.

"Othello"'s third act and the most strained act contains in all 12 remarks used in 40 positions, out of which only 33 are connected with stage motion.

The culminative third act of the comedy *"As you like it"* rich with motions has even less remarks, that is 7: (Shakespeare, 2003).

Scene — in 1 position.

Enter — in 12 positions.

Eluent — in 7 positions.

Exit — in 3 positions.

Aside — in 4 positions.

Coming forward — in 1 position.

Advancing — in 1 position.

In all 29 times!

Thus, W.Shakespeare's text is controlled through the characters' speech, but not remarks.

Lexical, Semantic and Grammatical Features of William Shakespeare's Language

W. Shakespeare often uses words in two or more meanings, creating layers of interpretation and encouraging the audience to consider alternative readings of the same utterance. Such semantic flexibility constitutes one of the most distinctive features of Shakespearean language and contributes significantly to its artistic richness (McDonald, 2001; Crystal & Crystal, 2002).

For instance, while dying, King John utters the expression, *"I beg cold comfort"* (Shakespeare, 2002, *King John*, Act V, Scene VII). This sentence can be interpreted in two different ways. According to the first interpretation, the king is lamenting the indifferent and inadequate care he receives and is implicitly wishing for greater sympathy and comfort. The second interpretation suggests a desire for physical coldness, since his body is burning from the effects of poison. Thus, the phrase simultaneously conveys both emotional dissatisfaction and a literal longing for relief from his physical suffering.

Meaning variation is often observed in W.Shakespeare's poetry where words can acquire different meanings. For instance, the word *"modern"* used by Shakespeare in the meaning of *"simple"*, *"commonplace"*, now is used in the meaning of *"up-to-date"*. As a rule, the meaning of his words are guessed partially. The word *"question"* in the language of Shakespeare together with the meaning of *"asking somebody a question"*, also meant *"speaking"*, *"talking"*. The word *"habit"* in W.Shakespeare's speech was in three positions used in the meaning *"cloth"*, *"putting on"*, while in modern language it expresses *"accustom"*. Such examples in W.Shakespeare's speech are numerous.

In W.Shakespeare's works the word is able for everything. It can acquire a number of meanings and colors in various positions. For instance, in the comedy *"As You Like It"* the jester is told by Rosalinda the following:

You'll be whipt for taxation. (Shakespeare, 2003, *As You Like It*, Act I, Scene II).

In this sentence *"taxation"* means *"imposing taxes"*. This meaning is observed to give rise to an additional meaning with a negative colour – *"punishment"*. In the speech of W. Shakespeare *"taxation"* acquires the meaning of *"bitter satire"*, *"mockery"*, *"humiliation"*.

In some cases the repetition of the same word served expressing different meanings. In the sentence: *"But as all is mortal in nature so is all nature in love mortal in folly"*. (Shakespeare, 2003, *As You Like It*, Act II, Scene IV).

The word *"mortal"* has got the meanings – vain (1) and rather (2).

The sentence can be translated in this way: *"Everything in the world is vain, and those who love each other are rather foolish."*

However, if the word *"mortal"* in both cases is conceived in the meaning of *"vain"*, the sentence can acquire a completely different meaning:

"Everything in the world is vain, and the foolishness of those loving each other is vain, too."

It is no mere chance, but the method of the author, who purposely wants the word to be understood in different ways. Through this method Shakespeare tries to direct his readers attention to two possible variegated points prescribed for choice.

W.Shakespeare's characters are always concrete and close to the feelings of readers and spectators:

That the stretching of a span

Buckles in his sum of age. (Shakespeare, 2003, *As You Like It*, Act III, Scene II).

Morphology of nouns and adjectives in W.Shakespeare's works does not substantially differ from that of today. A slight difference is observed in the expression of the degrees of the adjective. The author sometimes uses the analytical and synthetical ways simultaneously that can serve the utmost expressiveness:

A walled town is more worthier than a village (Shakespeare, 2003, *As You Like It*, Act III, Scene III).

Difference is often observed in some verbal forms. For instance, he preserves the suffixes *-st* and *-est* in the second person singular: *thou speakest, thou hast, thou doest(dost), thou shouldst, thou wast, thou wert.*

Sometimes the use of the ending *-th* is observed in the third person singular: *he hath...*

In many cases the ending *-ed* in the weak verbs forms a separate syllable. It is observed in the rhythm of poems. The verb "to do" is often used in emotional meaning: *Now I do frown on thee or Didst thou hear these verses?* (Shakespeare, 2000, Act 3, Scene 1)

In interrogative and negative sentences auxiliary verb is often omitted: *Know you where you are, sir?* or *I beseech you, punish me not with your hard thoughts* (Shakespeare, 2002, *The Merchant of Venice*, Act I, Scene I).

In dramatic texts speech mainly finds its expression in the form of monologues and dialogues. The elements of dialogues are structurally presented as a unique of

artistical composition. The short text below is just an example for such a composition:

Pliny (chattily): Nice weather we're having these evenings.

Amanda (splutters): !!!

Magnus: There is rather a threatening cloud on the western horizon, Mr. Pliny. (To Proteus) Have you heard the news from America?

Proteus: I have, sir.

Magnus: Am I to be favored with the advice of my ministers on that subject?

Proteus: By your majesty's leave, we will take the question of the ultimatum first.

Magnus: Do you think the ultimatum will matter much when the capital of the British Commonwealth is shifted to Washington?

Nicobar: We'll see it shifted to Melbourne of Montreal of Johannesburg first (Shaw, 1929, *The Apple Cart*, Act I-II).

The dialogue is semantically determined not only through the meaning of words, gestures and facial expressions but also the "situation". Therefore it is partly associated with the "mode of life" or, at any rate, deals with its illusion.

Generally, while talking about dramatic language W.Shakespeare's texts can be chosen as an optimal factographic base.

The study of W.Shakespeare's plays demonstrates that the language of dramatic texts is inherently functional, performative, and dynamic. W.Shakespeare's linguistic choices shape character, structure, and drive dramatic action and create enduring artistic value, confirming the continuing relevance of his works for linguistic and literary research (Crystal & Crystal, 2002). His contribution to dramatic language continues to influence literary and linguistic studies, confirming the enduring relevance of Shakespearean drama.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of William Shakespeare's plays demonstrates that language occupies a central position in the structure and functioning of dramatic texts. W.Shakespeare's dramatic discourse is characterized by its expressive richness,

semantic complexity, and strong performative potential. Through carefully constructed dialogues, monologues, rhetorical devices, and speech acts, W.Shakespeare creates multidimensional characters and advances dramatic action in a manner that remains influential in contemporary literary and theatrical studies. The study reveals that speech in Shakespearean drama serves not only as a means of communication but also as a powerful instrument for shaping events, expressing psychological states, and establishing social and interpersonal relationships. The playwright's extensive use of polysemy, figurative language, lexical innovation, and stylistic variation contributes to the artistic depth and interpretative richness of his works. Moreover, the limited use of stage directions compared with the extensive reliance on character speech highlights the dominant role of language in organizing dramatic structure and conveying meaning. The research further confirms that W.Shakespeare's linguistic mastery lies in his ability to combine poetic expression with theatrical functionality. His dramatic language simultaneously fulfills aesthetic, communicative, and performative functions, ensuring the enduring relevance of his plays across different historical periods and cultural contexts. Consequently, W. Shakespeare's works continue to provide valuable material for linguistic, literary, and theatrical research, demonstrating the inseparable relationship between language, character, and dramatic action.

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