
RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Pragmatic Analysis of Flattering in Some Selected Literary Texts

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at conducting a pragmatic analysis of speech acts expressing flattering in some selected literary texts (Hamlet). Flattering is used to express encouragement, which is false positive evaluation. Flattering assumes the effect of the listener's feelings, actions and thoughts via the speech acts offlattering. Flattery is a social phenomenon that treads a fine line between acceptable and unacceptable social behavior and brings forward the strategic element of language use. Although flattery was studied in different areas but pragmatic literature has not addressed the phenomenon, despite its potential to inform the interpretive process participants engage in when evaluating politeness strategies in interactions. A pragmatic methodology was used to collect the data. The results of this study show how the characters judge an action to be flattery, what (verbal) acts count as flattery, and the functions of flattery in interactions.

KEYWORDS

Pragmatics, Flattery, Hamlet, Communicative Strategy, Literary Texts

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1. Introduction

Flattery, as a communicative strategy, plays a significant role in literature, offering insights into the complex dynamics of human interaction and manipulation. Flattery, defined as excessive praise or compliments, is a persuasive communication technique employed to influence others' perceptions and behaviors. In literary works, authors often employ flattery to depict characters who strategically use compliments to achieve specific goals, shape relationships, or advance their individual agendas.

By conducting a pragmatic analysis of flattery in these selected literary texts, we can deepen our understanding of how this communication strategy operates within the fictional world. This analysis offers insights into the complexities of human interaction, the power dynamics at play, and the moral implications of employing flattery as a persuasive tool. Ultimately, it contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the literary works and the broader discourse on human communication and manipulation.

2. Definition of Pragmatics

Pragmatics is defined as the study of actual utterances, the study of use rather than meaning (Lyons, 1977: 171). It is also defined as the study of that part of meaning that is not purely truth conditional or the study of performance rather than competence. Yule (2000, 3) introduced yet another definition of pragmatics; it is the study of the intended meaning of speech acts or the study of the speaker's meaning.

Pragmatics, according to Kadmon (2001: 1), is concerned with the usage of language and going beyond its literal meaning. (Peccei, 1999: 2) claims that pragmatics concentrates on those aspects of implication that cannot be predicted solely by etymological learning and takes into account knowledge about the physical and social world. Pragmatics, according to Chomsky, is "knowledge of how dialect is related to the situation in which it is used." There are several linguistic aspects in everyday life, such as giving

discourse, declaring, talking, telling, and so on. A discourse is a formal speech given to a group of people to communicate their thoughts. (Oxford Dictionary, 1995: 1142).

Yule (1996: 3) defined pragmatics as the study of meaning as conveyed by a speaker (or author) and interpreted by a listener or reader. The focus of pragmatics will be on what people intend by their words and expressions rather than how they are formed. It entails comprehending what people mean in a given situation and how the situation influences what is said. The pragmatics approach also looks into how audience members can deduce meaning from what is said in order to arrive at a translation of the speaker's intended significance. It has to do with how much of what is implied is interpreted as a substantial component of what is communicated.

Cutting (2002: 2) defined pragmatics as the study that deals with the meaning of words in context, analyzing the parts of meaning that can be explained by knowledge of the physical and social world and the socio-psychological factors influencing communication, as well as the knowledge of time and place in which the words are uttered or written. This approach studies the context, text, and function. Based on its term, pragmatics focuses on the meaning of words in interaction and how a speaker and a hearer communicate more information than the words they use. The speaker's meaning is dependent on assumptions of knowledge shared by both. Pragmatics also deals with texts or pieces of spoken or written discourse. That means how language becomes meaningful and unified for its users. Moreover, pragmatics is concerned with function, which means that it analyses the speakers' purposes in speaking or interacting verbally.

Meanwhile, Mey (1993, 42) considered pragmatics as the study of human language use conditions, which has a close relationship with the context of society. Crystal (2003: 364) views pragmatics from different angles. Traditionally speaking, he sees it as a term used to refer to one of the three divisions of semiotics: pragmatics, syntax, and semantics. While in modern linguistics, pragmatics has to be applied "to the study of language from the point of view of the users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on the other participants in the act of communication". He further explains that "*the field of pragmatics focuses on an 'area' between semantics, sociolinguistics, and extra-linguistic context; but the boundaries with these other domains are yet incapable of precise definition.*"

3. Flattery as a Pragmatic Strategy

Flattery, as a pragmatic strategy, involves using compliments, praise, or exaggerated positive statements to achieve specific communicative goals. It is a strategic tool employed in interpersonal interactions to influence others, manipulate social dynamics, and elicit desired responses (Jones & Pittman, 1982: 231).

Flattery refers to the act of offering excessive or insincere compliments or praise to gain favor, manipulate others, or achieve personal objectives. It involves using positive language and exaggerated statements to create a favorable impression and influence the attitudes or behaviors of the recipient. Flattery is a form of persuasive communication that aims to change or shape the beliefs, opinions, or actions of others. It leverages compliments and positive statements to appeal to individuals' vanity, ego, or desire for validation, ultimately guiding them toward a desired outcome.

Flattery is a strategic communication tool used to achieve specific goals or outcomes. It involves intentionally selecting and delivering flattering statements to create a particular impression, establish rapport, gain trust, or manipulate social interactions for personal advantage. Flattery is a means of exerting social influence on others. By praising or complimenting individuals, flattery seeks to shape their perceptions, attitudes, or behaviors, either by appealing to their self-esteem or by positioning oneself favorably within social hierarchies.

Flattery can be viewed as a manipulative tactic within interpersonal communication. It aims to influence others' thoughts, emotions, or actions through the use of overly positive or insincere statements. Flattery may exploit people's vulnerability to compliments, leading them to act in ways that benefit the flatterer. Flattery often involves offering compliments and positive reinforcement to motivate or encourage others. It employs praise and admiration to reinforce desired behaviors, strengthen relationships, or create a supportive and favorable environment for oneself.

Strategic flattery refers to the deliberate and calculated use of flattering statements to achieve specific objectives. It entails tailoring compliments and praise to suit the needs and preferences of individuals, situations, or social contexts, with the intention of gaining influence, cooperation, or advantage.

It is important to note that while flattery can be a powerful, pragmatic strategy, its effectiveness and ethical implications can vary depending on factors such as cultural norms, sincerity, and the intentions behind its use.

Flattery as a communication tactic is frequently employed in English plays to advance the plot, develop character relationships, and add depth to the dramatic narrative. It serves as a strategic tool for characters to manipulate, persuade, or gain favor with others within the context of the play. Characters in English plays often use flattery as a means of manipulation and deception. They

employ exaggerated compliments and praise to deceive others, gain their trust, or manipulate their actions. Flattery becomes a tool for characters to achieve their own agendas or to manipulate the course of events.

Flattery is frequently employed by characters to navigate power dynamics and social hierarchies within the play. Characters of lower social status may use flattery to gain favor, protection, or advancement from those in higher positions. Flattery can be a means for characters to climb the social ladder or gain influence within the play's society. Flattery is often used as a tactic for building relationships or romantic connections in English plays. Characters employ compliments and flattering remarks to woo others, gain their affection, or create a positive impression. Flattery becomes a means of seduction, used to attract and manipulate the emotions of other characters.

Flattery is sometimes employed in English plays for ironic or satirical purposes. Characters may deliver insincere or exaggerated compliments to mock or criticize certain individuals or societal norms. Through the use of ironic flattery, playwrights can highlight the hypocrisy, vanity, or foolishness of specific characters or social values. Flattery can also serve as a source of comedic relief in English plays. Characters may engage in exaggerated or humorous flattery to create laughter and lighten the mood within the dramatic narrative. The use of comedic flattery adds levity and entertainment value to the play.

Flattery can be utilized as a communication tactic for conflict resolution in English plays. Characters may employ flattery to defuse tense situations, soften criticism, or mend broken relationships. It becomes a strategic means of smoothing over conflicts and restoring harmony among characters. Flattery can be utilized to create foreshadowing and dramatic irony within the play. Characters may deliver flattering remarks to others while the audience is aware of the insincerity or ulterior motives behind the flattery. This creates a sense of anticipation and tension as the audience waits for the truth to be revealed.

In summary, flattery as a communication tactic in English plays serves various purposes, including manipulation, power dynamics, relationship building, irony, comedy, conflict resolution, and foreshadowing. Its strategic use by characters adds complexity, intrigue, and depth to the dramatic interactions and helps shape the overall narrative of the play.

4. Power Dynamics and Social Hierarchies

Power dynamics and social hierarchies play a significant role in English plays, and flattery is often used as a communication tactic to navigate, reinforce, or challenge these structures. Flattery is frequently employed to reinforce existing social hierarchies within the play. Characters in positions of power or authority may receive flattery from those of lower social standing as a means of showing respect, gaining favor, or seeking protection. The flattery serves to acknowledge and maintain the established social order.

Characters may use flattery as a tool to assert dominance and establish their position within the social hierarchy. By flattering those in power, they aim to position themselves favorably and gain influence or advantages. Flattery can be a strategic means for characters to elevate their own status or advance their interests within the play's society.

Flattery is often employed by characters seeking to climb the social ladder. They may shower compliments and praise upon individuals of higher social status in the hopes of gaining access to their circles or improving their own standing. Flattery becomes a means of social advancement and a tactic for characters to elevate themselves within the hierarchy. Flattery can also be used as a subversive tactic to challenge or undermine established power dynamics. Characters may employ irony or insincere flattery to mock or expose the vanity, arrogance, or corruption of those in authority. By using flattery as a form of satire, playwrights can critique societal structures and question the legitimacy of power.

In some cases, characters may use flattery as a means of resistance or defiance against oppressive power structures. By skillfully employing flattery, they can manipulate those in power while appearing subservient. This allows them to navigate precarious situations, protect themselves, or subtly challenge the authority without drawing direct attention. Flattery can be used to reveal the hypocrisy or insincerity of characters within the play. Characters may engage in excessive flattery to expose the self-serving motives or false personas of those in power. Through this tactic, playwrights shed light on the gap between appearances and reality, challenging the authenticity of individuals in influential positions.

Flattery can serve as a tool for characters to discern the true intentions or hidden agendas of others. By observing who receives and dispenses flattery, characters can gain insights into the underlying power dynamics and identify potential allies or adversaries. Flattery becomes a means of deciphering the complex web of relationships and motives within the play. In English plays, the use of flattery in relation to power dynamics and social hierarchies adds depth, complexity, and commentary on the societal structures depicted. It explores the ways in which individuals navigate and manipulate the power dynamics of their time, shedding light on the human condition and the complexities of social interaction.

5. Character Relationships:

In William Shakespeare's play "Hamlet," the pragmatic use of flattery is prevalent and serves various purposes within the narrative.

Polonius's Flattery: Polonius, advisor to King Claudius, employs flattery as a means to gain favor and maintain his position of influence. He often uses excessive compliments and praise when addressing the king and queen, aiming to secure their trust and favor. Polonius's flattery demonstrates his pragmatic approach to social interactions and his desire to maintain his status within the court.

Hamlet's Mockery: Hamlet himself employs flattery as a tool for mockery and sarcasm. He often uses exaggerated compliments to subtly criticize and expose the hypocrisy or false motives of certain characters. For example, when interacting with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Hamlet flatters them while mocking their loyalty to the king. His use of flattery adds depth to his character and highlights his wit and intelligence.

Manipulating Ophelia: In his interactions with Ophelia, Hamlet utilizes flattery to manipulate her emotions and test her loyalty. He employs both flattering and insulting remarks to confuse and deceive her, ultimately contributing to Ophelia's emotional turmoil. Flattery becomes a pragmatic strategy for Hamlet to advance his own agenda and explore the loyalty of those around him.

Gertrude and Claudius: The characters of Gertrude and Claudius engage in mutual flattery to maintain their relationship and consolidate their shared power. They exchange compliments and affectionate words, presenting a united front to the court. Flattery becomes a pragmatic strategy for them to strengthen their bond and project an image of stability.

Polonius's Advice to Laertes: Polonius delivers a famous speech to his son, Laertes, before he departs for France. In this speech, Polonius imparts advice through a series of flattery-laden statements. He uses flattering language to emphasize his wisdom and portray himself as a knowledgeable and caring father figure. Polonius's pragmatic use of flattery aims to guide and influence Laertes's behavior.

The Gravedigger Scene: In Act V, Scene I, Hamlet engages in a witty and ironic conversation with the gravedigger. Hamlet uses flattery to elicit information and provoke reflection on mortality. Through playful banter and flattering remarks, Hamlet navigates the conversation to reveal the transient nature of power and the inevitability of death.

Polonius's Flattery of Hamlet: Polonius attempts to flatter Hamlet by praising his wit and intellect, hoping to gain favor and manipulate him. However, Hamlet sees through Polonius's insincere flattery and responds with sarcastic and mocking remarks, exposing Polonius's ulterior motives. This exchange highlights the pragmatic use of flattery as a tool for manipulation and reveals Hamlet's astuteness.

Overall, the pragmatic use of flattery in "Hamlet" serves to underscore the complexities of interpersonal relationships, power dynamics, and manipulation within the play. It adds depth to the characters, contributes to the development of the plot, and explores the intricate nature of human communication.

6. Conclusion

The pragmatic use of flattery in "Hamlet" serves to underscore the complexities of interpersonal relationships, power dynamics, and manipulation within the play. It adds depth to the characters, contributes to the development of the plot, and explores the intricate nature of human communication. In William Shakespeare's play "Hamlet," the pragmatic use of flattery is prevalent and serves various purposes within the narrative. So, flattery can serve as a tool for characters to discern the true intentions or hidden agendas of others. By observing who receives and dispenses flattery, characters can gain insights into the underlying power dynamics and identify potential allies or adversaries.

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