A DISCOURSAL ANALYSIS OF THE PLOT UNITY IN ONE -ACT PLAY

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Abstract

The research offers a discourse analysis of the interaction level of organization in Synge's one-act play Riders to the Sea. The analysis carried out anchors upon the identification and interpretation of the densities of lexical repetition in the dramatic discourse of the data.The aim sought is to reveal the validity of the hypothesis that the playwright's choice of lexis in a one-act play shows its plot development in addition to the three basic unities of time, place and action. The analysis shows that the identification of the recurrent deictic lexical items referring to spatio – temporal entities and actions leads to the specification of these three entities. Accordingly, the data reveals obvious unities of time, place, and action since the whole of the action takes place within twelve hours in the kitchen of a fisherman's cottage.

of the three dramatic unities of time, place, and action. Accordingly, the problem of this study consists in supplying databased answer to the following important question: "What is the role of lexical signalling in the development of dramatic plot and the maintenance of dramatic unities?"

1.2 Features of Dramatic Discourse

In their discussions of types of prose, most rhetoricians, such as Connolly (1953), Cargill et al (1955), Talmage et al (1962), and Brooks and Warren (1970), classify prose into four main types: *expository, descriptive, narrative,* and *argumentative*. These prose types imply four main purposes, respectively: to explain or inform, to tell what something looks like, to tell

1.1 Introduction

This research starts by discussing issues relevant to dramatic discourse analysis such as what is meant by the concept of dramatic discourse, and what helps to define it as such. It will also describe through the examination of lexis in the data, the structure of the action in terms of plot development. In fact, it is designed to fill in the gab by exploring the role of lexis in the organization of one-act plays taking **Riders to the Sea** as a specimen extracting its general plot development through the manifestation

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action requires dramatic discourse to be all in one piece in order to hold the addressees continuously. (Boulton, 1979: 12-24) the unity of place requires the whole play to occur only in one place. The unity of time is usually taken to mean that the events of a play must not extend over more than twenty-four hours, (Gray, 1984: 215)

Action in plays is unraveled through the dialogue, which is the conversation of characters. Burton (1980: 3) following Abercrombie (1959), argues that non-poetic dramatic dialogue should be considered as another type of prose when she states:

what happened, and to convince or persuade somebody of the matter.

Though both narrative and dramatic texts are essentially linguistic structures in which some "personage" accomplishes certain actions within some identifiable plot (arrangement of events), dramatic text has , strictly speaking, not narrative text an initiation through visible action rather than narration of a complete action. (Aristotle, II 384-322 B.C.) unlike action in everyday life, dramatic action is concentrated.

Aristotle makes, in his **_Poetics_**, the suggestions that eventually presented rise to the theory of the _three unities_ of action, time and place.Unity of

> **Most people believe that _spoken prose_, as I would call what we normally hear on the stage or screen, is at least not far removed when well done from the conversation of real life.**

the interpretation of _literary_ conversation. In his analysis of Shakespeare's _Othello,_ Coulthard (ibid.: 171-172) incorporates a method of analyzing dramatic texts by manipulating the "questions and answers" technique through which the validity of a series of underlying assumptions is examined. These assumptions are:

Coulthard (1977:170) defines dramatic discourses as "invented sequences created and shaped for an artistic purpose" with different rules and conventions.

Though any one specific type of discourse may overlap with the other, each has its own characteristics and principles that distinguish it from the other types. However, techniques that are applicable to the analysis of _natural_ conversation are also valid for

Ernest and Hess (1985: 199) differentiate between interpersonal dialogue and literary communication on the basis of the message-orientation that a certain text adopts towards the addressee. They argue that, in everyday conversation, the message is directed towards a socially and individually defined addressee; whereas in dramatic discourse, the orientation of the message is more complicated and directed to a socially and statistically defined audience. In other words, whenever a speaker takes a turn addressing his partner in the dialogue, he/she is, at the same time, addressing a hypothetic receiver outside the literary world. (ibid.)

Short (1989: 139-140) shares Ernest and Hess their views, and adds that the adequate analysis of drama must be based on the analysis of the dramatic *text* , not its *performance.* His reasons are as follows:
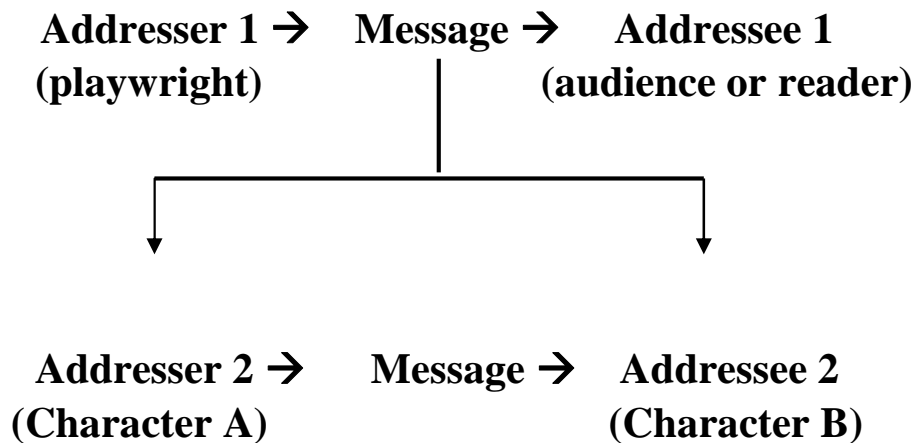
1- Addressee is listening.
2- Speaker questions at an appropriate time.
3- Addressee hears the question.
4- Addressee understands the question.
5- Addressee accepts speaker as a person allowed or empowered to ask the question.
6- Addressee thinks the speaker does not know the answer.
7- Addressee is willing to answer.
8- Addressee knows the answer.

In short, whenever the speaker asks a question, the assumptions above must be correct if he/she is to receive the appropriate answer he seeks. Violation of these assumptions can be dramatically manipulated for the creation of structure in the discourse, and for the development of theme through the form rather than the content. (ibid.: 177)

1-Teachers and students can discuss and argue about a play by reading it only without seeing it performed.
2-The dramatic producer cannot produce a play without reading and understanding the text of the play.
3-In theater, meanings and values could be changed from one performance of a particular production to another. Accordingly, "we will have to talk about X's production of Hamlet performed in theater Y on the evening of Z". In other words, the dramatic text is more suitable than the performance for the purpose of analysis.

another. This is because, in drama, the features which mark the social relations between two persons at the *character level* become messages about the characters at the *level of discourse* pertaining between author and reader/ audience (ibid.: 149). Such relationship can be diagrammed as follows:

Short (ibid.) believes that dramatic dialogue is similar to everyday dialogue; and that methods and techniques applicable to everyday conversation are appropriate to the analysis of dramatic discourse. However, the analyst has to take into consideration the fact that drama has an embedded structure wherein one level of a discourse is nested in

Addresser 1 → Message → Addressee 1
(playwright)   (audience or reader)

Addresser 2 → Message → Addressee 2
(Character A)   (Character B)

Short's (1989) Embedded Structure of Drama

is discourse, or more specifically, is conversation". (ibid.: 8) In her analysis of Pinter's Last *to Go* (1961), Burton (ibid.: 9) suggests a process of three steps for the analysis of any *piece* of dramatic discourse. These steps are:

- The reader should specify the data under investigation.
- He/she should give his intuition to the concise effect created by the text.

Burton (1980: 7) argues that the relationship between everyday dialogue and dramatic dialogue is based on a set of linguistic material which could uncover such relationship; and that the application of those linguistic material could not be done by "discussing sentences, phrases, alliterations, polysyllable-words, and so on… The only possible linguistic level to use as a basis for such analysis

effects, and the reader recognizes the exploitations and motivations behind them.

Generally speaking, most linguists agree that dramatic discourse consists of two *layers.* The first one is presented by the *physical being of the text in the world of reality,* produced by a real author who wants to impart his specific intentions to the receiver to achieve a certain effect. The second layer *has its own world which is related to the fictional reality.* The characters of a play interact within the *world of the text* by using the same linguistic code as that of *natural conversation,* and follow the same patterns of social conversations adopted by the real speakers at the time which the text reproduces.

1.3 Riders to the Sea (RTS): A Synopsis

This play was written in the summer of 1902, and was published in October 1903 in the *Samhain* after it had been rejected by the *Fortnightly.* The play was performed in 1904, first in Ireland, and then in London.

The plot depicts the intensity of man's suffering in a world full of adversaries. Calm resignation is the only thing man can do to preserve his dignity throughout his life.

The action of the play is concentrated into a fairly short act in a fisherman's cottage, off the West Coast

• He /she should select some relevant rules of naturally occurring conversation, and show how these rules could be manipulated to create the effect intuitively observed in step (ii) above.

She (ibid.: 111,144) considers the playscript as a transcript of a naturally occurring talk as well as the means of presenting the social world in a specifically alienated graspable way.

In his analysis of the first twenty-nine lines of *Hamlet*, Walter Nash (1989, 29-30) maintains that dramatic dialogue has a dual function. On the one hand, it is a reflex of ordinary conversation; on the other hand, it is a literary artifice: "an aesthetic structure with no more than superficial claims to the naturalistic statue". To get at these dual functions and their effect, Nash (ibid.) suggests the description of the patterns of conversation in a play must be conducted according to methods drawn from sociolinguistics and pragmatics.

Similarly, Simpson (1989: 172) points out that dramatic dialogue is an interaction between the fictional character in a play and the writer and reader. Through this dialogue, the writer exploits the conventions of language-use for particular stylistic

white boards and a deep grave, surely. (ibid.)

1.4 The Practical Analysis of "RTS"

1.4.1 Summary of Plot Development

The designation of the dramatic action has been classified in to eight episodes shown in Table (1). The topics identified within each of these episodes are singled out and categorized on the basis of their lexical thematic co-referential.

of Ireland. One son, Michael, has but recently been drowned, and his clothes are identified as the play begins. Still, the last surviving son of the family (Bartley) makes a journey, and is knocked over into the sea by his pony, and is washed out into a great surf. Soon, his dead body is brought back home. His old mother (Maurya), who has by now lost her husband and all of her six sons to the sea, tells herself: *"They are all gone now, and there isn't anything more the sea can do to me".* She can also find some comfort in her son's getting *a fine coffin out of the*

Table (1) Episode Topics in "*RTS*"

Episode Number	General Topic of Episode	Topic-Change Device
1	Exposition	Nora *comes in*
2	Clash of Wills	Maurya *comes from*
3	Confrontation	Bartley *comes in*
4	Reconciliation	Bartley *goes out*
5	Recognition (Revelation)	Maurya *goes out*
6	Foreshadowing	Maurya *comes in*
7	Crisis (Climax)	Old Women *come in*
8	Resignation (Dénouement)	Younger Women *come in*

falling action in the whole play, ie, its plot development. This development can be illustrated in the following Figure:

One relevant observation about the above is that the designation of the general topics of the episodes unravels the development of the rising and
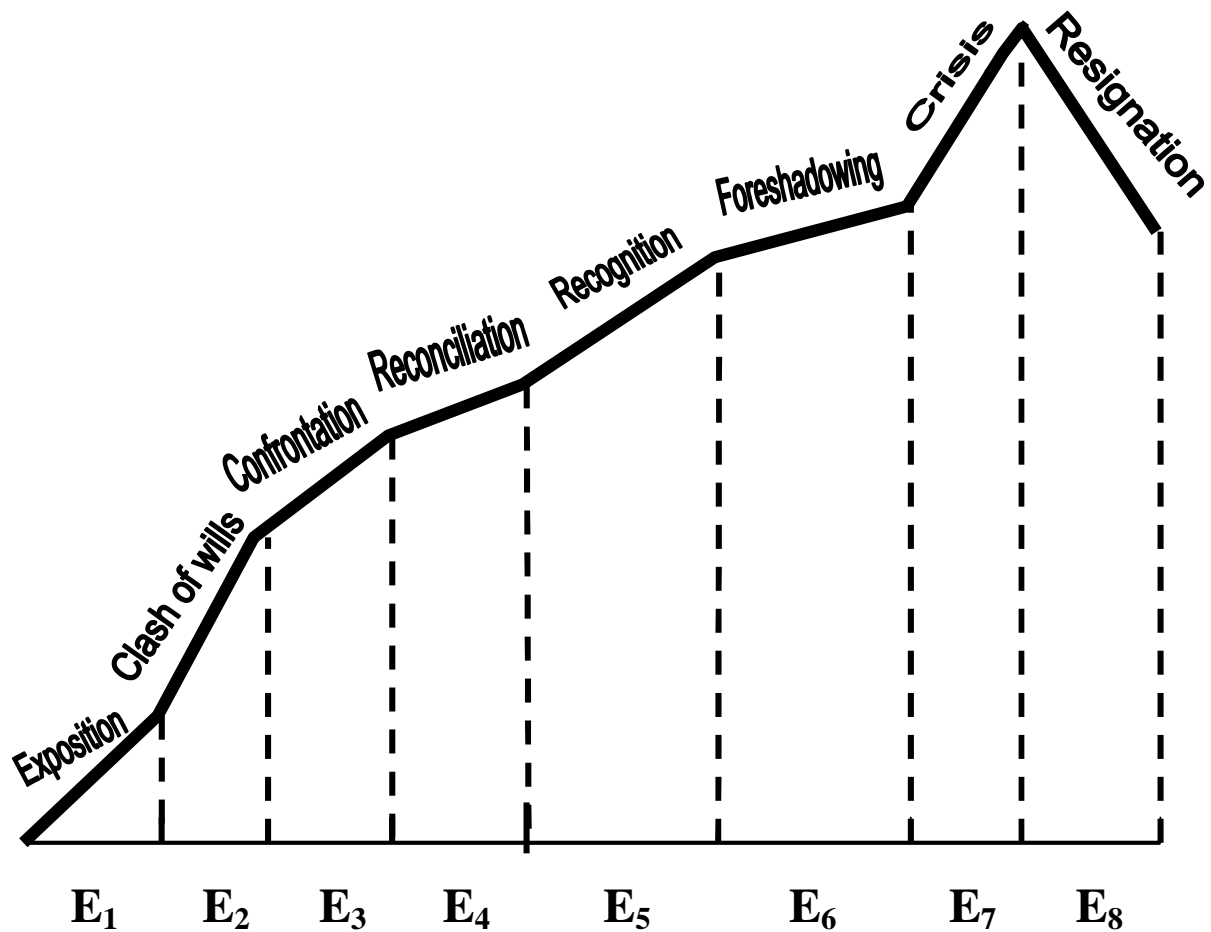
Figure (1)The Development of Action in *"RTS"*

1.4.2.1 Unity of Time

Unity of time demands that the period required by the events of the plot to take place should be the same period consumed by its performance in real life. One method of securing dramatic unity of time is to arrange the events of the play within the duration of one day in life so that the action performed on the stage does not appear unnatural to the addressees. In RTS, this same method is used by Synge as discussed below. So far as lexis is concerned, there are recurrent lexical references to time in seven out of the eight episodes comprising the whole play as illustrated in the following table:

1.4.2 Analysis of the Interaction of "RTS"

In terms of the discoursal structure of dramatic dialogue, the interaction is the highest level of dramatic structure as well as the largest structural unit that consists of all the episodes in the play. Being the largest unit of dramatic discourse, it does not function as a constituent of any other higher structural units. RTS consists of Eight episodes which reveal the plot development of the whole play . These episodes are bound together by the three unities of time, place and action, which will be discussed in the next sections.

Table (2) Lexical References to Time in *RTS*

Episode No.	Time-Indicating Lexis
One	This day
Two	This day
Two	This day
Two	This day
Three	This morning
Three	This day
Three	Tomorrow morning
Four	The black night is falling
Four	Till dark night
Four	Since the sun went up
Five	In the morning
Six	From this day
Six	This day
Six	This day
Eight	Sun rises

seen or reported eating in the course of the play, the addressees can conclude that the play starts after sunrise.

As for the end of action, this is indicated by Maurya's words in episode four: when the black night is falling, I'll have no son left me in the world. As the only surviving son she has is Bartley, this entails that when Bartley's dead body is brought home in the final episode, the time is night. This is confirmed by Cathleen's asking the Old Man in episode eight to make the coffin when the sun rises, which implies that the time of her speech is at the night of the same day.

All these references show that the period within which the play's action takes place is lexically specified as starting in the morning and ending at night, ie, within less than twelve hours. Such a very short time in dramatic terms shows how condensed the whole action is despite the fact that so many events are presented on the stage.

Obvious in the table above is the repetition of the lexical items this day which appears many times, indicating that the action is taking place at day time. Another important indicator is that this same phrase keeps recurring from episode one up to episode six to confirm to the audience that the characters are still speaking of the same day.

In addition, there are other lexical items that specify the time in which the action is taking place. For example, in episode three, Cathleen mentions that she has hung the rope by the white boards this morning. The fact that this same rope is visible to the audience from the start of the play, hanging by the boards, indicates that the whole of the action starts sometimes at or after sunrise.

In episode five, Maurya comments that the rope will be needed tomorrow morning. Here the audience can infer that the time in which Maurya is speaking falls within this day, not tomorrow. Similarly, when Nora says that Bartley has not eaten anything since the sun went up in episode eight; and Bartley has not been

the wall, pot oven, spinning wheel, table, fire place, ladder and door. Besides their presence as part of the setting, these items together with other domestic objects, recur either by these names or through some sort of paraphrase in all episodes as indicated in Table (3) below:

1.4.2.2 Unity of Place

Unity of place is as obvious in RTS as that of time, in that the whole action goes on in the same place,viz. the family cottage, or, more accurately, its kitchen cottage as indicated in the stage directions in of episode one. Setting items in this kitchen include: nets, oil-skins, new boards standing by

Table (3) Lexical References to Place in *RTS*

Episode No.	Place-Indicating Lexical Items
One	The door
One	Table
One	Table
One	Turf-loft
Two	Turf
Two	Chimney
Two	Turf
Two	Fire
Two	Cake
Three	Boards
Three	Nail
Three	Boards
Three	Boards
Three	Boards
Four	Door
Four	Door
Four	This house
Four	Fire
Four	Turf
Four	Bread
Four	Fire
Four	House
Four	Stool
Four	Bread
Four	Bread
Five	Ladder
Five	Knife
Five	Corner
Five	Corner
Five	Spinning wheel
Five	Door
Six	Chimney corner
Six	Stool
Six	Break
Six	Fire
Six	White boards

Six	Door
Seven	Door
Seven	This place
Eight	Table
Eight	Door
Eight	Dresser
Eight	Boards
Eight	Nails
Eight	Nails
Eight	Nails
Eight	the house

action ends with the revelation that Michael has got a clean burial in the north, and with the bringing of the dead body of Bartley.

This unity of action is realized in the repetition of the action verb *go* and all the other items that repeat or paraphrase this verb. This lexical item is repeated throughout the whole text of the play from the first to the last episode. This fact indicates that of all the actions referred to in the play, the main one is Bartley's going out to sea; hence the entire play rivets on this event. The following table illustrates this repetition:

All these lexical items either refer to the place of action,viz. the cottage kitchen, or to ome objects closely related to it.

1.4.2.3 Unity of Action

RTS reveals a conspicuous unity of action in that all the events revolve around the tragic departure of the last male member of Maurya's family: Bartley. As the play starts, the audience are told that Michael has drowned but his body is not found yet, while Bartley plans to go to the sea, and efforts are exerted to prevent him from doing so. However, these efforts fail and Bartley sets out to sea. The

Table (4) Lexical References to Action in *RTS*

Episode No.	Action-Indicating Lexical Items
One	Going
One	Stop
Two	Goes
Two	Go
Two	Stop
Two	Go
Two	Went down
Two	Pass
Two	Coming
Three	Comes
Three	Go
Three	Going
Three	Go
Three	Coming
Three	Holding
Three	Going

Three	Go
Three	Ride down
Four	Goes
Four	Gone
Four	Left
Four	Going
Five	Going (e)
Five	Going (e)
Six	Riding down
Six	Riding
Six	Came
Six	Riding
Six	Came
Six	Went
Seven	Leaving
Eight	Gone (e)

adopted by the real speakers at the time, which the text reproduces.

The dramatic discourse of "RTS" has been classified into eight episodes; each has its own theme and boundaries ,ie, when it starts and when it ends signaled by specific lexical items . Each episode is considered a step toward the development of the plot and all of them are governed by the three basic dramatic unities : time, place and action . Those three unities are related to the playwright's choice of lexis. The first two unities: time and place are lexically realized through the spatio-temporal, indexical items make recurrent in the play. As for the unity of action, it is indicated by those lexical items depicting actions. In the case of RTS, this action has been found to be indicated by the lexical items related to the events of the play that are connected to the central action of Bartley's going out to sea.

The number of the action-related items which concern Bartley's going is thirty two. This table proves statistically significant when compared with the number of the action-related items that concern all the other characters in the play, which is forty-two out of a total of seventy- four. Thus, the rate of the Bartley-related items of the action of going forms 43.24%. This provides lexical evidence that the play centers around Bartley's going out to sea as the main dramatic action in the text.

1.5 Conclusions

Generally speaking, most linguists agree that dramatic discourse is a unique one with its own structure . It consists of of two levels . The first one is exemplified by the physical being of the text in the world of reality, produced by a real author who wants to impart his specific intentions to the receiver to achieve a certain effect. The second level has its own world, which is related to the fictional reality. The characters of a play interact within the world of the text by using the same linguistic code as that of natural conversation, and follow the same patterns of social conversations

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التحليل الخطابي لمسرحية ذات الفصل الواحد

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الخلاصة

يقدم هذا البحث تحليلاً خطابياً لمستويات التنظيم الحواري في المسرحية ذات الفصل الواحد: "راكبون الى البحر" للكاتب الايرلندي "سنج". ويستند التحليل النصي المنجز هنا الى تشخيص وتفسير نماذج التكرار في ا لكلمات وكثافاتها في عينة البحث بغية اختبار صحة الفرضيه التي تكشف اختيارات الكاتب المسرحي للمفردات في المسرحية ذات الفصل الواحد عن تطور حبكتها وعن وحداتها الأساسية الثلاث: الزمان والمكان والفعل.. ولقد اظهرت الدراسة ان تشخيص المفردات المتكررة التي تفصح عن الزمان والمكان يفضي الى تحديد هذه الوحدات، كما اظهرت ان المسرحية المدروسة لها وحداتها المتميزة في هذا الصدد لان الفعل المسرحي فيها يتكامل خلال اثنتي عشرة ساعة في مطبخ كوخ يعود لصائد اسماك.