

Contextual variables in interpersonal conflict presented in dramatic dialogue

Joanna Bobin (Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Zawodowa, Gorzów Wlkp.)

Dramatic dialogue abounds in confrontational talk: conflict is often argued to be of central importance to the genre. While it is not identical to real life interaction, dramatic dialogue can be viewed as a representation of everyday conversational behavior. Communication that occurs is twofold: between the characters but also between readers or audiences and the playwright. As readers, we activate the same frames as when inferring speaker intention in real life. Stage directions partly account for context; however, context and meaning are dynamic phenomena. Interactants cooperate in constructing context, which involves various social, psychological and cognitive factors that determine what is said and what is understood during an exchange. In this presentation, the data for analysis is a selection of conflictive exchanges between fathers and their grown-up sons presented in American drama (e.g. Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey Into Night*, Sam Sheperd's *Buried Child* or August Wilson's *Fences*). Particular attention will be devoted to the mental context of the language used in these conflicts and its relation to the choice of conflict strategies. The internal (mental) context will be analyzed in terms of the participants' cognitive-affective-conative system; that is, e.g. how the interactants' beliefs, knowledge or attention can trigger conflict through false assumptions about each other's lives, denial of certain facts or lack of information; how the interactants' emotions, personalities, needs etc. contribute to the development of conflict when they are incompatible or mutually exclusive; and how the conflict participants' verbal behavior relates to their motivations and goals, such as instrumental or relational goals, either explicitly stated or deliberately obscured. An attempt will be made at categorizing the broadly perceived impoliteness strategies used by conflict participants in relation to particular contexts. Another important contextual variable relating to the participants and their self-system (cognitive-affective-conative system) is the co-presence of other family members. In addition, social variables such as the participants' power (and shifts in access to different bases of power), psychological distance and social roles will be looked at as they also influence the production and perception of conflict talk.

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