

A Study of Discourse Marker in Prem Chand's "Kafan"

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Abstract

In this paper, I try to interpret Premchandra's short story "Kafan" from a pragmatic point of view, specifically by applying the notion of "Implicature". The objective of my study is to show that, the chosen approach will be helpful to untangle the complex density of any literary text. The important feature of my paper is that I will not take any help from literary criticism. This paper also deals with the importance of discourse markers, that how they amplify and intensify the given content. I wish this paper will give us a new approach to explore any literary text. It is argued that the 'fresh' reader, who has no previous knowledge of the characteristics either of the text or of the author, can perfectly achieve a good understanding of the literary discourse through this kind of pragmatic approach.

Key words: Prem Chand, *Kafan* short story, discourse markers

Approaches to the Study of Discourse Markers

During the last two decades, analyses of discourse markers have occupied a larger space in the literature on pragmatics. Discourse markers have been considered from a variety of perspectives and approaches, example as signalling “a sequential relationship” between utterance (Fraser 1990; Fraser 1999) as marking discourse coherence (Schiffrin1987; Lenk 1998), and from a relevance-theoretic point of view (Andersen 2001; Blakemore 2002; Blass 1990; Jucker 1993), they have been analysed with regard to gender (Erman 1992; Holmes 1986) and age (Kyratzis and Ervin-Tripp 1999; Andersen 2001; Erman 2001) and in bilingual contexts (Goss and Salmons 2000; Maschler 2000; Matras 2000); they have been analysed as a group and have been treated individually. There is general agreements that discourse marker contribute to the pragmatic meaning of utterances and thus play an important role in the pragmatic competence of the speaker. Or, as Crystal comments in more everyday language, “I tend to think of [pragmatic expression such as *you know*] as the oil which helps us perform the complex task of spontaneous speech production and interaction smoothly and efficiently” (Crystal 1988:48)

Importance of Pragmatic Markers

For some authors of early publications on discourse or pragmatic markers or particles, it did not seem important yet to worry about a delimitation of what kind of linguistic elements should be subsumed under one or the other of these terms. Schourup (1985: 1), for example, commences his dissertation by declaring, “This is a study of several common items in English conversation known variously as ‘discourse particles’, ‘interjections’, ‘discourse markers’ and less respectfully as ‘hesitations’ or ‘fillers’. No further details are given on any characteristics of these particles. Likewise, such a description is lacking in Ostman (1981), who simply lists pragmatic markers as one type of “pragmatic devices” (p.5) and gives some examples. Redeker also chooses not to define the class of discourse markers by means of syntactic features; instead, she insists on a functional definition (1990:371 f., 1991). Svartvik(1980:168) in his treatment of *well* at least observers that there is “little agreement as to the function or word-class status of *well*” and that “lexicographers find it peculiarly awkward to define the particle *well*”.

Function of Discourse Pragmatic Markers

Discourse pragmatics markers generally do not contribute to the propositional context of communication in a particular context but do not have important functions in intensification and amplification of the context. As mentioned earlier most researchers agree that they are expressions which relate discourse segments but there is no agreement on how exactly are they to be defined or how they differ from each other due to constant overlapping of their respective domains. In spite of the various justifications given in the literature of the choice of a particular term, there is no agreement as to which linguistic items are to be considered discourse markers or pragmatic. Broadly, it can be said that discourse markers do not intensify and amplify the context as vividly as pragmatic markers do.

Communicative Act and Discourse Markers

The ability to comprehend and produce a communicative act is the social distance, has communicative pact between the speakers involved, the cultural knowledge such as politeness and the linguistics knowledge explicit and implicit. The main areas on which pragmatics focuses and through which we can easily understand the texts are:-

- Deixis
- Performatives
- Presuppositions
- Implicature

Implicature

The notion of ‘Implicature’ can be defined as ‘the information that the addressee infers from the addresser’s utterance in a linguistics exchange’. As opposed to ‘presupposition’, the information that implicatures convey is not overtly marked in a linguistic way, therefore, we can say that implicatures have to do with meaning rather than with form. Levinson (1983:97)points out that it is because of implicatures that we understand why ‘it is possible to mean. . .more than it is actually said’. According to this view we could deduce that the communicative function that language plays in the case of implicatures is merely a supportive one. We could also deduce, as Brown and Yule (1983) suggest, that implicatures create a relationship between speaker and hearer, rather than between sentences or utterances themselves. Another important issue to consider is that implicatures are context-bound (Brown and Yule, 1983); that is, we cannot completely understand the meaning of an implicature unless we observe and study the surrounding discourse and situation; in one

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word, they have unique discourse reference. In this way it is also very important to have some information regarding the background knowledge of the participants in the linguistic exchange (Stubbs, 1983).

Focus of This Article

In the present article I intend to interpret Premchand's short story 'Kafan' from a pragmatic point of view, especially by applying the notion of 'Implicature'. The main reason for choosing this approach for my analysis is because I think that it can be very helpful to untangle the complex density of any literary text.

My hypothesis is that the 'fresh' reader, who has no previous knowledge of the characteristics either of the text or of the author, can perfectly achieve a good understanding of the literary discourse through this kind of pragmatic approach.

In the present article I will try to follow the mind of the reader who approaches 'Kafan' for the first time, assuming that this hypothetical reader just relies on the knowledge of the language, and in his ability to make implicatures out of his reading. Another important feature of this article is that I will not use any help from literary criticism, which is obviously abundant in the case of Premchand, because the reader does not usually resorts to this kind of outside knowledge. In one word, I try to see if the text under study fulfills the feature that is ascribed to well written literary texts which states that they are self-contained in the message that they convey.

A lower caste father and his son are poor labourers in a village. An emergency occurs when the son's wife dies while giving birth to a child and the family has no money to cremate the body of the dead woman. The Lazy duo ask for money from the village zamindar and other members of the society. However, they use the money they get on liquor and food instead.

Analysis

I will analyse the text step by step, following all the implicatures that the reader should make in order to make full sense of the story. The first sentence says:

-"jhopde ke darwaze par baap aur beta , dono ek bhujhe hue alao ke samne khamosh bethe hue the".

Let's take 'baap/ beta'; who are they? The subsequent doubt is about the place where this baap/ beta' are sitting *bujhe hue alao ke samne* . It also indicates the end of something. The opening sentence helps in creating inquisitiveness and curiosity in the mind of the reader.

At this point of text the reader is presented with the third personal referent of the story:

-“ander bête ki naujawaan biwi Bhudiya dard se pichad kha thi aur reh reh ke us ke muh se aesi dil kharash sada nikalti thi ke dono apna kaleja thaam lete”.

Now some of the pieces of this jigsaw puzzle can start to fit together. The referent of “donon” is not overtly stated in the text, but in terms of linguistic cohesion we know that, from the three personal referents introduced in the texts, donon refers to baap/ beta.

At the beginning of the sentence we read something which could be illuminating:

'dard se pacharen kha rahi thi'. At his point the reader might feel that Premchand is breaking the Maxim of Relevance, because "bujha hua alao" has apparently nothing to do with dard-e-ze (labor Pain). However, the introduction of this element in the discourse, makes the reader infer that there is perhaps some hidden relationship. It seems obvious that she is not in good condition.

In the subsequent sentence we are offered an extensive description of the "labor pain". Once more the reader may question the relevance of this description and may think that there is an apparent failure of informativeness on the part of the addresser. The narrative technique through which the reader is introduced about the labor pain resembles the way in which a camera zooms.

Focus on Labor Pain

The narrator (Premchand) focalizes the "labor pain" by narrowing down the context of situation. There also seems to be a flouting of the Maxim of relevance when the narrator explains that "aesi dil Kharash sada nikalti thi ke dono apna kaleja thaam lete". It is not until line nine that we are told that budhiya could not survive. Now the reader can positively infer without almost any shade of a doubt that Budhiya dealt will occupy the focal point in the narrative.

Budhiya in the Background?

We have seen so far that the narrator introduces Budhiya in this text as if she were in the background. Budhiya seems to be an element which is manipulated by bap beta. As a matter of fact, we do not know yet if Budhiya is going to be the main character or if not, to what extent will she share the main role with the other characters introduced so far. Premchand exploits the presentation of definite referring expressions which are unknown to the reader in a cataphoric relationship with their counterparts and, therefore, the reader has to make use of implicatures in order to figure out how the different pieces of the discourse are interrelated.

Another sentence -

"Ghisu- mallom hota hai ke bachegi nahi, sara din tadapte ho gaya, ja dekh to aa".

"Madhav- dardnaak lehje mein bola, merna hai to jaldi mer kyu nahi jati, dekh kar kya karun".

Function of Conversation - What It Reveals?

This conversation between them shows their selfish nature. They are not worried at all for the pathetic condition of Budhiya but instead of that they were waiting for her death.

To sum up, I would say that once the story is finished the readers feel more at ease about the circumstances surrounding Budhiya 's life. We know how her life is, whom she loves and what her prospects in life might be. Eventually, the whole story makes sense and constitutes a perfect narratorial unit on its own. In this way, the readers do not need any reference either to future facts or to previous ones in order to have complete understanding of the story.

To Conclude

In the present article I have tried to describe the pragmatic approach in terms of implicature that can be applied to a literary text. This approach enables the reader to understand the meaning that the author of a literary text tries to convey, just relying on the actual sentences, rather than on any previous background regarding the author, or the circumstance of composition of the text.

The technique that Premchand uses to make the reader work out implicatures along the text is mainly based upon the presentation of the several elements of discourse in a cataphoric way.

Therefore, the new characters and situations are new to the reader, but apparently form part of the background knowledge of the imaginary world within the narrative. This mode of presentation forces the reader to look ahead in the discourse in order to make full sense of all the 'loose threads' that keep arising in the reading. In this way, implicatures are the only available recourse that permits the reader to follow the evolution of the text, while his or her mind creates a universe of situation for the characters and their behaviour. These assumptions will be later confirmed or dismissed as the new information is presented in the text.

Summing up, I would say that this text by Premchand constitutes a very neat example of how all the information included in any piece of literary discourse is essential for the understanding of its meaning. Furthermore, it also shows how the reader has to be very attentive to all the minute details of the text, expecting their relevance in the subsequent discourse. In this way the writer makes the reader become involved in the development of the action.

On the whole, the final conclusion might be that a good literary text is a complete piece of art which can be self-explanatory. Some knowledge of the spatio-temporal circumstances of composition might be useful for the understanding of a literary text.

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