

A Feminist-Stylistic Analysis of Discourse and Power Relations in Gaskell's North and South Based on Searle's Theory of Speech Acts

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Extended abstract

1. INTRODUCTION

A feminist-stylistic research of the Nineteenth Century British novel North and South by Elizabeth Gaskell based on the theory of speech acts by John Searle (1969, 1975, 1979, 1983, 2002), reveals that despite the period's very strict codes of conduct and etiquette governing women's behavior and interactions with the opposite sex, they nevertheless found ways and means of manipulating language to control situations in an intelligent fashion and maintain power.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Speaking in a language, claims John Searle is a matter of performing "acts" with specific intentions governed by a number of rules (1975/2002: 4). Searle classifies speech acts into the five different groups of assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives (1975/2002). He also discusses indirect speech acts, actual perlocutionary force/effect, directions of fit between language and reality and illocutionary dimensions. Furthermore, Norman Fairclough (1989) posits that discursive practices are ideologically shaped by struggles over power. He notes the various types of power struggles that can occur within class or social groupings such as between men, women, and ethnic minorities, or between the dominated and the dominating and considers such power struggles as 'necessary and inherent' in the social system. On the other hand, feminist stylisticians such as Deborah Tannen (1994), have introduced diverse points of view regarding the question of female identity and gender power relationships forged through social interaction. Tannen

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(1994) asserts that ways of talking are a matter not of identity but of display and that behavior is not a reflection of the individual's nature (identity) but rather of some performance that s/he is presenting (display).

3. METHODOLOGY

This article starts off with the hypothesis that a number of Victorian British novels showcase young and independent heroines who engage in constant battles of wit and misunderstandings with mature and reasonable male characters and apparently end up realizing the error of their ways through the course of the novel. Instead of treating women and men as an internally homogeneous group, an analysis of dialogues in novels focuses on specificity; that is, it looks at particular women and men in certain settings with their own detailed interactions, identity categories and power relations. A study of selected conversational exchanges between the main protagonists of Gaskell's *North and South* (1855) here, using Searle's theory of speech acts (1975), leads to some generalizations about identity and power relations between the two protagonists which may fit Faircough's (1989) and Tannen's (1994) aforementioned frameworks.

4. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Margaret's speech acts initially contain numerous expressives to articulate her feelings and impressions, but in many cases they indirectly serve as assertives or directives that require a course of action on the part of the hearer and consequently have conditions of satisfaction in her trying to make a word to world direction of fit. Her speech acts are taken by Mr. Thornton not merely as reactions to situations, but as strong recommendations for reform which achieve the desired uptake as he applies many types of reform to his mills even when she has left Milton. The research shows that the female character actually creates an opacity (unclearness) of link between discourse and ideology, thus empowering herself and naturalizing her ideology for the male to make it seem common-sense.

5. CONCLUSIONS and SUGGESTIONS

At the conclusion of the novel, despite the female character's seeming submissiveness or shorter turns as compared to the male's, there can be seen a shift in the power relationship between them in her clever manipulation of him through insinuation and the use of speech acts as she creates her intended uptake many times and constantly achieves her desired perlocutionary effect. Her speech mannerisms are "a matter not of identity but of display" (as Deborah Tannen asserts, 1994: 198) and is in fact a 'performance'.

Key Words: Discourse analysis, *North & South*, John Searle, Speech acts, Feminist stylistics.

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