



## **Analysis of Speech Acts in *All My Sons* by Arthur**

**Miller: A Pragmatic Approach**

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## تحليل الخطاب في مسرحية "كلهم ابناني" للكاتب الأمريكي ارثر ميلر: دراسة تداولية

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**Abstract:**

The main aim of the present study is to provide an in-depth pragmatic analysis of speech act theory in selected utterances in Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* (1947). The analysis of the carefully categorized speech acts, against the backdrop of Searle's (1969) typology of speech acts, offers an effective and useful tool for understanding the play.

The first part is mainly dedicated to provide a suitable background for the study. Furthermore, the aims and objectives and the statement of hypothesis is made clear in a nutshell. The second part explores the history and definition of pragmatics and then distinguishes pragmatics, syntax and semantics followed by a distinction between sentence and utterances. In the third part, speech act theory, one of the most vital tools of pragmatic analysis is discussed. The fourth part provides a pragmatic analysis of speech acts in Miller's *All My Sons*. In this chapter, the researcher uses Searle's theory in order to provide a pragmatic analysis of how speech acts are carefully used in the play to convey the author's real message. The final part of the study is briefly dedicated to summarize the most important conclusions, findings and the implications that the researcher has noticed throughout the present study.



## 1. Introduction

Undoubtedly, the interpretation of an utterance does not depend only on the literal meaning of words. People do not always or even usually say what they mean. Speakers' utterances might bear a completely different meaning from the intended meaning of the speaker. For example, I might say: *What a lovely weather* while the intended meaning is the opposite. Here, the utterance's informative meaning is the opposite of the speaker's communicative meaning. Now arises a very important question, that is, how people can understand the intended meaning of the speaker. In other words, how people can work out a specific local interpretation of an utterance that carries a large number of meanings. Such an important question can be handled within the area of linguistics known as pragmatics.

Therefore, the main objective of this chapter is to provide a brief overview to the part of pragmatics and its definitions. It is also designed to reflect the significance of pragmatics as a multi-transdisciplinary field for nearly all areas of language description and to provide a comprehensive examination of the creation of meaning.

Obviously, the concept of 'meaning' or 'to mean' can be understood in different ways, even when narrowed to the area of language studies. Lyons (1977: 1-4) has argued that there are at least ten different ways to



use the words 'to mean' and 'meaning'. Lyons (1977: 2) has gone on to note that although these different meanings are distinguishable they are not unrelated but just how they are related is difficult and controversial.

## 2. Objectives of the Study

The present study attempts to provide an in-depth analysis of selected utterances in Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* (1947). It endeavors to provide a premeditated direction into the study of the social and historical outlook of the competitive American society and helps understand Arthur Miller's play considering its contextual significance. The analysis of the carefully categorized speech acts, against the backdrop of Searle's (1969) typology of speech acts, offers an effective and useful tool for understanding the plays.

The study aims to offer a new dimension for the interpretation of the implicit and explicit forces of the selected speech acts/utterances in Arthur Miller's plays. The characters in a dramatic discourse produce utterances to 'get the things done'. In other words, they perform actions of various kinds with their words. Austin (1962:12) names these actions as 'speech acts'. The speech acts, performed on the stage, are the manipulated linguistic actions and are too multifaceted to interpret



easily, even in their immediate context. Therefore, the study of speech acts makes it easy to carry out this multifaceted task of interpretation satisfactorily.

Based on the questions above, the objectives of the study can be shown in the following sentences:

- 1) To identify the types of speech acts found in the play.
- 2) To categorize the significant speech acts into five major types proposed by J. R. Searle (1969) on the basis of their illocutionary force.
- 3) To describe the contextual meaning and the purpose of using these kinds of speech acts.
- 4) To analyze and interpret the speech acts in Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* and to explain its significance in the pedagogical environment.
- 5) To show how speech acts play an important role in the interpretation and appreciation of Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* (1947).
- 6) To offer pedagogical implications of speech acts in the study of dramatic discourse.



7) To highlight the relation between pragmatics and literature in the enjoyment of literature and in understanding complex human relations.

on of the creation of meaning.

### 3. Literature Review

Obviously, the significance and seriousness of speech can by no means be ignored. Speech is the means of communication, the tool of prosperity, the door of change, the way of development and the path of success. The Holy Qur'an has confirmed the importance of speech as it likens the good words to the good trees whose roots are firmly established and whose branches are very high, while the bad words are likened to ruined trees. Allah says:

See you not how Allah sets forth a parable? – A goodly word as a goodly tree, whose root is firmly fixed, and its branches (reach) to the sky (i.e. very high). Giving its fruit at all times, by the Leave of its Lord and Allah sets forth parables for mankind in order that they may remember. And the parable of an evil word is that of an evil tree uprooted from the surface of earth having no stability. (Ibrahim 24-26)

Actually, one may not touch on any deeper and very well-coined



parable that appreciates the value and significance of speech as the Qur'an did. Such holy verses tell us that speech is fruitful and productive. They develop trunk, branches and fruits, which is only true for good speech. Speech involves great responsibilities, charges and even hazards.

Hudson (1996) proclaims that "the function of speech is more than just the plain meaning of words." Wardaugh (1976) argues that a basic assumption behind any attempt to understand the functions of discourse is that utterances have a performative function; they are spoken with an intent to perform an act. Hence, utterances are no longer studied as merely composed of sounds; they are now studied as actions. Clark (1996) asserts:

Language is used for doing things. People use it in everyday conversation for transacting business, planning meals and vacations, debating politics, gossiping. Teachers use it for instructing students, preachers for preaching to parishioners, and comedians for amusing audiences. Lawyers, judges, juries, and witnesses use it in carrying out trials, diplomats in negotiating treaties, and actors in performing Shakespeare. Novelists, reporters, and scientists rely on the written word to entertain, inform, and persuade. All these are instances of language use-activities in which people do things with language. (P.12)





#### 4. Significance of *All My Sons* (1947)

The decision of Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* (1947) explicitly goes to the fact that one of its principle subjects is fault: fault of the mother coordinated at her husband, fault of the child against his dad, fault of the dad against his own self. In addition, it is considered as one of the most significant plays in Arthur Miller's history. Because of the focal job of the illocutionary act of Fault in the play, I found that it merits breaking down from a businesslike point of view. In connection, Susan Abboston (2005) says that "Miller is keen on the job blame may play, and how the characters manage blame is a typical topic in quite a bit of his work. Prior plays, for example, *All My Sons* or *Death of a Salesman* have story areas that lead to the revealing of an exacting or good wrongdoing" (Abboston. 116).

Besides, Steven R. Centola in which artic article makes reference to that *All My Sons* is "the victor of the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for best play of 1947" (Centola. 251). In the following citation he reveals insight into the significance and enormity of this play:

*All My Sons* is the work that propelled Arthur Miller's long and recognized vocation in the theater. While few would contend that it is Miller's ideal or most significant play, no one would question the way that



*All My Sons* merits an exceptional spot in the dramatist's ordinance since it comprises his first significant showy accomplishment, shows his phenomenal aptitude in dealing with sensational form. The basic achievement of *All My Sons* denotes a significant turning point in Miller's vocation, for it arrived in when the youthful essayist was attempting to build up his way of life as an abstract craftsman. (Centola, 51)

Another significant motivation behind why the researcher picked *All My Sons* (1947) explicitly is that it validate do theortical clam of this paper, in his presentation gives data of the establishment of the play and says that Arthur Miller in "first experience with his Collected Plays portrays the seed from which the play *All My Sons* developed" (E.R. Wood, 1971, viii). He, at that point, cites Miller saying that:

## **5. Theoretical Framework:**

As a recent field of linguistics, pragmatics concentrates on the interpretation of the speakers' intended meaning or the communicative meaning of an utterance rather than on the literal meaning of the utterance. In his book italicize, Levinson argues that "pragmatics is the study of the relations between language and context". According to Yule (1996:4), pragmatics is "the study of the relationships between linguistic forms and



the users of those forms.” Yule goes on to notice that pragmatics provides us with the opportunity to “talk about people’s intended meanings, their assumptions, their purposes or goals.” Furthermore, Leech (1982:21) argues that the domain of pragmatics is the study of language in the context of its use and in terms of the goals for which it is put to use. Here, it is obvious that the interpretation of an utterance is derivable from its context. The domain of pragmatics is, therefore, much more related to the process of communicating, not only informing. Crystal (1997) defines pragmatics as “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 an act of communication”.

Central to any pragmatic study of literary works is the Speech Act Theory. Austin and Searle are the two founders of the Speech Act theory. It is Austin who gave the radical statement 'speaking is doing'. This view of language changed the entire perception of the phenomenon called language. This also exposed the earlier view of 'language as a system'. The distinction between 'language' and 'language use' become cardinal and provides the paradigm shift that is at the base of pragmatics. Searle further developed the Austin's concept of speech act and added his own



classification based on the parameter of illocutionary points. Thus, the present article aims to study Arthur Miller's famous play 'All My Sons' in the light of Searle's typology of speech act.

## **6. Apragmtic of Searle's Speech Acts in All My Sons:**

Undoubtedly, one of the leading figures who provided much contribution to the field of speech acts is Searle. According to Searle, the meaning of an utterance does not lie exclusively in the meaning of words, rather the real meaning of the utterance lies in the intention of the speaker or what the speaker wants to do through words, not only what he wants to say. For Searle, language is intentional behavior. Therefore, it should be treated like a form of action. Searle refers to statements as speech acts. The speech act is the basic unit of language that expresses meaning. In fact, an utterance expresses an intention. Mostly, the speech act is a sentence, but it can be a word or phrase as long as it follows the rules necessary to carry out the intention. When a person speaks, he/she performs an act. Speech is not only used to choose something, it also essentially does something.

Therefore, speech act lays the stress on the intent of the act as a whole. According to Searle, understanding the speaker's intention is crucial



to pick the meaning of a particular utterance. Without the speaker's intention, it is not possible to understand the words as a speech act. Thus, Searle considers the intention i.e. the force of an utterance as a central part for the classification of utterances into different categories. From Searle's view, there are only five illocutionary points that speakers can achieve on propositions in an utterance, namely: the assertive, commissive, directive, declaratory and expressive illocutionary points. Speakers achieve the assertive point when they represent how things are in the world, the commissives point when they commit themselves to doing something, the directive point when they make an attempt to get hearers to do something, the declaratory point when they do things in the world at the moment of the utterance solely by virtue of saying that they do and the expressive point when they express their attitudes about objects and facts of the world.

The following section of the study is mainly designed to provide different examples from Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* according to Searle's classification of speech acts into five classes.

### **6.1. Assertive Speech Acts in All My Sons:**

According to Searle's classification, "assertives" means to confirm something as committing the speaker to something being the case. Thus,



assertive speech acts have a truth value and state what the speakers believe to be the case or not. The illocutionary point of assertive speech acts is to present truthful representations of facts. Assertive speech acts have a word-to-world direction of fit. An utterance "It is too hot." achieves success of fit, if it is really hot. The different kinds are: suggesting, putting forward, swearing, boasting, and concluding. For example: "No one makes a better cake than me". They are generally expressed through declarative form. However, declarative is not the only form, they are also expressed through imperative and interrogative forms. This class includes stating, suggesting, boasting, complaining, claiming, reporting, criticizing, denying, disagreeing, predicting, hypothesizing, concluding, replying etc. All the rhetorical questions come under assertive speech acts because they do not expect answer but are asked for only intensification of the assertion of one's ideas, views, opinions etc. Consider the following examples of assertive speech acts in Miller's *All My Sons*:

Frank Lubey: Well, a favorable day for a person is a fortunate day, according to his stars. In other words it would be practically impossible for him to have died on his favorable day. (P. 6)

## 6.2.Commissive Speech Acts in *All My Sons*:



“Commissives” means committing the speaker to doing something in the future. The different kinds are: promising, planning, vowing, betting, and opposing; for example: “I’m going to Paris tomorrow”. The illocutionary point of commissive speech acts is to assume commitments to carry out a certain course of action. Commissive speech acts have a world-to-word direction of fit. An utterance “I will lend you a hundred pounds.” achieves success of fit, if the speaker lends the listener hundred pounds. Consider the following utterance in which Chris pledges that he will get out and marry searching for another place to live in:

Chris: I’ll get out. I’ll get married and live someplace else. (P. 15)

The utterance occurs in the play when Joe argues with Chris over the issue of his marriage with Ann and denies giving his consent for the marriage. He emphasizes that Larry could be alive somewhere and will come back safely. Joe intends to keep Ann away from his family by preventing her marriage with Chris because he is equally responsible for the death of twenty one pilots as Steve is. This utterance carries a tone of threatening as Chris directly threatens his father and implicitly directs him to give his consent for his marriage with Ann. In other words, Chris puts a condition before his father to permit him to marry Ann; otherwise, he



threatens to leave the house. At the surface level, Chris commits himself to the future course of action but at deeper level he emphatically denies his father's suggestion of 'not to marrying Ann'.

Chris knows the significance of the interpersonal relations of the son and father. Therefore, he deliberately makes a final attempt through emotional blackmail as he vows to leave the house, to get his father's consent. The interpersonal bond of relations and Ann's willingness to marry Chris, fulfill the felicity condition required for its successful execution. Chris also knows that Joe, in this case, will definitely be defensive and will agree to give his consent for his marriage with Ann. Moreover, in the socio-cultural context, the implied suggestion of leaving home is similar to break up the interpersonal relation. Thus, Chris not only threatens his father but also vows to marry Ann at any cost. Chris intends to elicit his father's consent for his marriage with Ann by threatening to leave the house.

### **6.3.Directive Speech Acts in All My Sons:**

"Directives" means to direct someone's speech through trying to make the addressee perform an action. The illocutionary point of declarative speech acts is to bring a change in circumstances. The different kinds are: asking, ordering, requesting, inviting, advising, and begging. For





example: "Could you close the window?". These types of speech acts attempt to get the hearer to do something via words. In other words, these speech acts have the intentions or purposes of some sort of actions to be performed by its hearer. Therefore, directive speech acts are hearer centered. The illocutionary point of directive speech acts is to get someone else to carry out a certain course of action. Directive speech acts, too, have a world-to-word direction of fit. An utterance "Open the door!" achieves success of fit, if the listener really opens the door. Consider the following example:

Mother: Altogether (To Chris, but not facing them) your brother is alive, darling, because if he is dead, your father killed him. Do you understand me now? As long as you live, that boy is alive. God does not let a son be killed by his father. Now you see, don't you? Now you see. (P. 73)

#### **6.4. Expressive Speech Acts in All My Sons:**

"Expressive" speech acts reflect how the speaker feels about the situation. The different kinds are: thanking, apologising, welcoming, and deploring; for example: "I am sorry that I lied to you". The expressive speech acts are in which characters express their psychological states, feelings or attitude about a particular state of affairs. The illocutionary point



of expressive speech acts is to communicate attitudes of their performers about certain facts. Expressive speech acts have a null or empty direction of fit. An utterance "Congratulation!" presupposes that the addressee has succeeded in doing something. However, the conveying of congratulations relates not to reality but to an attitude of the speaker. This class includes apologizing, complimenting, condemning, complaining, criticizing, etc. Since Drama is particularly made for theatrical performance, it is always written in the form of dialogues. Characters are brought onto stage in order to perform linguistic actions.

The first utterance to be taken as an example of expressive speech acts takes place in the first act of the play by Chris when he says:

Chris: For God's sake, three years! Nobody comes back after three years. It's insane. (P. 12)

#### **6.5. Declarative Speech Acts in All My Sons:**

"Declaratives" means changing the state of the world in an immediate way, for example: "You are fired". This statement changes the world via utterance. Declaratives are speech acts whose successful performance is based on authorized and the highly institutional framework. In other words, declarative speech acts are extremely ceremonial. Leech observes (1983):



“Successful performance of declarative brings about the correspondence between the propositional content and reality.” According to the above definition, it becomes clear that for the successful performance of declarative speech acts; the speaker must have a special institutional role in specific context.

Throughout Arthur Miller’s play, it is difficult to find such declarations that change the world via their utterances. Declarative speech acts play the least important role in the play because of the immediate transformation into perlocutionary effect.

## 7. Conclusion

This paper attempts to summarize the observations and findings of the present study in the light of the aims and objectives stated in the first chapter. The different kinds of speech acts (the directive, the assertive, the commissive speech acts) in Arthur Miller’s *All My Sons* (1947) have been studied, within the framework of Austin (1962) and Searle’s (1969) theories of speech acts. The analysis of the speech acts has been made on the basis of the interpersonal relations of the participant characters in the play. Moreover, while analyzing the speech acts, the context, in which utterances occur, is considered.



## 8. Implications of the Study

Obviously, the concepts broadly discussed and illustrated with the significant utterances in Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* are not merely aimed to lay down a theoretical framework but it must be used in actual teaching and learning process. Undoubtedly, the process of creating a literary work is different from any kind of scientific writing. In writing literature, the author seeks to convey his ideology, his thoughts, his literary message and his knowledge of the world through his literary work. Therefore, literature occupies a vital status as a mirror to society with certain peculiarities of its own in the society. Literature can be viewed as the trusty mirror of the age. Therefore, the author selects and uses the linguistic expressions to perform desired actions through his characters. For the performance of actions, playwright uses several tools and methods effectively. Here, tools and methods mean linguistic behavior of the characters. An in-depth analysis of the speech acts from the play helps sharpen the perception and understanding of the intended message of the author. Hence, the teaching of drama will be interesting for both the teacher and students and it will reveal different dimensions of meaning for them. Being one of the most important pragmatic tools, speech act theory is the most authentic tool to understand the characters' deliberately manipulated linguistic expressions



in the dramatic discourse.

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**المستخلص:**

تتناول هذه الرسالة نظرية أفعال الكلام وقضية الاتصال باللغة الإنجليزية. وهي تلخص وتعلق علي الافتراضات النظرية المتعلقة بنظرية أفعال الكلام التي قدمها بعض اللغويين والفلاسفة اللغويين. كما تناقش هذه الرسالة استخدام أفعال الكلام في مواقف المحادثة المختلفة وتطبيقها علي مسرحية كلهم أبنائي للكاتب الأمريكي الشهير آرثر ميلر. وتستخدم مسرحية كلهم أبنائي كمصدر للبيانات وذلك لإيضاح ومناقشة دور الأفعال الكلامية في الكشف عن لغة الشخصيات في المسرحية.

يتناول الفصل الأول من الرسالة مقدمة عن خلفية الدراسة وإلقاء الضوء علي أهداف هذه الدراسة ومنهج الدراسة وأهميتها. ويتناول الفصل الثاني تعريف علم البراجماتية (دراسة المعاني وفقا للسياق) ونشأته ، كما يلقي الضوء علي الاختلاف بينه وبين علم البناء وفروع اللغويات الأخرى. أما الفصل الثالث يتناول مناقشة نظرية الأفعال الكلامية ونشأتها كواحدة من أهم أدوات التحليل اللغوي. ثم تنتقل الدراسة في الفصل الرابع إلي الجانب التطبيقي وتحليل بعض نماذج الأفعال الكلامية التي استخدمها الكاتب آرثر ميلر في مسرحيته الشهيرة كلهم أبنائي. ويركز البحث علي دور هذه الأفعال الكلامية في تكوين الشخصيات في المسرحية ودورها أيضا في توصيل الرسالة الأدبية. ثم يقدم الفصل الخامس والأخير ختاماً للرسالة متضمناً ملخصاً للرسالة وأهم النتائج والتوصيات النهائية التي توصل إليها الباحث.