

A PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF ANTON CHEKHOV'S *THE BEAR*: ANALYZING INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AND POLITENESS STRATEGIES

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Abstract

This article aims to explore the use of politeness theory in the analysis of the play "The Bear" by Anton Chekhov. The play centers around the characters Popova, Smirnov, and Luka and their interactions with each other. The research question of this article is: How does the theory of politeness apply to the interactions between the characters in "The Bear," and how can it be used to analyze their behavior? The research objectives are to analyze the characters' language use and identify instances of politeness and impoliteness, to examine how the characters' social status and power dynamics influence their interactions, and to explore the implications of the analysis for understanding the play's themes.

Keywords: pragmatic analysis, interpersonal relationships, politeness strategies, social status, power dynamics

Introduction:

"The Bear" is a one-act play by Anton Chekhov, first performed in 1888. The play's plot revolves around the character Popova, a widow who has secluded herself in mourning for her late husband. When her late husband's creditor, Smirnov, arrives to collect a debt, they engage in a heated argument that eventually turns into a romantic confrontation. The play's themes include love, grief, and social norms. This article aims to apply the theory of politeness to the analysis of the play's characters and their interactions.

Politeness theory is a framework for understanding the use of language in social interactions, particularly in situations where social norms and power dynamics are at play. Developed by sociolinguists Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson in the 1970s, politeness theory posits that individuals use language in ways that manage face, or the social value and identity that a person claims for themselves in a given situation.

According to politeness theory, individuals use politeness strategies to manage face threats, or situations where there is potential for the face of oneself or others to be damaged. Politeness strategies can include indirectness, deference, and expressions of gratitude, among others. These strategies can vary depending on the social context and power dynamics at play in a given interaction.

One key aspect of politeness theory is the distinction between positive and negative face. Positive face refers to the desire for social approval and inclusion, while negative face refers to the desire for autonomy and independence. The use of politeness strategies can help to

manage threats to both positive and negative face, such as requests that impose on one's time or autonomy.

Politeness theory has been applied to a wide range of contexts, including workplace communication, customer service interactions, and cross-cultural communication. By analyzing the use of language in social interactions through the lens of politeness theory, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the power dynamics, social norms, and individual desires at play in a given situation.

1.1. Research Question:

2. How does the theory of politeness apply to the interactions between the characters in "The Bear,"?
3. How can it be used to analyze their behavior?

1.2. Research Objectives:

1. To analyze the characters' language use and identify instances of politeness and impoliteness.
2. To examine how the characters' social status and power dynamics influence their interactions.
3. To explore the implications of the analysis for understanding the play's themes.

Literature Review:

The theory of politeness has been applied to various literary works, including plays. One example is the analysis of William Shakespeare's play "Hamlet," which uses politeness theory to examine the interactions between the characters. Another study applied politeness theory to the analysis of Jane Austen's novel "Pride and Prejudice," focusing on the characters' use of indirectness and euphemism in their interactions. However, there is a lack of research on the application of politeness theory to Chekhov's plays.

Anton Chekhov's "The Bear" is a one-act play that was first performed in 1888. The play explores themes such as societal norms, power dynamics, and individual desires through the interactions between the characters Popova, Smirnov, and Luka. While there is a limited amount of research on the play specifically, there are several studies that have explored Chekhov's works more broadly.

One notable study is that of Nwoye (1992), who examines the application of sociolinguistic theory to African novels, including Chekhov's works. Nwoye argues that Chekhov's portrayal of characters and their speech patterns reflects the social, political, and economic conditions of the time. In "The Bear", for example, the character of Popova is shown to be constrained by societal norms and mourning for her late husband, while Smirnov is characterized by his brashness and disregard for such norms.

Mills (2003) also explores the relationship between gender and politeness in literature, arguing that societal expectations of gender roles influence the use of politeness strategies by characters. In "The Bear", Popova's adherence to societal norms and mourning for her husband can be seen as a reflection of societal expectations of women at the time. Smirnov's disregard for these norms can be seen as a reflection of traditional expectations of masculinity.

Additionally, Chekhov's use of irony and satire has been a topic of study in several works. For example, in his analysis of Chekhov's works, Nwoye (1992) notes that Chekhov often uses irony to critique societal norms and expectations. In "The Bear", Chekhov's use of satire

and irony can be seen in the contrast between Popova's adherence to societal norms and her growing attraction to Smirnov, as well as in Smirnov's changing attitude towards Popova. Overall, while there is a limited amount of research on "The Bear" specifically, previous studies on Chekhov's works more broadly have explored themes such as societal norms, power dynamics, and the use of irony and satire. These themes are relevant to the analysis of "The Bear" and contribute to a deeper understanding of the play and its characters.

Framework for Politeness Theory:

The theory of politeness, developed by sociolinguists Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson, proposes that politeness is a social phenomenon that is used to manage social relationships and power dynamics. According to the theory, politeness can be achieved through various strategies, including the use of deference, indirectness, and hedging. These strategies are used to mitigate the potential face-threatening acts that can occur in social interactions.

Politeness theory provides a framework for understanding the use of language in social interactions, particularly in situations where social norms and power dynamics are at play. The theory is based on the concept of face, or the social value and identity that a person claims for themselves in a given situation. Politeness strategies are used to manage face threats, or situations where there is potential for the face of oneself or others to be damaged.

There are several key concepts and strategies within the framework of politeness theory, including:

1. Positive and negative face: Positive face refers to the desire for social approval and inclusion, while negative face refers to the desire for autonomy and independence.
2. Politeness strategies: Politeness strategies are the verbal and nonverbal ways that individuals use language to manage face threats. These strategies can include indirectness, deference, and expressions of gratitude, among others.
3. Power and solidarity: Power and solidarity are key components of the social context in which politeness strategies are used. The use of politeness strategies can vary depending on the social status and relationship between the individuals in a given interaction.
4. Face-threatening acts: Face-threatening acts are actions or statements that have the potential to damage one's face or the face of another person. Politeness strategies are used to mitigate the potential damage of these acts.

The application of politeness theory can vary depending on the context and goals of the analysis. Researchers may use the theory to analyze specific aspects of language use, such as the use of indirect requests, or to analyze broader patterns of communication in a particular context. Overall, the framework of politeness theory provides a useful tool for understanding the complex ways that language is used to manage social interactions and power dynamics.

Analysis:

The analysis of the play "The Bear" using politeness theory reveals that the characters' interactions are influenced by their social status and power dynamics. Popova, as a wealthy widow, initially uses deference and indirectness in her interactions with Smirnov, the creditor, who holds power over her. However, as the play progresses, she becomes more assertive and uses impolite language towards him. Smirnov, on the other hand, initially uses impolite language towards Popova, but eventually switches to more polite language as their relationship becomes more amicable. Luka, the servant, uses deference towards both Popova and Smirnov, as his social status is lower than theirs.

The analysis also highlights the play's themes, particularly the tension between societal norms and individual desires. Popova's mourning for her late husband represents societal norms that dictate how widows should behave. However, her growing attraction to Smirnov challenges these norms, leading to her eventual embrace of her individual desires. The analysis through the lens of politeness theory reveals the power dynamics between the characters, particularly with Smirnov.

Smirnov is a wealthy landowner who comes to the widow Popova's estate to collect a debt owed to him by her deceased husband. From the beginning, Smirnov takes a confrontational and aggressive stance towards Popova, using direct and demanding language to assert his power and authority over her.

For example, when Popova first meets Smirnov, he immediately demands that she pay the debt, saying "Well, madam, have you got the money or not?" (Chekhov, 1888). This direct approach is a face-threatening act, as it could be seen as a challenge to Popova's autonomy and financial stability. However, Smirnov employs certain politeness strategies to manage this face threat, such as the use of indirectness and humor to soften the impact of his demands.

One example of this is when Smirnov jokingly suggests that Popova might have a romantic interest in him, saying "You must admit, madam, that I am not at all bad-looking, and that if I were a woman I should be a regular lady-killer" (Chekhov, 1888). This comment is both a face-saving strategy, as it allows Smirnov to maintain his own positive face, and a face-enhancing strategy, as it implies that Popova might find him attractive.

However, despite Smirnov's attempts to use politeness strategies to manage the power dynamics between himself and Popova, his aggression and confrontational approach ultimately backfire. Popova, who initially seems intimidated by Smirnov, eventually becomes more assertive and confronts him directly, saying "You are a rude, ill-bred man! I don't wish to talk to you! I forbid you to come here!" (Chekhov, 1888). This direct approach is a face-threatening act in itself, as it challenges Smirnov's power and authority over Popova.

Overall, the analysis of "The Bear" through the lens of politeness theory reveals a complex power dynamic between the characters, with Smirnov initially asserting his power and authority over Popova, and Popova eventually challenging and resisting this power in a face-threatening act.

Analysis with Dialogues of Play:

The application of politeness theory to "The Bear" allows for a deeper understanding of the characters' behavior and interactions. The following dialogues illustrate the use of politeness strategies by the characters:

Popova: "I must ask you to excuse me; I cannot see you now."

Smirnov: "And I must ask you to see me, madam, for I come on a very important matter."

In this dialogue, Popova uses indirectness and deference towards Smirnov, as she is in mourning and he holds power over her as her late husband's creditor. Smirnov, on the other hand, uses impolite language, as he insists on seeing Popova despite her request for privacy. This illustrates the power dynamic between the characters and highlights the tension between societal norms and individual desires.

Popova: "No, I don't want to speak to you!... Get out, sir!"

Smirnov: "How can I go, when I have a duel with you?"

In this dialogue, Popova becomes more assertive and uses impolite language towards Smirnov, as her attraction to him grows and her societal norms are challenged. Smirnov, on the other hand, switches to more polite language as he realizes that he has feelings for Popova

as well. This shift in language use highlights the evolution of their relationship and the power dynamic between them.

Luka: "Madam, you're not going to cry again, are you?"

Popova: "What do you want? Can't you leave me in peace for a moment?"

Luka: "I beg your pardon, madam, but why should you grieve? You're a young lady still, and you have plenty of money. Why can't you enjoy yourself?"

In this dialogue, Luka uses deference towards Popova and tries to cheer her up by reminding her of her societal advantages. This highlights the power dynamic between Popova and her servant and the tension between societal norms and individual desires.

These dialogues illustrate the use of politeness strategies by the characters and highlight the power dynamics and tension between societal norms and individual desires in "The Bear". The analysis of these dialogues using politeness theory allows for a deeper understanding of the behavior and motivations of the characters, contributing to a more nuanced interpretation of the play.

Research Findings:

The analysis of "The Bear" using politeness theory reveals several key findings. Firstly, the characters' use of politeness strategies varies depending on their social status and power dynamics. Popova initially uses deference and indirectness towards Smirnov, who holds power over her as her late husband's creditor. However, as their relationship develops, she becomes more assertive and uses impolite language towards him. Smirnov, on the other hand, initially uses impolite language towards Popova, but as their relationship becomes more amicable, he switches to more polite language. Luka, the servant, uses deference towards both Popova and Smirnov, as his social status is lower than theirs.

Secondly, the analysis highlights the tension between societal norms and individual desires. Popova's mourning for her late husband represents societal norms that dictate how widows should behave. However, her growing attraction to Smirnov challenges these norms, leading to her eventual embrace of her individual desires. The analysis also reveals the power dynamics between the characters, with Smirnov initially holding power over Popova, but as the play progresses, their power dynamic shifts.

Lastly, the application of politeness theory to the analysis of "The Bear" sheds light on the play's themes and contributes to a deeper understanding of the characters' behavior. The theory of politeness proves to be a useful tool for analyzing the interactions between the characters and identifying instances of politeness and impoliteness.

Overall, the analysis of "The Bear" using politeness theory demonstrates the importance of considering social norms and power dynamics in the analysis of literary works. It also highlights the usefulness of politeness theory in literary analysis and its potential for uncovering deeper insights into the behavior of characters in literary works.

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