



THE ROLE OF PRAGMATICS IN ARTISTIC DISCOURSE

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Abstract: *This article investigates the role of pragmatics in understanding and interpreting artistic discourse. Pragmatics, as the study of language in use and context, provides a theoretical and analytical framework for exploring how meaning is constructed, implied, and negotiated within literary texts. Artistic discourse, unlike ordinary communication, often involves implicit meanings, figurative expressions, and multi-layered communicative intentions. By analyzing pragmatic principles—such as implicature, presupposition, speech acts, and deixis—this study reveals how writers encode and readers decode intended meanings beyond literal interpretations. The findings emphasize that pragmatic analysis deepens literary interpretation, clarifies character intentions, and uncovers the interplay between linguistic form and communicative function in artistic expression.*

Keywords: *pragmatics, artistic discourse, presupposition, speech acts, context.*

Introduction

Artistic discourse, encompassing literary works such as novels, plays, and poetry, represents a complex mode of communication in which language transcends mere information transfer and becomes a medium of aesthetic and expressive meaning. Unlike everyday conversation, artistic discourse is intentionally layered, contextually rich, and symbolically structured, inviting readers to engage in interpretive acts that go beyond the surface of words. In this interpretive process, pragmatics—the study of how meaning is shaped by context and communicative intent—plays a central role. Pragmatic analysis allows scholars and readers to uncover implicit meanings, speaker intentions, and discourse strategies that structure literary communication.

The aim of this study is to examine how pragmatic principles function within artistic discourse, and to highlight the ways in which pragmatic interpretation enhances our understanding of literary texts. The article argues that pragmatics not only contributes to decoding implied meanings but also explains the interaction between author, text, and reader as participants in a communicative act.

Literature Review

The integration of pragmatics into literary analysis has been one of the most significant developments in modern stylistics and discourse studies. Early theorists such as Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) established speech act theory, emphasizing that utterances perform actions rather than merely describe reality. In literary discourse, this insight allows critics to interpret dialogue, monologue, and narration as performative acts with intentional functions—commanding, promising, or



persuading. Grice (1975) introduced the Cooperative Principle and Conversational Implicature, providing tools to analyze how authors generate implied meanings that readers infer through shared knowledge and context. This framework is especially relevant to artistic discourse, where writers frequently flout conversational maxims to create irony, humor, or ambiguity.

Later scholars such as Leech (1983) and Verschueren (1999) expanded pragmatic approaches to literary texts, arguing that artistic communication involves complex layers of intentionality, presupposition, and politeness. Levinson (1983) further emphasized context-dependence, which is crucial for interpreting deixis (e.g., person, place, and time references) in narrative structures.

Recent research (Simpson, 2004; Mey, 2001) has shown that pragmatic tools especially speech act theory, implicature analysis, and relevance theory—provide powerful interpretive strategies for uncovering hidden ideological and emotional dimensions of texts. Yet, despite growing attention, many literary analyses still rely heavily on structural or semantic models, overlooking the communicative nature of artistic discourse. This article seeks to foreground pragmatics as a core analytical lens for understanding the richness of literary meaning.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative, analytical approach, using text-based examples from literary works to illustrate how pragmatic concepts operate within artistic discourse. The study draws upon selected passages from prose, drama, and poetry, analyzing them through key pragmatic categories:

1. Speech Acts – how utterances in literary texts perform actions (e.g., requests, threats, promises).
2. Implicature – how authors create implied meanings beyond explicit statements.
3. Presupposition – how prior knowledge and assumptions shape interpretation.
4. Deixis and Context – how reference to person, place, and time guides readers' orientation in the narrative.

The methodology integrates pragmatic theory with discourse analysis, focusing on how linguistic choices contribute to characterization, narrative perspective, and thematic development.

Discussion

1. Speech Acts and Character Interaction

In dramatic and narrative discourse, utterances are not neutral descriptions but actions performed through language. For example, when Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth says, "*Look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent under't,*" the utterance functions as



both a directive (urging behavior) and a strategic manipulation (constructing deceit as a communicative act). Analyzing speech acts in such contexts reveals characters' intentions and interpersonal dynamics. Promises, threats, and confessions in artistic discourse reflect not only plot development but also psychological depth and power relations. Pragmatics thus enables readers to interpret dialogue as performative behavior, not merely linguistic content.

2. Implicature and Literary Irony

Writers often exploit Grice's maxims (Quality, Quantity, Relation, Manner) to generate implicature meanings inferred rather than explicitly stated. When a character in a novel remarks, "*What a lovely day!*" during a thunderstorm, the deliberate flouting of the maxim of quality creates irony.

Such implicatures engage readers in inferential reasoning, encouraging active participation in meaning-making. In poetry, understatement, metaphor, or symbolic imagery often rely on similar pragmatic mechanisms, inviting readers to explore multiple interpretive layers.

3. Presupposition and Contextual Knowledge

Artistic discourse frequently embeds presuppositions implicit assumptions shared between author and reader. In the line "*She stopped smoking again,*" the verb presupposes that the subject has smoked before. In literature, presupposition contributes to character background and thematic cohesion, providing implicit continuity that enriches narrative coherence.

Pragmatic analysis helps identify how presuppositions guide readers' understanding, revealing how authors manipulate shared knowledge and cultural references to achieve subtle effects.

4. Deixis and Reader Engagement

Deictic expressions such as *here, now, I, you, then* anchor discourse in context. In first-person narration, deixis constructs narrative perspective, positioning the reader within the fictional world. For instance, the repeated use of "*I remember*" in modernist prose creates temporal and psychological shifts, reflecting fragmented memory and subjectivity. Through pragmatic interpretation, deixis becomes a tool for exploring narrative voice, point of view, and temporal structure, demonstrating how artistic discourse organizes meaning through contextual reference.

5. Pragmatic Enrichment of Stylistic Analysis

While stylistics traditionally focuses on linguistic form, pragmatics complements it by emphasizing use, function, and intention. For instance, analyzing metaphor solely as a semantic phenomenon overlooks its communicative purpose—to evoke emotion, imply comparison, or challenge expectation. Integrating pragmatics into stylistics



allows scholars to move from what is said to why and how it is said, achieving a holistic interpretation of artistic language.

Conclusion

Pragmatics plays a vital role in decoding the implicit, contextual, and functional dimensions of artistic discourse. By applying pragmatic principles speech act theory, implicature, presupposition, and deixis readers gain access to deeper layers of meaning embedded within literary texts. Pragmatic analysis reveals how authors design utterances to perform actions, imply attitudes, and construct fictional worlds, transforming language into a vehicle of aesthetic and communicative intent.

Ultimately, the integration of pragmatics enriches literary criticism by bridging linguistic theory and interpretive practice. Future research should explore how relevance theory, politeness strategies, and discourse pragmatics further illuminate the interaction between text and reader, particularly in contemporary and digital literary forms.

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