

The Linguistic Strategies Employed by King Claudius in Hamlet

Fatima Khalil Ibrahim

Directorate General of Education– Anbar–Iraq

Email: alrawif88@gmail.com

Abstract:

This paper presents an analysis of the linguistic strategies which are followed by King Claudius in Shakespeare's tragedy (Hamlet). The purpose of the analysis is to give a view of Claudius's character as it is reflected in his speeches with different characters. He is the antagonist in the play. He, no doubt, exposes different human aspects and follies. Emphasis is given to language role which is followed by King Claudius. He speaks the language of the monarch, which is full of arrogance, vigor and flattery. There are a lot of linguistic strategies which are followed by King Claudius, while he is addressing other characters. Most of these strategies are used as a kind of self-defenses and a tool for defining the hidden identity. They are used as a kind of punishment at the same time. The strategies, among other things, include pun, metaphor, paradoxes, persuasive language, peculiar spelling and punctuation marks, alliteration etc. Consider the following extract:

King: Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother's death,
The memory be green, and that it us be fitted
To bear our hearts in grief, and our whole kingdom
To be contracted in one brow of woe.

Key words: (King Claudius, strategies, persuasive language, Hamlet, Pun).

1- Introduction

One of the major interests of Shakespearian's drama is the careful employment of language. He exploits the use of language as a tool for self-defense, as means of search for reality from the other side. It is used as a tool for punishment. The language employed by Shakespeare in Hamlet falls in this sphere. It is used carefully for a variety of purposes. One of Shakespeare's dramas is to examine what is hidden in his characters. Claudius uses the language of a fretted court. Many times, he resorts to the use of complex-sentences. In addition, language is employed to pinpoint the multiplicity of

strategies. "It expresses, embodies and symbolizes cultural variety" (Kramsch, 1998: 3). The text of Hamlet to which we refer is Shakespeare's, William. (1968), London: Longman Group Ltd.

2- The Problem

Language can be used to encourage or discourage good communication or even cause conflict between interlocutors. The problem within this study is how different strategies are interpreted differently by different characters depending on the context and other elements.

3-The Procedures

To achieve this study, the following procedures will be followed:

a- Pinpointing the linguistic exchanges employed by king Claudius while addressing Hamlet.

b- Listing almost all the strategies employed by king Claudius.

c- Giving an account of each phenomenon as a concept of its types.

4-Limits of the study

The work is limited to the analysis of each strategy employed by king Claudias while addressing other characters mainly Hamlet. The samples taken for the purpose of the analysis are limited to the play, i.e. Hamlet.

5- Hypotheses

In this research, it is hypothesized that:

1. King Claudius employs in his speech rhetorical devices including metaphorical uses of images and metonymical uses of words in order to promote his policy.
2. The king employs language of deception throughout hiding his real intentions.

6-Linguistics and the Study of Literature.

At the present time, linguistic analyses of literature are one of the most creative and active areas of literary studies. There is much espousal between

the two trends. Pratt (1977:69) believes that there are formal similarities between natural narrative and literary narrative. This similarity emerges from the fact that both are utterances of the same type. Ohmann (1981:367) says that the reader of literature is an observer rather than a participant. He (ibid) adds that "literary works are discourses with the usual illocutionary rules suspended". This means that it is reader who decides whether a text is a piece of literature or not. Short (cited in Corter and Simpson, 1989:149) Points out that drama" like many texts, has a structure whereby one level of discourse is embedded in another".

A few studies have been carried out in the area under study, to the best of the researcher's knowledge. Al-Abdullah and Ramadan (2012:911) investigated the language strategies used by Shakespeare in the Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark. Emphasis is given to the type of language Shakespeare provided his characters in order to give them genuine or assumed identities.

Omar and Mua rich (2013) studied impoliteness in Shakespeare's Hamlet. They concentrated on the boundaries between politeness and impoliteness. They pointed out that most of the exchanges between Hamlet and the other characters led to a broken conversation.

Hall (n.d) exposed the language of Hamlet. He showed that it can be difficult for students to comprehend today. He added that" some words we still use today had different meanings in Shakespeare's day." (Ibid:49)

7-Results and Discussion

In his first speech the king points out a number of issues: his marriage to the queen, the imminent attack of the Norway over a small piece of land, giving permission to Laertes to leave for France and the grief of Hamlet over his father's death. Consider the following example:

King: Therefore, our sometime sister, now our queen.

This warlike state the imperial jointers
Have we, as 't were with a defeated joy -
With one auspicious, and one dropping eye,
With mirth in funeral, and with dirge in marriage,
In equal scale weighing delight and dole –
Taken to wife. I. ii. 13

He uses a series of antitheses which exposes the situation he is living. He uses language skillfully. In talking to Laertes on the occasion for leaving, he says:

King: And now, Laertes, what's the news with you?
You told us of some suit; what is 't, Laertes? I. ii. 13
He addresses Hamlet:

King: But now my cousin Hamlet, and my son –
How is that clouds still hang on you?
He makes use of the seemingly acceptance of Hamlet in the following way:

King: This gentle and unforced accord of Hamlet
Sits, smiling to my heart, in grace whereof
No jocund health that Denmark drinks today ... I. ii. 17

The king describes Hamlet's fixed grief in a manner of a religious preacher:

King: But you must know your father lost a father;
That father lost, lost his; and the survivor bound
..... But to persevere
In obstinate condiment is a course
Of impious stubbornness; 't is unmanly grief,
..... Fie! 't is a fault to heaven
A fault against the dead, a fault to nature,
To reason most absurd. I. ii. 17

Thus, he describes Hamlet's persistence sadness as a fault to heaven. The language used by the king is the language followed by the Danish people on such occasions of death.

The king's dexterity is clear in this part of the play. He follows the art of persuasions playing with the language in such a way to show that his ability to achieve the objectives by speaking. "Claudius is a shrewd politician". Garcia (2018:

9).

The king in his speech II. ii. 59-61 is addressing Rosencrantz and Guildenstern regarding their mission. They are friends to Hamlet. They could help to decipher his transformation. The two characters seem to fail in that mission. They could not know the reason of Hamlet's confusion:

King: Welcome, dear Rosencrantz and Guildenstern!

Moreover, that we must did long to see you

..... and to gather

So much as from occasion you may glean. II.ii.59

The king in an aside admits that he practices the deed of villain by saying:

King: [Aside] O, 't is too true!

How smart a lash that speech cloth gives my conscience!

The harlot's cheek. III. i. 97

In a beautiful metaphor the king explains Hamlet's madness.

King: There is something in his soul

O'er which his melancholy sits on brood

And I do doubt the hatch and the disclose

will be some danger, III. i. 103

This is the picture of a chicken brooding on its eggs, but the hatching will be dangerous.

The king escapes after watching the play prepared to him by Hamlet. (The Mouse Trap). He rushes away saying:

King: Give me some light III. ii. 121

The king, in a speech antithesis, decides to get rid of Hamlet.

King: Arm you, I pray you, to the steady voyage;

For we will fetters put upon this fear,

Which now goes too free-footed, III. iii. 129

The antithesis is in the words "fitters" and "free-footed".

In his famous soliloquy, the king discloses his offence of killing his brother. He cannot pray. His situation is that "a man to double business bound". III. iii. 131. You can do the impossible by money. But on heaven it is useless. As parts of the body are witnesses to your own guilt. This soliloquy "manifests his own tragic inner division". Forkes (1963: 225). "He, too, is caught between the irreconcilable claims of this world and the next". (ibid)

King: And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself

Buys out the law. But 'tis not so above;

There is no shuffling-there the action lies

In its true nature, and we ourselves compelled.

Even to the teeth, and forehead of faults

To give in advice. III. iii. 131

The king uses too much contractions. He uses wisdoms on Ophelia's distemper:

King: O, this is the poison of deep grief; it springs

All from her father's death. O, Gertrude, Gertrude,

When sorrows come, they come not single spies

But in battalions, first her father slain;

Next your son gone; and the most violent author. IV. v. 165

The king, thinks that he is protected by the heavenly care;

King: There's such divinity doth hedge a king

That treason can but peep to it would

Acts little of his will. IV. v. 169

The king, by his smooth style, succeeds in calming down Laertes who is so angry of the murder of his father:

King: _____ why, now you speak

Like a good child and a true gentleman

That I am guiltless of your father's death IV. v. 169

The King continues in his persuasive manner:

King: Laertes, I must commune with your grief,

Or you deny me right. Go but apart,

Make chance of whom your wisest friends you will,

And they shall hear and judge, twixt you and me.

If by direct or by collateral hand

They find us touched we will our kingdom give,

Our crown, our life, and all that we call ours,

To you in satisfaction. IV. v. 173

A speech which is full of the plural pronouns. We,(us etc.). The king, of course should show his capability before his multitude.

King: Break not you sleeps for that, you must not think

That we are made of stuff so flat and dull

That we can let our beard be shook with danger

And think it pastime. IV. vii. 177

Out of his shrewdness the king plots on the killing of Hamlet through a dual:

King: _____ I will work him

To an exploit, now ripe in my device. IV. vii. 179

He continues:

King: And for your rapier most especially,

That he cried out, 't would be a single indeed. IV. vii. 181

King: He, being remiss
Most generous, and free from all contriving,
Will not pursue the foils; so that, with ease,
Or with a little shuffling, you may choose
A sword unbated. IV. vii. 183

The following linguistic strategies are reached at:

There are many strategies employed by King Claudius. The most vivid ones are the following:

1. The use of persuasive discourse and the swift change to the conclusion he wants, e.g.:

King: Therefore, our sometime sister, now our queen,
The imperial jointress to this warlike state
Have we, as 't were with defeated joy,

Taken to wife. I. ii. 13

2. The use of paradoxes to expose his circumlocution marriage to a sister-in-law.

"Defeated and dole"

"Mirth and dirge" (Ibid)

3. The quick transition from one subject to another:

He talks about the death of his brother, the marriage to the queen, the threatening of Fortinbras of Norway, sending the ambassadors to Norway, giving permission to Laertes to leave for France, the speech with Hamlet in an attempt to persuade him.

Thus, he jumps from the war theme to the brand national issue, the marriage of the queen, the kinship, the public affairs.

4. The uses of pun and irony:

In literature, Gibbs (1993: 262) states that "irony is concerned with the technique of using incongruity to suggest a distinction between reality and

expectation, e.g. saying one thing and meaning another with the audience unaware of this". While to Hall (n.d.: 56) Irony means "a plot device in which the audience's or reader's knowledge of events or individual surpasses that of the characters".

King: But now, my cousin Hamlet, and my son,

How is it that clouds still hang on you? I. ii. 15

Claudius uses pun while addressing Hamlet.

King: Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother's death

We can see the irony in the use of the word "death" as he is his killer.

5. He tries to make himself a preacher. Thus, he argues that Hamlet's perseverance in grief exposes "impious stubbornness", an "unmanly grief", and defiance of religion. See Abdullah and Susanne (2012: 916).
6. The play with emotions in his meeting with Laertes, he tries to persuade him to kill Hamlet, Claudius deliberately evokes Laertes to manipulate his emotions:

King: What would you undertake?

To show yourself your father's son indeed,

More than in words? IV. vii. 183

7. The language employed by the king hides numerous linguistic tricks and games.

Claudius exhorts Learter to revenge upon Hamlet.

King Learter was your father dear to you?

8. The resort to the use of royal plural pronouns:

King: _____ Nor have we herein barred

Now For all of our thanks.

Or thinking by our late dear brother's death

Our state to be disjoint and out of frame. I. ii. 13

Halliday and Hasan (1976: 53) add that these pronouns are used in a particular group of individuals with which the speaker wishes to identify himself.

9. The use of figurative language, such as simile, metaphor ...etc.

King: like a man to double business bound. III. iii. 131

King: _____ Do it, England,

For like the hectic in my blood he rages. IV. iv. 157

10. The use of rhetorical questions.

King: Why should we, in our peevish opposition,

Take it to heart? I. ii. 17

11. Spelling: Crystal (2008: 60 ff) states that "it is possible to quantify the degree of possible differences between Shakespeare and modern English spelling by comparing older spellings to modern ones".

King: thus, much the business is "we have here writ. I. ii. 13

12. Differences in punctuation marks such as apostrophes, hyphens, and the use of ellipsis.

King: The imperial jointress of this warlike state

Have we, as 'twere with defeated joy-

13. The use of archaic pronouns.

King: The head is not more native to the heart.

The hand more instrumental to the mouth

Than is the throne of Denmark to thy father

What wouldst thou have, Laertes? I. ii. 15

14. King Claudius resorted to the use of language of ordering or intruding. He used threatening indirectly. He tried to use rectitude but in vain.

Conclusion

The results of the samples discussed show that Claudius's character may be revealed as Machiavellian. He dispatches Hamlet to England and there someone will kill him. There is much use of persuasive language. They

are mostly used as a means for an end. Claudius sometimes follows these strategies to expose his anger, persuasion, irony or humour. Analyzing the play carefully reveals that Claudius is the pivot of the scene most of the time. The figures of speech he uses are loaded with meaning. He is a powerful character that he has not been, from my point of view, sufficiently studied.

References

- Al-Abdallah, Mufeed and Susanne Ramadan (2012). Shakespeare's Language Strategies in Hamlet. *Journal of Literature and Art studies*. Vol. 2. No. 10. 911-924.
- Clemen, Wolfgang (1976). *Shakespeare Hamlet. A Selection of Critical Essays*, edited by John Jump. London: The Macmillan press Ltd.
- Crystal, David (2006). *Think on My Words: Exploring Shakespeare's Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Forkes, Charles (1963). Shakespeare's Theatrical Symbolism and its Function in Hamlet. *Shakespeare's Quarterly Summer, 1963*. Vol. 14, No. 3. PP. 215-229. <https://www.jstor.org/stable2867805>.
- Gibbs, Raymond (1993). Marking Sense of Tropes. In *Metaphor and Thought* (ed). 262-266. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gracia, Ruben Ajo (2018). *An Analysis of King Claudius in Two Contemporary Performances of Hamlet*. Spain: Maria Eugenia Perojo Arronte.
- Hall, J. (n. d). *Unlocking the Language of Shakespeare in Hamlet*. University of Houston. <https://shorturl.at/MIFYP>.
- Halliday, M.A.K and Ruqayia Hasan (1976). *Cohesion in English*. London: Longman.

- Kramsch, C. (1998). *Language and Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mahood, M. M. (1957). *Shakespeare: Wordplay*. London: Spott is word Ballantyne Ltd.
- Ohmann, Richard. (1981). "Speech Acts and the Space between". In: Freeman, Donald (ed). *Essays in Modern Stylistics*. London: Methuen.
- Omar, Zeydan, k. and Hazim, H. Muarich. (2013), *Impoliteness in Shakespeare's Hamlet*. *An International Journal of Contemporary Issues*. Vol.11. No2. PP. 115-126.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. (1977). *Towards. Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse*. U.S.A: Indiana University Press.
- Shakespeare, William (1968). *Hamlet*. London: Longman Group Ltd.
- Short, Mick (1989). "Discourse Analysis and Drama". In Carter and Simpson (eds), *Language Discourse and Literature*. London: Unwin Hyman.