

## SPEECH ACT THEORY IN ARTHUR MILLER'S DRAMA "THE CRUCIBLE"

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### ABSTRACT

*The research intends not only to describe the functions of the speech acts used by the main characters in Arthur Miller's drama, The Crucible but also to identify the illocutionary of the speech acts and to identify the illocutionary and functions of the speech acts dominant in Arthur Miller's drama, The Crucible. Based on the research findings, it is found that The first scene occurs at the beginning of Act II in John Proctor's house. The second scene occurs in Act IV in John Proctor's prison cell near the end of the play before he chooses to be hanged with honor rather than live with shame. Both scenes include an act of request, to confess in the first instance or to approve of an act of confession in the second. In both scenes, the hearer declines the request.*

**Keywords:** *Speech Act, Drama, The Crucible.*

### INTRODUCTION

It is a matter of fact that all human activities cannot be separated from the use of language as a means of communication and interaction. People need a language to share their ideas and feelings, to give information, to convey thoughts, and so on as Barton (1994) states that language is symbolic system within the connection between what happens inside mind and what goes outside environment. Therefore, to be able to communicate and interact, people are claimed to use and understand utterances formed by combining phonemes, morphemes, words, phrases, and sentences. The utterances or expressions, then, need to be understood through their meanings.

Concerning with the meaning, people should understand not only the property of expressions resulting the literal meaning through the concept of 'what does X mean?', but also the hidden meaning through the concept of 'what do you mean by X?'. It is due to the significance of speech act as acts of communication that this research proposes the concepts of pragmatics and speech acts used in literary works. Literary works are created not only to convey ideas, experiences, but also to convey cultural values to the readers. The hope to be conveyed will be



an alternative input and reprimand, so that the reader can draw conclusions and interpret it for the development of his life.

In tracing the journey of human life, literary works have many dimensions of problems that are realized by the author in his work. Unger (in Wellek and Warren, 1995, p. 141) classifies the problems that the authors are working on, inseparable from several things such as fate, religion, education, nature, people, society, family and country. To understand the literary work in its entirety, of course, one must go through a good appreciation process. According to Birch (1989, p. 6), literary appreciation is an activity to truly engage in literary works, appreciation, critical mind sensitivity, and a good sense of feeling towards literary work.

One of the literary works is drama. Drama is mimetic from everyday life. Events that occur in drama have similarities with events in everyday life. Drama teaches people about life's problems in the form of morals, character or characters, conflict, and all other aspects of human lives. These values are stated not only in the mandate, but also in the dialogue or speech of the character. Dialogue has a role to show character and to enrich plots, to create conflict, to connect facts, to connect scenes and images at once, and to disguise future events. To understand the contents of the dialogue, figures need to be studied in depth.

One of the most interesting dramas is *The Crucible* written by American writer, Arthur Miller. Through the analysis of the dialogue of the drama script, it is expected that the reader can more easily understand and examine the behavior of the character based on his speech or dialogue. *The Crucible* consists of three acts and in the form of manuscript (text, dialogue, discourse), and also provides assertion that the drama contains linguistic elements. Kane (1984) explains that in the drama we do not need to find out what's important. Selection has been made - whatever is significant. In addition, Simpson (1997, p. 130), further, argues that dramatic dialogue provides an excellent source of material for explaining the archetype of everyday conversation. In terms of pragmatics, 'the Crucible' text is a form of speech act. Contextually, it can be seen how Arthur Miller's sociocultural and situational background creates *The Crucible* containing the



function, meaning and purpose or purpose of speech used by American playwright, Arthur Miller.

## **METHOD**

The study focuses on two scenes of the play which occur between the two leading characters, husband and wife, John and Elizabeth Proctor. These are examined in the light of Speech Act Theory explored in the work of J. L. Austin and Searle to analyze the nature and development of the relationship between the two and the role this relationship plays in bringing about the catastrophic events of the play whose effects are not only confined to a limited number of individuals but to the society as a whole. The two scenes also reflect the agonizing inner voyage of John Proctor to find his lost honor.

In this case, it is crucial that people try to grasp what people want to do by saying something. It means that every utterance they say or write needs to be connected with situations or contexts resulting an implicit act performed. This kind of meaning is related to the concept of pragmatics. Levinson (1993) defines pragmatics as the study of meanings in relation to the speech situations. In other words, pragmatics requires a deeper concept resulting the way to get the intended or hidden meanings of the utterances or expressions produced. Fraser (2010) explains that pragmatics leads the speaker to have the competence or ability to communicate the intended message of the utterances or expressions produced by connecting to the social context as the interlocutor. Moreover, Finch (2000) argues that pragmatics does not focus on understanding the explicit meaning of utterances or expressions, but it focuses on understanding the implicit meaning or utterances or expressions through the speakers' style and manner within situational context. The term 'context' is something crucial since what people mean by the utterances or expressions produced relates to the situation happening which is known as the context.

Verhaar (2006, p.14) states that the context involves who speaks to whom, where, when, in what situation, and with what motivation. It can be said that the context is assumed to be the bridge for creating some acts that can be performed



by the speakers to refer to the utterances made or produced. This phenomenon is known as the speech situation. Leech (1983, pp. 5-6) states that pragmatics studies meaning in relation to speech situation. In other words, pragmatics learns the meaning or the intent of the utterance in relation to the speech situation, for what the utterance is done. It also asks what someone means by a speech act and associates meaning with. According to Yule (1994, p. 47), speech act is defined as an action done by the speaker to perform what is meant by their utterances. In other words, one may need to have some ways how to share his/her ideas and convince or influence others. The speech act can also be thought as acts of communication. In this case, the type of speech acts being performed may correspond to the type of attitude being expressed.

## **RESULT**

The first scene occurs at the beginning of Act II in John Proctor's house. The second scene occurs in Act IV in John Proctor's prison cell near the end of the play before he chooses to be hanged with honor rather than live with shame. Both scenes include an act of request, to confess in the first instance or to approve of an act of confession in the second. In both scenes, the hearer declines the request. The choices of the characters in both scenes tell us something about their personal integrity and about the terrible conflict going on within their minds and souls since confession of guilt means the loss of one's honor and property to avoid being hanged. An act of confession in the play is not just a matter of uttering some words: it is a way of saving one's life at the expense of losing one's reputation and property. The possibility of language to bring about a change of state is something examined by Austin in Speech Act Theory.

The first scene opens Act II. John Proctor comes back home after working all day in the fields. Elizabeth, his wife, puts their children to bed and serves him dinner. As the couple discuss the farm and the meal, relations between them seems stressed and distant. Elizabeth is still unable to completely forgive John for his love affair with their former maid, Abigail. The central speech act here is Elizabeth's request: "I think you must go to Salem, John... you must tell them it is



a fraud" (p. 76). Through fulfilling this act by John, Elizabeth expects a major change in what she feels to be a dire situation i.e. Abigail's growing power and influence in Salem's society. Her pre-request utterances include implicit performatives to inform John of Salem's latest news since he has been busy working in the fields all day:

1. Their servant, Mary Warren has gone to Salem against his orders.
2. Mary, an ignorant 17-year-old maid, has become an official in the newly created court to prosecute witches. That's why she brags about her high position and acts like "a daughter of a prince" refusing to obey Elizabeth's orders to stay at home. It is clear that the social order in Salem is turned upside down due to the witch-hunt.
3. Fourteen people have been imprisoned due the testimony of Abigail and the girls and will be hanged unless they confess to working with the devil.
4. Judges have come from Boston, headed by the deputy governor of Massachusetts.
5. Abigail has become extremely powerful and is respected by the people of Salem as though she was a saint.

By first conveying the disturbing news to John, Elizabeth attempts to open his eyes to the dangerous circumstances in Salem, hence to persuade him of the necessity of going there and denounce Abigail before it is too late. She aims at rendering the illocutionary force of her request more effective through a set of illuminating pre-request performatives. Indeed Elizabeth's relentless honesty is the most admirable quality of her character. She has taken upon herself to act as Proctor's conscience. She refuses to allow him to give up his responsibility to expose the girls' lies. His previous temptation of a young girl has already had dreadful consequences. In some way, Proctor has instigated the events that eventually led to the witch hunt. He has stimulated strong passions in Abigail and subjected her to hearsay from women whom she vindictively accused of witchcraft.



After conveying the alarming news of Salem to John, Elizabeth directly delivers her request (a directive speech act):

Elizabeth: " I think you must go to Salem, John.... you must tell them it is a fraud" (p. 76).

In the light of the previous disturbing news, it is obvious that Elizabeth realizes the evil desire of Abigail to take revenge upon her and upon the women of Salem. She also sees clearly that the girl is a natural killer, "a murderer" as she later states in the following scene (p. 104). Hence, her request strongly implies a warning to the hearer that if he does not go and tell the truth, the consequences will be dangerous to both of them.

Elizabeth: God forbid you keep that from the court, John. I think they must be told"(p. 77).

Proctor, however, hesitates because, as he explains, without other witnesses, his word would be taken against Abigail's. Elizabeth is shocked to discover that he was alone with Abigail when she told him the truth. She quickly confronts him with her doubts and begins to interrogate him to know under which circumstances he was alone with the girl. Her interrogation in the form of several consecutive questions suggests that she believes he still loves the girl and he is trying to protect her. Proctor angrily interrupts her and cuts short her enquiry. He steadfastly maintains that his affair with Abigail is over and forgotten. In addition, he sharply blames Elizabeth because from the time Abigail left his house, he has been trying to please her but she is cold and unforgiving. He resents her endless doubts indicating that he will not stand her to judge him anymore.

Proctor: You will not judge me more, Elizabeth.... look to your own improvement before you... judge your husband anymore. I have forgot Abigail."

Though he believes his folly has already been punished and repented for, yet she will never permit herself to forget it:



Elizabeth: "I have gone tiptoe in this house all seven month since...(Abigail) is gone. I have not moved from there to there without I think to please you, and still... I cannot speak but I am doubted, as though I come into a court into this house!" (p. 78).

He even regrets that he ever confessed his affair with Abigail to her thinking that she would forgive him:

Proctor: I should have roared you down when first you told me your suspicion. But I wilted, and, like a Christian, I confessed.... Some dream I had must have mistaken you for god that day. But you're not, you're not" (p. 79).

Elizabeth's misgivings drives him to use his male authority to put an end to his long suffering and alienation in his house. He insistently delivers his demands in two clear directive speech acts:

Proctor: Let you look sometimes for goodness in me, and judge me not" (p. 79).

These directives, in addition to his earlier declarations,

Proctor: "I'll not have your suspicion anymore," "You will not judge me more, Elizabeth" (p. 78)

Imply a serious threat to Elizabeth (maybe separation or divorce). Hence, they also serve as speech acts of threatening performed through the use of directives and declarations. As a result, Elizabeth softens and tries to justify her cold and unforgiving attitude before the end of the scene:

Elizabeth: I don't judge you. The magistrate sits in your heart that judge you. I never thought you but but a goodman, John --with a smile—only somewhat bewildered. (p. 79).

Some critics, like Popkin (1956) and Bonnet (1982), note that Elizabeth's interrogation of her husband in this scene lacks in mercy and understanding as the public justice of the wider context of Salem. Her heavy insistence on exploring and worrying over her husband's past crime soon relates her house to a courtroom.



Elizabeth's obsession by which she appoints herself a judge and turns her house into a courtroom where she prosecutes her husband is, to use Austin's terms, "infelicitous" because she has no instituted authority to act that way.

In addition, Proctor no longer endures her unforgiving, cold attitude, or rather he does not have "the requisite thoughts, feelings and intentions" to accept his wife's role as a magistrate anymore. Consequently, Elizabeth's illocutionary behavior has hitherto contributed to cause "a misfire" and "an abuse" due to violation of Austin's felicity conditions 2 and 3. A great soul and an honest being she is, yet this has little chance if her suspicions towards her repentant husband cannot subordinate themselves to more considerate tolerance of a passing manly weakness. At this stage, Elizabeth cannot fully realize the spiritual agony of her husband to which Miller refers in the play's notes: He is a sinner... not only against the moral fashion of the time, but against his own vision of personal conduct... Proctor, respected and even feared in Salem, has come to regard himself a fraud (p. 38).

Throughout the play, Proctor struggles against his own weakness in order to achieve a view of himself that he can be satisfied with. This battle for personal integrity is lost many times before it is finally won at the play's end. He has already lost respect for himself as a result of his affair with Abigail. His sin is coupled with deception: in presenting himself as an upright citizen of Salem, he considers himself a fraud. In Salem, a person's name or reputation is everything. Although he does not feel that he deserves his good name, he does not wish to lose it. By resisting Elizabeth's warning request, he is indeed unwilling to discredit Abigail, not because he still loves her, as Elizabeth quickly misinterprets, but because he believes that by condemning her, he would risk exposing himself as a lecher and ruin his good name.

Proctor at this stage believes that he can go on with life away from what is going on in Salem. By refusing to risk his reputation, he allows Abigail's power to enhance till she soon accuses his wife of witchcraft, and the latter is arrested and tried before the court. Despite his attempts to retreat from society, the insanity that has engulfed Salem soon turns his private world upside down.





Thus, the illocutionary force of Elizabeth through which she intends to urge Proctor to tell the truth fails because of his unwillingness to involve himself in the trials. The result is a perlocutionary sequel i.e. Proctor's refusal to go to Salem to discredit Abigail before the court. Instead, he promises to "think on it," while Abigail's power over the town grows stronger. As audiences, we strongly feel that his promise (a commissive speech act) is more likely to be a device to evade further argument with Elizabeth; even if he did think on the matter, we would not expect much of positive results. He does not really intend to commit himself to a future course of action with 14 people already in prison threatened to hang if they deny the accusations or else be excommunicated if they confess to mere lies.

Hence, he violates the felicity condition 3 and his "infelicitous" promise, without having the requisite thoughts, feelings and intentions to fulfill, results in an "abuse" of the procedure of promise. Another pattern of request and refusal occurs in the second scene between Elizabeth and John in Act IV near the end of the play. However, the scene reveals a favorable progress in their relationship after all the hardships they have gone through since Elizabeth's arrest at the end of Act II. When she was arrested at the end of act II, Proctor swears to "fall like an ocean on that court" (p. 106). Nevertheless, he continues to delay jeopardizing his reputation. He first attempts through a variety of legal arguments to free his wife. He also forces their maid, Mary Warren, to admit before the court that the girls have been pretending. When Abigail outwits him in the court, he has no choice but to denounce her as a harlot and confess being a lecher.

At last, he realizes that he cannot go on living isolated from the social turmoil of his town and, by hiding the truth, he has committed a great wrong. Ironically, when Deputy Governor Danforth questions Elizabeth to confirm Proctor's claim against Abigail, her concern for her husband's name causes her to deny that her husband is a lecher. Living in the puritanical environment of Salem and sharing its values, even "this model of truthfulness" values her husband's good name more than uttering truth (Popkin, 1964, p. 144). Her only lie proves to be her ruin, and far from protecting her husband it leads to his accusation and arrest



as a devil's agent. The second scene occurs in act IV, three months after Proctor's arrest on the night before he is to be hanged. He and his wife have been apart during this period and have never seen each other since. Elizabeth's life, as Danforth declares, has been spared till she gives birth to her baby. She has been previously urged by deputy governor Danforth and Reverend Hale to prevail upon her husband to confess to a lie to save his life.

The court officials are desperate for his confession. Rebellion is spreading around. To keep hold of its power, the court needs one of the convicted prisoners to confess thus proves to the seditious public the guilt of the victims. Elizabeth agrees to speak with her husband but does not promise to ask for his confession. Left alone for sometime in Proctor's cell, they clasp hands and begin with difficulty to speak. He asks about the expected baby and about the children. She tells him that their sons are safe. He asks about their friends, Giles Corey, Rebecca Nurse and Martha Corey. She tells him that Giles had been tortured to death and refused to confess. She adds that although many have confessed, Rebecca Nurse and Martha Corey have held firm. Proctor reveals that so far he has refused to confess out of stubborn pride. Despite torture, he has had no desire "to give a lie to dogs" (p. 173).

Now he is planning to save his life. In his heart, however, he knows that it is a cowardly and dishonest act. However, because he trusts Elizabeth's honest judgment, he desperately wants her to approve of his action as if to provide him with a moral pretext for dishonesty and cowardice. Unlike Elizabeth in the previous scene, he does not use pre-request performatives to emotionally persuade her to accept his request and approve of his future action. It is evident that he has meditated a lot over his decision. The news that his close friends have heroically refused to confess, instead of elevating his morale, causes him to feel frustrated. He indicates that it is a pretense and as a sinner, he is not worthy of a martyr death. He right away delivers his request using two consecutive questions:

Proctor: "What say you? If I give them that?" "What would you have me do?" (p. 173).



This time Elizabeth interprets her husband's intention correctly:

Elizabeth: "As you will, I would have it. Slight pause; I want you living, John" (p. 173).

She knows the essential goodness of his character. She also recognizes the conflict going on within his mind and soul. Though they have been separated physically, the suffering they both have experienced brings about their emotional and spiritual rapprochement. Nevertheless, Proctor is not yet quite true to himself. Elizabeth refuses to judge her husband's future action using a declarative speech act reflecting her upright and honest nature;

Elizabeth: "I can't judge you, John" (p. 172).

Rather she simply states her love and confirms her faith in her husband's goodness. She urges him to find goodness in himself because it is his soul he is risking, not hers. Ironically enough, Elizabeth in the previous scene desires her husband to act responsibly and confess to the truth to save his family and the whole society, but he refuses. In this scene, proctor wants to confess to a lie to save himself, but his wife refuses to encourage him. As in the previous scene, Elizabeth's refusal results in a perlocutionary sequel. The rational justifications he utters afterwards do not convince her to change her state of mind:

Proctor: "My honesty is broke Elizabeth; I am no good man;" or refusing to confess to a lie is "a vanity that will not blind God, nor keep my children out of the wind" (p. 173).

Earlier in their previous argument in Act II, Proctor ironically rejects Elizabeth's judgment of his actions to "look to your own improvement before you go to judge your husband" (p. 78). Instead of developing strong suspicions toward her husband, she should have realized the role she played in driving him to Abigail's arms. Now Elizabeth recalls those words. While refraining from supporting her husband's intentions to confess by refusing to judge his actions, she asks his forgiveness for her own sin of coldness and suspicion:



Proctor: "It needs a cold wife to prompt lechery" (p. 174).

Evidently, her character undergoes a remarkable change. During her stay in prison, she has plenty of time to seek out her soul. Now she delivers her own confessions disclosing how her own weakness, coldness and lack of confidence drove her husband into Abigail's arms. She has indeed looked to her improvement, and now she reveals her sorrow using expressives like: Elizabeth: "I never knew how I should say my love," and "it was a cold house I kept!" (p. 174).

Elizabeth's unbending truthfulness tortures Proctor and makes him realize his lack of moral courage. He reconsiders his grave decision for a while and agonizingly expresses his weakness in a series of questions reflecting his moral confusion:

Proctor: "Then who will judge me? ... God in heaven, what is John Proctor, what is John Proctor?" (p. 175)

Breaking free from all pretense and rationalization, he forces himself to face the truth using a commissive performative this time echoing his determination to confess to lies despite his wife's disapproval:

Proctor: "Good then—it is evil, and I do it" (p. 176).

The scene ends with the entrance of the court officials. Although Proctor thinks that he has surrendered to evil, yet there are red lines which he will not dare to cross. The example of Elizabeth is not fully lost in him and his commitment to his friends proves greater than he believes to be. He refuses to name anyone or to bear witness against Rebecca, Martha and others:

Proctor: "I like not spoil their names" (p. 179).

Danforth: "You will give me your honest confession in my hand, or I cannot keep you from the rope" (p. 182).

At last, Proctor makes his choice and gloriously tears up his confession. He associates himself totally with the ideals of sincerity and truthfulness, with faithfulness to his friends and to the devastation of the corrupt authority of



Salem's court. By refusing to reject these ideals, he regains his honor that he first lost with the seduction of Abigail. At last, he discovers his true self and finds a worthy answer to the question that has stimulated and distressed him from the beginning:

Proctor: "What is John Proctor?" (p. 175)

He can finally declare to Danforth, Paris and other court officials:

Proctor: "You have made your magic now, for now I do think I see some shred of goodness in John Proctor. Not enough to weave a banner with, but white enough to keep it from such dogs" (p. 183).

Realizing at the end that, to save his dignity and restore his self-esteem, his name must embody his soul, consequently he chooses a heroic death over a dishonorable life. Proctor's spiritual odyssey is highly personal but it is also social since he ultimately comes to an elevated self awareness through which he prefers to protect his honor rather than live in a society where deceit and pretense are "institutionalized" (Bonnet, 1983, p. 35). His last words to the weeping Elizabeth form a request, which echoes his victory over the dogs:

Proctor: "Give them no tears! Tears pleasure them! Show honor now, show a stony heart and sink them with it!" (p. 183)

As Proctor and Rebecca are led to the gibbet, Reverend Hale and Reverend Paris, members of the court, beg Elizabeth to persuade her husband to change his mind. Hale argues that Proctor is throwing his life away out of futile pride. He asks Elizabeth to "Go to him, take his shame away" (p. 184). But Elizabeth knows better: Proctor's sacrifice is not his shame but his honor. Out of love for her husband, she lets him die with his newly-found "goodness." With a cry and near collapse she exclaims: "He has his goodness now. God forbid I take it from him!" (p. 183)



## **DISCUSSION**

The first scene opens Act II. John Proctor comes back home after working all day in the fields. Elizabeth, his wife, puts their children to bed and serves him dinner. As the couple discuss the farm and the meal, relations between them seems stressed and distant. Elizabeth is still unable to completely forgive John for his love affair with their former maid, Abigail. The central speech act here is Elizabeth's request. Elizabeth aims at rendering the illocutionary force of her request more effective through a set of illuminating pre-request performatives. Another pattern of request and refusal occurs in the second scene between Elizabeth and John in Act IV near the end of the play. As in the previous scene, Elizabeth's refusal results in a perlocutionary sequel. Elizabeth refuses to judge her husband's future action using a declarative speech act reflecting her upright and honest nature.

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