BI-DIRECTIONAL APPROACH TO ANALYZING DIALOGICAL SPEECH IN JOHN STEINBECK’S NOVELS

The paper presented aims at linguistic and stylistic analysis of the direct speech of fictitious characters along with the examination of some pragmalinguistic features of the communicative situation as such. Language-based approach can be viewed as an ‘enquiry going from the text to the characters’, while pragmatic analysis unfolds in the opposite direction, ‘from the pragmatic intentions to the literary text’. Such a ‘dualistic’ approach can bring to light the correlation between communicative situations portrayed in novels and specific stylistic/textual characteristics of the dialogue. Besides that, it helps to unveil the author’s idea and message of a book. Therefore, the primary aim of the paper is to reveal the interrelation between the pragmatic parameters of a communication situation and stylistic/textual features of a dialogue. The methods used are pragmalinguistic analysis of communicative situations, linguistic analysis of the characters’ speech with the elements of stylistic analysis. The application of the bi-directional approach is demonstrated on the material of dialogues from John Steinbeck’s books.

Keywords: pragmatics, dialogical speech, communicative situation, speech strategies, self-disclosure of characters.

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**Introduction**

Though hardly a new issue in linguistics, dialogical speech and its role in literary characters’ representation (their personal features, background, motifs, etc.) is addressed with the help of a variety of controversial approaches. Of special interest is the task to determine, identify and compile a set of linguistic tools and devices used by an author in building up their characters’ self-disclosure as well as to look upon the structure of a dialogue through the lens of social communicative practice within the framework of anthropocentric paradigm adopted in modern linguistics [Kubrjakova, pp. 144–168; Dayter, pp. 38–39]. When working on a book/story/play, the author employs specific techniques in constructing dialogues which, if interpreted correctly, help the reader to come to the right understanding of a plot and the author’s message [Fernández, p. 43].

The paper presented focuses on linguistic tools used by John Steinbeck to describe his characters in dialogues, and also aims to demonstrate the capacity and efficiency of pragma-linguistics in analyzing samples of dialogical speech in fiction and human communication in general. Several dialogues from John Steinbeck’s “Grapes of Wrath” and “Of Mice and Men” underwent linguistic examination serving as practical material for this study.

**Methods and material**

It seems safe to claim that the most important aspects/levels of any literary work are its language (both the author’s and that of his/her characters) and a fictional world created in literature (which is a secondary sign system) [Lotman, p. 6]. Therefore, any artistic text is a sort of dualistic entity, on the one hand, it is a form of language existence, on the other, it plays a metalinguistic role, being a tool to create and reveal the artistic fictional world of the book to the reader. This fact poses a certain difficulty for a researcher making it necessary to differentiate between the two sides, their characteristics and elements. In this way, stylistic devices, syntax of sentences, register (to name a few) belong to the “language/speech” level, while plots, characters, chronotopes are the components of the fictional world [Arnold, p. 25].
At the same time, any ‘independent’ analysis of each of the two levels inevitably turns out to suffer from serious limitations. A dialogue perfectly illustrates drawbacks of such approach, as it is a multifaceted linguistic material being simultaneously a text (in a narrow sense, of course), a component of a plot, a device making ‘the artistic world’ develop and move. Therefore, one of the essential tasks in analyzing any literary work lies in revealing connections between the elements of the two levels.

The ‘traditional’ analysis of the language of literary works goes from bottom to top, from characters’ speech to the world of a novel allowing to unveil the characters’ relations to one another and their relationships, motifs, personal features and their places in a plot. In other words, being a significant part of the characters’ exposition, a dialogue provides us with their speech portraits, so the ‘bottom-to-top’ analysis aims at a proper reconstruction of these portraits.

The reverse movement — from top to bottom, from characters to their speech — is no less important, and pragmatics proves to be an effective tool in the task of understanding the characters’ reasons and intentions underlying their particular remarks with their hidden meanings given in a particular verbal form [for more detail see: Sinha]. It is the characters’ goal setting as a reflection of the author’s goal setting answers the question about the structure and form of a dialogue. The results of the two proposed approaches serve as a sort of ‘mutual verification’ proving each other’s reliability [Arnold, p. 28].

The aims of the paper are: (1) to determine the type of a dialogue, the extent of its coherence and symmetry; (2) to characterize their speech on all the levels (phonetics, grammar, lexis and style); (3) to analyze possible deviations from standard literary language as the most informative elements of speech; (4) to describe a communication situation, its context, communicants, their intentions, conflicts of interests and remarks, as knowing these makes it possible to understand what is implied by each remark, to assess its role in the development of a dialogue and contribution to the success or failure of communication [Dolgorukov et al, p. 13–59]; (5) to reveal the interrelation between the pragmatic parameters of a communication situation with stylistic and textual features of a dialogue.

The material analyzed includes passages with the characters’ direct speech, while the author’s remarks, the narrative itself and the reported speech are referred to only when otherwise it is hard/impossible to understand the role of a particular dialogue in the overall composition of a novel.
Linguistic and Stylistic Analysis

The characters of the two novels are from the state of Oklahoma and their speech is typical of South Midland Americans. J. Steinbeck demonstrates this on the phonetical level focusing on transformations of sound images of words in speech rather than on individual accents of the characters or peculiarities of their speech. Dialogues abound with the cases of substitution velar nasal [ŋ] for alveolar [n]: gettin’, goin’, doin’, nothin’, drivin’, drinkin’, puttin’, settin’, sneakin’, thinkin’ and the like. Another typical feature is a regular dropout of alveolar stops [t] и [d] primarily at the end of the words: win’child, an’, ol’, jus’, use’, didn’, thousan’, las’. Besides these, there are some other kinds of sound and even syllable dropouts as in ‘course, ‘cause, ‘less, ‘em, ‘Preciate it, su’prised, ever’thing, ‘im, ‘F, ‘bout. Finally, not infrequently the author uses non-standard word forms, such as tomorra, wanta, twicet, idear, git, ain’t, ast ta (= ask to), somepin.

As for their grammar, the dialogues demonstrate that the characters are inclined to use double and sometimes even triple negations:

you oughtn’ to take no walk;
I never was no hand to write, nor my old man neither;
I don’t mean nothin’ neither;
A guy that never been a truck skinner don’t know nothin’;
Well, it ain’t no goddamn cinch;
But it ain’t none of my business;
Nothin’ ain’t none of your affair;
I never asked you nothin’ about it; и т. д.

Another unconventional grammatical feature is the defective or inadequate subject-verb agreement as well as atypical usage of the articles:

I’d a walked her if my dogs wasn’t pooped out;
They was two fellas.

Moreover, the characters’ speech is highly elliptical with multiple cases of omitted subjects (expressed by personal pronouns I, you) and auxiliary verbs (to be, to have):

Sure, I seen it;
Didn’t have no other shoes;
Goin’ far?
Lookin’ for a job?
I seen your hands. Been swingin’ a pick or an ax or a sledge.
So long, fella. You been a good guy; 
What you want? 
What you payin’?

In terms of lexical level, the dialogues are characterized by lots of slang expressions, dialectal and vernacular words and expressions: *ya, ain’t, them* (meaning *the* and *their*), *whisht, old man (=father), shove around, mind my own yard*. A great many of word collocations and idioms have distinctly informal or derogatory coloring:

- *rich bastard;*
- *my dogs was pooped out;*
- *screwin’ around;*
- *You didn’t give a damn;*
- *it ain’t no goddamn cinch;*
- *won’t have a snort?*
- *You keep your trap shut*
- *Goddamn reds*
- *If you men want to sit here on your ass, O.K.*

Finally, words belonging to professional jargons of the 1930-s are also plentiful: *truck skinner* (long-distance truck driver), *cropper* (farmer), *cats* (Caterpillar heavy machinery).

Including the above-mentioned sub-standard elements into the characters’ speech, J. Steinbeck shows that:

These are poorly educated working-class people. This is seen both in the careless way they pronounce a large number of words, in numerous grammar mistakes as well as in various slang and jargon expressions. The number of speech ‘deviations’ correlates with the social status and cultural background of a character: the lower the status, the more non-standard forms the character uses. For instance, a police officer and a recruiter of workers make far fewer mistakes than workers.

The working-class characters are proud of their class affiliation and even try to alienate themselves from proprietors and the other well-off. The opposition ‘friend or foe’ manifests itself in such phrases as *rich bastard* when speaking of ‘foes’ like land-owners, while ‘friends’ or commoners are generally called *a guy, a fella.*

**Pragmalinguistic Analysis**

To begin with the pragmalinguistic analysis itself, we should outline the background of the episode considered further. The hero of “Grapes of Wrath”, Tom Joad, released after four years of imprisonment is hitchhik-
ing to his father’s farm. The truck driver he stops works for a company that forbids to give a lift to strangers (there is a sign «No Riders» on the windscreen of the truck). However, Tom manages to persuade the driver to pick him up. Throughout their conversation, the driver tries to find out what and who his companion is, while Tom in his turn avoids giving any clear-cut answer. The dialogue is long covering the whole chapter and can be divided into two phases, or two communication situations, each with its phatic stage of establishing a social connection, the stage of arousing interest and holding it, and the final stage before parting. The first part evolves on the car park in front of a roadside café, the second is in the driver’s cab.

Tom Joad as a communicator has an initial communicative intention of being driven to his destination, which has been formed before the communication itself starts. Later, during the second phase of the dialogue, another (situational) intention occurs consisting in his reluctance to let on his “wicked” past. Otherwise, he might suffer a communicative failure and might be put off the truck before the end of the journey. The driver’s communicative intention varies from (1) evading giving Tom a lift to (2) trying to keep loyal to his social class and, finally, to (3) his attempts to drag out some information about Tom’s past. Tom’s communicative success can be seen in the fact that he imposes on the driver a necessity to choose between ‘not taking Tom’ and ‘not betraying to his class affiliation’ making him choose the latter option. As any hitchhiker poses a potential threat, the driver starts to implement his third intention by asking questions that can help to shed some light on Tom’s biography. However, this brings the driver nothing but a communicative fiasco. Choosing between one strategy of communicative pressure on an addressee or another the addresser has to take into account the extralinguistic context as wide as possible including a communicant’s past. In the episode discussed that was hardly achievable since due to his jail experience Tom was most sensitive to the driver’s efforts to ‘fish’ some information about his past (when you been in stir a little while, you can smell a question comin’ from hell to breakfast. You telegraphed yours the first time you opened your trap). As a result, the communicative intention which was supposed by the addresser as implicit and/or hidden became in fact absolutely explicit and clear for the addressee who chose to give vague answers. Therefore, their communication was of clearly non-cooperative quality. On the level of text linguistics, it is demonstrated by lacking coherence asymmetric communication of the characters: long utterances, almost monologues of the driver and occasional laconic remarks of the hitchhiker.
This situation changes only coming closer to the end of the dialogue. Tom voluntarily discloses his past when approaching the final point of the journey. At this stage the probability of communicative failure becomes low and insignificant. Moreover, he can feel from the questions the driver asks that he is afraid of him and could easily be intimidated even more: His voice became harsh: «You know what I mean». Besides, our hero consumes alcoholic beverages, and this also exerts influence on his speech behavior (this is given in the author’s direct commentary: The whisky seemed to loosen Joad up). Finally, of note is the fact that exercising informative and plot-forming functions, in its concluding part the dialogue might be addressed to the reader as it explicitly divulges us the required biographical facts of the chief. This feature is typical of dialogic speech in fiction representing simultaneously an episode of intercharacter communication and a dialogue between the author and the reader.

A more interesting from the point of view of pragmalinguistics and therefore deserving attention is the first phase of the conversation when the driver agrees to take Tom. The part consists of four remarks, which we give below with their presuppositions and implicatures:

*Could ya give me a lift, mister.* This is a phatic phase expressed in the form of an indirect speech act, with the presupposition of the driver’s capability to pick Tom up, while the actual implicature lies in the related illocutive act of Tom asking to give him a lift to his home town. This implicature is to some extent conventional, more specifically, is conventional to the extent allowing for interrogative sentences to be conventionally used in requests. Moreover, whatever the following context might be, it can hardly cancel this implicature.

*Didn’ you see the No Riders sticker on the win’ shield?* This remark (as well as the following ones) keeps the communication between the characters going. The presupposition here is implied by the respective sign/sticker on the windscreen of the truck, while the conventional implicature dictated by the syntactic semantics of the sentence is: You have seen the sign “No passengers” on the windscreen. This implicature in a verbal form is: I do not take fellow-passengers and I am not going to take you. As we will see later, this speech implicature will be cancelled by the context that follows:

*Sure, I seen it. But sometimes a guy’l be a good guy even if some rich bastard makes him carry a sticker.* Here we arrive at the most intriguing and delicate part of this stage. The presupposition of the remark consists in the fact that Tom has seen the sign and is well aware of what is meant by it. However, an additional element of the presupposition is that there can be someone powerful and well-off who makes truck-drivers stick
such signs on the trucks. Several implicatures can be inferred: (1) You are made to have this sign some rich bastard/scoundrel; (2) Having the sign is compatible with being a 'good guy'; (3) A good guy will take passenger; (4) You are a good guy. Of these four implicatures only the second is conventional connected semantically with the construction even if while the rest can be cancelled by, for example, such remark as: But it is not about you. Implicatures (3) and (4) imposed on the truck-driver are clearly not compatible with the implicature of his own statement. Anyway, having a communicative intention to distance himself from the company owners, the driver accepts implicatures (3) and (4) and agrees to take Tom as a fellow-passenger.

_Scrunch down on the running board till we get around the bend._ This remark contains summarizing of the first stage of the characters’ communication analyzed. Here as presuppositions serve the availability of the truck step, on the one hand, and the fact that the road soon makes a turn/has a bend, on the other. The implicatures are: (1) Yes, I am a good guy; (2) Whatever sign is on my windscreen, no one but I myself decide whether or not to take passengers; (4) I don’t want you to be seen by anyone, therefore for some time you will have to stand on the truck step; (5) after the truck comes round the bend, you will be able to join me in the cab. The final implicature is conventional and is related to the semantics of the preposition _till_.

Of special interest this dialogue is the author’s explicit indication of the driver’s struggling communicative intentions: _The driver, getting slowly into the truck, considered the parts of this answer. If he refused now, not only was he not a good guy, but he was forced to carry a sticker, was not allowed to have company. If he took in the hitch-hiker he was automatically a good guy and also he was not one whom any rich bastard could kick around. He knew he was being trapped, but he couldn’t see a way out. And he wanted to be a good guy._ On the one hand, the pragmatic analysis of the dialogue might seem redundant, however, on the other, it demonstrates that the logic of the communicative act revealed by the pragmatic analysis carried out above coincides with the author’s logic of constructing the dialogue, which in turn clearly proves great potential of pragmalinguistics and its methods.

**Conclusions**

The first step of the analysis accomplished included a brief outline of the dialogue’s place and meaning in the novel’s composition and plot, its classification, textual characteristics and stylistic devices used, while the second step consisted in applying some pragmalinguistic methods. Both stages reveal the following:
John Steinbeck widely uses graphic expressive means to demonstrate phonetical peculiarities of the characters’ speech and, in this way, to make the dialogues sound as close to vernacular as it deems possible, and also to show the regional and social affiliation/background of the characters.

Colloquialisms, vulgarisms and informal idioms, systematic violation of the grammar rules of the literary language aimed at portraying an authentic speech of a typical working-class American southerner of the 1930-s abound in the speech of some characters and are less demonstrable in the speech of others.

These linguistic and stylistic differences are supposed to explain the conflicting intentions, presuppositions and implicatures of the speakers, which are considered from the angle of pragmalinguistics along with the role they play in the unfolding and developing dialogues.

The pragmalinguistic analysis carried out leads us to conclude that there is an intrinsic interrelationship between the pragmatic characteristics of the communicative situations and the stylistic/textual parameters of the dialogues.

Pragmalinguistic methods of text analysis are of great potential in what concerns dialogues in literary works/fiction. It is instrumental in studying the dialogue structure, mechanisms of role change, levels of the dialogue symmetry/asymmetry, stylistic devices used, etc.

The paper presented is intended to demonstrate that combining the two above-mentioned approaches to the study of literary dialogic speech can cast light on a deeper level the author’s intentions and ways bringing the reader to a better understanding of the book. At the same time, such examination of a literary text might be of interest for both readers, and writers-novices alike, since work of the latter starts with ‘painting a mental picture’ of a fictitious world and proceeds from it to the text itself. In this context, understanding the structure of human communication on the basis of already existing novels and stories can help a young writer to design his/her dialogues so as to emulate a connection between communicative intentions of characters and their verbalization that is experienced in real-life conversations. Finally, the significance of the proposed ‘dualistic’ approach can be seen in the fact that it gives a chance to study a text itself without having to resort to a wider biographical or historical context, and instead just to move ‘from top to bottom’ or ‘bottom to top’ where the top is the artistic/fictitious world of a book and the bottom is its language. It is obvious that the pragmalinguistic analysis demonstrated on the basis of one, though long, dialogue has its restrictions which can be lifted by considering a larger number of dialogues. This is the direction that a further study of dialogical speech can take in the future.
References


