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Reading and Teaching Poetry as Communicative Discourse: A Pragma-Linguistic Approach

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***Abstract*—**Language is communication on several discourse levels. The target of teaching a language and the literature of a foreign language is to communicate a message. Reading, appreciating, analysing, and interpreting poetry as a sophisticated rhetorical expression of human thoughts, emotions, and philosophical messages is more feasible through the use of linguistic pragmatic tools from a communicative discourse perspective. The poet's intention, speech act, illocutionary act, and perlocutionary goal can be better understood when communicative situational context as well as linguistic discourse structure theories are employed. The use of linguistic theories in the teaching of poetry is, therefore, intrinsic to students' comprehension, interpretation, and appreciation of poetry of the different ages. It is the purpose of this study to show how both teachers as well as students can apply these linguistic theories and tools to dramatic poetic texts for an engaging, enlightening, and effective interpretation and appreciation of the language. Theories drawn from areas of pragmatics, discourse analysis, embedded discourse level, communicative situational context, and other linguistic approaches were applied to selected poetry texts from the different centuries. Further, in a simple statistical count of the number of poems with dialogic dramatic discourse with embedded two or three levels of discourse in different anthologies outweighs the number of descriptive poems with a one level of discourse, between the poet and the reader. Poetry is thus discourse on one, two, or three levels. It is, therefore, recommended that teachers and students in the area of ESL/EFL use the linguistics theories for a better understanding of poetry as communicative discourse. The practice of applying these linguistic theories in classrooms and in research will allow them to perceive the language and its linguistic, social, and cultural aspect. Texts will become live illocutionary acts with a perlocutionary acts goal rather than mere literary texts in anthologies.

***Keywords*—**Coda, commissives, communicative situation, context of culture, context of reference, context of utterance, dialogue, directives, discourse analysis, dramatic discourse interaction, duologue, embedded discourse levels, language for communication, linguistic structures, literary texts, poetry, pragmatic theories, reader response, speech acts (macro/micro), stylistics, teaching literature, TEFL, terms of address, turn-taking.

I. Introduction

POETRY reading, analysis, interpretation, and teaching as part of the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in the Department of English Language and Literature (DELL), Faculty of Arts and Humanities, is one of the integral modules in all specialisms in DELL: Literature, Translation and Applied Linguistics. Teaching poetry through linguistic tools drawn from disciplines of communication, discourse analysis, and pragmatics will facilitate the reading, on the part of the student, and the teaching on the part of the teacher/ instructor/ lecturer.

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Stylistics is the interdisciplinary applied linguistics research area which would support that one understand texts in general and literature in particular. It historically started by analysing only *poetry* [1], as well as other literary genres later [2], by drawing on linguistics theories and tools from disciplines of *discourse analysis* (DA) [3] and *pragmatics* [4], using particularly the speech act theory (SAT) [5]-[7] as well as theories of *communication* [8], [9] to explain the target intention of the artist.

Stylistics originated and developed from literary, practical and linguistic criticism. It employed linguistic tools to interpret mainly poetic texts initially exploring only the linguistic grammatical levels of the language i.e. graphological, phonological, lexical, semantic, syntactic and further the text context, cohesion and coherence [10]-[14]. In a later stage, 'new stylistics' employed DA [15], [16] conversational analysis, turn-taking techniques and pragmatics to analyse also dramatic texts [17]-[20] and theories of narratology to analyse narrative texts [21]. As early as the 70's, poetic texts were, therefore, studied, interpreted, and further taught from a discourse pragmatics perspective [22]-[24].

In the area of *teaching language through literature* [25]-[28], the teaching of poetry in language classes [29], [30], becomes more feasible if a tool kit of linguistic techniques is employed for the understanding, interpreting, reading of the different poem types [31], whether dramatic, descriptive, or reflective. Poetic discourse is doing speech acts [32] that have a perlocutionary effect on the reader and/or causing the reader and/or the listener to make a change in the state of affairs [33], [34]. To teach English through poetic discourse stylistics in language classes from this communicative pragmatic perspective, as suggested in the present research, will be in itself an enlightening act for the EFL students.

II. Theoretical Background for Poetry Reading

A. Poetic Language as Communication: Communication Theories and SAT

Language is communication; poetic language is a communicative act with a communicative effect. A poem is, therefore, an illocutionary act that has a perlocutionary goal. In [35] 'Communicative interaction is a form of social interaction where individuals use overtly intentional acts, such as utterances, gestures or controlled facial expressions… It is also more ''social'' than Austin's and Searle's original conception of speech acts because it explains how the agency of addressees is implied by the performance of many

communicative acts' (see Fig. 1).

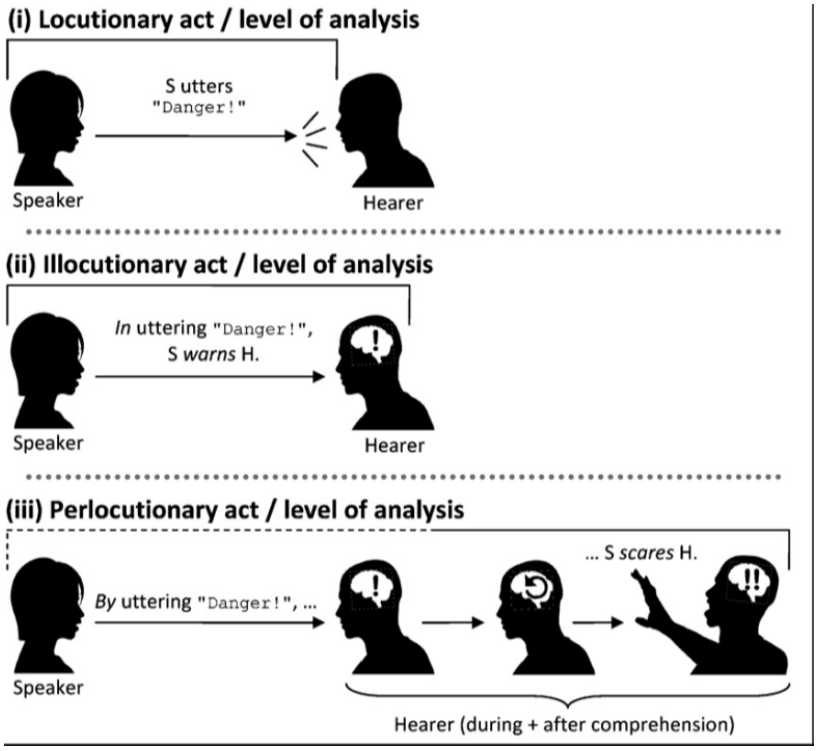


Fig. 1 The three components of a speech act, following Austin (1962). In [35]

The communicative nature of poetic language is a *deviant* type of language [36], using *foregrounding* techniques [37], but it is also *relevant* to its poetic message [38]. The speech act performed by the poet, his narrator or implied author, and/or his persona, is a message delivered and has an effect: another speech act and/or a perlocutionary effect/act. The communication of the speech act or message in any communicative context (see Fig. 2) might have more than one discourse level. Therefore, the poem might have one basic level (see Fig. 3), or a two (see Fig. 4), or multi-levelled discourse (see Fig. 5).

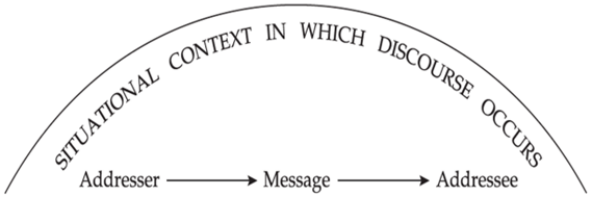


Fig. 2 Situational communicative context, in [39, p. 257]

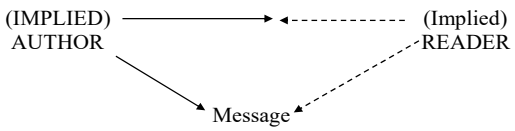


Fig. 3 One level discourse in [39, p. 281]

Reading poetry as communicative discourse was part of several research and work done in pragmatic discourse stylistics, an interdisciplinary area of applied linguistics e.g. [24], [40]-[42].

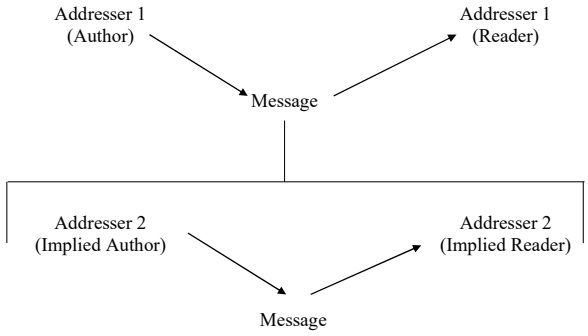


Fig. 4 Two level discourse in [39, p. 262]

B. Pragmatic Discourse Stylistics and the Teaching of Poetry

In a communicative situation, context is very central for the message to be transmitted to, and interpreted by, the receiver. Contextualising the poem [25], [43], [44], when analysing the poetic text on the different discoursal levels, helps the teacher and the student of English language and literature to read meaning(s) of texts. The three main types of contexts as explained in, among others [45], [46] and summarised in Fig. 6, are essentially integral part of any text analysis. Furthermore, the use of defamiliarisation [29] and foregrounding [29] are also important techniques that artists/poets use to support the use of the language formal

levels: graphological, phonological, lexical, semantic, syntactic and pragmatic discourse [40], [41].

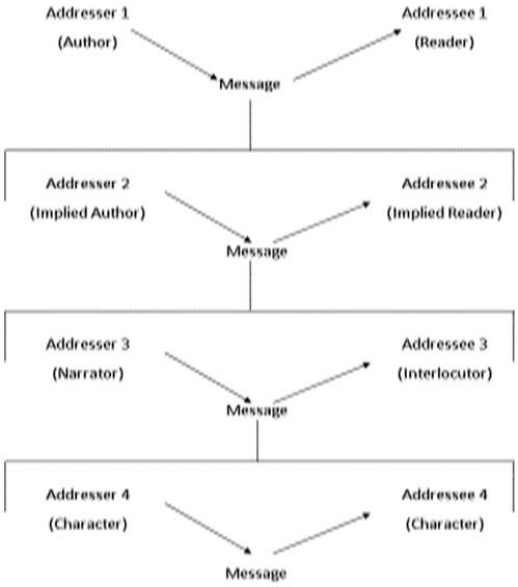


Fig. 5 Four level discourse in [39, p. 263]

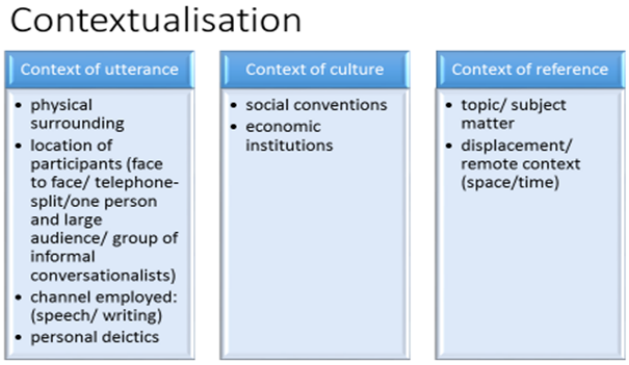


Fig. 6 Types of contexts summarised from [46]

C. Teaching Poetry as Communicative Discourse: A Model for Poetry Reading

Teachers and students are enlightened by the linguistic tools in the reading of literary texts. In poetic discourse stylistics, the model of using the language levels, DA and communicative discourse levels of analysis, SAT categories (see Fig. 7) from a pragmatic perspective is believed to be the most useful tool kit/model for the reading and teaching of poetic texts of various ages [47]-[51].

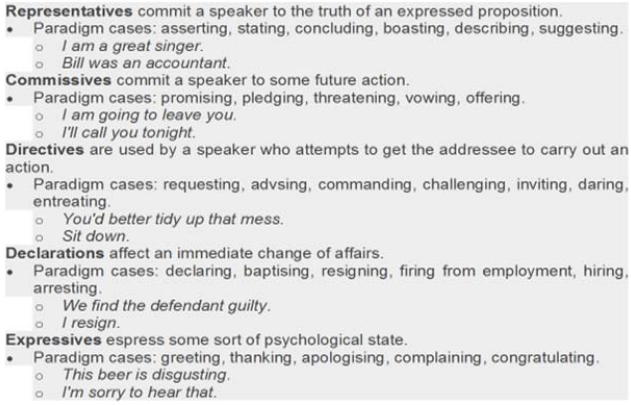


Fig. 7 Speech acts categories as per John Searle in [52]

III. Selected Poems and Discourse Level Analysis Results

In the present study selected poems from anthologies ranging from the 18th century to the 20th century [47]-[51]. They were analysed using the suggested tools: the traditional scanning of the graphological, lexical, semantic, and syntactic choices, as well as the communication, discoursal, and pragmatic tools. The analysis showed that the poems were discourse on more than one level. Results of a description of the percentage of dramatic dialogue in two levels to the one basic level are summarised in Table I.

TABLE I
Poems of Dialogic Properties in Relation to One Level Discourse

Anthology	Total number of poems	Group A: level II directed to a persona	Group B: level II	Anthology	Total number of poems
Palgrave [47]	462	218	58	276	59.74%
Roberts [48]	287	112	35	147	51.21%
Rushdy [49]	172	82	11	93	54.06%
Rouphail [50]	151	86	12	98	64.90%
Mahdy [51]	64	58	8	66	92 %

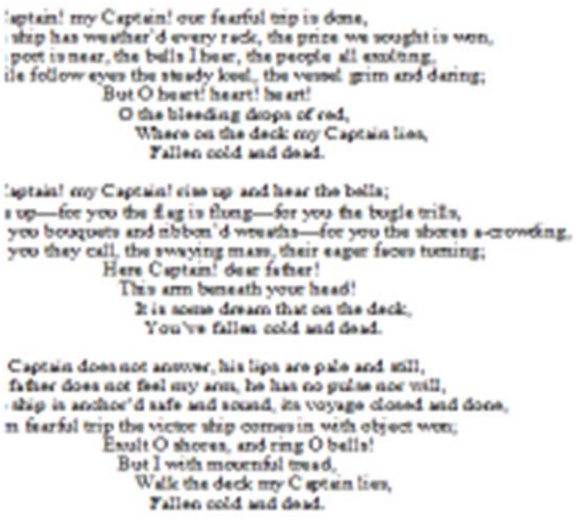
Reading, analysing, and teaching the poems from a pragmatic perspective using Searle's classification [6] of the speech act categories [52] showed that they are all speech acts: illocutionary acts, of miscellaneous categories [4], affecting the reader's mind, heart or possibly causing a future action: perlocutionary effect, for example, a poet would respond to another poet's act by writing another poem to respond or criticise. An example of this is the poem 'To Robert Browning' written by W. S. Landor addressing 'Browning' about poetry writing [53] making a *representative* speech act that is *indirect directive* calling for the writing of poetry. This was a poem that was on the level II discourse. Other poems on level I were sometimes descriptive or narrative poems like Wordsworth's 'I wandered lonely as a cloud' [54]. The poet is making a *representative* speech act, describing a situation and also an *expressive*, expressing his loneliness, 'solitude', and the 'pleasure' he experiences from nature in the last stanza:

'For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,

And dances with the daffodils' [54] (see Appendix item 1)

On level II and more the dialogic monologues or duologues are also speech acts or hybrid speech acts as per the SAT. Many examples are those written by Wordsworth and Shelley 'To A Skylark' 'To the Skylark', 'Ode to the West Wind', 'To the Cuckoo' and many others, all of which the implied author is obviously talking to Nature and about it using terms of address. Obvious dramatic dialogue like Wordsworth's 'The Fountain, A Conversation' [55] is also *representatives* mingled with *expressives*. Furthermore, other obvious dialogic poems are *representatives*, as well as *commissives*: making promises. In E. B. Browning's from 'Sonnets from the Portuguese' [56] the personal pronoun 'I' is the author or implied author talking to his love expressing, in a very powerful expressive, using syntactic and lexical *repetitions* that are *foregrounding* the feeling. It is closed by a strong commissives: a promise to love even more after death: 'I shall but love thee better after death' (see Appendix item 2). On the other hand, a poet can *foreground* and *defamiliarise* by expressing the opposite of what he means to say:

'I know I do not love thee! yet, alas!
Others will scarcely trust my candid heart;
And oft I catch them smiling as they pass,
Because they see me gazing where thou art' [57].


'aptain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done,
ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won,
port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
ile follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring;
But O heart! heart! heart!
O the bleeding drops of red,
Where on the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.

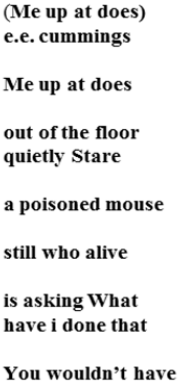
'aptain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells;
s up—for you the flag is flung—for you the bugle trills,
you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths—for you the shores a-crowding,
you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;
Here Captain! dear father!
This arm beneath your head!
It is some dream that on the deck,
You've fallen cold and dead.

Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still,
father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will,
ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage closed and done,
m fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object won;
Exult O shores, and ring O bells!
But I with mournful tread,
Walk the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.

Fig. 8 Graphological representation of poetry

In poems that are making *a directive speech act,* the poet creates a persona which addresses the implied receiver and draws the reader or implied reader to level II discourse and uses powerful directive *verbs* like 'Listen', 'Let's', 'Stand', 'Look', among others that introduce very strong speech acts. In 'A Woman's Last Word' by Browning [58], 'Look, Stranger' by Auden [59], and 'O Captain! My Captain!' by Whitman [60] we see examples of clear directives. They are all representatives, directives, and expressives. Moreover, the Whitman poem foregrounds the thought of the sailing in a boat with a proper *graphological* design that fits the thought (see Fig. 8). The directive is directed to a dead captain. This is a clear directive, one that will not cause a powerful action on the part of the dead captain, but just have an effect on the reader.

While the Whitman poem is employing terms of address and the verbs that represent the directives of giving orders. It is also full of the representative speech acts that represent facts and are *foregrounded graphologically*. It also has representations of the *expressives* describing the feelings and emotions expressed. The poetic license allows deviance not only on the graphological deviance but also the syntactic deviation. Deviation from the normal everyday language representation is also represented in poets like E. E. Cummings, foregrounding the thoughts by *syntactic deviation* [61], [62] (see Fig. 9).


(Me up at does)
e.e. cummings

Me up at does

out of the floor
quietly Stare

a poisoned mouse

still who alive

is asking What
have i done that

You wouldn't have

Fig. 9 Syntactic deviation of an indirect speech act

The *syntactic deviation* is representing the problem the persona has. The persona (mouse) is dying and division and scrambling of sentences suggest that. The graphological deviation too might suggest that the persona is not human [62]. It has a blaming act/tone: why did you kill me? This is an expressive/declarative. The persona 'Me' is addressing an implied receiver 'you' taking the reader into the seen. The discourse is therefore displaced to the reader's context. It is taken on to level II, now including the implied reader, displacing him from Cummings' context. Furthermore, what we might call an overt dialogic representation of the IV levelled discourse in poetry can be exemplified in the poem 'We are seven' by William Wordsworth (see Fig. 5 and Appendix item 4). On the other hand, the implied dialogue or the indirect dialogue description can be seen in the poem 'In the Park' by Gwen Harwood (Appendix item 3) [63]. These two types and two levels of discourse were presenting the same speech acts. Wordsworth and Harwood were both doing a simple representative mingled with an expressive. Indirectly they wish the reader to be empathetic with their thought.

Intertextuality, or relating texts in the service of interpretation, is one of the discourse-related techniques. Poems related to other genres [64], or two texts of the same genre are related. Intertextuality in teaching proved also very useful [65]. It should be also studied as part of the necessary tools for the interpretation. For the reader of the poem, teacher and student, it is important to receive the text, react and interact with it considering the intention of the poet and his

message.

In interpreting poetry, the reader as receiver is the most important essential part of the interpretation. The interpretation can be a *subjective* interpretation, considering the reader's/receiver's contexts displacing it to the reader's context, or an *objective* interpretation contextualising the poem in its original creation contexts. Therefore, both micro context, the historical context of situation, and macro context, inclusive of the larger socio-cultural context are both important for the interpretation and teaching of the work of art.

VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, the linguistic techniques and tools used in integration for the interpretation and classification of the poems proved that both the formal, as well as the discourse tools from the pragmatic perspective where the poem would be seen as an act of communication, are important. The fact that poems are speech acts in context and outside of their context: displaced in time and place, affect the readers, to say the least, by experiencing a new or different experience changing his state of affair. For the teacher, it is important to provide students with tools by which they can decipher the 'puzzle' language of the poem. After all, art in general and poetry in particular is a means of teaching the language and its socio-cultural aspect. Communicative competence includes discourse competence. It is believed that the present research will contribute to the teaching and learning of language through the teaching of poetry and interpreting it using the suggested model linguistic quantitative and qualitative tools. As [66] summarises and explains:

> "The domain of pragmastylistics, then, includes the study of all the conditions, linguistic and extra linguistic, which allow the rules and potential of a language to combine with the concrete factors of a situation in order to produce a text intended to bring about certain internal changes in the receiver. It distinguishes the abstract, theoretical or semantic meaning of utterance or text from its usage or effectiveness in a concrete situation and what the encounter means or intends to achieve by using it. It follows that pragmastylistics studies may focus on any expanse of language –in-use, ranging from the phrase or clause to a complete discourse, conversation or text."

Appendix

Selected poems of different types and of different levels:

1) ***Level I: The poet creates only one basic discourse of a reflective/descriptive poem.***

'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud' by William Wordsworth
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45521/i-wandered-lonely-as-a-cloud

2) ***Level II: The poet is directing the act to a persona***

'How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.' (Sonnet 43) by Elizabeth Barrett Browning
https://www.shmoop.com/how-do-i-love-thee-sonnet-43/poem-text.html

3) ***Level III: The poet is creating an implied dialogue***

'In the Park' by Gwen Harwood
https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/in-the-park-5/
Interpretive video: https://youtu.be/ZJdLp92uOeY

4) ***Level IV: The poet narrator is creating an actual dialogue***

'We are seven' by William Wordsworth
https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/52298/we-are-seven
Interpretive video: https://youtu.be/M4D5JA5MtYc

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