Analysis of Directives in Arthur Miller’s *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman*

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**ABSTRACT**

The present paper attempts to analyze the highly marked directive speech acts in Arthur Miller’s two famous plays i.e. *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman*. Directive speech acts are the hearer center; they intend to create a desirable effect on the hearer and attempt to get the hearer to do something with the words. In other words, these speech acts have the intentions or purposes of some sort of actions to be performed by the hearer. This class includes requesting, questioning, ordering, commanding, suggesting, urging, etc. This group frequently belongs to the competitive category of Geoffrey Leech and comprises a category of illocutionary force in which illocutionary goal competes with the social goal and creates negative politeness on the hearer.

**Keywords:** Pragmatics, Speech Acts, Directives, Dramatic Discourse

**Introduction**

The term, ‘pragmatics’ is derived from Greek word ‘pragma’, meaning ‘action’ and action is defined as an intentional behavior. The scholars and researchers in language across the globe interpreted the term ‘pragmatics’ in the practical sense of the word. Charles Morris (1938) very methodically studied pragmatics for the first time. According to him, there is a fundamental difference between semantics and pragmatics, in the sense that the relations of signs to interpreters are studied in pragmatics and the relations of signs to objects are studied in semantics. However, pragmatics reemerged in 1962 with the advent theory of speech acts in the posthumously published book, ‘How To Do Things with Words’, of the British philosopher of language, J L Austin. Austin initiated the theory of speech acts and his disciple, J R Searle (1969) codified it systematically.

**What is Speech Act?**

The British philosopher J L Austin was the first to draw an attention to the many functions performed by various kinds of utterances in his book ‘How To Do Things With Words’ (1962). He pointed out that numerous utterances do not communicate information, but are equivalent to action. Austin (1962) defined a speech act as an act of uttering a certain sentence in a given context for a determined purpose i.e. an act of communication. He believed that when people speak, they not only articulate meaningful sounds but also perform actions of numerous types like stating, ordering, proposing, requesting, greeting, etc. It is necessary for human beings to understand and to be understood. Therefore, speech acts are the basic acts in any human communication. Following are some of the important definitions of speech act:

a. **Speaking a language is performing speech acts, acts such as making statement, giving commands, asking questions, making promises and so on.** (Searle, 1969)

b. **Speech acts are actions performed via utterances.** (Yule, 1996)

c. **Speech act theory says that language is used not only to describe things but also to do things as well.** (Kempson, 2001)
Searle’s Typology of Speech Acts

J R Searle (1969) systematized and codified the five major types of speech acts that J L Austin (1962) had proposed in his posthumously published book ‘How to Do Things with Words’ (1962). Austin was much criticized for the overlaps in classification of speech acts by his contemporaries. However, much of Searle’s work (1969) embarks on, where Austin had left off it. In this matter, some argue that Searle is not altogether successful in systemization. Levinson (1983:238) says that his classification of speech acts is less clear than Austin’s original. Nevertheless, his later work is more comprehensive. He classified speech acts into five different categories i.e. assertives, commissives, directives, declaratives, and expressives.

A| Assertive Speech Acts

The illocutionary point of assertive speech acts is to present truthful representations of facts. Assertive speech acts have a word-to-world direction of fit. An utterance "It is too dark." achieves success of fit, if it is really dark.

B| Commissive Speech Acts

The illocutionary point of commissive speech acts is to assume commitments to carry out a certain course of action. Commissive speech acts have a world-to-word direction of fit. An utterance "I will lend you hundred rupees." achieves success of fit, if the speaker lends the listener hundred rupees.

C| Expressive Speech Acts

The illocutionary point of expressive speech acts is to communicate attitudes of their performers about certain facts. Expressive speech acts have a null or empty direction of fit. An utterance "Congratulation!" presupposes that the addressee has succeeded in doing something. However, the conveying of congratulations relates not to reality but to an attitude of the speaker.

D| Directive Speech Acts

The illocutionary point of directive speech acts is to get someone else to carry out a certain course of action. Directive speech acts, too, have a world-to-word direction of fit. An utterance "Sit down!" achieves success of fit, if the listener really sits down.

E| Declarative Speech Acts

The illocutionary point of declarative speech acts is to bring a change in circumstances. An utterance "I name this road Abdul Kalam Road." achieves success of fit, if the authorized person following appropriate procedure utters the above utterance, the road will named after Abdul Kalam.

Analysis of Directive Speech Acts in All My Sons

J R Searle (1969) includes in this class the speech acts like requesting, questioning, ordering, commanding, suggesting, urging, etc. These kinds of speech acts basically try to keep away the hearer from his goal, namely providing information for the question. The following utterance is addressed to Chris by his mother, Mrs. Keller; it occurs in the play, All My Sons, at a very crucial point. Mr. Keller and Ann’s father, Mr. Steve were the business partners in a cylinder head production plant. As the war was going on, there was an emergency of the cylinder heads. The army officers were in a severe need of cylinder heads. But suddenly one entire batch of cylinder heads came out with a serious defect. Mr. Steve was in the charge of plant; he noticed it and immediately phoned to Mr. Keller at his home and informed all the matter. However Mr. Keller, due to greed of money, directed Mr. Steve to patch up the defected cylinder heads and dispatch to the army. He also promised him, if there will be any problem, he would take all the
responsibilities. As a result of seriously defected cylinder heads, twenty-two pilots including Mr. Keller’s younger son, Larry, were killed. When the army officers came to know that the cylinder heads were seriously defected, they took Mr. Steve and Mr. Keller to the court but Mr. Keller escaped from the punishment but Mr. Steve was imprisoned. Larry was engaged with Mr. Steve’s daughter, Ann. But now, after three years of that tragic incident i.e. Larry’s death, Ann and Mr. Keller’s son, Chris, have decided to marry. However, Chris doesn’t know much about the incident that took place three years ago and Mrs. Keller and Mr. Keller want to keep him in ignorance by assuming that their son, Larry, is still alive. They believe that Ann doesn’t know anything about the case. However, the reality is different. Ann is the only person who knows more things about Larry’s death and Steve’s imprisonment than anyone in both the families. Therefore, Mrs. Keller does not allow Chris to marry Ann. She indirectly suggests Chris to believe that Larry is alive at least for his father’s sake. Let us examine the following utterance selected in Arthur Miller’s All My Sons:

Mother: Altogether (To Chris, but not facing them) your brother is alive, darling, because if he is dead, your father killed him. Do you understand me now? As long as you live, that boy is alive. God does not let a son be killed by his father. Now you see, don’t you? Now you see. (P. 73)

In the above utterance, the speaker, Mother, performs directive speech act. It is an act of suggestion, in which she requests her son, Chris, not to marry Ann. The reason behind the restriction is her knowledge about her husband, Mr. Keller’s crime. Mrs. Keller is worried that if Ann, after getting married with Chris, comes to know the truth about the crime committed by her husband, it will be difficult to survive for both her husband, Mr. Keller, and her son, Chris. Thus, in order to save her family from possible calamity, Mrs. Keller intends to restrict the probable marriage that is taking place between Chris and Ann.

As the play proceeds on, the complexities about the crime and punishment increase and stand before the family of Keller like a ghost. Even in this unfavorable situation, Mrs. Keller attempts to save her family by restricting Ann’s entry in her family as a family member by marrying her son, Chris. As the play moves on, Mrs. Keller, indirectly suggests as she suggested in the previous example. In order to avoid future unbearable consequences, she again emphasizes that Larry is alive.

Mother: Because if he’s not coming back, then I’ll kill myself, laugh! Laugh at me (She points to tree.) But why did that happen the very night she came back? (P. 21)

The illocutionary force of the utterance implicitly suggests the hearer to believe that Larry is still alive and one day will come back. The reason behind this assumption is that Mrs. Keller knows if Chris marries Ann and Ann acts like a detector then Mr. Keller will have to go to jail. Therefore, Mrs. Keller tries to avoid the future consequence by objecting their marriage.

Mrs. Keller’s utterance is complicated to understand without considering her intention or the illocutionary force of the utterance. Mrs. Keller having full knowledge about Larry’s death always deliberately acts as if she does not know anything and always supports that Mr. Keller is innocent. But in the above utterance there are two contradictory illocutionary forces. The first, according to Mrs. Keller, Larry is alive as she emphasizes, and the second, the author himself symbolically suggests that the tree, which was planted
in memory of Larry, is broken on his birth anniversary [means Larry is dead]. If these two forces are considered in detail, the first is very important because Mrs. Keller by showing her ignorance to other characters attempts to protect Mr. Keller from future consequences. Therefore, she has threatened to suicide. The second illocutionary force only brings change in the minds of the audience. That happens because of logical relationship between the tree and Larry; one could sense that Larry is dead.

As the situation goes out of control, Mrs. Keller keeps mum. On the contrary, Mr. Keller tries to justify his action in the following manner:

**Keller:** It was too late. The paper, it was all over the front page, twenty-one went down, and it was too late. They came with handcuffs into the shop, what could I do? (He sits on bench) Chris... Chris, I did it for you, it was a chance and I took it for you. (P.75)

Mr. Keller accepts his crime and makes clear that Larry is dead and is responsible for his son, Larry’s, death and Steve’s imprisonment. Mr. Keller seems to be justifying his crime. He also tries to take an advantage by creating emotional impact on Chris. Therefore, he declares whatever he has done; has done for his family. Here, Mr. Keller admitting his crime, attempts to seek sympathy. According to Mrs. Keller’s reaction, it is also clear that Mrs. Keller was having full knowledge of Mr. Keller’s crime. By saying that he was helpless, he expects something different in his favor.

**Analysis of Directive Speech Acts in Death of Salesman**

The characters, in Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*, using directives attempt to get the hearer to do something. This class includes commanding, ordering, requesting, suggesting urging, etc. In *Death of a Salesman*, when Linda Loman, in the beginning of the second act, frequently interrupts in the conversation and attempts to maintain peace in the family but Willy Loman suddenly orders her not to take the sides of her sons in the following manner:

**Willy** (turning on her): Don’t take his side all the time, god-dammit. (P. 45)

Here, the illocutionary force of the above utterance is a command and a kind of restriction on the part of the listener, Linda. Searle has stated that such kinds of speech acts basically try to restrict or to keep away the hearer from his goal. Similarly, Linda, being the addressee of the utterance, is not allowed to intervene in the conversation. Willy, in the above speech act, seems to be angry and out of control. The unpractical ambition is the major reason behind his mental distraction. As the contextual information, setting of the play and flashback scene suggest, that he has phony dreams and unpractical ambitions. According to his dreams, nothing happens and on the contrary, he has encouraged his two sons for highly difficult job. His two sons are in utter failure in job settlement and as a result, he is frustrated and is ordering his wife not to take the sides of his sons, particularly the elder son, Biff.

Another directive speech act occurs in the play when Biff invites his father, Willy, at the restaurant in the evening because he wishes to give him, good news about the big deal with Bill Oliver. However, Biff was not entertained by Bill Oliver and at the same time, Howard has fired Willy too when Willy asked him a local job. Thus, the situation has become very worse and helpless for both Willy and Biff. Biff tried to convey his father that he would try something the day after but Willy responds him in the following way:
Willy: I’m not interested in stories about the past or any crap of that kind because the woods are burning, boys, you understand? There’s a big blaze going on all around. I was fired today. (P. 78)

The illocutionary force of the above utterance is a suggestion in which Willy Loman suggests that he wants to hear something different than what actually he is hearing from Biff. In other words, the suggestion of the speech act is to make the sincere and honest efforts for the success. He also gives reason, why Biff has to be very careful about future because the future is too much competitive. In Willy’s words, the competitive means, ‘the big blazes of scolding are burning outside’. The implied suggestion is that Willy was previously kept on commission like a beginner and that now he is terribly fired by Howard. Thus, implicitly, Willy urges his two sons to act according to the need of time and should not tell him the stories of past which they are constantly repeating. At this point in the play, the relations are nearly broken up. It is also true that Willy was in no position to hear Biff. As a result of the suggestion made in previous speech act, Biff and Happy leave the restaurant without taking Willy.

When Biff and Happy come to home leaving Willy behind, Linda realizes that the situation has worsened for Willy. Therefore, she scolds to her both son and attempts to protect her husband from committing suicide. Willy constantly thinks of suicide, therefore, Linda, his wife, has many time requested her both sons not to argue with their father but talk to him nicely. But at the restaurant things happened are strange and unacceptable for her. Thus, she orders her two sons in following speech act:

Linda: Get out of here, both of you, and don’t come back. I don’t want you tormenting him anymore. Go on now; get your things together. (P. 92)

The illocutionary force of the above speech act is a command in which Linda furiously orders her sons to get out of the house. Linda, the first time in the play, seems to be so angry with her sons, because her very anxiety has been challenged by her sons at the restaurant. Her anxiety constantly apparent in the play is of Willy’s thought of suicide and his pathetic condition. It is also true that Willy has decided to commit suicide for the success of his two sons by getting money from his insurance policy. Linda, by ordering her two sons, makes a futile effort to back up Willy. It is also sensed by Linda that Willy is terribly disturbed at psychological level. Therefore, she endeavors to protect Willy at present from the future consequences by ordering Biff and Happy to go out of the house. She also declares that nobody would be allowed to torment Willy anymore. Thus, Linda performs the directive speech act and unsuccessfully takes the situation in her own hand for the first time in the play. Let us consider the following example:

Biff: (crying, broken) Will you let me go, for Christ’s sake? Will you take that phony dream and burn it before something happens? (P. 100)

Here, the illocutionary force of the above utterance is a request in which Biff earnestly requests to his father to give up his phony dreams in order to avoid the future consequences as Linda has already sensed out. In other words, Biff’s utterance is the result of Linda’s perlocutionary act of earlier speech act. Biff seems to have realized the basic problem. He does not follow his father’s phony dream, i.e. to be liked and to be loved. Therefore, he suggests Willy to burn it before something happens. The word ‘something’ is clear and it refers to Willy’s mental disorder, which ultimately causes Willy’s suicide at the end of the play.

Conclusion
The present paper is an attempt to investigate the significance of directive speech acts within the framework of Searle’s typology of speech acts. The highly marked directive speech acts have been selected in Arthur Miller’s two most celebrated plays i.e. ‘All My Sons’ and ‘Death of a Salesman’ and analyzed against the speech act theory as discussed in the introductory part of this paper. The study shows that the characters perform actions of various kinds through the utterances. Although, the dramatic exchange is a distinct kind of language usage, it provides us a deep insight to study the various aspects of drama. Furthermore, analysis has taken into account the various concepts of pragmatics like speech act, speech situation and speech event, sentence and utterance, presupposition and context. Certain principles of pragmatics have been taken into account while discussing the speech acts. In addition, the socio-political aspects of American life have been considered to establish the authenticity of the analysis.

References
Dive deep into Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman with extended analysis, commentary, and discussion. Death of a Salesman takes place at Willy Loman's home in New York City. Development has boxed the small house in, making it feel cramped and confining. Willy often thinks of his brother's adventures in distant lands. This suggests that Willy wants to escape his life. Willy puts pressure on himself to be a success. He measures a man's worth by his possessions and social status. He wants a big, ostentatious funeral, because he believes that will reflect how great a man he was. In the end, Willy Loman's funeral is small and disappointing, just like his life. Death of a Salesman is a 1949 stage play written by American playwright Arthur Miller. It won the 1949 Pulitzer Prize for Drama and Tony Award for Best Play. The play premiered on Broadway in February 1949, running for 742 performances, and has been revived on Broadway four times, winning three Tony Awards for Best Revival. It is widely considered to be one of the greatest plays of the 20th century.

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