Pragmatic Communicative Strategies of Persuasion in Shakespeare's Richard III

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Submitted by
Faisal Ashoor Qassim
20052710

Supervised by
Dr. Martin Parker
Associate Professor
University of Bahrain

Kingdom of Bahrain
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Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine and analyze the language of Shakespeare's character, Richard III, in his play Richard III, from a linguistic and pragmatic point of view. The villain, Richard, uses persuasive language with two women, in order to achieve his evil plans in the play. The manner of speech determines the level of speech's directness and, as a consequence, their level of politeness as well.

The data consisted of two scenes from Richard III: Act I Scene II and Act IV Scene IV, the so-called wooing scenes, in which Richard verbally interacts with the characters of Lady Anne and Queen Elizabeth. These scenes were analyzed according to the pragmatic theories: The cooperative principle, speech acts and politeness in order to lead to a comprehensive idea of the pragmatic characteristics of each interaction.

The linguistic and pragmatic analysis of the two wooing scenes successfully supported the literary analysis of these two scenes. The literary analysis described Richard as being a manipulator of language who uses lies, honesty and courtesy in his speech with the two ladies. Richard mostly lies to persuade and woo Lady Anne and Queen Elizabeth, but he also uses honesty in a number of instances, using both direct and indirect speech acts, and flouting and following mostly the maxim of quality. In addition, Richard is generally polite with Lady Anne and Queen Elizabeth, using lots of positive politeness strategies and the politeness maxims of approbation and generosity. Finally, Richard uses Romance as a tool to woo Lady Anne, and succeeds in this attempt. However, he uses reason as a tool to woo Queen Elizabeth, and fails in this attempt.