A Pragmatic Study of Gossip in Richard Brinsely Sheridan's *The School for Scandal*

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Abstract

This paper is mainly concerned with investigating the pragmatic perspective of gossip, away from sociological, psychological or any other non-linguistic tackling. Hence, its major appeal is to find out the different pragmatic stages through which gossip passes. This is done by analyzing various situations taken from Sheridan's comedy, on the basis of a model of analysis developed by the study itself to serve this very purpose. The analysis of the data has yielded that the existential presupposition represented by the proper noun is the only kind employed to engender gossip. Moreover, it has been found out that knowledge, which is to be pejoratively evaluated, is the most common function of gossip.

Keywords: pragmatics, gossip, knowledge, entertainment, offence

1. Introduction

Gossip is a topic that is very easy to interact with when heard of for the first time. It is very common to the extent that it is sometimes thought to be a manifestation of any of 'ordinary' everyday life – a very important part of our communicative and "social behaviour that nearly everyone experiences, contributes to, and presumably intuitively understands" (Foster, 2004, p. 78).

Nevertheless, in the twentieth-century gossip has attracted the attention of only anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists, evolutionary biologists, philosophers and literary critics (Prodan, 1998).

Nowadays, an emphasis has been shifted to approach gossip differently at various levels. For example, there have been studies (such as Prodan's, 1998) that have tackled gossip in a hybrid method (that is, sociological and linguistic (at both the pragmatic and the sociolinguistic levels)). Other studies, such as Eggins and Slade's (1997), have dealt with gossip linguistically but in a superficial way. That is, they have quickly referred to the politeness principle and the search for agreement in their approach of gossip without giving a full account of the employment of this principle in gossip. Besides they have only limited their study to the negative side of gossip, whereas almost all the scholars, who deal with the topic, agree that gossip does have a positive facet.

Accordingly, the present paper attempts to establish a pure pragmatic perspective of gossip through investigating its generic pragmatic structure (that is to say, the different stages of gossip). Besides, it aims to develop a model to pragmatically analyze gossip which, at the same time, can be utilized to help trace the pragmatic achievement of the different functions of gossip. To achieve these, twenty situations taken from Sheridan's comedy as a whole will be analyzed on the basis of the model developed.

2. Definition

It is very common that when anybody embarks on explaining something, s/he begins by giving a definition in order to draw a clear picture of that very thing. But, paradoxically, there might be cases, of which gossip is one, where it is very difficult to put forward a clear-cut definition that fits all cases. That is, gossip is one of the terms that are defined differently on the basis of how one tries to approach or study it. For instance, if one tries to approach gossip sociologically, then gossip can be defined as "a way   of talking between women in their roles as women, intimate in style, personal and domestic in topic and setting, a female cultural event which springs from and perpetuates the restrictions of the female role, but also gives the comfort of validation" (Jones, 1980, p.

243; for more definitions, see Rosnow and Fine (1976, p. 87), De Sousa (1994, p. 26), De Vos (1996, p. 20), Holland (1996, p. 198), Emler (2001, p. 318) and Iterson et al. (2002, p. 26)).

It can be said, then, that the definition of gossip is stipulative: it can be tailored according to one's aims of studying it. By so saying, an agreement with Izuogu (2009, p. 10) is reached. He states that "gossip does not lend itself to simple definitions or uniform explanations. We all know what gossip is, but defining, identifying, and measuring it is a complex enterprise for practical investigations".

However, as far as this paper is concerned, the operational definition will be Foster's (2004, p. 83): "in a context of congeniality, gossip is the exchange of personal information (positive or negative) in an evaluative way (positive or negative) about absent third parties" (italics ours).

In the following few lines, a short elucidation shows how this definition addresses the problem of this paper – the pragmatic tackling of gossip.

The key word in Foster's definition is 'exchange'. Exchange is, actually, an umbrella term that embraces different pragmatic notions. Since any exchange requires at least two interlocutors to communicate, then such a kind of communication means that the pragmatic concepts (such as the Cooperative Principle and Conversational Implicature, the Politeness Principle, and Presupposition) are (almost) all employed in order to open the channel of communication and keep it open as well, regardless of how this communication ends (i.e., whether or not it satisfies the convictions of both of the communicating parties). Put differently, any exchange almost means the non-literal use of language to mean (communicate) more than it seems to at face value. That very thing (i.e., the additional hidden meaning) is one of the main domains of pragmatics – the pillar of this work.

There remains one thing to close down the discussion on the definition of gossip: why should gossip be launched in a context of congeniality? Why not in an ordinary context of communication (two interlocutors (at least) with a specific topic)? Eggins and Slade (1997, p. 282) give an illustrative account on this point. They argue that unless that sense of agreement is confirmed (to the speaker), then s/he will back away from the gossip. Besides, if the interlocutors (participants) do not agree with the gossip, then they will not enable the gossip (in particular) and communication (in general) to continue. By so claiming, Eggins and Slade as well as this paper confirm the idea that the cooperative aspect of people's conversational activity is manifested in the preference for agreement in discourse.

3. Functions of Gossip

It is well-known that language, as the basic means of communication, is used to perform different functions. Whether transactional, interactional or aesthetic, any exchange should be purposeful. So gossip, as an exchange, must have functions as well.

Despite the slight differences, there is a considerable agreement on the number and taxonomy of the functions of gossip (One exception is De Vos (1996, pp. 23-24), where he numerates only three functions for gossip. But at closer inspection, it seems that they are actually four, in that the first function, social control, embeds another function – influence.). Gossip has four main functions: knowledge, friendship, influence, and entertainment.

3.1 Knowledge

The first function of gossip is to exchange information (knowledge) about others. It might be known that there are two ways whereby a person can get information about the other(s). One is direct by asking the person himself (which is normally dispreferred and employed almost in official contexts); the other is indirect by asking some people (whether friends, acquaintances, neighbours, etc.) about some other one, and this type is very common in the majority of societies.

As far as gossip is concerned, it is definitely an indirect yet a basic and "an efficient means of gathering and disseminating information" (Foster, 2004, p. 84). By the same token, Schmidt (2004, p. 17) remarks that gossip "serves as a way to inform and receive information". Being an indirect way of communicating different kinds of information (as hinted at before, see introduction), gossip involves two facets: positive and negative. It is positive when it is, for example, "meant to instruct another about appropriate actions within the surrounding culture" (Baumeister et al., 2004, p. 115). On the other hand, it becomes negative when it is used as a means of devaluating or destroying others' (fame), or even as a scandalous tool (Eggins & Slade, 1997, p. 280; Foster, 2004, p. 84).

There remains one important thing, referred to by Foster (2004, p. 84), about the various pieces of information to be considered gossip. He invokes Yerkovich (1977) to assert that "information, no matter how salient or scandalous, isn't gossip unless the participants know enough about the people involved to experience the thrill of

revelation". Knowing the people involved in gossip breathes relevance to the aforementioned context of congeniality (See 2. above) at two levels: the first is concerned with the agreement which people seek. If people do not know each other, then they will not engage in gossip because they do not feel safe to talk about others as freely as they want (especially if the communicated pieces of information are unfavorable). The second is concerned with the different functions one tries to achieve via gossip. Whatever the function might be, the possibility of achieving it will dwindle if the people involved do not know each other [For more details on this function, see De Backer (2005), Chapter 2.]

3.2 Friendship

As De Vos (1996, p. 24), Dunbar (2004, p. 105), and Foster (2004, p. 85) notify, gossip plays a good role in establishing or strengthening relationships with others. It does so at both the individual level and the group level. As for the first, gossip can be employed as a way of advertising one's own advantages, as a friend, an ally or even a mate. At the group level, on the other hand, people either break the ice (i.e. people gossip to clarify more their viewpoints about others), or they gossip to cement already developed relationships. Viewed as such, gossip, at the group level, can either include or exclude people depending on the degree of 'friendliness' or 'intimacy' shown by the different people involved in gossip. In a nutshell, by functioning as a friendship motivator, gossip, at the group level, distinguishes insiders from outsiders.

3.3 Influence

This is the most important function of gossip, as claimed by Foster (2004, p. 86). He thinks that gossip can help draw a map of the social behavior of the individual either competitively or instructively. The function of influence is viewed as competitive when people "attempt to gain control in situations, purposefully influencing the attitudes and actions of others in a specific direction" (Schmidt, 2004, p. 15). It becomes instructive when it is, for example, employed to reform or stigmatize the sinner, or when it sheds light on what (not) to behave in different contexts. Dunbar (2004, p. 105), in his turn, adds another aspect of the instructive influence of gossip: seeking or giving advice to others.

The importance of this function manifests itself in the fact that when we try to learn (or when we are being taught) certain norms or forms of social behavior, both formally and informally, then gossip would be the most common means to do so as it needs no special skill to produce, as do storytelling and singing, for instance (Foster, 2004, p. 86). It must be mentioned that the degree of influence of gossip varies from one person to another, the thing which is beyond the scope of this paper.

3.4 Entertainment

There are times, as Foster (2004, p. 86) observes, when gossip serves no less no more than a way of passing some (redundant) time between interlocutors. It is neither used for knowledge, nor for friendship or influence—it is merely used for the "immediacy of amusement". Consequently, gossip as entertainment can be said to provide relief from monotony in certain work environments (Foster, 2004, p. 86), or it can, as De Vos (1996, p. 24) comments, "create catharsis for guilt; constitute a form of wish fulfillment".

The most important thing to be noted about this function is that "the entertainment value of gossip occurs outside the actual exchange" (Foster, ibid.). He stresses that the entertaining value of gossip cannot be scaled at any level because it is something emotional or psychological that differs from one person to another. He supports his opinion by invoking what Spacks (1982, p. 21) argues that trying to account for the entertaining factor of gossip is just "like efforts to elucidate what's funny in a joke". Accordingly, this very function will not undergo the pragmatic analysis intended to be held in this paper, as pragmatics has nothing to do neither with emotions nor with psychology.

4. Eggins and Slade's (1997) Generic Structure of Gossip

Before embarking on explaining this model, it must be mentioned that it was the only one found as serving the purposes of this study at the time of conducting this research, as such this model is the only one invoked.

Eggins and Slade (1997, pp. 284-298) present their view by positing a clear idea about what a generic structure is meant to be. They characterize such a structure as being 'ideal': it has no fixed or rigid schema; rather it is a description of the underlying structure which participants often orient (but not necessarily stick) to.

As such, one can conclude that the structure of gossip is as stipulative as its definition. Yet, as they assert, there are obligatory and optional elements or stages (as they, apparently, use the two terms interchangeably) for gossip, as discussed below:

4.1 Different Stages of Gossip

These stages, as Eggins and Slade (1997, pp. 284-298) point out; occur in a specified sequence, as follows:

1)   Third Person Focus (TPF) Stage: Functions to introduce the gossipee and in most cases to beckon the deviant behavior.

2)   Substantiating Behavior (SB) Stage: This stage functions to present two things, p. the event about which gossip launches (as this event highlights some departure from normality); and the solid support (enough convincing information) provided by the gossiper(s) to make the other participants pass a negative evaluation.

3)   Pejorative Evaluation (PE) Stage: This is the final stage where the events outlined in the SB stage are evaluated and commented on. As a matter of fact, it is in the PE that a gossip exchange is motivated and driven forward.

Eggins and Slade (ibid.) give an important clue on these stages: in spite of being obligatory (core), these stages do not occur alone. There might be other intervening elements that co-occur with them (and thus called optional).

To clarify more, they argue that in the process between signalizing a behavior as being inappropriate or unacceptable (hence providing evidence) and then pejoratively evaluating it, there is often a speaker who requests more details. In other words, the cycle of SB followed by PE is often prompted by another speaker asking for further information. This optional element in which such a request is made has been labelled Probe. Another optional element which might follow the probe is Defense: where a listener disagrees with the speaker (gossiper) by defending some aspect of the gossipee. And this is normally followed by a Response to Defense (by the gossiper). As a result of these two elements, there comes a compromise position where one of the parties concedes, and here we have what is called Concession. The final optional element in this generic structure is labelled Wrap-up: a thematic summation of the event which pinpoints the aforementioned deviant behavior in the TPF stage.

Eggins and Slade sum up this generic structure in the following way: TPF stage paves the way for the negative (pejorative) evaluation which is reached by means of the SB stage whose function is to provide sufficient support that lays the ground for the PE, as just hinted at. Besides, they devise the structural formulae (that includes both the obligatory and optional elements) for gossip as follows:

Third Person Focus ^ [{Substantiating Behavior ● {(Probe)/ Pej. Evaluation} ^ (Defense) ^ (Response to Defense)] " ^ (Concession) ^ (Wrap-up)}"

Key:

[^ = is followed by, ●= occur in either sequence, () = optional, [] = domain of recursion or sequencing, {= either/ or, "=recursion].

Eggins and Slade finish up explaining their generic structure by further detailing the PE stage (as it is the real stage in which gossip is motivated and driven forward, as mentioned before (See 4.1 above). They summarize what they have in mind in Fig (1) below.

They give the following examples to further clarify these divisions:

1)   (It is really ridiculous), an example on evaluation of offence as an attribute.

2)   (It was the laughing stock of the whole hospital), as a value.

3)   (She's pretty insecure, that girl), an example on the general attribute of the offender evaluation.

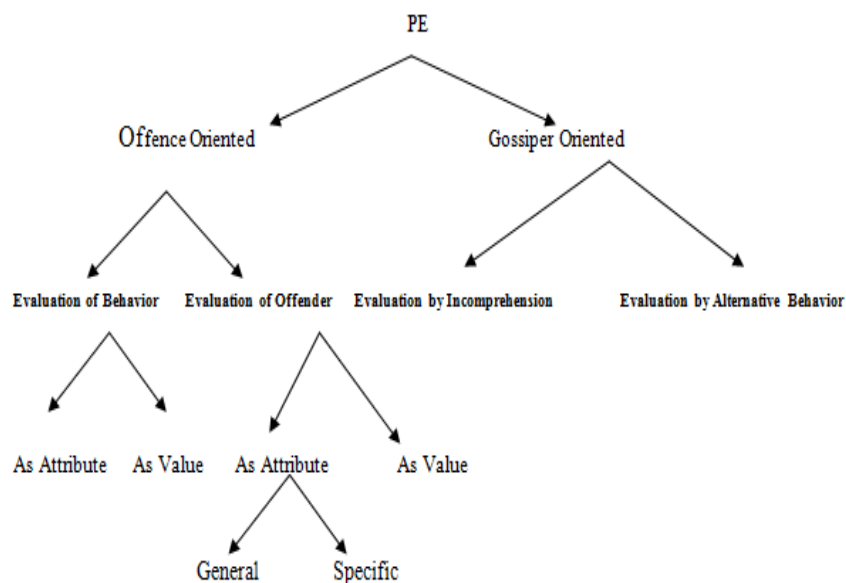4)   (She has made an absolute fool of herself), as a specific.

Figure 1. The structure of the pejorative stage

5) (She was the laughing stock of the whole hospital), as a value.

6) (I just do not understand), as an example on evaluation by incomprehension.

7) (I mean I would have asked), an example on evaluation by an alternative behavior.

4.2 The Generic Pragmatic Structure of Gossip as Developed in this Paper

On the basis of what has been just reviewed about the generic structure of gossip, it is time to achieve the second aim of this paper: developing the generic pragmatic structure of gossip, which will itself be the model utilized to analyze the data.

Eggins and Slade's (1997) structure will be partially adopted for one reason: theirs concentrates only on the negative facet of gossip, whereas gossip has two valences, positive and negative, as indicated before (See 2. above).

The developed pragmatic structure (henceforth, the model) can be illustrated as follows:

Gossip consists of three stages: Third Person Focus stage (henceforth, TPF), Substantiating Behavior stage (henceforth, SB), and Evaluation stage (henceforth, E). Two important things must be indicated in advance. First, the third stage has been named as evaluation only in order not to specify it with only one facet of gossip (whether positive or negative); rather, it refers to the general concept of gossip. Second, only the obligatory (core) elements of the structure will be included, all other optional elements will be excluded to make the model (and consequently the analysis) simpler.

4.2.1 Third Person Focus Stage

This stage introduces the gossipee in addition to some information about her/him to be gossiped. It has been hinted at before that any piece of information cannot be considered as gossip unless the gossipees are known by the people involved in this exchange (See 3.1 above). Pragmatically speaking, "what a speaker (writer) assumes is true or known by a listener (reader) can be described as a presupposition" (Yule, 2006, p. 117). Hence, the TPF is pragmatically achieved by presupposition.

Presupposition is of six types: existential, factive, non-factive, lexical, structural and counterfactual (Yule, 1996, pp. 27-30) [For the definition and example on each of these types, see Yule, 1996, pp. 27-30].

4.2.2 Substantiating Behavior Stage

In this stage, gossipers should posit some extra convincing support to get others involved in gossip. To pragmatically achieve this goal, the data reveal that conversational implicature is the pragmatic strategy that is employed to pass through this stage. But a point of caution must be raised here. By conversational implicature is

not meant the ordinary violation of the Gricean maxims; rather, it is used as an umbrella term to embrace two types of pragmatic strategies:

1) Relevance.

2) Rhetorical devices.

As for relevance, Wilson and Sperber (2004, p. 607) argue that "the expectations of relevance raised by an utterance are precise enough and predictable enough to guide the hearer towards the speaker's meaning".

Rhetorical devices, on the other hand, include: metaphor [a figure of speech in which a word or phrase is used to describe something it does not literally denote, e.g. this journal is a gem (McGlone, 2007, p. 2)], irony [as defined by Xiang (2008, p. 5), is a discordance between what is said and what is really believed to be true, as in "What a sunny day" during a storm], simile [the direct comparison between two things or action via the use of 'like' or 'as', such as: Their house is like a Renaissance palace, (Cruse, 2006, p. 165)], rhetorical questions [those questions which do not except an answer, as in: Is that a reason for despair? (Quirk et al., 1985, pp. 825-826)], overstatement [the deliberate positive or negative exaggeration to increase impact or to attract attention, as in The traffic was moving at a snail's pace (Cruse, 2006, p. 80)], and understatement [an expression of less strength than what would be expected. For example, an army officer lost his leg, but when asked how he feels, he looks down at his bloody stump and responds "Strings a bit" (Web source 1)]. One might wonder: what rhetorical devices have to do with conversational implicature? As a matter of fact, those devices have much to do with conversational implicature as they violate one or more of the Gricean maxims. Metaphor, for instance, violates the quality maxim as stated by Rozina and Karapetjana (2009, p. 598).

There remains one very important thing that the data of the work have revealed about the employment of these rhetorical devices: being optional. That is, it is not necessary to find one or more of these devices in the SB stage, as is the case with relevance. Rather, they are either employed as a convincing support or not, but all in all the relevance maxim still takes the lead in this stage. Consequently, in the model diagram those devices will be parenthesized to indicate optionality.

4.2.3 Evaluation Stage

This is the final stage where the events outlined in the first two stages are evaluated and commented on either positively or pejoratively. Whether this or that, this stage is pragmatically divided into two sub-stages:

1) Communicative-intent oriented [that is, one of the two types of intent, as argued by Leech (1983) and Sperber and Wilson (1986), that refers to speaker meaning. The other is the informative intent which refers to sentence meaning (Web source 2)]; and

2) Gossiper oriented.

4.2.3.1 Communicative-intent Oriented Evaluation

This first sub-stage of evaluation is further sub-divided into two branches, p.

1) Communicative-intent *per se*: which, as the data show, is expressed by different speech acts such as: (dis)praise, criticism, blame, etc.

2) Communicative-intent Issuer: which, as in the just outlined sub-stage, is expressed by means of different speech acts (the same just indicated ones) with the difference that they are, here, oriented to the gossipee and not to her/his intent?

It must be noted that Eggins and Slade's further divisions of each of these two sub-divisions (i.e. as attribute, as value, general and specific) will not be taken into consideration in this developed pragmatic model, as they have much to do with psychology which is far beyond the scope of this paper. This very reason, i.e. the psychological dress of Eggins and Slade's structure, has led this work to replace their terminology with a more accurate pragmatic one, hence there becomes (Communicative-intent Oriented) instead of (Behavior Oriented).

4.2.3.2 Gossiper Oriented Evaluation

In this sub stage of evaluation, it is the gossiper that is addressed and not the gossipee. Hence, this addressing is tackled from two various aspects:

1) Evaluation by incomprehension: This is arrived at by different speech acts as in: request, criticism, blame, thank, etc., because it manifests the addressees' (un)acceptability on what is said. As such, they will either request more information from the gossiper about some certain topic, or they will criticize, blame, thank, praise or whatsoever act that expresses their (dis)approval on what is gossiped.

2)   Evaluation by alternative behavior: which is achieved by different speech acts as well, like: suggestion and advice. This sub-stage is represented by these two speech acts only because they share in common the feature of giving some other alternatives that imply benefit for the addressee (alone in case of advice) and the addressor (in case of suggestion) concerning some certain issue.

Whether gossiper oriented evaluation is arrived at by incomprehension or an alternative behavior, the Politeness Principle (henceforth, PP) must be activated at this very stage. This is mainly because "the potential for conflict and confrontation inherent in all human interchange", as remarked by Lakoff (1977, p. 88), becomes really at stake when the interchange shifts from talking about some third 'absent' party to another some 'present' one.

The model of Politeness that will be chosen is Lakoff's (1973) as it applies very much to the data of this work, which are represented by various situations selected from a comedy entitled The School for Scandal by Richard Brinsley Sheridan. This drama has been found a representative of what is required by the data needed for analysis. [For the detailed discussion of this model, see Al-Hindawi (1999, pp. 97-104)].

The following diagram shows clearly how these various pragmatic strategies are distributed over the different stages of gossip, in order to form the eclectic model that will be utilized to analyze gossip pragmatically.

5. Data Analysis and Findings

In this section, the pragmatic perspective of gossip will be empirically manifested. This will be done by means of the following procedures:

1)   The eclectic model as developed by this paper will be used to analyze the data of the work, which are represented by twenty situations taken from Sheridan's comedy as a whole.

2)   The mathematical statistical tool that will be used for calculating the results of the analysis is the percentage equation.
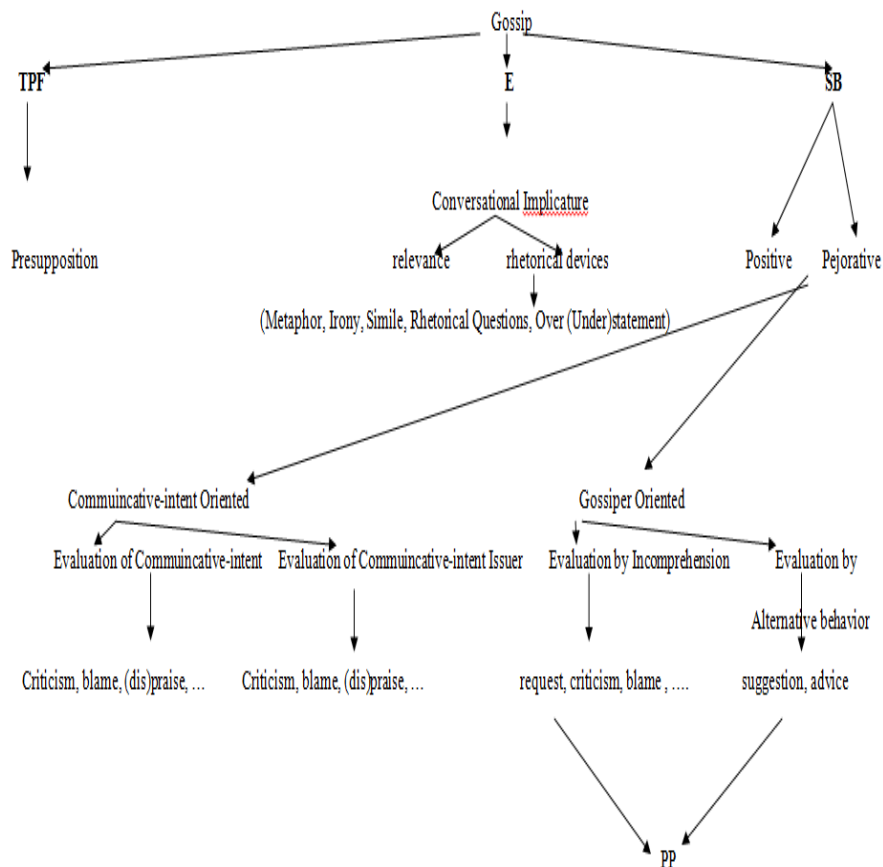
Key: TPF = Third Person Focus, SB = Substantiating Behavior, E = Evaluation, PP = Politeness Principle

Figure 2. A Model for the pragmatic analysis of gossip

It must be indicated that the data of the work are characterized by being concise and precise. They are concise in that the situations analyzed in the work as whole are not lengthy. They are precise in that there are no irrelevant details in the situations that might corrupt the smoothness of analyzing gossip pragmatically. Besides, they are various as far as topics are concerned. Consequently, the selected drama is representative of what is required by such a work to analyze.

5.1 Illustrative Examples for the Pragmatic Analysis

Due to the fact that the situations are too many to be analyzed in a paper like this; only some illustrative examples (viz. seven) will be posited to reveal the kind of the analysis conducted, in addition to shedding light on the findings.

Situation (1): LADY SNEERWELL. Why truly Mrs. Clackit has a very pretty Talent--a great deal of industry--yet--yes--been tolerably successful

in her way--To my knowledge she has been the cause of breaking off

six matches[,] of three sons being disinherited and four Daughters

being turned out of Doors. Of three several Elopements, as many

close confinements--nine separate maintenances and two Divorces.--

nay I have more than once traced her causing a Tete-a-Tete in the

Town and Country Magazine--when the Parties perhaps had never seen

each other's Faces before in the course of their Lives.

VERJUICE. She certainly has Talents.

LADY SNEERWELL. But her manner is gross.

VERJUICE. 'Tis very true. She generally designs well[,] has

a free tongue and a bold invention--but her colouring is too dark

and her outline often extravagant--She wants that delicacy of

Tint--and mellowness of sneer--which distinguish your Ladyship's

Scandal.

The TPF in this example is initiated by the employment of the existential presupposition represented by the proper name 'Mrs. Clackit', in addition to the discussion of her talent.

In the immediate SB, Lady Sneerwell, the gossiper, employs both of the pragmatic strategies: the relevance principle and a rhetorical device, viz. metaphor. As for relevance, the gossiper tells things which breathe relevance to the main topic of gossip (See the example itself).That is, the cognitive level is easily reached. At the communicative level, on the other hand, what is intended to be really communicated is that Mrs. Clackit has a good ability in destroying things (for instance, breaking off marriages, causing three sons being disinherited, etc.). A metaphor, that is industry, has been used to describe that very ability in order to show how skilful she is in doing that, due to the fact that any industry needs a certain skill to perform.

The E, which is communicative-intent oriented, is positive (though in some abnormal way). The evaluation is expressed by praising both the communicative- intent per se, and the communicative-intent issuer herself at the same time. As for the first, it is expressed by praising Mrs. Clackit's ability to screw things up by calling it a talent, as talent is an individual-specific feature (regardless of whether it is good or bad). The second, in its turn, is expressed, also, by implicitly praising her of being so skilful in that ability because assuring (via the use of the qualifier certainly) that a person has talents means that s/he is good at doing certain things while others are not.

After that (first E), another aspect of the same gossipee is tackled: her manner, which is described as being terrible (gross). Hence, there is another TPF with the same person (consequently, with the same existential presupposition) but different information to be gossiped (thus different SB and E).

In the (second) SB, only the relevance principle with its two levels is employed. The cognitive level is easily reached as Verjuice mentions only the things which make reference to what she intends to communicate at the other level (See the situation itself for examples). At the communicative level, Verjuice intends to criticize Mrs. Clackit's coloring and outline by describing them as being too dark and extravagant successively, things which are dispreferred in general.

The (second) E is a pejorative evaluation of the communicative-intent issuer (Mrs. Clackit) herself. It is expressed by implicitly criticizing her for not being delicate and mellow via the use of the verb 'want', which means that she has neither delicacy nor mellowness. This can be more emphasized by the fact that if someone has something already, then why s/he wants it again? Humans want only the things which they do not have.

Situation (2): LADY SNEERWELL. For our mutual interest--but I have found out him a long time since[,] altho' He has contrived to deceive

everybody beside--I know him to be artful selfish and malicious--

while with Sir Peter, and indeed with all his acquaintance,

He passes for a youthful Miracle of Prudence--good sense

and Benevolence.

VERJUICE. Yes yes--I know Sir Peter vows He has not his equal

in England; and, above all, He praises him as a MAN OF SENTIMENT.

In this example, TPF is triggered by the existential presupposition represented by the personal pronoun 'him' (referring to Surface), in addition to introducing some of his features.

Only the relevance principle is employed in the SB. The cognitive level is achieved so easily, as Lady Sneerwell mentions the relevant things only (See the example itself). At the communicative level, she intends to communicate the idea in spite of his bad features (selfishness and malice); Surface still has some good ones like prudence and benevolence, consequently he is not that bad person as one might be deceived at first.

The E is engendered by positively evaluating the communicative-intent issuer himself. This is expressed by praising him to be a man of sentiment, which is a basic motivation to treat others with such good features as prudence and benevolence that Surface already has, and hence meaning that he is a wise and tolerant man.

Situation (3): SURFACE. But--Madam--let me caution you to place no more confidence in our Friend Snake the Libeller--I have lately detected him in frequent conference with old Rowland [Rowley] who was formerly

my Father's Steward and has never been a friend of mine.

LADY SNEERWELL. I'm not disappointed in Snake, I never suspected

the fellow to have virtue enough to be faithful even to his own

Villany.

The TPF, in this example, is engendered by the existential presupposition represented by the proper name 'Snake', who is introduced by the gossiper (Surface) as someone that must be warned of.

The SB embraces both relevance and one of the rhetorical devices: irony. As regards relevance, it works effectively, yet not easily as the preceding examples, at the cognitive level. That is, what is mentioned about Snake (i.e. being detected in frequent conference with Rowland, the steward, who is not a friend of Surface) makes no direct relevance to why Snake should be warned of. But with a little cognitive processing, it will soon become clear that since someone (who is supposed to be at your side) is detected (and not just normally found) with some other one who is not a friend, then it means that such a person must be put under the consideration of caution. Consequently, what is intended at the communicative level is that Snake's loyalty is not purely oriented to the gossipers (Surface and Lady Sneerwell), thus they must be cautious about that.

The E is pejoratively oriented to the communicative-intent issuer himself (Snake). This is expressed by criticizing him for being not virtuous and unfaithful.

Situation (4): LADY SNEERWELL. Nay but we should make allowance[--]Sir Benjamin

is a wit and a poet.

MARIA. For my Part--I own madam--wit loses its respect with me,

when I see it in company with malice.--What do you think,

Mr. Surface?

SURFACE. Certainly, Madam, to smile at the jest which plants

a Thorn on another's Breast is to become a principal in the mischief.

LADY SNEERWELL. Pshaw--there's no possibility of being witty

without a little [ill] nature--the malice of a good thing

is the Barb that makes it stick.--What's your opinion, Mr. Surface?

SURFACE. Certainly madam--that conversation where the Spirit of

Raillery is suppressed will ever appear tedious and insipid--

MARIA. Well I'll not debate how far Scandal may be allowable--

but in a man I am sure it is always contemtable.--We have Pride,

envy, Rivalship, and a Thousand motives to depreciate each other--

but the male-slanderer must have the cowardice of a woman before

He can traduce one.

The TPF is motivated by the existential presupposition represented by the proper name 'Benjamin', with some features about him (especially his wit).

The SB employs both relevance and metaphor. Just like the preceding example, relevance at the cognitive level does not work easily; rather, it needs further processing. This is so due to the employment of the metaphor (thorn on another's breast) to indicate clearly Benjamin's malice. So, what is intended at the communicative level is that Benjamin's wit is not to be viewed positively as the general attribute suggests: he, actually, maliciously employs it with others.

The E is, also, pejoratively oriented to the communicative-intent issuer himself (Benjamin). This is expressed by explicitly criticizing him for traducing others via attributing 'woman cowardice' to a 'man'.

Situation (5): LADY SNEERWELL. Beg her to walk in. Now, Maria[,] however here is a Character to your Taste, for tho' Mrs. Candour is a little

talkative everybody allows her to be the best-natured and best sort

of woman.

MARIA. Yes with a very gross affectation of good Nature and

Benevolence--she does more mischief than the Direct malice of

old Crabtree.

SURFACE. Efaith 'tis very true Lady Sneerwell--Whenever I hear

the current running again the characters of my Friends, I never

think them in such Danger as when Candour undertakes their Defence.

The TPF, here, is started by the existential presupposition 'Candour', with some of her bad features such as affectation of good nature and benevolence.

The SB employs the relevance principle only, where the cognitive level is easily processed as Maria (the gossiper) mentions only relevant things directly (See the example itself). At the communicative level, on the other hand, she intends to communicate that Candour not only has 'gross affectation…benevolence', she is in fact worse than that, for she does more mischief than malice alone.

The E is pejoratively oriented to the communicative-intent issuer herself (Candour). It is expressed by implicitly dispraising her for being the worst person to defend others. That is to say, Candour is too bad a person whose defense cannot be trustworthy at all; on the contrary, if she defends someone, then s/he is to be considered at real danger from such a 'talkative' woman.

Situation (6): MRS. CANDOUR. So they are Child--shameful! shameful! but the world is so censorious no character escapes. Lord, now! who would have suspected your friend, Miss Prim, of an indiscretion Yet such is the

ill-nature of people, that they say her unkle stopped her last week

just as she was stepping into a Postchaise with her Dancing-master.

MARIA. I'll answer for't there are no grounds for the Report.

MRS. CANDOUR. Oh, no foundation in the world I dare swear[;]

no more probably than for the story circulated last month,

of Mrs. Festino's affair with Colonel Cassino--tho' to be sure

that matter was never rightly clear'd up.

SURFACE. The license of invention some people take is monstrous

indeed.

MARIA. 'Tis so but in my opinion, those who report such things

are equally culpable.

The TFP, in this situation, is, also, triggered by the existential presupposition 'Prim', tackling her behavior which is described by indiscretion.

In the SB, Candour (the gossiper) employs only the relevance principle. At the cognitive level, she makes things easily processed by mentioning directly relevant things to indiscretion (i.e., Prim's going with her dancing-master). Consequently, at the communicative level, Mrs. Candour intends to communicate that Prim is not a very well-behaved girl and that her manner is to be suspected.

The E is pejoratively, yet politely, oriented to the gossiper herself (Mrs. Candour). This is expressed by implicitly blaming her for reporting other people's private things, which is addressed via the use of the utterance 'culpable'. The PP, in its turn, is activated by the very indirect blame oriented to the gossiper.

5.2 Findings

The mathematical statistical analysis arrived at by applying the percentage equation has shown the following:

1)   Existential presupposition (represented by the proper noun) is employed 100% in the TPF.

2)   The percentage of relevance employment in the SB is 100%, which is very much higher than that of the rhetorical devices which is 36% (which has been calculated by summating the percentages given below and then dividing the result on the total number of the strategies which is six).

3)   Percentages of the different rhetorical devices are as follows, p.

-   Metaphor: 80%.

-   Irony and simile: 25%.

-   Rhetorical question: 10%.

-   Overstatement: 55%.

-   Understatement: 50%.

4)   In the E, the percentages have been distributed as follows:

-   Positive evaluation: 40%.

-   Pejorative evaluation: 60%.

-   The percentage of the different strategies employed in ECII (Evaluation of Communicative-intent Issuer) is double its counterpart in ECI (Evaluation of Communicative-intent) (that is, 50%, 25% respectively). Moreover, that very percentage of the various strategies of ECII (i.e. 50%) is higher than both of the different strategies of EI (Evaluation by Incomprehension) (which is 30%) and EAB (Evaluation by Alternative Brhaviour) (which is 0%). This last (0%) reveals that neither suggestion nor advice are employed in the work under analysis as part of E. Consequently, the EAB has not been activated by the investigated work as a vital part in the developed model.

5)   Percentages of the three functions of gossip are shown as follows, p.

-   Knowledge: 50%.

-   Friendship and influence: 25%.

6. Achievement of the Functions of Gossip

After analyzing some situations on the basis of the developed model, it is time to trace the achievement of the three functions of gossip (See 4. above).

Interestingly, data analysis has revealed that the different functions of gossip can be specified right from the first stage, TPF, and can be further verified by the two later stages, SB and E. That is, if the TPF is engendered by tackling certain type of information (as in situations 1,2,4 and 6 above), then gossip functions to exchange information (which is equally exchanged positively and negatively) (See 3.1 above). Hence, in the pragmatic achievement of this function we notice the following:

1)   TPF is triggered by existential presupposition.

2)   In the SB relevance is necessarily employed whereas the rhetorical devices employment is optional.

3)   The E can be either positive or pejorative towards the gossipee or the gossiper.

In another situation (that is, situation 3), TPF starts by making an influential act: Surface's warning. Consequently, gossip in such an exchange functions to competitively influence the other's attitude (Sneerwell in this example) concerning the behavior with such a person (i.e. Snake) (See 3.3 above). This is further emphasized by Sneerwell's pejorative evaluation of the fellow.

Situation 5 exhibits another function of gossip: friendship. This function is reached by the way in which the gossipee (Candour) is introduced (by Sneerwell, a gossiper) to Maria (another gossiper), that is, by advertising Candour's advantages (being the best-natured and best sort of woman) in an attempt to establish a relationship between the two. As such, the friendship function, in this example, works at the individual level (See 3.2 above).

7. Conclusions

On the basis of the findings arrived at by means of the analysis, this study has come up with the following conclusions:

1)   The developed model has proved its validity in pragmatically analyzing gossip.

2)   The pragmatic achievement of the various functions of gossip follows the same track of the generic pragmatic structure of gossip itself. That is, the developed pragmatic structure of gossip shows at the same time the pragmatic strategies via which the functions of gossip are achieved.

3)   In the SB, relevance has been shown to be more significant than the rhetorical devices, due to the fact that relevance has been employed in all the situations with a percentage of 100%, whereas the percentage of the employment of the rhetorical devices is only 36%.

4)   The most common function of gossip is to exchange knowledge, which is to be pejoratively evaluated in the end. The negative tint of gossip might be given due to this very point, that is to say, the percentage of the pejorative evaluations of gossip (that is 60%) exceeds that of the positive one (that is 40%). As such, gossip can be weakly defended to have an equally positive facet.

5)   There is no clear-cut distinction between TPF and SB. Consequently, it can be said that in the normal course of things, TPF is embedded within SB.

6)   Existential presupposition, represented by the proper name, is the only kind of presupposition that is used to initiate TPF with a percentage 100%. As a matter of fact, this makes sense due to the fact that whenever anyone tries to gossip, s/he will definitely specify who the gossipee is in order to keep communicating as easily as required. So, there is no need for further indirectness since the one to be backbitten is not present, thus one can feel free to mention her/his name to make things clearer.

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