



An Analysis of the Illocutionary Act of Blame in Arthur Miller's *All My Sons*: A Pragmatic and Conversation Analysis Approach

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

{يَرْفَعِ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا

مِنْكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا

الْعِلْمَ دَرَجَاتٍ}

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Abstract

This thesis is a linguistic analysis of of Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* (1947) from a pragmatic and conversation analysis approach. It is an interdisciplinary study between literature and pragmatics, a sub-field of linguistics. The researcher applied speech act theory, namely the illocutionary act of blame on the literary work *All My Sons* using conversation analysis as a toolkit. The conversation analysis tools that were used are: interruption, pausing and turn-taking techniques. The study is divided into five chapters. The first chapter includes the merged definition of blame which is "a unique moral judgment that is both cognitive and social, regulates social behavior, fundamentally relies on social cognition, and requires warrant" (Malleet al, 2014, p.147) and under which the researcher provided several blame accounts that were originally proposed by Coates and Tognazzini (2012). It also includes the significance and importance of the study, and the research questions. As for the second chapter, the researcher reviewed most of the works that are related to this study. That is, it includes an overview of the studies that have applied the linguistic theory; speech acts or the conversation analysis tools to

a literary work. Chapter Three discusses the method that the researcher adopted in analyzing the blame incidents in the play. In this chapter, the researcher provided information of the steps that the analysis chapter was based upon. Chapter Four includes the literary and linguistic analysis of the blame incidents that were extracted from the text. Chapter Five is the conclusion and it includes a general summary, in addition to, suggestions for further studies in this field.

Key Words: Pragmatics, Speech act theory, Illocutionary act of blame, Conversation Analysis, Turn-taking.

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.0. Introduction

This study is a linguistic analysis of the illocutionary act of blame scenes in Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* (1947). It was conducted using only two approaches of linguistics which are pragmatics and conversation analysis approaches. Pragmatics is a sub-field of linguistics that studies how context contributes to meaning. It encompasses speech act theory, talk in interaction and other approaches to language behavior in philosophy, sociology, linguistics and anthropology. On the other hand, conversation analysis (CA) could be defined as the study of the social interaction on both the verbal and non-verbal levels. The researcher attempted to choose these two approaches in specific to analyze the blame incidents in *All My Sons* as it is a very realistic play that is based on a true story. Therefore, pragmatics and conversation analysis approaches are applicable and suitable for analyzing it.

To analyze the illocutionary act of blame in Miller's *All My Sons* (1947), the researcher depended on merging two definitions of the blame theory. The first definition was adopted from Coates and Togazzini (2012) who contend that the speech act of blame is divided into several accounts that shall be introduced in the coming sections. The second definition of blame was adopted from Malle et al (2014) who argue that blame is "a unique moral judgement that is both cognitive and social, regulates social behavior, fundamentally relies on social cognition, and requires warrant" (Malle et al, 2014, p.147). These two definitions, in addition to the pragmatic analysis, as well as, the conversation analysis tools were considered as the basic structures of the analysis.

1.1. Significance of *All My Sons* (1947)

The choice of Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* (1947) specifically goes to the fact that one of its main themes is blame, blame of the mother directed at her husband, blame of the son against his father, blame of the father against his own self. Moreover, it is considered as one of the most important plays in Arthur Miller's history. Due to the central role of the illocutionary act of

blame in the play, I found that it is worth analyzing from a pragmatic perspective. In relation, Susan Abboston (2005) says that “Miller is interested in the role guilt might play...and how the characters deal with guilt is a common theme in much of his work. Earlier plays such as *All My Sons* or *Death of a Salesman* have narrative arcs that lead to the uncovering of a literal or moral crime” (Abboston, 2005, p.116).

Moreover, Steven R. Centola in his article mentions that *All My Sons* is “the winner of the New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award for best play of 1947” (Centola, 2010, p.51). In the following quotation he sheds light on the importance and greatness of this play:

All My Sons is the work that launched Arthur Miller’s long and distinguished career in the theater. While few would argue that it is Miller’s best or most important play, no one would dispute the fact that *All My Sons* deserves a special place in the playwright’s canon because it constitutes his first major theatrical achievement, displays his extraordinary skill in handling dramatic form...The critical and commercial success of *All My Sons* marks a major turning point in Miller’s career, for it came in a time when the young writer was struggling to establish his identity as a literary artist. (Centola, 2010, p.51)

Another important reason why the researcher chose *All My Sons* (1947) specifically is that it is based on a true story. That makes the dialogues more realistic, and hence the analysis applicable to everyday life, as well as, dramatic literary plays. E.R. Wood (1971) in his introduction provides information of the foundation of the play and says that Arthur Miller in his “introduction to his *Collected Plays* describes the seed from which the play *All My Sons* grew” (E.R. Wood, 1971, viii). He then quotes Miller saying that:

During an idle chat in my living-room, a pious lady from the Middle West told of a family in her neighborhood which had been destroyed when the daughter turned the father into authorities on discovering that he had been selling defective machinery to the army. The war was then in full blast. (E.R. Wood, 1971, viii)

1.2. Summary of *All My Sons* (1947)

The drama is set in America in World War II. Joe Keller is an airplane component manufacturer whose company has sold defective parts to the Air Force, resulting in the deaths of twenty-one American pilots. Keller is a man whose greed and pride overwhelm his sense of social responsibility, and he lets his business partner go to jail for the crime and takes the company over himself. Chris Keller, one of his two sons, is an idealistic young man and a war hero. He is convinced that one must adhere to the truths at all costs. The family is shattered by the news that Joe's other son, Larry Keller, is missing. The full horror of the situation is revealed in a letter that Larry has written to his former fiancée. He tells her that because of his father's involvement in the deaths of his fellow soldiers, he plans to take his own life. Joe is destroyed because of this, and he, too, commits suicide.

1.3. Linguistics Analysis of Literature

Mark Lester (1969) argues that those who are interested in the relation between linguistics and literature have found two claims of the importance of linguistics for literature. The first claim is that linguistics is the medium of literature. The second claim is that the critic may gain insight through the author's intentions through his choice of the linguistic patterns in writing, whether the author did it consciously or unconsciously. In relation, Sapir (1921) states that "language is the medium of literature just as marble or bronze or clay are the materials of sculptor" (Sapir, 1921, p.2).

One of the main reasons that linguists analyze literary texts is to elucidate certain unclear, or vague messages intended by the author which he may have not said explicitly. Also, authors of literary works of art use linguistics with its various branches to in fact begin writing their artistic text, not only in English, but in all the languages of the world. On this particular notion, Geoffrey N. Leech says that "a literary work cannot be properly understood without a thorough knowledge of its medium of expression" (Leech, 1969, p.1) and that "there is deeper reliance of literary studies on linguistic studies" (Leech, 1969, p.1). Also, linguists do not work exclusively on written texts, but also, on spoken conversations which people engage in their everyday life.

Consequently, literature without linguistics is a blank page, and conversations without words, phrases and sentences are silent conversations. The following sections are concerned with the linguistic theoretical foundations of the terms that were used in the analysis of the illocutionary act of blame scenes in *All My Sons* (1947).

1.4. Theoretical Foundations of the Study

1.4.1. Pragmatics

Pragmatics could be defined as a main branch of linguistics that “concentrates on those aspects of meaning that cannot be predicted by linguistic knowledge alone and takes into account knowledge about the physical and social world” (Peccei, 1999, p.2). Norrick and Bublitz (2011) say that it became an independent field of study in the early 20th by Moris, Carnap and Pierce. After that, it made its way into modern linguistics in the late 1960s when they explored the performance phenomena. They also state that other scientific studies nourished pragmatics afterwards such as anthropology, ethnomethodology and European sociology.

In addition, Taha Abdelrahman (2010) mentions in his book *A Dialogue in Language and Logic* that he "believes that the PRAGMATIC METHOD is suited for research in the fields of knowledge conveyed by natural language. Among these fields are: the field of literature" (Abdelrahman, 2010, p.8,9). That is, pragmatics could be used and applied widely in the studies of literature, especially realistic works of arts such as dramatic plays.

Moreover, George Yule (1996) in his classic book *Pragmatics* attempts to define pragmatics according to four criteria as follows:

a. Pragmatics is the study of the speaker’s meaning.

Pragmatics is concerned with the study of meaning as communicated by a speaker or a writer and interpreted by a listener or reader. It has, consequently, more to do with the analysis of what people mean by their utterances than what the words or phrases in those utterances might mean by themselves. (Yule, 1996, p.3)