

## Indirect Irony in Shaw's *Pygmalion* and *Arms and The Man*

**Dr. Bishnu Prasad Varma**

*B. Ed, M. A., M. Phil, Ph.D.*

Assistant Professor,  
Department of English,  
Hojai College, Hojai  
Nagaon, Assam-782435

### Introduction

Language is a means of communication which is used not only to convey the thoughts and views of the speaker but also to perform certain actions by use of words. Actions performed via words are referred to by Austin as *speech acts*. The theory of speech acts has aroused a wide interest in the field of language usage. Speech acts are the actions performed by use of words which are synonymous with the notion of the illocutionary acts of Austin.

According to Austin, while making the use of language in conversation people perform three different types of acts simultaneously. They produce an utterance to make the hearer know what they mean and what the hearer has to do. The utterance of the sentence, on the part of the speaker, is termed by Austin as *locutionary act*. When people utter a sentence, they make a statement, a request, a promise, etc. with a certain conventional force associated with the verb, this is an *illocutionary act*. People try to get desired effect on the hearer, by performing an illocutionary act; the consequences of the illocutionary acts were termed by Austin as the *perlocutionary act*.

### The Theory of Speech Acts

J. L. Austin delivered a series of William James lectures at Harvard University in 1955, which were printed posthumously in the form of a book in 1962 as *How To Do Things With Words*. The theory expounded in these lectures came to be known as the 'Theory of Speech Acts.' Austin discussed his theory of speech acts with his concept of 'performative verbs' and the 'conditions for happy performatives'. Austin classified speech acts into five broad categories which are: Verdictives, Exercitives, Commissives, Behavitives, and Expositives. Searle, on the other hand, modified the five categories of speech acts into Representatives, Directives, Commissives, Expressives, and Declarations.

Austin launched his theory of speech acts at a period when the doctrine of 'Logical Positivism' flourished. The central tenet of the doctrine was that unless a sentence can be verified, that is, tested for its truth or falsity; it was, strictly speaking, meaningless. He noted that some ordinary language declarative sentences, contrary to logical positivist assumptions, are not apparently used with any intention of making true or false statements, but rather the uttering of the sentence is an action, or is part of an action.

For example,

I name my team as 'The Warriors.'

By uttering such a sentence the speaker actually 'names the team' but he is not making any kind of statement that can be regarded as true or false.

According to Searle, one can perform only five basic kinds of actions in speaking, by means of the following types of utterances:

*Representatives* – These types of speech acts commit the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition.

*Directives* – These types of speech acts are used by the speaker to make the hearer to do something.

*Commissives* – These types of speech acts are employed by the speaker if he commits himself to a certain course of action to be taken in the future.

*Expressives* – These types of speech acts express the feelings of the speaker. They express particularly the psychological state of the speaker associated with feelings of joy, sorrow, etc.

*Declaratives* – The performance of these types of speech acts tend to bring out a change in the external situation of the world through utterances.

### **Indirect Speech Acts**

While performing actions through words speakers generally make use of sentences which have a particular form and a specific function. The linguistic forms and the functions conventionally associated with them are sometimes very strictly followed, whereas on some occasions the functions performed by the linguistic form uttered are not directly associated with the conventional function of the form. These direct and indirect associations of the form and function of an utterance lead to the classification of the speech acts into Direct Speech Acts and Indirect Speech Acts.

For example,

A husband says to his wife: I am hungry.

The locutionary act 'of saying' the sentence is the literal meaning that the husband is hungry, the illocutionary force 'in saying' is that he wants something to eat, whereas 'by saying' that he is hungry, he has persuaded his wife to provide him with food or indirectly requested his wife to prepare food for him, which is the perlocutionary act of the sentence.

The utterance, then, seems to be a declaration but it also implies that the speaker is making an indirect request to the hearer.

### **The Theory of Cooperative Principle**

H. P. Grice formulated the theories of cooperative principle. He talks of the maxims of cooperative principle, which are:

*Maxim of Quality*

Try to make true contribution.

- a) Do not say what you believe to be false.
- b) Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

*Maxim of Quantity*

- a) Make your contribution as informative as required (for the current purposes of the exchange)
- b) Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

*Maxim of Manner*

Be perspicuous

- a) Avoid obscurity of expression
- b) Avoid ambiguity
- c) Be brief
- d) Be orderly

*Maxim of Relation*

Be relevant.

**Analysis of Indirect Irony in Shaw's *Pygmalion* (1913) and *Arms and the Man* (1894)**

Irony is a figure of speech in which the speaker generally utters the opposite of what he actually intends to mean. It is generally meant for negative impressions of the target on the hearer or the audience. According to Leech (1983:143), "the ironic force of a remark is often signalled by exaggeration or understatement."

## Example 1

LIZA: How much?

TAXIMAN: Cant you read? A shilling.

LIZA: A shilling for two minutes!!

TAXIMAN: Two minutes or ten: it's all the same.

LIZA: Well, I dont call it right.

TAXIMAN: Ever been in a taxi before?

*Pygmalion: Act I, Page No. 18-19*

Freddy brings a cab for his mother and sister but does not find them; he is informed by Liza that they went by a bus. She says that Freddy need not worry about the cab as she would be going home in the cab. The above conversation occurs when Liza reaches her home and she is about to pay the taxi fare. The utterance of the taxi driver ('Ever been in a taxi before?') is in an ironical statement to Liza as he means to say that she has never been in a taxi earlier.

The utterance of the taxi driver is in the form of an interrogative but the function it performs is that of a statement of the declarative form which has the illocutionary force of irony. The ironical force of the utterance is indirect. The taxi driver utters it to mean the opposite of the literal meaning as he thinks Liza had never been in a taxi prior to that day (*propositional content condition*). The use of indirect speech act by the taxi driver is the result of mock-politeness (*preparatory condition*) on his part to Liza. The utterance is not only used to mean the opposite of the literal utterance but it also means more than that. In implying that if she would have been in a taxi before, then she would have the knowledge of the taxi fare and she would not have argued with him for the fare of the taxi. Liza feels that the utterance of the taxi driver is not just a question to know if she had been in a taxi prior to that time or not as that information would not be of any use to him, rather it is an ironical utterance (*shared factual background*), and the

situation of the utterance makes her understand that while dropping her at her home the question would not be a relevant one (*hearer's ability to infer*). But the utterance is relevant from the point of view of the taxi driver and appropriate in the context to be simply ironical in his utterance (*theory of cooperative principle*). The primary illocutionary act of the utterance is that of an ironical statement whereas the secondary illocutionary act is that of question. The type of speech act of the form is that of directive but the function is that of a declarative type of speech act which indirectly is an ironical statement.

#### Example 2

HIGGINS: Freddy!!! That young fool! That poor devil who couldnt get a job as an errand boy even if he had the guts to try for it! Woman: do you not understand that I have made you a consort for a king?  
 LIZA: Freddy loves me: that makes him king enough for me. I don't want him to work: he wasnt brought up to it as I was. I'll go and be a teacher.  
 HIGGINS: Whatll you teach, in heaven's name?

*Pygmalion: Act V, Page No. 103*

Higgins comes to know from Liza that she would marry Freddy as soon as she would be able to support him. Higgins is surprised to know that Liza would think of marrying Freddy whom he considers to be a 'fool' as he believes that he has made Liza fit for a king. Liza replies that Freddy is a king for her as he loves her and that he need not work, rather she would earn by being a teacher. Higgins is again surprised to know that she is planning to become a teacher as he knows that she knows nothing and she could not teach. This view of Higgins is presented by him in an interrogative form which has an ironical force in the above utterance of Higgins ('Whatll you teach, in heaven's name?').

The utterance of Higgins is in the form of an interrogative but the function it performs is that of a statement of the declarative form that has the illocutionary force of an irony. It is an indirect speech act with the form of directive type of speech act and the function of representative type of speech act. Higgins has been providing Liza lessons in English and has made her a high class lady out of a street flower girl through her speech and so he knows it well that she knows nothing that she could teach to someone else (*shared factual background*) and a fact which Liza is aware of and so she understands (*hearer's ability to infer*) that this utterance by Higgins is meant to have the opposite meaning of the literal utterance that she has no knowledge of anything that she could teach others (*propositional content condition*). His utterance is not only meant to have the opposite meaning but it also mocks (*preparatory condition*) the thought of Liza that she could be a teacher. The type of speech act used is that of a directive type which is used to function as the declarative type of speech act. The primary illocutionary act of the utterance is irony and the secondary illocutionary act is question.

#### Example 3

SERGIUS: If our conversation is to continue, Louka, you will please remember that a gentleman does not discuss the conduct of the lady he is engaged to with her maid.  
 LOUKA: It's so hard to know what a gentleman considers right. I thought from your trying to kiss me that you had given up being so particular.

*Arms and the Man: Act II, Page No. 35*

Sergius is in the house of Petkoff and he is engaged to his daughter, Raina. Sergius is trying to make love to the maid-servant of Petkoff, Louka. He tries to kiss her but she stops him by saying that the “gentlefolk are all alike; you making love to me behind Miss Raina’s back; and she doing the same behind yours” (Act II: 35). The words of Louka about Raina making love behind his back are not favoured by him and he says that he is not likely to discuss the conduct of his lady to a maid as he is a gentleman.

Louka utters the above on hearing Sergius saying that he is not going to discuss about Raina with her; Louka’s utterance is an ironical utterance meaning not only the opposite but something more than that as it is an indirect speech act.

The utterance of Louka has an ironical force which actually means the opposite that of what is expressed in the literal sense of the utterance. Louka’s utterance actually has multiple meanings as she might either mean that Sergius is not a gentleman or she might mean that the way he tried to flirt with her, she thought that he was not so particular about his feelings for Raina. The utterance means more than just the opposite of the literal meaning. It is an indirect speech act. The ironical force of the utterance of Louka is clear from the utterance of response of Sergius in the conversation that follows in which Sergius utters “devil! devil!” (Act II: 35) Sergius knows that Louka’s utterance has some deeper meaning as he is engaged to Raina but has been trying to make love to her (*shared factual background*) and it is not acceptable behavior of a gentleman to make love to a maid when he is already engaged to another lady (*hearer’s ability to infer*). The ironical force of the utterance comes with the violation of the maxim of manner which is ambiguous in meaning (*theory of cooperative principle*), but her violation contributes deeper meaning to her utterance as studied against the context of the conversation, for Louka intends the implied meaning that if he wants to make love to her then he should not be so particular about Raina, the lady to whom he is engaged. The primary illocutionary act is that of irony but the secondary illocutionary act is a declarative statement. The utterance, therefore, is an indirect speech act.

## Example 4

LOUKA: How easy it is to talk! Men never seem to me to grow up: they all have schoolboy’s ideas. You dont know what true courage is.

SERGIUS: Indeed! I am willing to be instructed.

*Arms and the Man: Act III, Page No. 59-60*

Sergius comes for a talk to Louka while she is talking to Nicola, servant of Petkoff to whom she is engaged, who leaves the room as Sergius enters. Louka asks Sergius that if he has found any man, whose father is poor like her, is less brave than the soldiers whose father is rich like his. The reply of Sergius makes Louka feel that he has only a schoolboy’s idea about courage and bravery and he really does not know what courage is. Sergius utters the above to Louka which is an indirect speech act and is an ironical statement.

The utterance of Sergius has the form of an imperative but the function it performs is that of a statement of declarative form with the illocutionary force of irony. Sergius is a Major and Louka is just a maid of the house of Petkoff to whose daughter he is engaged (*shared factual background*). He is an officer who is going to marry the daughter of another officer so it brings him to a higher social class whereas Louka is the daughter of a poor man and is a maid; Sergius has returned from a war with the Serbs and has won the war so it is clear to him that he could define courage better than a maid who has stayed all the time at home, so his utterance is ironical meaning the opposite than that of the literal one (*hearer's ability to infer*). The opposite meaning of his utterance is simply that how could a maid know about courage than a Major who has just returned from war (*propositional content condition*). The utterance of Sergius not only has an opposite meaning but it also means more than the opposite. Sergius has uttered it with the intention of a romantic expression to persuade Louka to approve his flirting with her, the utterance would, hence, be an expression of mock-affection (*preparatory condition*). Sergius has violated the maxim of quality by making the above utterance as he knows it well that his utterance would prove to be false as neither Louka has any practical experience or knowledge of courage nor she has the authority to instruct Sergius (*theory of cooperative principle*). The utterance of Sergius has the primary illocutionary act of irony and the secondary illocutionary act of a command.

### Conclusion

The characters make ironical comments using four ways but basically they use the interrogative form to function as a statement of the declarative form.

They use the directive type of speech act to make it perform the function of declarative type of speech act. The primary illocutionary act of irony is intended through the secondary illocutionary act of question (examples 1 and 2).

Secondly, the declarative type of statement is used to make an utterance with an ironical force (example 3).

Lastly, irony is meant by use of an imperative form which is used to function as the declarative form, the secondary illocutionary act, namely, a command (example 4).

### Works Cited:

- Austin, J. L. (1962, 2nd ed. 1976) *How To Do Things With Words*, Oxford University Press: Oxford, (Reprint 1984)
- Brown, G. and Yule, G. (1983) *Discourse Analysis*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Cole, P. and Morgan, J. L. (ed.) (1975) *Syntax and Semantics: Volume 3, Speech Acts*, Academic Press: New York.

- Cole, P. (ed.) (1978) *Syntax and Semantics: Volume 9, Pragmatics*, Academic Press: New York.
- Crystal, D. (1971, 2nd ed. 1985) *Linguistics*, Penguin: U. S. A
- Davis, S. (ed.), (1991) *Pragmatics: A Reader*, Oxford University Press: New York.
- Holdcroft, D. (1978) *Words and Deeds: Problems in the Theory of Speech Acts*, Clarendon Press: Oxford.
- Leech, G. (1983) *Principles of Pragmatics*, Longman: U. S. A. (Third impression 1985).
- Searle, J. R. (1969) *Speech Acts: An Essay in The Philosophy of Language*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge (Reprint 1970).
- . (ed.) (1971) *The Philosophy of Language*, Oxford University Press: Oxford (Fifth impression 1979).
- Shaw, G. B. (1894) *Arms and The Man*, UBSPD: New Delhi (Reprinted 2005).
- . (1913) *Pygmalion*, Orient Longman (Orient Longman ed. 1954, with notes by A. C. Ward): Hyderabad (Reprint 2006).
- Wierzbicka, A. (1987) *English Speech Acts Verbs: A Semantic Dictionary*, Academic Press: Sydney.