
An Interpersonal and Appraisal Analysis of Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*

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Abstract

This paper attempts to analyze Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* through linguistic perspective where conversational exchanges of the characters are laden with power and dominance. In most of the earlier studies done on *A Doll's House*, feminism has been discussed along with the basic socio-economic differences between males and females. The analysis of differences between the language of male and female characters, however, were scanty. But in this paper, an attempt has been made to study differences between the language of male and female characters of the play with the help of theoretical framework of *Systemic Functional Linguistics* as proposed by M.A.K. Halliday and *Appraisal* theory as described by Martin.

Keywords- Feminism, Naturalism, Impersonality, Linguistics

Introduction

Language is the most important tool invented by human beings. It is a means through which people interact and express their views and understand the views of others. With the help of language, interpersonal relationships are developed and maintained. One such relationship is of males and females in society. The differences and similarities between them have long been of great interest. In the co-ordination of interpersonal relationships, people often ask for or offer information and services while sometimes their emotions and behavior is evaluated. All these are involved in the *Systemic Functional Linguistics* given by Halliday and *Appraisal* framework as developed by Martin and White (2005). Lynne Young is of the view, "SFL is a perspective for describing language both externally as a social and cultural phenomenon and internally as a

formal system for expressing meanings. It does so through a theory designed not only to explain how people interact with each other through language, but to provide a methodology for the analysis of many types of discourse” (Lynne Young, 2011: 627).

This study focuses on the linguistic variations related to the gender of the speaker. It describes the differences found in the speech of males and females and relates these differences to the roles which are assigned and performed by men and women in our culture and society. Discourse analysts recognize that discourse is always embedded in a particular social context. Van Dijk (1998:120) is of the view that, “those who study language and gender consider the analysis of language practices as a central task in the study of human relationships”. The focus is on the form of dialogues delivered by both male and female characters of the selected play. More specifically, the main goal of the study is to show the differences in the speech of male and female characters of the play. The play is analyzed through linguistic perspective where conversational exchanges of the characters are laden with power and dominance.

Data and Methodology:

To understand the differences in the speech of males and females, Henrik Ibsen’s play, *A Doll’s House*, has been chosen. To meet the aim of the research, the selected play is analyzed from *Systemic Functional Linguistics* point of view. An effort has been made to analyze the play with the help of *Interpersonal Metafunction* proposed by Halliday and *Appraisal* framework as developed by Martin and White (2005). Only *Interpersonal metafunction* is used in this paper as it is more prominent in dialogues and least prominent in formal texts. For this, the analyzed data has been divided into different types, including speech acts (Searle, 1969), which clarify the form of the dialogue delivered. Van Dijk (2008: 181-182) supports this as, “There are standard modal ways to formulate a (context relevant) speech act, such as, request...or a command or recommendation...which express social obligations of the participants and hence features of the context”. The type of the dialogue suggests whether the spoken dialogue is assertive, suggestive, a request, a command or dominating. And *Appraisal* theory is concerned with the resources through which the emotions, attitudes and feelings can be evaluated. In most of the earlier

studies done on *A Doll's House*, feminism has been discussed along with the basic socio-economic differences between males and females but this paper tries to give it a linguistic turn.

Theoretical framework:

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) posits three metafunctions of language-*ideational*, *interpersonal* and *textual metafunction*. Halliday and Matthiessen (2004) suggest that language is used to serve any or all of three metafunctions that are the *ideational meaning* – to construe human experience, *interpersonal meaning* – to establish relationships with people around us, and *textual meaning* – to organize these construal and relationships with people into a cohesive text. The concepts of *mood* and *modality* are considered while studying the *interpersonal metafunction*. *Mood* in English is about two elements (subject and finite) of a clause that determines the form of the clause: whether it is an imperative, declarative, or interrogative. *Modality* is about those words that mark necessity, possibility or impossibility such as *should*, *probably*, *maybe*, etc. and *appraisal* theory as proposed by J. R. Martin and Peter White in *Evaluation of Language* (2005) is also called an extension of the *interpersonal metafunction* given by Halliday. It is mainly related to the evaluation of the feelings, emotions and attitudes etc. *Appraisal* can be divided into three types. These are: *Attitude*, *Engagement* and *Graduation*. Martin and White (2005:35) describe these types as “Attitude is concerned with our feelings, including emotional reactions, judgments of behavior and evaluation of things. Engagement deals with sourcing attitudes and the play of voices around opinions in discourse. Graduation attends to grading phenomena whereby feelings are amplified and categories blurred.” All these types are further sub-divided as follows:

Attitude: Affect, Judgment and Appreciation

Engagement: Social Esteem and Social Sanction

Graduation: Force and Focus

Results and Discussion:

While analyzing the play from *Interpersonal metafunction* point of view, it has been found out that total asserting dialogues were 23, out of which 4 dialogues are spoken by male character, that is, Torvald and 19 dialogues are spoken by female character, that is, Nora.

Asserting dialogues by Nora are found to be only in the last part of the play. Torvald has no need to assert himself as he only has to say what is to be done, he only commands and directs. Martin Rojo and Gomez Esteban (2005) after conducting a study of “female-styles” in focus-group organizations, is of the view that, “men do not have to perform in any special way or put on an act of being something they are not, and they are seldom seen as especially tough or authoritarian, because their authority as managers is stereotypically presupposed anyway” (Dijk, 2008: 203).

Total asking (Searle, 1969) dialogues of Torvald and Nora, in interpersonal communication, were found to be 29 out of which only 3 were spoken by Nora and 26 by Torvald. This shows that she only has to agree with whatever he says and he is in the position of asking her anything. Even he asks her trivial questions like:

“When did my squirrel get in?” (Ibsen, 1965: 44)

“And what’s in that package there?” (Ibsen, 1965: 45)

The need to know even trifles shows that he wants her to be under his control every time and he should be aware of whatever she does and why. Also Eggins and Slade (1997:87), state that “wh-interrogatives can also be used to achieve commands”. Then the requesting and suggesting dialogues are all spoken by Nora. It can also be said that as Torvald is in the habit of only commanding or directing, Nora is in the habit of obeying. All this shows the dominance of Torvald.

Usually it is said that women are manipulative and make the other person do whatever they want with the art of manipulation but in this play it has been found that even men can be manipulative. While doing the analysis, it was realized that Nora’s manipulative dialogues are 5 in number whereas Helmer’s are 6. Also that Nora’s dialogues are mostly embedded clauses whereas Torvald’s dialogues are not so. The dialogues uttered by Nora are like requests whereas Torvald’s are to convince her stay back at home, towards the end of the play. He tries to rouse her conscience by reminding her of her children, her duties and her religion. And lastly he says, *“But you’re my wife, now and wherever you go” (Ibsen, 1965: 113)*

The dialogues which show dominance are found to be total 64 in number, out of which those uttered by Nora are 09 and by Torvald 55. Dialogues delivered by Nora are only in the last act of the play. Whereas the dominated dialogues are total 19 in number and all of them are uttered by Nora. The dominating dialogues are like,

“You really will have to” (Ibsen, 1965:45)

“But you can’t be allowed to bring up the children” (Ibsen, 1965:106)

Sexist language is the language used to demean the other sex especially women. While analyzing the play, it has been found out that total sexist dialogues found are 19 out of which uttered by Torvald are 9, by Nora 7 and by Mrs. Linde are 3. It shows that at that time, not only men but also women used sexist language. As for example, when Nora tells Mrs. Linde that she has borrowed money and she has not told her husband anything about that, she says, *“A wife can’t borrow without her husband’s consent” (Ibsen, 1965: 53)*

She tells Nora that only husbands are capable to deal with financial matters. When she tells Nora what she had been saying the previous day, Nora herself says (pacing up and down), *“A man handles these problems so much better than a woman” (Ibsen, 1965: 76)*

It is seen that Nora’s sexist dialogues are somewhat arguing like asking questions or agreeing a bit and at the last part of the play defending herself, whereas the dialogues spoken by Torvald and Mrs. Linde conform to the society and patriarchy, showing male dominance and sexism towards women.

Attitude in appraisal includes *Affect, Judgment and Appreciation*. *Affect* is used for the expression of *affection, un/happiness and dis/satisfaction*. While doing *Appraisal* analysis of the play, it has been found out that total number of times *Affect* expressed is 17, which includes all these three sub-types. *Affect* is shown more by Helmer (10 times) and less by Nora (6 times) and by Dr. Rank (once). This shows that she is not that expressive or it can also be said that she is not so much frank as to express her love and affection. And when she expresses, it is not only for her husband but also for other people in her life. *Un/happiness* is expressed equally by both Helmer and Nora. Both of them use 2 expressions of happiness and 1 of unhappiness. Nora shows her

unhappiness and even her dissatisfaction towards the end of the play only when she feels herself confident and bold to assert herself in front of her husband.

Judgment is the evaluation of human behavior positively or negatively. *Judgment* has been divided into two sub-types: *social esteem* and *social sanction*. Total *Judgments* given are 18, out of which judgments based on *social esteem* are 11 and judgments based on *social sanction* are 7. Considering judgments based on *social esteem*, it has been found that Nora is judged negatively by both her husband (7 times) and her friend (once), whereas, she judges Helmer twice but positively. She dares judge negatively only Krogstad, an outsider, the one who blackmails her. This shows her personality and subordination in her family. If judgments based on *social sanctions* are taken into account, they are 7 in number, given all by Helmer for Nora. All these judgments passed are negative in nature showing the authority and domination of Helmer to blame and criticize his wife. She is judged negatively only because she has taken a step apart from the patriarchy by borrowing money from someone without telling or without seeking the permission of her husband.

Appreciations are the system of evaluation of products or processes and sometimes of people if they are treated as things. *Appreciations* can both be positive and negative. Taking *appreciation* results in view, it was found that *Appreciation* was done 22 times in the play. Out of which reactions given by Helmer include both things and Nora sometimes, when he evaluates her beauty. Helmer gives total 8 positive and only one negative reaction. Nora gives 9 positive and one negative reaction. Mrs. Linde also gives one positive reaction. Where Helmer discusses all the evaluation with Nora, she tells her reactions to her friend more than her husband. Out of her nine reactions, she tells Helmer only two. This also shows that she doesn't feel free to express herself to her husband. It can also be interpreted that she feels in a position to be free with her friend but not with her husband, thus showing her dominated position.

Engagement, as it is known, is the playing of voices from which the valuation and relations are judged. These can also be explained as acknowledging, challenging or rejecting etc. *Engagement* analysis of the play results in 102 times in number, out of which *Disclaim(deny)* is 64 times, *Disclaim(counter)* is 7 times and *Proclaim(concur)* is 30 times. *Disclaim (deny)* used

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only by Nora is 42 in number. Out of them, her denials used for Helmer are maximum in number (24 times). Out of those, 16 denials are present in the last act of the play when she tries to assert herself and contradict Helmer's acts. Her other denials include her denials for Mrs. Linde (2 times), for Dr. Rank (3times), her dad (2times), for maid once, for herself (4times) and for Krogstad (6times). When she uses denials for herself, she tries to convince herself and prepare herself for not to give up to the situation and never to meet Krogstad. Whereas 10 denials used by Helmer for Nora include instructions for her too. Other denials include Krogstad's for Nora-3, Mrs. Linde for Nora-1, Mrs. Linde for Krogstad-3, maid for Nora-1, Dr. Rank for Helmer-1 and Helmer for Mrs. linde-1. It can also be said that denials are the negation of verbs and not the opposite of positive but which invokes dialogism. Words like no, never or nothing are used to represent the form.

Unlike *Disclaim (deny)*, *Disclaim (counter)* is only 7 in number. *Disclaim(counter)* for Nora are total 4 in number which include by Dr. Rank to Nora (once), Krogstad to Nora (2times) and Helmer to Nora (once). Other counters include Nora to Dr. Rank (once), Nora to maid (once) and Mrs. Linde to Krogstad (once). These results show that Nora is countered most of the time and she counters two people only with whom she feels most comfortable. This also shows her submissive nature.

Total times *Proclaim (concur)* shown is 30 times. Nora shows *Proclaim (concur)* 12 times which include expressions for Dr. Rank (4 times), for Helmer (2 times), for her dad (once), for Mrs. Linde (4 times) and for herself (once). The other results are Helmer's expressions for Nora (5 times), for Dr. Rank (3 times) and for Mrs. Linde (once). Krogstad's responses for both Mrs. Linde and Nora showing *Proclaim (concur)* is 2 times. Maid also expresses such response for Nora once. These results also show that Nora acknowledges almost everyone very easily. These response are like of course, sure etc.

Graduation is the value provided to grading or scaling attached by a speaker to the utterance. It can be sub-divided into two types- *force* and *focus (sharpen and soften)*. Total evaluation on the basis of *Graduation* is 49. Out of which *Force (intensification)* is 14, *Focus (sharpen)* is 20 and *Focus (soften)* is 15 times. *Force (intensification)* is the degree of intensity.

Force (intensification) expressed by Nora is 7 times, that is maximum in number. It includes responses used for Dr. Rank (3 times), for Mrs. Linde (2 times) and for Helmer (2 times). Helmer uses such responses only for Nora (3 times). Mrs. Linde expresses herself once for Nora and once for Krogstad and lastly Dr. Rank shows for Nora (2 times). This shows that Nora intensifies her speech for almost everyone but still the number used for Helmer is even lesser. She is shown close to Dr. Rank in the play and this is also reflected in her speech as she expresses herself freely in front of him.

Focus (sharpen) are the exact pointed responses. This includes Nora's responses for Helmer (4 times), for Mrs. Linde (2 times) and once for Krogstad, Dr. Rank and for herself. Helmer uses focus maximum (5 times). The other characters use such responses as Dr. Rank for Nora once, Mrs. Linde for Krogstad once and Krogstad for Nora once. Helmer also uses such responses for Mrs. Linde and for Dr. Rank but only once each. *Focus (soften)* are the vague expressions. These are used for 15 times in total. Out of which Nora responds Helmer and Krogstad once each and Mrs. Linde (3 times). Helmer responds Nora twice, once each for Dr. Rank and Mrs. Linde. Dr. Rank uses these responses for Nora only, twice in number, Krogstad uses once for Mrs. Linde and twice for Nora and Mrs. Linde uses once for Helmer only. This shows that the results of *Graduation* are almost same for both male and female characters.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that present study shows significant difference between the language used by males and females. The male speech pattern expresses confidence and dominance and female speech hesitancy and dominated. Also, behavior shown through language depicts the specific roles played by the characters in family. As evident from Nora's behavior, she easily accepts her dominated position and agrees to whatever her husband says. It is only in the last part of the play that she takes a stand. This is only when she comes to realize that her husband misunderstands her. At this time, she asserts herself and decides to leave her husband and family. And this assertiveness and confidence is clearly shown in her language. Thus it can be said that language plays a vital role in life and gives meaning to it.

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