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Dissolution of Language Leads to Dissolution of Self: Pragmatic Analysis of Franz Kafka's Trial

Shruti Mishra ^{a, *}



^a Department of English, SKDL Govt. Girls PG College Ratangarh, Churu, India.

* Corresponding author Email: shrutimishra324@gmail.com

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Abstract: *The Trial* (1999) is one of the most complex novels in world literature. The research starts with reviewing various attempts that have been made by critics to comprehend the meaning of the novel *The Trial*. After overviewing the various ways in which the novel has been analysed, the present research aims to unravel the meaning of the text from a linguistic angle. The research is intended to do a pragmatic study of the text by taking Grice's Cooperative Principle as the theoretical base. The main purpose of the study is to find out whether the Grice's Maxims are followed in the text or not. In the case of the violation of four maxims of the Cooperative Principle, which type of maxims are violated and how and what impact it has on the overall understanding of the text?

Keywords: The Trial, Franz Kafka, Grice's Cooperative Principle, Pragmatism, Language, Self.

1. Introduction

Franz Kafka is one of the greatest writers of German Literature. His name only comes next to great German writers like Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Thomas Mann. His work's translation into English has made him one of the classic and most popular writers in the world. Though he never wanted his works to be published. In his letter to his Friend Max Brod, he requested him to burn all his writing as mentioned in the epilogue by Brod in Franz Kafka's Trial (Brod, 1999).

"Dearest Max, my last request: Everything I have behind me (that is, in the book-cases, chest of drawers, writing-table, both at home and in the office or where ever anything may have got to, whatever you happen to find), in the way of notebooks, manuscripts, letters, my own and other people's sketches and so on, is to be burned unread" (p.213).

But, Marx Bord, the friend of Franz Kafka denied Kafka's request and published his works, novels, and stories posthumously. *The Trial* is also one of the literary masterpieces which are published posthumously.

What is famously said of Monalisa can also be true in the case of the novel "The Trial", there is a mystery all around. It is the story of the protagonist Joseph K who has been declared accused without any proper reasoning. From the beginning to the end, he tries to find out the reason for what is happening to him and why it is happening and one day without the answer he has to die. The novel is about questions without any answers. In the novel, Joseph K interacts with various characters to seek his answers. Who has accused him and why? What is his guilt? What is the progress of his trial? In addition, in various conversations, he also attempts to convince people that he is innocent and he is not at fault but from the very beginning to end neither he can understand anything that is happening to him nor he can make other people convey his intentions. Everywhere there are questions that the protagonist seeks but at last, he has to die without any answer. So, the story starts with confusion and mystery also ends with confusion and ambiguity. The text never attempts to resolve the confusion and unravel the mystery. Franz Kuna (1974) describes *The Trial* as "one of the most labyrinthine books in the history of literature, a book not only pregnant with dire complexities but full of dead ends, contradictions and paths continuously doubling back on themselves" (p.111). This labyrinthine book of literature is one of the most complex works of literature. The novel



starts with confusion and ends with ambiguity. The overall impression left to the reader of meaninglessness and absurdity.

Its complexity and mystery have attracted the attention of various critics who have tried to analyse and fathom the mystery of the novel *The Trial* from various viewpoints and angles. One of the first critical analyses of *The Trial* is done by Kafka's Friend Max Brod himself. He has interpreted the text from a religious point of view. He points out that, "with Kafka art is a way to God" (Broad, 1963, p.97). According to him, the text deals with the eternal misunderstanding between God and Man. Edwin Muir (1987), one of the critics, being influenced by Brod, also read *The Trial* as a religious allegory. Brod and Muir interpreted the text with a religious orientation. They looked at it from the angle of comparison between God's infiniteness and Man's limitation. According to them, this is the reason for the complexity of the text. Charles Neider is another critic who has given a new angle to the analysis of *The Trial*. The complexity of the text he examines from the perspective of Psychoanalysis. Unlike religious interpretation, he said the complexity of the text can be best understood by looking at it from the "author's neurotic problem" perspective (Neider, 1949, p.153). Further comes the critics Hall and Lind who have read the text from a "biographical perspective". They have drawn a parallelism between the author's life and Joseph K's character life in the text (Hall, 1970, p.55). Then comes another writer Theodore Ziolkowski (1969) who has analysed the novel from the perspective of the theme of guilt. He believed that *The Trial* is a book about guilt and freedom: the inevitability of man's guilt in the world and man's freedom to accept the responsibility for his guilt" (p.44). In one another study, Ritchie Robertson (1985) called it a "metaphysical (or religious) crime novel" (p.90). According to him, in the similar tradition of metaphysical crime fiction, primary interest of this text also does not lie "in the ingenuity of the detective... nor in the psychology of the criminal... but in the metaphysical or religious themes like limitation of man to know the moral law arising out of the criminal's deeds". (p.90-91). Albert Camus explored it from the perspective of existentialism. According to him, it deals with an absurd world (Camus, 2000, p.117). Further, Goebel (2002) went to the extent where he considered novel based on tradition of modernist "city narrative" (p.43). He compares "the hapless figure of Joseph K to the individual whose historical precursor is "Baudelairean flaneur" (p.43). According to him, the protagonist is the rootless individual in his own hometown in the tradition of Flaneur whose "fundamental estrangement lies from his own surrounding" (p.46). On the other hand, Hoffman takes it as post-war literature which deals with the elements of surprise and violence in modern man's life (Hoffman, 1964, p.293).

To sum up, from religious allegory to psychoanalytical approach, from biographical reading to the thematic study of guilt, from the metaphysical crime novel to existential approach, from city narrative to post-war literature multiple ways are taken by the critics to unravel the complexity, comprehend the meaning of the novel *The Trial*. Still, the mystery and complexity of the novel remain unsolved. The present research will try to analyse the meaninglessness and complexity of the text *The Trial* from a linguistic perspective. As it is a language only which has the potential to create meaning and also to dissolve and mystify it. As in the process of creation of and dissolution of meaning, the self is also constructed and deconstructed.

1.1. Language and Self

Language can be understood as one of the most basic, central and strongest institutions of society. Every knowledge, belief, value, a perception that one possesses of oneself and the world is directly or indirectly conditional and dependent on the structure of language. We think in language and convey information and meaning through language, thoughts themselves are structured in the structure of language. Martin Heidegger in his seminal book *Sein und Zeit* (1927), was concerned with the impossibility of considering language as just one thing among other things of our world. Language, according to him, is first and foremost our way of "being within the world"; it is not part of the world, but rather, we can say its presupposition. He further insisted that the world we live in is always contaminated by the means of our language: "We don't say what we see, but rather the reverse, we see what one says about the matter" (as cited in Schmitt, 1969, p.75). Further, Lacan in his *Ecriture: A selection* (Lacan, 1977) when states "the unconsciousness is structured like a language" through this line emphasized the significant role language plays in the formation of the self (p.26) Eagleton in his *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, (Eagleton, 2015) sums up the argument aptly in these lines:

As not only my meaning, indeed but me: since my language is something I am made out of, rather than a merely convenient tool I use, the whole idea that I am a stable, unified entity must also be a fiction. Not only can I



never be fully present to you, but I can never be fully present to myself either. I still need to use signs when I look into my mind or search for my soul and this means that I will never experience any full communion with myself. It is not that I can have a pure unblemished meaning, intention or experience which then gets distorted and refracted by the flawed medium of language: because language is the very air I breathe, I can never have a pure, unblemished meaning and experience at all. (p.130)

So, the language which possesses the power to create meaning can also have the power to dissolve meaning. In the process of construction and dissolution of meaning, the self is also created and dissolved. Further, this creation of meaning and dissolution of meaning does not happen in isolation. It happens in the process of communication and conversations. Grice's Cooperative Principle is a very famous model under the umbrella of pragmatism which explains in detail the essentials of successful communication.

1.2 Pragmatism and Grice's The Cooperative Principle

Pragmatic is a newly emerging field of linguistics. Pragmatic as the field is concerned with the action-oriented approach to meaning. Alan Cruse in his work *Meaning in Language: An Introduction to Semantics and Pragmatics* (Cruse, 2006) writes that "Pragmatics deals with aspects of meaning that are not 'looked up' but which are 'worked out' on particular occasions of use" (p.136). Communication is one of the major uses of language. In communication, there is a speaker and hearer and the goal of any communication is what the speaker wants to convey, the listener should be comprehended. The fulfilment of this goal requires cooperation on both the part of the speaker and hearer as meaning is nobody's individual property. Communication of intended meaning and comprehension of the same meaning in other words which can be said 'successful verbal communication' require some principles. These Principles are known as Cooperative Principle which Grice has talked about in his work "Logic and Conversation" (Grice, 1975). According to him, the cooperative principle states: "Make your conversational contribution such as it required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged". Further, he has given four Maxims to show how the cooperative principle works. These four Maxims are "Maxim of Quantity", "Maxim of Quality", "Maxim of Relation" and "Maxim of Manner". In maxim of quality, the speaker should not say what he believes to be false, and should not say what you have not adequate evidence. In the maxim of manner, the speaker should avoid ambiguous expressions, avoid obscurity, should be brief, and orderly. In the maxim of relevance, the speaker should provide information that is relevant to the main topic of the exchange. (p.46).

2. Objective

The research is intended to do a pragmatic study of the text by taking Grice's Cooperative Principle as the theoretical base. The study aims to find out whether the Grice Maxims are followed in the text or not. In the case of the violation of four maxims of the Cooperative Principle which type of maxims are violated and how and what impact has it on overall understanding of the text

2.1 Methodology

For the research, randomly 15 conversations of Joseph K from the novel *The Trial* (Kafka, 1999) in which he interacts with other characters throughout the text are selected. The study has analysed these 15 conversations thoroughly and tried to observe whether the violation of Maxims occurs or not.

2.2 Data Analysis

In the whole novel, he interacts with many other characters. Some of the various characters with whom he interacts in the novel are two warders, Inspector Fraulein Buerster. Out of 15, 4 conversation samples from the novel have been shown below to explain how the violation of the maxim is observed and analysed in the process of the data analysis.



2.2.1. Context of the situation

This is the first interaction of the text between Joseph K and the two warders. The situation is that one fine day, when he wakes up, he sees two warders in his house instead of his maid who used to bring him his breakfast and he is very much surprised to see him.

Joseph K: "Who are you?"

Warder: "Did you ring?"

K: "Anna is to bring me my breakfast,"

Warder: "He says Anna is to bring him his breakfast." (p.7)

2.2.2. Context of Situation

The situation is that he is been informed that he is arrested and he tries to know the reason for his arrest.

Warder: "You can't go out, you're arrested."

K: "So, it seems,"

K: "And why am I under arrest?" he then asked".

Warder: "Go to your room and wait there. Proceedings have been instituted against you; you will be informed of everything in due course. I am exceeding my instructions in speaking freely to you like this. But I hope nobody hears me except Franz, and he himself has been too free with you, against his express instructions. If you continue to have as good luck as you have had in the choice of your warders, then you can be confident of the final result."

Franz: "You 'll soon discover that we are telling, you the truth"

(Examining his shirt) Warder said: "Much better give these things to us than hand them over to the depot, for there in the depot there 's a lot of thieving, and besides they sell everything thereafter a certain length of the time, no matter whether your case is settled or not. And you never know how long these cases will last, especially these days. Of course, you would get the money out of the depot in the long run, but in the first place the prices they pay you are always wretched, for they sell your things to the best briber, not the best bidder, and anyhow it's well known that money dwindles a lot if it passes from hand to hand from one year to another" (p.9).

Process of Violation of Maxims of Quantity and Quality and Relevance

1. In the first conversation, we see when he says Anna has to bring him breakfast, the warder repeats the sentence in ironic ways. Repetition leads to the violation of the maxim of quantity and an ironical statement leads to the violation of the maxim of quality.
2. In the next conversation, the maxim of quantity is violated. As in the reply to Joseph K's question why he has been arrested the warder speaks too much which is not needed. The violation of the Maxim of Relevance as there is a sudden shift in the discussion. Joseph K wants to know why he is arrested and suddenly he starts talking about handling his clothes to him.
3. Context of Situation:

He searches for his maid and tries to inquire why she is not here till now.

Joseph K: "Why didn't she come in?" he asked.

Warder: "She's not allowed to," since you are under arrest"

Joseph K: "But how can I be under arrest?"

Joseph K: "And how particularly in such a ridiculous fashion?"

Warder: So now you are beginning it all over again?"



Warder: "We don't answer such questions."

Joseph K: "You will have to answer them," said K.

Warder: "If you would only realise your position, and if you wouldn't insist on uselessly annoying us two, who probably means better by you and stand closer to you than any other people in the world (p. 11)."

Process of Violation of Maxim of Quality

In his interaction with the warder, his questions remain unanswered. The series of questions are there without any answer. In fact, the question of one is answered by the questions again. The warder denies to answer. The denial of answering leads to the violation of the Maxim of Quality. As the hearer and speaker are not cooperating with each other. So the failure of communication occurs.

2. 4 Context of the situation

He is unable to understand the situation and what is happening to him. He looks for his identification papers so that he can show them there is some misunderstanding. He brings his identification papers so that he can clear his identification

Joseph K: "Here are my identification papers"

Warder: "What are your papers to us?"

Warders: "You are behaving worse than a child". What are you after? Do you think you'll bring this fine case of yours to a speedier end by wrangling with us, your wanders, over papers and warrants? We are humble subordinates who can scarcely find our way through the legal document and have nothing to do with your case except to stand guard over you for ten hours a day and draw our pay for it. That's all we are, but we're quite capable of grasping the fact that the high authorities we serve before they would order such an arrest as this must be quiet, well informed about the reasons for the arrest and the person of the prisoner. There can be no mistake about that. Our officials, so far as I know them, and I know only the lowest grades among them, never go hunting for crime in the populace, but as the Law decrees, are drawn toward guilty and must send out us warders. That is Law. How could there be a mistake in it?"

K: "I don't know this law".

Warder: "All the worse for you".

K: "And it probably exists nowhere but, in your head,"

Warder: "You'll come up against it yet".

Franz to Willem (Two warders): "See Willem, he admits that he doesn't know the Law and yet he claims he's innocent".

Willem to Franz: "You're quite right, but you'll never make a man like that see reason".

Joseph K: "Must I' (he thought) let myself be confused still worse by the gabble of that wretched hireling" (p.11-12).

Process of Violation of Maxim of Manner and Quantity

As a wander is exaggerating the statement of Joseph K, of showing his Identification papers to them by saying "You are behaving like worse than a child". And Maxim of Quantity is again violated as the warder speaks too much in response to the attempt of Joseph K's showing them his identity papers. The intention is to clear the confusion but wanders exaggerating the situation and verbosity has things and situations more complex for him and for readers as well.



3. Findings

The present study has found all four types of Maxims are again and again violated throughout the text. In the text, though all the Maxims are violated as per the study, the maximum number of violations occur of the "Maxim of Quantity". The basic premise is, make your conversation as informative as much is required, neither more nor less. This is one of the biggest problems of the text's lack of proper supply of information that is responsible for confusion and ambiguity. In the various interactions, what has been observed during the interaction between Joseph K and other characters is either a lot has been spoken or told or very few have been spoken or told. Another situation is only one character speaks, the frequency of Joseph K being that character is very much. The best example can be the first interrogation scene in which Joseph K interacts with a Magistrate. In the conversation in reply to one line question, he goes to the extent of speaking to the length of two pages in the next. The extent of his speaking has even converted this dialogue into a monologue. The conversion of dialogue into a monologue on one side shows the failure of communication on the other side shows the emotional and disturbed state of the character. A lot has been said but his conversations have just like a monologue in which he is only the speaker and hearer. He only speaks and listens. He has a lot to say, but nobody is listening to him, and nobody can understand him. The failure of communication, which results in the dissolution of language has led to the dissolution of self. Throughout the text, he is struggling with this aspect, what he wants to say is not being properly conveyed, as his dialogues with only one person are only turned into a monologue.

The second aspect that is related to the "Maxim of Quantity", as a listener, when enters into communication, either opinions or thoughts are abundant, advice he finds around himself or he meets complete silence. The abundance of opinions is only adding to his confusion. The best example is the interaction between the warder and Inspector. His simple question of who they are, and who has accused him was answered by long dialogue. 'What is law', what it is supposed to do and so on, which has only added confusion and ambiguity to his anxiety. On the other hand, his interaction with another accused man in the court, which is more or less silent, has led to him at the level of provocation. The silence has turned him violent because of frustration.

Further, in the "Maxim of Quantity", also comes one important aspect of receptivity. In his many interactions, the common element is repetition. The repetition of questions is a more significant one. He keeps on repeating his questions, and his story. But from beginning to end his questions remained unanswered and his story remained unheard. This dissolution of language which is resulting from the failure of communication has resulted in the complete dissolution of self, the character of Joseph K in the context. He was completely shattered and finally "died like a dog", his last words have shown his level of dissolution.

Next comes the violation of the "Maxim of Quality". The main reason is stating something that the speaker himself does not believe in. And the second reason is the use of ironic and satirical statements. In the analysis of different conversions, this is also frequently observed. Further comes the "violation of Maxim of Manner". The main reason for a violation of this maxim in the given dialogues was the ambiguous way of interaction. Further, it was an exaggeration of the fact, situation and condition. This violation along with the violation of the Maxim of Quality brings forth another reason for confusion and complexity, intrusion of irony and lie, the ambiguity of the speech and exaggeration of the fact and situation makes the scene and life of Joseph K, even more, worse and full of confusion. Last comes "the violation of Maxim of Relevance". This relevance is observed only two times in the interaction. It is the least violated maxim. The main reason for violation is the wrong causality. In the interaction, wrong and irrelevant logic and argument are used by a speaker in the text. The wrong and weird reasoning, logic and causality in the interaction have paved the way for more mystery in the text and ambiguity in the life of the character. In addition, the finding of the least number of conversations with violation of Relevance also highlights one point that in the text after being majorly interacted following the maxim of relevance (as the number is comparatively less) the conversations of the text are unable to maintain the sense and meaning in totality. In other words, In Joseph K's interaction with other characters, mostly the time they are taken relevantly but still because of exaggeration, irony, ambiguity, repetition, and balance in conveying the proper information, the communication is failed.

The ultimate result of dissolution of language in all his communications is that Joseph K who in the beginning appeared as self - confident, rational being who fights for his right, determined about his questions, persistent to solve his doubts, in the journey of the novel, due to the lacuna in language, loophole in communication, futility of



resistance within this system of language he finally gives up his fight and accepts his defeat. Hence, the dissolution of language has led to dissolution of the character of Joseph K in the novel.

4. Conclusion

Language is a very important aspect of our life. Language has the potential to make and break one's sense of self. The basic argument is, it is not with lenses of history, religion, and biography that the mystery of the novel *The Trial* can be unfathomed but with the analysis of the language. The pragmatic study of *The Trial* reveals the fact that the mystery of the text is the result of the failure of verbal communication which has happened due to violation of the cooperative principle that has ultimately led to the dissolution of the character Joseph K. in the novel. To sum up, the novel *The Trial* is a story of an unnamed narrator who has been accused one day. However, who has accused him and why he has been accused, are not told and one day without giving any reason, he has been given death penalty. The novel starts in confusion and ends in confusion. Throughout the novel, he tries to communicate with other people, to share his anxiety, pain, to seek their help but the final result is neither he is able to convey his intentions and nor other are able to help him, as the major reason is problem of language, lack of cooperation between speaker and hearer, violation of four maxims in a communication that has led to communication loophole and confusion, bafflement that leads to the utter dissolution of the self.

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Yes



Conflict of interest

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