

Reconstructing diasporic attitude in the poem “*Abar Ashibo Fire*” through the lens of speech acts: a study in Pragmatics

Paulomy Bhattacharya

Ph.D. Research Scholar
Linguistics & Phonetics

The English And Foreign Languages University, Regional Campus, Lucknow.

Abstract: It is ubiquitous to analyze literary works within the boundary of stylistics, but analyzing the beauty of literature with the eye of linguistics, especially within the area of speech act should also be a sphere to focus on. Speech acts are the action one performs through utterance. This paper endeavours to analyze the translated version of the poem “*Abar Ashibo fire*”- Jibanananda Das by Clinton B. Seely through the light of speech acts to refurbish the diasporic attitude of the poem as it would help the reader to get a better understanding of the literal as well as the implied meaning of the poem. The poet tries to give the essence of his longing for the native land and to show this longing mostly what kind of speech acts has been used by him is going to be the main focus of this paper and how this speech acts are helping to flourish the essence of his diasporic attitude is also a point to look upon. This paper will use Searle’s(1969) concept of the Speech Act as a tool. People are tending to see it as nature poetry so this paper is an attempt to establish its diasporic attitude.

Keywords: Bengali poem, Translation, speech act, expressive, commissive, longing for home.

INTRODUCTION

Literary works are always a piece of art that pours value into the language with full of aesthetics and poetry is not an exception to this. Poetry is playing with words to give a beautiful picture, a story, or an imagination in a meaningful pattern which is different from the everyday usage of language. A poet can express his feelings through his way of writing mustering the words into a serene creation. The poetry can be about love, compassion, desire, anguish, hatred, and even it can be about seeking ‘home’, going through an identity crisis, the feeling of alienation in the present state of living, etc. This state is called Diaspora. The dispersion of people from their homeland or ancestral home. The term ‘diaspora’ comes from a Greek word that means ‘to scatter about’. Poetry can be one of the most potential tools to convey the diasporic philosophy (Gur-Ze’ev, 2005), but on the other hand, it can be the escape from the ‘exile’ from home and seeking the solace of homeland.

The poem ‘*Abar Ashibo Fire*’ by one of the renowned Bengali poets, novelist, and essayist Jibanananda Das, has beautifully depicted his longing for the native land and how eagerly he wants to return to the place where his soul exists- “*Abar ashibo fire dhansiritir tire, ei-banglay.*” which can be interpreted as the poet wants to say that he will return to his ‘home’, to the banks of the river “*dhansiri*” of Bengal no matter what. This poem clearly shows his immortal love for his native land and his soulful wish to get back to his land in any form if he gets a chance. So, this can be considered as one of the best examples of a diasporic attitude and can help readers to get a taste of the belongingness to the ‘home’.

Now the question that arises is what is the need of doing a speech act analysis of this poem, or why look into it linguistically? The answer to this question is, nowadays academicians tend to analyse any piece of literature in the light of stylistics, but looking at the beauty of this composition with the eye of linguistics, especially focusing on the speech acts will help the readers to get a deep understanding of the implied meaning as well apart from the literal one. In the words of Austin(1962), Speech acts are the actions people perform through their speech or utterance like performing the action of request, order, or bidding thank you through speech. Getting to know about the speech acts and their application of it to enhance the diasporic essence of this poem will help the readers to cherish this poem more. This will give the readers a new way to appreciate the elegance and artistry of this poem amongst every reader not only in the light of literature but also from the viewpoint of linguistics.

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

This paper will mainly focus on,

1. What are the speech acts that have been used by the poet to express his longing for the ‘home’? And,
2. How these speech acts are heightening the essence of this poem?

It is very likely that the poet would use mainly Commissives and Expressives in the poem as these acts will help him to express what he feels about his hometown and the urge he is feeling to return to his native place.

1. The data:

The poem “*Abar Ashibo Fire*” is written by Jibananda Das in 1934 and is from the collection of one of the sixty-two sonnets in *Ruposhi Bangla* (1957). The poem is majorly written as a totemic symbol of his desire to return to his home forgetting about the partition that was about to happen then. Bengal was not ready for this. Even the western part was majorly Hindu and the eastern part of Bengal were mostly Muslim, but still, they were united by their language, ethnicity, and lifestyle because of their proximity of living. So, this poem has a diasporic attitude to it but, generally, people saw it as nature poetry because it talks about the beauty of Bengal and how nature there is so serene; so it can be noteworthy to analyse it while looking at the speech acts the poet has used to express his urge or longing for home.

For the analysis, the English-translated version of the poem has been selected. The translation was done by Clinton B. Seely, the Professor Emeritus of South Asian Languages and Civilization at the University of Chicago. He has eminent knowledge of Bengali literature, especially in the writings of Jibananda Das. Being a renowned poem of Bengal, almost all Bengali have read this poem, and this is one of the closest translations that have been found and this version has kept the essence of the poetry intact. It will help the readers of other language communities as well to get to know about this beautiful composition and understand it in detail. That is why the translated one has been chosen.

2. Research Method:

To analyse the translated version of this poem, Searle’s (1969) classification of speech act has been used. The concept of speech act has been coined by J. L. Austin (1962) which “indicates that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action” (1962, p.6). Language is used to convey messages and on the other hand, also performs such particular functions through utterance. Initially, Austin (1962) classified speech acts into two types; one is Performatives, which cannot be evaluated as truth or false. Some utterances can only be produced and perform some action, but it is not possible to add truth or falsity to them. Whereas, there are Constatives, which can be evaluated as true or false apart from doing some course of action. Austin further classified speech acts into three types. When a speaker utters some meaningful words which has the capability of conveying some information that is locutionary act. Through the utterance, when the speaker tries to do some action, that is illocutionary act. And, when the hearer listens to it and the effect of the illocution on the hearer is perlocutionary act. For instance, if a student asks his classmate *would you please pass me the notebook?* Producing this sentence is locutionary act. Through this utterance the student is performing the action of request, which can be implied by the lexical entity ‘*please*’, so the action of request is illocutionary act. And after listening to this, the classmate can pass it or refuse it. This effect on the listener is the perlocutionary act. Thus, Austin (1962) validates the concept of Speech acts for future path of academics.

Searle (1969) further refines the theory of Austin (1962) in his book *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (1969) has given five types of speech acts which is the tool for analyzing the poem:

Representative/Assertives: utterances that have truth value to it, which means they can be evaluated either as true or false like *Sun rises in the east*.

Directives: utterances that are kind of giving direction to the hearer about what they should do like ordering etc.

Declaratives: utterances that are declaration about such thing which affects the society by bringing some changes like marriage vows, declaring someone husband and wife.

Expressives: utterances that state the feelings of the speaker like apologizing etc.

Commissives: utterances that state that the hearer is committing himself/herself to do some future course of action like promising, refusing, etc.

DATA ANALYSIS

In this section, each and every line of the poem will be looked at to extract the speech acts that have been used here.

- In the first line, the poet is committing for himself that he will come back again to his ‘home’, to his motherland, or take re-birth here only where he belongs. Here, he not only just uttering this sentence but also through this utterance he is committing for his own action that he is going to do whenever he gets the chance. Here, the word “again” is explaining that he wants to come back to his natieland, and “shall” shows his commitment to it that is he has to come back no matter what. So, this is a Commissive.
- In the second line, the poet is expressing his feelings that he does not want to be human again, but he will prefer to be a bird. So, here through his utterance, the poet is doing the action of expressing desires. So, this can be considered an Expressive speech act.
- The third line also performs the action of expressing the poet’s desire to be ‘a crow of dawn’ that flies above the farmland while the period of new harvesting in autumn. So, this is also an Expressive.
- In the fourth line,, the poet is committing that in the future he will float upon the heart of fog and will take shelter under the ‘shade of a jackfruit tree’. The phrase “one day” showing that he is giving the commitment for the future course of action. So, this is a Commissive speech act.
- Through the fifth line, the poet expresses his desire to be a duck and the pet of a beautiful young girl who will wear a tinkerbell to her beautiful red feet. Here, as the poet is doing the action of expressing his feelings about how he wants to return back to his native land, so this is an Expressive.
- The sixth line explains that the poet is directing himself to do if he becomes a duck; he is going to spend all his day floating on the water. At the first glance it may look like a Commissive because he is committing himself for some future work. But, actually the poet used Directive speech act as he is directing himself clearly on what he is going to do after becoming a duck just like other ducks present there. Here, he is both the speaker and the hearer.
- In the seventh line, again the poet is repeating that he will come again to this ‘home’ using “once again I’ll come” as he loves the rivers and the fields of Bengal; he loves all of Bengal. So, again the poet is doing the action of commitment

through his utterance that he is going to come back to his place-to his Bengal. Using “once again” shows his emphasis on his commitment. That is why; this is the speech act of Commissive.

- Through the eighth line the poet asserts how beautiful his place or his ‘home’ looks like. It is surrounded by the beautiful Jalangi river, whose waves make the banks greenery and serene. So, as the poet is stating what his native land looks like, and he is talking about a particular thing that is present there, this line has some truth value to it. That is why this is an Assertive speech act.
- The ninth line includes two speech acts that have been used by the poet. He is directing the readers to gaze at the airflow of the evening, where he is asserting that the readers will see him as a bird flying in the sky. So, the first one is Directive speech act whereas the second one is Assertive.
- In the tenth line also the poet has used two types of speech acts. At first, he is again directing the readers to listen and giving attention to the ‘shimul tree’. There, they may find him as a night owl hooting on the shimul tree. So, here he is asserting that the readers may or may not find him, adding a truth value to his utterance. So, he has used Directive and Assertive respectively.
- The poet has again asserted in the eleventh line that maybe the readers will find a child playing with puffed rice, by spreading it on the grass of his courtyard. Using ‘perhaps’ is helping him to add the essence of truth value to it. So, here also the speech act of Assertive has been used.
- In the twelfth verse as well, the poet is asserting some facts that the readers may find in his native land a boy, who is wafting in the muddy water of Rupsa river in his raft with torn white sail. He is wafting from a distance in the dawn which looks like he is wafting on the clouds of the dawn and as time passes and it is getting dark he is coming back to the banks. That is why it is Assertive as the poet is trying to spill some facts about what his native land looks like.
- At last the poet again used the speech act of Assertive. As, the poet is asserting the readers again about his motherland where the readers will find a white crane if they go to the very place and they will also find the poet amidst all these beautiful sceneries of his land, of his Bengal.

In the first paragraph, the poet has mainly used the Commissives or Expressives speech act as he is showing his commitment to come back to his homeland due to the feeling of alienation and the love for his place he has. And he is using Expressives mainly to express his desire in which he wants to be there. From this the reader can get that he is not at all happy to be detached from his motherland and going through an identity crisis, so he wants to come back anyhow.

On the other hand, in the second paragraph, the poet is stating how his homeland looks to the readers and justifies its beauty by giving different glimpses. As he is talking about the things that have been present there in a concrete form so the utterances have some truth value to them. So, the reader can see mostly the usage of Assertive there.

The result of the speech act analysis is here to check out at a glance:

Table 1

Sentence No.	Speech Act
1	Commissive
2	Expressive
3	Expressive
4	Commissive
5	Expressive
6	Directive
7	Commissive
8	Assertive
9	Directive & Assertive
10	Directive & Assertive
11	Assertive
12	Assertive
13	Assertive

Table 2

Type Of Speech Act	Frequency Of Use	Percentage
Assertive	6	40%
Commissive	3	20%
Directive	3	20%
Expressive	3	20%
Declarative	0	0%

CONCLUSION

This paper is an attempt to make people understand that poetry can also be analysed through the lens of speech acts and pragmatically in a broader spectrum just like novels or dramas or any other literary works. The conclusion derived from the poem has embraced a pattern in the distribution of speech act where the first few lines are indulged with Commissives and Expressives but the second paragraph is mostly filled with Assertive as the speaker is trying to establish his point that though being alienated from his homeland, he still remembers everything about his homeland. The intricacies of words that he has used explain his longing. Apart from it, he used Directives and Commissives to show his commitment towards his land and the also the usage of Expressives shows how beautifully he expresses his desire to be a part of his homeland again as the memories of it is still into him. Looking at the frequency of usage the reader can understand that the poet is trying to state the reality- the real truth of his life that is staying away from his home is kind of a living hell and that is why he always thinks about his place only.

REFERENCES

- [1] Austin, J. Langshaw. How to do things with words. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1962
 [2] Das, Jibananda. 'Abar Ashibo Phire'. Ruposhi Bangla. 1957 <https://poetandpoem.com/Jibananda-Das/abar-asibo-fire#:~:text=abar%20asibo%20fire%20dhansiritir,pabe%20tumi%20tahader%20vire.>
 [3] Gur-Ze'ev, I. (Ed.). Critical Theory and Critical Pedagogy Today: toward a new language in education. Haifa: University of Haifa. 2005
 [4] Searle, John. Speech acts. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1969
 [5] Seely, Clinton B. (n.d.) https://www.parabaas.com/jd/articles/seely_scent_bengal1.shtml

Appendices

*abar asibo fire dhansiritir tire-ei banglay
 hoyto manush noy-hoyto ba shonkhocil ba shaliker beshe,
 hoyto vorer kak hoye ei kartiker nobanner deshe
 kuashar buke vese ekdin asibo kathal chayay.
 hoyto ba has hobo-kishorir-ghungur rohibe lal pay
 saradin kete jabe kolmir gondho vora jole vese vese.
 abar asibo ami banglar nodi math khet valobese
 jolongir dheu e veja banglari sobuj korun dangay.*

*hoyto dekhibe ceye sudorshon uriteche sondhar batase.
 hoyto shunibe ek lokkhipeca dakiteche shimuler dale.
 hoyto khoiyer dhan sorateche shishu ek uthaner ghase.
 rupsar ghola jole hoyto kishor ek sada chera pale
 dinga bay-ranga meghe satraye ondhokare asiteche nire,
 dekhibe dhobol bok; amare pabe tumi tahader vire.*

1. Again I shall return to the Dhansiri's banks, to this Bengal,
2. Not as a man, perhaps, but as a shalik bird, or a white hawk.
3. As, perhaps, a crow of dawn in this land of autumn's new rice harvest,
4. I'll float upon the breast of fog one day in the shade of a jackfruit tree.
5. Or I'll be the pet duck of some teenaged girl — ankle bells upon her reddened feet —
6. I'll spend the whole day floating on duckweed-scented waters.
7. Once again I'll come, smitten by Bengal's rivers, fields, to this
8. Green and kindly land of Bengal, moistened by the waves of the Jalangi.
9. Perhaps you'll gaze at buzzards soaring, borne upon sunset breezes,
10. Perhaps you'll hear a spotted owl screeching from a shimul tree branch,
11. Perhaps a child is strewing puffed rice on the grass of some home's inner courtyard.
12. Upon the Rupsa river's murky waters a youth perhaps steers his dinghy with
 Its torn white sail—reddish clouds scud by, and through the darkness, swimming
 To their nest,
13. you'll spot white herons. Amidst their crowd is where you'll find me.