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Analysis of Spoken Discourse in the Film If Only

Abstract

Spoken discourse focuses on the words the speakers say and how these are spoken to convey a message. The film *If Only*, presents a series of conversations that revealed the events of the story. This study transcribes three major scenes to identify the frequency of key terms as mentioned by the characters. The verbal data were then segmented and coded for analysis. The theory of face-work was used as the conceptual framework of the study and the conversations were examined to identify how characters saved their face and protect the face of the persons they are having the conversation with. The results show that the conversations illustrated the concept of facework, particularly in the first half. In the second half of the film, there were fewer instances of the need to save face. Compliance responses also were observed in the second half of the film. This exercise has illustrated that the analysis of the spoken discourse would indeed enable the reader/audience to gain a deeper understanding about how language is used in different contexts such as the romantic.

Analysis of Spoken Discourse in the Film If Only

Introduction

Spoken discourse is a part of every person's existence. With a few exemptions, it is through conversations, talk, and discourse that people gets their message across towards their intended audience. The analysis of such exchanges or discourse analysis is considered an interdisciplinary undertaking carried out by scientists from different fields such as

anthropologists, educators, psychologists, to name a few. When experts, such as linguists and other scientists study the spoken discourse, they do so with the objective of making “ explicit what normally gets taken for granted; it is also to show what talking accomplishes in people’s lives and in society at large” (Cameron, 2001, p. 7). Scholars from other disciplines have conducted research about conversations and the theories tested or validated are summarized by Smith (2006). She first mentioned that ordinary language philosophers would focus on the “ relationship between what the speaker says and what the speaker means to convey” (p. 505). According to the Philosopher Grice, a conversation is a “ cooperative activity” wherein the four maxims of “ quantity, quality, relation and manner” have to be complied with by both partners of the conversation (p. 506). Smith (2006) also discussed the Brown and Levinson’s theory of politeness as well as Goffman’s theory of facework. She used the conversation between a lawyer and a client, to illustrate the key points offered by theories and studies from other disciplines. What was missing in the discussion was spoken discourse in the context of a romantic relationship. To address this gap, this paper takes on the film *If Only* released in 2004 and directed by Gil Junger. The objective of this analysis is to identify how spoken discourse functions in the context of a romantic relationship by looking at the words and patterns in spoken exchanges. This focus has a wider significance because the results are expected to enhance the reader/audience understanding of how conversations are handled in a romantic context. The conceptual framework selected for this study is Goffman’s theory of facework. According to Goffman, when people interact in conversations, “ each is interested in

saving face and in protecting the other's face" (Smith, 2006, p. 506). This study has selected three key scenes where the facework theory is being applied.

If Only is a story about the relationship of Ian Wyndham (Paul Nicholls) and his girlfriend Samantha Andrews (Jennifer Love Hewitt). Samantha is a singer/songwriter who has lived in London as a student of classical music. Ian works in a firm and occupies a management position. After their first major argument, Samantha had an accident and dies in the hospital. However, the twist of the story was when Ian woke up the next day to find her alive, although he recalled everything that took place the day before because he was living it again. His conversation with the cab driver was the key scene as their verbal exchange held the whole story together in the sense that questions about the film's story were answered in this scene.

The movie If Only(2004) was selected because it is a romantic love story and it has a lot of scenes with long verbal exchanges. In romantic conversations, lovers would tend to protect each others' faces or keep each other from embarrassing themselves. The theory of face work has more opportunities of being applied because the romantic relationship requires verbal expressions of love and emotions. Since saving face means avoiding embarrassment, and in the confrontation between lovers expressing of emotions is always present, the theory of face work is always present in the conversations. The plot is simple and the events occur in a span of just two days. It was necessary to obtain a copy of the said film to commence the viewing and analysis and this was made possible through an online link through youtube.com. Web research was done to select and download related studies about

discourse analysis. After accessing secondary data and going through these, the researcher viewed the downloaded film. Specific scenes were transcribed to better analyze the flow of the conversations between the characters. The scenes transcribed were Ian's conversation with the cab driver (00: 12: 33-00: 18: 30); Ian and Sam's talk over dinner before Sam's accident (00: 22: 13-00: 24: 35); and Ian and Sam's conversation just before they boarded the cab on the second night (01: 19: 28-01: 21: 12). The conversation with the cab driver was selected because this exposes the plot of the story. It identifies the conflict that Ian is going through (loving someone so much and not knowing how to love them) and allows the audience to understand why the next events would take place. The conversations of Ian and Sam before and after Ian's knowledge of the accident were chosen because these scenes show the contrast of the exchanges. How Ian talk with Sam on the first night is different from the way he handled the conversation on the second night even though the setting (dinner in a restaurant) was the same. All these three scenes were selected because these illustrate how the conversations can change based on the characters (particularly Ian) knowledge about succeeding events.

The verbal data was then segmented by studying the exchanges since this researcher was interested in examining the overall structure of the conversations. Exchanges, according to Hymes (1974 as cited in Florio-Ruane & Morrell), “ reveal human beings creating and negotiating social identity and meaning in their talk” (p. 87). Through the selected exchanges the characters were revealing their emotions and perspectives in life and in the process their identities become clearer. Their perception about love and

relationship also become clearer to the other person. The three components in the conversation – initiation, response, and follow up were identified. The responses that were looked for in the exchanges were examined to see if the response was a compliance, alteration, declination, or withdrawal. The data was then coded by listing the frequency the terms love, death, choices was used by the speakers. These terms were selected because the conversations revolved around the relationship and the verbal expression of affection is often a source of conflict in relationships. The utterance of these terms or not mentioning these terms cause conflict because there are expectations from lovers to hear terms such as love and choices. The recurring patterns in the conversations were then noted down. A narrative was then prepared to report the results of the empirical research.

Since the focus of this study is the romantic, the conversations that are most relevant to the study are those between Samantha and Ian which occurred after Ian's conversation with the cab driver. The words " love," " death," and " destiny" are the key words that this researcher has paid particular attention to while watching the movie and listening to the characters' exchanges. The flow of the conversation before Ian's knowledge and after his conversation with the cab driver was also compared to identify how context affected the discourse.

Results

In the first 20 minutes of the film, the word " love" was mentioned only a few times, once by Sam when she was trying on the vintage coat and also by Sam's favorite student Oliver, who gave her a card and told her he loved her, after her concert. The word cropped up again during Ian's conversation with

the cab driver. It was only after Sam's accident and Ian's realization that the word "love" came up many times in the movie. This was uttered by Ian in four scenes when he expressed his love for his girlfriend. Table 1 below provides details.

Aside from love, the words destiny, choice, life, and death as well as their synonyms and similar concepts, are also integrated into the conversations. Choice and destiny is introduced at the very start with Sam commenting on his words as he practiced his lines for his presentation. Sam introduced the concept of death by saying that its bound to happen and cannot be controlled. She also pointed out that the only things that are in one's control are the choices that a person makes. There are two other instances where the word "kill" was used. Sam said it "kills" her that Ian doesn't understand, and the other is when she did not want him to read her diary. Death was again mentioned in the second half of the movie when Ian was opening up about the impact of his father's death on him. Table 2 enumerates the other times in the film that the above-mentioned words were integrated into the characters' conversations.

Discussion

This study is limited by a lack of the actual script that the actors were using to dub for the movie. Such document could have provided more information about the directions for the actors' which can give additional input for the analysis. On the part of this researcher, the ability to transcribe the whole film is one limitation because of the needed hours for the transcribing process. This researcher's thorough grasp of the concept of facework is

another limitation.

The results show that the word love came up more frequently in the conversation between Ian and Sam on the second night. The characters have become more comfortable with the word love, especially Ian and he was expressing it more often. Sam's cooperation is shown by her responses of compliance. There were instances when Sam makes an effort to save Ian's face (see below), but towards the end of the film there was the revealing of the identity of Ian and his statements of love were not face threatening. A sequence of lines uttered by the characters and which build upon each other makes up a conversation. It cannot be limited into just an answer to a previous statement. An example is this scene from *If Only* towards the end of the film just before Sam and Ian boarded the cab.

Ian: I wanna tell you why I love you.

Sam: It's. It's raining. You know that, right.

Taking just these two lines out of the series of lines leaves a lot of unanswered questions. One reading such statements would observe that talking about the rain is not an appropriate answer to the preceding declaration of intent to say the reason for loving. However, when one sees the lines before those above as well as the lines after those above, then the reader gains an understanding about the situation between the two people talking.

Ian: I love you

Sam: I love you too.

Ian: I wanna tell you why I love you.

Sam: It's. It's raining. You know that, right.

Ian: I have to tell you this and you need to hear it. I love you since I met you but I wouldn't allow myself to truly feel it until today. I was always thinking ahead, making decisions out of fear.

The manner by which the characters deliver their lines is necessary in making the analysis of the spoken discourse. In many parts of the film, particularly in the second half, it was Ian who did most of the talking as he expressed his emotions. In these scenes Samantha's answer was only in the way of a look, a touch or a nod. If one just reads through the script, or the transcript of the conversations, it would not be enough to understand the story and the emotions.

According to Cameron (2001) it is important to pay attention, “ not merely to what people say but how they say it” because this attitude “ gives additional insight into the way people understand things” (p. 14). The conversation of Sam and Ian about his father's death supports the idea of paying attention to how people say the words.

Sam: Ian, death doesn't put an end to love

Ian: You think so?

Sam: I know it.

[tears flowed from Ian's eyes as he gazes at Sam]

Sam: Ian, you didn't have to tell me any of these

The film viewer understands the impact of Sam's words on the emotions of Ian, because Sam referred to the father's death but for Ian who knows that Sam will die in the accident, those words mean so much. It should also be

noted that in the second half of the film, every word being uttered, particularly those mentioned in Tables 1 and 2, become more meaningful because of the knowledge that at the end of the film, Sam will die. This knowledge, the weight of this knowledge is felt by Ian and shows up in the way he says things and responds to Sam's statements in their conversations. This knowledge makes up the difference in the context of the conversations. When Sam tells Ian " you didn't have to tell me any of these," she was saving Ian's face. In the film, Ian showed deep emotion and there were tears in his eyes when he talked with Sam, and his girlfriend tried to " save his face" or protect him from embarrassment by telling him, he does not need to say things that he is not comfortable expressing or might be embarrassing for him.

The main strategy used to collect data for this study was the viewing of the film. As Cameron (2001) says, " discourse analysis generates data by getting people to engage, or observing them while they engage in an activity— talking—which is normal and familiar to them" (pp. 14-15). It was by observing how Sam and Ian talked to each other and not by only listening to their lines that the viewer gets a deeper and a more accurate understanding of their story and their emotions.

Conclusion

Conversations, in the context of the romantic, tend to put the parties talking with each other in situations where there may be embarrassing moments. Thus, the theory of face work is applied. In the film, Ian's conversations with Samantha regarding love changed when he had prior knowledge about the accident that will take place. The words love, death, choices, and destiny are

integrated into the characters' lines. The use of these words as well as how often these are uttered is different in the first and second half of the film. Love was mentioned only four times before Sam's accident. However, in the second half of the film, Ian, with the knowledge that Sam will die in the accident, uttered love numerous times. The manner by which he expressed these words was also more emotional. This exercise has illustrated that the theory of face work can be applied in the analysis of the spoken discourse and this strategy would indeed enable the reader/audience to gain a deeper understanding about how language is used in different contexts such as the romantic.

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