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DIALOGUE IN TOM STOPPARD'S «ROSENCRANTZ AND GUILDENSTERN ARE DEAD»

The article deals with analysis of linguistic and structural peculiarities of dialogue in «Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead» by Tom Stoppard. Such features of dialogue as repetition, clichés, music-hall passages, ready-made language, play of words and verbal byplay have been singled out. It has been discovered that the play under study is structurally close to the play «Waiting for Godot» by Samuel Beckett. Some of the music-hall exchanges in «Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead» seem to be direct parallels to those in «Waiting for Godot». In the play under analysis the music-hall talk consists of ready-made stock sentences. There are passages where the order of the lines is not the only possible one, but could be changed without affecting the «intelligibility» of the dialogue. In such passages the sentences have become almost interchangeable building blocks and speech merely a game. One more peculiarity concerns the cohesive relations within music-hall passages. The bulk of the passage forms one logical and associative entity. There is a tendency in «Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead» towards considerable logical and associative cohesion within music-hall passages. Stoppard strives for smooth transitions from one scene to the next, providing associative and logical links between topical units. The associative and logical links can, however, be somewhat artificial, contrived through verbal trickery.

Key words: dialogue, absurdist, clichés, repetition, music-hall, ready-made language.

ДІАЛОГ У П'ЄСИ ТОМА СТОППАРДА «РОЗЕНКРАНЦ ТА ГІЛЬДЕНСТЕРН МЕРТВІ»

У статті розглянуто та проаналізовано лінгвістичні і структурні особливості діалогу у п'єсі Тома Стоппарда «Розенкранц та Гільденстерн мертві». Виокремлено такі риси діалогу, як: повтор, кліше, абзаци з елементами мюзик-холу, штучна мова, гра слів і вербальні натяки. Виявлено структурну схожість аналізованої п'єси із п'єсою Семюеля Беккета «В Очікування Годо».

Ключові слова: діалог, абсурдист, кліше, повтор, мюзик-хол, штучна мова.

ДИАЛОГ В ПЬЕСЕ ТОМА СТОППАРДА «РОЗЕНКРАНЦ И ГИЛЬДЕНСТЕРН МЕРТВЫ»

В статье рассмотрено и проанализировано лингвистические и структурные особенности диалога в пьесе Тома Стоппарда «Розенкранц и Гильденстерн мертвы». Выделено такие черты диалога, как: повтор, клише, абзацы с элементами мюзик-холла, искусственный язык, игра слов и вербальные намеки. Обнаружено, что пьеса, которая анализируется, структурно близка к пьесе Сэмюэля Беккета «В Ожидании Годо».

Ключевые слова: диалог, абсурдист, клише, повтор, мюзик-хол, искусственный язык.

The study elucidates lingual and structural peculiarities of dialogue in Tom Stoppard's «Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead». Since Stoppard is admired as a master craftsman of language, the emphasis is on his use of language. The subject of the article is the play «Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead». The object of our research is features such as repetition, clichés, music-hall passages and ready-made language that could explain why the dialogue might appear cliché-ridden. The reason why this aspect was considered important was that Martin Esslin, Joseph Chiari, Robert Brustein, Ronald Hayman and Arnold Hinchliffe [1, 2, 5, 6, 7] have commented on the use of cliché-ridden language by Absurdist. Stoppard being a living playwright, any attempt to make a definitive evaluation of his work has only transient value. As most studies on Stoppard to date treat together several of his plays written so far it was decided to make only one play, «Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead», the sole object of the study. The narrow focus will allow greater depth.

When «Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead» opened in New York, an interviewer asked Stoppard what it was about. «It's about to make me very rich,» came the Wildean response. The play had already made Stoppard's name: Harold Hobson, in the Sunday Times, described the 1967 National Theatre production as «the most important event in the British professional theatre» since the opening of Pinter's «The Birthday Party» in 1958 [9, c. 104]

At one level the play is about two Elizabethan courtiers who have been summoned to the stage where they make increasingly desperate attempts to delve and glean what afflicts Hamlet, to find out «what's going on» [11, c. 58] in the mystifying world of Elsinore. Their fumbling efforts to understand their situation make them sympathetic, even endearing, characters. The courtiers flip coins, volley question, and toy with getting caught up in the action when they encounter The Player and his tragedians. Their banter is never less than engaging and frequently laugh-out-loud funny. But amid the laughter, the very amorphousness of their identity and the irony of their situation make it easy for viewers to suppose that Stoppard's hapless courtiers must be emblematic of something [10, c. 279-280].

Although T. Stoppard did not see his play as an existentialist fable at first, later he confessed «I didn't know what the word «existential» meant until it was applied to Rosencrantz.» He added that «even now existentialism is not a philosophy I find either attractive or plausible.» What Stoppard had stumbled on in «Rosencrantz» was not a philosophy but a comic stratagem. What came through more strongly than in previous writings was the playwright's gift for badinage, repartee, verbal byplay [10, c. 280]:

Guil» What's the first thing you remember?

Ros: Oh, let's see... The first thing that comes into my head, you mean?

Guil: No – the first thing you remember.

Ros: Ah. (Pause.) No, it's no good, it's gone. It was a long time ago.

Guil (patient but edged): You don't get my meaning. What is the first thing after all the things you've forgotten?

Ros: Oh I see. (Pause.) I've forgotten the question [11, c. 6–7].

T. Stoppard is playing at words here. Even the earliest interviewers found him, as Clive James would say, «a dream interviewee talking in eerily quotable sentences» [8, c. 70]. While his conscious purpose in Rosencrantz may have been to amuse a roomful of theatre-goers, in the banter between Ros and Guil he found the kind of ironic juxtaposition that would be characteristic of his comedies throughout his career. Only in retrospect did he recognize the extent to which he was being self-revelatory not just in the substance but in the manner of the persistent crosstalk. «They both add up to me in many ways in the sense that they're carrying out a dialogue which I carry out with myself», Stoppard said. «One of them is fairly intellectual, fairly incisive; the other one is thicker, nicer in a curious way, more sympathetic. There's a leader and the led. Retrospectively, with all benefit of other people's comments and enthusiasm and so on, it just seems a classic case of self-revelation» [3, c. 19].

In the endless banter of the two courtiers, which he describes as «a sort of infinite leap-frog» [3, c. 58], Stoppard had found a way of putting on stage something of the inner debate that he already carried on with himself: 'I write plays because dialogue is the

most respectable way of contradicting myself'. The play, Stoppard affirmed, 'had nothing to do with the condition of modern man or the decline of metaphysics' [3, c. 95–99].

Music-hall talk is an essential part of the dialogue in «Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead». Some of the music-hall exchanges in «Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead» seem to be direct parallels to those in «Waiting for Godot». «That's the idea, let's ask each other questions», says Estragon; in «Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead» the asking of questions takes the form of a question game, played on an extensive scale [11, c. 30-36]. In «Waiting for Godot» Vladimir and Estragon take considerable pains trying to find out the date and determine the location; in «Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead» the heroes are worried about the points of the compass and whether they are witnessing a sunrise or sunset [11, c. 41-42, 62]. In the play under study the music-hall talk consists of ready-made stock sentences. There are also passages where the order of the lines is not the only possible one, but could be changed without affecting the «intelligibility» of the dialogue [4, c. 60-61]:

Ros: – Where's it going to end?

Guil: That's the question.

Ros: It's all questions.

Guil: Do you think it matters?

Ros: Doesn't it matter to you?

Guil: Why should it matter?

Ros: What does it matter why?

Guil (teasing gently): Doesn't it matter why it matters?

Ros (rounding on him): What's the matter with you? Pause

Guil: It doesn't matter.

Ros (voice in the wilderness):...What's the game?

Guil: What are the rules? [11, c. 32]

In passages like the above the sentences have become almost interchangeable building blocks and speech merely a game. Stoppard seems to have an irresistible urge towards verbal showmanship as the above virtuoso performance, based on simple variations on simple everyday sentences like «It doesn't matter» testifies. One more peculiarity concerns the cohesive relations within music-hall passages. Even if the above passage evinces some discontinuity in the flow of the dialogue (e.g., the beginning and the end), the bulk of the passage forms one logical and associative entity. All in all there is a tendency in «Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead» towards considerable logical and associative cohesion within music-hall passages. The following excerpts built largely of ready-made sentences may provide illustration [4, c. 61–62]:

Ros: We're on a boat. (Pause). Dark isn't it?

Guil: Not for night.

Ros: No, not for night.

Guil: Dark for day. Pause.

Ros: Oh yes, it's dark for day.

Guil: We must have gone north, of course.

Ros: Off course?

Guil: Land of the midnight sun, that is.

Ros: Of course. [11, c. 71]

Each step of this plodding game of deduction, starting from «dark» and leading to the «land of the midnight sun», is patiently laid bare, the very insistence of the characters on discussing obvious facts in itself creating rich possibilities for comedy. «Dark» leads first to the contemplation of the period of time with which it is associated, «night», and then to the spatial and geographical considerations which affect the phenomenon of dark: «north», «the land of the midnight sun». The sound pattern of «of course» is reflected in «off course», which, at the same time, gives vent to Ros's anxiety about the navigational success of their expedition. The second part of the passage repeats and sums up the ingredients of the first part in a speeded-up succession [4, c. 62]:

Ros: I think it's getting light.

Guil: Not for night.

Ros: This far north.

Guil: Unless we're off course.

Ros (small pause): Of course.

In the following passage tight associative coherence is gained through the fact that the verbs all denote functions of sensory and other bodily organs [4, c. 62]:

Ros: – I can't see a thing.

Guil: You can still think, can't you?

Ros: I think so.

Guil: You can still talk.

Ros: What should I say?

Guil: Don't bother. You can feel, can't you?

Ros: Ah! There's life in me yet!

Guil: What are you feeling?

Ros: A leg. Yes, it feels like my leg.

Guil: How does it feel?

Ros: Dead.

Guil: Dead?

Ros (panic): I can't feel a thing! [11, c. 70]

It could be pointed out that in «Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead» Stoppard seems to strive for smooth transitions from one scene to the next, providing associative and logical links between topical units. The associative and logical links can, however, be somewhat artificial, contrived through verbal trickery as in the following instances [4, c. 63-84]:

Ros (relaxes): It couldn't have been real.

Guil: «The colours red, blue and green are real. The colour yellow is a mystical experience shared by everybody» – demolish [11, c. 14].

Here it is Guil's fictitious essay title that provides a smooth transition from the word «real» via colours to Guil's analysis of mystical encounters which is to follow. A verbal link connects the Player's speech on the essence of truth to the discussion of Hamlet's melancholy:

Player: – One acts on assumptions. What do you assume?

Ros: Hamlet is not himself, outside or in [11, c. 48].

The dichotomy of music-hall pattern versus aphoristic mode of speech is evident in the play. The character who tends to speak in aphorisms and epigrams is the Player, who bears some resemblance to Lord Malquist in Lord Malquist & Mr Moon. They have a similar attitude to life in that they observe the struggle of those engaged in action whilst remaining passive, or, in Lord Malquist's words, their posture is «that of the Stylist, the spectator as hero, the man of inaction who would not dare roll up his sleeves for fear of creasing the cuffs». Being an outsider, the Player can afford to regard Ros and Guil, mock-heroes enmeshed in tragedy, with sententious serenity. The Player's aphorisms and epigrams include references to dramatic art and the theatre/life metaphor as well as to life in general in a hostile world [4, c. 64–65]:

For some of us it is performance, for others, patronage [11, c. 16].

We keep to our usual stuff, more or less, only inside out. We do on stage the things that are supposed to happen off. Which is a kind of integrity, if you look on every exit being an entrance somewhere else [11, c. 20].

Uncertainty is the normal state [11, c. 47].

Everything has to be taken on trust; truth is only that which is taken to be true. It's the currency of living. There may be nothing behind it, but it doesn't make any difference so long as it is honoured [11, c. 48].

There's a design at work in all art [11, c. 57].

Generally speaking, things have gone about as far as they can possibly go when things have got about as bad as they reasonably get [11, c. 57–58].

The bad end unhappily, the good unluckily. That is what tragedy means [11, c. 58].

Life is a gamble, at terrible odds – if it was a bet you wouldn't take it [11, c. 83].

In our experience, most things end in death [11, c. 89].

The Player is not, however, the only one who is inclined to speak in epigrams. Guil, who has lost the neutral ground of an observer in the heat of the action, also has lines which tend towards the aphoristic or epigrammatic. On at least one occasion he even resorts to an old proverb. The scientific approach to the examination of phenomena is a defence against the pure emotion of fear [11, c. 11]. The only beginning is birth and the only end is death – if you can't count on that, what can you count on? [11, c. 28] Your smallest action sets off another somewhere else, and is set off by it» [11, c. 29] – if we can't learn by experience, what else have we got? [11, c. 65] Old ways are the best ways [11, c. 33].

The question is, does not even Ros make some attempts at the epigrammatic, albeit along the lines of gruesome humour:

Life in a box is better than no life at all. I expect [6, c. 51].

Repetition is typical of «Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead». The proportion of idiosyncratic speech is negligible, some instances being «well», «I say», and «I mean» in cases where there is no elucidation of a previous utterance. In the «seeking-out» of Hamlet scene what could be described as idiosyncratic speech is used, on a symmetrically increasing and diminishing scale, in a manner typical of Stoppard's playful use of language:

Guil: *Well...*

Ros: *Quite...*

Guil: *Well, well.*

Ros: *Quite; quite. (Nods with spurious confidence). Seek him out. (Pause). Etcetera.*

Guil: *Quite.*

Ros: *Well* [11, c. 63].

Thus, we come to the following conclusion. In «Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead» there are language games for intellectuals. The number of clichés is surprisingly small and idiosyncratic speech is often used in this play. It contains music-hall passages, often of heightened stereotypy because of ready-made elements. Aphoristic or epigrammatic speech, which is found in «Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead», may in some cases add to stereotypy; in most cases, however, being of an elaborated code type, it may counteract the impression of stereotypy.

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