
Discourse Analysis: Conversation Analysis in R.K Narayan's Short Story *Father's Help*

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Abstract:

Discourse is a perspective on social life that contains both methodological and conceptual elements. Discourse means a combination of sentences and defined in terms of its application – breaking up of the text into its fundamental elements or component parts; in order to understand discourse, it must achieve Conversation Analysis. Conversation is one of the most prevalent uses of human language. All human beings engage in conversational interaction and human society on conversation in order to function. CA is analysis of real world, situated, contextualized talk. The purpose of this paper is to define and describe Conversation Analysis of short story based on the work of Halliday and Hasan (1976). It also emphasizes the necessity of using cohesive devices like grammatical and lexical cohesion in linguistic analysis of R. K. Narayan's short story "Father's Help". The study noticed that the most grammatical and lexical devices used are references, conjunctions, and synonyms etc.

Keywords: Cohesive devices, Conversation Analysis, Discourse Analysis, Human language, Interactions, Grammatical and Lexical Cohesion.

Introduction:

Sociolinguistics is the descriptive study of the effect of any and all aspects of society, including cultural norms, expectations, and context, on the way language is used, and society's effect on language. Discourse analysis examines patterns of language across texts and considers the relationship between language and the social and cultural contexts in which it is used. Discourse analysis also considers the ways that the use of language presents different views of the world and different understandings. It examines how the use of language is influenced by relationships between participants as well as the effects the use of language has upon social identities and relations. It also considers how views of the world, and identities, are constructed through the use of discourse. A major area of study in the analysis of discourse is conversation analysis. Conversation analysis looks at ordinary everyday spoken discourse and aims to understand, from a fine-grained analysis of the conversation, how people manage their interactions. It also looks at how social relations are developed through the use of spoken discourse.

Literature review:

Different types of researches have been carried out in the area of discourse analysis. In the area of discourse analysis, spoken discourse plays a vital role in the study of conversation analysis. Some of reviews focus on telephonic openings “how are you” sequences in telephone conversations, turn-taking models in dramatic discourse which constitute speech events and speech acts, identified degrees of indirectness in the performance of illocutionary speech acts in R.K. Narayan’s *The Guide*, identification of speech events through question/answer technique in D.H. Lawrence’s *Sons and Lovers*.

From the review of the research we can see that not much has been done by way of analysis of dialogues in literary texts. In particular, short stories constitute a rich source for conversations in socio - cultural contexts. One can get much insight into ‘language in use’ from the interaction of the characters. Hence the short story *Father’s Help* by R.K. Narayan has been chosen for textual analysis to observe to what extent they reveal or do not reveal features normally associated with Conversation Analysis.

Methodology:

This paper focuses on features of conversations in Indian short stories and from short story eight conversation pieces have been selected and given numbers to identify easily and in those conversations, conversational features have been identified such as language, background knowledge, socio-cultural background, cohesion, lexical cohesion, grammatical cohesion, turn taking, adjacency pairs etc.

Data Analysis:**Father’s Help**

R.K. Narayan has woven extremely interesting stories with Swaminathan as their central figure. In this story “Father’s Help”, there are three interesting characters namely Swami’s Mother, Father and his teacher Samuel. It is Swaminathan who is the link between the three. We are here concerned with the conversational content of the story and the clue it provides to understanding the psychology of the characters. The important conversations in this story are between Swaminathan and his mother, Swaminathan and his father and between Swaminathan and his teacher Samuel. These conversations throw light on Swaminathan’s nature, a typical boy plying truant to school and his strategies to have his own way.

Conversation I

The conversations setting in this story are at home. In this story, the dialogues between the parents and Swami are set in their home while those between the teacher Samuel and Swami are at school in the classroom. These conversations throw light on Swaminathan’s nature, a typical boy plying truant to school and his strategies to have his own way.

1. Swaminathan : I have a headache.
2. Mother : Why don’t you go to school in a Jutka?

3. Swaminathan : So that I may be completely dead at the other end? Have you any idea what it means to be jolted in a Jutka?
- 4 Mother : Have you many important lessons today?
- 5 Swaminathan : Important! Bah!

In this conversation, the speakers are a mother and the son, Swaminathan. The interaction between both the speakers is in informal language. The function of the conversation is to persuade Swaminathan who is not interested in going to school, so the mother suggests that Swami could go by jutka.

In this conversation, Swami, the young boy, is probably bored of school work. By temperament, he loves play and fun, not serious things. He dreads Monday, the day when he should go to school after a full holiday. He wants to skip classes on Monday. He knows his father is a hard nut to crack. He would not countenance absence from the school but his mother is unlike his father. She is a mother, first and last. He comes out with a ruse to win over his mother — the ruse of headache.

In the 2nd utterance, when his mother suggests that Swami could go by a jutka, he knows he is on the defense. To get over the situation, he depicts a horrible picture of a jolted journey by jutka leading to death to frighten his mother, in the 3rd utterance, “so that I may be completely dead at the other end? Have you any idea, what it means to be jolted in a jutka”. The mother’s question is put in the form of a suggestion and instead of eliciting a yes/no response meets with an indirect rejection beginning with ‘so that’, while ‘it’ refers to being jolted in a jutka.

In the 4th utterance, the mother asks, “Have you many important lessons today?” Swami knows that his mother is gradually relenting. Then he talks of a whole period of arithmetic, when students are beaten. Swami knows pretty well that no mother would generally like her child to be beaten for a full period. This stratagem of Swami brings his mother round to his viewpoint. His dismissive exclamation “Important Bah!... Important lessons!” is taken at face value by the mother who generously suggests that he may stay at home. The indulgence of a mother for her boy caring more for his well-being than his classes and studies, is brought out well in this conversation. Though young, Swami is too smart for his mother. He is a good strategist.

Conversation II

The setting of the interaction is at home. The speakers are a father and the son, Swaminathan who use informal language. At 9:30, when he ought to have been

shouting in the school prayer hall, Swami was lying on the bench in mother's room. Father asked him,

1. Father : Have you no school today?
2. Swaminathan : Headache.
3. Father : Nonsense! Dress up and go.
4. Swaminathan : Headache.
5. Father : Loaf about less on Sundays and you will be without a headache on Monday.
6. Swaminathan : I can't go so late to the class.
7. Father : I agree, but you'll have to; it is your own fault. You should have asked me before deciding to stay away.
8. Swaminathan : What will the teacher think if I go so late?
9. Father : Tell him you had a headache and so are late.
10. Swaminathan : He will beat me if I say so.
11. Father : Will he? Let us see. What is his name?
12. Swaminathan : Samuel.
13. Father : Does he beat the boys?
14. Swaminathan : He is very violent, especially with boys who come late.
15. Father : If he is so violent, why not tell your headmaster about it?
16. Swaminathan : They say that even the headmaster is afraid of him. He is such a violent man.

It presents a series of strategies adopted by Swami and his father. Here in this conversation we can see that turn-taking runs smoothly. This conversation brings out a beautiful contrast between a mother and a father in their attitude towards their child. The mother is generally indulgent to her children where as a father is rigid and firm with his child. Mother cares more for the present while father cares more for the future of the child. That is how we can plausibly explain the no-nonsense attitude of Swami's father.

In utterances 1 and 2, we have an indirect answer to a yes/no question from the father. The one word answer 'Headache' provides the reason for not being at school. The boy persists with the reason in utterance 4. In the 1-3 utterances, Swami's ruse of

headache does not work with his father. 'Dress up and go', he tells in a hard rebuff to his boy. In the 3rd utterance, we can see the simple additive conjunction which connects the sentence as a single element. From the 5th utterance, 'Loaf about less on Sundays and you will be without headache on Monday', it is clear to Swami that his father is not in a mood to budge from his hard stand; therefore he changes his tactics. In the 6th utterance, he speaks of going too late and Samuel's beating. In 9th -11th utterances 'he', 'him', 'his' cataphorically refers forward to 'Samuel'. In 13th -16th utterances, near synonyms 'beat', 'violent', are used as approximation in lexical cohesion. In this conversation, 'beating', 'violent', 'violence' are used as alternative terms for the word 'punishment', which is a strategy of approximation. The pattern of moves is a series of excuses trumped up by the boy which are one by one discounted by his father.

Even after Swami tells his father about the violent nature of the teacher, Father only asks him why they don't inform the headmaster. Not getting the expected response, Swami is forced to offer that even the headmaster is afraid of Samuel. Here, Swami again builds up a horrific picture of his teacher Samuel's violence so that his father might relent. He is quite taken up with the topic and describes in detail Samuel's violent beating of latecomers until blood spurts out but much to Swami's chagrin, his father adopts quite another unexpected line.

Conversation III

The interaction takes place at home between a father and his son, Swaminathan. The theme of this conversation is that of a father writing a letter to the headmaster and asking Swaminathan to bring an acknowledgement in the evening.

1. Father : What do these swine mean by beating our children? They must be driven out of service. I will see..."
2. Swaminathan : What have you written, Father?
3. Father : Nothing for you. Give it to your headmaster and go to your class.
4. Swaminath : Have you written anything about our teacher Samuel?
5. Father : Plenty of things about him. When your headmaster reads it he will probably dismiss Samuel from the school and hand him over to the police.
6. Swaminathan : What has he done, Father?
7. Father : Well, there is a full account of everything he has done in the letter. Give it to your headmaster and go to your

class. You must bring an acknowledgement from him in the evening.

In this interaction both the speakers use informal language. There are no adjacency pairs as it is a casual conversation. The father gives a letter to Swami asking the headmaster to take rigorous action against Samuel. Swami finds that his excuses for not going to school have gone effective. So he gives the excuse of his teacher beating him for going late to school. The father changes his approach now seeming to accept the boy's excuse. Swami knows that he has gone too far in the case of his teacher Samuel. And so he will be in trouble. The conversation between the father and the son apparently shows a domineering father and a smart but frightened child.

In the 1st utterance 'these swine' is used as demonstrative plural near reference to violent teachers. In the 2nd utterance, Swami apprehensively, asks 'What have you written, Father?'

In the 3rd utterance, Father replies 'Nothing for you. Give it to your headmaster and go to your class'. Swami feels guilty. He knows that Samuel was not such monster as he has portrayed. In the 4th utterance 'anything' refers forward to the 5th utterance as 'plenty of things'. In the 6th utterance, he tries to probe, 'What has he done?' But Father gives him another rebuff. No concessions, no relenting but only a curt reply, 'give it to your headmaster and go to your class'. 'You must bring an acknowledgement from him in the evening'. Swami is not at all happy with his father's last command. 'You must bring an acknowledgement'. Swami is aware that his father knows his timidity too well. But Swami, though a child, is quite intelligent. He hits upon another tactic. He must go to school late, and thereby invite violent beating by Samuel to justify his father's letter. This is manifest in the next piece of dialogue.

Conversation IV

The context of the situation is Swami being given a letter containing allegations against Samuel to be handed over to the headmaster. But Swami is bothered about the accuracy of the picture he drew of Samuel. He was not sure how much of what he had said was imagined and how much of it was real. He is grieved that he is ruining his teacher who will be dismissed from school and put in jail. He decides to deliver the letter to the headmaster only at the end of the day hoping that Samuel might do something to justify the letter. Swami stood at the entrance of his class. Samuel was teaching arithmetic.

1. Samuel : Are you just coming to the class?
2. Swaminathan : Yes, sir.
3. Samuel : You are half an hour late.
4. Swaminathan : I know it. (Swami hoped that he would be attacked now)

5. Samuel : Why are you late?
6. Swaminathan : I have a headache, sir. (Swami wanted to reply, Just to see what you can do.)
7. Samuel : Then why did you come to the school at all?
8. Swaminathan : My father said that I shouldn't miss the class, sir.
9. Samuel : Your father is quite right; a very sensible man. We want more parents like him.
10. Swaminathan : Oh, you poor worm! Swami thought. You don't know what my father has done to you.
11. Samuel : All right, go to your seat. Have you still a headache?
12. Swaminathan : Slightly, sir.

In the 4th conversation, the speakers are the teacher and the student, Swaminathan. The setting of the interaction is in the classroom. The function of this conversation is Swaminathan being late to the class and the class teacher Samuel enquiring the reason for it.

Conversation V

This conversation takes place between the teacher and Swami in the classroom. Samuel calmly accepts the boy's excuse of headache for going late to class and asks him to take his seat. He hopes for a chance to irritate Samuel.

1. Samuel : Swaminathan, where is your homework?
2. Swaminathan : I have not done any homework, sir.
3. Samuel : Why---headache?
4. Swaminathan : Yes, sir.
5. Samuel : All right, sit down.
6. Swaminathan : Why did not Columbus come to India, sir?
7. Samuel : He lost his way.
8. Swaminathan : I can't believe it; it is unbelievable, sir.
9. Samuel : Why?
10. Swaminathan : Such a great man. Would he have not known the way?
11. Samuel : Don't shout. I can hear you quite well.
12. Swaminathan : I am not shouting, sir, this is my ordinary voice, which God has given me. How can I help it?

In 1 – 4 utterances, when Samuel excuses Swami even though he had not done any homework, his hope of being thrashed in a bloody manner to justify his father's letter was coming to nothing. In 3rd and 4th utterances we can observe direct question / answer as yes/no ellipses 'yes sir'.

Luck again seemed to be smiling on him when Samuel came to the class to teach history in the last period. Desperate to seize the opportunity of annoying Samuel, Swami suddenly shouts at the top of his voice "Why did not Columbus come from India, Sir?" (6th utterance). In the utterances 8 and 10, he continues his irritating questions in a loud voice, "I cannot believe that he lost his way, would he not know the way".

In 9th – 11th utterances, Samuel's patience even after his provoking questions surprise Swami. Samuel finally tells him to shut up and sit down. Swami's hope of being punished rose again. When the hope appeared to fade away, Swami shouted again to irritate Samuel. When the teacher chides, Swami simply says that this voice is god given, and he can't help it. In spite of the shouting, Samuel does not lose his balance and simply ignores Swami and when he persists, Samuel warns him that he would cane him.

In 11 and 12 utterances 'shout', 'shouting' and 'ordinary voice' are used as general words in lexical cohesion. 'It' refers back to shouting and 'this' is used as near demonstrative reference.

In this dialogue, we see Swami's deliberate attempts to annoy his teacher who at first defies his expectations but progressively loses his temper. Later on, Swami invites the caning from Samuel who simply gives him several wholesome whacks on his palms.

Conversation VI

The context of this dialogue is that Swami succeeds in his attempts to make Samuel to cane him. Now light-hearted, in spite of his smarting hands, Swami runs to the headmaster's room to hand him his father's letter but finds the door locked.

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| 1. Swaminathan | : | Where is the headmaster? |
| 2. Peon | : | Why do you want him? |
| 3. Swaminathan | : | My father has sent a letter for him. |
| 4. Peon | : | He has taken the afternoon off and won't come back for a week. You can give the letter to the assistant headmaster. He will be here now. |
| 5. Swaminathan | : | Who is he? |
| 6. Peon | : | Your teacher, Samuel. He will be here in second. |
| 7. Father | : | I knew you wouldn't deliver it, you coward. |

8. Swaminathan : I swear our headmaster is on leave.
9. Father : Don't lie in addition to being a coward.
10. Swaminatha : I will give this to the headmaster as soon as he back.
11. Father : Don't come to me for help even if Samuel throttles you. You deserve your Samuel.

In 1st – 6th utterances, Swami runs to the headmaster's room to hand over the letter but he finds that things were not going his way. He was in a fix as to what to do with the letter. He was unwilling to face his father without the letter being given. But at the prospect of facing Samuel who is the assistant headmaster, he flees from the place. His father says that he was too cowardly to give the letter. Swami swears that the headmaster is on leave but his father calls him a liar. Finally his father tears up the letter expressing his disgust at the cowardice of Swami.

In the utterances 2 and 3 'him' anaphorically refers back to the headmaster and in utterances 5 and 6 'he' refers back to Samuel. In 7th – 11th utterances, we can see that Swaminathan is unwilling to show his face to his father without the letter being given. As he fears, Father tears up the letter expressing his disgust at the cowardice of 'Swami'. And the word 'in addition to' is used as prepositional expression which indicates complex additive relations (internal) in the story.

In the above conversations we do not find proper adjacency pairs because it is not prepared conversation, it is a casual conversation. In the closing of the casual conversations we cannot observe sequence of pre - closing and closing to prepare the grounds for ending a conversation. In this story the closing is seen in Swami's father muttering the words "don't come to me for help even if Samuel throttles you, you deserve your Samuel".

Findings:

In this story, the dialogues between the parents and Swami are set in their home while those between the teacher Samuel and Swami are at school in the classroom. The role relationships in both cases involve an authority gap; hence a polite style is used by the boy. We can observe certain conversational features like turn-taking, topic-shift, message adjustment etc. while others like adjacency pairs, openings and closings etc. typical of social interaction are to a large extent absent.

In this short story, lexical cohesion can be seen in the repetition of words like 'late' and violent' 'shout and shouting' which are used as 'same word', in a lexical cohesion. 'Screeched' and 'shout' are used as near synonyms. 'Cane', 'peel the skin off', 'tear', 'beat', 'skinned people's hands' are used as words and 'near synonyms' to violence. In these

conversations two types of cohesive ties i.e. referential and lexical can be identified. Conjunctions are used to connect the sentences. In the 2nd conversation, 'beating', 'violent', 'violence' is used as alternative terms for the word 'punishment', which falls under approximation.

R.K.Narayan maintained cohesion with the help of the repetition of the words in lexical cohesion, synonyms or near synonyms. In these conversations turn-taking runs smoothly. In R.K. Narayan's short story, "Father's Help", it has been shown that even the words expressing contrast also contribute to the cohesion of the text. For example 'anything', 'something', 'nothing', 'plenty of things' and 'everything' are used as non-specific deictic forms in nominal ellipsis. Repetition of words of violence like 'tear', 'abused', 'caned', 'peel the skin off' are closely related and they express collocation for the word 'punishment'. Again 'shouting' and 'shout' are near synonyms which are used as an approximation for the word 'screached'; 'beating', 'violent', 'violence' are used as alternative terms for the word 'punishment', which indicates approximation.

In the story "Father's Help", turns have been taken one after the other and there are no pre-sequences in casual conversation for adjacency pairs. In the closing of the casual conversations we cannot observe sequence of pre-closing and closing to prepare the grounds for ending a conversation. In this story closing is seen in Swami's father muttering the words "don't come to me for help even if Samuel throttles you. You deserve your Samuel". As far as lexical cohesion is concerned, R.K. Narayan maintained cohesion with the help of the repetition of the words in lexical cohesion, synonyms or near synonyms. In these conversations turn-taking runs smoothly.

Conclusion:

The data analysis used in this paper reveals to what extent the conversational features are present in R.K. Narayan's short story "Father's Help", some of the issues cohesion, and role relationships, temperaments, situational context, background knowledge, culture etc are identified. We can observe continuous turn-taking, overlap, pause, insertion sequences, and different types of referential cohesion in abundance.

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