

## STYLISTICS AND LINGUISTICS IN DATTANI'S TARA

Gajendra Kumar\*

### ABSTRACT

*The chief characteristic of a drama is that it relies on action. The action of a drama imitates or represents human behaviour. When we come to an analysis of language and speech in a play, the question that inevitably arises is whether action is an area that lies outside the words that we study or whether action is inherent in the words. A play like 'Tara' does not have any drastic physical action. The action is primarily psychological. In other words, the action takes place and consists of the thoughts, emotions and relationships of the characters which keep fluctuating constantly. The words, stances or gestures also keep fluctuating. In this paper, an attempt has been made to show how the language in the play ,Tara, has been used by Mahesh Dattani to put across his themes and concerns.*

**Keywords:** class, Girish Karnad, humour, Kannadiga,R.K. Narayan.

### INTRODUCTION

Mahesh Dattani's play, *Tara*, deserves encomiums from the reader for reasons more than one: for the playwright's deft handling of the plot, for the playwright's handling of several themes, for the technical innovations, and to cap them all, the playwright's remarkable freedom of language. The last of these aspects is related to stylistics which is a study of languages used for a particular purpose, generally, the purpose is literary. So, when we make the bold attempt to examine the linguistic features occurring in a text and then characterize those linguistic features occurring in the same text, we take a plunge into stylistics. From this we infer that Stylistics concerns itself with analyzing the choice of linguistic features and the ways in which the linguistic features are arranged in a text.

We have seen linguistic conventions developing in different social groups. These linguistic conventions serve the definite purpose of separating one language from another. This is not all. Since social groups migrate and their cultural characteristics keep changing, even the language spoken by the different groups registers signs of change. This variation can be either 'synchronic' or 'diachronic'. When it is synchronic, the variation takes place within a single time frame, in terms of region, class or caste. The language variation can be diachronic due to factors of time.

In *Tara*, we find clear evidence of synchronic variation in Dattani's use of tag questions.

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\*Gajendra Kumar is a Research Scholar at the Mewar University, Chittorgarh, Rajasthan

Concise Oxford Dictionary defines ‘tag questions’ as a frequently repeated piece of stock phrase that is attached to the main body. Tag questions are used not only in dialogues but also in prose narratives. Let us suppose that a speaker has to use the tag question (“don’t we?”). Dattani would, in all intents and purposes, make him utter “isn’t it” because Indian English has undergone variation within one time period and this tag question is heard more frequently in Indian English rather than the authentic stock phrase “don’t we”. The amusing thing is that Dattani not only makes points with his use of English but also makes points with the use of Kannada. Dattani introduces Roopa with the sole purpose of making points with his use of Kannada. Roopa gets to know that the Patel family hails from Bangalore in Karnataka; small wonder she breaks into Kannada. Roopa has had her education in modern metropolitan Mumbai. Her cultural education has been truly hotchpotch and as a sequel to this her Kannada is appalling in as much as her English.

Much of the humour in the play *Tara* emanate from jokes and quibbles which presume Dattani’s knowledge of Hindi. But the dramatist creates characters who add spice and zest to the play by their Hindi and Urdu spoken in the north and central parts of India. There is a long lost sibling act in *Tara* in which Tara addresses her brother Chandan ‘*Bhaiya*’. As a rejoinder to this, Chandan states that she has called him a milkman. Chandan does not use the word milkman but flatly uses the word ‘*doodhwala*’. For a man familiar with Hindi, ‘*bhaiya*’ means brother. In Mumbai Hindi, ‘*bhaiya*’ would refer to a milkman or ‘*doodhwala*’. It is interesting to see how an Indian English play like *Tara* can move into other Indian languages. This movement from Indian English to other Indian languages has been done for reasons more than one: partly to emphasize the local colour and partly to show that a word from the Indian language has gained currency in a play in which Indian English is the principal mode of communication.

Dattani’s skill in characterization is seen in his use of Kannada, more particularly in his character portrayal of Roopa. It is amusing but true that Roopa’s English individualizes her. Dattani makes fun, albeit a cruel fun of the girl’s weak command over the English language. Dattani makes fun for her wrong idiomatic expression, “two peas in a pot.” By substituting pot for pod in her usage, she evokes whole-hearted laughter. Roopa’s last utterance before Chandan is that she and Chandan are not “combatible”. The ‘b’ in the middle of the word ‘combatible’ points to her inability to distinguish between ‘b’ and ‘p’. This is a failing common to most South Indians, but a native speaker of English would regard it as a pure case of malapropism. There are other instances of malapropism in the play. When Roopa is all praises for Bharati’s adeptness at making coffee, Chandan approves of all that she says. Roopa expresses surprise and states ‘Really? But it has that typical Southie flavour. I think it’s the you know Concoction.’ Tara corrects her saying, ‘She means decoction’ (*Tara* 26-27).

Style must be appropriate to the speech situation in which the interaction takes place. In order to create a speech situation there must be various factors at work. At the outset, there are participants in an interaction. The relationship between the participants is of paramount importance.

When one is considered superior and the other inferior in terms of age, sex or social status, the language used by both bespeak their style. On account of her faulty English, Roopa is inferior to Tara and Chandan on the cultural plane. Apart from her faulty English, Roopa's language is Kannadiga English. Small wonder, she is reduced to a funny creature whenever she opens her mouth. Dattani is certainly alive to the class attitude in operation in the society and this explains the reason why he introduces a modicum of Kannada to demonstrate that Roopa is conspicuous by her deficiency both on the linguistic plane and intellectual plane.

The play *Tara* can fittingly be described as a play of the middle class for a couple of reasons. First, Dattani steers clear of royal English or upper class English. Secondly, the play was meant to be performed in urban closed auditoriums. Dattani had to use a language that could be comprehended in closed auditoriums. Both these factors accounted for the use of middle class English in the play. In Dattani's *Tara*, there is an avoidance of stress and intonations which the reader comes across in British plays. Therefore, in Dattani's plays meticulous care is not taken to follow grammatical rules and syntactical structures. Dattani uses Indian words for the niceties of the occasion in the drama. But he does not use Hinglish as Rushdie does by making a mixture of Hindi and English. Nor does he use the de-doxified English of Rushdie in which the cultural baggage of a language is reversed. Dattani admits the free use of allusions and metaphors in the play. Much of the humour in the play is derived from linguistic deviations and these deviations are significant pointers to class aspirations and lower status of the characters who speak this deviant English. This brings Dattani's characters close to the middle class deviant characters of the fiction of R.K. Narayan as in *Vendor of Sweets*, the *Financial Expert* and in *The Guide*.

As an instance of Raju's deviancy in *The Guide*, we see how he lures the tourist to go to Malgudi Photo Bureau to have his roll-film developed. The tourist asks Raju, 'Will he develop and show me a print while I wait?' To this question Raju replies, 'Of course, before you count twenty. He is a wizard.' (*The Guide* 60)

A pertinent question regarding the language of *Tara* is whether the English spoken in *Tara* limiting in any way? We must do well to remember that this is a family formed by an interstate marriage; Bharati is Kannadiga whereas Patel is a Gujarati. The children have been educated in public schools where the medium of instruction is English. They have also moved to different places. The play speaks of their former stay in Mumbai and their latter stay in London. It is quite natural on the part of the children to speak English fluently. Some snap scenes from the play are as follow:

*Chandan:* How can you know at twelve? How can you know at sixteen?

*Tara:* We women mature fast. Speaking of maturity, you better not skip any physiotherapy sessions. Daddy wants you to be big and sturdy. He will find out from the hospital and... This music is so... I don't know.

The comfortable manner in which Dattani's characters speak English points at the new global world of the middle class. There can be no denying that the lingua franca of this world is English.

Questions have been raised by critics about the limiting role of English in *Tara*. It would be in the fitness of things to recall the conversation between the playwright Girish Karnad and Dattani regarding the performance of Karnad's play, *The Fire and the Rain*. It is worthwhile to recall that Karnad translated this play into English. Dattani remarked, "... what was really refreshing ... was that you gave so much to a group to work with, the language and the sheer simplicity of words ... at no point did I feel that it was slipping into rhetoric or self-indulgent poetry." (*Indian Review of Books*, Vol.8 (6)). Karnad's reply was that English is sensitive to pomposity. That provides the explanation as to why Dattani avoids 'high' emotion "rhetoric or self-indulgent poetry as all these smack of pomposity. In fact, the limiting of English in the dramas of Dattani is a blessing in disguise as it leaves no room for pomposity.

Dattani individualizes characters by the English they speak. Roopa and Dr. Thakkar are individualized by their spoken English. Roopa speaks Indian (Kannadiga) English which is strongly accented whereas Dr. Thakkar employs a formal style of speaking English. As his style is highly formal there is little possibility for variation. As Dr. Thakkar speaks his lines, he is particularly wary of every word that he speaks:

*"There were many points to be reconfirmed and further observations were necessary before any decision on surgery could be taken. The twins were flown in from Bangalore and were moved immediately to the intensive care unit for observation and tasks. It was two weeks of exhausted work. The results were encouraging. The twins did not share any vital organ. There were two hearts clearly indicated by two electrocardiograms. There were two livers, although joined. Each twin would have one kidney all this meant there was a very strong possibility of both twins surviving. What we needed to know more about was the pelvic region and the extent of conjointment there".*

(Tara 22-23)

Chandan's skills in writing, honed by his occupation as a writer show him toying with the English language. Tara's English is akin to the English which is spoken by the educated Indians, notwithstanding her use of slangs. Patel and Bharati speak in a consciously-chosen language, though Bharati's language is particularly conspicuous in its use of Indian words.

Dattani sketches in a social and geographical locale and here his language is made to serve a special function. The cosmopolitan Indian cities with their multicultural ambience and especially Mumbai are worked into the play with the names of people. In the neighbourhood, we come

across Narayan Saab, in the hospital there is Dr. Kapoor then there is a Kannadiga, Roopa. The Patels name their children Chandan and Tara but the symbolism underlying their names is set to naught by the irony in their lives. The name Chandan does not smack of sandalwood but his wooden leg which is not a desirable object in the play. Similarly the name Tara conjures visions of a twinkling star. In the play she is not an adorable twinkling star but an object of the derisive laughter of Prema, Nalini and Roopa.

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