

V. Мова і культура

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Topic change in *As You Like It*: the pleasure of conversation

1. Introduction

The latest linguistic paradigms, pragmatics and cognition, have proved extremely useful not only when applied to language teaching or conversation analysis, among other fields, but also to literature analysis. Pragmatics provides, from its sociolinguistic derivation, the concept of language in use and its implications (the negotiation of meaning, implicatures, politeness theories, etc), while cognition introduces the point of view of inference and information storage during the interaction. If this application is possible for any literary text, it is doubly pertinent for the analysis of a dramatic text, as many authors have stated:

“Rules and principles governing real-life conversation on the one hand and dramatic dialogue on the other are close enough to allow the application of methods that have been originally devised for the study of real-life conversation to the investigation of dramatic dialogue.”¹

In the case of Shakespearean theatre, this textual approach has been amply developed in its multiple aspects: reference and deictics in regard to *Othello* and *Julius Caesar*²; conversational maxims in *Hamlet*³; inference strategies in *Henry VIII*⁴; turn-taking and floor control in *King Lear*⁵; among many others.

In this article, part of a famous scene from *As You Like It* (VI,1,36-150) is going to be briefly analysed from the perspective of topic change, without forgetting the semiotic

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Bearing these factors in mind, we have singled out five different topic drifts within the main topic, all of them introduced by Rosalind. These are as follows:

1. Lines 36 to 50: the expected speech act for the beginning of a conversation, a greeting, is displaced by a reproach (“Why how now Orlando, where have you been all this while? You a lover! And you serve me another trick, never come in my sight more”), what obliges Orlando to produce a feeble protestation first, and a complete apology afterwards (“Pardon me dear Rosalind”). In this way the complete supremacy of Ganymede-Rosalind is established: s/he is not going to tolerate any misdemeanour from the other part.

2. Lines 51 to 64: in the process of amatory instruction, a recurrent topic derivation is the anxiety for women infidelity or, colloquially said, *cuckoldry*, as Rosalind superbly states with the metaphor of a snail: “Why horns – which such as you are fain to be beholding your wives for”. The Renaissance patriarchal societies state this fear in all their popular cultural manifestations, and Rosalind, who is able to see further than tradition, makes use of them for her own mocking purposes.

3. Lines 65 to 104: Rosalind is “in a holiday humour” and makes a request: “come, woo me, woo me”. She is thus letting the simulation game advance in her own profit, apart from enjoying the mere pleasure of her wit in conversation. As Coulthard states: “the relative frequency of marked topic introduction is some measure of the quality in conversation”⁸. Following with her strategy of making fun of all the current traditions – mainly through a degrading language, especially by images of animals, and within the rhetorical pattern of the *digressio* – including mythological icons, she introduces a sub-topic about the fact that nobody dies for love:

“Troilus had his brains dashed out with a Grecian club, yet he did what he could to die before, and he is one of the patterns of love. Leander, he would have lived many a fair year (...) men have died from time to time and worms have eaten them, but not for love”⁹.

4. Lines 105 to 134: Rosalind shows herself “in a more coming-on disposition”. Carried by the pleasure of the conversation – this is a play in which, basically, to enjoy conversation is equivalent to plot development –, she moves her simulation forward to its next stage: the wedding enactment. Obviously, the value of the declarative acts with which they both commit to marriage (“I take thee Rosalind for wife” / “I take thee Orlando for my husband”) is null, as the circumstances are not valid for its real performance, with Rosalind’s cousin Celia playing the part of the priest.

5. Lines 135 to 150: Rosalind chooses the typical topic variant which rises after a wedding episode: “Now tell me how long you would have her, after you have possessed her?”. Orlando’s response, “For ever, and a day”, epitomizes a romantic vision of eternal love which is immediately deconstructed by Rosalind/Ganymede through a misogynist discourse on the inconstancy of women. She uses all the canonised images available – taken from Medieval texts and purposely degrading – about women: “cock-pidgeon, parrot, ape, monkey, shrew”). This is probably the most interesting part of the conversation, as Rosalind adopts, thanks to her disguise, an alien word to herself. She translates the stereotyped thoughts of a male mind, a definite example of what Bakhtin called *alien discourse* with double meaning¹⁰; the semiotic game enacted (a woman talking against women in an estranged register) turns her whole *digressio* into a burlesque episode.

The cognitive implications of Rosalind’s speech are also worth considering. The concept of *cognitive environment*¹¹ refers to the previous shared knowledge of the individuals engaged in conversation, necessary for a gradual and progressive introduction of new information. Rosalind activates both Orlando’s and the public’s frame of mind on love questions, that is, its best-known facet, only to submit it to her own judgement.

We could continue skimming all the occasions, in the play, in which Rosalind illustrates the rest of the characters on the subject of love. But the scene evoked should serve to state

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how, through a privileged use of topic shift in conversation, together with a command of *alien voices* in disguise and a deep knowledge of the love and courtship traditions she means to derive, she stages her version of conversational strategies and for her own purposes.

3. Conclusions

The whole scene takes place in prose, as it corresponds to the most pleasurable phases of comedy. Agile, comic, witty prose is the ideal weapon for demythologizing and parody. Rosalind's *Ars Amandi* – let's not forget that Shakespeare contracts, in this play, an unpayable debt with Ovid – is superior to Orlando's pastoral-romantic conception of love and to stereotypes from popular culture like cuckoldry or female shrewdness. Hers is a Renaissance concept of love, based on intellectual equality and affect further than the *love at first sight* principle, which became known in the different European countries thanks to the circulation of Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano*. Other Shakespearean characters, like Beatrice and Benedick in *Much Ado About Nothing*, are also debtors to this love and wooing model:

“[They] represent a new concept of love, which (...) doesn't force them to communicate through the oft-repeated love topics, nor sorts them out in differentiated roles according to their sex; rather, it implicates both participants by a dialogue rich in witty remarks and indirect interpretative resources.”¹²

If Orlando is meant to be worthy of Rosalind's affection, he has to be trained first in the proceedings of the right approach to love, free of preconceived ideas and clichés. Rosalind-Ganymede, the master-mistress of the learning process, will guide him through the process of learning. For McCaules, this is the real message Rosalind is communicating to the audience while she is talking to Orlando:

“We receive this information when we witness Rosalind's detachment from the role she plays, a detachment signalled by

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- ⁴ *Bolton W. F.* Shakespeare's English: Language in the History Plays. – Oxford: Blackwell, 1992.
- ⁵ *Herman Vimala.* “Dramatic Dialogue and the Systematics of Turn-Taking” // *Semiotica* 83, 1991. – P.1-2, 97-121.
- ⁶ *Ángeles, de la Concha María et al.* Literatura Inglesa hasta el siglo XVII, vol. II. – Madrid: UNED, 2002. – P.133-139; *Hidalgo Pilar.* Shakespeare Postmoderno. – Universidad de Sevilla, 1997. – P.19-52.
- ⁷ *Coulthard Malcolm.* An Introduction to Discourse Analysis. – London: Longman, 1985. – P.79-82.
- ⁸ *Coulthard Malcolm.* Advances in Written Text Analysis. – London: Routledge, 1994. – P.80.
- ⁹ *Shakespeare William.* As You Like It. The Arden Editions of the Works of William Shakespeare. – London: Routledge, 1991.
- ¹⁰ *Bajtín Mijail.* Teoría y estética de la novela. – Madrid: Taurus, 1989. – P.141.
- ¹¹ *Dijk, Van Teun A. and Kintch, Wallace.* Strategies of Discourse Comprehension. — New York: Academic Press, 1983. – P. 46.
- ¹² *Carbajosa Natalia.* “Beatrice y Benedick en Much Ado About Nothing: análisis pragmático”. *Atlantis* XIX (2), 1997. – P.42.
- ¹³ *McCaughey Michael.* “Shakespeare, Intertextuality, and the Decentered Self” // *Shakespeare and Deconstruction/ Douglas Atkins and David M. Bergeron* (eds.). – N.Y.: American University Studies, 1988. – P.194.
- ¹⁴ *Traub Valerie.* Desire and Anxiety: Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama. – London: Routledge, 1992. – P.17.