Pragmatic Functions of Interrogative Sentences in English: A Corpus-based Study

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Abstract: *This study attempts to identify the various discourse functions of interrogative sentences in English. A corpus of authentic literary texts of three plays is surveyed in order to determine the pragmatic functions of this type of sentence. It is found that interrogatives perform more than thirty-five pragmatic functions. The analysis also reveals that contextual factors pertaining to interlocutors, their status and relationships, in addition to the time, place and world of discourse play a vital role in determining the pragmatic function of an interrogative sentence. Relevant implications to teaching English as a foreign language are highlighted.*

1. Introduction

This paper aims at investigating the illocutionary forces (pragmatic functions) of interrogative sentences in English literary discourse. It argues that illocutionary forces of sentences are determined by pragmatic rather than by syntactic factors. Therefore, foreign language learners need to be taught explicitly how to identify these functions in order to develop their pragma-linguistic competences in the foreign language.

Sentences in English can be classified into different types according to a number of criteria. In terms of structural complexity, for example, four major types can be identified: simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex. In terms of grammatical form or mood, English sentences can be declarative, imperative, interrogative, or exclamatory (Greenbaum & Quirk 1990:231-41; Aarts & Aarts, 1988:92-6). Each of these grammatical forms is usually associated with a primary communicative function (illocutionary force). The characteristic function of a declarative sentence, for example, is to provide a statement; whereas the imperative sentence is used to issue an order or a command, and an interrogative sentence is primarily used to ask for information. Table (1) below shows the

grammatical forms of sentences and their corresponding characteristic illocutionary forces.

Table (1): Sentence forms and functions

Grammatical form	Illocutionary function	Example
1. Declarative sentence	Statement	My friend studies Chinese.
2. Imperative sentence	Command/order	Prepare well for your exam.
3. Interrogative sentence	Question	When did you visit Cairo?
4. Exclamatory sentence	Exclamation	What a nice man he is!

This convenient match between form and function does not always hold true. Language use is much more complex than what we usually see in many grammar books. Very often, we mean more than what we say. Investigating language functions in authentic discourse can readily prove that this direct correlation fails. In naturally occurring discourse, linguistic forms usually display a variety of functions other than those typical direct ones stated in grammar references. This means that there is no one-to-one correspondence between sentence form and function. A particular form can be used to indicate more than one rhetorical function, and a certain function may be realized by different forms. For instance, a declarative sentence whose primary function is to express a statement can be used to convey the illocutionary force of command as in 'You must observe the traffic regulations'. Similarly, an interrogative sentence which is basically used to perform the function of question can be used to indicate a number of other functions. Consider the following examples:

1. Are you in a hurry? (seeking information/question)
2. Do you know what time it is? (requesting information)
3. Why don't you come in? (suggesting/requesting a nonverbal action)
4. Who do you think you are? (threatening)
5. Isn't it cute? (complimenting or exclamation when uttered by a woman pointing to her friend's baby)
6. Why don't you consult your doctor? (advising)

A quick glance at these examples reveals that the relationship between the syntactic form of a sentence and its function in discourse is primarily determined by pragmatic factors available in the discourse situation. This paper is an attempt to identify the pragmatic functions of interrogative sentences as well as the contextual factors that may contribute to determining these functions. The study proceeds as follows. The objectives and rationale of the study will be presented in section (2). A brief review of the related literature will be presented in section (3); whereas the research methodology will be presented in section (4). Section (5) will be devoted to the findings of the study, and finally the implications and recommendations will be highlighted in section (6).

2. Objectives and rationale

2.1. Objectives
This study investigates the relationship between the two frequently discussed grammatical notions of form and function. It aims at identifying the various pragmatic functions of interrogative sentences in authentic literary texts. In other words, the study attempts to investigate the effect of contextual factors on interpreting the meaning of interrogative sentences in literary discourse. Specifically stated, the study is an attempt to answer the following questions:

1. What are the pragmatic functions of interrogative sentences in authentic literary discourse?
2. What pragmatic factors in the speech situation determine the illocutionary force of interrogative sentences?
3. What are the various syntactic forms of interrogative sentences in literary discourse?
4. How far do these forms match what foreign language learners are taught in pedagogical grammars? In other words, how do interrogative sentences in literary texts deviate from the formal syntactic question formation rules?
5. What implications may this study have to teaching language and literature in general, and to grammar in particular?

2.2. Rationale

In order for EFL learners to develop their pragmalinguistic competence, they need to be more aware of the relationship between the syntactic forms of sentences and their pragmatic functions in authentic discourse. This awareness may be best developed through the students' exposure to the various sentence forms and their functions in authentic contexts. Misunderstanding the speaker's intention may lead to a breakdown in communication. Yule (1996:132-3) holds that failing to realize the speaker's indirect intention may lead to 'humorous effects'. Consider the following exchange:

> Father: (to his son who forgot to brush his teeth before going to bed) How many times do I have to tell you to brush your teeth?
> Son: Five times.

In this example an order to do something is issued by the father to his son. It would be hilarious to interpret the intent of the speaker as asking for information. Furthermore, teaching language entails teaching learners to perform speech acts such as requesting, agreeing, disagreeing, complaining, etc. These functions cannot be properly realized without knowing the forms used for expressing them. The identification of the pragmatic functions of interrogative sentences in discourse may have direct implications to teaching language and literature to foreign language learners.

3. Form-function relationship

The correspondence between form and function has been investigated by many researchers. In her investigation of women's contributions in public settings, Holmes (1991) showed that tag questions have more important discourse functions than just asking for information. She found that tag questions can be used to involve someone into the ongoing conversation and to establish rapport between conversants.

In speech act theory, interrogative sentences are classified as directives in which the speaker expects the hearer to do something verbally or nonverbally (Grice 1975; Ervin-Tripp 1972). In this respect, Bach and Harnish (1979:40) hold that 'Questions are special cases of requests, special in that what is requested is that the speaker provides the hearer with certain information'. Furthermore, Huddleston and Pullum (2005:159-68) hold that the characteristic speech act that interrogative sentences

perform is asking a question. However, one needs to be careful not to generalize and interpret each interrogative sentence as a direct speech act of question since not all interrogative sentences perform the speech act of seeking or requesting information. In fact, the number of indirect speech acts performed by a certain sentence form is difficult to determine since these indirect speech acts vary according to the speaker's intention in a certain context.

Bardovi-Harlig, Hartford, Mahan-Taylor, Morgan and Reynolds (1991:4) state that 'speakers who do not use pragmatically appropriate language run the risk of appearing uncooperative at the least, or, more seriously, rude or insulting'. In the cooperative principle that Grice (1975) proposes, he assumes that the addressee in a conversation utilizes his general knowledge of the context and the world of discourse in order to induce what the sender intends to convey. Therefore, the ability to interpret the proper function of a sentence is governed by the extent to which the interlocutors are cooperative.

In addition to Grice's maxims of the cooperative principle, Hurford and Heasley (1983:250-6) talk about a set of conditions that must be met in order for communication to be successful. They refer to these conditions as 'felicity conditions'. The felicity conditions of the speech act of ordering, for example, include:

1. The speaker must be in a capacity that entitles him to issue an order to the hearer, i.e., having a superior status.
2. The hearer must be able to perform the action required.

The illocutionary force of a speech act is contextually determined since it relates to the topic, place and time of the conversation. The social status, role, age, and gender of the interlocutors are factors to be considered in such a context as well. Wilson and Sperber (1988:77-101) hold that 'meaning, and in particular the meaning of mood, must interact with contextual assumptions and pragmatic principles to yield a satisfactory account of how utterances are understood'. Furthermore, De Beaugrande (1994:163-200) maintains that 'language should be described in respect to variations due to time, place, or identity of speakers'. These views clearly indicate a dire need to use contextual factors in interpreting linguistic forms.

In his definition of discourse analysis, Stubbs (1983:1) stresses the notion that this field is concerned with 'the study of language use in social contexts, and in particular with interaction

or dialogue between speakers'. In order to examine the functions of interrogative sentence, the researchers decided to cull their data from naturally occurring interactive dialogues of three plays: *Trifles* by Susan Glaspell (1916), *Our Town* by Thorton Wilder (1938), and *Driving Miss Daisy* by Alfred Uhry (1988).

4. Methodology

4.1. Data collection

The data for this research were culled from the three plays mentioned above. These plays were chosen because of the interactive nature of this genre as one is bound to find more questions in a drama text than in any other literary genre.

 Our Town is a three-act play written in 1938. It consists of 71 pages. This dramatic text is of special appeal to students not only because of its universal themes that deal with everyday life, love, marriage, and death, but also because of the sense of identification that such a work creates between the two protagonists and students. *Our Town* is perhaps the most performed play in high schools and colleges where it is taught.

 Trifles is a short, one-act play, consisting of nine pages. Though this play was written in the second decade of the twentieth century, it has managed to keep its appeal in the classroom undeniably because of the gender issues that it tackles—issues which still trigger our students' interest.

 Driving Miss Daisy won the 1988 Pulitzer Prize for the best drama of the year. It is a long, one-act play consisting of fifty pages. Students enjoy working with this play for it is witty, accessible, and touching.

 The three dramatic texts have different themes, but they are all acclaimed works which have been part of the literary canon and will continue to trigger the interest of teachers, scholars, and students alike. The three works include a plethora of interrogative sentences with different syntactic variations and functions. Excluding question tags, the researchers were able to locate 148 questions in *Our Town*, 31 questions in *Trifles,* and 153 questions in *Driving Miss Daisy*. The total number of questions found was 332 questions.

4.2. Method of analysis

The researchers read each of the three plays and identified all instances of interrogative sentences. The context for each interrogative sentence was also determined by the two researchers. The contextual factors that were examined for each token included the speaker, the addressee, the relationship between them, the topic of conversation, the response of the addressee, and the place and time of the utterance. One might wonder how the response can be a determining factor in identifying the function of an interrogative sentence. In fact, it is the response to the question that reveals whether or not the intention of the speaker has been properly understood by the hearer. The following template was used to collect the information required:

Figure (1)

Question: _____	Page No._____
Speaker: _____	Addressee: _____
Relationship: _____	Topic: _____
Time and place: _____	Response to question: _____
Function: _____	Syntactic form: _____

The researchers filled in this template for each question identified in the three plays. The function of each question was determined by the two researchers together, and whenever disagreement arose, one or two native speakers were consulted before a final decision was taken concerning the function of the question into consideration.

5. Findings and discussion

The analysis reveals that interrogative sentences have different discourse functions. The number of interrogative sentences identified in the three plays was 332, representing 35 different functions. Table (2) below shows the frequency and percentage of occurrence of all the identified functions in the three literary works. The functions are arranged in a descending order, from the most to the least frequent. The generalizations that can be drawn from the data analysis can be displayed as follows:

5.1. Typical and non-typical functions (Direct vs. Indirect functions)

It might be convenient at this point to remind the reader of what is meant by direct and indirect function of a speech act. A direct function of an utterance is the function that is directly indicated by the literal meaning of an utterance as its grammar and vocabulary indicate. However, the indirect function is any further function or meaning an utterance may have. For example, the direct function of 'Can you show me where the post office is?' is an enquiry about whether or not the hearer can show the speaker where the post office is. The indirect function is a request for information.

Table (2) below clearly shows that the most frequent function of interrogative sentences is seeking/requesting information, which is in fact the direct or typical function of this type of sentences. However, the second most frequent function is expressing surprise or disbelief, which is an indirect function of interrogative sentences, followed by the function of seeking clarification that is a direct function. This already proves that the way many grammar books (Quirk & Greenbaum 1973; Wekker & Haegeman 1985; Azar 1989; Murphy 1994; Frodesen & Eyring 2000; Downing & Locke 2006) present interrogative sentences to second language learners leaves much to be desired. The functions of interrogatives, unlike what many grammar books communicate to instructors and students, are much more complex and varied than what we are led to believe.

Table (2): Frequency and Percentage of Functions

	Function	No. of Tokens	%
1	Seeking/requesting information	65	19.6
2	Expressing Surprise/ disbelief	39	11.8
3	Seeking clarification	32	9.7
4	Asserting or confirming	19	5.7
5	Maintaining/ Initiating conversation	18	5.4
6	Seeking Confirmation	18	5.4
7	Reprimanding / blaming	12	3.6
8	Expressing suspicion	12	3.6
9	Denying, or negating	11	3.3
10	Making an offer	11	3.3
11	Expressing sarcasm or irony	11	3.3

12	Expressing disapproval, or disagreement	10	3.1
13	Expressing Irritation, or exasperation	10	3.1
14	Drawing hearer attention	8	2.4
15	Seeking agreement, or approval	6	1.8
16	Expressing exclamation	5	1.5
17	Changing topic of conversation	4	1.2
18	Seeking advice	4	1.2
19	Asking for permission	3	0.9
20	Demeaning,	3	0.9
21	Expressing disappointment, complaint, or dissatisfaction	3	0.9
22	Ordering	3	0.9
23	Reminding	3	0.9
24	Requesting non verbal action	3	0.9
25	Suggesting	3	0.9
26	Advising	2	0.06
27	Expressing a wish	2	0.06
28	Expressing regret	2	0.06
29	Giving Permission	2	0.06
30	Requesting verbal action	2	0.06
31	Rejecting an offer	2	0.06
32	Giving information	1	0.03
33	Rhetorical question	1	0.03
34	Threatening	1	0.03
35	Warning	1	0.03
	Total number of questions	332	

It is true, according to this table, that the most frequent function of interrogative sentences is seeking/requesting information as it is commonly assumed, but one can not help noticing that this frequency accounts only for 19.6% of the functions of interrogatives. This remains a low percentage even when we add to it the percentage of the direct function of 'seeking clarification', that is, 9.7%, which is a recognized function in grammar books. The overall percentage of these two direct functions amounts to 29.3%. It becomes evident that the remaining 70.7% presents the percentage of functions that grammar books do not recognize. The way interrogative sentences are presented in EFL books does not reveal the complexity and multiplicity of their illocutionary forces.

Although expressing surprise or disbelief is the second most frequent function representing 11.8% of all functions as the table shows, this function is not one of the direct typical functions of this type of sentences recognized in grammar books. The conclusion that one can draw from a quick look at this table is that amongst the 3 major common functions stated in this table: '**seeking information**', '**expressing surprise or disbelief**', and '**seeking clarification**', only the first and third are recognized as typical functions of this type of sentences. '**Expressing surprise or disbelief**' is hardly mentioned in many grammar books as a possible illocution of interrogatives. Moreover, some of the rare functions such as '**asserting**', '**reprimanding**', '**demeaning**', '**reminding**', '**advising**', '**threatening**', and '**warning**' are rarely, if ever, explicitly recognized as illocutions of interrogative statements although the other indirect functions, together, constitute more than 70% of the frequency of interrogative functions.

5.2. Knowledge of the world of discourse determines the function of interrogatives

The complexity of interrogative statements does not stem from the way they are presented in grammar books. However, this complexity is engrained in the diversity of functions that interrogative statements can fulfill in different contexts. For example, George in *Our Town* asks Mrs. Webb: 'How's Emily'; and Mrs. Webb answers; 'she hasn't waked up yet' (Wilder 2000:57). From a first impression, it may seem that George is asking for information; however he is not. If George were asking for information, an array of perlocutions would have been possible for George's illocution. The possible perlocutions would have varied from 'she is fine', to 'not very well', to 'I will go and check on her'. But because of the various factors involved in the discourse situation, Mrs. Webb rightfully understood George's interrogative as a request for permission to see his future wife, Emily. Mrs. Webb indirectly denies George the possibility to see Emily because she is very superstitious about a groom seeing his bride on their wedding day. In this case readers need some familiarity with the world of discourse of *Our Town* where Mrs. Webb believes that a groom can't see his bride on his wedding day, not until he sees her in church. Without much knowledge

about the parameters of the situation in which the discourse is produced, the objectives and the effects of this discourse are unlikely to be understood. This supports Renkema's (1993) claim that 'knowledge of the world' is crucial in deciding the illocutionary intent of the utterance (26). Moreover, this example proves that illocutionary forces of sentences are pragmatically rather than syntactically determined.

5.3. Interrogatives fulfill a given function and its opposite

The picture becomes further complicated when interrogatives fulfill a given function and its opposite. Interrogatives can affirm and negate, make and reject an offer, seek and give advice, seek and give information, and seek approval but express disapproval.

The analysis reveals that interrogative sentences can perform opposite functions such as affirmation and negation. Thus, they start to assume the functions that affirmative statements tend to fulfill. Examining some examples will make this point clear. In her conversation with Mrs. Peters, and reflecting on Mrs. Wright's crime of killing her husband, Mrs. Hale in the short play *Trifles* states: 'I wish I'd come over here once in a while! That was a crime! That was a crime! Who's going to punish that?' (Glaspell 2000:951). Devoid of its context, the illocution of this interrogative is bound to be understood as asking for information. However, this interrogative lacks the conditions that would make it so. The addressee, Mrs. Peters, in this case is not in a position to answer this question, and one cannot expect the answer to be within her prerogative either. Not responding to this interrogative in an informative manner, Mrs. Peters recognizes the fact that she has no answer for Mrs. Hale. She rather commented: 'we mustn't take on' (ibid.).

Moreover, Mrs. Hale does not seem to have the genuine expectation that Mrs. Peters would answer her question informatively. In fact, the illocution to this interrogative seems to be more of an affirmation. Mrs. Hale is affirming with a very determined tone the feeling of guilt she is fraught with for not having visited Mrs. Wright to relieve her from her pain and despair. The verbal context of this utterance reinforces such an interpretation. Her sense of regret expressed in 'I wish…', her exclamation, and her repetition of 'that was a crime' makes the tone and therefore the meaning of the interrogative rather

confessional. Mrs. Peters comment 'we mustn't take on' is the appropriate perlocution to Mrs. Hale's confession. In her own passive manner, Mrs. Peters is trying to relieve Mrs. Hale from the tension of her guilt.

While Mrs. Hale's interrogative is a confessional affirmation, Miss Daisy's 'who was here to help me?' is an emphatic negation. Miss Daisy is aware that the addressee Hoke knows for sure that there is no one around in the house to help Miss Daisy to carry her Christmas gift boxes from the house to the car as they are both readying for a day journey to Georgia. Both the sincerity and the essential conditions are lacking in Miss Daisy's interrogative. In fact, had Hoke replied to Miss Daisy with information such as 'your neighbors are there to help', or 'why didn't you call Boolie' or 'you knew I was coming', then nothing would have saved Hoke from Miss Daisy's anger and frustration. What Miss Daisy is expecting at this point is Hoke's approval and agreement, if not his sympathy. Any other answer Hoke would have opted for would have produced a counter effect, and thrown Miss Daisy off balance into an endless and unpredictable rage of anger and frustration. If Hoke had responded in a manner different from the way he did, the damage he would have caused to his communication with Miss Daisy would have been irreversible. Miss Daisy would have perceived him as uncooperative or even rude and insulting. Miss Daisy was not in a state of mind to take any disagreement or opposition to her negation.

Expressing affirmation and negation is not the only case where interrogatives can convey opposite functions. Interrogatives can extend and reject an offer simultaneously. George's interrogative in *Our Town* 'Can I carry your books home for you, Emily' (Wilder 2000:61) expresses the indirect function of offering since it cannot be understood as having the direct function of seeking information. However, interrogatives can also have the illocution of 'rejecting an offer'. Boolie in *Driving Miss Daisy* offers to 'stop by tomorrow evening' to help, and Miss Daisy responds: 'How do you know I'll be here?' and continues, 'I'm certainly not dependent on you for company (Uhry 1988:5). Miss Daisy's interrogative utterance conveys the illocutionary force of 'rejecting an offer' because the verbal context that follows the interrogative sentence makes it clear that

Miss Daisy will not accept the offer for she doesn't feel dependent on anyone in general and on her son Boolie in particular. Even if Miss Daisy had not added her clarification; 'I am certainly not dependent on you for company', Boolie would not have missed the implied meaning of his mother's question.

It has become clear that the functions of interrogatives are complex and even confusing. It is difficult to deduce the illocutionary force of an interrogative sentence without a clear understanding of the factors involved in the discourse situation.

5.4. The same interrogative sentence may have different subtle interpretations

The illocutionary intent of an interrogative is not always easily categorized in neat, clear cut compartments. For instance, Hoke is informing Miss Daisy about what they need from the store. The exchange proceeds as follows:

Hoke: You right about dat. Idella say we runnin' out ta –
              coffee and Dutch Cleanser
Miss Daisy: We? (Uhry 1988:9).

Though Miss Daisy's answer is a one-word utterance, the function it carries is rather complex. On the one hand, it expresses her surprise and shock at the fact that Hoke, the newly-hired driver of Miss Daisy, dared to include himself as a member of the household with Miss Daisy and Idella. At the same time, 'we' also implies rejection and denial. Miss Daisy communicates to Hoke the impossibility of including himself as a member of her household.

In another incident, and in an attempt to curb Miss Daisy's resistance to let him drive her around, Hoke reminds Miss Daisy: 'Ain't that what Mist' Werthman hire me for?' (ibid.). On the face of it, this question is a 'reminder' since Hoke is trying to remind Miss Daisy of the job he was supposed to have been hired for, but readers cannot help sensing the underlying tone of sorrow and disappointment at the fact that Miss Daisy is not willing to let him drive her around. The illocutionary forces of interrogatives are often multiple. Authors of EFL books need to change their approach of presenting language forms in ways that help learners cultivate some sensitivity to the subtleties and nuances of language forms.

5.5. Different functions of interrogative sentences having the same structure

Factors of the immediate context of the utterance distinguish the different functions of interrogative sentences having the same structure.

The indirect correlation between the form of interrogatives and their meaning renders the identification of their functions heavily dependent on the context in which they are used. The following interrogatives taken from different dramatic texts have the same syntax, but they bear different functions.

   a. George to his father: What do you mean, Pa? (*Our Town*, p. 43)
   b. Mrs. Webb: What do you mean, Charles? (*Our Town*, p. 59)
   c. Miss Daisy to Hoke: What do you mean? (*Driving Miss Daisy*, p. 44)

The function of interrogative (a) is casting doubt or expressing 'suspicion'. In the exchange between Dr. Gibbs and George, Dr. Gibbs is trying to reprimand his son for not helping his mother chopping woods to cook and heat up the house. Instead of hitting the point directly, Dr. Gibbs is trying to remind George that he is now a grown up young man who is about to assume some responsibilities of his own as an adult. Dr. Gibbs is reminding George of his future responsibilities as a farmer; 'You will be willing, will you, to get up early and milk and feed the stock… and you'll be able to hoe and hay all day?' (Wilder 2000:43). But George, suspecting his father's intention, asks; 'sure, I will. What are you… what do you mean, Pa?' (ibid.) George is not asking for clarifications because what his father said is pretty clear. There is nothing that needs to be clarified about what George will need to do as a farmer, or about the responsibilities that he will have to assume as an adult. But George sensed that his father is casting doubt on George's abilities to assume his responsibilities as an adult if he is unable to assume the more basic ones of helping his mother at home. George's interrogative reply reveals the doubt he had about his father's intention.

In example (b) above the interrogative statement 'what do you mean, Charles' has the same syntactic structure as example (a) 'what do you mean, Pa?' Yet, both have different illocutionary functions. In *Our Town*, Mr. Webb comments: 'Myrtle, I guess

you don't know about that older superstition' (Wilder 2000:59). And Mrs. Webb asks, 'What do you mean Charles?' (ibid.). Mrs. Webb does not know about such superstition and inquires from Mr. Webb to tell her more about it—a request to which Mr. Webb responds: 'since the cave men: no bridegroom should see his father-in-law on the day of the wedding, or near it. Now remember that' (ibid.). Obviously, Mr. Webb realizes that his wife is asking for clarification. Though examples (a) and (b) have the same syntactic structure, the illocutionary force of (a) is 'suspicion' whereas that of (b) is 'asking for clarification'.

In *Driving Miss Daisy*, the same form of interrogative is used to seek clarification in the same manner as Mrs. Webb did, but with a different shade and nuance that one can expect only from a witty character as Miss Daisy. Miss Daisy comments on how wonderfully race relations have changed in the 1960s America though she knows, or should know very well through her everyday experience with Hoke, her private driver, and Idella, her household help, that these race relations haven't really changed much from what they used to be few decades earlier. Ironically enough her behavior with Hoke does not point out to the considerable progress she thought had been done to race relations in America. Unwilling to be fooled by Miss Daisy's rather superficial and contradictory comment, Hoke asks: 'What you think I am Miss Daisy?' (Uhry 1988:44). Not knowing how to respond to Hoke's outburst, Miss Daisy asks Hoke: 'What do you mean?' (ibid.). Though it is possible that Miss Daisy is seeking clarification for Hoke's outburst, the reader cannot help feeling that Miss Daisy is pretending not to understand Hoke's comment. Miss Daisy has chosen to select the racial reality she is more comfortable to believe in throughout her conversation with Hoke who is not willing to deal with this selectivity and the disparity between her acts and her beliefs. The illocution of Miss Daisy's interrogative is not 'to seek information' because readers can not deny the fact that through her questions Miss Daisy is trying to deflate Hoke's outburst and disapprove of his reaction.

Hoke did not process Miss Daisy's interrogative statement as a request for information, instead he chose not to offer any information that would explain his outburst. Readers cannot discard the psychological make up of Miss Daisy including her pretenses, her contradictions, her phoniness, and the hypocrisy

with which she has handled the racial differences between her and Hoke throughout the whole play. Variations such as the social status of the two interlocutors, the time and place when the conversation is taking place, and the racial identity of both speakers have determined the illocutionary intent of Miss Daisy's interrogative.

To conclude one can mention that although the three interrogatives above: (a), (b), and (c) have the same syntactic structures, their illocutionary forces are different: 'to express suspicion', 'to ask for clarification', and 'to express disapproval', respectively. In the absence of any correlation between the grammatical form and the function of an interrogative, one has to remain totally reliant on the pragmatic factors available and the immediate situation of discourse to be able to pin down illocutionary intents.

5.6. In authentic discourse, interrogative sentences are realized in a variety of forms

Seven forms of interrogative sentences are identified in the three plays. They range from the standard form that is formed in accordance with question formation rules in English to a variety of spoken forms that consist of either a phrase or one word. These forms can be summarized as follows:

5.6.1. Interrogatives with subject verb inversion representing the standard form of making questions as in 'Is he sassy to you?' (*Our Town*, p. 27)

5.6.2. Intonation questions: These are declarative sentence in terms of word order, but they have a rising tone at the end as in 'You know what I mean?' (*Our Town*, p. 23)

5.6.3. Questions with deleted auxiliary verbs as in 'Somebody been sick?' (*Our Town*, p. 24)

5.6.4. One-word questions with a rising tone as in 'Sure?' (*Our Town*, p. 25) 'We?' (*Driving Miss Daisy*, p. 9).

5.6.5. Phrases: Interrogatives can be conveyed by phrases as in 'Mr. Webb?', 'In yards?' (*Our Town*, p. 42).

5.6.6. Questions with deleted auxiliaries and subjects as in: 'See what I mean?' (*Our Town*, p. 41)

5.6.7. Echo questions: These questions repeat in part what was said in a previous sentence as in the following exchange from *Driving Miss Daisy* (p.17):

Daisy: Here it is. … So I counted.
Boolie: You counted?

Boolie's question repeats part of what Miss Daisy said in the previous utterance. The purpose of this question is to express surprise and shock.

Looking at these interrogative forms, we can immediately notice that many of them are not taught in EFL textbooks. Foreign language learners are often discouraged from using these various forms because on the surface as they do not seem to be grammatically correct as they do not include the general rule of subject-verb inversion. However, it is essential to expose foreign language learners to such forms. An effective way to familiarize students with these forms is to expose them to examples in authentic texts.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

This paper addresses the relationship between interrogative sentences as grammatical units and interrogative sentences as pragmatic units. It argues that the relationship between sentence form and function is contextually determined. In other words, the speech acts that interrogative sentences perform in discourse are determined by the immediate context as well as by the world of discourse in which the utterance is used. This is to say that the correct interpretation of utterances in natural discourse requires both linguistic and nonlinguistic contexts. Teaching grammar to foreign language learners, therefore, needs to be expanded to incorporate discourse-based grammar rather than remaining sentence-based. This finding agrees with what Johansson (1998:3-4) called for when he stated that 'We need a new generation of grammars and dictionaries, based on the study of language in use'.

Curricula designers and textbook writers need to pay more attention to the form and function of linguistic structures as they are manifested in authentic texts. Literary texts can perhaps be very useful in teaching the functions of language structures in contexts.

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