

## Michael Frayn'ın *Here* Adlı Oyununda İlişkinin Dili

## Language Of Relationship In Michael Frayn's Play *Here*

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### ÖZET

Dil, kendimizi ve dünyayı algılamamızda ve ifade etmemizde önemli bir araçtır. Bir tiyatro metninde de dil karakterlerin iç dünyasını yansıtan, birbirleriyle ilişkileri hakkında ipuçları veren önemli bir unsurdur. Çağdaş İngiliz oyun yazarlarından Michael Frayn'ın kaleme aldığı *Here (Burada)* adlı oyunda da dilin zannedildiği gibi her zaman iletişim sağlamadığı, kimi durumlarda kişilerin doğru kelimeyi bulamadığını gösterilir. Oyunda Cath ve Phil henüz birbirlerini tam anlamıyla tanımadıkları ve evliliklerinde yeni oldukları için birçok iletişim kazasına maruz kalırlar. Her ikisi de hem hayatı hem de ilişkilerini sorgularken birbirlerini kırmadan, incitmeden ilişkiyi yürütmeye çalışırlar. Bu durum kimi zaman bitmeyen cümlelerle, yanlış anlamalarla, kimi zaman da ardı ardına sorulan sorularla ifade edilir. Kadın ve erkeğin dili farklı kullanımları da sağlıklı bir iletişim kurulmasını engeller. Bu çalışmada, boş bir daireye yerleşmeye çalışan Cath ve Phil çiftinin kendi dillerini oluşturma çabaları, bu süreçte birbirlerini tanıma ve evliliklerindeki rollerini bulma serüvenleri dilin kullanımı dikkate alınarak incelenmiştir. Oyun yazarının dil aracılığıyla karakterlerin kişiliklerini, çatışmalarını yansıtmayı, dekor, zaman, yardımcı karakterler gibi unsurların oyun kurgusunun oluşmasındaki rolü de ele alınmıştır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Michael Frayn, *Here*, dil, iletişim  
**Çalışmanın Türü:** Araştırma

### ABSTRACT

Language is a kind of tool to express ourselves and the universe. It is a fact that through language people have a chance to reflect their inner world. According to linguistics, women and men use language in different ways. The difference is obvious especially in their conversations. Women are more likely to be people-oriented and to stress interpersonal concerns while men tend to be more object-oriented and primarily interested in matters of the outside world. As Donohue states, in conversation, men are more likely to emphasize the confirmation while women stress the support. (Donohue, 1999;8). Language is also one of the important elements of drama and it gives some clues about the playwright's aim. It expresses the major and minor characters' mind, conflict, desires and struggles. The language of a play is not a language of words which represents reality, but a language which classifies and controls subjects, power and status of the characters.

In this study, the play of one of the well-known contemporary English playwright, Michael Frayn's *Here* is going to be analysed in terms of its language in order to show the characters' identity, their feeling of possession and the needs for communication. The aspects of language such as pragmatics and syntax and also the gender factor in the usage of language are going to be analysed to foreground the reason of lack of communication in the play. Thus, in order to examine relationship between the major characters the function of the other dramatic elements, such as place, time and the minor character of the play are going to be studied.

Michael Frayn deals with a newly married couple's difficulty of having a good communication/relation in a two-act play, *Here*. In the play Frayn points out that although it is believed that people can solve every problem through communication, sometimes they cannot achieve to have a dialogue if it is created artificially. Frayn, in the play *Here*, shows a newly married couple's effort of ordering the world which needs understanding each other and having a good communication. This chaotic atmosphere becomes even more difficult with the challenging usage of language. In the play, there is a couple, Cath and Phil, at the beginning of their marriage and they try to organize their new flat together. The characters force themselves to understand each other, but just because of the complexity of human nature and also the life, they have difficulty to reach the same point. Frayn gives this conflict by creating an atmosphere with a new setting and a newly married couple. Throughout the play, because of the ambiguous language Phil and Cath used, there does not appear to be clearly signaled difference of opinion between them. But through a close analysis of the play can show that Phil and Cath have lots of conflicts about each other and life. It is clear that although Cath and Phil have different personalities they try to share the same life. Sometimes they have difficulty in looking at the life from the same point of view, and they know that only a good communication can help them in this situation. But being a newly married couple, they hesitate to share their thoughts or desires most of the time in order not to make the other sad. Throughout the play they try to understand their role in the 'concept of marriage' through language. This is reflected by unfinished sentences, questions and misunderstandings in the play. This situation reflects that the characters feel themselves standing at a crossroad in their life and relationship.

In the play, *Here*, the playwright foregrounds the function of language in the development of the plot of the play. He does not think of using any special prop to tell the personalities, identities and relations of the characters. An empty flat and being a newly married couple are just the key terms in the play. Throughout the play, Cath and Phil force themselves to find out their place in the universe, in their flat and in their marriage. And they know that if they achieve to have a healthy communication they can solve every problem related to their relation and the life. The playwright does not mention the age of the characters, but probably they are in their early twenties. This means that they do not have sufficient experience about life and relationships. For that

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reason, he presents another character, Pat, in the play. She is the owner of the flat and as an old lady she shares her opinion about life and marriage with them. It is seen that most of the time the young couple does not want to listen to her ideas or memories but at the end of the play they understand that in fact Pat is talking just about the truths of life. In the play, the memories or past is reflected by Pat and the future is represented by Cath and Phil. In this way, Frayn underlines the fact that there is continuity in life and if you have enough knowledge to solve the puzzle of the universe you have a chance to have a good and happy life and a happy relationship. It is emphasized that in order to be successful or to have a harmonious relationship with nature or the universe you should not ignore the experience of the old people and should follow the signs carefully.

At the end of the play, Cath and Phil achieve to create their own language in their relation and move into another flat and this means that same problems or hesitations are going to be experienced by another couple in the same flat. The life is just a vicious circle. Throughout the play, the playwright shows the importance of language in communication. By the help of language, the individual understands the universe, expresses himself and communicates with other people. But in the play, the playwright shows another perspective that he underlines that language can be a dangerous tool and function just in an opposite way and causes lack of communication even in a close relationship.

**Keywords:** Michael Frayn, *Here*, language, communication

**The Type of Research:** Research

## I. Introduction

Language is a kind of tool which helps us to and expresses ourselves and understands the universe language is an important part of culture, and helps people to communicate in various relations both in private and social life. Language is also a weapon used by the powerful to oppress the subordinates. As Cameron states "Language is held to be the primary means by which we make sense of the world, placing significant constraints on our thought and our perceptions. He also adds that, "it is assumed that men control language, just as they control all other resources in a patriarchal society. It is men who decide what words will mean and who will have the right to use them" (Cameron, 1998;93).

According to linguistics, the gender is important to reflect the differences in language uses.

*"...the way they are taught to use language, and... the way general language use treats them... relegate women to certain subservient functions... therefore certain lexical items mean one thing to men, another to women, a difference that cannot be predicted except with reference to the different roles the sexes play in society" (Lakoff, 1975; 4-5).*

Another important detail about gender-oriented usage of language is obvious in the conversations. While men tend to be more object-oriented and primarily interested in matters of the outside world, women are more likely to be people-oriented and to stress interpersonal concerns. In conversation people generally try to seek and give confirmation and support. It is seen that men are more likely to emphasize the confirmation while women stress the support. (Donohue, 1999; 8).

## II. Method

It is known that communication is thus a process by which we assign and convey meaning in an attempt to create shared understanding. Therefore, communication is a social interaction where at least two interacting agents share a common set of signs and a common set of semiotic rules. Michael Frayn deals with a new married couple's difficulty of having a good communication/relation in a two-act play, *Here*. In this study, the play *Here* is analysed in terms of language in order to show the characters' identity, their desires and struggles. Thus, aspects of language such as pragmatics and syntax are studied to foreground the mind style and point of view of the major characters. Besides the language of the play also the function of the other elements of drama, such as place, time and the minor character of the play are analysed to foreground the importance of communication in the marriage.

## III. Discussion

Language is one of the important elements of drama that gives clue about the playwright's style. It expresses the characters' personality, their relation and status in a play. Sartre, one of the important literary figures, talks about the inseparability of drama, language and action as;

*"Speech in the theater should express a vow or commitment or a refusal or a moral judgment or a defense of one's rights or a challenge to rights of others, and so be eloquence or a means of carrying out a venture, by a threat, for instance, or a lie or something of the sort; but in no circumstances should it depart from this magic, primitive, and sacred role" (Sartre, 1976; 17).*

It should be noted that in the stylistic studies of drama it is accepted that the text should be performed and the elements of drama should be analysed in the light of this fact. Since the text of the play has been

written with performance in mind, the text contains an implied production that the reader/critic can enter into. From the given context, the reader/critic can infer appropriate gestures, body position, gaze, intonation, loudness, accent, and so on. Regarding this approach, it can be said that in *Here*, Frayn foregrounds the characters' effort to order the world, making it manageable through language. This chaotic atmosphere gets even more difficult with this challenging usage of language.

In the play, there is a couple, Cath and Phil, at the beginning of their marriage and they try to organize their new flat together. It is seen that Cath and Phil has a rhythm in their speech; sometimes they use only a word; "No" or "yes, yes?", sometimes they express themselves with a short sentence "I just do. The same as you just do." contrary to this, the minor character of the play, Pat, the owner of the flat, has long utterances. Pat, as the elder in the play, has lots of things to tell about life and world. Her experience is expressed through her long sentences. It should also be noted that throughout the play, Pat enters, for several times, to the stage to talk about her own marriage and to give advice about life like a chorus of an Ancient Greek Drama. In Ancient Greek Drama, the speech of the chorus has a different rhythm and style from the major characters to give the impression that the members of chorus are the voice of wisdom, and sometimes the voice of the playwright. The same approach is used in this play, too. The playwright consciously portrays the character, Pat, through her own experience in a way to underline that every single couple has many problems in their marriage, but the language they use is unique to them. Thus, the important thing is to find out the language that is going to create communication between people.

From the beginning to the end of the play Frayn tries to reflect the difficulty in understanding ourselves and the universe. Although the characters talk to each other in the play, it is not all the time easy to understand the other's inner world. But it should be noted that this lack of communication is not like the one in absurdist playwright's text. In an absurd play, the playwright consciously uses lack of communication to underline the meaningless of life. But in this play, *Here*, the characters force themselves to understand each other, but just because of the complexity of human nature and the order of life, they have difficulty to reach the same point. Frayn gives this conflict by creating an atmosphere with a new setting and a newly married couple. The setting of the play is an empty flat, and this couple tries to settle their furniture in this flat. By presenting an empty flat, the playwright gives his characters the opportunity to order their flat and so their life according to their wish. They can do whatever they want in this empty place. But they understood in the end that it is not so easy to order things especially if you are not alone. Because in the play Phil and Cath show the audience/reader the difficulties of accepting the rules of marriage. And this conflict is given by the speech of Phil; "You've thoughts about us. I've thought about us. We've thought about us. We're us. That's fixed. That's the problem. It's how we think about everything else. How we think about everything else. How we think as us. How we shape our world. How we decide" (Frayn, 1993; 14).

At the beginning of the play, Cath and Phil don't want to make each other sad, for that reason they hesitate to say what they really think or feel directly:

*Cath: No, but I know you think no.*

*Phil: Not at all.*

*Cath: You don't think no?*

*Phil: Not if you don't think no" (Frayn, 1993; 4).*

*or,*

*"Isn't that what you want me to say?*

*Phil: What I want you to say?*

*Cath: Isn't it?*

*Phil: I'm saying yes!*

*Cath: Yes, you're being very sweet.*

*Phil: So?*

*Cath: So, I'm being very sweet back.*

*Phil: And saying no?*

*Cath: Then you can be very sweet back to me and say all right, no" (Frayn, 1993; 20).*

What is ironic is that although he/she is not sure about the other's thought he/she does not allow the other to finish his/her utterance or try to get the exact word which signifies the thoughts of the other:

*Cath: The cooker's a bit...*

*Phil: Yes.*

*She closes it. He opens the second door.*

*So's the bath.*

*She looks as well.*

*Cath: Yes...Not very" (Frayn, 1993; 4).*

Such unfinished utterances can be used to mitigate the force of utterances that may be potentially offensive to the listener, and this is clearly what is happening in the extract above. Cath cannot finish her utterances because she does not want to hurt Phil. As she doesn't know the exact thoughts of Phil, she cannot express her ideas directly.

As Mandala states, "conversation analysts look at the phenomena such as filled pauses, false starts, stammers and hesitations within the framework of what is called repair" (Mandala, 2007;15). He defines that "repair refers to the various strategies employed by speakers in talk to correct perceived problems in an interaction, such as mis-hearings or misunderstandings of what is said, slips of the tongue, changes of word choice, misspeaking, interruptions, etc." (Mandala 2007;15). In the play, repairs refer to the misunderstanding of one another. Both of the characters have difficulty in identifying themselves in a relationship and what is worse, they don't know the personality of the other.

One of the features of language in the play is the usage of adoption. The words of the interlocutor in the speech can be a sign of respect, an acknowledgement of the interlocutor's superior status. In the play, repeated situations are used in both agreeing and challenging conversational moves. In the first act of the play, Phil shows his superior position in the marriage, but in the second act, this time, he is the one who shows respect to Cath. Thus, the playwright gives the change of the characters' role in their marriage.

In the beginning of the play, Phil does not accept the idea of being a couple for that reason he has hesitations about the meaning of their actions and 'words' they use in their marriage: "We are both saying what we really think?" or "I cannot bear it when we just say what we think each other thinks" (Frayn, 1993; 5) or "... How *we* think about everything else. How we think as *us*. How we shape our world. How we decide" (Frayn, 1993; 14). He is the one who questions their way of communication: "I'm just saying, if we don't know what each other actually thinks..."/ "I'm not absolutely clear what you mean" (Frayn, 1993; 6). In fact, he takes life serious and wants to be sure about his decisions. He thinks that he is standing at a crossroads without any signpost. There is no other way but depending on his senses or mind to find out the right way, but as he has no idea about life and knows no rule about marriage, the situation gets worse. In the play, only when Phil and Cath are inside the same jumper they have a chance to look at the life and each other from the same view point: "Phil: ... side by side. Seeing everything from each other's point of view" (Frayn, 1993; 70). In fact this is the key utterance in their relationship, and in the play. Frayn underlines the fact that it is not so easy to achieve a harmony in your relationship. It is also stressed that accepting the rules of marriage is not so easy even though the love exists. Frayn successfully foregrounds this idea by focusing on the possessive adjectives in the play:

*"Cath: I just don't want it in my bedroom.*

*Phil: Your bedroom?*

*Cath: The bedroom.*

*Phil: Our bedroom" (Frayn, 1993; 128).*

In the play, the couple sometimes seriously talks about the place of the things, these decisions are especially so important for Phil that they have the meaning of existence in the world: "Cath we're talking about something we're going to be looking at every single day of our lives. That's what we're deciding" (Frayn, 1993; 8). For him, individual's perception of the objects depends on his/her position in the universe which means that there is not a certain criterion about the place of the objects, here or there, in the world. In the play, it is also underlined that relation of individual with the objects gives clue about his/her personality and worldview such as Phil, who questions everything in the universe, does not want to miss the opportunities in his life, but it is tragic that he doesn't have enough knowledge about the order of the universe: "Phil ... all right, we're not thinking about that place, not that particular place, all right,

but we could be thinking about it, we could be thinking about whether to be thinking about it or not. Then suddenly it's all decided!" (Frayn, 1993; 10). On the contrary, Cath seems not interested in the place of the objects, which show that she accepts what life brings without questioning.

The playwright gives the women's point of view and their usage of language by the character Cath. Because Cath regards the complaints of Phil as he is not sure about their relation/love:

*"Cath: Year after year. That's what you said. Day in, day out. Stuck here forever. No fixed term.*

*Phil: I don't mean us.*

*Cath: You might find something better.*

*Phil: That's what you're worrying about?*

*Cath: I'm not worrying about it. You're worrying about it.*

*Phil: Not about us, Cath! I'm not worrying about us!" (Frayn, 1993; 13).*

She all the time thinks that her existence or their marriage forces Phil to do something unwillingly:

*"Cath: I don't know what you're talking about.*

*Phil: Don't you?*

*Pause.*

*Cath: You mean me.*

*Phil: What?*

*Cath: You mean you don't like me.*

*Phil: Don't like you?*

*Cath: Is that what you're saying?*

*Phil: Just a moment. I say, I like this place. You say, You mean you don't like me...?" (Frayn, 1993; 16).*

or

*"Phil: I just felt all kind of ... Do you know what I mean?*

*Cath: Anyway...*

*Phil: Just all kind of ... walls and ceilings. You know?*

*Cath: Honestly, Phil. Sometimes...*

*Phil: Pressing in.*

*Cath: I'm not trying to trap you!" (Frayn, 1993; 16-17).*

Throughout these dialogues, although Phil is talking about the flat and the places of the objects, Cath regards his words personal and begins to question her husband's love. As Cameron states:

*"there will always be plurality in feminine language. ... a superimposed hierarchy of meaning, but the fact that at each moment there are always for women at least two meanings, without one being able to decide which meaning prevails, which is 'on top' or 'underneath', which conscious or 'repressed'" (Cameron, 1998;128).*

In the play, *Here*, questions are used to keep the conversation going. This means that the one who asks the question cast as subordinate and addressee casts as superior. (Toolan, 1998; 151). In other words, in the first act of the play it is Cath who asks questions about their relationship, which implies her lack of self-confidence. Phil, on the other hand, is the one who has questions about life. He tries to understand his aim of existence in the world and to shape his relationship according to his position in life. The interesting thing is that in the second act of the play Phil has questions, this time about their relationship, which implies that he questions his role and importance in his marriage. This situation shows that Cath gives up asking questions about their relationship and becomes dominant in the later years of the marriage while Phil still forces himself to find out certain answers about life and his marriage. It should be underlined that questions are important to understand the role of language in interaction because they bring to light the conflict and status of the characters in the play.

#### IV. Conclusion

In drama, through characters' speech it is easy to follow how they manipulate each other in pursuit of their goals and how the plot is pushed forward. It can be said that conflict in interaction appears either as a symptom, or as a cause of social disharmony, and where there are tensions between characters, the audience/reader is more likely to see developments in character and plot (Culpeper, 1998; 86). In the play, *Here*, conflict between two characters seems to rest not on something that has actually been said, but on something that remains unsaid. Because of the ambiguous language they used there does not appear to be

clearly signalled difference of opinion between them. But through a close analysis of the play, it is seen that Phil and Cath have lots of conflicts about each other and life.

In *Here*, Frayn gives the conflict between the objective universe and individual's helpless attempts to give the world personal structure and order. It is seen that the playwright successfully uses the stock responses through showing potential tragedy beneath the comic surface; and 'his focus is always on a personal, individual level.' (Innes,1992;314). As Blansfield points out, "disparity between subjective and objective reality, the significance of human relationships, and the nature of language" are used in this play (Blansfield,1996;153). It is a fact that people shape life through language. But sometimes that language does not help individuals to understand the universe and people. In the play, *Here*, the playwright underlines that language can also be a dangerous tool and function just in an opposite way and cause lack of communication even in a close relationship.

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