ISHIGURO'S DIALOGUES (II) (IF ONLY WORDS COULD SPEAK…)
Discourse analysis applied to some dialogues from 'The Remains of the Day' by Kazuo Ishiguro

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Abstract

The present paper is the second one that regards Kazuo Ishiguro's dialogues, after Ishiguro's Dialogues (I) (If Only Words Could Speak…)[2], as it intends to read between the lines of the novel 'The Remains of the Day' and thus, to analyse them from the point of view of their power to depict the British post-war society. Analysing the discourse of the dialogues, it tries to demonstrate how representative they can be for the author's view of the world. Therefore, a fine touch of the discourse analysis approach would help us understand better the main character's intensions, and implicitly, the author's.

Keywords: discourse analysis, 'reading between the lines', dialogue, Kazuo Ishiguro

Discourse analysis is sometimes defined as the analysis of language 'beyond the sentence.' It is, therefore, the examination of languages use by members of a speech community. It involves looking at both language form and language function and includes the study of both spoken interaction and written texts. It identifies linguistic features that characterise different genres as well as social and cultural factors that aid in our interpretation and understanding of different texts and types of talk. A discourse analysis of written texts might include a study of topic development and cohesion across the sentences, while an analysis of spoken language might focus on these aspects plus turn-taking practices, opening and closing sequences of social encounters, or narrative structure.

About the author

Kazuo Ishiguro was born in Nagasaki, Japan, in 1954 and moved to Britain in 1960. At the time, his parents thought that they would soon return to Japan and they prepared him to resume life in his native land. They ended up staying and Ishiguro grew up straddling two societies, the Japan of his parents and his adopted England. Ishiguro attended the University of Kent at Canterbury and the University of East Anglia.

All of Ishiguro's novels have received critical acclaim. His first novel, *A Pale View of Hills*, won the Winifred Holtby Prize of the Royal Society of Literature; his second, *An Artist of the Floating World*, won the 1986 Whitbread Book of the year Award; *The Remains of the Day* was awarded the 1989 Booker Prize, then *The Unconsoled* (1995), is the winner of

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the Cheltenham Prize, the novel *When We Were Orphans* was shortlisted for the 2000 Man Booker Prize and last but not least, the novel *Never Let Me Go* (2005) was shortlisted for the 2005 Booker Prize, for the 2006 Arthur C. Clarke Award and for the 2005 National Book Critics Circle Award. It also received an ALA Alex Award in 2006.

An inviting and full of savour novel is Ishiguro's third novel, *The Remains of the Day (1989)*, in which he examines the intersections of individual memory and national history through the mind of Stevens, a model English butler who believes that he has served humanity by devoting his life to the service of a 'great' man, Lord Darlington. The time is 1956; Darlington has died, and Darlington Hall has been led by an American businessman. As Stevens begins a solitary motor trip to the West Country, travelling farther and farther from familiar surroundings, he also embarks on a harrowing journey through his own memory. What he discovers there causes him to question not only Lord Darlington's greatness, but also the meaning of his own insular life.

The journey motif is a deceptively simple structural device; the farther Stevens travels from Darlington Hall, it seems, the closer he comes to understanding his life there. But in Steven's travel journal Ishiguro shapes an ironic, elliptical narrative that reveals far more to the reader than it does t Stevens. The butler believes, for instance, that he makes his trip for 'professional' reasons, to persuade a former housekeeper, Miss Kenton, to return to Darlington Hall. But through deftly managed flashbacks and Steven's naïve admissions, the reader sees instead that the matter is highly personal: Stevens had loved Miss Kenton but let her marry another man; he now wishes to make up for lost time, to correct the mistakes of his past.

More important than that veiled the story – but intimately connected with it – is the matter of Lord Darlington, and the degree to which Stevens' sense of self is founded upon his beliefs in Darlington's greatness. It becomes clear enough to the reader, though Stevens is long in admitting it to himself, that Darlington had been a political pawn of fascism and the Nazis – unwitting perhaps, misguided no doubt, but hardly the 'great man' that Stevens had deceived himself into believing he served. These revelations are made through a delicate and powerful process: as Stevens' journal shifts between travelogue, personal memoir and reflections on his profession, his memory slides continually between Darlington Hall in the ruined, empty present, the height of Darlington's influence (and Stevens' pride) in the 1920s, and the tense, disturbing pre-war 1930s. Carefully elided from consideration, repressed and hidden, are the war years themselves and their immediate aftermath. We know they are there, of course, and we may guess what they meant at Darlington Hall, but Stevens' memorial archaeology leaves that particular tomb unexcavated.

In the end, Stevens must come to some sense of resignation and resolution, both about Darlington and about himself. The source of Stevens' pride is also, after all, potentially the source of his shame. He is willing enough to shine in the light of Darlington's greatness, and now must either share in his disgrace, or – what is perhaps

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more difficult – admit that his own dedicated and deeply considered 'professionalism' has had no real part to play on the stage of world history.

Like all great novels, *The Remains of the Day* is an organic work, its parts perfectly integrated, every scene imaging the whole. In his carefully controlled prose, so perfectly suited to his narrator, in his effortless movement among several different time settings, in his almost magical evocation of simultaneous humour and pathos, Ishiguro proves himself a masterful artist in full command of his elements. And in this novel, those elements combine to form a profound psychological and cultural portrait that reveals the author's great abiding theme: the art and artifice of memory.

Because it is the memories of the intriguing character, Mr. Stevens that are stringed like beads on a thread. Hiding behind the journey pretext, he re-lives certain events of his life, almost as vividly as if it were real again.

But the places they see and the people they meet are not the only ones that send us back in time. Every time the main characters do something which remind them about something else, they do not hesitate to present the readers with a story; moreover, they are aware of the fact that they divert and come back to the main story in order to maintain the central idea, and not to confuse the readers; because the story is written in a diary-like style, therefore, the author is concerned with its (possible) readers.

Even thought we do not meet the author directly, but through his characters, he succeeds in making the reader understand which is, in fact, the real point in the book: Mr. Ono is, surely, very much interested in his youngest daughter's wedding, but what he really tries to do is work on his own image, from the point of view of the maturity he reached eventually. Mr. Stevens, as well, might want to see whether Miss Kenton would like to come back to work at Darlington Hall but, in fact he would rather make up for the lost love for the remains of his days, even thought he does not admit in words his love, not even to himself. Even if the main characters are fully aware of what they are actually doing or not, Ishiguro takes good care to use his literary talent in such a way as to make his readers understand what is going on inside and outside his, why not admit, stubborn characters. This is a reason enough to consider him one of the most valuable representative of postcolonial literature.

The Remains of the Day is a very thus delicate love story between the butler, Mr. Stevens and the housekeeper, Miss Kenton at Darlington Hall. The events are being conveyed to the readers through the words of Mr. Stevens himself, as the novel unfolds before us like an open book, as stated previously, like an open diary.

The language that Ishiguro chose for his characters to speak is, indeed, so very polished and meaningful, that to pursue a discourse analysis on it would seem quite a challenge.

I have depicted some of those dialogues that were carried on between Mr. Stevens and Miss Kenton and tried to show how their unspoken and undeclared though shared love is obvious and transmitted through the words they utter even though both of them (seem to) try hard to prevent the other(s) from realising their true feelings towards each other.

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One shouldn't forget some very important details, which are, therefore, not to be overlooked: the jobs they both have, the social positions they so proudly occupy and not to mention their nationality. They are English servants but not just any kind of servants; they are the butler and the housekeeper of a very respectable English house. Their jobs are highly looked up to by the other members of the household, and their opinions are valued by the master of the house. They are not just anybody, therefore, they are aware they shouldn't act just like anybody. This is why they never stop addressing to each other formally. These 'details' are very important in understanding why they are so concerned and preoccupied in hiding their real feelings from each other and from the rest.

The fact that Mr. Stevens remembers almost every encounter with Miss Kenton so vividly as if it was just taking place at that very moment, is a sign enough that she never left his mind and especially his heart.

For instance, he re-lives the moment when she first brought flowers into his 'dark and cold pantry':

> "(…) As I remembered it was one morning a little while after my father and Miss Kenton had joined the staff, I had been in my pantry, sitting at the table going through my paper-work, when I heard a knock on my door. I recall I was a little taken aback when Miss Kenton opened the door and entered before I had bidden her to do so. She came holding a large vase of flowers and said with a smile:
>
> 'Mr. Stevens, I thought these would brighten your parlour a little.'
>
> 'I beg your pardon, Miss Kenton?'
>
> 'It seemed such a pity your room should be so dark and cold, Mr. Stevens, when it's such a bright sunshine outside. I thought these would enliven things a little.'
>
> 'That's very kind of you, Miss Kenton.'
>
> 'It's a shame more sun doesn't get in here. The walls are even a little damp, are they not, Mr. Stevens?'
>
> I turned back to my accounts, saying: 'Merely condensation, I believe, Miss Kenton.'
>
> She put the vase down on the table in front of me, the glancing around my pantry again, said: 'If you wish, Mr. Stevens, I might bring in some more cuttings for you.'
>
> 'Miss Kenton, I appreciate your kindness. But this is not a room for entertainment. I am happy to have distractions kept at minimum.'
>
> 'But surely, Mr. Stevens, there is no need to keep your room so stark and bereft of colour.'
>
> 'It has served me perfectly well thus far as it is, Miss Kenton, though I appreciate your thoughts. In fact, since you are here, there was a certain matter I wished to raise with you.' (…)" (52)

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Mr. Stevens admits that he was surprised to find Miss Kenton entering his bachelor room, especially since she did this without waiting for him to invite her in or even greet him. She seemed to have prepared a 'speech' for herself, since she appears to be quite sure with herself, to his astonishment. In order to be more blunt, she puts the flowers (which are but a meaningful pretext) directly in his face and even offers to bring him in some more in order to colour up his 'room' (or she may have meant 'life'). Very severely, Mr. Stevens cuts on her enthusiasm by saying that his room is not 'a room for entertainment' and that he wants 'distractions kept to a minimum'. One can easily realise what 'distractions' he was talking about: it weren't the flowers the ones that seemed to distract him. Even thought he says that his room (implying, of course, his life) 'has served me perfectly well thus far as it', one might believe he is afraid to admit the truth to himself. Moreover, not to give himself away, he immediately turns to some formal matters by saying 'In fact, since you are here, there was certain matter I wished to raise with you', therefore, hiding his feelings again. One can notice that his sentences are quite short and cutting, while hers are almost as if inviting him, daring him, but he never loses the calm and distance that characterise him.

An interesting episode would be the one that happened in the 'back corridor of the house, which serves as a sort of backbone to the staff's quarters of Darlington Hall', corridor which is rather dark, almost like a tunnel.

> "(…) On that particular occasion, had I not recognised Miss Kenton's footsteps on the boards as she came towards me, I would have been able to identify her only from her outline. I paused at one of the few spots (…) of light (…) and said: 'Ah Miss Kenton'
>
> 'Yes, Mr. Stevens?'
>
> 'Miss Kenton, I wonder if I may draw your attention to the fact that the bed linen for the upper floor will need to be ready by the day after tomorrow.'
>
> 'The matter is perfectly under control, Mr. Stevens.'
>
> 'Ah, I'm very glad to hear it. It just struck me as a thought, that's all.'
>
> I was about to continue on my way, but Miss Kenton did not move. Then she took one step more towards me so that (…) I could see the angry expression on her face.
>
> 'Unfortunately, Mr. Stevens, I am extremely busy now and I am finding I have barely a single moment to spare. If only I had as much spare time as you evidently do, then I would happily reciprocate by wandering about this house reminding you of tasks you have perfectly well in hand.'
>
> 'Now, Miss Kenton, there's no need to become so bad tempered. I merely felt the need to satisfy myself that it had not escaped your attention…'
>
> 'Mr. Stevens, this is the fourth or the fifth time in the past two days you have felt such a need. (…)
>
> Deciding it best to let the matter go no further, I continued on my way. I had almost reached the kitchen doorway when I heard the furious sounds of her footsteps coming back towards me again.

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'In fact, Mr. Stevens', she called, 'I would ask you from now on not to speak to me directly at all.'

'Miss Kenton, whatever are you talking about?'

'If it is necessary to convey a message, I would ask you to do so through a messenger. Or else you may like to write a note and have it sent to me. Our working relationship, I am sure, would be made a great deal easier. (…)" (79-80)

This might work in the case of 'working relationship', but what about the personal one, the one neither one of them is willing to admit… It is interesting how Mr. Stevens was able to recognise Miss Kenton in that dark corridor; one could only guess how many times he followed her there. Even though Mr. Stevens himself admits one too many times that Miss Kenton's services are impeccable, he still cannot help teasing her when he gets that chance, here implying that she might have missed to get the linen ready (another pretext, of course). On the other hand, Miss Kenton is aware of the fact that he is, under no circumstance, questioning her professionalism, yet she 'plays' his game, a game which very much resembles the wooing ritual. As a response, she teases him back, by telling that she no longer wishes to talk to him directly and that he should use some sort of messenger. She pretends to be very upset and offended by his remarks, when is quite obvious that she enjoys every moment of their encounters. The tension in this fragment is quite high, and one could feel it growing on as the dialogues unfolds itself. It is also interesting to notice that it is not only Mr. Stevens (or, respectively, Miss Kenton) the one to take the initiative: every time they meet, if not one, then the other, would immediately say something to tease the other person; they do not waste any occasion to interact one way or another, be it in a form of a quarrel, which only adds a little 'salt and pepper' to the situation.

Although she requested not to be addressed directly, she behaves professionally when his father dies and when he cannot tear himself away from his current duties. She doesn't judge him nor does she reproach his awkward (at least from the reader's point of view) behaviour at that tragic moment. This is the moment when they put an end to the foolish 'messenger issue' thus, a kind of an intimate bondage between them appears. Moreover, they even reach as far as to have private meetings every evening in her parlour at the end of each day, meetings which he calls 'overwhelmingly professional tone'.

It was one of such meetings that Mr. Stevenson announced Miss Kenton about the necessity of dismissing two of the girls in the staff on the grounds that they are Jewish. Miss Kenton's reaction was the expected one, threatening him to leave the house together with the two unfortunate girls. For Miss Kenton, the problem was not so much the girls' misfortune, which she admitted was a great one, but the fact that Mr. Stevenson seemed to take matters in such an indifferent manner (attitude required by the position he is in: a respectable English butler). That was why, one year after the event, when Mr. Stevens told Miss Kenton about the lordship's regret for having done such a terrible thing to the poor girls, she was pleasantly surprised to discover that he also felt that the girls had been done a great injustice.

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"(…) As I recall, you only thought it was only right and proper that Ruth and Sarah be sent packing. You were positively cheerful about it.'

'Now really, Miss Kenton, that is quite incorrect and unfair. The whole matter caused me great concern indeed. It is hardly the sort of thing I like to see happen in this house.'

'Then why, Mr. Stevens, did you not tell me so at the time?'

I gave a laugh, but for the moment was rather at a loss for an answer. Before I could formulate one, Miss Kenton said:

'Do you realise, Mr. Stevens, how much it would have meant to me if you had thought to share your feelings last year? You knew how upset I was when my girls were dismissed. Do you realise how much it would helped me? Mr. Stevens, why, why, why do you always have to pretend?'

I gave another laugh at the ridiculous turn the conversation had suddenly taken. 'Really Miss Kenton,' I said 'I'm not sure I know what you mean. Pretend? Why, really…

'I suffered so much over Ruth and Sarah leaving us. And I suffered all the more because I believed I was alone.' (…) (153-154)

This dialogue was nothing but a pretext for Miss Kenton to ask the crucial question: 'Mr. Stevens, why, why, why do you always have to pretend?' Deep down in her soul she hurts because she feels that he is not how he wants to appear, that he is kind-hearted, gentle and caring. Of course, as we already used to, he cannot deal with his sudden, ridiculous turn of the conversation. All he can do is to give a nervous laugh and leave. He doesn't know how to comfort her or what to say to her to assure of his true beliefs. He, on his turn, also hurts inside his heart, as neither of them knows just what to do… it seems that words are not helping them, even though they are using the language in a very refined manner.

If only we were ready to depict the consistency of Words… they seem to be powerful, even more powerful than we are ready to believe. We could analyse every dialogue that took place among any of the characters and see that their shared, but hidden behind words, love is very obvious.

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