

# A Study In Pragmatics In The Novels Of Khushwant Singh

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DOI: 10.47750/pnr.2022.13.510.432

## Abstract

Indian writing in English has stamped its greatness by mixing up tradition, customs culture and modernity in the production of art. It has a history of one hundred and fifty years. It is known as Indian Writing in English. It is a part of commonwealth literature as India was a former colony of British Empire. Indian English writer thinks and feels as an Indian and expresses his/her ideology using western medium (English) in the form of literature. Indian English literature is a body of literature in which Indian experiences and ideologies are reflected. The writers of the free nations started to write on the new theory that is termed as post colonialism. The emergence of post colonialism has given a new scope to the approach to study literature, which does not mark an end, which other-isms contain, but rather it is the beginning of the comprehension of the postcolonial period. Indian English is the product of Indian geography. It contains the grammar and speech habits in different linguistic areas, but now is recognized for its significance. Indian English fiction from 1950 onwards was influenced by the wave of post-colonial period which brought radical changes in the Indian English fiction. Post-colonial was a continuation of modernism, a revolt against authority and significance. India is a multilingual and multicultural country. Many Indian writers have made attempts to depict India and its culture through Indian Writings in English. The author er has taken a consistent and detailed approach to examine the pragmatic aspects dealing with the five novels of Khushwant Singh by applying the principles of pragmatics. Sociolinguistics is the study of language in relation to its society; the selected novels are examined and interpreted against the backdrop of the Indian socio-cultural context existing at the time when these novels were being written.

**Key Words:** approach, culture, grammar, language, multi-cultural, pragmatic, speech habits

## INTRODUCTION

Khushwant Singh's selected novels reveal the Indian socio-cultural context. Therefore, a pragmatic approach would prove a vital tool to explore the various aspects of the language used by the writer while depicting not only the deplorable conditions of the marginalised sections of the Indian society but it also paves the way to understand the attitude of the high caste/class people through the linguistic behavior of the characters. The characters portrayed by the writer come alive as they make use of local words, phrases and idiomatic expressions to convey their emotions and attitude to life. Khushwant Singh also uses various techniques to highlight the sociolinguistic and pragmatic realities in India when the novels under consideration were being written.

The present paper is an endeavor to study, examine, and explore the various pragmatic, socio-cultural, historical and autobiographical elements, which might have gone a long way in creating, supporting and sustaining the caste and class based hierarchical social structure as reflected in Khushwant Singh's sociological as well as historical novels. His novels can be best understood against the existing socio-cultural background. Pragmatic analysis of the study of the language in use, the novels selected for pragmatic study offer a tremendous scope for the in-depth pragmatic analysis because the varieties of the language used by the characters are unique and culture-bound. An attempt is made to scrupulously discover the pragmatic features in the Post-colonial India as reflected in them.

Sociolinguistics and Psycholinguistics have emphasized in the recent decades a process model of human language abilities. The primary of the social dimensions of language study has been stressed by the recent advances in the areas of text analysis, discourse analysis and conversation analysis. Pragmatics has been significantly added to these new developments of linguistic analysis. Pragmatics has given the primacy to meaning in use. These approaches have led to a remarkable shift from 'competence' to 'performance'. Grammar is the abstract formal system of language. Pragmatics deals with the principles of language use. Both grammar and pragmatic have complementary domains within the disciplines of linguistic sciences. In order to understand the nature of language in totality, it is necessary to understand properly to students both the domains of grammar and pragmatics. Similarly, it is essential to study the domains of semantics and pragmatics which are concerned with meaning. Semantics deals with meaning as a dyadic relation while pragmatics deals with meaning as a triadic relation. Meaning in semantics is defined relative to a speaker or user of the

language. Pragmatics is thus the study of meaning in relation to speech situations.

The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein was the first to state that 'Speaking is something doing'. The speaking of language is a part of an activity or a part of a form of life. Uttering a sentence is a bit of conduct, a public performance or action. What is done in uttering a sentence or in speaking, it is not always best described by the grammatical or semantic characterization of that utterance. It is best expressed in terms of the features of all of utterance itself. Not only speaking is something people do but also there are many other things which may be done by people in speaking or by speaking.

'How to Do Things with Words' (1962) by J.L. Austin, it is the first work on pragmatics based on his lectures which he delivered at Harvard University in 1955. He protested against the belief that every declarative sentence could be proved 'either true or false', 'I name her Meena', 'I gave my coat to Harry', 'I bet it will not rain' are the sentences used by the speaker to perform the action of 'naming', 'giving', or 'betting'. The utterance 'I am thirsty' is a way of issuing the command to the speaker's wife to prepare a cup of coffee. J.L. Austin proposed the Speech Act Theory which is a major paradigm shift in the study of language. The basic proposition is 'speaking is doing'. Actions can be performed by producing a sequence of meaningful sounds. Language is thus a social instrument used to achieve desired results of effects. This is the mainstay of the speech act theory. There are three dimensions of the action which is produced by an utterance. J.L. Austin calls them **i. locutionary** (Just the production of a meaning in utterance) **ii. illocutionary** (the illocutionary force is the speaker's intention behind the production, its communicative point attitudes involved, presuppositions), **iii. Perlocutionary** (creating an effect in the mind of the learner as a result of producing an utterance). (1) It is raining (locutionary- a statement that it is raining). (2) It is raining (illocutionary- the contextual meaning- telling somebody not to go outside as it is raining outside). (3) It is raining (perlocutionary- the hearers will recognise the effect intended by the speaker and respond accordingly by not going out as it is raining outside)

The two major forms of communication are verbal communication and non-verbal communication. Verbal communication occurs in oral and written form with the help of words, Non-verbal communication takes place without the help of words and through gestures, postures, eye-contact, body language, signals, flags, whistles and other types of signs and symbols. Of course, oral and written verbal communication is the most useful to convey thoughts, emotions, ideas, intentions, desires and wants of one person-addresser to another person addressee (Sender, Receiver).

Doing things with language is different from just the sum-total of a speaker speaking and a listener listening. It is the joint action that emerges when speakers and listeners (writers and readers) perform their individual actions in co-ordination, it means that the conversation between two or more people is a kind of joint action. It depends on the co-ordination and performance of individual. The day to day communication, discussion, performance of stage plays, television news, storytelling- each type of communication consists of a set-participant, a place a point of true situations and the actions performed. These are the communicative situations, joint actions, individual performance of the participant communicator. In all types of communication as language has an important role to play, every utterance produced by the speaker has a particular objective and a specific purpose as well as typical intentions. The successful act of communication takes place only when the listener is able to understand the objective and intention of the speaker. Every utterance is meaningful. Its meaning is determined by the context that includes the information provided by the speaker. This shows that the use of language depends exclusively on the speaker (communicator), the listener (receiver of what is communicated) and the (contextual) situation.

Pragmatics is the study of language use in relation to the structure of language and the context of the utterance. Pragmatics is relatively new branch of linguistics which appeared in late 1970s, J.L. Austin, J.R. Searle, H.P. Grice, Stephen Levinson, Geoffrey Leech, George Yule and others here made significant contributions to the development of pragmatics. Pragmatics primarily concerned with the use of language in human communication as determined by the conditions of society. H.P. Grice (1975) has discussed the modern treatment of meaning by distinguishing two kinds of meaning: natural meaning and non-natural meaning of utterances. The natural meaning is often called an entailment, a meaning that is present in every occasion when an expression occurs, the non-natural meaning is only sometimes associated with the expression from which it may be derived and is therefore not a part of the conversational meaning of that expression, 'clever' that is smart is its natural meaning but the use of clever ironically indicates 'clever' that is 'stupid' which is its non-natural meaning specifically associated in a typical situation in which the use of irony is made as in the famous speech by Mark Antony in Shakespeare's play Julius Caesar in which he uses the expression 'honourable' frequently and the situational context indicates its non-natural meaning 'dishonourable' throughout that speech.

Two landmark developments in pragmatics are the discovery of the Co-operative Principle by H.P. Grice (1975) and of the Politeness Principle by Geoffrey Leech (1983). Stephen Levinson (1983) believes that pragmatics is the study of all those aspects of meaning, which are captured in a language and context that are basic to an account of language understanding. Geoffrey Leech (1983) has redefined pragmatics from the linguistic point of view as 'the study of meaning in relation to speech situations', Grundy (1999:87) says, "Pragmatics is about explaining how we produce and understand such everyday but apparently rather peculiar uses of language." According to George Yule (1996:03), "Pragmatics is concerned with the study of meaning as communicated by the speaker (or writer) and interpreted by a listener (or reader). It has, consequently, more to do with the analysis of old people mean by their utterances than what the words or phrases in those utterances might mean by themselves," Mey (1993:2001) states; "Pragmatics studies the use of language in

human communication as determined by the conditions of society.” The study of language through pragmatics is really useful as one can talk about peoples intended meanings, their assumptions, their purposes, and the kind of actions that they perform when they speak.

In the 1960s, sociolinguistics was pioneered by linguists such as William Labov in the US and Basil Bernstein in the UK. William Labov, known as the founder of the study of sociolinguistics, has introduced the quantitative study of language variation and change, making the sociology of language into a scientific discipline. Code-mixing: In the paper entitled ‘Code-mixing in the process of Indianization of English’: A corpus-based study, ‘Shastri (1986) refers to the types of code-mixing, and the correlation between genres of writing and the degree of Indianness of their lexical component. The highly marked examples of code-mixing and Code switching, have been done through the study of selected Indian English novels of Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura* (1938), Mulk Raj Anand’s *Untouchable* (1935), R.K.Narayan’s *Waiting for the Mahatma* (1955, Reprint 2011), and Shobhaa De’s *Starry Nights* (1991). The attempt is made to explain the categorically selected examples of code-mixing from the above mentioned novels, taking into consideration with different sociolinguistic point of view.

A number of writers were influenced by the contemporary upheavals caused by the social and political awareness in Post-independence. The creative writers in their literary works manipulate the language to suit their characters. The characters are given certain specific roles in the society in which they are born, brought up and live. Therefore, their language has to be governed by the set of social norms of that time realistic novels were written. M.H. Abrams defines realistic novel as, “the fictional attempt to give the effect of *realism*, by representing complex characters with mixed motives that are rooted in a social class, operate in a developed social structure, interact with many other characters, and undergo plausible, everyday modes of experience” (Abrams, 192).

The present paper deals with Khushwant Singh’s selected novels deal with the traumatic experiences and burning problems at the time of independence and afterwards. Om P. Juneja in his book, *Post Colonial Novel*, differentiates between a novelist and a historian as, “While the novelist is interested in how power is sought and exercised by the individuals, the interest of the historian lies in studying the operation of power by groups” (1995:58). This operation of power is examined by both the historian and the novelist through representative figures, though for different reasons.

Though the freedom struggle was now over, events of the early post-independence period such as the Partition, and its terrible impact, the merger of the princely states into the Indian Union, and the wars with Pakistan and China, provided usable material to the writers. The tragic drama of Partition was inspired by Khushwant Singh’s ‘Train to Pakistan’ (1956) and thereafter great fiction writer like Chaman Nahal’s ‘Azadi’ (1975) and Manohar Malgonkar’s ‘A Bend in the Ganges’ (1964) dealt with the theme of partition. There are various studies among Manohar Malgonkar emerged as one of the prominent writer to present fictional account of the recent Indian history in his novels like ‘Distant Drum’ (1960), ‘The Princes’ (1973), ‘A Bend in the Ganges’ (1964), ‘The Devils Wind’ (1971) etc. Kamala Markandaya’s novels like ‘Some Inner Fury’ (1956) and ‘The Golden Honeycomb’ (1972) deal with the events from pre-independent India and present a fictional account by making her characters become involved in actual events. Most of the novelists have tried to reinterpret the history of modern India and feel as if they are, like Salman Rushdie, “handcuffed to history.” They have tried to tackle the besetting problem of reality vis-a-vis a social picture of post-colonial India simultaneously.

The topic of the present paper deals with pragmatic features is operative in the novels of Khushwant Singh. The researcher primarily makes an attempt to analyse a Pragmatic features through the selected novels to focus on social, historical, political and autobiographical aspects as per the utterances and conversations by the characters.

Therefore, an attempt of the author is to apply subfield of pragmatic principles to interpret and analyze the selected five novels of Khushwant Singh. Social changes take place in society constantly; literature is bound to reflect them with the help of the language used by writers. Therefore, it is through language that a writer tries to depict the conditions of the society. The writer depicts what he sees in the society. As literature is a social product and a mirror of society, it studies and reflects the social system.

Khushwant Singh is one of the best-known Indian writers of all times. He is one of the finest historians and novelists and an outstanding observer and social critic. His assessment and comparison of social and behavioral traits of people from India and the West is full of outstanding wit. He is considered as a realist and humanist in one and this picture of him is revealed in his work. His use of language is down-to-earth, realistic and often an exact translation of the Hindi or the Punjabi dialect. His language is a living and vital entity that can be termed as Indian-English or Indianism. The English of Khushwant Singh is distinctly postcolonial and postmodern. It gives us glimpses into his conscious craftsmanship, which aims at linguistic decentralization and hybridization. The very peculiar linguistic deviations and innovations that mark his text are: the sprinkle of English language with Hindi and Urdu words; his abundant use of colloquial speech’ frequent word-for-word translation from Hindi into English; his keen observation and vivid description; an extra pinch of dramatic flavor at times and use of various figurative expressions, especially irony at its best.

Five popular novels of Khushwant Singh have been selected for the present study in this paper.

## 1. Train to Pakistan (1956)

A historical novel of all times, *Train to Pakistan* was published in the year 1956. The researcher makes an attempt to interpret the selected speech acts in the novel 'Train to Pakistan' by means of pragmatic approach. The pragmatic approach is in nutshell to the select utterances from *Train to Pakistan* against the theory of speech acts in particular and the relevant principles of pragmatics i.e. deixis, implicature, presupposition, etc. in general. Jacob Mey (2001) rightly observes: "Pragmatics studies the use of language in human communication as determined by the condition of society". (P.6 The success of one's utterance depends upon who says what to whom, when, where and why. For example, in the following speech act, the speaker, an old woman indirectly begs for her life.

*"In the name of God, take what we have, all our jewelry, everything," (P.17)*

The utterance is addressed to a dacoit Malli and his gang by one of the older women of Lala Ram Lal's family who being older in the family gets an authority to promise someone. The situation in which the utterance occurs is grave and terrified. Let us see another striking example in which indirect speech act triggers multiple layers of meaning considering its immediate context and interpersonal knowledge of addresser and addressee in 'Train to Pakistan'.

*"Wear these bangles, Juggia. Wear these bangles and put henna on your palms" (P.19)*

The utterance occurs in the novel when Malli and his gang passed from Jugga's house while fleeing away after robbing and murdering Lala Ram Lal. The utterance is directly addressed to Juggut Singh by Malli.

An indirect speech act is also an attempt to strengthen the interpersonal relationship between the addressee and addresser and is basically used as shield to save the face of the addressee. For example, in the following utterance, Hukum Chand asks an indirect question to Haseena: *"How long have you been in this profession?" (P.120)*

The utterance is directly addressed to a young girl, Haseena Begum, by the magistrate, Hukum Chand. The situation of the utterance is that the girl has been called to fulfill the sexual hunger of the magistrate therefore, he cannot use his power to ask direct question about her illicit relations.

### Use of Native Vocabulary

Khushwant Singh displays his skill at 'Indianisation' and 'hybridization' at its best when he, at the lexical level, employs some words from Hindi and Urdu dialects. At the foremost glimpse, the most appealing characteristic of his language is the abundant intersperse of English with Hindi, Panjabi and Urdu words throughout his prose-work, and this multihued sprinkling offers an oriental flavor to his work. Some examples of such words are; 'kisan', 'zenana', 'coolie', 'janta', 'kala nag', 'phannyar', 'krait', 'sahib', 'zaildar', 'toba-toba', 'lambardar', 'charpoy', 'gharreeb purrwar', 'mehsahib' and many more. *Train to Pakistan* is an endeavor at portraying these multiple yet distinct voices. Singh uses names like Iqbal, religious slogans "Ya Allah" and "Hey Wah Guru" (1), chants and symbols like the triangle which has the temple, the mosque and the Hindu landlord itself.

## 2. I Shall Not Hear the Nightingale (1959)

Kushwant Singh's second novel is set in British India and is about a magistrate loyal to Britishers and his nationalist and patriotic son. The language used in the novel is more than just sounds, words and sentences because in the context of the novel the characters do not speak just to say something, but they intend to do something by saying, and speaking does not merely involve physical actions or movements but specific goals and intentions of the speakers.

### Use of Semantics and its Indianization

Another element of Linguistic innovation in Khushwant Singh's writing is the indianization of the semantic elements. He achieves the same through:

1. Use of single or compound English words that are unusual in American or British English. It includes single or compound words that might have been directly translated from Indian regional languages. The meaning of the word might be understandable to American or British English speakers just by their comprehending the context of the utterance, but the word itself is unusual in American or British English. For example:

We cannot really play this stabbing game.

i. Government, she knows nothing about drink.

ii. Pull the punkah for an hour or two till it gets cool.

iii. I thought the Sahib was tired and would like his feet pressed.

iv. Naming people by using their predominant personality trait, individual or family occupation, location, and family relationship.

v. I can check up the turn of water with the canal man.

## 3. Delhi: a Novel (1990)

Singh regarded as an enormous, erotic and cheeky work of art by critics and readers, *Delhi: A Novel* is a tale that moves around the history of Delhi. The pragmatic features are discussed as follows.

### Use of Simiotic words

While making a comparison of one thing to another, especially in the context of Indian set-up, Khushwant Singh often uses semiotic word that are comparisons with specific elements in Indian culture and native terminology.

- i. You snored like a railway engine
- ii. He will run like a jackal when he hears my name
- iii. See how he sleeps like a pig without a care in the world
- iv. He is like a stud bull
- v. They have behaved like snakes.

#### Use of Eye-Dialect words

Khushwant Singh's work has a frequent use of eye-dialect encoding of characters' speech— that is, the authors' use of non-standard spellings in novel dialogue to draw attention to the characters' nonstandard variety of English.

- i. Hulloo, Hulloo, Hulloo
- ii. Hindou – Hindou

#### 4. The Company of Women (1999)

A work of fiction, Khushwant Singh wrote this novel at the age of 84. A comment on hypocrisy in the Indian society, the novel deals with the story of Mohan Kumar who believes "lust is the true foundation of love". The novel talked about for its unbridled sexuality and brazen views on man-woman relationship. On the other hand, the social milieu of The Company of Women is made of the different high-middle-class society of a metropolitan city, Delhi, in the 1980s.

Language in the context is an undeniable fact that language is used in the context plays an important role in the use of language.

#### Use of Anglicized Native Idiomatic Expressions

Khushwant Singh often translates the native idioms word-for-word in English

- i. This new government is talking very loudly of stamping out all this.
- ii. Politically they are the world's biggest four-twenties.
- iii. Yes, absolutely, sixteen annas in the rupee.
- iv. It is written on our foreheads and on the lines of our hands.
- v. I am going to be the servant of your feet

#### 5. The Sunset Club (2010)

The present novel features Pandit Preetam Sharma, Sardar Boota Singh and Nawab Barkatullah Baig as the three main characters that have been close friends for more than forty years and are in their eighties now. They are habitual of gathering in Lodhi Gardens during the sunset, gossiping about everything from daily-life events, news and religion, love and sex. At occasions, 'The Sunset Club' turns to nature and politics to then goes on throwing light on the common complexities of the typical life, the characters Pandit Sharma, Buta Singh and nawab baig used Hindi, Punjabi dialects for communication. Literal translation of Hindi words, phrases and sometimes, even sentences into English are some of the linguistic tricks used by Khushwant Singh. There is also a rich store of swear- words or abusive terms which are literally translated into English. This is Khushwant Singh's most colourful and interesting experimentation.

For Example: There are some Hindi verbs which have undergone experimentation like 'don't buk buk', 'Salaam babuji' and 'Mehrbani'. The expression 'don't buk buk' is made of English auxiliary verb followed by Hindi verb in imperative mood.

Name by which the exalted status of an individual is implied: Huzoor, Maharaj, Your Highness etc Kinship term: brother-in-law, brother, daughter, son etc.

Professional term and - Professional-kinship term: Hakimji, Padri Sahib, Colonel etc..

## CONCLUSION

In this way, the novels of Khushwant Singh are abundant with examples of code- mixing and code-switching which are to be studied as elements of pragmatics.

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