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A Pragmatic Study of Nagging in Samuel Beckett's Endgame

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ABSTRACT

The term nagging is often used in conversations to describe, or accuse the behavior of a person. Nagging behavior can be annoying to the receivers of nags; however, individuals who nag believe their behavior is a demonstration of their concern (Tannen, 1990:13). The miscommunication that occurs when an individual uses nagging behavior can be problematic for interpersonal relationships (Dunleavy, 2007:1).

Intimacy is a key in a world of connection where individuals negotiate complex networks of friendship, minimize differences, try to reach consensus, and avoid the appearance of superiority, which would highlight differences. In a world of status, independence is a key, because a primary means of establishing status is to tell others what to do, and taking orders is a marker of low status. Though all humans need both intimacy and independence, women tend to focus on the first and men on the second. It is as if their lifeblood ran in different directions (Tannen, 1991:10).

The present study aims at Pointing out the pragmatic structure of nagging in the data under analysis; finding out the types of nagging that are used in the nagging episodes; highlighting the pragmatic functions triggered by the use of each type of nagging; identifying the pragmatic strategies that are used in each of the stages of nagging in the nagging episodes; and developing an eclectic model for analyzing nagging. It is hypothesized that nagging is a pragmatic process with certain identifiable strategies and that it comes in sequences of different formats according to the degree of intimacy between naggers and naggees.

In order to achieve the aims of this study and verify or reject its hypotheses, the following procedures are taken on board such as surveying the pragmatic phenomenon of 'nagging' in the related literature to highlight its meaning, strategies and functions in the data under analysis; Explicating the criteria by which we can differentiate nagging from other related attitudes such as 'gossiping' and 'begging'; designing an eclectic model for the analysis of the selected data,

based on Boxer's (2000) work on the stages of 'nagging', and Kozloff's (1988) work on the description of the nagging exchange. As such, this study is limited to the investigation of nagging in a number of exemplary illustrative examples taken from Samuel Beckett's one act paly of Endgame.

1.   Introduction

The speech behavior having the semantic label of 'nagging' is on that which occurs principally within the familial arena and is relevant to both parent-child communication and couples communication. Because it is widely agreed that nagging is unpalatable, the question that arises is: why is nagging so ubiquitous in the domestic context? (Boxer, 2002:33).

Consequently, this section aims at investigating 'nagging' both as a speech act and as a speech event. It also sheds light on the pragmatic characteristics of nagging in terms of its meaning, categories, and functions. Moreover, this section considers the differences between nagging and other nagging-related speech acts such as gossiping, begging, and complaining in addition to presenting some previous approaches to nagging, some relevant issues to nagging, and also nagging in politeness theory.

2.   Definitions of Nagging

Nagging is an interesting speech act which combines an external perspective on a certain kind of speech activity with insights into the speaker's mental attitude. The external perspective is expressed in the pejorative character of this verb. There is something unpleasant, tedious, off-putting about nagging, not from the speaker's point of view, but from that of an onlooker, or the addressee. Yet the speaker's attitude is also relevant for this verb, and the only way to spell this out accurately is to employ the first person format, suitable for typical speech act verbs. For a full explication of the verb, however, a further, pejorative, component should perhaps be added to the actual format, not on a par with the other components. This component, too, should start with an 'I', but this time the 'I' refers to the speaker, who uses the verb 'nag', not to the nagger, as the 'I' of the other components does (Wierzbicka, 1987:144-5.

Nagging was conceptualized by Dunleavy and Myers (2006:2) as "pestering others with demands, pleas, and/or requests for compliance when they are not doing what we would like them to do". Dunleavy (2007:3) modifies his definition of nagging based on research related to concepts similar to nagging, and nagging research itself, as "an exchange in which a person makes persistent, non-aggressive requests which contain the same content to a respondent who fails to comply". The main difference between this definition and the one provided by Dunleavy and Myers (2006) is that it helps differentiating nagging from other persuasive constructs such compliance gaining, complaining and demand/withdraw.

Soule (2001:193) defines nagging as " a particular communication ritual occurs in many relationships, creating responses ranging from humor to exasperation to anger. This interpersonal ritual is nagging. Yet, the term 'nagging' seldom appears in interpersonal communication or conflict textbooks. It appears that nagging is commonly used in everyday conversation but it rarely makes it into academic print.

The person who nags has perceived that someone has, once again, failed to do something that they should have done, despite many earlier urgings and reminders from the same speaker. The speaker feels therefore 'something bad' (irritation, annoyance, displeasure, etc.). it is not that the matter in question is terribly important, and that the offence is very serious (one can hardly nag about yet another murder or yet another robbery); but it is a matter that the speaker has already spoken about many times, to no avail. The speaker has no real authority or real power over the addressee, and yet he is determined to go on and to say the same thing many more times. He is conscience that it must be unpleasant for the addressee to hear the same thing said again and again, and he hopes that the very tediousness and unpleasantness of the act will finally break the addressee's resistance on inertia; hopefully, a time will come when the addressee will prefer to do what is required of him than to listen to more of the same. This strategy used by the speaker to achieve his goal is reminiscent of begging, there too, the speaker is prepared to go on until the addressee gives in. But nagging is also linked with 'complain' and 'criticize'. This time the addressee is at fault, since he hasn't done something he should have done, and this failure makes the speaker wants to say 'something bad' about the addressee (Wierzbicka1987:145).

3. Types of Nagging

Based on the typologies of nagging made by Schlosser (2002:42), the aforementioned types of nagging can be categorized into three main pragmatic categories, each of which includes certain types of nags

1. In the benefit of the nagger nags.

2. In the benefit of the naggee nags.

3. In the benefit of both the nagger/naggee nags.

According to the first category "In the benefit of the nagger nags" the nagger tries to make the naggee do something which is solely in the best interest of the nagger, in other words, the nagger attempts to change a certain behavior of the naggee so as to meet something beneficial to him or her. The types of nags that are associated with this category are: forceful nags, demonstrative nags, threatening nags, and pleading nags. Each of these nags reflects the nagger's desire to change.

The nagger tends to be more persistent in seeking the other party's compliance. Putting it differently, the less the degree of power that the nagger has on the

naggee, the more he/she tend to use less aggressive strategies and even powerless mechanisms such as urging the naggee to do something, winning the naggee's sympathy, or making him/her feel guilty about the whole thing.

According to Boster et al. (2009: 222) the urgency mechanism requires the target be asked repeatedly to comply. Asking repeatedly for a favor can lead to the target forming the impression that compliance is urgent with a limited time frame in which to perform the task. The second potential mechanism is guilt, an unpleasant emotional state characterized by feeling of perceived judgment about an action. Research has demonstrated that inducing guilt is an effective technique in gaining compliance. This mechanism illustrates that guilt will be relieved if the respondent complies. In general, guilty individuals comply more with requests than those individuals who are not guilty. Respondents to nagging behavior are influenced by feelings of guilt. The individuals who experience guilt are likely to perceive the nagging as legitimate. Legitimacy is important to the nagger because respondents who do not perceive the nagging as legitimate begin to make negative attributions about the nagger. Guilt is a motivator for respondents to both compliance gaining and nagging (Dunleavy, 2007:14).

The third potential mechanism is winning the naggee's sympathy which is characterized by arousing feelings of compassion and understanding for the nagger's problem. Sympathy has also been found effective in eliciting some supportive behaviors as in the use of pleading nags which involve the use of a word or a phrase repeatedly such as "please" "for god sake", "mom".

According to the second type of nagging which is " the benefit of the naggee nags", the nagger intends to change a certain behavior which is not in best interest of the naggee, therefore, pity nags are used for this purpose. Pity nags are claims that things will go wrong if met with noncompliance, such as not being so popular in school or not fitting in with others. Persistent nags are also used in this context which involve constant requests; the wording may change, making this type of nag different from the pleading one, but the content remains the same (Dunlevy, 2007:8). The use of these types of nags by naggers is motivated by love and a real concern in for their spouses well-being, and the most frequent topics in which individuals nagged their spouse about are taking his or her medicine, going to the dentist, quitting smoking, or exercising for health reasons (Soule, 2001:198).

The third type of nagging " in the benefit of both the nagger/naggee", the nagger has no other choice but to practice a great deal of persistence on the naggee so as to gain the latter's compliance. Therefore, the first party has to follow the right steps in doing nagging with great deal of caution in order to arrive at the desired positive results. In other words, the nagging episode is triggered by a prior request with repeating and persisting as the favorable strategies for this pragmatic category, and, since there is no control of either parties on each other or any kind of power, the nagger is obliged to use a great deal of mitigation signaling to the naggee that what he or she is demanding is

in both parties interest or benefit. As such, the nagger is in the position of making suggestions to the naggee. The nagging episode reaches an end when the naggee shows compliance, or the in the case of non-compliance the nagger will have to deliver a message for the naggee that he or she will be held responsible for any potential negative consequences as a direct result for his or her act of non-compliance. The ideal types of nags that are typical of this category of nagging is the persistent nags and pity nags.

4.   The Pragmatic Functions of Nagging

Nagging may serve a variety of functions in our interpersonal relationships. It may allow us not only to influence someone but also to show caring and to avoid acting aggressively (Soule, 2002:198). The following section aims at identifying the following pragmatic functions of nagging following Soule (2002). These are:

Compliance gaining

Showing affection

Avoiding conflict

Compliance gaining

Compliance gaining refers to any effort to induce an individual to enact a behavior the other individual might not perform otherwise (Dunleavy, 2007:12). As such, in reality, it takes a number of attempts and strategies to reach the desired compliance by the nagger. Compliance gaining has been tackled from different perspectives such as the effectiveness of specific strategies, the intent of the requester, and the options of the target. Therefore, the degree of intimacy between the nagger and the naggee will inevitably affect the selection and use of the strategy, in that the nagger has to make sure the chosen strategy will effective and yet inoffensive so as not to damage the relationship. Using aggressive strategies by the nagger in his attempt to gain compliance will jeopardize the long-term satisfaction between the interlocutors.

The second pragmatic function of nagging in interpersonal relationships proposed by Soule (2002:198) is showing affection. Though the primary goal of nagging is compliance gaining, but the motivation is different. The Nagger uses nagging to show the target that he/she cares about him/her. For example, nagging your wife to take her medicine, or to drive slowly are instances of showing affection through nagging. Therefore, the pragmatic function of nagging is taking by the target as a sign of caring, concern, and love.

As for the third pragmatic function of nagging 'avoiding conflict; is different from the aforementioned functions in that the nagger here intends to avoid a conflict with the naggee by not escalating to aggressive strategies and commit himself or herself to the less aggressive influence strategy of repeating the same content of the message in every turn in the nagging episode. As such, the

nagger decides not to use abusive statements, threats, or even non-verbal behaviors such as hitting. The nagger primary goal is to nag at his/her partner using mitigating strategies so as not start a violent conflict. This function of nagging is manifested in men's nagging rather than women's nagging. Since men are thought to be more aggressive. Therefore, the nagger who decides to escalate to a more aggressive strategies to try to influence a another male could cause a verbal conflict and even a fight (Soule, 2002:198).

These functions indicate that nagging may play an important role in helping to maintain harmony in a variety of relationships. However, it should be noted that interactions are not always positive. In extreme cases, a nagee could be irritated enough to respond to a nagger with violence (ibid:199). As such, the researcher believes it is necessary to propose a fourth pragmatic function of nagging which is the "submissive function".

The submissive function of nagging is clearly manifested in nagging in the workplace, especially between two interlocutors where the relationship is characterized by the superior-inferior relationships. That is, the nagger thinks that gaining the naggee's compliance is something nonnegotiable, and, therefore, cannot be compromised. As a result, the naggee often feels irritated and treated with unjust by the nagger, and, hence, tries to resist, refuse, and complain.

Consequently, every time the nagger repeats the demand to change or to show compliance, it will be faced by a number of negative responses showing the degree of unwillingness to comply to the nagger's desire. As such, the more the naggee shows noncompliance to the nagger's demand the more the nagger will persist, and, therefore, the nagging episode will not reach an end until either the nagger abandons his or her request or the naggee decides to show compliance by changing a certain behavior to accommodate with the nagger's desire. In other words, the nagger is no only concerned in changing the naggee's behavior but also in submitting his opponent. So, in such cases it is a matter of "Me Vs. Him".

5.   5. The Analytic Framework and Data Analysis

The section aims at introducing the analytic framework represented by the electic model adopted from Boxer's (2002) study of nagging, and Kozloff's (1988) description of the nagging exchange for the analysis of the data. As such, this section also sheds light on the selected data which is Samuel Beckett's one act play of 'Endgame' and the reason behind selecting it to serve as data for analysis. Moreover, this section highlights the results of analysis, putting forward the discussion of findings, and finally recapitulates some conclusions.

5.1 The Analytic Framework

A bottom-up approach will be adopted in the analysis of the selected data. Five illustrative exemplary scenes has been chosen for analysis in that they represent the most prominent ones. The eclectic model adopted from Boxer (2002) and Kozloff (1988) will be utilized in the analysis of these examples. This eclectic model meets the objectives of this study in identifying the nagging process and the strategies used by the naggers and nagees in the nagging exchange. As such, figure (1) below shows the functionality of the aforementioned model:
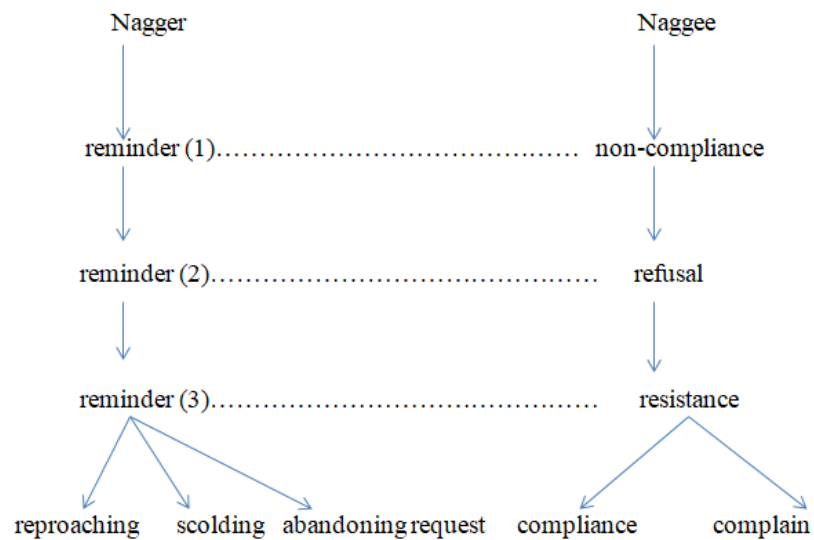
Figure (1) The Pragmatic Structure of Nagging.

5.2 Text Analysis

Four illustrative exemplary scenes have been chosen for analysis. These examples represent the most prominent ones in Beckett's paly of 'Endgame'.

Example (1):

HAMM: Is it not time for my pain-killer?

CLOV: No.

HAMM: How are your eyes?

CLOV: Bad.

HAMM: How are your legs?

CLOV: Bad.

HAMM: But you can move.

CLOV: Yes.

HAMM: (violently)

Then move! (Clov goes to back wall, lean against it with his forehead and hands).

In this example, the first strategy in the nagging process is realized by Hamm's (nagger) interrogative question which has the force of request concerning the time to take his pain-killer pills. Clov (Naggee) tries not to comply by giving 'No' as an answer. The first reminder is realized by Hamm's question about Clov's eyes, and Clov responds by 'Bad' which also represents a non-compliance act. The third reminder is manifested in Hamm's question about Clov's legs and the latter gives 'Bad' also as an answer which in turn signals non-compliance. The final strategy is realized by Hamm's question to Clov concerning whether he can move or not, and the answer is 'Yes'. This answer is faced by an order realized by "Then Move!" which makes Clov comply by moving toward the wall. Colv's compliance ends this nagging sequence.

Example (2):

HAMM: What's the weather like?

CLOV: As usual.

HAMM: Look at the earth.

CLOV: I've looked.

HAMM: With the glass?

CLOV: No need for the glass.

HAMM: Look at it with glass.

CLOV: I'll go and get the glass.

HAMM: No need for the glass.

In the above example, the nagging sequence starts with Hamm's question about the weather. Clov's answer reinforces the nagger to make another move for he is not satisfied with "As usual" for a sign of compliance on the part of the naggee. Therefore, Hamm makes another move by asking Clov to look at the earth. At this point in the dialogue, Clov's answer "I've looked" motivates the nagger to demand that he should look at the earth with the glass (telescope), and hence, realizes the first reminder. This reminder is faced by a non-compliant answer "There is no need for the glass". This latter answer motivates the nagger to make another reminder in the form of an imperative this time. Consequently, the naggee shows compliance by submitting to the nagger's demand by telling Hamm (nagger) that he will go and get the glass. As such, Clov's answer represents a reward for Hamm and a small victory in that his success in submitting Clov to his will meets the ultimate goal behind this sequence of nagging.

6.   Conclusion

This study concludes that nagging interactions are not always end in the favor of the nagger. Showing compliance to the naggers wishes and demands is not always the case with nagging. In fact, showing compliance on the part of the naggee reinforces or even motivates the nagging behavior. The analysis has revealed that nagging is a process with identifiable strategies used by naggers and naggees in a face-to-face interaction, and who ever masters the employment of these strategies, he or she will ultimately get their reward by winning the combat by submitting the other to his will. Nagging is a process with identifiable strategies used by naggers and naggees whom their relationships are intimate.

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