Witty Banter in Shakespeare's "Much Ado About Nothing" and "The Taming of the Shrew": A Pragmatic Study

Nesaem Mehdi Al-Aadili (PhD)

University of Babylon/ College of Education for Human Sciences/ Department of English

ABSTRACT: *Banter could be manifested in everyday conversations to foster social intimacy and establish a bond of familiarity. Despite the effectiveness of this topic, it has not been given ample research in literary works, particularly plays. Thus, the present study deals with this topic from a pragmatic point of view to find answers to the following questions: (1) what are the pragmatic strategies via which banter is realized in the selected plays? (2) what are the pragmatic functions of banter? The study hypothesizes that (1) banter is realized via various pragmatic strategies such as mocking and teasing, and (2) banter performs variegated pragmatic functions. Related literature is surveyed and a model is developed for the purpose of analyzing the data. Besides, a statistical means represented by the percentage equation is used to calculate the results.*

KEY WORDS: banter, mock-impoliteness, rhetorical devices, strategies

INTRODUCTION

Banter is a form of mock-impoliteness or under-politeness whose function is to foster social intimacy and establish or maintain a bond of familiarity between intimates or people of different status (Culpeper1996: 33). It is an outrageous way of being cordial. Accordingly, the present study attempts to shed light on banter as a form of mock-impoliteness. In other words, the study aims to find out the pragmatic strategies via which banter is realized in the selected plays and investigate the pragmatic functions of banter.

2. Banter Principle

For Leech (1983: 83), banter principle is a rhetorical principle which is clearly obvious in everyday conversation, mostly among youths. For example, in a chess game, one person may tell another in a joking way *"What a mean cowardly trick!"* referring to a particular clever gambit. Or a friend may welcome another saying *"Here comes trouble!"*

Leech (1983: 83) expresses banter principle as follows: "in order to show solidarity with H, say something which is (i) obviously untrue and (ii) obviously impolite to H". Consequently, banter which is a form of mock-impoliteness or under-politeness functions as a way of establishing or preserving a bond of familiarity, that is to say "the more intimate the relationship, the less important it is to be polite". In this regard, the absence of politeness can become a sign of cordiality.

Accordingly, the banter principle conveys the following implicature: "What S says is impolite to H and is clearly untrue….What S really means is polite to H and true". Thus, banter principle is called a "third-order principle" because it may utilize irony. As such, it could be described as "mock-irony" as in *"A fine friend YOU are!"* said in a joking manner to a fellow who has donated an advantage in a card game. The previous utterance requires the following interpretations:

(i)   "You are a fine friend". (Face-value)
(ii)   "You are not a fine friend". (Irony principle).
(iii)   "But actually, you are my friend, and to show it, I'm being impolite to you". (Banter principle) (Leech, 1983:145).

According to Norrick (1993: 30) and Blake (2007: 27), banter involves "the exchange of word play with a teasing or provoking element". It includes word play in the customary meaning of "punning and extended metaphor". It follows that banter is somewhat negative in tone.

2.1 Banter as a Form of Mock- impoliteness

Leech (1983: 144) introduces the term mock-impoliteness to indicate "instances where a speaker says something which is obviously untrue and impolite in order to convey something which is often the opposite of what is said and is polite to the addressee". Leech defines banter as a form of mock-impoliteness or as "an offensive way of being friendly". He gives the following greeting used among friends as an example of banter: "Look what the cats brought in!"

The previous utterance is seemingly impolite, but since it is used in an appropriate context, it is not received as such because what is communicated is politeness. Thus, banter "is supposed to mark emotional closeness or even intimacy". Patently, banter could be a sign of intimacy (i.e., very small

social distance and low power value which correlate with no need for formal politeness) (Leech, 1983: 144).

Culpeper (1996: 352) defines mock-impoliteness as "impoliteness that remains on the surface, since it is understood that it is not intended to cause offence" which "reflects and fosters social intimacy". Culpeper regards banter as a form of "superficial impoliteness". Nowik (2005: 34) argues that in mock-impoliteness utterances (or banter utterances), two layers of meaning exist: "the surface layer of impoliteness and the proper layer of politeness".

For Leech (1983: 144) and Holmes (2000: 174) banter only arises in conversations among friends or intimates. Bousfield (2008: 137) has another view. He argues that banter could arise in interactions among unacquainted speakers or speakers of different statuses. Yet, although banter is considered the same as mock-impoliteness, it has been used by Norrick (1993: 92) to refer to "joking around or jesting in a playful manner", "exchanging humorous lines oriented toward a common theme though aimed primarily at mutual entertainment rather than tropical talk", "teasing", "mocking a particular target", or "insulting others in a ritualized manner".

2.2 Banter versus Irony

Leech (1983: 83) argues that irony principle conveys the following implicature: "What S says is polite to H and is clearly not true…. What S really means is impolite to H and true". Leech states that irony could be comic or offensive commands such as *"Do help yourself"*.

Leech (1983: 144) differentiates between irony and banter saying that irony is "an apparently friendly way of being offensive (mock-politeness), while banter is an offensive way of being friendly (mock-impoliteness)". Thus, banter marks emotional closeness and intimacy.

Cruse (2006: 90) states that the intended meaning in an ironic utterance is usually the opposite of the literal meaning. For example, in saying *"Politicians never lie",* the speaker intends to mock or ridicule. Thus, the intended meaning is different from the literal one.

According to Gibbs and Colston (2007: 65), and Wilson and Sperber (2012: 32), the speaker of an ironic utterance echoes a thought, a belief, or an intention that he imputes to others and expresses "a mocking, scornful, or contemptuous attitude to this thought".

2.3 Banter versus Sarcasm

Sarcasm is a circuitous form of speech which is frequently employed to convey 'implicit criticism'. It is the use of "positive worded utterances to convey negative attitudes". For example, one may say *"Your intelligence astounds me!"* when what is really meant is the reverse (i.e., that the person is lacking intelligence). This is the opposite of banter where impoliteness functions to foster social intimacy. It follows that while banter is a form of mock-impoliteness marking emotional intimacy and closeness, sarcasm is a form of mock-politeness intended to give offence (McDonald, 1999: 487).

According to McDonald (1999: 487), both sarcasm and irony involve saying something and meaning the opposite. Yet, the difference between them is a difference of degree. Basically, sarcasm is broader and more intentional in its reversal of meaning, irony may be very fine.

2.4 Banter and Verbal Play

Pun is a rhetorical device for generating banter. Broadly speaking, pun is "a form of word-play in which some feature of linguistic structure simultaneously combines two unrelated meanings". Thus, banter is playful. The main idea is to have fun. If the partner suddenly seems upset or insulted, this means that the speaker has gone too far or hit a sensitive topic (Simpson 2004: 45).

3. Modal of Analysis

This section involves the development of a model which purports to analyze banter through recourse to certain strategies and devices via which it is realized in the two selected plays. These include the following speech act strategies: (1) teasing, (2) mocking, (3) insulting, and (4) joking or jesting in a playful manner as well as the rhetorical devices of (1) symbolism, (2) pun, (3) simile, (4) imagery, and (5) metaphor. The model of analysis can be represented in the following diagram:

```
                              ┌──────────┐
                              │  Banter  │
                              └────┬─────┘
               ┌───────────────────┴───────────────────┐
       ┌───────────────────┐                   ┌───────────────────┐
       │ Speech act        │                   │ Rhetorical devices│
       │ strategies        │                   │                   │
       └───────────────────┘                   └───────────────────┘
```

Speech act strategies: Teasing, Mocking, joking, Insulting

Rhetorical devices: Symbolism, Metaphor, Pun, Imagery, Simile

functions:
- Showing intimacy and closeness
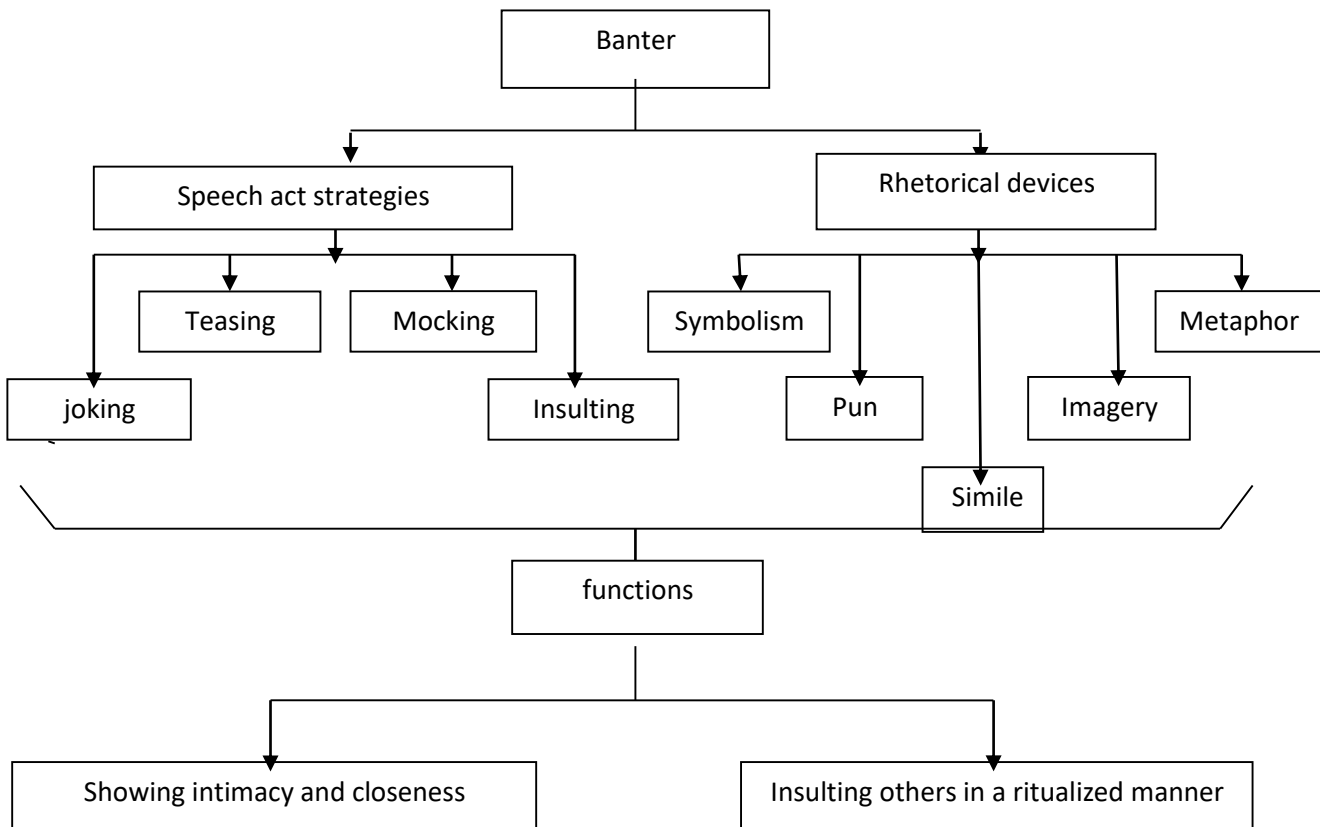- Insulting others in a ritualized manner

Figure (1): Pragmatic analysis of banter

In the analysis of the two plays, Leech's banter principle is adopted. However, Leech's argument that banter only arises in interactions between intimates or friends is set aside and Bousfield', that banter is not only restricted between intimates, will be taken into consideration. It will be shown that there are various instances in which banter arises in interaction between different characters in the plays, not necessarily intimates.

4. Data of the Study

Two plays by Shakespeare are chosen as the data of the study so as to analyze the topic in question. The two plays are: *"Much Ado about Nothing"* and *"The Taming of the Shrew"*. These two plays are specifically chosen because they represent an example of witty banter as has been mentioned by Shakespeare himself.

5. Data Analysis

5.1 "Much Ado about Nothing"

(Text 1)

"Benedick: Good keep your ladyship still in that mind! So some gentlemen or other shall escape a predestinate scratched face"

"Beatrice: Scratching could not make it worse, an twere such a face as yours were"

"Benedick: Well, you are a rare parrot-teacher"

"Beatrice: A bird of my tongue is better than a beast of yours"

"Benedick: I would my horse had the speed of your tongue, and so good a continuer. But keep your way, I God's name; I have done"

A kind of chirpy war is obvious between Benedick and Beatrice. Whenever they are together, they banter each other. Each one picks up the other's words, twists them, and hurls them back. There is a special kind of relationship between Benedick and Beatrice. Benedick wants to court Beatrice, and she refuses him though she loves him because he abandoned her before. Beatrice is niece to the Governor of Messina, Leonato. She is quick-witted and enjoys banter.

Benedick and Beatrice are witty characters; they banter each other whenever they meet. One eminent feature of their attacks upon each other is their ability to extend a metaphor throughout lines of dialogue for the sake of banter- which is realized by mocking or insulting. Benedick banters Beatrice saying that if she keeps in this mind, no one will court her because no one would like having his face scratched. She, in turn, uses Benedick's words saying that his face is scratched. Benedick uses a metaphor calling her "a rare parrot teacher" and she responds "a bird of my tongue is best than a beast of yours". Benedick continues referring to animals in his response wishing that his horse had the speed and endurance of Beatrice's tongue. Thus, in this extract, Benedick and Beatrice are bantering each other through exchanging insults realized by metaphors- references to animals. Accordingly, banter is expressed through the use of the speech act strategy of insulting and the rhetorical device of metaphor.

(Text 2)

"Watchman: We will rather sleep than talk: we know what belongs to a watch"

"Dogberry: Why, you speak like an ancient and most quiet watchman; for I cannot see how sleeping should offend"

Dogberry is the chief policeman of Messina. He is a comedic entertainer with an eccentric persona. He keeps talking to Watchman, (another policeman). Watchman is sleepy; he wants to sleep rather than talk. He asks Dogberry to stop talking and to eat his tongue. Dogberry banters him saying that he speaks like an ancient watchman. Banter, thus, is achieved by the speech act strategy of mocking and the rhetorical device of simile.

(Text 3)

"Dan Pedro: Good morrow, Benedick. Why, what's the matter. That you have such a February face, so full of frost, of storm and cloudiness?"

"Claudio: I think he thinks upon the savage bull. Tush fear not man; We''ll tip thy horns with gold. And all Europa shall rejoice at thee and once Europa did at lusty Jove, when he would play the noble beast in love"

"Benedick: Bull Jove, had an amiable low And some such strange bull leape'd your father's cow, And got a calf in that same noble feat. Much like to you, for you have just his bleat"

Pedro, Claudio, and Benedick are close friends. Benedick falls in love with Beatrice and wants to court her but she is playful and obstinate. She insists on refusing him because he has let her down before. Pedro and Claudio banter Benedick saying that he looks pale, with a February face. Claudio banters him saying that he is thinking of the savage bull. Claudio calls Beatrice a savage bull because she is obstinate. He continues his banter saying that Benedick is a cuckold with horns. Horns are an interesting symbol in the play. They are things that wild beasts have. This symbol is used here for the sake of banter.

Pedro banters Benedick saying "In time the savage bull doth bear the yoke." Throughout the play, this image represents a reference to marriage, that is, the bachelor is tamed by responsibility when he gets married like the liberated and arrogant bull which is tamed by the farmer. The horns of the bull are another part of the image: the cuckold—or man who is cheated by his wife—was portrayed as having horns outgrowing from his head. Altogether, "the image of the tamed bull suggests that marriage robs a man of his freedom, turns him into a beast of burden, and comes with a risk of cuckold-like shame". However, the meaning of the image converts as Claudio assures Benedick that his horns will be "tipped with gold," like those of Jove (Zeus), who transformed himself into a bull to seduce Europa. First, the bull stands for a humiliated beast of burden, but by the end becomes connected with the mythological sexual adventures of Zeus, King of the Gods. Hence, banter is realized through resorting to the speech act strategy of teasing and the rhetorical devices of symbolism and imagery.

(Text 4)

"Don Pedro: When shall we set the savage buu's horns on the sensible Benedick's head?"

"Claudio: Yea, and text underneath, here dwells Benedick the married man?"

"Benedick: Fare you well, boy: you know my mind. I will leave you now to your gossip-like humor: you break jests as braggarts do their blades, which god be thanked, hurt no"

Pedro and Claudio are bantering Benedick who is falling in love with Beatrice. Banter is intended to show intimacy between friends. Pedro asks when they shall put the savage bull horns on Benedick's head. He uses the savage bull horn as a symbol of marriage resembling Benedick to a bull. Benedick, in turn, banters them saying that they like gossip and he will leave them to their "gossip-like humor". He also tells them that they jest as braggarts. Consequently, banter is expressed through recourse to the speech act strategy of teasing and the use of symbolism as a rhetorical figure of speech.

5.2 "The Taming of the Shrew"

(Text 5)

"(Enter Biondello)"

"Lucentio: Here comes the rogue"

" Sirrah, where have you been?"

"Biondello: Where have I been? Nay, how now, where are you? Master, has my fellow Tranio stolen your clothes? Or you stolen his? Or both? Pray, what's the news?"

"Lucentio: Sirrah, come hither. Tis no time to jest"

Lucentio is a young man who wants to marry Bianca. He masquerades himself as Cambio, a teacher, to woo Bianca secretly. Biondello is Lucentio's intimate fellow. As soon as Biondello enters, Lucentio banters him saying "Here comes the rogue". When Lucentio asks Biondello where he is, Biondello jokingly asks him the same question "Where are you?" Lucentio disguises himself in order to go to Bianca's house. Thus, Biondello banters him again by asking him whether Tranio, the servant, has stolen his clothes, or whether he has stolen Tranio's ones. Thus, impolite banter in this extract is realized by the speech act strategy of joking or jesting and by the use of metaphor " the rogue". It is a sign of emotional closeness and intimacy indicating small social distance and low power values which are associated with no need for politeness.

Text 6

"(Enter Petruchio and his man Grumio)"

"Petruchio: Verona, for a while I take my leave to see my friends in Padua, but of all my best beloved and approval friend, Hortensio. And t trow this is his house. Here, Sirrah Gumio, knock, I say"

"Grumio: Knock sir? Whom should I knock? Is there any man has rebused your worship?"

"Petruchio: Villain, I say, knock me at his gate and rap me well, or I'll knock your knave s pate"

"Grumio: My master is grown quarrelsome. I should knock you first and then I know after who comes by the worst"

"Petruchio: Will it not be? Faith, Sirrah, an you ll not knock, I ll ring it. I ll try how you can sol, fa, and sing it. (He wrings him by the ears. Grumio falls)"

"Gramio: Help, mistress, help! My master is mad"

"Petruchio: Now knock when I bid you, Sirrah villain"

Petruchio and his man, Grumio, come to Padua. They arrive at Hortensio's house. Hortensio is Petruchio's best friend. Petruchio asks Grumio to knock on the door of Hortensio's house. Grumio banters Petruchio through punning. He willfully misinterprets the word "knock" taking it to mean "hit" or "punch", which is why he asks "whom should I knock? Is there a man who has rebused your worship?" Grumio "seems to play the stereotypical role of a witty Shakespearian servant who engages

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development-UK

in such banter with his master, who is not much better". Here, banter is playful. The main idea is to have fun. The word "knock" is used humorously to wrongfully imply the action of punching someone. This example shows that banter not only arises in interaction between intimates. It even arises in instances of bantering via punning between masters and servants.

Text 7

"Curtis: Is my master and his wife coming, Grumio?"

"Grumio: Oh, ay, and therefore fire, fire! Cast on no water"

"Curtis: Is she so hot a shrew as she reported?"

"Grumio: She was, good Curtis, before this frost. But thou know st winter tames man, woman, and beast for it hath tamed my old master and my new mistress and myself, fellow Curtis"

"Curtis: Away you three-inch fool, I'm no beast"

"Grumio: Am I but three-inch? Why, thy horn is a foot, and so long am I, at the least"

Grumio who is Petruchio's servant is busy making a fire inside Petruchio's country abode and he is complaining about the cold in preparation for his master and mistress' arrival. Curtis, another servant, who has not met the new bride asks if she is as shrew as reported. Grumio responds that she was shrew, but the cold journey has tentatively tamed her. He claims that Winter tames man, woman, and a beast. By saying "a beast", Grumio is bantering Curtis saying that he is a beast. Curtis, on the other hand calls Grumio "three- inch fool". Both Grumio and Curtis are servants at Petruchio's house. They are bantering each other for the sake of fun. In their speech banter is performed via the use of metaphors.

Text 8

"Petruchio: Come, come, you wasp, I faith you are too angry"

"Katherine: If I be wasipish, best beware my sting"

"Petruchio: My remedy then is to pluck it out"

"Katherine: If the fool could find where it lies"

"Petruchio: Who knows not where a wasp does wear his sing? In his tail"

"Katherine: In his tongue"

The exchange between Petruchio and Katherine takes place during the first time they met. Their exchange is a special display of witty banter. They both mock each other with Petruchio utilizing pun in order to detonate Katherine's standoffishness and anger. The other characters in the play used to compare Katherine to a dangerous wild animal, that is why Petruchio calls her a "wasp" just to make fun of her. Katherine responds saying that if she is a wasp, he should be careful of her sting. He confidently says that he will simply pluck her sting out, rendering her incapable of harming him. In saying this, Petruchio basically "throws down a challenge to Katherine acknowledging his intent to tame her". Katherine replies that Petruchio is too much of a fool even to know where a wasp's sting is. Katherine's banter is realized via the speech act strategy of insulting and the rhetorical figure of metaphor, i.e., saying that Petruchio is a fool. Her remark refers to her sharp tongue, but Petruchio turns her remark into a sexual insinuation by insisting that "a wasp wears his sting in his tail". Katherine quickly belies him saying "in his tongue."

CONCLUSIONS

1. Banter, which is a form of mock-impoliteness, can be pragmatically realized via the speech act strategies of joking, teasing, mocking, and insulting as well as the rhetorical devices of pun, symbolism, imagery, simile, and metaphor.

2. Banter functions as a means of establishing or maintaining a bond of familiarity and closeness. It correlates with a low position on the scale of politeness; that is to say the more intimate the relationship, the less important it is to be polite. Thus, lack of politeness becomes a sign of intimacy which is not planned to cause degradation. Using banter to show intimacy, for example, is evident in text (5) where Lucentio says "Here comes the rogue" as Biondello enters. Banter, sometimes, is intended to insult others in a ritualized manner. This is evident in the exchange between Petruchio and Katherine in text (8).

3. Banter involves the exchange of word play with a joking element. It is slightly negative in tone. Text (6) is a clear example where pun is used for the sake of banter. The text shows how a witty Shakespearian servant engaged in a witty banter with his master. Moreover, the text shows that banter is not only restricted between intimates; it even arises in instances of punning between masters and servants.

4. Banter could be realized via the use of witty insults and through resorting to metaphors. This is clear in text (1) where Benedick banters Beatrice saying "You are a rare parrot-teacher". Exchanging insults in text (7) is also used for the sake of bantering and making fun wherein Grumio insults Curtis and uses a metaphor-calling him "a beast", and Curtis returns the insult by calling Grumio "a three-inch fool".

5. Banter could be realized by the strategy of teasing through the use of symbols and images. This is obvious in text (3) where the symbol of "horns" is used for the sake of banter. Similarly, banter, in text (4) is intended to show intimacy through the use of the same symbol.

REFERENCES

Blake, Barry. (2007). Playing with Words: Humour in the English Language. London: Oakville Equinox.

Bousfield, Derek. (2008). Impoliteness in Interaction. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Cruse, Alan. (2006). A Glossary of Semantics and Pragmatics. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Culpeper, Jonathan. (1996). 'Towards an anatomy of impoliteness'. Journal of Pragmatics, 25 (3): 349-367.

Gibbs, Raymond and Hebert Colston. (2007). Irony in Language and Thought: A Cognitive Science Reader. New York: Erlbaum.

Holmes, Janet. (2000). 'Politeness, power, and provocation: how humour functions in the workplace. Discourse studies, 2 (2) 159- 185.

Leech, Geoffrey. (1983). Principles of Pragmatics. New York: Longman Group Limited.

McDonald, Skye. (1999). 'Exploring the process of inference generations in sarcasm: a review of normal and clinical studies'. Brain and Language, 68 (3): 486-506.

Norrick, Neal R. (1993). Conversational Joking: Humour in Everyday Talk. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Nowik, Ewa.. (2005). 'Politeness of the impolite: relevance theory, politeness and banter'. In Korzeniowska, Aniela and Malgorzata Gregorzewska (ed), Relevance Studies in Poland. Warsaw: Warswa University.

Simpson, Paul. (2004). Stylistics. London: Roultedge.

Wilson, Deidre and Dan Sperber. (2012). Meaning and Relevance. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.