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The expression of passive aggression in family conflicts in selected American plays

Abstract

The article presents sample forms of expression of passive aggressiveness in family conflicts in selected American plays. It briefly describes the notion of passive aggression, dating back to post-war era and originally used to denote passive resistance against superiors. The linguistic expression of passive aggression relies mostly on indirectness as a means of avoiding confrontation, hurting the other person subtly though with a clear intention. Frameworks from the fields of pragmatics and pragmastylistics, such as the concept of face, implicature, theories of (im) politeness or turn-taking facilitate the understanding of how passive-aggressive utterances are constructed and expressed and provide implicit characterization cues that help the reader infer the character participating in conflict.

Keywords: American drama, pragmatics, pragmastylistics, characterization

1. Introduction

There is a wide-spread opinion that linguistics benefits from being approached as an open discipline; that is, one that does not disregard topics, frameworks or findings from other disciplines. Such transdisciplinary approach is well visible in pragmatics, which is concerned with the use of language and the relation of the meaning to the users of the language – how the speaker communicates their intended meaning and how the hearer interprets what was communicated.

Insights from other disciplines and fields of study, e.g., psychology or philosophy, contribute to pragmatic analyses and influence pragmatic frameworks. One such framework which reflects the pragmatic assumptions of co-construction of meaning and dependence on context is (im)politeness. Spelled in this way, (im)politeness suggests a continuum which has replaced the traditional separate approaches to politeness and impoliteness. It also indicates, in line with Kadar and Haugh[1], that (im)politeness

[1] D.Z. Kadar, M. Haugh, *Understanding Politeness*, Cambridge 2013.

research is an increasingly multidisciplinary endeavor. Following this basic assumption, new perspectives and areas of interest have been opening to pragmatic research. Pragmastylistics, for example, combines pragmatic and stylistic approaches to reveal how the language used by literary characters constructs power relations, contributes to their characterization and how it reflects real-life conversations, which, in turn, allows analysts to apply pragmatic frameworks to literary dialogue[2]. The selected framework of (im)politeness, complemented with other major pragmatic theories used for interpreting human interaction, will be returned to in subsequent sections.

2. Fictional dialogue as data

For literary dialogues, Lambrou[3] points out, "one way of maintaining realism in the talk between characters is to present talk with the structure of real, naturally occurring interaction". Dramatic dialogue, for example, is said to be like natural conversation, but somewhat 'tidied up'[4], which means that whenever such features of spontaneous interaction as hesitation, repetition, overlaps, slips, false starts, voiced fillers appear in a drama, they are there for a good reason – communicating something about characters and their relations. While naturally occurring interaction is unprepared, unrehearsed, and often simply obscure to an accidental overhearer, dramatic dialogue is more of a "concentrated and condensed experience extracted, as it were, from a continuum which is never going to be presented in its entirety to the audience"[5]. Drama is a genre that is intended to be performed (spoken), so dramatic dialogues have the power to create personalities, speakers convey hidden meanings, hearers infer them, and the level of interaction between characters reflects the same rules and mechanics of conversations as in naturally occurring exchanges. M. Short noticed that "in both real and dramatic talk we use our observation of conversational behavior to infer the things people suggest (as opposed to what they state) when they

[2] M. Lambrou, *Stylistics, conversation analysis and the cooperative principle*, [in:] *The Routledge Handbook of Stylistics*, ed. M. Burke, London and New York 2014, p. 136.

[3] Ibidem, p. 138.

[4] Ibidem, p. 139.

[5] R. Piazza, *Dramatic discourse approached from a conversational analysis perspective: Catherine Heyes's "Skirmishes" and other contemporary plays*, „Journal of Pragmatics" 1999, 31, p. 1001.

talk"[6]. This principle of contextual embeddedness means that drama has two levels of discourse: one is the character-character interaction, and the other the playwright-reader (audience) level, and as such, it invites the readers (audience) to draw on their communicative competence as much as their linguistic competence in interpreting dramatic dialogues. The major differences between spontaneous natural interaction and dramatic dialogue can be summarized on the basis of Elam[7] as follows: (1) the convention requires dramatic dialogue to be more ordered syntactically, as being the vehicle of action, it needs to be followed by the audience; more realistic, fragmentary, obscure speech would make it much more difficult; (2) dramatic dialogue is meant to be informative and descriptive (cf., contextual embeddedness) rather than phatic; (3) the features of the turn-taking system such as gaps, overlaps, floor control or interruptions are not intended so much to be an authenticating device as an element of characterization and foregrounding of plot development.

3. Passive aggression

In psychology, active aggression has been investigated extensively for many years, but the concept of passive-aggressive personality and passive-aggressive behavior has not been researched to such an extent, which led to its exclusion from the official register of mental disorders. Schanz et al. refer to the origin of the concept of passive aggression, which was first used to describe the behavior of WW2 soldiers resisting their superiors' orders[8]. It was initially included in the 1952 *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-1)*, where it was characterized by a number of behavioral symptoms in relation to defying authority, e.g., procrastination, pouting, intentional inefficiency[9]. In the subsequent versions of the DSM the concept of *passive-aggressive personality disorder* was retained and used interchangeably with a broader *negativistic personality disorder*, gradually

[6] M. Short, *Exploring the language of poems, plays and prose*, London 1996, p. 179.

[7] K. Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, London 1980.

[8] G. Schanz et al., *Development and Psychometric Properties of the Test of Passive Aggression*, „Frontiers in Psychology" 2021, vol. 12.

[9] F.L. Coolidge and D.L. Segal *Evolution of personality disorders diagnosis in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, „Clinical Psychology Review" 1998, vol. 18, no. 5, p. 585-599.

presenting increasing difficulties in capturing its clinical significance, and in the most recent DSM-5 (2013) it was abandoned altogether as a separate label and the umbrella term *other specified and unspecified personality disorders* is now in use to encompass, among others, passive-aggressive behaviors. Thus, passive aggression is receiving a lot of attention as a pattern or tendency displayed as a trait present in other disorders, but also as a common form of expression of conflict – using apparently nonconfrontational means to convey one's negativity. This frequently involves manipulation, inaction, and indirectness. Examples of passive-aggressive behaviors may include passive resistance, complaining, feeling unappreciated, arguing, acting sullen, bitterness, resentfulness, envy, procrastination, blame shifting[10]. Undoubtedly, emotions are the essence of dramatic plots, and the selected linguistic frameworks can be used for analyses of conflict, here specifically for expressions of passive aggression in family arguments. Such analyses contribute to our understanding of character through the consideration of their communication style.

4. Inferring character

Analyses of dramatic dialogues from linguistic-pragmatic perspectives have been discussed in many works, for example: Short (1989) in Carter and Simpson (eds.), Herman (1995), Short (1996), Lowe (1998) in Culpeper, Short and Verdonk (eds.), Piazza (1999), Culpeper (2001), Bousfield (2007) in Lambrou and Stockwell (eds.), Mandala (2007), Culpeper and Fernandez-Quintanilla (2017) in Locher and Jucker (eds.), McIntyre and Bousfield (2017) in Culpeper, Haugh and Kadar (eds.). A particularly interesting pragma-stylistic approach to characterization can be found in recent works authored and co-authored by Jonathan Culpeper. He views characterization through dialogue as a process, not as a product, and suggests that we apply top-down and bottom-up processing of a text when inferring character from a literary dialogue. The top-down approach relies on our application of schemata normally used in 'real-life' interactions. McIntyre and Bousfield[11] explain a schema as a reference to our

[10] www.psychcentral.com/disorders [date of access: 20.08.2022].

[11] D. McIntyre, D. Bousfield, *(Im)politeness in Fictional Texts*, [in:] *The Palgrave Handbook of Linguistic (Im)politeness,* eds. Culpeper J., Haugh M. and D.Z. Kadar, London 2017, p. 759-784.

background knowledge, which allows us to form expectations of situations, people or places, drawing on our experience of interaction with others, as well as the media or literature. Schemata can be said to consist of frames, referring to typical, stable characteristics, and scripts, representing typical, expected course of action in a given situation (place, person). Bottom-up processing, on the other hand, relies on the reader's (viewer's, hearer's) analysis of textual cues that contribute to characterization. Culpeper[12] provided a comprehensive checklist of character cues, consolidating a number of pragmatic, sociolinguistic and stylistic perspectives. These textual cues include sets of explicit, implicit and authorial cues. Explicit characterization cues are delivered as self-presentation (that is, when a character talks about him or herself) and other-presentation (when other characters in the dialogue talk about him or her). As Culpeper[13] rightly observes, both self- and other-presentation can be unreliable; a character may present him- or herself strategically, and other-presentation may be manipulative for different reasons. Implicit characterization cues require processing effort from the reader, as they have to be derived from conversational structure, the character's choice of vocabulary and grammatical choices, paralinguistic and non-verbal features, and such sociolinguistic cues as dialect. Sometimes it is necessary to consider authorial cues such as symbolic names or certain details in the setting. Consequently, it can be seen that the notion of characterization as a process relies on adopting a variety of frameworks, and more importantly, on assuming a broad approach to context. Advocated by Kopytko[14], the notion of pancontextualism assumes the existence of internal (cognitive, affective and conative) context and external (social and physical) context of interaction. These variables can be applied to fictional situations and dialogues in order to facilitate the process of inferencing.

5. Analytic frameworks

The choice of topic of the paper – the exercise of passive aggressiveness – was motivated by the will to combine pragmastylistic analysis leading to inferences

[12] J. Culpeper, *Language and characterisation: People in plays and other texts*, Harlow 2001, p. 163-234.

[13] Ibidem.

[14] R. Kopytko, *The mental aspects of pragmatic theory: an integrative view*, Poznań 2002.

about character, made in light of quite widely discussed current considerations of personality disorders; specifically, here, passive aggressive personality disorder. The expression of aggressive behaviors undoubtedly falls into a pattern of conflictive exchanges, though it is not necessarily immediately visible. Therefore, pragmatic frameworks that account for hostile language and indirectness will be selected, namely, the framework of face, (im)politeness and implicature (which results from maxim flouts within the cooperative principle). Bearing in mind that dramatic dialogues normally abound in conflicts, the author will provide excerpts from contemporary American plays concerned with family antagonisms, where passive-aggressive behavior is demonstrated. The particular frameworks will then be referred to in discussions of the dialogues.

The notion of face is often treated as a point of departure, from which the later strategies of (im)politeness were derived. Brown and Levinson[15] define face as "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself". There are two aspects of face: one is negative face, i.e., the basic claim to territories and the right to non-distraction, interpreted as personal freedom of action and from imposition; the other one is positive face, i.e., the positive self-image, intended to be appreciated and approved of by others in conversation. Face is mutually vulnerable, so it is in both participants' interests to attend to each other's face; in this respect, face is universal. Face is also thought of as a set of wants to which participants of interaction orient themselves. Negative face is the want to have your actions unimpeded by others; positive face is the want to be liked, admired, understood, to be included, etc.[16] Originally, the framework of politeness accounted for the occurrence of the so-called face-threatening acts, which inherently damage the addressee's face and therefore need to be redressed so that the damage is minimized. Since then, there has been a growing conviction that (im)politeness is not inherent in any particular words (lexemes) or forms of language, but depends on the interactants' contextual perceptions and evaluations of the language used. Facework, moreover, should not be taken only as face-saving. For Goffman[17], whose

[15] P. Brown, S.C. Levinson, *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*, Cambridge 1987, p. 61.

[16] Ibidem.

[17] E. Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face to Face Behavior*, New York 1967, p. 12.

remarks on face are frequently quoted as the source of the definition, facework means "the actions taken by a person to make whatever he is doing consistent with face", so they should include hostility and aggression consistent with the speech activity of conflict. Brown and Levinson's concept of face as wants soon came under criticism and the term was developed to include other aspects that the hearer identifies with; in other words – all aspects that the target is face-sensitive about. Such is the framework proposed by Spencer-Oatey[18], which is developed on the foundation of theories of identity. Put simply, our identities are constructed of self-aspects, which are both cognitive (the way we want to present ourselves) and social (developing and emerging in interactions). In certain circumstances, we become face-sensitive about some self-aspects, depending for example, on how defining or how desired a given self-aspect is in a given context.

(Im)politeness is a framework that captures the fact that not all human interactions ultimately aim at social harmony and equilibrium. Originally proposed by Culpeper[19] in 1996 and significantly developed and broadened since then, it assumes that impoliteness takes place when: "(1) the speaker communicates face-attack intentionally, or (2) the hearer perceives and/or constructs behavior as intentionally face-attacking, or a combination of (1) and (2).[20]" It emphasizes the co-construction of meaning and the intention to cause conflict and disharmony. Impoliteness does not include incidental face threat, which is a by-product in a situation such as communicating critical remarks to a student; it does not include such emergent phenomena as faux-pas; finally, it excludes banter – pretended impoliteness that in fact strengthens in-group bonds. Culpeper[21] enumerates strategies designed to attack face, divided into positive and negative impoliteness super-strategies which pose threat to positive and negative face respectively. A separate category of strategies is devoted to indirect offense, performed by means of implicature (cf. below).

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[18] H. Spencer-Oatey, *Theories of identity and the analysis of face*, „Journal of Pragmatics" 2007, 39, p. 639-656.

[19] J. Culpeper, *Towards an anatomy of impoliteness*, „Journal of Pragmatics" 1996, 25, p. 349-367.

[20] J. Culpeper, *Impoliteness and entertainment in the television quiz show*: *The Weakest Link*, „Journal of Politeness Research" 2005, 1, p. 38.

[21] J. Culpeper et al., *Impoliteness revisited: with special reference to dynamic and prosodic aspects*, „Journal of Pragmatics" 2003, 35, p. 1545-1579.

Implicature is a notion connected with Grice's Cooperative Principle[22] and its four maxims that describe how a rational conversation is held: we normally say what we believe to be true (maxim of quality), we say as much as is required (maxim of quantity), we relate to what has been said before (maxim of relevance) and we speak clearly and understandably (maxim of manner). When a maxim is deliberately flouted, it gives rise to implicature, that is, the intended, but unexpressed meaning of the utterance. Therefore, as Mooney[23] notes, conversational maxims "help to understand interactions not only when followed, but also when they are not". All forms of indirect communication, such as, for example, understatement, sarcasm, metaphor, silence, speaking in quotes, contribute to the interaction as much as when the maxims are observed, on condition that the addressee has access to sufficient contextual knowledge. Cooperation then is not a matter of social goal sharing, but linguistic goal sharing. In the context of a recognized activity type – here, conflict – participants cooperate in conveying impolite beliefs, so implicatures are generated and recognized as intended. It may seem that impoliteness communicated indirectly is on principle mitigated, but Brumark[24] notices that going off-record may in fact increase the force of implicature, for example in the presence of a third party. Indirectness may flout any of the maxims under the cooperative principle. Silences, pauses, understatements flout the maxim of quantity; speech acts with void illocutionary force (when felicity conditions are not fulfilled) flout the maxim of quality; torrents of words not addressing the real issue (which Tannen calls 'wordy silences'[25]) flout the maxim of relevance; sarcasm, innuendo, speaking in quotes, abrupt changes of topic flout the maxim of manner.

Finally, aspects of turn-taking also contribute to the understanding of impolite intention in interaction, because such phenomena as unequal turn distribution

[22] H.P. Grice, *Logic and conversation*, [in:] *Speech Acts,* eds. P. Cole, J. Morgan, New York 1975, p. 41-58.

[23] A. Mooney, *Co-operation, violations and making sense*, „Journal of Pragmatics" 2004, 36, p. 905.

[24] A. Brumark, *Non-observance of Gricean maxims in family dinner table conversation*, „Journal of Pragmatics" 2006, 38, p. 1206-1238.

[25] D. Tannen, *Silence as conflict management in fiction and drama: Pinter's Betrayal and a short story, Great Wits,* [in:] *Conflict talk: Sociolinguistic investigations of arguments and conversations*, ed. A. D. Grimshaw, Cambridge 1990, p. 260-279.

and length, topic control, deliberate turn lapsing (silence as reply), interrupting or conflictive preference organization may represent expressions of impoliteness.

6. Linguistic expression of passive aggressiveness

As has been said, drama thrives on conflict. One of the selected texts, *Long Day's Journey Into Night* by Eugene O'Neill, features the Tyrone family: James Tyrone, the father, is an unfulfilled actor; Mary Tyrone, the mother, is a morphine addict – a fact concealed and denied by the male Tyrones; Jamie, the elder son, unable to find himself, works around the family's summer house for pocket money; and Edmund, the younger son, who suffers from consumption and whom Jamie considers a rival. In the words of Schiach[26], the Tyrones are bound together not by mutual love and trust, but by "a shared experience of conflict, guilt, dependencies and hatreds". O'Neill says quoted by Krasner[27] that the Tyrones, after the series of heart-breaking confrontations, remain "trapped within each other by the past, each guilty and at the same time innocent, scorning, loving, pitying each other, understanding yet not understanding at all, forgiving but still doomed never to be able to forget". Throughout the play, we see numerous examples of concealed hostility. In one example, conflict emerges rather unexpectedly. In the morning, Mary mentions Tyrone's snoring and Edmund agrees:

Edmund	I'll back you up about Papa's snoring. Gosh, what a racket!
Jamie	I heard him, too.
	He quotes, putting on a ham-actor manner.
	"The Moor, I know his trumpet."
	His mother and brother laugh.

This pattern seems characteristic of the Tyrone family. It starts out as a joke, but is soon reframed when the father takes offense, triggered by Jamie's turn. Without the knowledge of the context, the reader might think it was innocent banter, but Jamie stings his father where Tyrone is the most face-sensitive – being

[26] D. Schiach, *American Drama 1900-1990*, Cambridge 2000, p. 16.

[27] D. Krasner, *American Drama 1945-2000. An Introduction*, Malden 2006, p. 55.

typecast in a Shakespearean play which shut his career down. "Putting on a ham-actor manner", which makes others laugh, is in fact indirect, veiled hostility. As Porter[28] remarks, Jamie's line is originally said by Iago, a villainous character of *Othello*, and Tyrone's act in *Othello* was the peak of his career. The intention here is to mock Tyrone, but because it is only an implicature, it is cancellable. That is how Jamie communicates negativity, but non-confrontationally.

Tyrone	*Scathingly.*
	If it takes my snoring to make you remember Shakespeare instead of the dope sheet on the ponies, I hope I'll keep on with it.
Mary	Now, James! You mustn't be so touchy.
	Jamie shrugs his shoulders and sits down in the chair on her right.

Tyrone's sulk in response makes it clear that he feels offended, and he retorts conforming to the same passive-aggressive pattern. The "scathing" manner expresses his bitterness, and he returns the subtle dig by shaming Jamie, mentioning his horseracing bets (seeking disagreement, a positive impoliteness strategy). At the same time, Tyrone puts himself in the position of a loser, a victim, for the greater good, as if he was sacrificing himself. This exchange ends in Jamie's withdrawal, which is a form of avoidance and non-committal attitude. Speaking in quotes, a very clever form of hostile indirectness, is often used by the theatrical Tyrones and expresses their passive aggressiveness. In another argument, the father again flouts the maxim of manner, expressing his negative feelings in the form of a quote.

Tyrone	*Stares at him puzzledly, then quotes mechanically.*
	"Ingratitude, the vilest weed that grows"!
Jamie	I could see that line coming! God, how many thousand times—!
	He stops, bored with their quarrel, and shrugs his shoulders.
	All right, Papa. I'm a bum. Anything you like, so long as it stops the argument.

[28] L. Porter, *Musical and Literary Allusions in O'Neill's Final Plays*, „The Eugene O'Neill Review" 2006, vol. 28, http://www.eoneill.com/library/review/28/28j.htm [date of access: 20.10.2010].

This Shakespeare-like quote[29] is delivered "mechanically" and predictable. It refers quite clearly to Jamie's thanklessness which hurts Tyrone's ego. A typical passive-aggressive pattern communicates one's feeling unappreciated, and while Tyrone craves respect and admiration, he gets none from his family. Finally, Jamie gives up the fight and admits being 'a bum'; he is pretending, which makes this act infelicitous and manipulative, therefore displaying the features of passive aggressiveness. On another occasion, Tyrone speaks from a position of a good Catholic, or at least a believer, where his stance is juxtaposed with that of his sons. It is one of his central self-aspects, as he associates the religion with his Irish roots, and he believes that it gives him a sense of belonging. This face sensitive attribute gives Edmund an opportunity to resort to a quote, too. Aware of Mary's morphine addiction and shifting the blame for her condition, the men arrive at a point where Edmund indirectly undermines Tyrone's complacency. The point is, again, that Edmund can cancel the implicature from the quote.

Edmund	*Bitingly.*
	And did you pray for Mama?
Tyrone	I did. I've prayed to God these many years for her.
Edmund	Then Nietzsche must be right.
	He quotes from Thus Spake Zarathustra.
	"God is dead: of His pity for man hath God died."
Tyrone	*Ignores this.*

In response, Tyrone ignores Edmund's hostility. Attributable silence at transition relevance place, where some reaction is expected due to dyadic nature of the exchange, signals Tyrone's sullenness and avoidance. With regard to this type of response, another character immediately jumps to mind: Brick Pollitt, from Tennessee Williams' play *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. The Pollitt family also relies on

[29] This is said to resemble a *King Lear* line: "Ingratitude! Thou marble-hearted fiend, more hideous when thou show'st thee in a child, than the sea-monster…" (Act 1, Scene IV); perhaps because of Tyrone's other use of *King Lear*, but while talking to Edmund: "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child!" (Act 1, Scene IV) (L. Porter, *Musical and Literary*… op. cit.).

passive aggressiveness in their concealed conflict over the inheritance. In this game of appearances and hidden agendas, Brick is the master of evasiveness. Like Jamie in the above-quoted extracts, Brick pretends to cooperate. Evasive responses are discussed by Galasinski[30] and defined as "those which are semantically irrelevant to the question they are an answer to". The evasive speaker knows how to sound cooperative, so their answers comply with the rules of conversation, but it is only pretending. The evasive speaker might be talking about the same thing but choosing one of the other focal arguments of the question and responding to it, or apparently sticking to the topic without directly answering, or, pragmatically, indicate their willingness to answer but then uncooperatively move away from the question. This framework is most obvious in question-answer pairs, as the natural purpose of a question is to elicit a response, but Galasinski[31] admits that "evasive utterances are acts of non-cooperation related to the Gricean maxim of relation and, as such, will share some of its faculties with other acts of the sort". Therefore, what seems most relevant are conversational adjacency pairs that normally require responses, such as criticisms, challenges, compliments and others. Throughout the play, Brick's father, Big Daddy, tries to get through to Brick and pull down the wall between them, but Brick is stubbornly evasive. There is no open hostility in Brick's utterances, but his passive-aggressive negativity frustrates Big Daddy.

Big Daddy Today the report come in from Ochsner Clinic. Y'know what they told me?

[*His face glows with triumph*.]

The only thing they could detect with all the instruments of science in that great hospital is a little spastic condition of the colon! And nerves torn to pieces by all that worry about it.

[*Silence. The two men stare at each other. A woman laughs gaily outside*.]

Brick ignores Big Daddy's attempts to dominate; he is indifferent to his triumph and does not want to participate in it. Brick knows that Big Daddy has been lied to about his condition and chooses to remain silent. Big Daddy continues his efforts, trying to elicit from Brick why he is so uncooperative and keeps asking him questions.

[30] D. Galasinski, *Pretending to cooperate. How speakers hide evasive actions*, „Argumentation" 1996, 10, p. 375.

[31] Ibidem, p. 376.

Big Daddy	If I give you a drink, will you tell me what it is you're disgusted with, Brick?
Brick	Yes, sir, I will try to.
	[*The old man pours him a drink and solemnly passes it to him*.]
	[*There is silence as Brick drinks*.]

Again, there is silence. Alcohol, contrary to Big Daddy's expectations, does not make Brick any more talkative. Brick pretends to cooperate and fails to address the issue. He answers the questions but evades them at the same time. Big Daddy has no influence on his son. Another example, below, shows how Brick pretends his willingness to respond, but his responses are non-informative and can be interpreted as passive resistance, stubbornness, avoidance – in other words, the characteristic inaction rather than action.

Brick	A drinking man's someone who wants to forget he isn't still young an' believing.
Big Daddy	Believing what?
Brick	Believing….
Big Daddy	Believing *what?*
Brick	[*stubbornly evasive*] Believing. …

No wonder then that Big Daddy's attempts are dampened. Brick's insensitivity to his father's endeavors is reminiscent of another form of emotional manipulation, the so-called gaslighting. The way that gaslighting works in interpersonal communication is making the other person believe that what they think happened did not really happen, making them second guess how they feel, question their self-esteem, wonder what is wrong with them. Linguistically, these utterances may have the form of challenges, accusations, as well as all kinds of indirect impoliteness. Big Daddy, too, uses this strategy of passive aggressiveness.

Big Daddy	You started drinkin' when your friend Skipper died.
	[*Silence for five beats. Then Brick makes a startled movement (…)*]
Brick	What are you suggesting?
Big Daddy	I'm suggesting nothing.

By responding that he is suggesting nothing, he in fact suggests very strongly that Brick's alcohol addiction dates back to his best friend's suicide, suggesting there was a homosexual relationship between the two. Brick is startled and confused, at first unable to understand, and then gets cut off by Big Daddy. In another play, *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller, we witness many conflictive exchanges between father, Willy Loman, and one his sons, Biff. Similarly, here Willy gaslights Biff, asking a manipulative fallacious question, a face-damaging trap, whose presupposition is expressed in the so-called extreme case formulation[32] ('always').

Willy	They laugh at me, heh? Go to Filene's, go to the Hub, go to Slattery's Boston. Call out the name Willy Loman and see what happens! Big Shot!
Biff	All right, Pop.
Willy	Big!
Biff	All right!
Willy	Why do you always insult me?
Biff	I didn't say a word. [*to Linda*] Did I say a word?
Linda	He didn't say anything, Willy.

Willy's question leaves Biff wondering where, how, and why he insulted his father, and asks his mother to confirm that his perception is correct and there is nothing wrong with him. He addresses the 'why', but not the 'always', which simply reflects Willy's emotional state. To prevent the escalation of conflict, Biff also pretends to cooperate and agrees with Willy. A similar fallacious question is later posed by Biff. In this excerpt, he questions Willy's authority and needles his father indirectly touching upon a face-sensitive topic: Willy's affair from the past that only the two of them know about.

Biff	[*starting left for the stairs*] Oh, Jesus, I'm going to sleep!
Willy	[*calling after him*] Don't curse in this house!
Biff	[*turning*] Since when did you get so clean?

[32] A. Pomeranz, *Agreeing and disagreeing with assessments: some features of preferred/dispreferred turn shapes*, [in:] *Structures of Social Action: Studies in Conversation Analysis*, eds. J. M. Atkinson, J. Heritage, Cambridge 1984, p. 57–101.

The very use of 'since when' is manipulative, as it presupposes that Willy at some point was not clean. This is obviously passive-aggressive, referring to Willy's history that others have no idea about. This fact from the past also implicitly characterizes Willy as having passive-aggressive personality traits – he kept his affair hidden, procrastinating and unable to get to grips and face the issue. Willy's caustic comments directed at Biff communicate his negativity: "Ah, you're counting your chickens again", "Even your grandfather was better than a carpenter", "What're you, takin' over this house?", "And whose fault is that?" etc. Another well-known play, Edward Albee's Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf, abounds in examples of passive-aggressive remarks; in fact, all characterization cues according to Culpeper comprise the picture of George and Martha as an embittered married couple, entangled in a game of illusion. The action of the play takes place early one night, as Martha and George return from the university faculty party. They live on the campus of a small New England university. Martha informs George that they will have guests in a moment: a new math professor and his wife, though it later turns out that he is in the biology department. The guests, Nick and Honey, inadvertently become witnesses and participants in George and Martha's hell of a marriage. While Martha more freely uses open aggression, George is more passive-aggressive. His turns at talk directed at Martha appear to be neutral, non-face threatening, but considering the context, especially the shared cognitive context, i.e., their shared history, as well as the presence of a third party, George's utterances are in fact expressions of hostility, veiled in fake politeness. For example, when Martha brings up a sensitive topic (a punch fight in which she knocked George down), we first see George fuming inside, but then he pretends to cooperate by inviting Martha to tell the story. His encouraging "you're good at it" sounds almost threatening and the leaves the reader/audience, as well as Martha, wondering what George meant by it.

Martha	Hey George, tell'em about the boxing match we had!
George	[*slamming his drink down, moving towards the hall*]: Christ!
Martha	George! Tell'em about it!
George	[*with a sick look on his face*]: You tell them, Martha. You're good at it.

It feels like he is one step away from revealing something that would make Martha regret she started it. However, Martha's orders, humiliating comments that make George feel uncomfortable, trigger mostly his passive aggression. It is visible in some actions, as in the example above – George slams his drink and leaves. In the scene where Nick and Honey ring the doorbell and the hosts are arguing, George manages to casually ridicule Martha:

George	[…] Isn't it nice that some people won't come breaking into other people's houses even if they *do* hear some subhuman monster yowling at'em from inside…?
Martha	FUCK YOU! [*Simultaneously with Martha's last remark, George flings open the front door. Honey and Nick are framed in the entrance. There is a brief silence, then…]*
George	[*Ostensibly a pleased recognition of Honey and Nick, but really satisfaction at having Martha's explosion overheard*]: Ahhhhhhhhhhh!

Opening the door at such a moment was like a trap. The intention is easily deniable, but the satisfaction that George feels is true. Whereas Martha is more direct and uses identifiable output strategies of impoliteness such as name calling, snubbing, selecting a sensitive topic, disassociating from George, openly ridiculing or invading his space, George is able to express the same negativity but off record. He picks Martha's face sensitivities and stabs her where it is sure to hurt. They are both middle-aged, though George is six years younger. He is 46 and Martha is 52, which is hardly discernible. When they criticize one another's appearance and Martha says she has got more of her own teeth than he has, George responds with: "I suppose it's pretty remarkable… considering how old you are", as if he could not help it. It is not clear whether the pause is there because George hesitates or because he wants the effect to be stronger. Martha calls him derogatory terms throughout the play ("flop", "sourpuss", "you lousy little…", "you miserable…"), but George expresses his criticism in the form of e.g., irony or understatement, as when Martha, with overdone enthusiasm, invites Honey and Nick to come inside:

Nick	[*Without expression*] Well, now, perhaps we shouldn't have come…
Honey	Yes… it *is* late, and…
Martha	Late! Are you kidding? Throw your stuff down anywhere and c'mon in.
George	[*Vaguely… walking away*]: Anywhere… furniture, floor… doesn't make any difference around this place.

When Martha is absent (she goes upstairs), George provides the audience with some other-characterization of his wife, in the same passive-aggressive manner, as he is talking to Nick. Martha mistakenly announced Nick as a math professor, and when he corrects the information, George says, as if jokingly: "Martha is seldom mistaken… maybe you *should* be in the Math Department, or something." In this rather biting, gossip-like way, he exposes her annoying domineeringness. Martha changes her dress upstairs to look sexier, to which George reacts: "Why, Martha… your Sunday chapel dress!" and manages to, on the one hand, acknowledge her effort, and on the other, mock her in front of the guests.

7. Conclusion

In view of the above, it can be said that the psychological concept of passive aggression can be traced in dramatic dialogues with the use of pragmatic and pragmastylistic approaches. The above-quoted passive-aggressive behaviors are linguistically realized generally as indirect impoliteness, conveyed by means of implicature, because its main advantage, in the eyes of the perpetrator, is its cancellability. Regarded in the broad context of the situation, these utterances have obvious hostile intention, but their characteristic feature is that they are not overtly disruptive. Their intention is to hurt the addressee (the target) by attacking their face sensitivities, which may not even be obvious to other participants. The examples taken from dramatic texts all share the situational context of family disputes. The interactants are close to each other and consequently, know where to hit the other to hurt the most; yet they are distant at the same time – emotionally detached, perpetuating the negativity and conflict by the avoidance to address and solve the issues that stand between them. Such passive-aggressive utterances are implicit cues that might inform pragmastylistic characterization (Culpeper 2001), in particular when they constitute a pattern typical

of a personality disorder. Their conversational structure, strategies of (im)politeness, lexical choices, non-verbal cues included in stage directions cannot go unnoticed and contribute to our inferring of the character.

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Wyraz biernej agresji w konfliktach rodzinnych w wybranych dramatach amerykańskich

Streszczenie

Tematem artykułu jest wyrażanie biernej agresji w konfliktach rodzinnych przez bohaterów wybranych dramatów amerykańskich. Pojęcie biernej agresji wywodzi się z okresu powojennego, a początkowo używano go w odniesieniu do przejawów biernego oporu wobec przełożonych. Językowy obraz biernej agresji tworzą głównie wypowiedzi nie wprost, unikanie konfrontacji, ranienie drugiej osoby w sposób celowy, choć zamaskowany. Teorie z zakresu pragmatyki i pragmastylistyki, takie jak koncepcja twarzy, implikatura, teorie (nie)uprzejmości językowej czy organizacja konwersacji ułatwiają zrozumienie konstrukcji wypowiedzi bierno-agresywnych i dostarczają wskazówki tekstowe charakteryzujące rozmówców.

Słowa kluczowe: dramat amerykański, pragmatyka, pragmastylistyka, charakterystyka