

Study of Power Relation in the “The Salesman” Analysis of the Studied Subjects’ actions (Cognition of Strategies and Techniques)

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Abstract: *Everyday life has intertwined with the kinds of relations that people have with each other. When these relations become power relations, people try to influence the relationship process. This article have examined the power relation in the “The Salesman”, produced by Asghar Farhadi, and has analyzed the power relations that has been formed between subjects- Emad and the aggressor- and has attempted to answer these main questions: How did the subjects affect each other in this relation of power, and what strategies and techniques did they use to exercise power? To answer these questions, Foucault's views were chosen as the theoretical framework and the method of critical analysis of discourse of Fairclough was chosen as the research method. The unit of analysis in this study was the text of the conversations of these two subjects. The result of the research shows that the aggressor and Emad used dominant and antagonistic approaches to influence each other. The comparison of these actions showed that although the aggressor tried to use his dominant approach to advance his purposes, Emad confronted him with a rival approach. Eventually, Findings show that Emad, after many interactions, was able to turn his strategies into a "winning" strategy by changing his techniques.*

Keywords: *power, power relation, subject, technique, strategy, Foucault, Farhadi.*

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Introduction

Since the formation of social life, "relationship" has always been one of the most important aspects of human life. Sociology study “all those aspects of life designated by the adjective “social.” These aspects of social life never simply occur; they are organized processes. They can be the briefest of everyday interactions” Navabakhsh, 2015: 1).

Indeed, every day and social life is intertwined with the kinds of relationships between people with equal or unequal situations such as differences in personal, social, economic and cultural characteristics that can underlie the emergence of power in the relationships.

As many philosophers and sociologists study the “power” and “relation” from different perspectives, the artists, especially in the cinema, use these concepts as the main basis of their works. Accordingly, Films have always been a field for the sociological study of the relationships and researchers have analyzed these relations.

This article tries to study "power relations" in Asghar Farhadi's movie “The Salesman”. Asghar Farhadi is one of the most famous Iranian screenwriters and directors who focuses on human-social and moral issues. He depicts moral issues, such as assault, with a focus on relation and shows contradictions and confrontations of ordinary people with different characteristics and abilities in such relations.

“The Salesman” is one of the most important of Farhadi’s works that deals with the subject of the assault. Farhadi portrays a man who has assaulted a woman and this issue formed a relationship between him and two subjects (Rana and Emad), who have been directly (Rana) and indirectly (Emad)

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affected by this problem. In fact, the core of this film is how deal with the aggressor; forgive or punish.

Accordingly, this article has analyzed the power relations that has been formed between these subjects and has attempted to answer these main questions: How did the subjects affect each other in this relation of power, and what strategies and techniques did they use to exercise power? To answer these questions, Foucault's views were chosen as the theoretical framework and the method of critical analysis of discourse of Fairclough was chosen as the research method.

This research done because of different reasons; first of all, assault has the serious consequences such as psychological problems on the victim and her/his family- according to scientific research. For this reason, it seems that how to deal with the aggressor is one of the important aspects that should be addressed; on the other hand, "the media in new societies help people in interpreting organized data by creating the experimental framework and general cultural attitudes, and create the way that people would be able to interpret social life." (Navabakhsh, Mohammadi, Golkar, 2013: 39), so it is important to study the cinema (film) as a media that has these characteristics. In addition, showing how to deal with such an issue by Asghar Farhadi as a filmmaker adds its importance, because he was able to engage the general cinema audience and world cinema critics with this film- This film has won the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film.

Theoretical framework

In this research, in this article, Foucault's views on "power" and "power relations" have been the basis of research. "Power" is the most fundamental concept in Foucault's studies. The importance of this concept in Foucault's system of thought can be found in his statement: "For me, power is the problem that has to be resolved" (Foucault, 1988: 104). He addresses this question: "how is it exercised, what exactly happens when someone exercises power over another?" (Foucault, 1988: 102).

And these analysis moves "towards the definition of the particular realm formed by power relations, and towards the tools that make its analysis possible" (Foucault, 1978, v. 1:82).

According to Foucault power is not "an additional structure over society" but it is rooted in the whole social network, present everywhere, and present in every moment and every relationship. He nearly considers every human relationship as a power relation. In his view these relations can exist in various forms such as family relations, within an institution, between the ruling class and the subordinate class (Foucault, 2007 a: 109-108, 2007 b: 136 and 157, 2011 a: 429).

He believes for a relationship to be exactly a power relation, the simultaneous presence of two dimensions is necessary:

- A) "other" (the one on whom power is exercised) is accepted and preserved as the subject of action to the end;
- B) In front of the power relation, a full range of possible answers, reactions, effects and initiatives should be opened" (Foucault, 2011a: 426).

In these analysis of power, Foucault uses the three concepts of "subject", "strategy", and "technique" which are briefly explained below.

Foucault believes that the subject is constructed in real actions (Foucault, 2011a: 493). In his view, the "subject" has two meanings: "subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to." (Dreyfus, Rabinow, 1983: 212)

Foucault defines the "strategy" as "the choice of winning solutions", and considers the mechanisms used in power relations "as" strategies. He believes that there is at least one strategy of struggle within power relations, and this strategy creates a boundary for power relations. (Foucault, 1390a: 434-432). And he also defines the techniques of power and self in this way: Power techniques determine the behavior of individuals, subordinate them to specific goals or to function and self-techniques allow people, alone or with the help of others, to perform a number of operations on their body and soul, thoughts, behaviors, and ... (Foucault, 2011a: 368).

He calls the two techniques of "power" and "self", "Governmentality"; means to "structure the possible sphere of action of others" and to manage their behavior (Foucault, 2017a: 144 and 58-57).

In this section, the most important theoretical concepts of Foucault were briefly explained and in the following, the power relations between the subjects will be studied on this basis.

Literature review

A review theoretical studies of Asghar Farhadi's cinema has always been highly regarded and many researches and articles have been published about his works, but a small number of these studies have focused on the "The Salesman". In the following some of these researches will be mentioned.

Amiri and Golkar (2007) have written the article entitled "An Analysis of Inter-textual References in Asghar Farhadi's The Salesman". The purpose of this descriptive-analytical study is to answer the question of how inter-textual references may affect our perception of the film. The findings of this study show that the main theme and conflict of the film should be sought in the contrast between tradition and modernity, which is reflected in the pattern of "father's decline" or the contrast of past and future in the film.

Gholam-Ali (2017) in a research, with a descriptive-analytical method and in four sections, examines the "Dancing in the Dust", "Beautiful City", "Fireworks Wednesday", "About Eli", "The Separation", "The Past" and "The Salesman". He emphasizes that Farhadi is constantly raising issues in his films. The author considers some objects, gestures, people and elements that are present in most of Farhadi's films. He also believes that Farhadi's cinema is close to modern tragedy and narrates contemporary Iranian man. In the other part, he considers the commonalities in the works of Farhadi and Dostoevsky and comparatively studies "The Salesman" with the novels "The Double", "Notes from Underground" and "Crime and Punishment".

Kasraei and Mehrvarzi (2017) have written an article entitled "Representing the Social Role of Women in Post-Revolutionary Iranian Cinema" in which they have studied the two films "A Cube of Sugar" and "The Salesman". The purpose of this study is to identify "how to represent the social role of women in the cinema media and to identify the hidden ideologies behind these representations." For this purpose, two methods of Bart narrative analysis and Fisk semiotics have been used. The results show that the representations of women in both films are aimed at consolidating the gender stereotypes of Iranian society.

Honarkhah (2018) in the dissertation entitled "Psychoanalytic analysis of characters in Asghar Farhadi's films based on the Master/Slave dialectic of Hegel" in five films "Fireworks Wednesday", "About Eli", "A Separation", "The Past" and "The Salesman". The aim of this research is to analyze the dialectical relations between male and female couples in these works and the content of the films has been analyzed in a interpretive way and with a psychoanalytic approach using the Freudian and post-Freudian schools. The result obtained from this study shows that the relations between couples in the Iranian patriarchal society are represented as Master/Slave dialectical relations in the five studied films.

Research Method

This article is a qualitative research and has analyzed the data based on the method of Fairclough's critical analysis of discourse in a descriptive-analytical study.

Fairclough believes "Critical approaches differ from non-critical approaches in not just describing discursive practices, but also showing how discourse is shaped by relations of power and ideologies" (Fairclough, 2006: 12).

The Fairclough approach is one of the most codified methods for research in the fields of communication, culture, and society because it includes both a set of philosophical assumptions and methodological guidelines with linguistic analysis techniques. Fairclough considers texts to be important forms of social action, and for this reason, he considers textual analysis to be important in socio-scientific research and he believes that there is a dialectical relationship between social action and social structures. Based on this view, he emphasizes that the analysis of texts should be consistent with systematic analyzes of the social context (Jorgenson, Philips, 2012: 109-110 and Fairclough, 2010: 153-154).

Mills says "Fairclough is able to show that social relations are not simply the imposition of one discourse type or another (...), but are rather constituted by the clash of different discourse types for ascendancy within interactions" (Mills, 2001: 153)

Accordingly, Fairclough tries to analyze these relationships on three levels:

- Description is concerned with formal properties of the text;
- Interpretation is concerned with the relationship between text and interaction;
- Expalnation is concerned with interaction and social context (Fairclough, 1996: 26)

Based on these explanations and according to the main purpose of the research, the relationship between Emad and the aggressor was selected from among the various relationships in the “The Salesman” based on purposeful sampling and the texts produced by these two subjects were analyzed by Fairclough’s critical analysis of discourse.

To evaluate the validity of the research, the Wetherell and Potter’s method has been used, which is based on the two principles of coherence and usefulness. And also three principles of solid, comprehensive and transparency have been considered (Jorgensen, Philips, 2012: 280-277).

Results and discussion

Summary of the “The Salesman”

Rana, Emad's wife, was assault by an unknown man in the house that they had just moved into. After finding out about the incident, Emad decided to report the matter to the police, but was opposed by Rana. This incident caused problems in the relationship between Rana and Emad, which made life more difficult for both of them. For this reason, Emad offers Rana two ways to get out of this situation: either forgetting the incident or complaining to the police.

But with Rana's opposition, Emad pursued the matter directly. Based on the evidence left over from the night of the incident, Emad tried to find the aggressor. After finding the driver of the van, Emad makes an appointment with him under the pretext of moving, but on the day of the appointment, an old man comes to Emad and Rana's former house instead of the young man. During the conversation, Emad realized that the aggressor is the old man, not the young man.

Critical analysis of discourse of “The Salesman”

Description Level

The relation between Emad and aggressor was a personal, direct, and informally situational relationship based on Emad's revenge plan. At the beginning of the acquaintance, when Emad thought that the aggressor's son-in-law was the person who had attacked Rana, this relationship was a normative one, but his chosen tone and words were accompanied by anger and respect:

- “Wait a minute, dear father”
- “Please take your shoes off for a minute”
- “Come here. Come here”
- “Sit for a minute”

But after Emad realized that the old man was an aggressor, his words and tone changed significantly, and they were mostly insulting, threatening, and misinterpreted:

- “I will not let you go out until you tell the truth”
- “I want you to tell your wife why did you go in that house that night. Call [your wife]”
- “Go out. I will call your son-in-law and tell him”
- “Your daughter must know who her father is”

The man was not a passive subject to Emad, either when he denied the assault or when he admitted it. He tried to influence the process of relation by relying on the moral aspect:

- “I did not want to disturb anyone. Let me go”
- “I did not go to the bathroom”
- “I did not know [the previous tenant left the house]”
- “I ran away when I found out”
- “I made a mistake. I am sorry”
- “My daughter is just getting married”
- “My wife has lived with me for thirty-five years”

Examination of grammatical features used by both subjects showed that these two people do not use grammatical forms equally. Systematic asymmetries in the distribution of modes indicates the different position of both of them in this relation.

The inequality of the position of the subjects, in this power relation, had affected the ways of controlling the conversation as well as Emad and the aggressor's words and tone of. By describing, explaining, re-reading the issue, Emad forced the aggressor to accept his narration of that night.

Another important point that can be said about the relationship between Emad and the aggressor is that although these two people were from two different economic and social classes - Emad belonged to the middle class and the aggressor belonged to the lower class- but in their talk cannot see "impersonal" sentences that emphasize the separation of two groups or classes.

This is important about Emad because the issue of assault on his wife does not make him pessimistic about a class or a group - at least in his words this pessimism cannot be seen.

Interpretation Level

The position of these two subjects can be placed in these formats: Emad "questioner" and the aggressor "respondent".

According to Rana, Emad at least knows that the aggressor has entered the bathroom, so he pursues this face-to-face and personal relation based on two purposes:

- 1: Forcing the aggressor to tell the truth;
- 2: Punishing the aggressor (main purpose)

Regarding inter-textual context, two important issues should be noted; one is "assault" and the other is "infidelity". Emad and the aggressor agree on the social taboo of both of issues. This commonality shows that there is a common understanding between the two subjects about pre-existing moral presuppositions, and each of them used this inter-textual context to achieve their purpose based on their position in this relation.

On the other hand, how to deal with assault was the most important part of this relation and the subjects addressed this issue under morals discourse. Aggressor was trying to blame victim (Rana): "Your wife opened the door for me. Why did your wife open the door?"

He also asked Emad to forgive him by raising the issue of "reputation". And Emad used reputation as a means of revenge. And his insistence on this approach caused aggressor's repeated requests for forgiveness. But these requests and even Rana's support for him could not dissuade Emad from his decision.

Explanation Level

"assault" and "rape" are issues that have existed in more or less all societies, but today these two phenomena are viewed with more sensitivity. Recognizing the causes and consequences of rape for victims and their families is generally discussed in scientific studies. One of the most important issues in the discussion of assault and rape is the society's view of the victim and the aggressor.

Blaming the victim is one of the most common reactions of the people. And many efforts have been made by societies and universities to change this approach.

Niemi and Young discuss the reasons of such a reaction from the people and point to the powerful role of moral values and ideology in people's attitudes toward victims (Niemi, Young, 2016: 1227). On the other hand, one of the consequences of people's negative reactions to the victim of assault is the victim's silence. Arnes has addressed the issue of rape from this perspective. He studies why victims are silent. The results of this study show that the negative reactions of family members and friends lead to self-blame of victims and victims of rape prefer silence to telling the truth (Ahrens, 2006).

These studies and other similar examples show an attempt to change the morals discourse that focuses on "blaming the victim".

The "The Salesman" also shows this aspect of assault and rape and how to deal with the victim; forgiveness or punishment- two approaches that the aggressor and Rana (victim) on the one hand and Emad on the other represent them.

The relationship between Emad and the aggressor was a relationship between someone who had power but needed to hear the truth and someone who did not have the power but had the truth. This inequality of situation created a power relation between two subjects.

Emad, who was looking for the truth, used the strategy of pressure and the technique of threatening and confronting the victim to force the aggressor, who avoided telling the truth, to tell the truth.

After the first purpose was achieved, Emad tried to achieve his second purpose with his revenge plan - to make the aggressor's family aware of assault and infidelity in his own words.

In fact, the second purpose was to start a discussion about how to deal with the aggressor; Forgiveness or Punishment.

This conflict can be considered as a battle of wills. In the sense that the aggressor once imposed his will on Rana and Emad's life. And expressing the issue of forgiveness can be considered as an obstacle to Emad reaching his request (punishment). On the other hand, by rejecting this request, Emad not only tried not to be the subject of the "other" will again, but also he tried to construct the subjugation from the aggressor.

By choosing the strategy of "destruction" and the technique of "confession", Emad tried to force the aggressor to tell the truth to his family and returned the feeling of shame to him that himself and Rana had experienced: "Tell your family what you told me, then go."

But Rana's opposition caused Emad to change his technique from "exagoreusis" to "exomologesis".

This technique, in addition to being able to impose shame on the aggressor, was able to make him the subject of the "other" will. Thus, the Emad's strategy of "destruction" became the "winning" strategy.

According to Foucault, in addition to its external results, this technique also produces internal changes in its speaker. Such an expression could acquit the aggressor - as he, at least, was saved by the victim [Rana]. The aggressor, with his real or symbolic death, caused Emad to reach his purpose, but was able to turn Emad into an immoral subject for the victim (Rana) - a subject who had probably become a cow - an issue that eventually led to a rift between Emad and Rana. (Foucault, 2007 a, 2011 a, 2017 a, 2017 b)

briefly, the aggressor's normative techniques did not work well against Emad's punitive techniques; Although he succeeded in achieving his want - not telling the story to his family - he could not change the terms of the relation according to his purpose - to be forgiven - and ultimately failed.

Conclusion

In this article, we tried to recognize strategies and techniques and analyze how subjects exercise power through their actions.

As mentioned in the previous section, maybe it can be said that how to deal with the aggressor is the most important issue in "The Salesman". Asking for forgiveness and feeling remorse is usually the most natural reaction that any wrongdoer, including a aggressor, shows before being punished. Accordingly, in the relationship of power between Emad and the aggressor, the acceptance or rejection of forgiveness by the victim and his family can be considered in the context of the battle of wills.

The results of the study show that Emad and the aggressor used different strategies and techniques to achieve their purposes. These interactions during the relation caused the power to shift between the two subjects. They were trying to change their strategies and techniques to influence each other.

In fact, the aggressor, who once imposed his will on the Rana and Emad's life, after the truth was revealed, tried again to influence Emad's will by using normative techniques in the matter of assault. This technique, which was largely influenced by the moral discourse, reproduced the established order in such an issue - blaming the victim and asking for forgiveness; an effort to maintain and strengthen the existing order that can strengthen and stabilize unequal power relations.

On the other hand, Emad had chosen the strategy of "destruction" and the technique of "confession" to achieve his goal. In fact, Emad fought against these normative and established techniques. As the research findings show, in these interactions, Emad's strategies and techniques were effective in achieving the main goal, and he was able to impose his will on the aggressor and stand against this relatively dominant approach.

Foucault argues that many actions that are considered normal, familiar, and universal are not only not based on general rules of behavior but are the product of very specific historical changes. Accordingly, he states that in the critique of things what previously seemed obvious should no longer be taken obvious (Foucault, 2011a: 335 and 330).

Thus, it can be said that Emad, by proposing a rival approach, fought against naturalized perceptions, such as forgiving the wrongdoer and blaming the victim; the perception used by the aggressor.

As a critic, Emad, despite the pressures, was able to turn the relatively normalized approach into a problem; an issue that caused a serious confrontation between Emad and Rana- A confrontation that eventually led to a rift within the family.

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