

The Joys of Dramatic Discourse: Paradox and Identity in G. B. Shaw's Plays¹

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Abstract

Surprisingly, hardly any systematic linguistic research has been carried out on Shaw's plays. So far the Anglo-Irish playwright's celebrated paradoxical and ironic vein has been studied only from the perspective of literary criticism (Chesteron [1959], 2008; Berst 1998; Evans 1998). However, the latest developments in literary pragmatics have opened up novel approaches to dramatic dialogues in general, and Shavian plays, in particular (a pioneering work is Leech 1992).

Since the texts to be analysed belong to the dramatic genre, beside the ideational function, the interpersonal function of language is brought to the forefront. Drama is prototypically the literary genre composed almost entirely of face-to-face interaction between characters (Tan 1998). The methods of analysis, which focus on the linguistic structure of the dramatic dialogue, are discourse analysis and pragmatics, which deal precisely with face-to-face interaction. Besides, politeness theory can illuminate the social dynamics and character interaction, while discourse analysis can shed light on aspects of characterisation.

In this study I propose a micro-sociolinguistic approach to paradox: the plays are taken as an authentic socio-cultural linguistic corpus (Bucholtz and Hall 2005). In this context, the social variables that shape the characters' identity are related to their language use and social behaviour. It is suggested that ethnic identities and ethnic stereotypes are present in the linguistic interactions of the different characters in the form of alternative, paradoxical identities. In the third part of the study the above-mentioned claims are analysed using fragments from Shavian plays.

In this way, it is shown that the interface of language and literature, stylistics and pragmatics can be productively and effectively applied to literary analyses and that the combination of literary criticism and linguistics is both legitimate and creative. Thus linguistics provides a method of analysis, it steels the researcher with a battery of concepts, which bridge the space between text and its ideological and sociological significance.

Keywords: face-to-face interaction, dramatic dialogue, literary pragmatics, paradoxical identity

1. Introduction

This study aims to investigate the effects of the newly emerging linguistic approaches applied to literary texts, specifically it concentrates on the results of a close analysis of G. B. Shaw's plays from a micro-sociolinguistic perspective with the help of pragmatic means. This paper presents some of the results of research carried out on Shaw's plays² applying the latest methods of analysis in pragmatics: discourse analysis, politeness and impoliteness

theory respectively, considering that ethnicity is one of the defining topics of the Shawian plays and ethnic stereotypes constitute one of their structuring elements.

2. Preliminaries

Since the texts analysed belong to the dramatic genre, beside the ideational function of language (the way language is used to convey experience and information about the context and is best exploited in poetry and prose), the interpersonal function of language is highlighted. Drama is prototypically the literary genre composed almost entirely of face-to-face interaction between characters (Tan 1998). The methods of analysis, which focus on the linguistic structure of the dramatic dialogue, are discourse analysis, conversation analysis and pragmatics, which deal precisely with face-to-face interaction. All these prove to be useful tools in analysing the meanings of utterances in (fictional) dialogue. Politeness theory, which is also applied in the analyses, can illuminate the social dynamics and character interaction, while discourse analysis can shed light on aspects of characterization.

It can also be added that drama has proved to be a neglected child for linguistic analysis. Only a small number of articles on the analysis of drama have been published in one of the most outstanding journals of the field, *Language and Literature*,³ and no article on Shaw's language. One of the aims of this study was to try to address this deficiency.

Surprisingly, hardly any systematic linguistic research has been carried out on Shaw's plays. So far the Anglo-Irish playwright's celebrated paradoxical and ironic vein has been studied mostly from the perspective of literary criticism (Chesterton [1959], 2008; Berst 1998; Evans 1998).

Literary criticism of Shaw's contemporaries and of the recent past focus mainly on the issue of paradox as the structuring element of the plays. According to G. K. Chesterton, paradox 'means an idea expressed in a form which is verbally contradictory', it is 'truth inherent in a contradiction', 'collision between what is seemingly and what is really true' ([1950] 2008: 64).⁴ Most critics emphasize Shaw's mastery of paradox.⁵ Margery Morgan, for instance, highlights Shaw's art of unconventional thinking, of offering his readers a fresh look at the world. According to Evans (1976: 308), 'Shaw uses the weapon of paradox, which is to contend that if such and such an idea is sound, another idea, which

ought to horrify the defenders of the first one, is just as sound in the light of their arguments.’ Berst (1998: 58) speaks of Shaw’s ‘taste for paradox, irony, and allegory’, while Innes stresses the playwright’s typical way of thinking (1998: 173): ‘The intellectual process operates through inversion, paradox, and divergence within repetition: all characteristic techniques of Shaw’s drama, here subsumed into a mode of reasoning.’ Last, but not least, ‘[t]he final period of Shaw’s dramatic production, from *Saint Joan* to his plays in the 1930s may be seen as, in themselves, a paradoxical representation of the whole of his writing life. For one who employed paradox to such a great extent in his own style of writing and thought, this in itself is an exquisite example of paradox.’ (Evans 1998: 254)

Similarly, there have been studies highlighting the mastery of irony in the Shavian plays, just to mention Amalric’s (1991) study on *Intertextuality and Irony*. This study also approaches this topic, but from the perspective of linguistic theories of irony.

In summarizing these studies it can be claimed that they have concentrated mainly on paradox as the fundamental dramatic construction procedure of the plays. Paradoxical thinking, the impossibility of formulating uncontradictory conclusions, suggests the complexity of modern life and mostly the inadequacy of conventional wisdom. In this way, the large-scale employment of paradox in Shaw’s plays is not only a means of shocking the viewers, coercing them to reexamine the famous “middle class morality” of which Alfred Doolittle speaks in *Pygmalion*. At the same time, paradox is also a means of *ludic deconstruction* of this morality, in this sense, paradox accompanied with irony (and even parody), becomes a procedure of postmodern deconstruction.

So far only a small number of books have dealt with the **language of the plays** scattered over a period of about fifty years. In *Shaw: The Style and the Man*, Richard Ohmann (1962) analyses Shaw’s characteristic ‘linguistic modes’, especially in the Prefaces. John A. Mills (1969) extends the linguistic analysis to the plays themselves in *Language and Laughter* and examines Shaw’s employment of dialect, wordplay, and linguistic satire. A linguistic analysis of Shaw appears in one of the chapters of *Six Dramatists in Search of a Language* where Andrew Kennedy (1975) discusses Shaw’s linguistic naturalism (References in *Bernard Shaw: Guide to Research*, by Stanley Weintraub (1988: 46)). One single example

of a pragmatic analysis that I came across is Leech's fascinating study on *Pragmatic Principles in Shaw's 'You Never Can Tell'* (Leech 1992: 259-278).

However, the latest developments in literary pragmatics have opened novel approaches to dramatic dialogues in general, and Shavian plays, in particular. In my research I propose a sociolinguistic approach to paradox. I suggest that ethnic identity and ethnic stereotypes are present in the linguistic manifestations, in the verbal behaviour of Shavian characters in the form of alternative, paradoxical identities. It is claimed that Britishness appears in the form of ambiguous, parallel identities the way the characters' linguistic manifestations reveal it.

3. The interface of language and literature

The study of style and the language of literature is one of the most traditional applications of linguistics, 'one which has been given new impetus by the rapid new developments in linguistics since the development of generative grammar. At the present time, linguistic analysis of literature is one of the most active and creative areas of literary studies' (Traugott and Pratt 1980: 19-20). Although linguistics is not essential to the study of literature, it can contribute to a better understanding of a text. It can help in raising awareness of why we experience what we do when we read a literary work and it can also reveal how the experience of a work is in part derived from its verbal structure. Above all, however, linguistics can give the conscious reader a point of view, a way of looking at a literary text that will help them develop a consistent analysis, and prompt them to ask questions about the language of a text that they might otherwise ignore. Linguistics helps ensure a proper foundation for analysis by enabling the literary critic to recognize the systematic regularities in the language of a text. In this sense, we can use linguistics to construct a theory about the language of a text in the form of a 'grammar of the text'. In this way, linguistics forms an integral component of literary criticism.

Linguistic means and methods have always evolved offering the literary researcher various techniques of analysis. Most major linguistic orientations have had interesting applications in the study of literary texts. Structuralism introduces the concept of literary science but mostly through literary semiotics, it introduces the idea of studying a text as a

closed system of signs. It claims that the significance of the text must be revealed within the text and not outside it. On the other hand, following the Saussurean concept of *value*, semioticians become more and more conscious of the fact that the referent of the sign is constituted by reporting it to other signs, and thus any text allows for different modalities of constituting these relationships. The signification (meaning) of the text is thus dynamic, and – as Barthes claims – the text allows for different “closures”, i.e. its different readings. Through my analyses I propose a new type of closure of the Shavian text, selecting those intratextual relations, which describe and interpret the concept of *ethnicity and ethnic identity*. As always in linguistics, I apply a structuralist and objective methodological approach as far as the interpretation relies on the text. Although it is true that the spectacular development of postmodern literary theory (see gender studies, all kinds of identity studies, post-colonialism, post-communism, etc.) has estranged literary scholars from linguistics, it is also true that the study of literature by linguistic means not only continues to develop within the academic discipline (see Traugott and Pratt’s (1980) handbook *Linguistics for the Student of Literature*), but also as a specific domain of research, as a separate infrastructure (see such as journals of this borderline area like *Text*, *Poetics*, *Journal of Literary Semantics*, and especially *Language and Literature*). These journals also provide firm evidence that the combination of literary criticism and linguistics is both legitimate and creative.

Thus in my analyses I examine the ‘significance’ of the literary text from a linguistic perspective, investigating its language from different points of view. In this sense, investigation takes place on two levels:

1. the analysis of the *language proper*, of the linguistic choices the author (G. B. Shaw, in our case) makes, which draws no distinction between the literary text and other types of texts;
2. the analysis of the *significance of such linguistic choices*, which leads the critic to a deeper, more proper interpretation of the literary work.

Maintaining the fundamental structuralist premise that linguistic choices of the author are sense-bearing, they connote a certain ideology, the methods of analysis adopted belong to linguistic pragmatics. Through pragmatics, linguistics extends its area of research

towards sociology, anthropology, to the study of power relations and language ideology (as discussed by Foucault and Barthes). In my analyses, however, I remain within the area of linguistics (micro-sociolinguistics), by offering analyses based on cultural pragmatics. Thus linguistics provides a method of analysis, it provides us with a battery of concepts, which bridge the space between text and its ideological and sociological significance. The micro-sociolinguistic concepts employed in the analyses originally derive from the fathers of pragmatics and language philosophy; such as Austin and Searle's 'illocutionary force', Grice's 'conversational implicature', further developed by Leech's 'interpersonal rhetoric' (as it appears in his *Principles of Pragmatics*), and Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory, as well as Culpeper's impoliteness theory. From the vast area of micro-sociolinguistic research I have chosen the method of conversation analysis, which is viewed as micro-sociolinguistic analysis. The discussion of the roles, identities and ethnicity that the different characters assume takes us to the realm of their language use, the field of socio-pragmatics (as Leech defines it in his 'interpersonal rhetoric'),⁶ also incorporating Speech Acts, viewed as social transaction.

4. The Corpus

In the plays selected for analysis the characters are biased by their ethnic identity. They openly declare themselves belonging to an ethnic group, to be an ethnic Swiss, Bulgarian, Roman, American, British or Irish. Their ethnic identity forms the basis for their 'dramatic conflict' that these plays are centred around. For instance, in *Arms and the Man* as the title also makes allusion to it, the conflict of the play takes place between the eastern stereotype manifested in the ethnic Bulgarian characters (the Petkoffs, their household and Sergius Saranoff) and the western stereotype represented by Bluntschli, the only Swiss character. Similarly, *Caesar and Cleopatra* is also based on the east-west opposition, and this is detectable in the verbal behaviour of the different ethnic characters, the Egyptians and the Romans. Although the title of *The Devil's Disciple* suggests a story about the main character, Richard Dudgeon's anti-religious attitude, the play is constructed around English and American parallelisms detectable in the linguistic manifestations of the Puritan

American (Mrs Dudgeon) and the American revolutionary (the minister Anthony Anderson), as well as the two faces of the British pair, the ironist General Burgoyne and the middle-class moralist Major Swindon. Finally, *John Bull's Other Island* is a play about Ireland, with the paradoxically reversed roles of English and Irish characters, focusing especially on the verbal conflict between the English Thomas Broadbent and the Irish Larry Doyle.

5. Method of Analysis

The text of the plays is regarded as an authentic socio-cultural linguistic corpus (Bucholtz & Hall 2005) and is analysed with the help of microsociolinguistic means. The key problem in this field of linguistic research is always the origin and nature of the social valence attached to linguistic forms. Choices of form are primarily determined by the social characteristics of participants and setting. As Brown and Levinson (1987) point out, it is precisely in action and interaction that the most profound interrelations between language and society are to be found. In this context, the social variables that shape the identity of the characters are related to their language use and social behaviour. Born from the writer's fictional world, the language these individuals use is characteristic of the time and society in which the author lived and created them. In this sense, my research is an attempt to capture the typical sociolinguistic features of these literary figures who – though on the surface have nothing to do with real life at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century – basically are the 'children' of their creator's age, whether the action of the play takes place in the 16th (*Saint Joan*), 19th century (*A Man of Destiny*) or right in Shaw's own time (*Mrs Warren's Profession*, *Major Barbara*, or *Pygmalion*).

On the other hand, it might be stated that all Shawian characters are not only 'typical' but also 'stereotypical' from a sociological perspective, because they embody Shaw's view of the nationality or ethnicity they belong to. In this way, the texts display several stereotypical English, French, American, Swiss and other nationality characters who behave, act and speak according to Shaw's view about these nations and ethnic groups. In my research I have selected plays that highlight the function of ethnic stereotypes as an

element of drama-construction. This means that stereotype research in the Shavian plays reveals significant aspects of the text not discussed so far. On the other hand, the selected plays present a gallery of British identities, whose subtle understanding must start from the concept of British ethnic identity. The constructed British identity is an *ideological* element derived from a *specific rhetoric*, which in principle includes all the linguistic elements discussed so far.

In interpreting the selected plays the ethnic stereotype functions as a starting point which determines a series of linguistic and behavioural expectations from the given ethnic characters. On the other hand it is interesting to follow how certain characters refuse to fit the stereotype, contesting and hybridising it. What counts here is the grade of proximity or distance of these characters from the stereotype. In my analyses I try to demonstrate that Shaw's important characters are paradoxical and ambiguous (also) on the level of ethnic behaviour.

However, nationality and ethnicity form only one side of these characters: like real people, they also bear the features of their own race, class, gender, etc., all the parameters through which their identity is created. As a result, in my analyses I consider them as stereotypes of their race, class, gender, ethnicity, but at certain places—wherever the case—they are viewed as counter-stereotypes, diverging from the stereotype, i.e. being basically different from what society expects them to be.

By offering an ambiguous view of the created ethnic stereotypes, Shaw *constructs* and *undermines* at the same time his characteristically paradoxical plot and character treatment. My analyses concentrate on all the conversational strategies the Shavian characters employ while they act like a typical specimen of their ethnic group or nationality, of their gender or their class, or exactly the opposite. These analyses not only capture these characters in their linguistic interaction with other characters, but, as their ethnical bias is revealed in ways other than language, the way they utter certain sentences or make certain gestures, use body language, etc. is also seized. In other words, the focus of my work is to analyse how interacting participants use language, which – as a result – shapes their ethnic identity. However, because ethnicity is not neatly isolable from other facets of identity, it is necessary to consider the participants' positioning with respect to other types of group

identity (e.g. gender, class, age), as well as personal and interpersonal identities that are adopted, shaped and abandoned in the course of the unfolding interaction.

6. A Sample Analysis

For the sake of this conference I have selected *Arms and the Man*, which is based on the contrast between two ethnic communities: one group of ethnic Bulgarians, representing a young, i.e. newly constituted south-eastern European nation, on the one hand, and one Swiss character, representative of a mature nation, of western, indirectly British, mentality, on the other. The ethnic element impregnates the characters' way of speaking, the decisions they take and their mutual attitudes. The characters are captives of their ethnic identity and this sometimes prevents them from understanding each other's message.

The east-western axis of the play must also be regarded as a temporal one, the eastern nations being slightly lagged behind. The Bulgarian stereotype is represented by the Petkoffs and their household, Louka and Nicola, completed with Raina's suitor, Sergius. The newly born Bulgarian nation manifests a Romantic attachment towards chivalrous ideas, like bravery on the battlefield and hospitality. They also embody national attachment and aristocratic pride, contempt for enemies and last, but not least, romantic love for one single woman. These are values that the west had lived for in the age of Byron and Pushkin, both authors assiduously read by Raina, but values which were already outdated in the second half of the 19th century, when the plot of the play takes place. However their attachment to these values is not very deep. This can be seen not only in Raina's evolution, but also in the Petkoff's happily accepting her new suitor, very different from the previous one. The immature Bulgarian characters aspire for maturity (Raina's case) or they accept mediocrity (the case of Sergius, who renounces the Romantic ideals, and finds happiness next to a less complicated woman).

The east-west distinction also institutes another opposition, the one based on material civilization and education, which impregnate the characters' lifestyle. The newly emerging Bulgarian nation (in the play!) is deficient in material civilization and even education, in

spite of the fact that they display high respect for education and books (see the Petkoff's special pride in their library, which proves to be a form of snobbery).

The western axis is represented by Captain Blunschli, who represents a liberal and mercantile, much more egalitarian mentality of the bourgeois citizen in the second half of the 19th century, a mentality which the eastern, Bulgarian group only aspires for. In spite of his Germanic name, Bluntschli considers himself a free citizen of the (western) world and in the play is less conditioned by his own ethnic identity. He is the stereotypical Swiss businesslike gentleman, a 'commercial traveller in uniform' (p. 47) for whom war is not a matter of national pride, but only another business to do in order to achieve some extra profit.⁷ Being a soldier for him is nothing else but a profession, but one that he performs by meeting the best standards.

- (1) BLUNTSCHLI. I'm a professional soldier: I fight when I have to, and am very glad to get out of it when I haven't to. You're only an amateur: you think fighting's an amusement. (p.78)⁸

He draws a clear distinction between the state of a professional and an amateur soldier claiming that the basic difference is in the time of recreation: the amateur enjoys himself when fighting while the professional takes pleasure when not having to be in conflict. Fighting for the first country which 'came first on the road from Switzerland', Captain Bluntschli does not have any Romantic or patriotic ideals about war, an enterprise which produces him much physical discomfort. He is not a typical soldier who can survive under harsh conditions for a long time. Bluntschli "is not a conventional stage soldier": "he suffers from want of food and sleep; his nerves go to piece, after three days under fire, ending in the horrors of a rout and pursuit" (p. 15). While the commercial spirit makes him a typical example of the Swiss stereotype, the way he acts and speaks is inconsistent with the stereotype of the western male. The pet name that Raina gives him ("chocolate cream soldier") also derives from his practical way of thinking: "He has found by experience that it is more important to have a few bits of chocolate to eat in the field than cartridges for his revolver" (ibid.) All these features make him a less Romantic character, i.e. a typical anti-romantic hero, but who becomes for the same reason more acceptable, palpable and natural and therefore more dramatic.

On the other hand, he is also free from very deep emotions, which characterize the eastern-European ethnicities. He does not show any feelings of sorrow or grief at the news of his father's passing away. The only problem this personal event causes him is 'an unexpected change in his arrangements'. This indifferent attitude may be interpreted as a sign of a different ethos of communication⁹ from that of the Bulgarians, who therefore do not understand or misunderstand his reaction. He belongs to an ethnic group who *in general* do not express their emotions overtly but try to hide them as they consider this to be a sign of indiscretion or weakness. In this respect, he resembles the British stereotype with its relatively more negative politeness strategies, an ethos of conversation defined on the basis of conventional indirectness and an ethos of distance (Manno 2005: 102).

Another stereotypical difference between the two ethnic groups is their different approach to hospitality, one of the key features that a nation displays when in interaction with another. While Raina takes the notion of hospitality as *a matter of morality*, providing the example from the opera Ernani (where the host does not give up his guest although he is his bitterest enemy), Bluntschli considers hospitality *a matter of business*:

(2) BLUNTSCHLI. My father is a very hospitable man: he keeps six hotels. (p. 36)

This ironic remark is a sign of the commercial and practical spirit that surrounds him in every respect. The irony emerges from the clash between the two parts of the utterance separated by the semi-colon. The illocutionary effect of the first part is based on the literal definition of the adjective 'hospitable', i.e. 'pleased to welcome and entertain guests', naturally without any financial proceeds, therefore obviously referring to a person's moral feature. This meaning is deleted by the second part of the clause which refers to a totally novel interpretation of the same adjective and which signifies 'providing guests with a commercial aim, in hotels.' The Swiss character's utterance stands as a key sentence highlighting the main difference between the two ethnic groups.

The practical spirit, his businesslike character is the strongest Swiss stereotypical feature displayed by Bluntschli. For him war and hospitality are practical enterprises and not moral duties. Like any good Swiss he 'keeps a low profile' by avoiding the verbal ostentation of

his wealth, thus minimizing “praise of self” (Manno: 2005: 107). He prefers ‘mediocrity’, not wanting to reveal his family background and fortune, as he does not want to make his interlocutors feel inferior. This egalitarian ethos is demonstrated by the importance of non-imposition of his own merits and wealth because this may risk disturbing others (ibid.), another trait which is typical of negative politeness. However, he is perfectly capable of changing, of revealing his fortune and origin when he realizes that this is the key to be accepted as Raina’s husband.

(3) PETKOFF. (...) you know, Raina is accustomed to a very comfortable establishment. Sergius keeps twenty horses.

BLUNTSCHLI. But who wants twenty horses? We’re not going to keep a circus.

CATHERINE [*severely*] My daughter, sir, is accustomed to a first-rate stable.

BLUNTSCHLI. Oh well, if it comes to a question of an establishment, here is goes! [*He darts impetuously to the table; seizes the papers in the blue envelope; and turns to Sergius*]. How many horses did you say?

SERGIUS. Twenty, noble Switzer.

BLUNTSCHLI. I have two hundred horses. [*They are amazed*]. How many carriages?

SERGIUS. Three.

BLUNTSCHLI. I have seventy. (...) I have nine thousand six hundred pairs of sheets and blankets, with two thousand four hundred eider-down quilts. I have ten thousand knives and forks, and the same quantity of dessert spoons. I have three hundred servants. I have six palatial establishments, besides two livery stables, a tea gardens, and a private house. I have four medals for distinguished services; I have the rank of an officer and the standing of a gentleman; and I have three native languages. Shew me any man in Bulgaria that can offer as much! (p. 87-8)

At the beginning of the interchange he ironically rejects an excessive number of horses considering them useless and preventing him from happiness.¹⁰ Afterwards he reluctantly starts mentioning the inheritance waiting for him after his father’s death, which exceeds Petkoffs’ wildest expectations for a wealthy son-in-law. No wonder that they instantly agree to their daughter marrying him although he is ‘the enemy’. However, what is also interesting to note is the long enumeration in which he not only enlists his material wealth but also his spiritual fortune, which also distinguishes him from the eastern stereotype.

Last but not least, Captain Bluntschli manifests certain general western stereotypical features which draw him closer to the schema of the British stereotype: his polite behaviour

based on negative politeness, his reserve in exhibiting his feelings, which are hyperbolically displayed by the Bulgarian group.

All in all, *Arms and the Man* highlights some dramatic functions of the ethnic stereotype. These can be summarized in the following way:

a. The ethnic stereotype is a constructing element of the plot. Thus, like any other ‘well-made play’ of the 19th century, *Arms and the Man* has a triangle in its centre, two men (Sergius and Bluntschli) who dispute a woman, Raina, in this case. The rivalry between the two is not based on beauty or class. What distinguishes them is exactly their different mentality (east and west), a lifestyle deriving from the characters’ ethnic identity.

b. The ethnic stereotype differentiates the main characters from the secondary ones. Interestingly but not surprisingly, the background characters are *prisoners of their stereotype*. They represent these stereotypes in a simplified way, they even become caricatures (see the Petkoffs), while the main characters depart from the stereotype, provoking and undermining it.

c. The ethnic identity, like other identity attributes, generates paradox. Thus Sergius, the ‘real Bulgarian’, heroic and romantic by definition, proves to be a calculated merchant, while the Swiss Captain Bluntschli, unromantic by his stereotypical ethnic identity, by his education and mentality, proves to be capable for real romantic love. We find the fundamental figure of Shaw’s way of thinking: *paradox*, configured on the level of ethnic identity.

7. Conclusions

Summarizing my research carried out on Shaw’s plays which are analyzed from a linguistic perspective the following can be stated:

1. Through the subject and methodology of my research I would like to contribute to the return of studies on literary semiotics, as well as to the possibility of using linguistic pragmatics in such kind of studies.
2. Analyzing Shaw’s work from a linguistic perspective addresses an important gap in the literature dedicated to this author.

3. Starting from the concept of ethnic stereotype, reading the Shavian plays in ethnic key offers interpretative gains. Firstly, this research reveals a new type of complexity of the characters: *the paradoxical or ambiguous character on the level of ethnic identity*; this way complex relations are suggested among characters and cultures, between social (for instance, class) and ethnic identity, between gender and ethnic identity, etc.
4. The ethnic stereotype is an element of dramatic construction, not only on the level of the characters; it may also become a causal element of the plot (*Arms and the Man, John Bull's Other Island*) or it may offer a criterion of classification of the characters into two groups: the one of static secondary characters who illustrate only the stereotype in its different acuity (Mrs Durgon in *The Devil's Disciple*, Mrs Pierce or Mrs Higgins in *Pygmalion*) and dynamic main characters, who—through the relationship between their personal and ethnic identity—reject, exceed or undermine the stereotype. In such cases the stereotype generates paradox and ambiguity.
5. On the metadiscursive level, the analyzed plays fully demonstrate the cognitive functions and flexibility of the stereotype. The selected plays offer a colourful array of British identities, which may all be incorporated in the British ethnic stereotype.
6. From a methodological perspective, like any linguistic analysis, my research also starts from the author's linguistic choices, i.e. from the rhetoric of the text. Thus the connotative ideological analysis proves to be highly rigorous and objective.
7. Last, but not least I have been trying to “recover” Shaw—somehow fallen into obsolescence due to his Socialist inclinations—as a post-modern author, both on the level of his subject matters (his obsession for identity problems, colonial and post-colonial topics, ethnic diversity), as well as on the level of literary technique (the stereotype being deconstructed, reconstructed, parodied, following the rules of post-modern discourse).

By combining past and present, by flexibly and productively applying and combining these new linguistic trends in literary criticism my research follows the vein of the mobilities-paradigm (cf. Urry 2007).

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¹ The study has been carried out with the financial support of the Institute of Research Programmes of Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania.

² My research on this subject has been published in the form of monograph entitled *Britain and Britishness in G. B. Shaw's Plays – A Linguistic Perspective* (Ajtony 2012).

³ From the past twenty years I have found the following articles which approach drama with linguistic means (I enlist them in chronological order): Seargeant's 'Ideologies of English in Shakespeare's "Henry V"' (*Language and Literature* 2009 (18,1): 25-44); 'Storytelling as Interaction in "The Homecoming" by Hugo Bowles (*Language and Literature* 2009 (18,1): 45-60); Dan McIntyre's 'Integrating multimodal analysis and the stylistics of drama: a multimodal perspective on Ian McKellen's "Richard III"' (*Language and Literature* 2008 (17, 4): 309-334); 'An "interactive" approach to interpreting overlapping dialogue in Caryl Chrichill's "Top Girls"', by Andriy Ivachenko (*Language and Literature* 2007 (16, 1): 47-89); Dan McIntyre's 'Point of View in Drama: A Socio-Pragmatic Analysis of Dennis Potter's "Brimstone and Treacle"' (*Language and Literature* 2004 (13, 2): 139-160); Zongxin Fen and Dan Shen's 'The Play off the Stage: the writer-reader relationship in drama' (*Language and Literature* 2001 (10,1): 79-93); 'A Cognitive Approach to Characterization: Katherina in Shakespeare's "The Taming of the Shrew"' by Jonathan Culpeper (*Language and Literature* 2000 (9, 4): 291-316); 'Discourse and Time in Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet"' (*Language and Literature* 1999 (8, 2): 134-161); 'The Language of Shakespeare by N. F. Blake (*Language and Literature* 1993 (2, 2): 137-138); 'Discourse Analysis, Pragmatics and the dramatic character: Tom Stoppard's "Professional Foul"' (*Language and Literature* 1993 (2, 2): 72-99).

⁴ 'Paradoxically', it is Chesterton himself who disputes Shaw's understanding of paradox and claims that there is nothing really paradoxical in Shaw's mind ([1950], 2008: 64-66).

⁵ Even Shaw himself liked 'to be applauded as the most humorously extravagant paradoxer in London. (In: Preface to *Widowers' Houses*, p. 9)

⁶ Cf. Leech (1983: 79) where he shows that both the CP (Cooperative Principle) and the PP (Politeness Principle) are required to account for pragmatic interpretations, and there is a need for a 'rhetoric', i.e. a set of principles which are observed in the planning and interpretation of messages.

⁷ Here I am particularly referring to Bluntschli's story about how he persuaded Petkoff's regiment to give him 'fifty able-bodied men for two hundred worn out chargers, [which] werent even eatable.' (p. 47)

⁸ Page numbers refer to Shaw [1894], (1962).

⁹ See Brown and Levinson (1987: 43-47) for the affective quality of an interaction.

¹⁰ This claim is underlined by Bluntschli's utterance when he finds out about his inheritance, which would prevent him from reaching his ideal: being a free citizen.

BLUNTSCHLI. [*He takes up a fat letter in a long blue envelope*]. Here's a whacking letter from the family solicitor. [*He puts out the enclosures and glances over them*]. Great Heavens! Seventy! Two hundred! [*In a crescendo of dismay*] Four hundred! Four thousand!! Nine thousand six hundred!!! What on earth am I to do with them all? (p. 69-70)