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Похвальба и позитивная самооценка в пьесах А. П. Чехова

Аннотация: В настоящей статье теория речевых актов применяется к рассмотрению использования и функционирования похвальбы/позитивной самооценки в текстах трех пьес А. П. Чехова: «Чайка», «Три сестры» и «Вишневый сад». Анализ проводился с помощью ручного кодирования речевых актов похвальбы/позитивной самооценки, результаты его демонстрируют, что данный речевой акт использовался Чеховым в разных текстуальных функциях для обрисовки характеров действующих лиц. В частности, похвальба применяется как литературный прием описания персонажей, которые по замыслу автора нравятся зрителю/читателю меньше, а также для предоставления возможности другим персонажам постоять за себя против несправедливого отношения или провокаций. Похвальба/позитивная самооценка включает формы смягчения и отягчения. Смягчение достигается в основном при помощи грамматических или фразовых средств, а также семантически через самокритику/самоуничижение. Отягчение достигается преимущественно также грамматическими и фразовыми средствами. Единственный семантический прием отягчения, обнаруженный в текстах, представляет собой критику или уничижение других персонажей. Специфические формы позитивной самооценки в чеховских пьесах — это лингвистическая похвальба, контекстно необоснованные переходы на французский и латинский, а также похвала своему поколению (последняя форма представлена в драме «Три сестры»). Результаты свидетельствуют, что исследования речевых актов в пьесах могут быть продуктивны для теории литературы, они уточняют разработку персонажей и мастерство драматурга.

Ключевые слова: А. П. Чехов, речевые акты, похвальба, положительная самооценка, драматургические персонажи, текстовый анализ, «Чайка», «Три сестры», «Вишневый сад».

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Research Article

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Self-praise and Positive Self-assessment in Chekhov's Plays

Abstract: This paper applies Speech Act Theory towards an investigation of the use and role of self-praise/positive self-assessment in the texts of three Chekhov's plays: *The Seagull*, *Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchard*. The findings conducted with manual coding of texts for the speech acts of self-praise/positive self-assessment suggest that Chekhov employed self-praise for a number of textual and character-building functions. In particular, self-praise functions as a literary device to identify less likable characters as well as to provide a chance for more likable characters to stand up for themselves against injustice and provocation. The self-praise/positive self-assessment comes in mitigated and aggravated forms. Mitigation is mostly achieved through grammatical or phrasal means, as well as semantically through self-criticism, whereby the only form of aggravation observed in the data was other-criticism/other-derogation. Specific forms of a positive self-assessment likely unique to Chekhov's plays are 'linguistic brags', i.e., contextually unjustifiable switches to French and Latin as well as 'generational' positive self-representation in *Three Sisters*. The results suggest that investigations of speech acts in dramas could be productive for literary theory, as they shed more light on the characters development as well as the genre mastery of the playwright.

Keywords: Anton Chekhov, speech acts, self-praise, positive self-assessment, drama characters, text analysis, *The Seagull*, *Three Sisters*, *The Cherry Orchard*.

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Introduction and literature review

This paper investigates the use of self-praise/positive self-assessment speech act in the texts of three Chekhov's plays: *The Seagull*, *Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchard*. Speech act theory (SAT) initially proposed by Austin and further developed in works by Searly is based on an assumption that a speaker pronounces each utterance in order to achieve a specific communicative goal, whereby each goal is connected to a specific speech act, such as requests, refusals, compliments, criticisms, etc. [Salam El-Dakhs et al.: 494]. Systems for analyzing speech acts in conversational settings have been subsequently developed [e.g., Asher and Lascarides]. Speech act theory is widely employed in linguistics, particularly in its subdiscipline called Pragmatics that explores interactions between context and text/speech meaning). Since "literature consists of language", SAT has also had an impact on literature studies [Petrey: 3] becoming "a recognized category of current literary theory" [Gorman: 93].

Chekhov's dramas are an object of inquiry in this paper for multiple reasons. Chekhov is celebrated around the world as "a master playwright" [Dominiczak: 703], who keeps affecting contemporary literature and art [Kataev]. He is known for insightful reflections on human nature, which are attributed to his medical doctor experiences of a "listener" of real life dramas [Dominiczak: 703]. His realism bordering on modernism recreates "life as it is" in a "fictional universe" [Shcherbenok: 297–298]. His language has been described as being simple, close to conversational, with the use of vernacular [Wood: 25]. His major plays (three of which are selected for the analysis in this article) remain in the foreground of literary studies [Whyman]. As outlined in earlier research, Chekhov's characters "perceive the world, themselves and each other inaccurately" [Shcherbenok: 299]. From the viewpoint of speech acts, perceiving oneself inaccurately can result with either too positive or too negative self-assessment. In this article, we focus on self-praise or positive self-assessment/self-representation.

Self-praise (an act of praising or complimenting oneself, providing a positive self-assessment/self-representation) is described as a “self-elevating behavior in interaction” [Wu: 3153]. In this paper, we present self-praise speech act as a continuum ranging from a positive self-assessment or self-representation (understood as synonyms) to a boasting spree, i.e., it is the magnitude (strength) of positive self-representation that counts.

Self-praise remains an understudied speech act, since it is often frowned upon in many cultures due to its reputation of being disruptive or immodest [Dayter, 2014; 2018]. Even in cultures where self-praise is an undesirable behavior in general, such as Chinese [Wu], a speaker can encounter a situation when he/she/ze needs to promote oneself or project a desirable image of oneself. For example, a positive self-representation can arise as a reaction to a verbal attack, an attempt to stand one's ground, etc. Some specific genres and situations of language use have been identified where some use of self-praise is tolerated, expected, or even required, e.g., job interviews, political speeches or computer-mediated communication [Dayter 2018; Matley]. Due to social constraints on self-praise, it often comes with some kind of mitigation or attenuation, such as a disclaimer, a shift of focus, self-denigration, reference to hard work [Dayter 2014: 91], reporting other people's words, disclaimer of an extreme situation, playing a sufferer, i.e., treating the matter as complainable [Wu: 3153]. Besides mitigation (making the force of the speech act milder), speech acts can also come with aggravation (making it stronger) [Benoit & Benoit; De Pablos-Ortega]. However, so far, aggravation in self-praise has remained outside of the scope of research investigations.

While there is a body of literature on the expression of speech acts in Russian [e.g., Gabidullina; Diachkova], to the best of our knowledge, there are no full-fledged studies of self-praise in Russian contexts, probably due to the fact that Russian culture is overall not very supportive of self-praise, which is associated with stupidity [Krysin]. Self-praise (похвальба) is, however, included in the list of Russian speech genres [e.g., Dement'ev: 41]. The aim of this paper is to fill in the above gap in research by exploring the use of self-praise/positive self-assessment in three Chekhov's plays *The Seagull*, *Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchard*. The research questions of the study are: (1) Do characters in these plays employ self-praise/positive self-assessment? (2) Which characters may use this speech act, and how does it contribute to the image of the character? (3) If there are instances of self-praise, does it come with any attenuation (mitigation) or aggravation?

Materials and methods

The study is based on a qualitative descriptive examination of the self-praise/positive self-assessment speech acts. The three selected plays have very similar total word numbers between 13,000 and 16,000 words each (Ref. Table 1), therefore, they are well compatible for speech acts research. The texts of the plays (close to 30,000 words) were manually examined for instances of self-praise/positive self-representations, the strength of the speech act, presence/lack of attenuation and aggravation, and the type of attenuation and aggravation (by grammar-syntactical or discoursal means). The self-praise acts were tagged as belonging to the following categories by force: (1) a weak positive self-representation, (2) a medium strength positive self-representation, (3) a strong positive emphatic self-representation, (4) a boast of one's abilities, position, etc., (5) an extended bragging spree. The tagging was done by the author according to the length of the act in words, the vocabulary (emphatic/non-emphatic) and the semantics of the act. Possible mitigation and aggravation types were identified based on earlier studies [Benoit & Benoit; Dayton 2014, 2018; De Pablos-Ortega; Wu].

It should be noted as a limitation of the study that speech act and its strength identification are subjective, as they are based on the author's reading of the text. Perhaps, in future, more experimental techniques with other human readers assessing the strength of speech acts could help to add more objectivity to the results. Automated analysis was impossible, because it usually relies on queries for lexical markers [Dayton 2018], and up-to-date, to the best of our knowledge, there is no list of collocation markers for self-praise in Russian. The analysis method is Functional Communicative Grammar (FCG), since it accounts for semantic and communicative aspects of texts as well as text structure and functioning, and one of Chekhov's short story texts has already been analyzed using this approach [Kolyaseva: 642]. The analysis data were tabulated, and are presented in the Results section in an aggregated form as well as in text illustrations.

Results

The answer to research question 1 (Do characters in the examined Chekhov's plays employ self-praise/positive self-assessment?) is a definitive 'yes', as summarized in Table 1. Unexpectedly, the highest number of instances of self-praise comes from '*Three Sisters*' (where there are no super-achievers or vain artists amongst the characters), and the lowest — from '*The Seagull*' which examines literary and theatrical lives and features two literary authors and two actresses among its characters.

The answers to research questions 2 and 3 are presented in the descriptions of the self-praise acts in the characters' lines in each of the three plays.

**Table 1 — The total number of self-praise counts
for the three analyzed Chekhov's plays**
**Таблица 1 — Общее количество самовосхвалений
в трех проанализированных пьесах Чехова**

Play	N words	N self-praise acts
The Seagull	13763	11
The Cherry Orchard	13157	17
Three Sisters	16439	34
total	29596	62

The Seagull

The results of the distribution of self-praise and self-praise mitigation by character are summarized in Table 2. As the Table 2 shows, the major producer of self-praise in the drama is Irina Arkadina, an aging actress (6/11 instances of self-praise). Her self-praise has no specific context, reason or function, except for self-indulgence. Arkadina's self-praise is strong (evaluated as 3.8/5 on the average). In particular, she engages in one full notorious bragging spree that makes her sound grotesque (Example 1):

Example 1

«Затем, я корректна, как англичанин. Я, милая, держу себя в струне, как говорится, и всегда одета и причесана *comme il faut*. Чтобы я позволила себе выйти из дому, хотя бы вот в сад, в блузе или непричесанной? Никогда. Оттого я и сохранилась, что никогда не была фефёлой, не распускала себя, как некоторые... (Подбоченясь, прохаживается по площадке.) Вот вам — как цыпочка. Хоть пятнадцатилетнюю девочку играть» [Chekhov: 172–174].

It should be noted that Arkadina's bragging monologue includes a code-switch to French (*comme il faut*) as a part of the above brag, which may reflect her ambition of being seen as an educated lady of high society, but the French expression makes the whole boasting spree even more ridiculous, as the use of French was considered unpatriotic by Russian intelligentsia since mid-nineteenth century [Offord, et al., 2018].

There are two major objects of her self-praise. The first one is related to her looks: appearing youthful, holding it together, being well dressed and always styling her hair, not letting herself go. The second object of her self-praise is related to her artistic work and talent: working, feeling, being in the middle of things, having an exciting occupation, being well received, having an ovation, receiving flowers and presents from fans. Her vain-glory could be a reflection of one of the things Chekhov hated about the theatre and actors [Goriacheva].

Arkadina's self-praise is mildly mitigated only in three (out of 6) instances, when she uses impersonal sentences to report fans' admiration of her acting: «Как меня в Харькове принимали, батюшки мои, до сих пор голова кружится» [Chekhov: 228]. In one self-praise act, she starts with a slightly mitigated grammatically impersonal self-praise in a relatively formal style Russian, where the grammatical subject is not Arkadina herself, but her exquisite outfit: «На мне был удивительный туалет...», but she immediately continues with a direct in-your-face boast in the first person singular that sounds colloquial, almost vernacular: «Что-что, а уж одеться я не дура» [Chekhov: 228].

One striking feature of Arkadina's self-praise is that her own perfections are juxtaposed (in 3 cases) against her critique or denigration of other people, e.g., «...я работаю, я чувствую, я постоянно в суёте, а вы сидите всё на одном месте, не живёте...» [Chekhov: 172]. Instances of self-praise

combined with criticism or denigration of others have been subsequently observed in the lines of other characters and entered in Table 2.

As Arkadina's son Treplev says about her in the play, she craves other people's praise as self-validation: «Нужно хвалить только ее одну, нужно писать о ней, кричать, восторгаться ее необыкновенною игрой» [Chekhov: 150]. If the daily praise is not coming in satisfying amounts, she praises herself, or she shamelessly solicits praise from others, for example, by asking who looks more youthful — she (at the age of over 40) or a 22-year old Masha.

Two self-praise acts are found in the lines of Evgeny Dorn, a medical doctor. He provides a positive self-representation of himself as a good doctor and an honest man (Example 2), which comes contextually as a response to a verbal provocation by Polina who accuses him of being a lady's man.

Example 2

«В отношениях женщин ко мне было много хорошего. Во мне любили главным образом превосходного врача. Лет 10–15 назад, вы помните, во всей губернии я был единственным порядочным акушером. Затем всегда я был честным человеком» [Chekhov: 156].

The self-praise strength in Example 2 is classified as “3” (strong positive emphatic self-representation). It starts as mitigated (reporting other people's opinions, impersonal), and then progresses to an unmitigated positive self-representation (in first person singular). Another positive self-representation (strength: 2) occurs in Dorn's advice to Treplev to carry on writing. The purpose of this positive self-representation is to emphasize the value of advice as coming from a life's ‘expert’: «Вы знаете, я прожил свою жизнь разнообразно и со вкусом, я доволен...» The self-praise is mitigated phrasally by ‘you know’ (вы знаете) [Chekhov: 170].

Treplev, a young author who is torn by self-doubt (as well as by unreciprocated love) produces just one utterance of a positive self-assessment (strength=3) which contextually comes as a response to his mother's scolding him for having no talent and being envious of an established writer (as well as her boyfriend) Trigorin (Example 3). There is a very slight phrasal attenuation “коли на то пошло” (if it comes to this). The positive self-evaluation is followed by a strong emotive critique (denigration) of others (Ref Example 3).

Example 3

«Треплев (иронически). Настоящие таланты! Я талантливее вас всех, коли на то пошло! Вы, рутинеры, захватили первенство в искусстве и считаете законным и настоящим лишь то, что делаете вы сами, а остальное вы гнетете и душите! Не признаю я вас! Не признаю ни тебя, ни его!» [Chekhov: 202].

Nina Zarechnaya, a young promising actress, only utters one positive statement about herself. Notably, it only happens in the end of the play after she has developed confidence in herself as an actress: «Я уже настоящая актриса, я играю с наслаждением, с восторгом, пьянею на сцене и чувствую себя прекрасной» [Chekhov: 238]. This relatively strong positive self-representation (3) comes unjustified communicatively, as a need for self-expression, and is not attenuated.

Masha, a secondary (supporting) character is hopelessly in love with Treplev, but as her feelings are not reciprocated, she decides to marry someone else, and she calls herself “brave” in recognition of the willpower required to take this decision: «А все же я храбрая. Вот взяла и решила: вырву эту любовь из своего сердца, с корнем вырву» [Chekhov: 192]. This positive self-representation is of medium strength (2) and comes without attenuation.

It appears to be worth noting that only five out of a total of thirteen characters in the play are provided by Chekhov with an opportunity to say something positive about themselves. Some major characters do not engage in self-praise even if they could be considered ‘eligible’ to some self-admiration. It is somewhat surprising that Trigorin, who is portrayed as a relatively famous writer, has a low opinion of himself, and does not produce a single positive self-assessment utterance. Quite the opposite, he is full of self-loathing.

Table 2 — A summary of self-praise/positive self-assessment speech acts in ‘The Seagull’ (by character)

Таблица 2 — Количество и типы речевых актов самовосхваления/положительной самооценки в «Чайке» (по персонажам)

Characters	self-praise act	Strength	Mitigation	Mitigation type	Aggravation (other-criticism)
Arkadina	A1	3	no	N/A	yes
	A2	5	no	N/A	yes
	A3	3	no	N/A	yes
	A4	4	yes	reporting	no
	A5	4	yes	reporting	no
	A6	4	yes	impersonal	no
Dorn	D1	3	yes	reporting	no
	D2	2	yes	phrasal	no
Treplev	T1	3	yes	phrasal	yes
Zarechnaya	N1	3	no	N/A	no

Note: Characters whose lines have no self-praise speech acts are excluded from this and subsequent tables.

The Cherry Orchard

The second of the three plays by the number of self-praise/positive self-assessment acts is ‘*The Cherry Orchard*’ (Ref. Table 3 for the distribution of self-praise acts and their mitigation by characters).

**Table 3 — A summary of self-praise/positive self-assessment speech acts
in *The Cherry Orchard* (by character)**

**Таблица 3 — Количество и типы речевых актов самовосхваления/
положительной самооценки в «Вишневом саду» (по персонажам)**

Charac- ters	self-praise act	Strength	Mitigation	Mitigation type	other criti- cism
Lopakhin	L1	2	yes	humble origins, phrasal, self-derogation	no
	L2	3	yes	humble origin, self- derogation	no
	L3	4	yes	irony	no
	L4	3	yes	humble origins	no
	L5	2	yes	phrasal	yes
Trofimov	T1	4	no	N/A	yes
	T2	3	yes	1st person plural «my»	no
	T3	2	no	N/A	no
	T4	2	no	N/A	yes
	T5	4	no	N/A	yes
Dunyasha	D1	3	no	N/A	no
	D2	2	no	N/A	no
	D3	1	no	N/A	no
Anya	A1	1	no	N/A	no
Gaev	G1	1	yes	phrasal and impersonal	no
yasha	J1	3	no	N/A	no
Pishchik	P1	2	yes	self-derogation	yes

It is interesting to note that two of the representatives of the ‘new’ generation and a new direction in Russian society (an entrepreneur Lopakhin and an eternal student Trofimov) are sharing equal numbers of self-praise in the text (5 each), and the strength of their self-praise is similar (average of 2.8 for Lopakhin and 3.0 for Trofimov). Lopakhin’s praise is mitigated by references to his humble origins and self-derogation (Ref. Example 4). He also employs the phrasal type of mitigation. His self-praise is focused

on his dandy outfit, the fact that he is rich and can pay for anything, his profit making skills, his triumph of becoming the owner of the cherry orchard estate, his hard work, and an understanding of his purpose in life. He symbolically contrasts his work with the critique of individuals who have no purpose in life (Example 5).

Example 4

«Отец мой, правда, мужик был, а я вот в белой жилетке, желтых башмаках. Со свиным рылом в калашный ряд. Только что вот богатый, денег много, а ежели подумать и разобраться, то мужик мужиком...» [Chekhov: 460].

Example 5

«Когда я работаю подолгу, без усталости, тогда мысли полегче, и кажется, будто мне тоже известно, для чего я существую. А сколько, брат, в России людей, которые существуют неизвестно для чего» [Chekhov: 540].

His positive self-representations attenuated by self-criticisms and references to his slave origins are reflections of the complexity of this character, a destroyer of the past (cherry orchard), and a creator of the 'new order.' Lopakhin has been seen as a "bridge from the past to the future, from Christianity to a superman," [Komarov: 107] and at the same time, he is a hamletian figure, with a strong connection to the past (his admiration of Ranevskaya and the cherry orchard).

By contrast, the rebellious eternal student Trofimov does not mitigate his self-praise. He also refers to himself a few times as "we" (which can be interpreted as a megalomaniac self-representation of himself as a spokesperson for the whole generation) (Example 6).

Example 6

«Она [Варя] своей узкой головой не может понять, что мы выше любви. Обойти то мелкое и призрачное, что мешает быть свободным и счастливым, — вот цель и смысл нашей жизни. Вперед! Мы идем неудержимо к яркой звезде, которая горит там вдали! Вперед! Не отставай, друзья!» [Chekhov: 508].

While Lopakhin uses other-criticisms only once in a mild form (Example 5), Trofimov's self-praise is combined with other-derogation in three out

of five occurrences of self-praise, e.g., his condemnation of Varya in Example 6. Trofimov's brags pose him as a leader of the new rebellious generation marching towards an unidentified idealistic goal (likely a social revolution which could not be named due to censorship restrictions). His self-praise acts come in the form of a 'generation/social group' positive self-representations. He also attempts positive projections of himself as being above love, above the vulgar and mundane (пошлость), being a sufferer for the cause and a harbinger of a mysterious happy future. This active self-promotion of the 'new' generation is likely Chekhov's attempt to show the social change and the fall of the old order after the abolition of serfdom in Russia. On the other hand, Trofimov lives in a bath house (an abode of evil, according to Russian folklore) [Komarov:112], has a rather unattractive appearance and is called 'oblezlyj barin' (a shabby lord) by common people. Thus Chekhov makes Trofimov's pretence for being a 'hero of our time' somewhat pathetic, and uses self-praise acts (among other tools) to achieve this goal.

Dunyasha (a maid) makes three positive self-representations in which she describes herself as being sensitive, delicate, and incapable of simple life, almost like a noble lady (Example 7). Her self-praise comes unmitigated, and with no criticism of others.

Example 7

«Меня еще девочкой взяли к господам, я теперь отвыкла от простой жизни, и вот руки белые-белые, как у барышни. Нежная стала, такая деликатная, благородная, всего боюсь...» [Chekhov: 492].

Positive self-representations in the lines of other characters seem to highlight some nuances of their personas. Anya is portrayed in the beginning of the play as being almost a child, and to emphasize this perception, she utters only one little childish (unmitigated) brag about flying in a hot air balloon in Paris [Chekhov: 466]. Gaev (Ranevskaya's brother) only manages one weak mitigated positive self-representation in which he portrays himself as a sufferer for his convictions and being admired by peasants, all pointing out that he is not a bad person [Chekhov: 486]. The servant Yasha (a self-conceited unpleasant character) boasts about taking a courier train and going to Paris (unmitigated, aggravated by a criticism of Dunyasha) [Chekhov: 542]. A bankrupt landlord Pishchik who borrows money from everyone

around can say at least one positive thing about himself (although mitigated by self-derogation) — that he is proud of his good health [Chekhov: 512].

Three Sisters

'*Three Sisters*' have the highest number of self-praise/positive self-assessment acts among the three plays (Ref. Table 4 for self-praise speech acts by character).

Table 4 — A summary of self-praise/positive self-assessment speech acts in *Three Sisters* (by character)

Таблица 4 — Количество и типы речевых актов самовосхваления / положительной самооценки в «Трех сестрах» (по персонажам)

Charac- ters	self- praise act	Strength	Mitigation	Mitigation type	other criticism
Kulygin	K1	2	no	N/A	no
	K2	2	no	N/A	no
	K3	1	no	N/A	no
	K4	1	no	N/A	no
	K5	1	no	N/A	no
	K6	3	no	N/A	no
	K7	1	no	N/A	no
	K8	2	no	N/A	no
Prozorov	P1	2	yes	sufferer	no
	P2	1	yes	attribution to other	yes
	P3	3	yes	self-derogation	yes
	P4	3	yes	reference to the past	yes
	P5	3	yes	self-derogation	no
Natalia	N1	3	mitigation/ aggravation		no
	N2	2	no	N/A	yes
	N3	3	no	N/A	yes

	N4	1	no	N/A	yes
	N5	3	no	N/A	no
Irina	N1	2	no	N/A	no
	N2	2	yes	reference to God	no
	N3	3	yes	reference to God	no
Soliony	N1	1	yes	an example	no
	N2	3	yes	self-criticism	yes
	N3	2	yes	reporting	no
Vershinin	N1	2	no	N/A	no
	N2	3	yes	self-criticism	no
Tuzen- bach	N1	3	no	N/A	no
	N2	2	yes	phrasal	no
Anfisa	N1	1	yes	self-criticism	no
	N2	4	yes	fate reference	no
Olga	N1	1	yes	self-criticism	no
	N2	3	yes	reference to being forgotten	no
Masha	N1	3	yes	sufferer	yes
Chebuty- kin	N1	2	yes	self-irony	no

The most 'boastful' character is Kulygin (8/34 self-praise acts), a school-teacher, married to Masha (the middle one of the three sisters). His boasts are weak (1.6 average strength) and are not mitigated (See Table 4). The high number of self-praise acts in Kulygin's lines is surprising at first glance, because there is not much for Kulygin to boast about. His means are moderate, and his wife is in love with another character (Vershinin). One possible interpretation of this paradox is that Kulygin's positive self-representations may be addressed to himself more than to others. The purpose of his self-praise is to convince himself that his wife loves him by uttering repetitive chants: «Маша меня любит. Моя жена меня любит» [Chekhov: 358], and that he is content with his life: «Я доволен, я доволен, я доволен» [Chekhov: 414]. Some of Kulygin's positive self-representations come in response to potential social threats (such as seeing officers around the house): «Я педагог, и здесь в доме свой человек, Машин муж...»

[Chekhov: 360] He also tried to improve Masha's perception of him in response to her verbal challenge (Example 8). His self-representations project a picture of a respectable occupation (a school teacher, later an inspector), a hard working, honest and simple person, who is content with his life. What is there not to like? And yet his wife does not like him at all. To explain to the audience why Kulygin is not a lovable character, Chekhov, first, gives him an unpleasant sounding last name which is derived from 'кулыга' (a salesman), and second, makes him recite Latin phrases and even insert grammar comments: «Рассчитывал провести вечер в приятном обществе и — о, fallacem hominum spem!.. Винительный падеж при восклицании...» [Chekhov: 398]. His wife Masha mocks his obsession with Latin by conjugating a verb "to love" in Latin. In other words, multiple Latin platitudes make Kulygin annoying, and he loses ground as compared to more interesting and handsome men in the play.

Example 8

«Мы с тобой не бедны. Я работаю, хожу в гимназию, потом уроки даю... Я честный человек. Простой... Omnia mea mecum porto, как говорится» [Chekhov: 414].

The runners-up in self-praise are two more not-so-likable characters of the play — Andrey Prozorov and his fiancé and subsequently wife Natalia, with five self-praise acts each. Andrey's self-praise acts appear slightly stronger in force than Kulygin's (2.4 on the average). Prozorov provides positive self-representations related to his reading and thinking at night, an intent to translate a book from English, his knowledge of French, German and English, his ambitions to become a famous scholar (Example 9) as well as being proud of his civil service [Chekhov: 422] (which goes contrary to his earlier statement in Example 9). Andrey's self-praise is rather indirect, mitigated as a 'sufferer' (in two cases), with an attribution to his father (one case), a self-derogation (in three cases), a reference to a 'dream', and a reference to the past and a generational self/other criticism (Example 10). It should be noted that three out of five self-praise speech acts uttered by Andrey contain aggravations, i.e., criticism/derogation of others.

Example 9

«Мне быть членом здешней земской управы, мне, которому снится каждую ночь, что я профессор московского университета, знаменитый ученый, которым гордится русская земля!» [Chekhov: 370]

Example 10

«О, где оно, куда ушло мое прошлое, когда я был молод, весел, умен, когда я мечтал и мыслил изящно, когда настоящее и будущее мое озарялись надеждой? Отчего мы, едва начавши жить, становимся скучны, серы, неинтересны, ленивы, равнодушны, бесполезны, несчастны...» [Chekhov: 444].

The last instance of a positive self-representation by Prozorov comes from his 'vision' of a happy future (mitigated by a self-derogation) (Example 11). Notably, his vision contains no elements of a 'commissive', a speech act of a commitment to future actions, the happy future just 'happens' on its own.

Example 11

«Настоящее противно, но зато когда я думаю о будущем, то как хорошо! Становится так легко, так просторно; и вдали забрезжит свет, я вижу свободу, я вижу, как я и дети мои становимся свободны от праздности, от квасу, от гуся с капустой, от сна после обеда, от подлого тунеядства...» [Chekhov: 444].

Natalia, is perhaps the most unlikable of all Chekhov's characters in the three plays. Literary analysis works have referred to her as "a demonic witch", a "conqueror", and a "devil in the flesh" [Dimitrov: 62, 65], who "occupies" the Prozorovs' house [Baturina: 6]. Her positive self-representations are of medium strength (2.4 on the average). She uses one specific functional form of self-praise twice: she praises her children (without any sound reason) and at the same time praises herself, including references to herself as their mother, i.e., elevating herself as a woman who gave birth to and is bringing up such remarkable children (Example 12). In Example 12, "you think this is just the mother talking", looks like a mitigation of the praise of the child, but at the same time, she aggravates the self-praise by referring to herself as the mother of the wonder-child. There are no other mitigations of self-praise in Natalia's lines.

Two other brags are implicit: Natalia uses code-switches to her broken French twice in order to elevate herself and make her look educated

(Example 13). In Example 13, there is no situational need to use French, except for a show-off, as any passers-by could potentially hear her yelling from the window and admire her linguistic prowess.

Example 12

«Вы думаете, во мне говорит только мать, но нет, нет, уверяю вас! Это необыкновенный ребенок» [Chekhov: 384].

Example 13

«Кто здесь разговаривает так громко? Это ты, Андрюша? Софочку разбудишь. Il ne faut pas faire du bruit, la Sophie est dormee deja. Vous etes un ours» [Chekhov: 444].

Finally, one (and only one) explicit brag by Natalia comes from her conversation with Olga, when Natalia claims full “domestic” powers and supreme knowledge on handling the servants, and ousters Olga from the household matters (Example 14). Example 14 is followed by an aggravating fit of rage (a demonstration of her new powers) in which she calls the old servant Anfisa names and demands that she is thrown out of the house.

Example 14

«Ты в гимназии, я — дома, у тебя ученье, у меня — хозяйство. И если я говорю что насчет прислуги, то знаю, что говорю; я знаю, что го-во-рю...» [Chekhov: 404].

Four instances of positive self-representations are found in the lines of Irina, the youngest of Prozorov sisters. Once, she compliments her own wonderful thoughts (Example 15). She also tells everyone about how excited she was taking her school-teacher examination and how she looks forward to her new life. After she decides to accept a proposal of Tuzenbach whom she does not love, she feels exhilarated and is eager to work (Example 16). Two of her positive self-representations are mitigated by references to God’s will.

Example 15

«И какие чудные мысли волновали меня, какие мысли!» [Chekhov 336].

Example 16

«Всё в божьей воле, это правда. Николай Львович сделал мне предложение... Что ж? Подумала и решила. Он хороший человек, удивительно даже, такой хороший... И у меня вдруг точно крылья выросли на душе, я повеселела, стало мне легко и опять захотелось работать, работать...» [Chekhov: 432].

The next bragger-in-line is an officer Soliony with three positive self-representations of moderate strength (2.0 average). Soliony is in love with Irina and kills her fiancé Tuzenbach in a duel a day before their planned wedding. Soliony mentions his physical strength, being more noble and honest than most people and compares himself to the famous Russian poet Lermontov (Example 17). This comparison is symbolic, since Lermontov was killed in a duel (unlike Soliony who kills another person in a duel), and it brings a dark note of apprehension to the play. All Soliony's instances of self-praise are mitigated: one offered as an example in an abstract discussion, another containing self-criticism, and the third (Example 17) includes a reference to other people's opinions ('as they say').

Example 17

«Но у меня характер Лермонтова. (Тихо.) Я даже немножко похож на Лермонтова... как говорят...» [Chekhov, 2010, p. 388].

Baron Tuzenbach, who is in love with Irina (the youngest of the three Prozorov sisters), produces two self-praise acts (one moderate, one strong). In one of them (unmitigated), he proclaims having a passion for life, fight and work [Chekhov: 369]. In the second one (also unmitigated), he tells Irina that despite his German name, he is Russian and Orthodox, and only retained German patience and stubbornness [Chekhov: 354]. The first of these is motivated by a positive self-disclosure to a woman he loves, and the second one is aimed at highlighting that he fits in her social circle.

Surprisingly, two positive self-representations in the play are produced by an old servant Anfisa. In one of them she describes herself as a hard worker in order to avoid an eviction from the house [Chekhov: 402]. In the second one, she praises her good luck of living with Olga in the school-owned apartment (Example 18).

Example 18

«И-и, деточка, вот живу! Вот живу! В гимназии на казенной квартире, золотая, вместе с Олюшкой — определил господь на старости лет. Отродясь я, грешница, так не жила... Квартира большая, казенная, и мне цельная комнатка и кроватка. Все казенное. Проснусь ночью и — о господи, мать божия, счастливей меня человека нету!» [Chekhov: 446].

Vershinin, one of the more likable characters (despite having a wife, two daughters and an affair with Masha), is assigned two prophetic monologues in the play, in which he justifies the purpose of life for the whole generation. This purpose is in living, suffering and working in order to secure a new happy life for future generations [Chekhov: 380]. This is a generational self-justification and self-praise, which is hard to evaluate in terms of strength. In the second 'prophecy', he also includes a positive self-representation (ameliorated by self-criticism) of himself as a person who craves knowledge and comprehends well the most important truth (see Example 19).

Example 19

«...а между тем, чем больше живу, тем больше хочу знать. Мои волосы седеют, я почти старик уже, но знаю мало, ах, как мало! Но все же, мне кажется, самое главное и настоящее я знаю, крепко знаю... Мы должны только работать и работать, а счастье это удел наших далеких потомков» [Chekhov: 380].

The oldest of the three sisters, a school teacher, subsequently a headmistress Olga utters a weak self-praise only once, when she says that she feels younger than yesterday, and that she is only 28 years old (mitigated with self-criticism) [Chekhov: 336]. Just like Vershinin, in the last (fourth) act of the drama, she also utters a 'prophecy', a vision for the future, on behalf of all the three sisters and the whole generation (a generational positive self-representation), in which she validates their lives.

Example 20

«Пройдет время, и мы уйдем навеки, нас забудут, забудут наши лица, голоса и сколько нас было, но страдания наши перейдут в радость для тех, кто будет жить после нас, счастье и мир настанут на земле, и помянут добрым словом и благословят тех, кто живет теперь. О, милые сестры, жизнь наша еще не кончена. Будем жить!» [Chekhov: 454]

Masha, the middle sister married to Kalygin, cannot stand her husband and engages in an affair with married Vershinin. She delivers one act of self-praise in which she portrays herself as a super-sensitive person disturbed by rudeness and lack of sophistication. The act is mitigated by portraying herself as a sufferer and aggravated by other-criticism (Example 21).

Example 21

«Про мужа я не говорю, к нему я привыкла, но между штатскими вообще так много людей грубых, не любезных, не воспитанных. Меня волнует, оскорбляет грубость, я страдаю, когда вижу, что человек недостаточно тонок, недостаточно мягок, любезен. Когда мне случается быть среди учителей, товарищей мужа, то я просто страдаю» [Chekhov: 372–374].

In addition, the military doctor Chebutykin boasts about not having done anything in his life, not having read a single book and not reading Dobroliubov (mitigated by self-irony) [Chekhov: 340].

Discussion and conclusion

The analysis of the speech act of self-praise/positive self-assessment in Chekhov's three plays demonstrates that he employs this device in a few functions. First, he uses self-praise acts to identify less likable characters (like Arkadina, Trofimov, Kulygin, Andrey Prozorov and Natalia), whose self-praise acts tend to be strong and unmitigated or even aggravated. In particular, Arkadina's brags in *'The Seagull'* appear to be a sublimation of everything that Chekhov hated about the theatre and actors while at the same time being enchanted by them [Goryacheva: 34–43].

Second, to depict more likable characters, Chekhov scripts mild to moderate positive self-representations that are contextually justifiable: as a response to a verbal attack, a misrepresentation or threat, or as an attempt to fit in (e.g., Dorn in *'The Seagull'* or Anfisa fearful of an eviction, or Tuzenbach identifying as Russian Orthodox in *'Three Sisters'*).

Third, one specific kind of self-praise act modification that Chekhov resorts to is a generational/group self-praise in the first person plural (with Trofimov posing as a new generation spokesperson in *'The Cherry Orchard'*, and Vershinin and Olga in *'Three Sisters'*). Group positive self-representations

typical for political leaders and social activists are used by Chekov as a literary device likely intentionally, as politics has been identified as one of the themes in his plays [Whyman].

Finally, there are also some specific applications of self-praise act in the plays. For example, Lopakhin's positive self-representations (often mitigated by self-criticism) reflect the advancement of a new social group of successful businessmen, an interest in this group may be rooted by a contrast with Chekhov's unhappy childhood spent in his father's failing grocery store that eventually got bankrupt [Bartlett; Chekhov, 1960]. The final positive self-representation by Anfisa gives an illusion of a happy ending for at least one character in the *'Three Sisters'*. Partly, the self-praise in the plays is also a reflection of the characters' delusions, and seeing only what they want to see [Stepanov].

A specific type of self-praise found in Chekhov's plays are 'linguistic' brags, i.e., citations from Latin and French used by less likable characters like Kulygin, Natalia and Arkadina. While Chekhov himself had a "rigorous classical education in Taganrog gymnasium [Bartlett: 3] and knew Latin well, he also saw classical languages as a way of "hiding from real life," as also demonstrated in the character of another school teacher Belikov in Chekhov's short story "Man in a Case" [Bartlett: 5]. The use of French by Russian nobility lasted until the pre-revolutionary times, but from the mid-nineteenth century, Russian intelligentsia and some gentry were more affected by cultural nationalism that prioritized Russian [Offord et al.]. This may explain the paradox of French use by Natalia on the one hand (to signify that she is not patriotic and wants to pose as a high society lady), and a disparaging attitude to her not speaking it right (she is neither noble, nor well-educated), on the other hand. By contrast, the Prozorovs are the ones who are described as being fluent in a few foreign languages (coming from gentry origins), but not a single one of them code-switches in the *'Three Sisters'* to any language other than Russian (placing them amongst the patriots).

Chekhov's expert use of self-praise in his plays questions the opinions expressed in earlier studies that his texts are not truly communicative [Ivleva: 123]. From the viewpoint of Speech Act Theory, Chekhov's plays present an interesting material to explore speech act modifications, such as mitigation and aggravation. Mitigation reduces and aggravation strengthens the illocutionary force of an utterance [Benoit & Benoit: 172], which is

particularly important in case of the 'risky' speech acts, such as self-praise. Chekhov's plays provide illustrations to mitigated and aggravated self-praise, whereby more likable characters mitigate, and less likable — aggravate the speech act. The only type of aggravation observed in the plays is criticism or derogation of others. By combining self-praise with criticizing or putting down others, a character gets a 'short-cut' to the goal of the self-praise act, i.e., elevating oneself above others. The study also shows that specific grammar-syntactic types of self-praise attenuation in Chekhov's plays include the use of impersonal syntactic forms and reporting. It would be productive to compare these findings with the grammar-syntactic forms of self-praise attenuation in spoken Russian.

To conclude, discourse structures analysis has been identified as an emerging theme in literature studies [Peftiev: 3]. As our study seems to suggest, research investigations of speech acts in drama texts could be productive for literary theory, since they highlight the construction of the dialogue by the author, and assist with a better understanding of the characters as well as human values they are supposed to represent. Speech act studies of dramas may also give a much needed boost to the analysis of literary character [Weststeijn] as well as to philological analysis of the language of literature.

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