CHAPTER I

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1.1 Introduction

Language reflects the thought and the behavioural pattern of the whole society. The study of language used in society and the context of the language use by the speakers, goes deep into the thought series of the speakers to dig out the intended or implied meaning. The primary study of language is meaning in the literal sense or the denotative meaning, which falls in the field of ‘Semantics’. But the meaning of an utterance does not solely depend on its literal sense; rather it changes according to its use in specific context(s). The change in meaning of a sentence or an utterance from one context to another made linguists consider the contextual concept into the analysis of meaning, which is the subject matter of a whole domain of language study called Pragmatics.

Pragmatics is a very wide area concerned with the study of language use and different theories have been formulated to provide a better insight into a conversation. The different theories that are considered vital in the field of pragmatics are: The Theory of Cooperative Principle, The Theory of Politeness Principle, The Theory of Speech Acts, Conversational Implicature, Presupposition, Turn-Taking, and Adjacency Pair.

1.2 Rationale and Significance

The theory of Cooperative Principle is one of the major contributions to
the field of pragmatics by the philosopher H. P. Grice. He formulated the cooperative principles believing that speakers prefer to cooperate with each other in communication. Speakers and listeners make use of language in such a way that it helps them to continue communication with successful fulfilment of the intended purpose of their utterances.

The present study would be a significant contribution to the whole literature in pragmatics, and would provide the reader(s) with the knowledge of how to understand the implied meaning of a play when there is any violation of the maxims of conversation. In order to make a conversation successful it is necessary that the participants are cooperative.

The violation of cooperative principle sometimes is intended to promote the conversation by successfully having an impact on the social function of language. It is not always necessary that the participants engaged in a conversation should always strictly adhere to the maxims of cooperative principle rather the violation of the cooperative principle also plays a major role in the use of language in context.

This research deals with the in-depth study of the violation of cooperative principle in the selected plays of Oscar Wilde. The researcher would try to bring up the implications of the violation of cooperative principle in promoting the understanding of the selected plays from a linguistic pragmatic point of view.

The researcher has limited her work to the violation of conversational maxims, by way of the application of the theory of cooperative principle to the dialogues and monologues collected as data from the reading of the selected plays of Oscar Wilde; and bring out the implications of the violation of conversational maxims as well as the indirect observance of
the maxims in promoting the understanding of Wilde’s plays. The study would make a new contribution to the field of pragmatics in general and to the theory of cooperative principle, in particular. It would also enhance the understanding and study of dramatic literature.

1.3 A Survey of the Work Done in the Research Area and the Need for More Research

Pragmatics is a recent branch in the field of linguistics; it is growing very rapidly. Pragmatics emphasizes more on the context of language use. The philosophers who provided the basic ground for the study of language in the area of pragmatics are J. L. Austin, J. R. Searle, and H. P. Grice. Austin talked about the theory of speech acts and observed that actions could be performed through words, where as Searle further systematized and categorized the speech act theory and put forward the concepts of direct and Indirect Speech Acts. Grice formulated the theory of Cooperative Principle.

Recently, pragmatics has been a thrust for many philosophers studying language in context, for example:

*The Handbook of Pragmatics* (2006) edited by Laurence R. Horn and Gregory Ward contains articles on recent developments on linguistic pragmatics. The articles have been grouped in four different categories, namely, The Domain of Pragmatics, Pragmatics and Discourse Structure, Pragmatics and its Interfaces, and Pragmatics and Cognition. The first category includes articles on Implicature, Presupposition, Speech acts and other concepts in pragmatics. Discourse markers and articles dealing with a discussion on discourse analysis are compiled in the ‘pragmatics and discourse structure’ section. The third category, ‘pragmatics and its interfaces’, discusses issues like pragmatics and
semantics, pragmatics and the philosophy of language, historical pragmatics, pragmatics and acquisition of language, etc. The Last category takes into consideration ‘pragmatics and cognition’. It presents Sperber and Wilson’s ‘Relevance Theory’, along with other cognitive linguistic issues in pragmatics. The book has brilliantly discussed recent developments in the field of pragmatics, apart from the basic theories and applications in pragmatics, making it a very handy book on pragmatics.


Thorat in his book A Discourse Analysis of Five Indian Novels (2002) attempts a discourse analysis of five selected Indian novels. He analyses the selected novels in the three major sections that follow the introductory chapter. The introductory chapter of the book describes its theoretical framework.

In analysing discourses, Thorat begins with the theory of Speech Acts and applies them to the selected Indian novels, while in the second section he analyses the use of politeness principle in the selected novels,
and the third section deals with the analysis of cooperative principle, its maxims and the violation of its maxims in the selected novels.

The book is an important piece of writing in the field of pragmatics as well as for those who are interested in studying discourse.

Leech’s *Principles Of Pragmatics* (1983) deals with the basic principles of Pragmatics. The first chapter is an introductory outset to the book. It talks of certain historical background of pragmatics and some major distinctions between semantics and pragmatics. The second chapter is about the postulates in relation to the topic of the book, while the next chapter provides some formal and functional descriptions of language. The next two chapters deal with cooperative principle and politeness principle, whereas the following chapter talks of communicative grammar and the eighth chapter discusses Austin’s term ‘performatives’. The ninth chapter of the book is about the use of speech-act verbs in English. The last chapter is on the retrospect and prospect of the theories of pragmatics. The book is of much use for anybody attempting research in the field of pragmatics.

Levinson discusses the essential topics that form the basics of pragmatics in his book *Pragmatics* (1983). He has provided a very firm background to the concept of pragmatics, and has discussed the major theories of pragmatics with many examples. The first chapter of the book deals with the scope of pragmatics and its current interest. The second chapter discusses the concept of ‘deixis’ and explains its five major types. Grice’s ‘theory of Conversational Implicature’ is the sole concern of the third chapter of the book, while in the fourth chapter the author has discussed ‘Presupposition’. The theory of speech act is the subject matter of the next chapter. In chapter six, ‘conversational structure’, Levinson has discussed the concepts like ‘turn-taking’, ‘adjacency pairs’, etc. The concluding chapter discusses pragmatics in
relation to sociolinguistics and psycho-linguistics; it also talks of applied pragmatics its relation to other fields.

The philosophical approach to pragmatics relates pragmatics and philosophy to have a better interpretation from context based dialogues.

Yule’s *Pragmatics* (1996) brings the basic concepts of pragmatics. The first section is entitled ‘survey’ which contains nine chapters. The nine chapters of the first section form the basic theoretical part of the theories of pragmatics. Each of the chapter’s deals with the major concepts in the field of pragmatics, like the background, deixis, presupposition, cooperative principle, politeness principle, discourse, etc. Each term has been defined very clearly with simple examples. Yule’s fifth chapter of section one, which is termed as ‘cooperation and implicature’ shows how the theory of Cooperativeness is related to implicature. It discusses the ‘Cooperative Principle’ and the ‘Conversational Implicatures’ along with the various maxims and types, respectively. In the second section the author has provided some ‘readings’ from some special pieces of literary work. The third section provides the readers with the list of references to get more knowledge in the field of pragmatics, while the fourth section is a glossary of the terms related to the field of study of pragmatics.

Application of the theories of pragmatics to literary texts brings out newer meanings and interpretations. Some of the examples of the study undertaken to apply the theories of pragmatics to literary texts are:

In the dissertation Aldo Sevi has taken into consideration the Quantity maxim put forward by Grice and has modified it based on the work of Larry Horn. He has applied the first sub-maxim of Grice’s Quantity maxim to the ordering scales given after a context. He has developed an alternative theory of implicature while studying the application of the quantity maxim. Sevi has argued in the dissertation “that the strong interpretations attributed to the application of some version of Grice’s first maxim of Quantity, are available through the semantic operation of exhaustivization” (p. 215).


Jacobsen in his study of pragmatic analysis of non-cooperative communication takes into account the dialogues in question-answer form which are based on courtroom interactions. In his research, Jacobsen has taken into consideration the theory of Cooperative Principle and has dealt in detail with the conversational maxims. While discussing about courtroom interactions he not only talks about the theory of Cooperative Principle but also mentions the different ways of non-observance of the conversational maxims and explains them with examples. He briefly discusses all the four maxims of conversation against the background of the different ways of non-observance.


In the research undertaken by Bishnu Prasad Varma, he has analysed the use of Indirect Speech Acts in the plays of Shaw, for the purpose of which he has selected four plays. While analyzing the utterances of the
selected plays, Varma has taken into consideration the importance of violation of cooperative principle and has shown how in the utterance of an Indirect Speech Act the speaker violates the conversational maxims put forward by Grice.

Not much work has been done on the application of conversational maxims to drama, especially not any on Wilde’s plays, whereas there is ample scope in a drama for the application of the theory of cooperative principle, as a dramatic text revolves around dialogues and conversations.

The present research would probe into the dramatic texts, particularly of Wilde, with the notion to bring out the significance and importance of violation of conversational maxims in drama.

The present study would contribute to the growth of pragmatics by applying the theory of cooperative principle to the dramatic genre of literature, especially to the selected plays of Oscar Wilde.

1.4 Hypothesis

The intentional violation of conversational maxims helps to promote the conversation by successfully having an impact on the social function of language.

Violation gives rise to implicature and thereby helps to communicate more than what is said. The strict adherence to the maxims and the intentional violation of the maxims both are important part of language use in context.
1.5 Aims and Objectives

The aim of the study is to apply pragmatic theory to the data selected from the plays of Oscar Wilde and to analyze it taking into consideration the conversational maxims. The study will attempt to achieve the following objectives.

- To study the violation of conversational maxims in the selected plays of Oscar Wilde.
- To explore into the motives of characters behind violation of conversational maxims.
- To use the theory of cooperative principle to analyse conversation.
- To attempt a pragmatic interpretation of Wilde’s witty language.
- To evaluate the overall impact of the violation of conversational maxims on the development of Wilde’s plays.

The researcher intends to apply the theory of cooperative principle to the selected plays of Wilde and study its importance and impact on the whole effect of the plays and, also, to study the function of the intentional violation of conversational maxims.

The study would analyse the conversational pieces collected from the plays selected for the purpose of study. It would focus on the violation of the conversational maxims following the model of Grice. The purpose would be to bring out the motives of the characters behind the intentional violation of maxims and its impact on their conversation as well as the whole effect of the plays.
1.6 Methodology

Any research is goal oriented and a methodology is needed to carry it out. Research in various disciplines requires various kinds of methodologies like case study, data collection, laboratory research, library research, etc. The present study would adopt the following methodology. The present study is an application. It is an application of a pragmatic theory to a work of art, and so basically the library research method would be used.

The primary sources for the study would be the plays of Wilde selected for the purpose of study- based on the availability of data. Grice’s theory of cooperative principle and the maxims of conversation will be used as a framework to analyse the works of Oscar Wilde.

The secondary sources would be chosen from the study in the area of pragmatics, with reference to cooperativeness, focusing on the ideas put forward by Austin, Searle and Grice, and include recent developments in the field of pragmatics and the corpus of literature in between.

In the present study, the researcher would collect the data and analyse against the background of the theory of cooperative principle and the maxims of conversation as formulated by Grice. The collection of data for the purpose of the study would be based on the reading of the literature available from various sources like libraries, books, journals, etc.

The utterances that would be considered valuable from the viewpoint of analysis would be selected and analysed thoroughly, and an attempt would be made to find out that ‘how’ and ‘why’ and with what effects, the maxims of conversation are flouted in the plays.
Some examples from Wilde’s plays:

Example 1

JACK: How utterly unromantic you are!

ALGERNON: I really don’t see anything romantic in proposing. It is very romantic to be in love. But there is nothing romantic about a definite proposal. Why, one may be accepted. One usually is, I believe. Then the excitement is all over. The very essence of romance is uncertainty. If ever I get married, I’ll certainly try to forget the fact.

(Quantity Maxim)

_The Importance of Being Earnest_, Act I, p.10

Jack and Algernon are engaged in a conversation the centre of which is Gwendolen. Jack admits that he is in love with Gwendolen and wants to propose to her. Jack says that to propose to Gwendolen is the prime motive of his visit to the town. Algernon is of the view that Jack’s visit to the town is nothing but can be termed as ‘business’, which takes the feeling out of the intention of Jack to propose to Gwendolen. Jack says that Algernon is an unromantic person who calls a proposal of love—business.

Algernon flouts the maxim of quantity in the utterance above. The first sentence of his utterance (I really don’t see anything romantic in proposing.) could have been sufficient enough to present his belief that proposing is not a romantic act. But he goes on uttering further utterances to support his view with a kind of logic of his own and to prove his point that the very essence of romance is uncertainty. Under the influence of his belief he makes a statement that he would even forget the fact of being married after he gets married.
Example 2

LORD DARLINGTON: And what a wonderful fan! May I look at it?

LADY WINDERMERE: Do. Pretty, isn’t it! It’s got my name on it, and everything. I have only just seen it myself. It’s my husband’s birthday present to me. You know today is my birthday?

(Quantity Maxim)

Lady Windermere’s Fan, Act I, p. 13

Lord Darlington comes to visit Lady Windermere. Lady Windermere is in a receptive mood to be at home to anyone who calls on that afternoon. After the customary welcome, Lord Darlington ‘sees a fan lying on the table’ and seeks permission of Lady Windermere to have a look at it. Lady Windermere allows him to do so, but she adds additional information to her utterance which leads her to violate the maxim of quantity. Her utterance above (Do.) is sufficient enough to permit Lord Darlington to have a look at the fan, but she provides additional information by saying that the fan has got her name on it, that it is a gift from her husband on her birthday. She finally informs that that day is her birthday.

1.7 Scope and Limitations

Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics, and its popularity has grown wide in the recent years. Any study in pragmatics must deal with the different theories of pragmatics, among which the theory of cooperative principle is a basic one. When two or more persons are engaged in a conversation there occur either the observances or the violation of the cooperative principle. The application of the theory of cooperative principle in any
work of art (or even in real life) where there is a communication has a lot of scope for study. A research work can be undertaken to explain the significance of the observance or violation of cooperative principle in a literary work or in a real life conversation.

The present study is limited to violation of the maxims of cooperative principle in the selected plays of Oscar Wilde.

1.8 Oscar Wilde and His Place in English Literature

Oscar Wilde was born in Dublin on 16th October 1854. Though, he is popularly known as Oscar Wilde his original name was Oscar Fingal O’Flahertie Will Wilde. He was the second son of William Wilde, an Irish surgeon, and Jane Francesca Elgee, a journalist and poet, who wrote under the pseudonym ‘Speranza’. His education started with the school at Enniskillen and then to Trinity College, Dublin which then proceeded towards Magdalen College, Oxford. Wilde has been said to achieve distinction after he received the Newdigate Prize for English verse in 1878 for his poem *Ravenna*.

Wilde was influenced by the cult of ‘Art for art’s sake’ and became a supporter of Walter Pater. He became famous for his use of witty language and was considered influential for the wit and wisdom presented in his conversation. His first volume of *Poems* was published in 1881 whereas in 1888 a collection of fairy tales by Wilde *The Happy Prince and Other Tales* appeared. His collection of fairy tales were followed by the publication of his collection of *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime, and Other Stories* (1891). Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), the only novel by Wilde, is a gothic melodrama which brought upon him protest when it first appeared in Lippincott’s Magazine (1890). Wilde was imprisoned in 1895 on the charges of homosexuality
from which he was released after two years, that is, in 1897. After being released from the prison he went to France where appeared his ‘The Ballad of the Reading Gaol’ (1898). His other works include the critical dialogues—The Decay of Lying (1889) and The Critic as Artist (1890).

Oscar Wilde’s place in English literature is mostly accounted for his dramatic works. Of his plays, the first two, Vera, or the Nihilists (1800) and The Duchess of Padua (1883) were not so successful. His fame mostly rests on the four comedies, namely, Lady Windermere’s Fan (1892), A Woman of No Importance (1893), An Ideal Husband (1895), and his masterpiece The Importance of Being Earnest (1895).

Wilde died in Paris in 1900.

1.9 The Wit of Oscar Wilde

Wit in general terms could be defined as the use of language that is marked with some sort of cleverness and that creates some sort of fun. The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary defines wit as ‘the ability to say or write things that are both clever and amusing.’ Wit has also been described by Sigmund Freud in Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious (1910) (translated into English by A. A. Brill) ‘as a subspecies of the comic’. Wit has acquired different meanings as the ages past. According to Cuddon (1999: 985), it was used to mean ‘intelligence’ or ‘wisdom’ during the Renaissance period. Wit is also associated with ‘comparison’, ‘cleverness’, and ‘quickness’.

Oscar Wilde was one of the most talked about man because of his wit and the wisdom that was presented through his language. The writings of Oscar Wilde, either poetry, prose, or drama, are full of wit and the wittiness in them makes them more readable or enjoyable. In the prose
of Wilde, including both stories and novel, readers find the use of language ‘ingenious, witty, polished, and ornamental in style, but lacking in human warmth’ (Albert, 1979: 476).

His four plays, on which his fame rests, are abundant in witty dialogues. He has made use of language in a very clever way to enhance the fun and comic effect of his comedies. According to Albert, ‘the continued popularity of his plays depends on the dialogue, with its hard glitter, its polish and scintillating wit.’ (1979: 477).

Some of the examples of wit in the plays of Oscar Wilde are:

‘Anything is better than being sacrificed!’

*Lady Windermere’s Fan* (Act I, p. 16)

‘I can resist everything except temptation.’

*Lady Windermere’s Fan* (Act I, p. 17)

‘The very essence of romance is uncertainty.’

*The Importance of Being Earnest* (Act I, p. 9)

‘I dislike arguments of any kind. They are always vulgar, and often convincing.’

*The Importance of Being Earnest* (Act III, p. 64)

‘Woman is the intellectual helpmate of man in public as in private life.’

*A Woman of No Importance* (Act I, p. 13-14)

‘If a man is a gentleman, he knows quite enough, and if he is not a gentleman, whatever he knows is ban for him.’

*A Woman of No Importance* (Act III, p. 53)

‘An acquaintance that begins with a compliment is sure to develop into a real friendship.’

*An Ideal Husband* (Act I, p. 10)

‘Nothing is so dangerous as being too modern.’

*An Ideal Husband* (Act II, p. 56)
1.10 The Plays Selected for Study

Three plays of Oscar Wilde have been selected for the purpose of the study, namely, *Lady Windermere’s Fan* (1892), *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), and *An Ideal Husband* (1895)

1.10.1 *Lady Windermere’s Fan* (1892)

Oscar Wilde’s *Lady Windermere’s Fan* was first staged in 1892, and gained immediate success launching the career of Wilde as a dramatist. The play is a social comedy.

Characters in the play

*Major:* Lady Windermere (the protagonist), Lord Windermere (Lady Windermere’s husband), Lord Darlington (an admirer of Lady Windermere), Mrs. Erlynne (considered as a social outcast, she actually is the mother of Lady Windermere).

*Minor:* Lord Augustus (an older gentleman who loves Mrs. Erlynne), Mr. Dumby, Mr. Cecil Graham (a gentleman with good sense of humour and wit), Mr. Hopper (son of an Australian business man), Duchess of Berwick, Lady Agatha Carlisle (Duchess of Berwick’s daughter), and Lady Plymdale.

The Story in Brief

In Act I, Lady Windermere is seen in the morning-room, at her residence, preparing for the birthday party she was giving that night. Lord Darlington, a friend of her, visits her and she shows off her new fan which is her husband’s birthday present to her. While she is having a
talk with Lord Darlington, she reveals that she does not like to have much of compliments. He wants to be a friend of Lady Windermere to which she remarks that they are already ‘very good friends’ (p.15). As they are engaged in their conversation, the Duchess of Berwick and Lady Agatha Carlisle comes to the house. After having some conversations with the Duchess, Lord Darlington leaves the place with a self-invitation to the party of Lady Windermere to which she responds positively but warns him ‘not to say foolish, insincere things to people’. (p. 19).

The Duchess of Berwick informs her that her husband, Lord Windermere ‘goes to see’ Mrs Erlynnee ‘continually, and stops for hours at a time, and while he is there she is not at home to any one’ (p. 20). Lady Windermere finds it hard to believe. After the Duchess is gone, she tries to find out the truth by checking the bank book of Lord Windermere. She finds in the second bank book that ‘monstrous sums of money’ have been given to Mrs. Erlynne. When Lord Windermere comes to his house, he is confronted by his wife. He tries to tell the details of Mrs. Erlynne’s life, to which he is objected, but he requests her to invite Mrs. Erlynne to her birthday party that night and help her to get back to the society. Lady Windermere denies inviting Mrs. Erlynne, and Lord Windermere decides to invite her, to which she expresses her intention to insult and strike the lady with the fan that he has given her as birthday present. The act ends with the exit of Lady Windermere and Lord Windermere’s words ‘I dare not tell her who this woman really is. The shame would kill her.’ (p. 28)

The second act opens set in the drawing-room in Lord Windermere’s house. People are entering in the house for the birthday party and Parker is announcing the names of the guests very distinctly as ordered by Lady Windermere.
Lord Augustus, one of the guests, is worried about the social status of Mrs. Erlynne and so asks Lord Windermere if he would introduce her to his wife. Lord Windermere informs him that she is going to attend the party.

Lord Windermere tries to make peace with his wife but he is unsuccessful and so decides to tell the truth about Mrs. Erlynne in order to avoid any scene to be created by Lady Windermere; before he could tell anything to his wife, Mrs. Erlynne arrives at the party. Mrs. Erlynne is busy in conversation with other guests in the party. Lord Darlington requests Lady Windermere to be on the terrace. When Lord Darlington and Lady Windermere are on the terrace, he proposes to her and offers her his life. Lady Windermere wants to wait and think and she hopes that her husband might return to her. Lord Darlington wants her to reply immediately as he thinks ‘it must be now or not at all’ (p. 38), to which she replies ‘not at all’ (p. 39). Lord Darlington leaves heartbroken with a decision to never meet her again.

Mrs. Erlynne discusses her plan to accept the proposal of Lord Augustus with Lord Windermere on the terrace, while Lady Windermere decides to leave the house and accept the proposal of Lord Darlington. Lady Windermere has left a letter for her husband which Mrs. Erlynne reads after knowing about it from Parker. She, then, tells Lord Augustus to take Lord Windermere with him to his club and to see that he should not come back that night.

In the third act, Lady Windermere is in the house of Lord Darlington, waiting for him to come, and pondering over her decision. Mrs. Erlynne comes in search of Lady Windermere to Lord Darlington’s house. She tries to persuade Lady Windermere to return to her husband. She tells her that Lord Windermere is ‘guiltless of all offence towards’ (p. 48)
her. Mrs. Erlynne finally tries to convince her to go home for the sake of her child, but when the two ladies are ready to leave Lord Darlington’s house, they hear voices outside the house. Lady Windermere hides herself behind the curtain as she recognizes her husband’s voice, whereas Mrs. Erlynne hides because she hears Lord Augustus’s voice. The men are all engaged in a conversation when Cecil Graham points out at a fan. Lord Windermere recognizes it at once as his wife’s fan and demands an explanation from Lord Darlington. Mrs. Erlynne comes out of her hiding place and tells everyone that she has brought Lady Windermere’s fan by mistaking it for her own; meanwhile Lady Windermere ‘slips out from behind the curtain and glides from the room’ (p. 57).

The fourth act is set in the morning-room of Lord Windermere. Lady Windermere is seen wondering about what happened after she ‘escaped from that horrible room’ (p. 58). Lord Windermere enters the house, he feels pity for her and proposes to go for a holiday the same day at 3.40, but she wants to meet Mrs. Erlynne. Lord Darlington tells her not to think of Mrs. Erlynne. He further says that he was ‘mistaken in her’ (p. 60).

Parker comes with the fan and a card. Lady Windermere tells Parker to ask Mrs. Erlynne to meet her, which is objected by her husband. Mrs. Erlynne informs that she is going to leave the place for ever and requests Lady Windermere to give her a photograph of her (Lady Windermere) along with her little boy. Lady Windermere goes upstairs to bring a photograph, when it is revealed that Mrs. Erlynne is none but Lady Windermere’s mother whom she has thought to be dead. She tells that she is going to get out of the life of her daughter and son-in-law. Lord Windermere proposes to tell the truth to his wife but is forbidden by Mrs. Erlynne. Lady Windermere returns with a photograph and gives it to her. She asks her husband to see if Mrs. Erlynne’s carriage has
arrived. While Lord Windermere is out, Mrs. Erlynne takes a promise from Lady Windermere to not to speak about her (Mrs. Erlynne) saving her (Lady Windermere) life when she left her husband and went to Lord Darlington’s house. Mrs. Erlynne also requests her to give her the fan which is a present from her husband and which has ‘Margaret’ inscribed on it- which is the Christian name of both Lady Windermere and Mrs. Erlynne. Lady Windermere agrees to give her the fan. Mrs. Erlynne is ready to leave when she asks Lord Augustus, who has arrived to the house, to carry the fan up to the carriage. When Lord Augustus comes back, he informs that Mrs. Erlynne has informed him that she was at the house of Lord Darlington in search of Lord Augustus and she wanted to put him out of suspense. He informs that she has accepted his proposal of marriage. Lord Windermere thinks Mrs. Erlynne to be ‘a very clever woman’ whereas Lady Windermere is of the view that Lord Augustus is going to marry ‘a very good woman. (p. 70).

1.10.2 *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895)

Oscar Wilde has considered *The Importance of Being Earnest* as ‘a trivial comedy for serious people’. It ‘was a scathing attack on the polished hypocrisy of the Victorian age.’ (Nayar, 2009: 289)

Characters in the Play

*Major*: Jack Worthing (Protagonist of the play), Earnest Worthing (false brother of Jack Worthing), Algernon Moncrieff (friend of Jack, who turns out to be his brother at the end of the play), Gwendolen Fairfax (cousin of Algernon whom Jack loves and wants to get married), and Cecily Cardew (ward of Jack Worthing who call Jack uncle out of respect).
Minor: Lady Bracknell (mother of Gwendolen Fairfax), Miss Prism (governess of Cecily Cardew), Lane (manservant of Algernon), Mr. Bunbury (invented friend of Algernon), Canon Chasuble (local vicar), and Merriman (butler).

The Story in Brief

Act I, begins with the unexpected visit of Jack, who is known to Algernon as Earnest, to Algernon’s house when he is engaged in conversation with Lane (Algernon’s man servant). Jack informs Algernon that he wants to propose to Gwendolen, cousin of Algernon. Gwendolen Fairfax and Lady Bracknell (Gwendolen’s mother) are supposed to visit Algernon that day. Algernon shows a cigarette case to Jack and wants explanations about Cecily who has presented it to Jack which has an inscription inside ‘from little Cecily with her fondest love to her dear Uncle Jack’ (p. 11). Jack informs that Cecily is his ward who resides at his country estate with Miss Prism as a governess. Algernon wants to know the truth about Jack as he knows Jack by the name of Earnest and has ‘introduced you to every one as Earnest’ (p. 11). Jack informs him that his real name is Jack and has pretended to have a false brother by the name Earnest to use as an excuse to visit the town. Jack tells ‘my name is Earnest in town and Jack in the country, and the cigarette case was given to me in the country’ (p. 12).

On hearing about Jack’s false brother Earnest, Algernon shares his secret that he too has an invented friend called Bunbury, to get a chance to go to the country whenever he likes to do so. The two are then engaged in conversation when Lady Bracknell and Gwendolen arrive. Algernon takes Lady Bracknell into the music room with the intention to provide a chance to Jack to propose to his cousin Gwendolen. Jack proposes to Gwendolen (who knows him by the name of Earnest). She
tells him that her ideal has always been ‘to love someone of the name Earnest. She accepts his proposal of marriage.

When Lady Bracknell comes to the room, she comes to know from Gwendolen that she and Jack are engaged. She, then sends Gwendolen to the carriage, interviews Jack to find out his eligibility to be married to Gwendolen although she feels ‘bound to tell (him) that (he is) not down on my list of eligible young men’ (p. 20). She does not approve of his marriage to Gwendolen.

After a short while, Gwendolen re-enters the scene and asks Jack the address of his house in the country. When Jack tells her the address, Algernon overhears it and notes it down. He informs Lane that he is ‘going Bunburying’ (p. 27).

The second act of the play opens in the garden at Manor House, where Cecily is seen watering flowers and Miss Prism tries to create interest in her to learn German. Miss Prism goes for a stroll with Dr. Chasuble. Cecily is informed about the arrival of Earnest Worthing (who is actually Algernon). Cecily informs Algernon that Jack wants Earnest ‘to choose between this world, the next world, and Australia’ (p. 32). Algernon asks Cecily to reform him as she thinks he is not good enough for ‘this world’.

Jack returns to the house, from the back of the garden, ‘dressed in the deepest mourning’ and informs Miss Prism and Dr. Chasuble that his brother Earnest is dead. But Cecily comes from inside the house and informs Jack that his brother is in the dining room. Jack is angry on Algernon but he could not tell the truth to others because he has created his false brother Earnest to deceive people.
Cecily informs Algernon that her interest in him comes from the fact that his name is Earnest. She tells ‘there is something in that name that seems to inspire absolute confidence’ (p.42). Algernon goes to see Dr. Chasuble to have a talk on christening himself as Earnest with a promise to her that he would be back in no time; while he is away, Gwendolen arrives at Manor house unexpectedly. Gwendolen and Cecily do not know each other. Cecily acts a host to Gwendolen and in their conversation it comes out that both are engaged to Mr. Earnest Worthing. As they confront each other, Jack and Algernon arrive. Both the ladies find that both of them have been deceived by the two men and there is, in reality, no one called Earnest. Both the men want to be christened as Earnest by Dr. Chasuble.

In the third act, the two ladies, Cecily and Gwendolen are eager to reconcile with their respective lovers and so ask them to give explanation about the fictional Mr.Earnest. Algernon tells that he pretended to be Mr. Earnest Worthing to meet Cecily, whereas Jack admits to have a false brother so that he could visit town to see Gwendolen as often as possible. Both Cecily and Gwendolen want to forgive the two men but as they decide to do so they remember that they are not engaged to Earnest. Both the men reply that they have made arrangements to be christened as Earnest, on hearing about their sacrifice both the women forgive their respective lovers.

As the couples reconcile, the arrival of Lady Bracknell is witnessed. She enquires Algernon about Bunbury to which he replies that he is dead. Lady Bracknell agrees to the proposed marriage of Algernon and Cecily as she comes to know that Cecily is indeed very rich. But Jack does not approve of the marriage and forbids it on the ground that he is the guardian of Cecily; he further says that he would agree on the marriage of Algernon and Cecily only when Lady Bracknell would
agree for his and Gwendolen’s marriage. Lady Bracknell disagrees to the condition and asks Gwendolen to leave the place.

As Lady Bracknell and Gwendolen are about the leave, Dr. Chasuble comes and informs ‘everything is ready for the christenings’ (p. 62). But both the men to be christened are of the view that the then christening is of less practical value and so postpones the programme. Dr. Chasuble is ready to leave as Miss Prism is waiting for him in the vestry. As he utters the name of Miss Prism, Lady Bracknell asks some questions and wishes to see her.

Lady Bracknell meets Miss Prism and asks her about the whereabouts of a baby of male sex that she carried away twenty-eight years ago. She informs that ‘in a moment of mental abstraction…(she) placed the baby in the hand-bag’ (p. 64). Jack, who had been listening attentively, asks Miss Prism about where she deposited the handbag. After getting the answer of his questions, Jack retires to his room for a moment and returns with a handbag which Miss Prism recognizes as the bag in which she left the baby twenty eight years ago. Jack thinks that Miss Prism is his mother, but Miss Prism is unmarried and tells that Lady Bracknell could give the answer. Lady Bracknell informs that Jack is her poor sister’s, Mrs. Moncrieff, son. Jack, finally, has got a brother, Algernon. After the revelation of Jack’s real identity the objections on Gwendolen and Jack’s union are supposed to be over, but Lady Bracknell asks Jack about his Christian name as he is someone else after the discovery of his identity. Lady Bracknell informs Jack that he was christened after his father as he was the eldest son, but she could not at that moment recollect his father’s Christian name. Jack searches the Army Lists of the period and tells everyone that his father’s Christian name was Earnest. He tells Gwendolen that ‘it is Earnest after all’ (p.67). The play ends with Lady Bracknell’s remark on Jack that he seems ‘to be
displaying signs of triviality’ to which Jack replies that he has ‘realized for the first time in my life the vital importance of Being Earnest’ (p.67).

1.10.3 An Ideal Husband (1895)

An Ideal Husband is a melodramatic play by Oscar Wilde which projects the Victorian sensibilities of being ‘ideal’ by presenting dandies and other characters opposite to the dandies under the cover of ‘ideality’ that lead an ‘ideal’ life.

Characters in the Play

Major: Sir Robert Chiltern (protagonist), Lady Gertrude Chiltern (wife of Sir Robert), Lord Goring (friend of Sir Robert), and Mrs. Cheveley (lady with intentions to ruin Sir Robert for her profit)
Minor: Miss Mable (sister of Sir Robert), and Lord Caversham (father of Lord Goring), and other servants and butlers.

The Story in Brief

The play opens, with a party, in the Octagon room in Sir Robert Chiltern’s house. The party is being hosted by Sir Robert Chiltern and his wife, Lady Gertrude Chiltern. Among the guests, Mrs. Cheveley enters the party, whom Lady Chiltern happens to know from their school days, but they hate each other and behave as enemies.

Mrs. Cheveley claims to know a secret of Sir Robert and wants to blackmail him. She tells Sir Robert that Baron Arnheim, an old friend of Sir Robert and Mrs. Cheveley, tempted and convinced to sell him a cabinet secret. She tells him that she knows that Sir Robert is a man
‘who laid the foundation of his fortune by selling to a Stock Exchange speculator a Cabinet secret.’ (p. 25)

Meanwhile, Lord Goring has arrived in the party. Most of the people in the party are talking about Mrs. Cheveley. While other guests proceed for the dinner, Mrs. Chevely asks Sir Robert Chiltern to withdraw his report on the Argentine Canal scheme and ‘to make a short speech stating that he believes there are possibilities in the scheme’ (p. 16). Mrs. Cheveley thinks that she would be successful in blackmailing him because she is in possession of a letter which Sir Robert Chiltern wrote to Baron Arnheim ‘when you were Lord Radley’s secretary, telling the Baron to buy Suez Canal shares – a letter written three days before the Government announced its own purchase’ (p.25). Sir Robert Chiltern promises to help Mrs. Cheveley.

Lady Chiltern asks her husband not to help Mrs. Chiveley on the canal scheme. She has been informed by Mrs. Cheveley about her husband helping her, and so she asks him not to compromise with any situation. She does not know anything about her husband’s past and of the blackmailing plot of Mrs. Cheveley. She considers him as an ideal husband. Sir Robert Chiltern accepts his wife’s suggestion.

On the other hand, Mabel Chiltern and Lord goring, while in a conversation, find a diamond brooch which Lord Goring is of the view that it could also be used as a bracelet. He decides to keep the brooch which him and requests Miss Chiltern to inform him if she finds any claimant of the brooch.

The second act of the play begins in Sir Robert Chiltern’s morning room in which he discusses about the problem related to the demand of Mrs. Cheveley to Lord Goring. Lord Goring suggests him to tell everything to
his wife as ‘no man should have a secret from his own wife. She invariably finds it out.’ (p. 38). They further discuss the matter during which Lord Goring reveals that he and Mrs. Cheveley were engaged in the past. Lord Goring engages in a conversation with Miss Mable and they flirt with each other.

Mrs. Cheveley appear in the scene to search for a diamond brooch which she feels she has left in Sir Robert’s house during her visit in the party. When Lady Chiltern and Mrs. Cheveley are alone in the room, Mrs. Cheveley comes to know that it was Lady Chiltern who forbids her husband to withdraw his promise to help Mrs. Cheveley. Mrs. Cheveley, then, reveals the secret of the origin of the wealth and fortune of Sir Robert Chiltern to her. Sir Robert comes in the room and asks Mrs. Cheveley to leave. Lady Chiltern refuses to forgive her husband.

Act III is set in Lord Goring’s house where he receives a letter from Lady Chiltern in which the addressee has not been mentioned. Lord Goring thinks that Lady Chiltern would be visiting him any moment then, so he prepares for her arrival. But unexpectedly, Mrs. Cheveley visits and the butler asks her to wait in the drawing room as he thinks that she is the lady whom he has been directed to receive by Lord Goring. Before Lord Goring could meet Mrs. Cheveley, he is visited by Sir Robert for further help and suggestions.

As Mrs. Cheveley waits, she finds the letter that Lady Chiltern has written to Lord Goring. Finally, Sir Robert discovers Mrs. Cheveley in the house, and leaves the house angrily believing that Mrs. Cheveley and Lord Goring, two lovers in the past, are again having an affair.

Lord Goring and Mrs. Cheveley confront each other. Mrs. Cheveley puts the condition to handover the letter of Sir Robert to Lord Goring, if
he (Lord Goring) would accept her proposal of marriage, which Goring refuses. During their conversation, Mrs. Cheveley tells him that she went to Chiltern’s house to retrieve her diamond brooch. Lord Goring takes the brooch out from his table and tells that it is a bracelet that he gave to a cousin many years ago and which had been stolen by Mrs. Chevely. He threatens her to call the police. He tells her that she could avoid being arrested if she would hand over the letter, Sir Robert’s letter, to him. Lord Goring gets the letter from her and burns it. Lady Cheveley leaves the house with a warning to Lord Goring to send the letter, which Lady Chiltern has written to him, to Sir Robert.

The fourth act opens in Sir Robert’s morning room. Lord Goring comes to know from the newspaper ‘The Times’ read by Lord Caversham, that Sir Robert has denounced the possibility of the scheme of the Argentine canal. He is delighted to hear the act of Robert. Miss Mabel enters the scene and Lord Goring proposes to her which she accepts.

Lady Chiltern comes in the room and is informed by Lord Goring that he has managed to get Sir Robert’s letter from Mrs. Cheveley and burnt it; he also informs that she has taken the letter that she (Lady Chiltern) wrote to him and plans to put ‘a certain construction on that letter and proposes to send it to’ (p 100) Sir Robert; at that particular moment, Sir Robert enters reading Lady Chiltern’s letter which he has misunderstood to be written to him as the letter has no addressee mentioned. Sir Robert and Lady Chiltern are united feeling that for both of them ‘a new life is beginning’ (p. 113). They also permit Lord Goring to get married with Miss Mable.
1.11 Justification for Selecting the Plays

The study has been undertaken to bring out new insights into the study of pragmatics and the violation of the maxims of the cooperative principle in drama. The plays of Oscar Wilde are selected for the purpose of the study. The plays of Wilde are full of wit which leads to violation of the conversational maxims, thus providing ample data for the purpose analysis. The conversational pieces or the utterances that are useful as a piece of data in order to explain the role and importance of the cooperative principle and the significance of conversational maxims in communication have been selected for the study. The dialogues of the play that would provide a better insight into the analysis of the violation of the conversational maxims and bring out the intentions of the characters and the impact of the violation on the whole context, along with the role of wit, of the selected plays have been considered valuable from the point of analysis.

1.12 Conclusion

The chapter presents the hypothesis, aims and objectives, methodology along with the scope of the study. The chapter also discusses the place of Oscar Wilde in English Literature along with a discussion on the wit of Wilde. The plays selected for the purpose of the study are also taken into consideration and are presented with the stories in brief. The chapter also justifies the selection of the plays.